

# Reviews

## What the Black Book left out

**Stephane Courtois et al, *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*, Harvard University Press, 1999, \$37.50/£23.50, pp.1120**

The new year opened with familiar refrains, amplified by the numerology: a chorus of self-adulation, sombre ruminations about the incomprehensible evil of our enemies, and the usual recourse to selective amnesia to smooth the way. A few illustrations follow, which may suggest the kind of evaluation that would have appeared, were different values to prevail in the intellectual culture.

Let's begin with the familiar litany about the monsters we have confronted through the century and finally slain, a ritual that at least has the merit of roots in reality. Their awesome crimes are recorded in the newly-translated

perhaps out of embarrassment at the frenzied and hysterical rhetoric of the respected statesmen Dean Acheson and Paul Nitze; for a sample, see my *Deterring Democracy*, chap. 1.

The picture has always been an extremely useful one. Renewed once again today, it allows us to erase completely the entire record of hideous atrocities compiled by 'our side' in past years. After all, they count as nothing when compared with the ultimate evil of the enemy. However grand the crime, it was 'necessary' to confront the forces of darkness, now finally recognised for what they were. With only the faintest of regrets, we can therefore turn to the fulfilment of our noble mission, though as *New York Times* correspondent Michael Wines reminded us in the afterglow of the humanitarian triumph in Kosovo, we must not overlook some 'deeply sobering lessons': 'the deep ideological divide between an idealistic New World bent on ending inhumanity and an Old World equally fatalistic about unending conflict.' The enemy was the incarnation of total evil, but even our friends have a long way to go before they ascend to our dizzying heights. Nonetheless, we can march forward, 'clean of hands and pure of heart,' as befits a Nation under God. And crucially, we can dismiss with ridicule any foolish inquiry into the institutional roots of the crimes of the state-corporate system, mere trivia that in no way tarnish the image of Good versus Evil, and teach no lessons, 'deeply sobering' or not, about what lies ahead – a very convenient posture, for reasons too obvious to elaborate.

Like others, Ryan reasonably selects as Exhibit A of the criminal indictment the Chinese famines of 1958-61, with a death toll of 25-40 million, he reports, a sizeable chunk of the 100 million corpses the 'recording angels' attribute to 'Communism' (whatever that is, but let us use the conventional term). The terrible atrocity fully merits the harsh condemnation it has received for many years, renewed here. It is, furthermore, proper to attribute the famine to Communism. That conclusion was established most authoritatively in the work of economist Amartya Sen, whose comparison of the Chinese famine to the record of democratic India received particular attention when he won the Nobel Prize a few years ago.

Writing in the early 1980s, Sen observed that India had suffered no such famine. He attributed the India-China difference to India's 'political system of adversarial journalism and opposition,' while in contrast, China's totalitarian regime suffered from 'misinformation' that undercut a serious response, and there was 'little political pressure' from opposition groups and an informed public (Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen, *Hunger and Public Action*, 1989; they estimate deaths at 16.5 to 29.5 million).

The example stands as a dramatic 'criminal indictment' of totalitarian Communism, exactly as Ryan writes. But before closing the book on the indictment we might want to turn to the other half of Sen's India-China comparison, which somehow never seems to surface despite the emphasis Sen placed on it. He observes that India and China had 'similarities that were quite striking' when development planning began 50 years ago, including death rates.

‘But there is little doubt that as far as morbidity, mortality and longevity are concerned, China has a large and decisive lead over India’ (in education and other social indicators as well). He estimates the excess of mortality in India over China to be close to 4 million a year: ‘India seems to manage to fill its cupboard with more skeletons every eight years than China put there in its years of shame,’ 1958-1961 (Dreze and Sen). In both cases, the outcomes have to do with the ‘ideological predispositions’ of the political systems: for China, relatively equitable distribution of medical resources, including rural health services, and public distribution of food, all lacking in India. This was before 1979, when ‘the downward trend in mortality [in China] has been at least halted, and possibly reversed,’ thanks to the market reforms instituted that year.

Overcoming amnesia, suppose we now apply the methodology of *The Black Book* and its reviewers to the full story, not just the doctrinally acceptable half. We therefore conclude that in India the democratic capitalist ‘experiment’ since 1947 has caused more deaths than in the entire history of the ‘colossal, wholly failed...experiment’ of Communism everywhere since 1917: over 100 million deaths by 1979, tens of millions more since, in India alone.

