Reviews

Shukri Al-Mabkhout, ***The Italian*****,** Al-Tanweer Press, Beirut 2014; 344 pp; ISBN 9789938886481, $16.00, pbk

Shukri Al-Mabkhout's first novel *The Italian* is a political narrative par excellence. A linguist by profession, Al-Mabkhout ventures into Tunisian contemporary political history via the Marxist militant Abdennaser, a controversial character that won him the 2015 Booker Prize for Arabic Literature. Nicknamed the 'Italian', Abdennaser is a self-deceptive Tunisian Marxist who starts off his journey as a hard-nosed activist in the leftist General Union of Tunisian Students (UGET), and then an influential member in a 'radical Marxist' Party. He, due to the changing political climate after the 1987 November coup against President Habib Bourguiba, suffers both moral and ideological decline. Al-Mabkhout enmeshes Abdennaser in a morass of incidents that reveal the inability of Marxism-Leninism to keep its ideological promises. From the outset, Abdennaser 'unabashedly' rebels against Arab-Muslim culture, and subscribes to radical Marxism. But he is gripped by a volatile personality that is revealed in connection to many characters. Some key characters have considerable influence on Abdennaser's future. Zina, his wife, deconstructs his rigid dogma; his liberal-minded brother Salaheddine challenges his 'perfunctory' defense of socialism; and Nagla, his mistress, causes his moral collapse.

Abdennaser joins the UGET while studying for a law degree in Tunis. Gradually, he becomes an ardent defender of the proletarian cause, and engages in underground activities against the Bourguibist regime. He meets Zina, the philosophy student, at a very critical conjuncture when he is told by a Communist leader to 'eliminate her' because of her continuous attacks on the 'comrades' (pp63-64). Contrary to expectations, he falls in love with her and decides to protect her. Al-Mabkhout deliberately connects Abdennaser's volatility to the changing political environment in Tunisia after the 1987 coup. The coup coincides first with Abdennaser's betrayal of Zina with her best friend, Nagla (pp221-229), and then with his departure from Marxism-Leninism (pp295-300).

Despite its lack of rigor – while accounting for the political-theoretical position of the Tunisian left – *The Italian* successfully brings up the question of the controversial role of the left in Tunisia during Ben Ali's rule. Abdennaser is used to articulate the left's oscillation between dogged militantism (during Bourguiba's rule) and uncouth opportunism after the 1989 general elections. Yet, Al-Mabkhout does not explain the fluctuation of the Tunisian leftists on ideological grounds. Although he discusses the theoretical props of Tunisian Marxism via Zina and Salaheddine – often in negative perspective – he does not connect Abdennaser's downfall to, for instance, his failure to assimilate Marxist theory or his decision to depart from it. Al-Mabkhout offers no convincing explanation why a militant as engaged as Abdennaser would dig his own ideological grave. In the novel, Abdennaser sustains moral and ideological decline not because he loses faith in the Marxist creed but because of financial hardship and marriage difficulties. Abdennaser, Al-Mabkhout implies, is a good Marxist corrupted by financial need. And this is why he decides to divorce his wife and commit to a care-free life (pp221-229), and then compromises his Marxist principles by accepting a post in the neoliberal regime's organ (pp295-300).

A major weakness in Al-Mabkhout's narrative resides in his attempt to reduce the validity of the Marxist project in Tunisia via Zina's eclectic neo-Marxist approach. For Zina, Tunisian Marxist-Leninists of the 1970s, 1980s (and early 1990s), including Abdennaser, are 'extremist' and 'professional partisans' (p54) incapable of grasping the revolutionary moment and the difference between revolutionary consciousness and trade union consciousness (pp55-56). She forges such a critique by curiously fusing the work of the Frankfurt School, Gramsci's historicism, Luxemburg's anti-centrism, Kautsky's reformism and Lenin's contempt for trade union consciousness (p55). And it is unmentioned in the novel whether Zina's critique affects in any way Abdennaser's decision to quit Marxism-Leninism and accept a post as a propagandist for the neoliberal Ben Ali regime. For a good historical reason, Al-Mabkhout's employment of Zina to articulate the crisis of the Tunisian left is erroneous. Al-Mabkhout overlooks the fact that in the context of the 1970s and 1980s neo-Marxism – to which Zina subscribes – had had insignificant influence on both the student movement and the radical left in Tunisia. The debate had been focused more on which of the classical currents of Marxism was more timely and could wield power in favour of the working classes. The conflicting trends in Tunisia were characteristically either Marxist-Leninist, Maoist or

Trotskyist; any mention of a neo-Marxist approach then would be reduced as revisionist.

Al-Mabkhout seems to miss the point that the crisis of the left in the late 1980s had to do chiefly with the disillusionment with Soviet-type socialism rather than the failure to adopt a neo-Marxist critique of the Tunisian context. A whole generation of Marxist militants was demoralised by the (American) unipolar moment whose devastating political effect on Tunisia was far-reaching. But, despite the impact of the collapse of socialism, most such militants chose to confront the oppressive apparatus of the neoliberal regime. In *The Italian*, Al-Mabkhout dismisses the impact of the international order on Tunisia, and proposes a surreal reading of the late 1980s; he critiques the role of the radical left by referring to the passive role of the Communist Party in the aftermath of the November coup. But, he curiously leaves unmentioned the key role of radical Marxist parties like the Communist Workers' Party (PCOT) and the Democratic Patriots' Party (WATAD) which, despite the debilitating post-Cold War order, had stood up to both the Bourguibist autocracy and the Ben Ali oligarchy.

Al-Mabkhout's *Italian* succeeds in identifying the vicissitudes of the Tunisian left, especially after the November coup, but it fails to trace the ideological determinants of the crisis of many leftists in the wake of the 1989 general elections. The use of Abdennaser to inform this crisis is problematic, basically because he falls for reasons other than the devastating effect of neoliberal policies adopted by the Ben Ali regime. The Ben Ali regime overtly supported the alleged 'triumph of liberal democracy' and dragged the Tunisian people down the neoliberal path. On the other hand, the employment of Zina aggravates Al-Mabkhout's misconception of the historical conjuncture of Abdennaser's downfall. Zina's role in the novel is loose. As she seeks to supplant radical Marxism, she is trapped in contradictions that weaken the validity of her claims. The marriage that she makes between Kautsky and Lenin on the one hand, and Lenin and Gramsci on the other reveals Al-Mabkhout's own fictional bricolage and his lack of mastery of differing approaches within Marxism.

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Ruth Ewan, *Twenty-Nine Thousand Nights: A Communist Life by Nan Berger*, Book Works, London 2017; 192 pp; ISBN 9781906012861, £15.00, pbk

Too often when examining the individual lives of communists in Great Britain during the twentieth century the focus is on spies, traitors, and Soviet stooges. The story of Nan Berger is one that shows that for every Dave Springhall and Alan Nunn May there were thousands of CPGB members who sought not governmental secrets but social justice and progressive change. *Twenty-Nine Thousand Nights: A Communist Life* recounts, in Berger's own writings, the wider struggle of the Left during the latter half of the past century as well as her personal journey to communism. The book is primarily Berger's unpublished autobiography, but it includes a wealth of supplementary material that brings the reader into the world of the historian and researcher. Ruth Ewan called this work a 'project' rather than a book and in many ways this is accurate. Interspersed throughout the text is an assortment of personal pictures, newspaper articles – both authored by Berger or about her – and even official Security Service reports on Berger and her activities. Ewan also includes an interview she conducted with Vicki Berger, Nan's daughter. By including these additional documents Ewan creates the feeling that one is not just reading a personal account by Berger but travelling vicariously through her life sharing her experiences. It makes for a wonderful visual aesthetic and narrative excursion into the life of an extraordinary woman.

Twenty-nine Thousand Nights: A Communist Life is a key resource for readers of a variety of interests – including those searching for a first-hand account of progressive politics or of women's role in British society, or simply an engrossing tale of an individual who sought a better world and tirelessly worked towards this goal from a young age. This book does not, however, provide a detailed account of CPGB activities or an ideological defence of the communist position. Instead, this work ranks as a welcome addition to the field of the social history of British communism. Berger's life story is told in a way where her personal accounts are interspersed with the current events of the age. Often this works well, but not always. Her commentary on such topics as the General Strike, the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War are enlightening from a feminist and Marxist perspective. Yet Berger's writing style shifts from the very intimate to the detached observer, leaving the reader sometimes wanting to know more of her life story, and at other times wanting a bit

more on the 'larger picture'. One example of this is when Berger recounts her time spent living in Poland for a year in 1949-1950. She attempts to balance recounting her day-to-day activities in a foreign land with social commentary on the Polish Communist experiment. Although her writing style is engaging, neither theme is fully fleshed-out, so that the reader still wants to know more about both facets of her experience in Poland. In her interview with Berger's daughter at the beginning of the book, Ruth Ewan seems to agree with this assessment as well. Ewan comments that in Berger's autobiography 'she misses out much of her personal research work, books, and her later family life' (p16).

