

# Reviews

## Master Works

**Vasily Grossman, *Everything Flows*, Harvill Secker, 290 pages, ISBN 9781846552366, £16.99**

**Andrey Platonov, *The Foundation Pit*, New York Review of Books, 224 pages, ISBN 9781590173053, \$14.95**

Two master works have now appeared in harness. Andrey Platonov was born in 1899, a railwayman's son. He started work at thirteen, and became an engine driver's assistant. The Revolution encouraged his talents, and he started publishing poems and articles in 1918, whilst studying engineering. During the twenties he became an expert in land reclamation, draining swamps and digging wells. He also built three small power stations. But he never stopped writing.

During the thirties, he was compelled to eat some of those words. He recanted several times, but he continued writing. His stories were only a little bit more acceptable to the authorities than before. His son was sent to the Gulag in 1938, contracted TB and died of it when he was released in 1941. Andrey was given a job on the Red Army's *Red Star* journal, working as a war correspondent on the recommendation of his friend, Vasily Grossman.

Vasily Grossman is by now already well known for his titanic novel, *Life and Fate*. We have been waiting for a long time for an accessible edition of *Everything Flows*, which now appears simultaneously in a NYRB edition in the United States and here under the flag of Harvill Secker. It was published before, under the title *Forever Flowing*, in a version by T. F. Whitney.

Both these books are now translated by Robert and Elizabeth Chandler, in an exceptional labour of love. They are beautifully written, even though they come from an unfinished work, still far from complete.

In an immortal tribute of vice to virtue the late Mr. Suslov, the apparatchik's apparatchik, said that *Life and Fate* had no chance of being published for at least two hundred years. This shows that Suslov had an exaggerated idea of the durability of his regime: but interestingly it also shows that he had sufficient taste and intelligence to understand that this masterpiece would indeed be read two hundred years after we have all gone.

If Suslov could utter such opinions about *Life and Fate*, he would nonetheless have had a heart attack about *Everything Flows*. Here, Grossman honours his murdered mother, to whom *Life and Fate* had been dedicated. He sets down a fictional version of her searing recollections of the great famine, of which she was a witness. It resulted from the forced collectivisation, and sent all Russia, and its Communist Party, into a convulsive turmoil. Out of it were to arise the purges, the trials, and the darkest pre-war years of the Soviet Union. Then followed the calamity of the Nazi invasion. Grossman's mother had subsequently been killed by the Gestapo because she refused to leave Ukraine when her son urgently pressed her to move away from the war to live with his family in Moscow, which might have offered her a marginally safer refuge. Grossman himself was sent off as a war correspondent to Stalingrad, so he was to become no stranger to the horrors of the Nazi invasion. But he always felt that his mother might have survived had he been more insistent on the need for her to uproot, and that is why he felt a towering debt to the woman commemorated in these two extraordinary works, and why he needed to record her memories of that terrible hunger.

Chapters 12 and 13 of *Everything Flows* take us into the camps. As Grossman says:

‘A lot can be forgiven anyone who, amid the filth and stench of camp violence, remains a human being.’

Masha, who has endured sufficient anguish and despair, finally realised that the husband of whom she continually dreamed had already been shot, whilst her orphaned daughter was still lost in the great wastes of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

‘and she was left without hope, entirely alone ... never would she see Yulia – neither today nor in future, when she was an old woman with grey hair. Lord, Lord, have pity on her. Pity her, Lord. Have mercy upon her. A year later she left the camp. Before returning to freedom, she lay for a while on some pine planks in a freezing hut. No one tried to hurry her out to work, and no one abused her. The medical orderlies placed Masha Lyubimova in a rectangular box made from boards that the timber inspectors had rejected for any other use. This was the last time anyone looked at her face. On it was a sweet, childish expression of delight and confusion ...’

Chandler adds a note to his translation, which says:

‘These events are so tragic and so vast that they can seem entirely beyond understanding. Even Stalin's great purges of 1934-8 are easier to understand; they were, among other things, a successful attempt on Stalin's part to destroy,

or terrify into submission any members of the Soviet élite who might conceivably oppose him. It is harder to understand why a ruler should choose to destroy a huge part of the peasantry that had, until then, produced much of the nation's wealth.'

Chandler's incomprehension is shared by a number of other commentators, who offer different explanations in answering. Grossman's own explanations will not satisfy all the historians. But none will fail to recognise the human consequences of these terrible decisions, wrung out here by Grossman in tears of blood.

Platonov, too, was deeply affected by the famine, which shaped his thinking in *The Foundation Pit*. In this story, people are toiling to excavate a pit in which will be built an enormous structure, large enough to house all the people who live in a small town. They have ceased farming, and neither plough the fields nor sow any crops. There is nothing to eat, but the people dedicate themselves completely to the dream which they have of a radiant future that is due to arrive. Those who own anything are exiled, despatched down the river on a raft to the cold sea. Those who stay behind to dig gradually die of starvation.