The ‘criminal indictment’ of the ‘democratic capitalist experiment’ becomes harsher still if we turn to its effects after the fall of Communism: millions of corpses in Russia, to take one case, as Russia followed the confident prescription of the World Bank that ‘Countries that liberalise rapidly and extensively turn around more quickly [than those that do not],’ returning to something like what it had been before World War I, a picture familiar throughout the ‘third world.’ But ‘you can’t make an omelette without broken eggs,’ as Stalin would have said. The indictment becomes far harsher if we consider these vast areas that remained under Western tutelage, yielding a truly ‘colossal’ record of skeletons and ‘absolutely futile, pointless and inexplicable suffering’ (Ryan). The indictment takes on further force when we add to the account the countries devastated by the direct assaults of Western power, and its clients, during the same years. The record need not be reviewed here, though it seems to be as unknown to respectable opinion as were the crimes of Communism before the appearance of *The Black Book*.

The authors of *The Black Book*, Ryan observes, did not shrink from confronting the ‘great question’: ‘the relative immorality of Communism and Nazism.’ Although ‘the body count tips the scales against Communism,’ Ryan concludes that Nazism nevertheless sinks to the lower depths of immorality. Unasked is another ‘great question’ posed by ‘the body count,’ when ideologically serviceable amnesia is overcome.

To make myself clear, I am not expressing my judgments; rather those that follow from the principles that are employed to establish preferred truths – or that would follow, if doctrinal filters could be removed.

On the self-adulation, a virtual tidal wave this year – perhaps it is enough to recall Mark Twain’s remark about one of the great military heroes of the mass slaughter campaign in the Philippines that opened the glorious century behind us:

he is 'satire incarnated'; no satirical rendition can 'reach perfection' because he 'occupies that summit himself.' The reference reminds us of another aspect of our magnificence, apart from efficiency in massacre and destruction and a capacity for self-glorification that would drive any satirist to despair: our willingness to face up honestly to our crimes, a tribute to the flourishing free market of ideas. The bitter anti-imperialist essays of one of America's leading writers were not suppressed, as in totalitarian states; they are freely available to the general public, with a delay of only some 90 years.

*Noam Chomsky*

Visit [www.zmag.org](http://www.zmag.org) for a continuation of this argument.

## Where the Bodies are . . .

**J. Arch Getty and Oleg V. Naumov: *The Road to Terror: Stalin and the Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932-1939*. Published by Yale University Press, £22.50, pp.635**

We have met J. Arch Getty before, as a prominent Sovietologist. Now he has teamed up with Oleg Naumov, a Moscow archivist, to examine the hitherto secret official records covering the genesis and growth of the great terror in the Soviet Union. It is hardly surprising that entry to the formerly closed archives has provoked in Professor Getty a self-critical mood. He sums up the distance between this work and his own earlier *Origins of the Great Purges* thus:

'In spite of some misreadings and misunderstandings of earlier work, Stalin's guilt for the terror was never in question. We can now see his fingerprints all over the archives ... but even with the new documents (his) role remains problematic and hard to specify.'

Macavity, it seems, wasn't there.

'Even in Stalin's office, there were too many twists and turns, too many false starts and subsequent embarrassing back-trackings to support the idea that the terror was the culmination of well prepared and long-standing master design. Stalin was not sure exactly what kind of repression he wanted or how to get it until rather late in the story. He seems not to have decided on a wholesale massacre until early in 1937. But when he did his uncertainty was replaced by a fierce determination to root out all sources of real or imagined disloyalty.'

These perceptions may provoke some disagreement. The great merit of this book, however, is that it furnishes a quite sufficient evidence to feed that disagreement amply, and to allow an informed argument about how to evaluate the awful events which it chronicles.

Early in their argumentation, Getty and Naumov have to deal with the Kirov assassination. This was the pretext, indeed the trigger, which set off all the nightmarish sequence of purge trials, and alongside these, a bloodstorm of other

purges which were not publicised. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that Kirov was murdered on Stalin's instructions. The pre-archival literature of the opposition, and the memories of a succession of insider escapees and defecting security men, provided voluminous evidence on this score. In any case, we were soon to reach the position in which the sensible presumption about the death of leading Soviet statesmen was that they were all Stalin's victims, unless there was compelling evidence to the contrary.

Of course, no papers have yet turned up to record the decision, 'let's murder Kirov'. The editors of these documents think that there is no evidence for the view that Kirov might have offered a more liberal alternative to Stalin's leadership. But it is not necessary to presume that the alternatives on offer within the much diminished political culture of the CPSU might be more or less 'liberal'. What was not permissible was for there to be any alternative at all, or even any candidates for an alternative.

After Kirov's assassination, a very revealing Central Committee letter expatiates on the guilt of the 'Zinoviev anti-Soviet Group'. This began with the statement that 'the nest of villainy ... has been completely destroyed'. In this sense, the editors are clearly justified in saying that there was no pre-ordained plan to the process which became known as the terror, because the closure of the file was strictly temporary. One thing led to another, and these documents show how.