Born into a wealthy family near Manchester in 1914, Nan Berger in her younger years lived a life of comfort but one with many peculiarities. Her father, a functional alcoholic – she went so far to describe as a 'Jekyll and Hyde figure' – was the epitome of the entrepreneurial spirit that capitalism so adores. Far ahead of his time in respect of reusable resources, he founded a profitable business in recycling gunny off imported cotton bales and reutilising oil rags. Obsessed with conspicuous consumption at home and conspicuous frugality at work, her father made Nan and her siblings dress up at home but kept simpler clothes for them to wear when visiting him at his factory. He sought hard to impress his neighbours, but feared to show his family's wealth in front of the many labourers he employed, imagining they would ask for raises or better working conditions. Her father provided her first insights into the capitalist economic model, and Berger was far from impressed. In 1935 she moved to London to join her brother Peter who was studying at the London School of Economics. They both joined the CPGB shortly afterwards.

Berger discovered the patriarchy and classism of British society was replicated even in the ranks of the Communist Party – as a woman from a privileged family she found only a 'sullen acceptance' in the CPGB overall and recounted:

> My acceptance into the Party branch was equally lukewarm. Even though the branch was in an area filled with the middle class and intellectuals, the comrades in the branch were mainly working class who looked upon the rest of the population as a spineless mass backing up the ruling class. Protesting now and again in order to retain a progressive image. As a member of this mass I was tolerated – just (p71).

Despite not gaining the support and the friendship she had hoped for, Berger worked hard for the party and took great pride in her membership.

Reading and studying Marxism for her became a full-time occupation. Coming into the CPGB as a committed pacifist, she dropped this position and took the official line of the Party after her brother Peter joined the International Brigade to fight the Nationalists in the Spanish Civil War. She wrote that the conflict in Spain had the greatest effect in transforming her to an unswerving communist and a committed fighter in the international class struggle.

During the early years of the Second World War Berger worked for the Bank of England until she was dismissed for her political affiliations. She found work immediately afterwards in the Civil Service and was employed until after the war. In this capacity she was awarded an OBE at the age of 33 in 1948 for her work in the statistical department of the Ministry of Fuel and Power. She would leave the Civil Service to raise her two children and to devote her time to journalism. In the latter half of her autobiography Berger recounts how she never lost faith in the dual dreams of a more egalitarian British society and a just global community.

The story of Nan Berger is an inspiring and uplifting tale of a woman who sought to bring about change in a world she found unfair. Supplemented with Ruth Ewan's wealth of archival work, this is a worthwhile resource for anyone interested in the struggles of the progressive movement from the early 1930s until the 1990s. It is not merely a well-edited book but a treasure trove of primary source documents that gives a fuller account of an extraordinary life and well might be the prototype – the shape of things to come – for future works by social historians.

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Paul Hanebrink, ***A Spectre Haunting Europe: The Myth of Judeo-Bolshevism,*** Belknap Press, Cambridge MA, 2018; 368 pp; ISBN 9780674047686, £23.95, hbk

Paul Hanebrink's detailed research into the myth of Judeo-Bolshevism is a timely, welcome, most valuable and much needed study that brings compelling insights into anti-Semitism and anti-Communism. The latter are both comprised of many variants, with Judeo-Bolshevism being one of the most virulent and persistent. Most importantly, Hanebrink shows how Judeo-Bolshevism was a construct, a dangerous and consequential one that held Jews responsible for the creation and propagation of

Bolshevism, responsible therefore for the crimes of Communism and a threat to Europe, indeed to the whole of western civilisation. He carefully charts the array of complex factors and historical forces by which meaning was attached to the fact that *some* Bolsheviks were Jews, which signified nothing until it was made to do so.

Hanebrink traces the myth from its origins as a component of anti-Communism in the mix of war, civil war, revolution and imperial breakdown in Europe between 1914 and 1923. He then examines the use made of Judeo-Bolshevism by fascists in the interwar period, as well as by conservatives, the Christian churches included, who sought either to mobilise or neutralise it for their own purposes. There is careful analysis of how the concept contributed to the unfolding of the Holocaust. In the second part of the book Hanebrink examines how the uses of Judeo-Bolshevism changed after the fall of Nazi Germany, including its transformation under the Eastern European communist regimes and its western trajectory. He also looks at its legacy, and most notably its re-emergence at the end of the Cold War with the concomitant rise of nationalism.

Judeo-Bolshevism was not simply made in the context of war and revolution to appear as a wholly new danger, it drew on older, embedded anti-Jewish prejudices that exacerbated existing fears and loathing. Hence, defying all sense of logic and rationality, the traditional charges that portrayed Jews as cunning and malicious financiers were linked to 'Jewish' supported revolutions against capitalism as proof of the Jewish quest for power that would embrace and manipulate any system that would serve their purposes. Hanebrink reviews the history of anti-Judaism from the nineteenth century, back through the Middle Ages and ultimately to the Gospel era 'when Jews were first marked as evil and hostile to the Christian order on earth' (p27). He emphasises that the Judeo-Bolshevik myth was in essence but one type of anti-semitism among many that was constructed from the raw materials of anti-Judaism, subsequently recycled and rearranged to meet the demands of a new age. It was distinct from other variants of anti-Jewish hatred in that it highlighted specific Jewish stereotypes and endowed them with new meaning.

The lengthy, complicated relationship between Judaism and Christianity meant the Christian-Jewish binary, perhaps inevitably, remained a constant in a context where an imagined Christian civilisation appeared under threat. In a post-World War One context of fear that revolution could spread across Europe and North America, deeply ingrained convictions about an international Jewish conspiracy gave

life to the forged *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, taken as a further sign that Christian order and morality was under attack. Such convictions were legitimised and strengthened and given coherence by Christian perceptions of revolution as a secularised version of Jewish messianism. Hanebrink relates how this was especially true in Catholic intellectual circles, giving the example of the philosopher Jacques Maritain. Whilst a member of Action Française, which Hanebrink labels fascist, Maritain insisted Jews were 'an essentially messianic people' who played 'a subversive role in the world' (p31).

Racist representations of Jews gelled with orientalist images of uncivilised barbarians and Asiatic beasts, the invading hordes from the East, positing the latest 'clash of civilisations' which required the defence of Christian Europe. Post-war revolutionary unrest, along with the newfound militancy of the workers' movement throughout the Continent, created a climate in which Judeo-Bolshevism revived old anti-Jewish prejudices and re-worked them into a broadly persuasive critique of Bolshevism that, following ceaseless repetition, secured influence beyond the far right. Hanebrink shows how the equation of Jews and Bolshevik revolution moved from being a paranoid generalisation into an accepted fact, a perceived reality that meant that the idea of Judeo-Bolshevism became inseparable from violence against Jews. He supports his argument with the example of Hungary in 1919 where, under the pretext of eradicating Communism and redeeming Hungary as a Christian nation, paramilitary troops unleashed an orgy of opportunistic violence that became known as the White Terror and was subsequently acknowledged as excessive and destabilising. Nonetheless, some western conservatives applauded Hungarian anti-Communism, whilst the British Foreign Office produced a report that dramatically minimised the violence. Anti-Bolshevism of course dominated the strategic calculations of the victorious western allies at Versailles where a key deliberation about the future of post-war Europe was how to contain or roll back Communism.

The image of the Jewish Bolshevik was central to Nazi ideology and Hanebrink illustrates how the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union returned it to European politics with dire consequences. The invaders encouraged and provoked violence by identifying Jews as Bolshevik criminals, providing horrendous examples of what might be undertaken in the anti-Bolshevik cause: 'burning Jews alive in the Bialystok synagogue; massacring Jews labelled as Bolsheviks in Dobromil; organising mass shootings of suspected Jewish "subversives" in Vilnius' (p143). The defeat of Germany did not lead to the demise of the concept of

Judeo-Bolshevism, which was to shape the way in which many would understand the Soviet occupation and which also cast a long shadow in the West over post-war political and social reconstruction. However, the Judeo-Bolshevik threat was notably absent from Cold War proclamations that indicted the Soviet Union as a threat to western civilisation and Christianity.