Platonov had seen the forced collectivisation for himself. His work had taken him to the country, and in the villages he had seen all the horrors. Robert Chandler and Olga Meerson, in an afterword to the novel, suggest that Platonov had provided much of the testimony which convinced Grossman that he should compose *Everything Flows*. Be that as it may, these two writers are unique in Soviet literature, in the accuracy of their account of wholesale collectivisation, and the resultant famine. Others have written about these events, sometimes honestly and sometimes even courageously. But these two rise above the horrors they describe, to give us a powerful legacy. It is all the more extraordinary that these were such modest and retiring men.

Tatyana Tolstaya records a youthful utterance of Platonov:

'I know that I am one of the most insignificant of people. You have no doubt noticed this, but I also know another thing: the more insignificant a creature is, the more glad it is for life, because it is least deserving of it.'

Tolstaya continues:

'And further, the mysterious words: "for you being a man is just a habit – for me it is joy, a holiday ..."'

Such horrors. Such joys. Such an extraordinary people.

*Ken Coates*

## The Tolstoys

**Sophia Tolstoy, *The Diaries of Sophia Tolstoy*, translated by Cathy Porter with a foreword by Doris Lessing, Alma Books, 450 pages, hardback ISBN 9781846880803, £20**

Sophia Behrs was only 18 when she was introduced to the 34-year-old Count Leo Tolstoy, in 1862, and by September of that year they were married in Moscow. On the eve of their wedding, Tolstoy asked his bride-to-be to read his diaries, in which he describes his sexual relationships with serfs, a love affair with one young woman in particular who bore him a child, and his homosexual leanings. The young Sophia was devastated and disgusted by what she had read:

‘The whole of my husband’s past is so ghastly that I don’t think I shall ever be able to accept it ... When he kisses me, I am always thinking, “I am not the first woman he has loved”. It hurts me so much that my love for him – the dearest thing in the world to me ... should not be enough for him.’

From this difficult beginning sprang a tortuous and tumultuous life together. The Tolstoys lived in Yasnaya Polyana, Leo’s 4,000 acre estate, and had 13 children in all, eight of whom survived. Sophia was to be in charge of the estate, the children and Leo himself, and it is through her diary that we gain an insight into how unhappy she was with her lot. In 1863, after only a year of marriage, she writes:

‘I am to gratify his pleasure and nurse his child, I am a piece of household furniture, I am a woman. I try to suppress all human feelings.’

Their relationship was composed of two disparate characters. Sophia wanted a more spiritual side to their life together, whilst Leo demanded sexual relations, but refused to use birth control. When Sophia did get pregnant he would become repulsed by her:

‘My pregnancy is to blame for everything – I’m in an unbearable state, physically and mentally ... As far as Lyova is concerned I don’t exist.’

From her diary the reader soon discovers that Sophia did everything within their relationship, around the estate, and was even a literary agent for her husband. She ensured copyright for his works and battled continuously with the Russian censors on his behalf. She put a tremendous amount of effort into advancing his writings, and every evening she would copy out his untidy drafts in her neat handwriting, returning them to Tolstoy the next day for him to revise once again, which would lead to still more copying for her. Sophia copied out *War and Peace* seven times! But it is this aspect

of their relationship that provides her with a sense of being wanted and needed by her husband.

When he reached middle age Tolstoy turned away from writing towards shaping his own version of Christianity. In the mid-1880s, he became a religious guru and turned his back on fiction and on his wife. He threatened to give away all his property and the copyright to his works to the Russian people. Around this time Sophia's diary becomes more fraught:

‘What I have predicted has come true: my passionate husband has died, and since he was never a friend to me, how could he be one to me now? This is not the life for me.’

On many occasions throughout the diary, the reader is privy to Sophia's longing to have the time to become a musician or artist:

‘... hundreds of times I have felt my intellectual energy stir within me, and all sorts of desires – for education, a love of music and the arts ...’ But this was not to be: ‘... time and time again I have crushed and smothered these longings’.

She does have music lessons and tries, in a two-and-a-half hour session, to master the ‘8<sup>th</sup> Invention by Bach’. Her creative abilities were not only musical, for some of Sophia's fascinating photographs of the Tolstoy family are reproduced here.

*The Diaries of Sophia Tolstoy* is a 450-page tome spanning 57 years in the life of this remarkably intelligent and tolerant woman. Her life was not easy, for she loved her husband even though he tormented her and, in the background, they lived through some of the more turbulent times in Russian history. These private diaries offer the reader an insight into the predicament of women in the past (I can't see many 21<sup>st</sup> century females putting up with that kind of behaviour), but the pages are mainly filled with deep-seated neurosis, pain and anguish. They are not an easy read, so I would recommend a ‘dipping-in-and-out’ approach.