As the processes wore on from one trial to the next, so the nightmare intensified. This was, as the Austrian Socialists insisted at the time, a chain of witchcraft trials. The poor witches who were beaten and tortured, and threatened with dreadful reprisals against their families, frequently failed to acquit themselves with much dignity. It is probable that the original witches who were innocent women, drowned in the processes which 'tried' them, might also have died inelegantly.

No-one can read these terrible documents with any sense of uplift. They show us an unrelieved portrait of evil, which is if anything heightened by the compilers' severe efforts to attain objectivity.

*Kevin Smith*

## **Colombia's suffering**

**Constanza Ardila Galvis, *The Heart of the War in Colombia*, Latin America Bureau, 2000, £11.99, pp.224**

For more than half a century, Colombia has been devastated by continuing armed conflict and civil war. In 1998, it is estimated that 3,832 civilians were killed and a further 1,512 lost their lives in military operations. Drug trafficking, kidnapping, the forced displacement of perhaps one-and-a-half million people from their homes, torture and human rights abuses are constant features of life in Colombia. Action to combat poverty, ill health and illiteracy get little priority in such circumstances.

Two main guerrilla groups, the F.A.R.C. and E.L.N., are not strong enough to take power, but are too strong to be vanquished. They could perhaps muster combined forces of 20,000 but this is only half the numerical strength of the army. They also face, however, 4,000-5,000 paramilitaries, who are estimated by the U.S. State Department to have murdered over 1000 people in 155 massacres in 1997. Drug traders operate other armed groups.

*The Heart of the War in Colombia* is by Constanza Ardila Galvis, a journalist, who works with a human rights organisation, CedaVida. Its objective is to illustrate the appalling effects of the violence on ordinary Colombians by publishing the personal stories of a cross-section of selected people.

The result is truly horrifying. Those who feature in the book have not only suffered between them the effects of the oppression and violence of the army, the guerrillas and the paramilitaries; their lives have been utterly degraded by the degeneration of social and family relations. Wives are beaten, abused and raped, even by their husbands; children are also victims; parents, including mothers, desert their partners or their offspring or are forced to leave their land. Some become informers, or refuse to accept this role at terrible personal cost, since those suspected of aiding the other side may be summarily and cruelly executed by guerrillas, paramilitaries or the army alike. Malnutrition, ill health and lack of education are common.

Life in such conditions must be sheer hell. All the narrators of personal experiences, recorded in this book, have lost close family members. On this attitudes differ. Angela, aged 63, is proud that her two sons had the courage to be guerrillas, although both were killed. Others, however, are doubtful whether their sacrifice has been worthwhile.

The overwhelming conclusion is that an alternative to suffering, bloodshed and destruction has to be found to resolve Colombia's problems. There must be a peace process. If, after more than 50 years of armed struggle, no military solution is in sight, other ways must be found to provide what the overwhelming majority of the Colombian population undoubtedly want.

Anyone who wants truly to understand the agony of Colombia and the desperate need for an end to it should read this book. It requires some perseverance but the final impact is utterly devastating. Something must be done!

*Stan Newens*

## **Ruskin College**

**Geoff Andrews, Hilda Kean & Jane Thompson, *Ruskin College, Contesting Knowledge, Dissenting Politics*, Lawrence & Wishart, 1999, pp.186**

The centenary of one of the better known institutions of the British Labour Movement might be expected to have stimulated much discussion of the significance of the contribution of Ruskin College to that movement together

with some thoughts about the future role of the College. So far we have had a gathering in the Oxford Town Hall reviving the launching meeting there in 1899, followed by a march through the City, a lecture by John Hughes, the College's Principal in the 1980s, a brief record of former students' voices on Radio 4. We have not had the promised study by David Browning of the background of the College's founders, Walter and Amne Vrooman and Charles and Mary Beard, nor his survey of the subsequent careers of Ruskin alumni, neither apparently pursued by the College. This is unfortunate since this list would have revealed the great body of achievements of former students, and would have indicated the value of collective approaches to education, which the present Government's policies ignore in their emphasis on the individual. But now we have this little book from the College, a collection of essays, of which it is claimed in the blurb that it

'is the first account of what is often called 'the Ruskin experience'... [which] reflects on the contribution that Ruskin has made in the fields of education and politics ... [and] assesses the significance of Ruskin through the experiences of both students and staff.'