In 1928 the National Conference of Christians and Jews was established in the United States to combat nativist attacks in America against Catholics and Jews. In 1930's America, against the backdrop of the evolving international crisis, a broad consensus was established that religion was central to liberal democracy, linking it to the concept of Judeo-Christianity. As the Cold War emerged, Judeo-Christianity, embraced by American Judaism as a means of securing a place in Cold War America, moved from being a pillar of anti-fascism to one of anti-communism and a key feature of Cold War liberal rhetoric. As the United States embraced Germany as an anti-Soviet ally, reaching out to its churches as vehicles to rebuild a democratic and anti-communist state, America's Jews had to avoid open discussion of the Holocaust to show support for American foreign policy. Whilst the idea of Judeo-Bolshevism was suppressed, that of 'Asiatic Bolshevism' was not, as evidenced by representations of the 'Mongol' rapist Red Army, contributing to the equation of Nazism and Communism as twin forms of totalitarianism that were morally equivalent. Prior to the Second World War, European leaders had viewed with disdain America's vulgar materialism. Post-war America became a necessary security partner and Judeo-Christianity a bonding mechanism facilitated by the theory of totalitarianism essential to its rise. When the latter declined in the course of the 1960s, Holocaust memory moved to the fore, casting Nazi genocide as a greater evil than Soviet repression. When the theory was revived for political purposes in the 1980s it brought the idea of Judeo-Bolshevism back into the frame.

Hanebrink concludes his masterful survey by examining how the idea of Judeo-Bolshevism became entangled with the politics of holocaust memory and its re-birth in post-Communist Europe. Hanebrink has produced a powerful and fascinating book that will be of interest to a wide spectrum of scholars as well as general readers. Highly recommended.

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Konstantinos Kavoulakos, *Georg Lukács's Philosophy of Praxis: from Neo-Kantianism to Marxism*, Bloomsbury Academic, London 2018; xvi and 248 pp; ISBN 9781474267410, £85.00, hbk

It is packed with 'difficult' philosophical concepts and technical language; many of the footnotes refer to texts which are available only in German; and Kavoulakos's writing style is often less than graceful.

These issues and barriers to the non-specialist reader are, however, rendered trivial and insignificant by Kavoulakos's achievement with this important book. It amounts to a contemporary recovery of central elements of the philosophy of the Hungarian Marxist Georg Lukács, and it succeeds on several levels. Kavoulakos identifies key perspectives which shaped Lukács's thinking, but which have been obscured over the last ninety-five years through mistranslation and commentary. More significantly, he shows how some of Lukács's insights and understandings have contemporary relevance: they could be popularised so as to directly resource those who are struggling today for the possibility of another – progressive – modernity.

Lukács lived a long life, and his thinking went through different stages. There are both continuities and ruptures across his work. Kavoulakos's focus is on Lukács's famous book *History and Class Consciousness*, first published in 1923. This comprised eight essays, some of which were reworked from versions he had written whilst directly engaged in the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919, and his subsequent escape into exile. Other pieces – of more lasting significance – expressed the beginnings of significant critical reflection on the experience of defeat. These introduced arguments and themes which became starting points for 'Western Marxism': the Frankfurt school figures Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin were amongst those drawn to Marxism by *History and Class Consciousness* (Adorno having already been enthused about philosophy more generally by Lukács's earlier, pre-Marxist work, 1916's *The Theory of the Novel*).

History and Class Consciousness was immediately controversial: at the Fifth Congress of the Communist International in summer 1925, Lukács's theories were furiously denounced as 'revisionist' and 'idealist' by Zinoviev, Bukharin and several lesser figures. Lukács took the pragmatic decision to withdraw the book: its subsequent influence took an 'underground form' until the 1960s, when it was republished in Europe and America, resonating with some of the 'new left' themes animating student radicals. (After the Fifth Congress, in 1925 or 1926, Lukács had

drafted a defence of his book, but this was entirely hidden for seventy years until discovered in the Moscow archive of the defunct Communist Party of the Soviet Union. It was published by Verso in 2000 as *Tailism and the Dialectic*. By the time *History and Class Consciousness* re-emerged in the late 1960s, Lukács claimed to be ambivalent about his 1923 book, stating explicit disagreement with some of its positions, whilst accepting that it still had 'a certain value').

It is widely recognised that a key theme in *History and Class Consciousness* is the continuing importance of Hegel's thought. This was not something which Marx had simply 'moved through' and then 'left behind'. Lukács shows that 'a whole series of categories of central importance and in constant use [in Marxism] stem directly from Hegel's *Logic*'.

Kavoulakos evidences that Lukács combined his turn (or return) to Hegel with another important resource: his neo-Kantian philosophical training, which 'continued to form the framework of his thought'. Lukács was unusual in being an important figure in the early years of twentieth-century communism as someone who had not previously been part of the labour movement. The rich and cultured banker's son came to revolutionary politics having established a reputation as a literary critic and philosopher, and after years studying in Heidelberg. This meant that Lukács had not absorbed the increasingly stultified 'Marxism' of the Second International's 'orthodox' leaders. Instead, he 'was able to read Marx's texts in a new, fruitful way, based on … deep knowledge of the problems of modern philosophy'. Lukács would later state 'that he never regretted the fact that he took his first lessons in social sciences from [Georg] Simmel and [Max] Weber and not from Kautsky'.

Neo-Kantianism was itself a complex tradition. Beginning in the 1860s, its different schools and thinkers shared the view that many of Immanuel Kant's categories, insights and approaches from the 1700s deserved revisiting and developing, on the basis that they could serve to critique and clarify philosophical debates which had developed since his death. But there were many competing and divergent views about how this should be done, and what the applications of Kant's thought should be. For some neo-Kantians, including Lukács, the point was to push and stretch Kantian theory to its limits, on the basis that this would help bring into focus a range of questions about the contradictions and problems of modern life.

How were 'neo-Kantian' optics in Lukács's outlook relevant to revolutionary politics? One example relates to the neo-Kantian understanding that 'meaning' should be distinguished from the factual existence of

things. Linked to this, neo-Kantians argued that the 'objectivities' of different types of thing generate varied and specific 'domains of meaning'. History, art and science are different things: so are the types of meaning which they produce and with which they are concerned. Against the background of debates on such issues, Lukács uses neo-Kantian terms to precisely track the procedures and mediations through which different kinds of reality which are present in capitalist society are subject to a process of 'reification'. This involves the 'logic' and 'values' which are inherent in capitalist commodity-exchange being extended and multiplying to shape – and distort – society more generally. Reification tends towards the recasting of all things as commodities, leading to increasingly dehumanising forms of social and political organisation, corrupting our 'personal' lives, and determining our subjective experience of the world in such a way as to risk reconciling us all with the needs and interest of the capitalist class. That this does not happen to a total extent is the result of irreconcilable social tensions which express themselves through class struggle - which Lukács describes and analyses in ways which make further use of neo-Kantian categories.

Kavoulakos tracks the 'sources and component parts' of Lukács's thought in a careful and systematic manner. Although the material is complex, the author has worked hard to make it possible for readers to follow his arguments and evidence. Part One of the book reconstructs 'the philosophical presuppositions of Lukács's early Marxism' and Part Two critically assesses 'his theory of rationality and modern society'.

Kavoulakos frequently highlights the differences between his analysis and other readings of Lukács which he considers to be mistaken. For example, in one chapter, Kavoulakos devotes nine closely-argued pages to a critique of Axel Honneth's 2008 book *Reification: a new look at an old idea*. There is understated wit in such sections: for Kavoulakos, it was a good thing that Honneth's publication generated some international discussion of Lukács – but this unfortunately came at the high cost of Honneth entirely distorting Lukács's theory and robbing it of its 'most radical dimensions'. For Kavoulakos, one of Honneth's mistakes is to present reification as 'a kind of constant anthropological factor' which is present in all forms and periods of social life, whereas Lukács's clear aim was 'to demonstrate the historically contingent character of capitalist social relations'.