*Abi Rhodes*

## A Q Khan

**Gordon Corera, *Shopping for Bombs: Nuclear Proliferation, Global Insecurity and the Rise and Fall of the A.Q.Khan Network*, Oxford University Press, 304 pages, paperback ISBN 9780195375237, £12.99**

The threatening face of the Pakistan scientist A.Q.Khan, which peers out banefully from the front cover of this book, sets the tone for what is inside.

Khan was, and perhaps still is, a major threat to the security of our world. That is not how he started out in life. As a young scientist he learnt his nuclear trade in The Netherlands, where he seems to have had almost unlimited access to what ought to have been most secret data about reprocessing and the essential centrifuges.

A photograph in the book of a Pakistani general surrendering shows the moment when Khan's national nuclear missionary zeal began. As a Pakistani, he felt deeply humiliated when Pakistan had to surrender to India in 1971, and lost a large part of its territory to what became Bangladesh. The young Khan would, from then on, do all he could to give his country a weapon which would, as he thought, make such a future surrender impossible.

Nationalism was the driving force that moved him. His attitude was rather like that of our own Ernest Bevin who, generations earlier, demanded his nuclear bomb with 'a bloody Union Jack on top'. That was also the conviction of the political leaders in Pakistan. Their bomb project began secretly, but it was well funded and staffed. Khan had whatever he wanted to bring the project to a successful conclusion. The secrecy was padded out with lies. Benazir Bhutto, in 1989, told a joint session of the US Congress that 'we do not possess nor do we intend to make a nuclear device. That is our policy.'

Perhaps it was hers. It was not the policy of those who held the levers of funding and power.

'All Praise to Allah' said the scientist who pushed the button in May 1998 and set off Pakistan's first nuclear explosion. If Khan's career had ended there, then it would have been bad enough that there had been a major breach of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty: another country added to the list of nuclear weapon states. But it did not end there. Khan became a model of active commercial free enterprise. He built up a vast international network, which supplied components and designs to anyone who wanted to buy. Primarily, his customers were Iran, North Korea and Libya.

I cannot believe for a moment, granted the interest shown in his activities by several surveillance organisations, not least the CIA, that his numerous trips abroad and the reasons for them were not well known to the authorities in his own country. The power of these organisations is even greater than I thought. When they wanted to inspect a cargo ship on its way to Libya, they simply ordered it to redirect to an Italian port where it was inspected and its cargo of nuclear components confiscated.

How the net was finally pulled in on Khan, the biggest fish in nuclear proliferation, makes this a scientific mystery story which is well told. In 2001, General Musharraf, dealing carefully with one who had become a national hero, put Khan under what amounted to house arrest. It was all

done with great dignity. A retirement banquet in Khan's honour was held, and a special new post was created. Khan's days as an exporter were over. At least I like to think so, but it is optimistic to think that his entire global empire simply unravelled.

This is very much a 'proliferation is the big danger' book. The author, who works for the BBC as a security and terrorist expert, reflects the normal BBC perspective. Proliferation is the big worry. The nuclear arsenals of the major powers are probably going to be in place indefinitely and are not the major cause of concern. True, he does refer to Article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which calls on nuclear weapon states to negotiate the elimination of their weapons, but that is not the focus of this book.

The Libyan story is worth a paragraph on its own. Gadaffi did not abandon his active nuclear weapons ambition, in 2003, because he was threatened or bombed. Indeed, Libya had been bombed once before, for other reasons, during Reagan's days. Gadaffi made an approach, first of all to the British, to tell them that, under certain conditions, he would give up his nuclear weapon efforts. But why? In his own words, this programme 'is not useful to Libya but it actually represents a danger and a threat to Libya's very integrity'. His Ambassador in London was even clearer. If we had nuclear weapons, 'we would be in more danger than if we didn't have them'.

What wisdom! The whole book is interesting and revealing, but these Libyan comments are amongst the best parts of it.

*Bruce Kent*

## Iran

**Mark Fitzpatrick, *The Iranian Nuclear Crisis: Avoiding Worst Case Outcomes*, Institute of Strategic Studies/Routledge (Adelphi Paper 398), 100 pages, paperback ISBN 978041546677, £15.99**

**Saira Khan, *Iran and Nuclear Weapons: Protracted Conflict and Proliferation*, Routledge, 168 pages, hardback ISBN 9780415453073, £75**

The acquisition of nuclear weapons by Iran is a matter of deep concern – not only to western nuclear powers and their allies, but also to the international movement for nuclear disarmament. If the Islamic Republic of Iran develops the capacity to launch nuclear missiles against its enemies, this will not only seriously undermine the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and encourage other countries to follow suit, it will increase the possibility of an outbreak of nuclear war.

Mark Fitzpatrick, in *The Iranian Nuclear Crisis*, analyses the problem from the point of view of the western powers. He produces the evidence that the intention of the Iranian authorities is to develop nuclear arms, and discusses past and possible future efforts to prevent such an eventuality.