The editors are current tutors at the College, one of whom was a Ruskin student, and the contributors apart from themselves comprise three other current staff members, two other former Ruskin students, and Roger Fieldhouse, the Professor of Adult Education and Director of Continuing Education at the University of Exeter. Professor Fieldhouse contributes an essay, which originally appeared in 1987 introducing a reissue by Nottingham University of the 1908 *Report on Oxford and Working Class Education*, a report which Ruskin's arrival in Oxford had stimulated.

Fieldhouse's essay and the first essay by Nick Kneale on Ruskin's foundation reflect on the supposed historic conflict between Ruskin and Oxford, which is said to have reached its climax in the Ruskin students' strike of 1909, and led to the breakaway of the Central Labour College. The conclusion of Harold Pollins in his 1984 study, *The History of Ruskin College*, that 'a major factor in the dispute was the personal antagonism within the small staff' is not considered.

There are no essays on Ruskin during the sixty years between 1909 and the late 1960s, presumably because there was no conflict between Ruskin and Oxford in those years. But Bob Purdie, a 1974-6 Ruskin student and current Ruskin tutor in politics, tells us that in May 1968 'two members of the teaching staff, Ralph Samuel and David Selbourne, took the lead in ... a revolt against the College's attachment to the Oxford University Special Diplomas, which all students sat and which subordinated the College to a very traditional academic curriculum.' From then on, it appears, the College regained its radical stance of 'contesting knowledge and dissenting politics.' Ruskin students' protests against racism, gender inequalities and the Viet Nam war, and for civil rights in Northern Ireland are well documented by Bob Purdie.

Unfortunately, as it transpired, Ralph Samuel and David Selbourne fell out in the 1980s. According to Geoff Andrews, 'The nature of their dissenting

relationship to the College mirrored some of Ruskin's own paradoxes in its relationship to the university,' but the story he tells describes the widening gap which became obvious in the 1990s between 'old' and 'new' Labour. While Samuel saw the Miners' Strike of 1984-5 as 'an act of faith – faith in each other, faith in the unions, faith in their leaders, faith in coal as a bedrock of British life', and bitterly protested the abandonment of class politics, Selbourne regarded all this as a romantic illusion and even after Murdoch's destruction of the print unions wrote for Murdoch's papers. In the dispute that followed this he lost his job at Ruskin. We are not told that the College's academic advisers, who acted as a court of appeal, were all Oxford dons. Ralph Samuel stayed on.

There is much more about Ralph Samuel in Paul Martin's contribution and elsewhere, understandable in the year of Ralph's death. The emphasis, however, in the whole collection on what are really peripheral aspects of the life of the College – the History Workshops, the Women's Liberation Movement conferences, the student revolts and demonstrations – leaves the reader quite uninformed about the actual educational ethos of the College, its influence on those who went through its doors, its role in the 20th century history of the Labour Movement. Even the one practical chapter by Richard Bryant on the financial hardship of being a student relates to the vocational course for social workers, which has always been in many ways separate from the main student body.

In the keynote paper from editor and Women's Studies tutor Jane Thompson entitled 'Can Ruskin Survive?', the issue of Ruskin against Oxford in the 1900s is rehearsed once more. Raymond Williams's authority is claimed for the following sentence (two references are given, one to a 1979 book, one to a 1989 book by Williams):

'The structure and content of the college curriculum would look very different in the centenary year if the structure of feelings and resources for a journey of hope exemplified by the radical tradition in adult education, and personified in the Plebs' commitment to liberating knowledge from the control of the university and to class solidarity, had triumphed, rather than the elitism, and subsequent inertia, of the university connection.'

Such a wholesale condemnation of the years between 1909 and 1969 (or 79 or 89 or 99), if Raymond made it, needs to be justified. But there is no essay in this collection which covers these years and Harold Pollins passes over them very superficially. I have to declare an interest here. My father was successively Vice-Principal for two years and then Acting Principal and Principal for the rest of the 20 years between 1921 and 1941. It would be important to compare the results of the Plebs commitment as evidenced in the Central Labour College and the National Council of Labour Colleges with the results of Ruskin's 'elitism and subsequent inertia'. In one respect there is a solid fact that can be discovered, which Hilda Kean overlooks in her essay on 'impact of the physical presence' of the Ruskin buildings. It was in the inter-war years that the college's debts were paid off, the old wooden buildings were pulled down and replaced by a new library, dining room, common room, vice-principal's lodgings etc.



Jane Thomson complains that, when New Labour set up a National Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning, Ruskin was not involved. She describes the Group's first report as 'not the most radical of documents – as might be expected from a group that wants to effect and influence what happens, rather than analyse and be critical of what does not.' And in the end, she lays down what is needed in the future, to be

'useful to those who are activists and participants in social change. It would mean the principled pursuit of collaboration, and connection and commitment to the distinctive educational, social and political advancement of hitherto marginalised and excluded groups within the working class.'