In the third part of his book, on 'praxis', Kavoulakos builds on his earlier discussions to explore Lukács's 'theory of social and political change'. As part of this, Kavoulakos considers Lukács's controversial

formulations about 'imputed' or 'ascribed' class consciousness. In *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács uses this term to identify 'the thoughts and feelings which men would have in a particular situation if they were able to completely grasp [it] … i.e. to infer the thoughts and feelings appropriate to their objective situation'. For some commentators, this concept is proof of Lukács's idealism and elitism: he is 'rationally', in his mind, deciding what peoples' understanding of their situation should be, and then judging their actual views by assessing the extent to which these correspond to his view about what they should think.

Kavoulakos shows that, in fact, Lukács's concept is part of avoiding a dualistic counter-position between subjective or voluntarist impulses and the 'scientism' of Second International Marxism: this saw a shift to socialism as an 'inevitable' and 'necessary' outcome of social trends, in which it was not clear what need there was for consciously determined action by workers' parties and organisations. As the late István Mészáros insisted, the distinction between 'ascribed' and 'psychological' class consciousness was no lapse back into idealism. It was in fact a reformulation of one of Marx's important insights.

This book's short epilogue on 'the significance of Lukács's philosophy of praxis today' includes stimulating and inspiring arguments. Lukács was focussed on 'the possibility of creating new norms at the moment when the given system begins to tremble due to its inner inconsistency and its inherent instability'. Kavoulakos highlights the current 'spread of conflict and warfare … growing social and political tensions … the exploitation of the natural resources of the planet and its rapid ecological breakdown'. In this 'trembling' context, 'the established … social and political practices keep repeating the same story: What is happening is inevitable, it is the result of objective necessities, there have always been difficulties or even: we have already seen worse … the problem is only how to stay calm, rational, moderate, tolerant and optimistic – above all, how to remain sceptical toward any radical rejection of the established system'. Such 'reifying' arguments and 'reassurances' are leading us to disaster: it is time for a politics through which those threatened with the barbarism inherent in 'the given system' can understand things as they actually are – and act effectively in ways which are 'appropriate to their objective situation'.

Mike Makin-Waite

Jack Lindsay, *Who are the English? Selected Poems: 1935-1981*, Smokestack Books, Middlesbrough 2015; 139 pp; ISBN 9780992740931, £8.95, pbk

The Australian-born polymath, Jack Lindsay 1900-1990, is largely forgotten now despite or because of the fact that he published a ridiculous number of books in a ridiculous range of genres: his some 170 books include historical and contemporary-set novels, critical works on art, plays, works of history, philosophical works, translations, editions of historical English texts, political treatises and memoirs. Several other works exist only in manuscript form. Many PhDs about Lindsay's work need to be written. In the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* James M. Borg succinctly describes Lindsay's legacy as a 'magnificent ruin' – because of his varying, sometimes inchoate ideological positioning as much as for the restless adoption of new writing genres and styles. Despite myriad swings of ideology and preoccupation one thing about Lindsay was consistent: membership of the British Communist Party. After moving from Australia in 1926, Lindsay joined the Party in or around 1940; despite his pained response to the traumas of 1956 and 1968 he never left the Party, remaining a member until his death in 1990. He was sufficiently appreciated in Moscow to be included as a subject in the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* – and sufficiently feared in Britain to be watched energetically by MI5. Lindsay was also a prolific poet: his 1981 *Collected Poems* is over 600 pages long. Lindsay's poetry, unlike many of his other branches of writing, is direct, accessible and both resonant of the times it was written and powerfully compelling today. This somewhat quirky, messy edition of a small selection of his poetry is valuable for reminding us of the efficacy of this forgotten figure's leftist poetry.

Before I address the appeal of the verse in this edition I shall comment on its contents and its quirkiness. The book is not dated. There is a three-page 'Preface' written by someone – I do not know who – no editor is credited. We have then an inadequate two-sentence 'Note on the Text' and, more substantially, a very useful 'Introduction' by Anne Cranny-Francis. An extremely small 'Bibliography' is then offered – I'm totally confused by a reference to one publication which is dated to '1928-1912'. This is followed by the meat of the book: a hundred pages of Lindsay's poems – some of which are marred by typos and other errors. Some – not all – of the poems are afforded 'Notes' at the rear of the book. These notes are erratic. On one page there are three irritating errors: on this page, page 135, we are told that Robert Kett rose against enclosures 'in the

early 1600s' even though, we are accurately told, he was executed in 1549; we are told that the Peasants' Revolt took place in '1331' (it was 1381); and we are told that Luis Prestes was a member of the 'Brazilian Popular Front'. There is no excuse for this sort of sloppiness. Frustrating.

The quirky messiness of the book, though, should not totally distract us from the poems themselves because they are energetic and compelling. Lindsay's verse, which often combines pointed reference to specific political events with a call for a global expansion of class consciousness, is written in varied aesthetic styles: sometimes the poems are presented in almost random free verse; sometimes more conventional, more ordered stanza and metric structures are utilised. Some of the poems were read at mass declarations. The most well known is probably 'Who Are the English?' from 1936. Lindsay wrote this poem as a direct challenge to nationalistic discourses that praise military leaders, monarchs and servants of the state as being the only true English heroes. For Lindsay the heroes are those who challenged the English state through the centuries: obvious heroes for Lindsay include John Ball, Jack Cade, Lollards, Levellers, Luddites, Chartists and the General Strikers of 1926. The poem laments the current status of 'shophands' and 'slum denizens' who are rendered stupid by subjugation to sports results, horoscopes and embodied fascism in the 'dope' of 'national newspapers' and 'hire-payment systems'. This bleakness can be overcome if we recognise the true heroes of the past who can inspire us to push forward for an equitable 'Socialist Republic / England my England'. It is rousing stuff.

'Warning of the End' is a tight four-stanza poem that celebrates a reported mutiny by Spanish troops on 17 February 1936. The first stanza sarcastically addresses the lack of care shown by bankers and politicians for half-starved citizens. The second stanza notes the disinterest of the global bourgeoisie about atrocities carried out by Japanese troops against Chinese civilians. The third stanza points out that a decline in income may damage capitalists but not fatally. The fourth, final paragraph exultantly revels in the idea of something that will actually harm the ruling classes – soldiers realising that the rioters that they are sent to oppress are actually 'Brothers'. The poem, ultimately, is a fantasy that hired hands all over the world will mutiny in a global Marxist uprising.

Similar hopes for localised action followed by global awakening is expressed in another declamatory performance, 'On Guard for Spain', from 1937. It is impossible to not believe that Lindsay is on the right side of history as he lambasts a dystopian European body politic dominated by 'Franco the Butcher', 'Hitler the gangster' and 'Mussolini the

gambler'. Lindsay's ingeniousness with words is clear as he memorably describes the poor of Spain as 'unbreakfasted' but 'uprose'. Repetition and anaphora is used to generate anger as we are reminded to 'mourn for the workers', 'mourn for the children' and 'mourn for the women's bodies' but it is also used to generate enthusiasm and passion as we note that 'Spain rose up', 'Spain rose up' and 'Spain rose up'. Fighting is now imperative. It is a time to fight off the 'fascist monster', the 'fascist vultures'. It is not a time for 'tenderness' – nor might it be said, is it a time for nuanced, even-handed verse. Lindsay, unapologetically, offers not nuance but urgent, partisan, rousing verse.

Some later poems are more explicitly personal. 'To Ann' is a love poem dedicated to his partner, Ann Davies; a poem addressed to his estranged father, 'To my Father Norman', the artist Norman Lindsay, is a bleak meditation on the 'obdurate' father who will not respond to any efforts at rapprochement. But leftist politics, a way of life for Lindsay, is never marginalised entirely. 'Christmas Eve 1952' is a poem that unexpectedly and effectively blends socialist imagery with Christian discourse. Dawn brings in a new day, a day when men can rise against the tyranny of Herod. Herod metonymically represents all aggressive, greedy evil in the world. We should all be enemies of Herod, Lindsay asserts. Messy as this book is, its publication allows us to again engage with Lindsay's call for mass action against egregious, freedom-denying tyranny. At a time when irrational right-wing hatred of others including women, homosexuals, vegetarians and refugees seems both mainstream and quotidian, Lindsay's call for action against the jealous Herods of the world is very welcome.