Fitzpatrick completely dismisses the claims of Tehran that the aim is solely to enrich uranium for peaceful purposes. Legitimising the enrichment process would make it possible for an Iranian government to switch over to the production of nuclear weapons very speedily. It would also make it possible to manufacture them in secret, while claiming to be engaged on generating electricity for civilian purposes alone.

The introduction of sanctions, financial pressures, strict control of exports, and international vigilance are put forward as measures to be implemented to prevent Iran realising its nuclear ambitions. By isolating Iran and preventing it achieving economic prosperity, Fitzpatrick argues, not only will the development of nuclear weapons be obstructed, but also the support of the population for the Government and its policies will be undermined.

Fitzpatrick advocates, in addition, security assurances from the major powers to neighbouring states that Iran will not be permitted to intimidate them. Although he does not propose direct military intervention in Iran, he states that a deterrence strategy must include ‘a credible threat of use of force if red lines are crossed’ [p.84]. At the same time, he urges ‘a corresponding reassurance to Iran’s leaders that their country’s sovereignty and security will not be threatened if “red lines” are observed’.

Saira Khan, in *Iran and Nuclear Weapons*, approaches the issue of Iran’s nuclear ambitions from a very different standpoint. She argues that Iran’s desire to develop nuclear weapons is fuelled by the protracted conflict with the United States.

In 1953, the USA intervened to secure the overthrow of Iran’s Prime Minister, Mohammed Mossadeq and his government. It supported the Shah against popular opposition until he was overthrown. It failed to condemn Iraq for developing and using chemical weapons against Iran in the Iran/Iraq War. It failed to condemn Israel for bombing an Iraqi nuclear reactor in 1981. It launched the Gulf War against Iraq, and developed bases in Saudi Arabia. President George W. Bush labelled Iran as one of the ‘axis of evil’ states.

Saira Khan argues that protracted US hostility towards Iran has led Iran’s leaders to conceive of a nuclear deterrent capability as a means of defending the country against some future military action directed at them. They have also come to regard the prestige attached to possession of



nuclear weapons as essential to their aspiration to the role of a major power in the Gulf region. Furthermore, the United States has not objected to Israeli possession of nuclear weapons, nor to its failure to comply with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. She comes to the conclusion that Iran will never give up its nuclear ambitions while it feels threatened by the US:

‘As long as the US does not fashion a different style of foreign policy to Iran and terminate the protracted conflict with Tehran, it is unlikely for Iran to relinquish its nuclear programme.’ [p.117]

Though democrats and progressives should have no illusions about the repressive nature of the Iranian regime, we should recognise that threats of military intervention – veiled or open – strengthen the Iranian authorities’ case for seeking to develop nuclear weapons, and weaken internal opposition to it. While taking the strongest possible stand against Iran obtaining nuclear weapons, the idea of US, Israeli, or other western intervention in Iran must be totally condemned and opposed.

While repression and abuses of human rights in Iran should be strongly denounced, reforms and changes in the system are the business of the Iranian people. The sovereignty of Iran must be fully respected.

Both these books provide a great deal of background on Iran and its nuclear ambitions. Pressure, persuasion and sanctions may play a part in deterring or persuading Iran to abide by the Non-Proliferation Treaty, but threats of military intervention are counter-productive and should be totally ruled out.

*Stan Newens*

## **Gulag**

**Asim Qureshi, *Rules of the Game: Detention, Deportation, Disappearance*, Hurst & Company, 234 pages, paperback ISBN 9781850659686, £12.99**

‘What I’m trying to do here is, and this will be followed with the action in the next few weeks as I think you will see, is to send a clear signal out that the rules of the game have changed.’

*Tony Blair, 5 August 2005*

Taking its cue from Tony Blair’s candid remarks following the London bombings of 7 July 2005, Asim Qureshi’s revealing and valuable book spells out how those changes impact on individuals around the world. Indeed, the impact pre-dated the tense summer of 2005, and began to be felt by people in different parts of the world very quickly in the days

following the attacks on the United States in September 2001. In another memorable one-liner, Cofer Black, who was Director of the CIA's Counter-Terrorist Center, remarked that 'after 9/11 the gloves came off'. Qureshi's book examines some of the enduring consequences of the beating, bruising and worse that followed their removal.

Some of the first arrests were made in Bosnia. In particular, several Algerians who had come to Bosnia to fight with the Muslim community against the Serbs and Croats, were detained on 24/25 September 2001. Some of them had married Bosnian women, were settled in the country, and held Bosnian passports. Initially, the Bosnian authorities decided to release the men, but the United States insisted on their continued detention. Ultimately, they were given over into the custody of the Americans and wound up in Guantanamo, where they remained until release in 2009, when it was found they had no charges to answer.