She distinguishes this from what she says 'needs to be recognised', in part quoting Beatrix Campbell writing in 1984, 'that Ruskin remains an organisation that also has its roots in the white working class and the liberal academic "men's movement"'. Well, these at least are views that could be argued about, and it is just unfortunate that this collection does not contain any of that argument.

*Michael Barratt Brown, founding Principal, Northern College*

## An Unhappy Family?

***Capitalism at the end of the Millennium: A Global Survey, Monthly Review, Vol.51, No.3, July/August 1999***

To free-market enthusiasts, successful capitalist societies are a clan of near-siblings. Spurred on by healthy emulation their economies are, aided by pressure from increased trade and financial exchanges, converging. Efficiency is stimulated by colossal take-overs, privatisation, flexible workforces, the involvement of private capital in public administration, and leaner welfare states. Third Way governments claim to harness these global trends to social justice by equipping their populations to compete in the world bazaar. Yet capitalism in this increasingly 'chemically pure' form is, as French Socialists state, riddled with irrationality and injustice. At the 21st Congress of the Socialist International, Lionel Jospin called for markets to be contested, reformed and regulated (*Le Monde*, 9.1.99). Despite these phrases, the Socialist Prime Minister proclaimed capitalism's virtues in the 'creation of wealth and the allocation of resources'. The free-market assumptions of the official left have narrowed policy debates to the communal infrastructure surrounding private enterprise; a potential socialist economy is excluded from the lineage of social democracy.

Ellen Meiksins Wood begins this special issue of *Monthly Review* with a different household image. Echoing the words of Anna Karenina, capitalism is an unhappy family with ingrained difficulties. Its domestic life is rent with crises, it has not restored profitability to the rates of the 'impure' state-managed post-war

decades – even in the model new economy of the United States – and has spread increasing misery across the planet. Sovereign states have been complicit in globalisation, and are actively working against the interests of wage-earners. Reviving the tattered remnants of social democratic solidarity is, in this context, simply anger-management. Instead, action is needed, ‘aimed at detaching social life from the logic of capitalism altogether’ (p.12). As a result, *Monthly Review* looks for renewed radicalism. The weakness of attempts to reform capitalism has opened up a political space. Massive protest movements around the World Trade Organisation suggest that such calls have a growing audience; broad swathes of the unofficial left and international social movements have targeted the binding threads of capitalism as the source of a multitude of problems.

Ellen Meiksins Wood and David McNally’s anti-capitalist overviews box-in the pages of *Capitalism at the End of the Millennium*. For both, capitalism is not driven by an optimal rationality, always waiting to be set free. It is an historical phenomenon formed, not by reason, but by class interests. Drawing on her *Pristine Culture of Capitalism* (1993), Wood described Britain’s early modern state, and advanced agrarian capitalism. This was the first society to develop the unified sovereignty and economy that permitted the “‘spontaneous” or indigenous development of a capitalist system...’ (page 3). This historical nexus spread its influence through ‘an outwardly expanding commercial system’. Today, capitalism is nearly universal, with ‘certain general laws of motion’. Nevertheless, if general capitalist determinations operate, they only exist in specific national and regional forms. In these spheres, new types of imperial domination, by debt and financial manipulation, have appeared, accompanied by militarism and the quest of ‘boundless hegemony over the global economy’ (page 10). For David McNally, the end of the Keynesian class compromise and state-regulated monopoly capitalism of the post-war era has meant a resumption of the dynamics of an earlier free-trade epoch. In the process, the tendency to over-accumulation and crises of profitability have returned. These foundations of the world economy are not open to Keynesian or updated regulation. They cannot be channelled by reforming governments, and softened by trust and social cohesion into a modernised social democracy.

If these premises are accepted, the task of contributors is to illustrate how global capitalism operates in a vast panorama of nations and regions. This is an ambitious objective. In the execution, Marxist categories permeate their work unevenly. There is a great diversity of use of capitalism’s various ‘laws of motion’, and how they operate in each country. The ultimate contradictions of globalised class society, and the dynamics of profitability and accumulation, prove hard to pin down. One reason is that the Marxist theory of crises – the well-spring of anti-capitalism – remains controversial amongst Marxists, not least because there are so many different angles revealed in over a century of debate. Explanations vary from under-consumption (the weak purchasing power of workers), over-accumulation (such as too great quantities of capital fixed in ageing industries), disproportionality (at its crudest, the absence of planning in a

capitalist society) to the declining rate of profit. These factors have been given different weight by Marxists to explain the periodic revalorisation of capital, or the process of 'creative destruction' which leads to unemployment and the re-allocation of resources to new areas.<sup>1</sup> *Monthly Review* cites the importance of increased financial flows. A surplus of capital sloshing around the financial markets, with 'significant autonomy', burning up in currency and stock market panics, most recently in the Far East, expresses – in a manner not explained – the 'instabilities that have developed in the sphere of production and capital accumulation' (page 142). Capitalism as a system is, on average, always unstable. This approach tells us little about the 'specific national and regional forms' and the historical conditions in which capitalism's real crises exist.