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John Medhurst, ***No Less than Mystic: a history of Lenin and the Russian Revolution for a 21st century left***, Repeater Books, London 2017; 651 pp; ISBN 9781910924488, £9.99, pbk

According to Noam Chomsky, the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 was one of the 'great blows to socialism in the Twentieth Century'. For John Medhurst, who quotes Chomsky with approval, it was hardly a revolution at all, but an insurrection that under Lenin's leadership quickly became a counter-revolution. Russia's real revolution, according to his line of reasoning, was the 'people's revolution' that had toppled the tsars in the spring of 1917. Medhurst maintains that its best hope of success lay

in a form of broad left coalition, and he demonstrates the groundswell of support there would have been for an all-inclusive socialist government even following the Bolshevik seizure of power. Lenin and Trotsky, of course, wanted nothing of it. In *No Less than Mystic*, Medhurst therefore takes his stand with the left libertarian critique of Bolshevism that began with the soon-to-be persecuted Mensheviks and anarchists, and with dissenting Marxists like Luxemburg and Pannekoek. He also notes the more conciliatory instincts of some prominent Bolsheviks; and how the Bolshevik Party had temporarily 'de-Bolshevised' itself in response to the political ferment of the revolution. His most obvious targets are therefore Lenin himself, and the recent rehabilitation of Leninism which writers like Badiou and Žižek have helped to stimulate. However, Medhurst is equally concerned to counter the effect of what he calls the 'soft Leninist' tradition of Deutscher, Liebman and their successors.

He makes his case through a broad-brush narrative history that runs from the Bolshevik-Menshevik split of 1903 to the suppression of the Kronstadt revolt in 1921. Focusing more specifically on the earliest years of Soviet power, he also includes thematically organised chapters on issues like the sexual and cultural politics of the revolution. For those swept along by Badiou and Žižek, this is just the sort of narrative needed to remind us of the lived experience of communism which they disregard with something approaching levity. More directly, *No Less than Mystic* also serves as counterpart and antidote to the Lenin-friendly histories that also appeared on the revolution's centenary, like those of China Miéville and Tariq Ali. Medhurst stresses that his account, like theirs, has no pretences as a work of original research. He has, however, skilfully navigated the historiographical and polemical minefield of the revolution. He does not take for granted any specialist knowledge and he hasn't misrepresented in any significant way the historians he disagrees with. For readers familiar mainly with the Bolshevik-centred view of the revolution, Medhurst's book is worth reading for the sort of critical perspectives that are so often excluded from such accounts.

On the other hand, it also has a good deal in common with them, just as two comrades arguing about the revolution in the pub have. A distinctive feature of Medhurst's treatment is the interspersal of historical narrative with extended commentary on more recent political episodes. These range widely, from the Arab spring and second-wave feminism, to the coalition politics of Green parties and the political economy of the Bolivarian revolution. Medhurst's aim is to show the continuing relevance of this history for the '21st century left' he is writing for. Although

it makes for a book that jumps about a lot and needs some section headings and an index, he does by and large succeed in this aim. The problem with it is, however, that this can come across as a counter-teleology very much of the Bolshevik type, one that means choosing historical sides according to what best suits our own current preoccupations.

Some of the points are ones we have all heard or made in the pub. From the Bolshevik corner of the table, the most obvious rejoinder to Medhurst's teleology is that he discusses the revolution as if from the very outset it were one of wholly and even intrinsically national scope. For those whom Medhurst critiques, it was of course axiomatic that for Lenin and Trotsky an exclusively Russian revolution had (in E.H. Carr's words) 'no meaning, no validity and no chance of survival'. One can certainly imagine the counter-rejoinder that this was a naïve or self-serving rationale. Even so, it does rather undermine the force of Medhurst's title, taken from the Menshevik Martov, that it was 'no less than mystic' to imagine a political form that could surmount all such economic, social and national constraints. Whatever we choose to make of this aspect of Lenin's politics, it is a truly gaping oversight to avoid properly discussing it.

On almost any issue offering a more favourable construction of Bolshevik rule, there is the same teleological bias. It is plausible to trace the degeneration of the Bolshevik party-state to Leninism's 'inherent logic', and Medhurst provides compelling evidence to this effect. On the other hand, it might itself be thought somewhat mystic, or at least oblivious to the same issue of historical constraints, to extend the argument to something like the Bolsheviks' sexual politics. Medhurst grudgingly concedes that Lenin was 'not especially misogynist' by the standards of his time. He also concedes, which can hardly be denied, that the Bolsheviks introduced progressive legislation on education and childcare. He nevertheless points out sternly that this 'was not the same thing as a fundamental transformation of sexual relations and attitudes'. That seems rather a lot to ask for in four years of war and civil war. The goalposts have evidently shifted, and the Bolsheviks are condemned both for believing they could surmount all historical constraints and for failing to surmount them. It's not that Medhurst fails to recognise the challenges that the Bolsheviks faced, because he does. Through selective teleology he nevertheless steers through the superior models of Wilhelm Reich and second-wave feminism, while avoiding the wider sexual politics of the labour movement, and ends up with the old linearity and the tarring of Lenin with the brush of Stalin's sexual counter-revolution.

The chapter on culture follows a similar course. Curiously, however, Medhurst singles out Yuri Pimenov's *New Moscow*, dating from the worst year of the terror, as an exception to Stalinist philistinism and the reversion to bourgeois cultural norms. I have always thought it a beguiling image that epitomises these things. Depicting a strikingly independent young woman at the wheel of an open-top coupé, the painting certainly offers an image of emancipated womanhood, and it is one that Medhurst's discussion of sexual politics has left one rather prepared for. On the other hand, its seductively 'impressionistic' style marks a definite retreat from such powerful images as Pimenov's *War Veterans* (1926), which may clearly be located within the wider course of European modernism in a way that *New Moscow* cannot. It is not just that it is, in its way, a conservative and isolationist image. Alluring as it appears, *New Moscow* casts its sheen on the very building, the House of the Unions, in which the show trials were then being staged. Perhaps, as with Shostakovich, there are hidden ironies to be uncovered. But if any image represents what Medhurst calls a 'chocolate-box cover' on an ocean of victims, it is this.

It is curious that Shostakovich doesn't appear here, and that little sense is given of the numerous cultural luminaries who drew inspiration from the October revolution, or of why they should have done so. The reverse side of the coin is an alternative cast of socialist heroes that stretches from Owen, Morris and Carpenter to Tony Benn and Pablo Iglesias. Medhurst concedes that they differed widely on points of doctrine, and rightly says that this is to be welcomed. Nevertheless, the sorting of the wheat from the chaff according to some assumed relationship to Bolshevism is teleological in itself and simplifies complex political choices into one that is fundamentally communism and anti-communism. One cannot seriously maintain that we should look to Orwell for an alternative to the Bolsheviks' sexual politics. Whatever we discover in Morris or Benn (and in the former it is much) is not the clarity on the transition to socialism which eluded Lenin. If we are stepping back from Bolshevism because of a commitment to democracy, we had best be careful with Owen and his 'parallelograms of paupers' (didn't Proudhon group him with Napoleon and Louis XIV?) or Emma Goldman with her Nietzschean contempt for the masses.

The issue is political rather than one of academic pedantry. It might be thought parochial view to elevate Bevan, Orwell and Benn to the socialist pantheon above Gramsci or Walter Benjamin. In its unspoken premises, it is also a way of a passing over the dilemmas of twentieth-century

politics which help explain the appeals of communism, and what these appeals actually were. It is unfortunate that in Medhurst's alternative list of socialist luminaries there are none of the period's prisoners, martyrs or resistance fighters, and no room for the anti-fascist or anti-colonialist movements. Jaurès can be included because his assassination in 1914 leaves him uncompromised by what was to follow. Morris is also there; Tom Mann, one imagines, would be, had he not lived long enough to become a communist. Medhurst does very briefly acknowledge that decent and honest socialists supported the Bolsheviks. He then, however, dismisses this as a case of the 'irrational' in politics, very much in the manner of Leninists dismissing false consciousness, and Trotsky using history as a dustbin.

Despite these differences of opinion, Medhurst's book can be thoroughly recommended because it takes the politics of revolution seriously. Fundamentally I agree with the book's left libertarian line, and the vindication of such once neglected figures as the Menshevik Martov and the workers' oppositionist Shlyapnikov. Nevertheless, I am not convinced that a usable history for a twenty-first century left means writing off so much of its twentieth-century history. It is not just E.P. Thompson's adage about the enormous condescension of posterity. It is not even Thompson's point, also in the preface to *The Making of the English Working Class*, that causes that were lost in one part of the world might be still be won in another. It is rather that we may ourselves be entering a period when causes that we thought were won may still be lost again. Certainly, a world of Putin, Trump and Erdogan is one that suggests that the coming century might be one of further challenges against which our more recent history might come to appear like another fin-de-siècle lull before the storm. The last thing we need is a sanitised view of communism, or the celebration of the Russian revolution like a royal wedding. But until the age of storms has finally passed, we need histories that recognise the dilemmas of practising a socialist politics within them, and draw what lessons we can from the Russian revolution as a truly world event in both its initial ambitions and its influence.