In Britain, it was also Algerians as well as Libyans who were amongst the first to be targeted following 9/11. The haphazard nature of such detentions emerges all too plainly in the telling interviews conducted by the author, Moazzem Begg and their colleagues at Cageprisoners ([www.cageprisoners.com](http://www.cageprisoners.com)), excerpts from which are reproduced here. This important organisation, with meagre resources but great dedication, tells us much about the war on terror and its impact on individuals, most of whom are completely innocent of any destructive or harmful intent.

In Pakistan, for example, detention was a money-spinner for officials. In 2005, one victim of this trade, Alam Ghafoor, told Cageprisoners:

'Over the previous four years, the Pakistani security services had kidnapped hundreds of foreign nationals on its streets, many of whom ended up in Guantanamo – it is claimed that 85 per cent of those who are detained at the base camp in Cuba were sold by the Pakistani government to the US at a price of \$5,000 each.' P.27

[Testimony of Alam Ghafoor to Cageprisoners, 11 August 2005]

Mr Ghafoor's testimony receives some measure of corroboration from no less a source than Pervez Musharraf, the former President of Pakistan, who wrote in his autobiography:

'Since shortly after 9/11 – when many Al Qaeda members fled Afghanistan and crossed the border into Pakistan – we have played multiple games of cat and mouse with them ... We have captured 672 and handed over 369 to the United States. We have earned bounties totalling millions of dollars ...' [quoted on p.137]

What of MI5's involvement in this global sweep? Ashraf Hossein was detained in Bangladesh between 1 December 2005 and 29 May 2008. He

seems to have been caught up in the wake of the 7/7 bombings in London. He had travelled to Bangladesh to get married and also to visit his native town in Sylhet. A month after his marriage, he was arrested by the Bangladeshi authorities with, he thinks, two ‘white men’ wearing balaclavas in attendance. After a period of detention and abuse at the hands of his Pakistani captors, Mr Hossein met with two British officials, Liam and Andrew. His hopes that, as a British citizen, he would now find some ‘justice, law and order’ were quickly dashed:

‘Liam says, “From our findings we see you are a highly trained individual aren’t you, so why have you obtained all this training?” He then says, “Ahh so you are the mastermind for the atrocities in the UK, aren’t you? So you know about the July 7 Bombings” saying this very calmly but with a sharpness coming from his throat.

At that point I told Liam and Andrew, “it’s not true, it’s all been a mistake, I am innocent, I don’t know why I am arrested, please tell me why I am here for, what have I done, please help me I am a British citizen.” These guys have been abusing me for the last three weeks or so, beating me and threatening me that they will rape my wife. Whatever I have said or wrote is all made up; I did all this just to please the Colonel. The MI5 men just turned around and looked at the Colonel and shook their heads in disappointment. Liam said, “I think we need a break”...’

Mr Hossein was led away and beaten about his body, but ‘not the face’, on the instructions of the Colonel. On his return to the meeting room:

‘Andrew says, “Are you okay, I hope you are okay and the break has done you some good.” Liam says, “where were we, so you are a trained person from my notes I see you trained in Kashmir, bomb expert, I just agreed with him ...’

Notwithstanding his ‘confession’, Mr Hossein was eventually released, although MI5 and the Bangladeshi security services continued to harass him and tried to buy his co-operation. It was many more months before he was able to return to Britain.

*Rules of the Game* contains much first-hand testimony to the folly of those who prosecute the ‘war on terror’. But it is balanced by a measured assessment in the face of these depredations, which itself seems to reflect the enduring disposition of many of those whom the ‘war on terror’ has abused. In the author’s own words:

‘... the purpose of this book is not to count numbers, it is to highlight the human value of what is taking place in the hope that those voices will appeal to the public and administrations to reverse the current trend.’

*Tony Simpson*

## China in Africa

**Deborah Brautigam, *The Dragon's Gift: The Real Story of China in Africa*, Oxford University Press, 398 pages, hardback ISBN 9780199550227, £18.99**

Just over two years ago I reviewed four books on Africa in China, published in 2007. They all gave warnings of the possible threat of a new colonialism, this time not from European or American powers, but from China and, possibly, from India. But the conclusion was relatively hopeful, that China's approach to Africa was different, and that the more colonialist aspects were changing. Two years later, this book, by Deborah Brautigam, shows that there have indeed been changes for the better, and that Chinese policies were not so bad as some critics had assumed. Brautigam starts from Zhou Enlai's 'Eight Principles for China's Aid to Foreign Countries', announced in Ghana in 1964, which she prints in full in Appendix 1. These emphasised the principles of mutual benefit and equality, respect for sovereignty, and independent economic development. To this end, aid was to consist of low interest loans and provision of technical experts, who will have the same standards of living as local experts. Brautigam believes that these principles have largely been adhered to. Her evidence derives from her many visits, over a period of three decades, to projects in different parts of Africa, her discussions with Chinese officials both in Africa and in China, and rigorous research into relevant reports and other documentation.