Articles in *Capitalism at the End of the Millennium* shed only occasional light on such problems. They tend to highlight the purely formal coupling of capitalist 'laws of motion' with class, political and inter-state policy. The failure of the developmental state in Sub-Saharan Africa is described by John Saul and Colin Leys. The introduction of global market forces through structural adjustment programmes, and the legacy of the client-spoils system, has rendered the prospects of social advance dire. As a result, Saul and Leys claim, much of the African continent 'exists in a capitalist world, which marks and constrains the lives of its inhabitants at every turn, but is not of it' (page 13). In Latin America, James Petras and Henry Veltmeyer regard 'the neoliberal parabola' of the 1970s as something which 'burst on the scene under the guns of the military and the tutelage of the CIA and the Pentagon...' (page 49). Prabhat Patnaik does, by contrast, in a strongly argued analysis, examine a new form of finance capitalism, 'hot money', and portrays its influence on Asia. Financial liberalisation has an enormous influence on the Asian domestic class and economic structure, limiting the possibilities of developmental nationalism. But concern with the power of 'metropolitan financiers' leaves the reader with the impression that this has been a conscious strategy, and not the product of the laws governing capitalist production, which appear to operate in whatever way that favours bourgeois interests. Other contributions, on America, Japan and Russia, tend similarly to treat economic policy as the result of pressure from global capitalism enthusiastically adopted by the domestic bourgeoisie (or, in Russia's case, a corrupt hybrid bureaucratic mafia). As a result, many articles can be read as specific accounts of national and regional class and political conflict, with only passing reference to the deeper global capitalist laws of motion.

There remain profound problems about the approach taken. Greg Albo and Alan Zeuge's portrait of Europe demonstrates the problematic assumptions at the heart of *Capitalism at the End of the Millennium*. The project of European integration is located within the 'internationalisation and concentration of capitalist production'. The European Union is an attempt to drag the continent out of its economic impasse (mass unemployment, slowing growth) into the global competitive environment. It therefore springs directly from the chemically pure capitalism France's socialist leadership denounces. On the way there is little

room for the negotiated social pacts that underpinned social democracy in the Keynesian era. Any 'progressive form of globalisation' has been ruled out by the joint influence of national capitalistic classes who have no need to compromise, and modernising social democratic elites who have pared down their objectives. 'Competitive corporatism' – Blair and Schröder are cited as supporters, though it is hard to imagine the British Prime Minister engaged in partnership talks with anybody other than corporations – cannot master Europe's 'weak and divided centre'. Nor can any programme for a social Europe succeed. In fact, 'The competitive corporatism that has arisen in response to European stagnation and integration has become the particular European means to intensify work, facilitate rapid adjustment, or shift shares from labor to capital' (page 117). European politics is reduced to a troupe of puppets operated by capitalism. Resistance – such as it is – can be seen in the mass strikes in France, Greece 'and elsewhere' (where?) 'against Maastricht' (page 118). The authors perhaps refer to the French 1995 upheaval against Alain Juppé's Health and Welfare reforms – a long running sore that long predates the Euro. But then, why bother with such details if one's main intention is to find opposition to capitalism?

Faced with the remorseless throw-back to classical free-market capitalism, the contributors to *Capitalism at the End of the Millennium* find hope in the stirrings of 'new radical working class and popular organisations' (David McNally). The political strategy here recalls Pudovkin's Soviet film, *Storm over Asia*, where workers and peasants' discontent builds up into a cascading flood of revolt. Romantic expectations, however, obscure strategic battles. Mitterrand's Keynesian expansion plans came unstuck in 1982, partly from market attacks, but principally from a lack of left mobilisation and will from key members of the Mauroy cabinet and the President himself. Since then, the European left has been engaged in a long and complex struggle at the level of the European Union, trying to channel popular anger at neo-liberalism into a democratisation of its structures. The French Socialist current, the Gauche Socialiste, labels this (after Jaures), the fight for a European Social Republic. Pressure in this direction has come from initiatives such as the *European Conventions for Full Employment* (1997, 1999), which assembled hundreds of delegates from a wide range of union and civil society bodies. Plans for full employment, a reduced working week and social investment, try to tackle the principal fault lines of modern capitalism. This 'Keynesian' programme has yet to be adopted. That the European Central Bank is continuing its free-market course, with downward pressure on wages and welfare, that Lafontaine has been shunted off, and even France's 'plurielle' left has accepted privatisation, does not prove that the left should simply abandon the attempt. As this large-scale project has not been implemented, it is impossible to know if it is unworkable. Since socialist politics is not just about battling capitalist marionettes, but about giving a voice to the mass support for these immediate and somewhat unromantic principles, work for a social Europe is unlikely to be abandoned in the face of present adversary.