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Jon Piccini, Evan Smith, Matthew Worley (eds), ***The Far Left in Australia Since 1945***, Routledge, London 2019; xiv + 286 pp; ISBN 9781138541580, £23.99, pbk

This is an important and timely book, which deals with the little-examined subject of the 'far left' and how it helped to shape Australian society for the better. While several books have been published that acknowledge the role played by various organisations and individuals associated with the 'far left', this is the first study that attempts to define what this term means by examining the broad spectrum of political groups and ideas that collectively comprise this term in one volume. Its authors, however, are aware that a lot more work needs to be done before it can be claimed that a comprehensive history of the post-war far left has been written. It is timely because over the past several decades the three dominant political parties that have comprised all Australian governments have moved away from the left to the right of centre. The small left wing of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) occupies a liberal position that rejects key tenets of socialism. Today, in the so-called 'post-truth' period of Trump and Trumpism, it is vital to recall that while the far left, as Jon Piccini, Evan Smith and Matthew Worley put it in their excellent introduction, 'might have never led a revolution in Australia, it has inarguably played a central role in revolutionising it' (p1).

The book is divided into four major sections. Given the dominant influence that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) had on communist parties all over the world, including the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) which reached a membership of well over 20,000 in the mid 1940s, the first section thoughtfully discusses key historical moments in the history of the Soviet Union that not only tremendously impacted the CPA but fundamentally changed the far left in general. The first chapter examines how events like Khrushchev's Secret Speech, the Polish October and the Hungarian Revolution in 1956 affected prominent Australian communists and caused major rifts and arguments in their organisations. The following chapter discusses the rarely studied topic of 'Australian Maoists'. Against the backdrop of the Sino-Soviet dispute, despite being few in number, they formed their own breakaway Marxist-Leninist Communist Party and were active and influential in the Builders' Labourers Federation and various student organisations on university campuses. In the late 1960s and 1970s, the CPA continued to question its relationship to the CPSU, and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia further convinced its members to look for alternate

paths. While their actions may have 'displayed intellectual courage of a high order, given that this involved renewing and rejecting much of their previously held views' (p72), it is indisputable that their action assured the end of the CPA. In the last chapter of the 'Organisational histories' section, Piccini and Smith tackle a subject that permanently casts a 'long, lingering shadow' over all discussions of 'progressive policies' in Australia (p92) – the opprobriously repugnant 'Immigration Restriction Act', more commonly known as the 'White Australia Policy'. The authors succeed in showing that in their efforts to bring about socialism in Australia, the CPA and other organisations of the far left simultaneously supported racist immigration policies that clearly negated any 'spirit of proletarian internationalism' (p92). Piccini and Smith conclude that the 'contemporary left' is still prone to this contradiction (p92).

There follow three chapters in a section 'The 1950s and 1960s: In and out of the Cold War'. The first continues the discussion about racism in Australia by examining the formation of the Council for Aboriginal Rights (CAR). Founded in 1951 at a meeting in Melbourne attended by some seventy individuals, only two of whom were Aboriginal, CAR aimed to obtain rights for all Aboriginal people. Against the backdrop of Robert Menzies wanting to outlaw communism, CAR 'provided a vehicle' (p113) for communists, socialists, unionists and other interested individuals to demand basic human rights and freedoms for Aborigines. The historical importance of CAR was that it recognised the need to make Aboriginal affairs a Commonwealth responsibility and spearheaded a long campaign to make that a reality. The author omits to mention that CAR's importance today is diminished by the fact that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are still waiting for constitutional change to acknowledge their existence and exclusion at Federation and continue to endure appalling treatment at the hands of state and federal governments. The second chapter is very much 'in the cold war' as it deals with anti-nuclear politics in the 1960s. Surprisingly, British nuclear testing on land inhabited by Aboriginal peoples in South Australia is not mentioned as a good segue from the previous chapter. Discussing the Australian Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), which took its cue from Britain's anti-war movement for unilateral nuclear disarmament, the chapter's author is perhaps too harsh in concluding that by 1965 the national anti-nuclear organisation 'had come to naught and, like the broader peace movement, the war in Vietnam demanded activists' attention' (p129). Nevertheless, he convincingly demonstrates that the pioneering activism of the CND campaigns, in part due to the influence

of radical migrants who had 'experiences of socialism and direct action' in their own countries, made 'a more lasting contribution to the evolution of radical peace protest in Australia' (p129). The third chapter looks at 1968, remembered in Australia as representing 'a time of hope' (p135) with the rise of the student movement and the 'New Left' which was now associated with more than the labour movement and communist parties. The Vietnam War and conscription were issues central to the radicalism of the New Left. While there is little doubt that the Sixties changed Australian society for the better, it came at the huge cost of allowing liberal capitalism to endure. As Russell Marks correctly concludes: 'Perhaps the best answer is that the legacy of 1968 is in both an extension of liberalism's promises and a radical critique of the status quo toward socially progressive ends. While some have actively resisted them, no government since Whitlam's has been able to ignore these demands' (p147).

The third section, 'The 1960s and 1970s: The valences of liberation' has four chapters. The first is a brief discussion of the women's liberation movement in Australia and the myriad of challenges that the left had to face as a result of the rise of the politics of 'personal solutions'. This identifies an Achilles heel of the feminist movement, namely that efforts by various groups to raise the consciousness level and self-awareness of women led to a fragmentation of these groups and women on the basis of identity. The emphasis on identity came about, in large part, due to the failure of liberal feminism to take up the struggle for all oppressed and marginalised women within the movement. The author concludes by declaring that the left has to decide what emphasis it should give 'personal change' in revolutionary politics (p167). Chapter 9 returns to the question of racism by examining the rise of Black Power politics in the 1970s when the left was still divided over questions of race and racism and governments had not made any real progress on matters related to our first Australians. Although Whitlam's Labor Government won power in 1972 promising land rights and a separate Department of Aboriginal Affairs, many Aborigines found its policy of 'self-determination' to be wanting. The author examines the little studied Action Conference on Racism and Education held at the University of Queensland campus in 1972 to highlight 'the gritty politics of Aboriginal Black Power activists seeking to build a broader movement' (p172). The importance of this conference was overshadowed by the establishment of the Tent Embassy with its powerful claim for land rights but it did help to forge a Black Power consciousness that forced white radicals to 'come to grips with their own racism' by making them see 'the struggle against racism not in

terms of liberal "do-goodism" but as Black self-determination and liberation' (p186). It is disappointing to admit that white radicals and Black Power activists are still waiting for the 'meaningful and decolonised politics of solidarity' (p186) that the author concludes was necessary.

Chapter ten by Liz Ross goes way beyond the time parameters of this section and might have been better placed after the chapter on Wollongong. Nevertheless, given recent belated gains for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) community in Australia, this essay, like the introduction by Piccini, Smith and Worley, should be required reading in all introductory Australian history courses. Ross succinctly argues that while the CPA(ML) (a pro-China Maoist split from the CPA in 1963) and the pro-USSR Socialist Party of Australia (SPA) were homophobic and their influence 'had a negative effect on the fight for gay rights', these two groups 'were not the voice of the left within Gay Liberation or other LGBTI struggles' (p193). The left voice for these struggles came from the CPA, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and the International Socialists who were active in workplaces, unions, campuses and radical movements in general. Ross concludes that 'the left brought analysis, organisation, class politics and a focus on what united LGBTI people in the struggle against the common enemy, capitalism'. It is refreshing to read that the left 'has continued to argue the case for total social change – for revolution not just reforms' (p207). Diana Covell's chapter on the campaign to secure employment at the Port Kembla steelworks between 1980-1991 by Wollongong women, concludes the third part of the book. This chapter is of particular interest to me because it is about the town where I live and it discusses people I knew and events I experienced and witnessed. Covell, who at the time was a member of the SWP, was a key figure in an arduous 'Jobs for Women' (JFW) campaign that lasted over fourteen years. The SWP along with other socialist groups and individuals, including trade unionists, public service feminists, women from migrant communities and volunteers from the Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC), 'took on the biggest, most ruthless employer in Australia' – Broken Hill Propriety (BHP) – and won (p225). The importance of this historic victory is nicely stated by Paul Matters, then Port Kembla's Rank and File Organiser for the Federated Ironworkers' Association: 'BHP fought all the way to the High Court because its whole industrial strategy was not to be seen to be defeated. BHP was fighting for the right of capital to control, to manage. The JFW campaign challenged that directly and even more rarely, BHP was defeated in a straight out confrontation' (p226). Despite being 'one of the most successful campaigns initiated by

members of a far left group in Australia since WWII', Covell warns not only of 'the pitfalls of sectarian ultra-leftism but also the crisis of leadership and dangers of political cultism common to the contemporary far left' (p226).