Brautigam describes a number of joint projects involving both Chinese and African enterprises. These go back quite a long time – to the TanZam railway, starting in 1967 and completed ahead of schedule in 1975. From the 1970s onward, Chinese companies operating overseas were separated from their government ministries, and the banks financing them were required to work on commercial principles. By the 1990s, the authorities in Beijing were looking for 'value for money'. Competition, efficiency and 'market oriented' principles were required in the use of public money, including foreign aid.

Unlike most Western countries, China does not give cash aid, except for disasters and for technical and medical assistance. Joint projects between Chinese and African enterprises, which Brautigam has examined in person and in detail, are financed by what are called 'resource-backed loans'. These comprise, *inter alia*, infrastructure improvement, textile factories, and leather goods processing.

The scale of activity is impressive. Concessionary loans by China to Africa rose tenfold from the year 2000 to 2007 when they topped \$1.7

billion. By that time, total financial flows from China to Africa were exceeding those of any other donors apart from the United States. Chinese loans by then even exceeded those of the World Bank.

The spread of China's interest in Africa is very wide. In nearly all Sub-Saharan Africa's states China had, by 2006-7, entered into Economic and Technical Agreements. The only exceptions were Gambia, Malawi, and São Tomé and Príncipe. The reason for these exceptions was that these countries continued to recognise Taiwan as China. The existence of two 'Chinas' has been a long-standing cause of Beijing's hesitation in reaching agreements with African governments. Otherwise, there are no evident preferences in Beijing's choice of partners in Africa. It is not even the case, as is often suggested, that Beijing is only interested in 'resource-rich' countries. Even China's Foreign Aid Loan agreements are to be found equally in countries without rich resources, throughout East Africa, for example, and in Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. The 'resource-backed' loans are not necessarily based on exploitation of mineral resources.

Brautigam's last chapter (11), entitled 'Rogue Donor? Myths and Realities', summarises the various arguments that are adduced to support the case against China's 'Dragon's Gift'. The first is that China's interest is really about oil or, alternatively, copper, iron ore, timber, etc. It is certainly true that China's interest in oil in Angola and in Sudan has been very obvious, but it has been no greater than that of other countries with major oil interests, and we have seen that China's activities are just as evident in African countries without rich resources.

Another argument which stresses China's 'neo-colonialism' is that China is less concerned with human rights and democratic governance than other foreign powers in Africa. This takes a bit of believing, especially in relation to the prevalence of corruption. China has partnered Mauritius, South Africa and Botswana, among less corrupt regimes, as well as the most corrupt, such as Equatorial Guinea and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. But so have the Western powers. Sudan and Zimbabwe are the two cases most frequently cited in criticising China's policies of partnering unsavoury regimes. In fact, the World Bank and Western powers have not been above providing aid and even selling arms to dictators. Japan and India both get oil from Sudan, and the Russians have sold arms to Khartoum. Zimbabwe is a special case where the Western powers have imposed sanctions, but China has not.

Brautigam provides evidence that China's policies in Zimbabwe, as well as in Sudan, are changing. Beijing has shown that it is anxious to follow the lead of African organisations such as the African Union and the

regional Southern African Development Community (SADC). This reveals the real weakness of Africa, that such organisations are quite weak. Africa remains divided up by colonial rule into over fifty individual states, with each of which China, like the one-time colonial powers, reaches separate agreements.

Finally, arguments against China's policies in Africa relate to unfair subsidies and low environmental and social standards, especially labour standards. Again, Chinese policies can be shown to be changing. In 2007, China's Eximbank signed a memorandum of understanding with the World Bank's International Finance Corporation on what are called 'Equator Principles', a voluntary set of social and environmental principles. The Chinese Government can see that its reputation is at stake. By far the biggest criticism of Chinese trade practices in Africa is that Chinese manufactures, based on cheap Chinese labour, are being sold everywhere in Africa, and driving African manufacturers out of business. In some places cheap Chinese labour is settling in Africa at the expense of Africans. Brautigam can show many examples of joint Sino-African projects which are advancing African skills, but the fact remains that Sino-African trade mainly consists of the export of Chinese manufactures to Africa in exchange for Chinese imports of raw materials from Africa. This is little different from the colonial trade and what has been continued by the ex-colonial powers after African liberation. It remains to be said again that only all-Africa co-operative actions to resist this pattern of trade will bring any change.

*Michael Barratt Brown*

## Capitalism

**Fred Magdoff and Michael D. Yates, *The ABCs of the Economic Crisis: What Working People Need to Know*, Monthly Review Press, 144 pages, paperback ISBN 9781583671955, £9.95**

**Richard D. Wolff, *Capitalism Hits the Fan: The Global Economic Meltdown and What to Do About It*, Olive Branch Press, 262 pages, paperback ISBN 9781566567848, £16.99**

**Alan S. Kahan, *Mind versus Money: The War between Intellectuals and Capitalism*, Transactions Publishers, 312 pages, hardback ISBN 9781412810630, £29.95**

Three books in very different styles which complement each other. The financial crisis has prompted two of them. The third is a thorough

examination of the roots of capitalism and why intellectuals both support and criticize it.