In the *Grundrisse*, Marx talked of the 'relations of circulation as well as of

production which are so many mines to explode it'.<sup>2</sup> *Monthly Review* has drawn out many 'mines' ready to explode in the face of global capitalism. Marx continued that '...if we did not find concealed in society as it is the material conditions of production and the corresponding relations of exchange prerequisite for a classless society, then all attempts to explode it would be quixotic...' (ibid). Here, the authors largely drew a blank. Resistance to capitalism on its own is not the basis of a new mode of production. In *Democracy Against Capitalism* (1995), Ellen Meiksins Wood suggested a search for a 'new driving mechanism of the economy', above all, the 'democratic organisation of the economy'.<sup>3</sup> Surely then, the left does not have to be an eternal Don Quixote, always sadly facing the last defeat at the hands of free-marketeers, the Third Way, and capitalism's 'laws of motion'. It must engage in the democratisation of regional blocs, Europe onwards, for the kind of practical anti-capitalist politics that can get a lever on the democratic machinery that could be transformed into such a mechanism? Only when we can talk again of a potential socialist economy will the left be in a position to fight effectively the twins of neo-liberalism and the Third Way.

Andrew Coates

#### References

1. A good outline of these problems is in Simon Clarke, *Marx's Theory of Crisis*. Saint Martin's Press, London 1994.
2. Page 159. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, Penguin, London 1973.
3. Page 290. Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism*, Cambridge University Press, 1995.

## End of Millennium – Business as Usual

***Human Rights Watch: World Report 1999, Published by Human Rights Watch, New York, £17.95, pp.506***

This annual report covers five continents, and more countries than it omits. It is based on the end-of-Millennium assumption that

'it is a sad truth that Governments and warring parties will always be tempted to violate human rights. Why tolerate a nettlesome opposition, governments will ask themselves, when it can be jailed?'

Some go further. Why jail the malcontents, when execution is so easy?

Nonetheless, some progress was registered. The Mine Ban Treaty had been ratified by forty countries, in time to take effect in March 1999. A Treaty to establish an International Court moved closer to realisation in spite of strenuous opposition from the United States, China, India and others. Pinochet was arrested, even if he might never be brought to trial. And Kofi Annan, it is reported, showed 'a greater commitment to human rights than any other UN Secretary General'.

However, the Americans maintained their policy of rigorous exceptionalism, refusing to accept even a hint of international influence on United States domestic decisions.

‘Washington revealed itself once more to be severely out of step with most of the rest of the world. Ironically, in light of its long-stated commitment to upholding human rights at home and in its foreign policy, the US Government today poses a threat to the universality of human rights.’

This censorious judgement leads to criticism by Human Rights Watch, on the grounds that Washington’s non-compliance will be ‘mimicked by less savoury regimes’, and on the grounds that it will also undermine respect for the United States as an advocate of human rights. It must be said that the protection of American sovereignty from universal human rights covers a number of grave infractions, not only of rights, but of common decency. The Americans refuse to stop the execution of juvenile offenders, or to provide protection from certain kinds of discrimination. The Americans have still not ratified a number of major Treaties, including those on women’s rights, children’s rights, labour rights, economic rights, and the protection of civilians in time of war. When the Security Council sought to investigate the American bombing of the Al-Shifa pharmaceutical plant in Khartoum, the US Government blocked any such attempt.

Lest it can be thought that this report is only concerned with the role of the United States, it must be said that it provides very detailed information about repressive regimes from Turkmenistan to Burundi, and from Indonesia to Latin America. It also features special articles on the state of academic freedom, child soldiers, prisoners, refugees and lesbian and gay rights.

Its section on arms and arms transfers will be of interest to peace campaigners everywhere.