The final section of the book, 'Mainstreaming the far left', looks at ways the far left allowed their ideas to be part of the political mainstream through popular culture. The first chapter rightly questions whether the largest and most powerful union in Australia at the time, the Amalgamated Metal Workers Union (AMWU), which was then aligned with the Communist Party, made the right decision to back the Accord – an agreement between unions and the ALP to reject industrial campaigns for higher wages and better working conditions by collaborating with the owners of industry through arbitration and appeals. Important short-term gains from the Accord – Medicare and the introduction of industry superannuation – were used not to index wages fully and not to increase the old age pension. In the long-term, however, the Accord proved that even the ability of the working class to develop a trade union consciousness could be controlled once it became part of the national government's political and economic decision-making process. As a result of the Accord, militant industrial strategy and the need for mobilisation were quashed because as left unions were now part of 'the process of national economic restructuring' (p244), profits were put before improving the living standards of workers. As the author concludes, 'This was a tragic outcome, the consequences of which reverberate well beyond its ranks and are still with us today' (p245). The last two chapters explore how the far left was involved in all aspects of culture. Jon Piccini and Ana Stevenson look at the impact that Germaine Greer and Dennis Altman had not just on radical intellectual culture but political and social culture in general. It is not surprising to learn that even though these two high-profile intellectuals with divergent views were popular with mainstream readers, they were still criticised by just about everyone, including fellow activists, because of their 'radicalism' (p261). Greer and Altman, like so many other Australian intellectuals, were victims of the tall poppy syndrome and so were compelled to go overseas before obtaining the success they deserved Down Under. However, Piccini and Stevenson identify a much more important dimension than this syndrome and that is that ideas are not bound by borders. As the authors conclude, 'to pigeonhole these writers as "Australian" ignores how much both their writing processes, inspiration and, importantly, reception and contestation, were transnational' (p262). In exploring 'the rich diversity of Australian left cultural

activist groups in the post-war period' (p267), the last chapter shows the influence of this transnationalism in various fields of cultural endeavour: theatre, literature, visual arts, film and music. Even so, Lisa Milner is very aware that in Australia there was an 'ongoing and intricate dialogue between nationalism and internationalism' which manifested itself in the 'radical nationalist idiom of many left cultural activists and Communist Party members' (p269). Plainly speaking, Australian far left culture may have had an internationalist basis with 'a collectivist impulse' (p271) but, in the end, it could not exorcise the xenophobia, racism and sexism which were deeply rooted in the Australian identity, a theme that runs strongly throughout the book.

Although a few typos and stylistic inconsistencies escaped the editing process, they do not detract from the book's overall value and significance. Routledge ought to be congratulated not only for publishing the series *Routledge Studies in Radical History and Politics* but for declaring its two main aims to be: to 'focus on the history of movements of the radical left' and 'to publish books which focus on more contemporary expressions of radical left-wing politics'. The need for such publications is clearly demonstrated by the fact that this is the first book to consider the achievements of the Australian 'far left' since WWII, in particular the 1960s to the beginning of 1990s. Furthermore, while this volume succeeds in examining a wide range of topics, some of which have not been discussed for many years while others are examined for the first time, a single collection of articles cannot cover, even superficially, every important initiative, individual, group or event to do justice to the book's subject. It can only be hoped that Routledge will give Jon Piccini, Evan Smith and Matthew Worley the opportunity to edit other volumes to allow them to present a fuller picture of how the 'far left' contributed to Australia's development – even with its shortcomings.

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Nan Sloane, *The Women in the Room: Labour's Forgotten History*, I.B. Tauris, London 2018; 252 pp, 12 illustrations; ISBN 9781788312233, £20.00, hbk

With an introduction by the Rt Hon. Harriet Harman, MP, Nan Sloane's aims are clearly signposted. *The Women in the Room* draws attention to a particular and formative period in the history of the Labour Party:

1900-1918 when women were present as activists and organisers but seemingly invisible. Sloane draws on published work, biography, archived collections and unpublished research, to show that those 'Women in the Room', Mary Macarthur, Marion Phillips, Margaret Bondfield, Margaret Macdonald, Mary Middleton, Katharine Bruce-Glasier, Isabella Ford, amongst many others, were women who were indeed present and active, though accounts of key moments tend not to name them even when they were clearly 'in the room'. She opens with an account of the inauguration of the Labour Representation Committee in 1900, a committee of men, watched by experienced women activists seated in the public gallery. What is original in her account is the framing of the history in relation to the emergence of a Labour Party influenced by women who, through the organisations they set up, the National Federation of Women Workers, the Women's Trade Union League and the Women's Labour League, to name the most prominent, set an agenda for what was to be a party which foregrounded class and equality as central to its identity.

The chapters are issue-based and follow chronologically. Chapter 1, 'Trades Unionism' charts relationships with leading trade unionists of the day and follows the impact of new unionism on the rather staid structures of the TUC which, until 1875, had not heard a woman's voice. With differences over factory legislation, equal pay and suffrage, gaining representation at the TUC was not guaranteed even when new unions were having success recruiting amongst unskilled and low paid women workers in the north and midlands during the 1890s.

Those women who were to take leading roles creating organisations championing the struggles of working women, providing a federation of support for women's unions, campaigning on poverty and low wages, supporting and initiating strike action, fund-raising and providing the essential administrative hubs, knew each other, swapping roles, sharing committees and platforms. Some were also members of organisations such as the ILP and SDF, with socialist commitments. Chapters on 'Socialists' and 'Foundations' show how an issue like adult suffrage focused debate and built unity as the trade union movement sought representation and power for members through parliament. They also show how compromises meant that socialist organisations came to play a less central role in the emerging party of labour and in organisations such as the Women's Labour League which was separate but connected to the Labour Party.

In the history of women's action and organisation in the period before the First World War the campaign to secure the vote has taken prime place. With chapters covering the period of militancy and Labour's

representation in parliament, Sloane argues that 'For most working-class women, the struggle was for enough to live on rather than the vote' (p3). Arguments in the TUC and emerging Labour Party for and against campaigns for adult as opposed to women's suffrage led to splits and the emergence of a more militant, single-issue organisation, headed by Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst. From 1906 with the Labour Party represented in Parliament after a successful electoral strategy, women in affiliated organisations, linked to the trade union movement were confronting 'Suffrage' with 'Sweating'. They were making the case for wages boards, setting minimum wages for women.

Women campaigners spent days, weeks and months speaking at events, talking to working class women about their concerns and views, supporting their local action. Though they may not have been in a position to win positions of leadership in the Labour Party or TUC they had a keen ear for what mattered to women workers and their families and were prepared to use any legal means to push for this. If this meant persuading TUC delegates to accept measures like Wages Boards setting minimum wages with the prospect that the new Labour MPs might vote for such short term measures, this was an achievable goal which could win broad support from low paid women workers and with that a shift in affiliations which might also ultimately boost a Labour vote.

However policies and publicity might be formulated, women leaders 'in the room' were not in control over the conditions in which they campaigned in the years immediately before the outbreak of war. It could be working women taking the initiative when Bermondsey women workers spontaneously struck for an increased wage in the summer of 1911, or the Liberal government's imperfect National Insurance scheme or responses to Suffrage militancy as this became more extreme. Whatever the issue it was likely to generate debate and expose division where unity might have been expected. Sloane shows the scale of the task when stalwart Marion Phillips, organising secretary of the Women's Trade Union League, argued that women should first be educated ready for political responsibility and when it was still possible for a powerful trade unionist, the miners' leader Robert Smillie with his 600,000 members block vote, to oppose a resolution supporting equal suffrage at the 1912 Labour Party conference. He was unsuccessful. The shaky relationship between the Labour Party and women and women active in the suffrage movement was eventually shored up with an agreement that Labour would oppose Liberals who did not support voting rights for women. Sloane points out that ironically this important step seems to have been taken without

women even being 'in the room'. There was still some way to go before women activists would be accepted as equals.