My main observation concerns a confusion between capitalism and market. The two are not the same. I go to my local farmers' market. Are they capitalists? Capitalism is a particular structure of production, albeit with differences between countries. There have been many commentaries about this.

*ABCs of the Economic Crisis* takes us back to the seminal work of Baran and Sweezy (1966). It is an important introduction to the chaotic world of capitalism. It contains all the definitions we need to know and handles hedge funds, futures, leveraged buyouts, structured investment vehicles, and subprime loans with ease. The chapter 'How Did It Happen' is an excellent exposition and translation of technical obfuscation for readers.

It is summed up by the photo on the front cover of a cowboy-looking police officer presiding over the eviction of a woman holding her children's toys. The book makes scathing and startling comments about the connections between macro-economics and the personal implications. It should be on students' reading lists.

*Capitalism Hits the Fan* takes us through a series of articles written by the author since 2005, many of them prescient. It delves into some of the definitions of neo-cons and what they were after. I loved the piece about 'Nominating Palin Makes Sense', charting what has happened to the Republicans, and to the Democrats. It is an interesting reflection on the subject matter of all three books about capitalism. We should not forget the role of political parties. The three books combine economic, political and religious analysis in a fascinating way.

Then we come to Kahan's book. This is well researched and worth anybody's money, so to speak. Dismissive of Karl Marx, 'over-simplifier', (p.137), but he explained the world with tremendous force (p 138), followed by an excellent analysis of money and its dehumanization, and the implications of anti-semitism by anti-capitalist intellectuals. This is the most interesting chapter:

'The German socialist leader August Bebel ... remarked that "anti-semitism is the socialism of fools". The point is not to convict Marx or Marxists of anti-semitism. It is to show how anti-semitism could gain strength from anti-capitalist ideas and become an episode in the struggle of mind versus money.'

The problem is surely that one could apply this to anti-Marxism with its anti-semitic undertones. As a result 'mind versus money' loses its force.

The quotes in this book are legion. References to Rousseau,

Montesquieu, Hume, Hirschman, Smith, Simmel, Tocqueville, Socrates and many more make you realize what a rich world of the ‘mind’ exists. A classic one, I paraphrase, ‘preachers produce violence, merchants produce peace’ (p.79). Making money was a more innocent occupation than religion. It civilized the aggression of religion.

An interesting thesis. Even the reference to Mozart, ‘The Magic Flute’, which extols the value of work, is a valuable insight into the history of capitalism and how the ideas appeared in the librettos of cultural heroes. It shows us how hegemonic ideas penetrate everything, even ‘shopping’ (p. 79).

Chapters on the ‘Honeymoon between Intellectuals and Capitalism’, then ‘Why the Honeymoon Ended’ are clever disguises for intellectual analysis. This is a very interesting book.

The three are an important addition to the literature on the puzzling subject of capitalism, why it persists, how it destroys things, and why nothing is done about it.

*Richard Minns*

## Socialism

**Leo Panitch, *Renewing Socialism – Transforming Democracy, Strategy and the Imagination*, Merlin Press, 226 pages, paperback ISBN 9780850365917, £14.95**

Recently interviewed on Canadian television, the author was asked why he didn’t join the Canadian New Democratic Party (NDP): he replied that he had been looking for a party to join all his life, so far without success. This book of essays presumably suggests what the parameters of such a party might look like. The text is largely made up of articles written for *Socialist Register* (of which the author is a joint editor with Colin Leys) before the present ongoing financial crisis.

In the first chapter, however, Panitch warns us presciently that capitalist crisis is an organic phenomenon integral to the capitalist system itself, enabling it to resolve its present contradictions and preparing the ground, if necessary, to move to a new operational mode. For socialists these crises provide both opportunities and dangers and too often we have found it difficult to take advantage of the opportunities. This is the case both for social democratic and communist parties, and Panitch believes that this was partly because they were building the wrong kind of parties. This brings us



to the central thrust of the book: that we require new, or transformed existing parties, to galvanise into action a mass working-class movement committed to a socialist outcome. The New Left of the 1960s pinned its hopes on the rise of democratic socialism advancing in both the East and West, conjoining with Third World struggles for colonial liberation. What transpired was not revolution but counter-revolution with the neutering of trade unions, the adoption to one degree or another by social democratic parties of the neo-liberal agenda, the collapse of the Soviet bloc, and economically brutal capitalist restoration. At the same time, successful colonial liberation in the Third World became blighted by underdevelopment and repressive factionalism, all exacerbated by Western intervention, both armed and economic. No wonder many socialists and radicals prefer involvement, if at all, in single issue campaigns and social movements rather than the messianic world view of yesteryear. This is at a time when many of the major fault lines of globalised capitalism are taking on an immediacy likely to threaten life on the planet itself. How can a mass socialist movement be resuscitated to begin to tackle these problems? For the writer a first step is the re-examination of both the successes and failures of the international labour movement, but as Panitch, quoting Marx, makes clear, 'finding once more the spirit of revolution, not making its ghost walk about again'.