*James Donnelly*

## Utopias

**Leo Panich & Colin Leys (eds.), *Socialist Register 2000: Necessary and Unnecessary Utopias*, £30 cloth/£12.95 paper, Merlin, 1999, pp.283**

To persuade 15 socialist authors to write something about Utopias at this moment of history, even though it is marked by the calendar year 2000, was a considerable achievement. In fact the 15th essay by Peter Gowan is about Kosovo, no Utopia, but worth buying the book for, if the rest puts you off. The collection of essays is inevitably uneven and we are never told what would be the ‘unnecessary’ utopias. Even the fairy tales like the *Land of Cokagne* and *News from Nowhere* and the dire warnings like *Brave New World* and *1984* have their place in arousing our imagination and making us aware that change is possible, both for good and ill. Here the authors take a different view from another English

socialist writing fifty years ago on the English Utopia. A.L. Morton, the Marxist historian, could see nothing but despair and hatred in the writings of Huxley and Orwell.

The editors and writers in this collection, while they plead for us to retain the vision of a society where all can realise their potential capacities to the full, have their feet firmly on the ground, recognising only too clearly how capitalism ‘cripples our capacities, stunts our dreams and incorporates our politics’. They start from where Wordsworth started 150 years ago, in his Prelude:

*Not in Utopia, – subterranean fields, –  
Or some secreted island, Heaven knows where!  
But in the very world, which is the world  
Of all of us, – the place where in the end  
We find our happiness, or not at all.*

The editors even give a ten-point list of what has to be transformed in applying our vision to the world as it is, so that it incorporates ‘a utopian sensibility with a concern with capacity building’. Norman Geras in a further list of ten theses distinguishes a ‘minimum utopia’ in a world cured of all ‘its worst remediable deprivations and horrors’. These appear to be the same as the United Nations’ Development Programme target for the year 2020: ‘a condition in which people had enough to eat, adequate water, shelter, health care, and the fundamental rights of expression, belief and assembly, and in which they were free from arbitrary imprisonment, torture, “disappearance”, threat of genocide’. The UNDP likes to contrast the cost of providing this for two billion people with a small percentage of the wealth of the richest 300 men in the world. But how to tax the rich so that the poor can benefit permanently? Geras sees hope in a reshaping of our moral consciousness through a ‘pervasive culture of mutual aid’.

Diane Elson in the most thought provoking paper of the collection explores the very practical steps that could be taken to establish such a mutually beneficial division of labour in place of that which obtains in the contradictions and exploitation of the capitalist market. Rejecting both market socialism and the social market as objectives for socialists, she argues for initiatives to socialise markets. She draws a distinction between the market, which is a system of production and exchange dominated by big capital, and individual markets which can, she believes, be organised through non-capitalist institutions to serve the needs of people and not capital. She distinguishes four sectors of production and distribution in the economy in which markets are embedded – the capitalist, commercial, so-called private sector; the state or so-called public sector; the domestic sector, which includes consumption not only of the products of the private and public sectors but also all the unpaid services provided mainly by women; and a fourth, not-for-profit sector, which she calls the ‘associative sector’. She sees economic activity in these sectors being driven by different aims, but also generating different values. ‘The private sector’, she writes, ‘transmits commercial values, the public sector regulatory values, the associative sector solidaristic values and the domestic sector , provisioning values’.

Diane Elson understands very well that a right to common property must be the basis of a socialist economy so that no individual or group can be excluded from the use of natural and human resources. She also sees that this right cannot be unqualified. There have to be regulations to protect the environment, to restrict overcrowding of cars or housing. The right to a basic income would have to carry with it an obligation to perform some unpaid, part-time citizen duties. These collective rights she sees as the 'vision' of socialism, which would need a macro-economic framework set by open and democratically accountable planning commissions for central coordination of taxation and public expenditure, and for financial parameters and rates of resource depletion, for human development and environmental protection. Markets would still operate, with the exception of those for corporate control and financial derivatives, but they would be brought increasingly under domestic and associative aims and values. She believes that women's demands for more control over the domestic sector and the growth of the Fair Trade Movement in the associative sector indicate a line of advance towards the goal of more egalitarian social relations.

It is impossible within the limitations of a short review to touch on all the aspects of utopia that the several authors of this collection have explored. But it is good to see a knock-down piece by Alan Zuege on 'The Chimera of the Third Way' and a splendid defence by Julian Tudor Hart of his project in South Wales, involving patients in the care of their health. Colin Duncan argues forcefully for the centrality of agriculture in Britain's economic history and in our future development, but accepts too easily the fashionable downgrading of the industrial revolution. There is an important attempt by Judith Adler Hellman to sort out the reality from the myths in the reports coming out from the Zapatista's struggle in Chiapas, and there is an urgent warning from Varda Burstyn about the lack of democratic control over genetic technology. Indeed, the message of the whole collection can be summed up in Diane Elson's plea that we should democratise, not liberalise, the economy and society.

*MBB*