The outbreak of war brought new divisions, with many suffrage campaigners, following turning into recruiters. Some joined the struggle against conscription and for peace, while others continued to work for women though under new conditions being drawn into positions on government committees as women were drawn into war work and women's trade union membership surged. Sloane ends her detailed history in 1918 with the reconstruction of a peacetime Labour Party, when for the first time most men and about two thirds of women could vote. With the absorption of the Women's Labour League it was to be a more unified party based on individual membership, though women would be ranked second-class and without their own organisation would have less independence.

By 1918 some of the women who had worked with untiring commitment had died, others lived on to occupy high profile positions in the labour movement. Sloane's account successfully repositions their efforts and achievements even if by focusing on the Labour Party other arenas are excluded from her account. She makes a convincing case but how it will be fed into the consciousness of successor generations and how will those successor generations ensure that their history is not neglected are questions we are left asking. Perhaps the Labour Party needs to take the risky step of exploring its own history by taking a direct approach. Oral history would be a good start.

Joanna Bornat

James D. White, ***Marx and Russia. The Fate of a Doctrine***, Bloomsbury, London 2019; 240 pp; ISBN 9781474224062, £19.79, pbk

Karl Marx was still alive when his ideas first began to find a receptive audience in Russia, among the diverse radical, socialist and revolutionary millieux of the late nineteenth century. The attention was reciprocated – in the last decade of his life, Marx undertook an extensive study of Russia's social and economic development, intending to use his findings to enrich the analysis in the final two volumes of *Capital*. Subsequently, with the development of a social-democratic movement in Russia from the 1890s onwards, subjects of the Russian Empire made numerous contributions to the development of what had by then become 'Marxism'. The Bolshevik party's victory in the Russian revolution and civil war,

and the enormous authority it derived from that success, ensured that most of the 'Marxism' of the remainder of the twentieth century drew its inspiration from the ideas of Vladimir Lenin, as interpreted by Joseph Stalin or, to a lesser extent, Leon Trotsky.

The multifaceted and tangled relationship between Marx and Russia is explored systematically in James D. White's fascinating new book. A scholar who has been working on the intellectual history of the Russian revolutionary movement for more than four decades, White is particularly well equipped to undertake this study. His findings will certainly provide food for thought for anyone familiar only with the apostolic successions Marx-Engels-Lenin-Stalin or Marx-Engels-Lenin-Trotsky, as well as those who believe that Marx's analytical focus was almost exclusively on the development of capitalism in Western Europe.

Marx and Russia has ten broadly chronological but themed chapters, starting with Marx's first attempts to follow developments in Russia after the end of serfdom in the 1860s, and ending with the publication of the *History of the CPSU(b): Short Course* in 1938. In this way, the story takes the form of a 'rise and fall' of Marx's ideas in Russia, from the initial contacts while Marx was still alive, through the luxuriant flourishing of Marxist ideas and schemas in the period before World War 1, to the collapse into sterile apologetics and mythologisation for the Bolshevik regime in the post-October period and into the 1930s. White's final verdict is damning: 'In their journey through the Russian revolutionary movement and the creation of the Soviet state, Marx's ideas were emptied of their original content in such a way that only the outer shell remained' (p205). The 'journey', however, is compelling, and the glimpses White provides of paths not taken are tantalising. On the way, we meet a large cast of familiar and not-so-familiar characters, and their contributions to Marxist thought. Although White is scrupulously fair in his treatment of these various thinkers, some emerge with much more credit than others.

The first chapter considers Marx's *Capital*, and his schema whereby capitalism subsumes all pre-existing economic formations. White traces how Marx, sensing that the vitality of the Russian peasant commune undermined this conception, began to study N. G. Chernyshevsky's writings on the peasantry, even learning Russian for the purpose. There followed a long and fruitful correspondence with Chernyshevsky's followers Nikolai Danielson and G.A. Lopatin – both of whom, incidentally, subsequently joined the socialist-revolutionary rather than the social-democratic current in Russian socialism. White shows that Marx, as a result of his investigations, began to take the notion that Russia could

develop towards socialism via a different path to that of Western Europe quite seriously. But he never managed to integrate his Russian material into the drafts for volumes 2 and 3 of *Capital*.

The second chapter considers some other Russian collaborators with Marx, in particular Nikolai Sieber, an economist at Kiev University who in 1871 set out and analysed the economic doctrines of *Capital* volume 1. White sees Sieber as especially significant, in that in his presentation of Marx's economic ideas, Sieber rejected their dialectical, Hegelian trappings in favour of a concrete, historical approach – and seemed to have won Marx's endorsement for this.

Marx's death in 1883, and Sieber's death in 1888, had fateful consequences for Marxism in Russia. White argues that Friedrich Engels, in compiling volumes 2 and 3 of *Capital* for publication from Marx's notes, completely disregarded both Marx's Russian material, and his shift away from Hegelian dialectics in his final decade. These volumes, completed by Engels, reflected Marx's thinking as it had been in the 1860s, before he looked eastwards. Meanwhile Engels undertook to modernise dialectics, while in Russia, the death of Sieber left the way clear for Georgii Plekhanov to claim the mantle of the 'father of Russian Marxism'.

White credits two particular innovations to Plekhanov – the codification of Marxist philosophy as 'dialectical materialism', and the use of the term 'narodnik' to denote any socialist who questioned the necessity of capitalist development in Russia. White is clearly not a fan of Plekhanov, and even less so of Lenin. Lenin's *Development of Capitalism in Russia* (1899) is criticised for being ahistorical and not rooted in an empirical study of social relations in the Russian village, his *What is to be Done?* (1902) represents an abandonment of the principle that 'the emancipation of the working class is the affair of the working class itself', and his attitude to Marx and Engels is presented as 'authoritarian', in that he regarded them as 'prophets of absolute truth' (p160).

Here White takes the side of Aleksandr Bogdanov, a major, if rather neglected, Russian Marxist thinker, to whom he devotes a chapter. Bogdanov's ideological innovations included an attempt to find an alternative philosophical basis for Marxism to Plekhanov's dialectical materialism, a plan for a universal science of organisation (tectology) and the notion that a distinct proletarian culture was a necessary prerequisite for working-class power. He even wrote works of science fiction, depicting – on Mars – the workings of the future socialist society. It is notable that Bogdanov and his colleagues opted for the Bolshevik rather than the Menshevik faction after the Russian Social-Democratic Workers' Party

(RSDRP) split of 1903. Early Bolshevism was the more ideologically heterodox current, and consequently it gets more attention in White's book than its factional rival.

The only other thinker to get a whole chapter to himself is Trotsky, whose pre-1917 work, in particular his idea of permanent revolution, is treated sympathetically by White. Subsequent chapters look at different conceptions of imperialism in World War I, and the different conceptions of revolution in 1917. Here White pays considerable attention to the fundamentally divergent conceptions of Lenin and Bogdanov. In 1917 Lenin contended, following Rudolf Hilferding, that Russia's banking oligopoly already provided the necessary and sufficient basis for a socialist state economic apparatus. Bogdanov, meanwhile, argued that Russia's economy was further away from socialism than ever, and that Lenin and other 'maximalists' were confusing the soldiers' barrack-room egalitarianism – 'war communism' – with the 'new form of cooperation' that is socialism (p176).

Post-October Marxism is considered in the final chapter. White remarks that 'in the Soviet period Marxist theory took on an apologetic role, that of defending and justifying Soviet practice' (p181). For a few years, Nikolai Bukharin was the most prolific party theoretician, and White shows his (unacknowledged, if not vehemently denied) debt to Bogdanov in his portrayal of the socialist future. Overall, though, the years from 1917 to 1938 are presented as the decline and fall of Russian Marxism, in which theoretical rigour always defers to political expediency.

White's text runs to just over 200 pages, so it is easy to identify areas which could have received more attention. There is – perhaps surprisingly – nothing on the Socialist-Revolutionaries' attempts in the 1900s to amalgamate Marxism with Russian agrarian socialist traditions. The discussions among Marxist economists on planned economy and industrialisation of the 1920s are dealt with very cursorily, while the Mensheviks' post-1917 attempts to account for their party's defeat and explain Soviet Russia in Marxist terms are not considered at all. But despite these inevitable limitations, White has produced an excellent survey of an important historical theme.

Francis King