In the main, Panitch looks to Lukács and Gramsci for his model of the mass party, which should not be primarily about 'putting forward a team of political leaders' at election time. Nor is it 'that of forging a small band of revolutionaries', it is the shaping of an 'economic group – and turning them into qualified political intellectuals, leaders and organisers'. The last quotation is from Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*, and Panitch expands and develops the idea of class identity in a contemporary setting.

In chapter two, 'Observations on Communism's Demise', the author draws upon a 1990 visit to vehicle assembly plants in the Soviet Union at the height of Gorbachev's reforms. He describes in some detail the malaise affecting the workforce and its seeming imperviousness to reforms from the top. For Panitch this was partly owing to the reforms' implicitly contradictory nature, granting a degree of industrial democracy but also endorsing the tyrannies associated with capitalist market forces. The workers used their new freedoms to slacken the work pace, which Panitch noted was much harder than that of their Western counterparts.

The text moves on to discuss the work of C.B. Macpherson, a prominent Canadian academic, who through a lifetime of intellectual activity sought to assemble a synthesis of the 'insights' of Marxism and the 'valuable parts

of the liberal tradition'. This is a dense but interesting chapter with Panitch drawing on Macpherson's work to take issue with the criticism of Ellen Wood. Panitch uses the opportunity to discuss democracy and the state in an incipient socialist state. Such a state would quickly be assailed by hostile powers and he realises the need for internal defensive coercion and the resulting danger of generalised repression.

The legacy of the *Communist Manifesto* forms the backdrop to the next essay, and Panitch situates the text as the inspirational foundation stone in the development of the mass organisations of the working class, the trade unions and the social democratic parties. For him we have now arrived at a situation where organised communism is largely eclipsed, and social democracy has mostly abandoned any pretence of socialist aims, joining with the power élite in worshipping at the altar of the market. It is therefore ironic that the contemporary period has seen Marx's predictions about the nature and scope of capitalism realised, albeit a little later than he imagined. We now have a truly globalised economy, but unfortunately many would agree that as Perry Anderson has remarked, 'no collective agency able to match the power of capital is yet on the horizon'. In this context Panitch accepts that the New Left has failed to transform the existing social democratic and communist parties, but considers we should return to the *Manifesto* to put back on the agenda the irreconcilability of democracy with capitalist property relations as a key ideological concept. As Marx put it, 'the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all'.

In the chapter 'Bringing Class Back In: Reflections on a Strategy for Labour', Panitch discusses the relationships of trade unions and social movements in the context of their feminisation, together with the changed workplace situation under the neo-liberal dispensation, linking it with the changes in the composition of the working class. Stressing the centrality of trade unions both in the industrial and political arenas, Panitch appeals for strategies that are ambitious rather than always defensive, and that make radical demands on the state. At the same time, unions should adopt an educationally transforming strategy for members to root out residual racism, sexism, homophobia and anti-environmentalism amongst the membership.

The book is meant to inspire weary socialists and it certainly does make a bold attempt, with the final chapter and interview addressing the problem of pessimism on the Left directly. Additionally, apart from the many ideas and insights contained within the text, Panitch thinks that socialism has always been inspired by an element of utopian thinking. He therefore suggests the resuscitation of utopian thinkers of an earlier period with the assistance of the socialist philosopher Ernst Bloch. Bloch was convinced

that, ‘unconditional pessimism therefore promotes the business of reaction’, and he very well might have a point.

This is a thoughtful book, if not a succinct whole. It is an amalgam of separate articles, and leaves the reader feeling that a more structured explanation of Panitch’s ideas would be welcome. It will, however, reward the reader with its perspicacity, knowledge and stimulating ideas. The intellectual vigour of Panitch’s thinking, and his abandonment of old shibboleths, is to be praised and emulated.

*John Daniels*

### What Price European Union?

**Perry Anderson, *The New Old World*, 564 pages, Verso, hardback ISBN 9781844673124, £24.99**

Verso for New Left Books has published in one large volume twelve of Perry Anderson’s essays contributed to the *London Review of Books* between 1996 and 2008, plus an essay in *New Left Review* of May-June 2009. The result comprises 547 pages of text and a 17 page index. The title and the painting of Narcissus on the cover are designed to suggest a dream of a new Europe reflecting the virtues of an older Europe. The index tells us something about the nature of the essays. It is an index of names, not of subjects. Each essay is a massive review of the literature on the subjects of the book – the development of the European Union, its largest members – Germany, France and Italy – and two of the Union’s major problem areas – a divided Cyprus and a not yet admitted Turkey. The position of the United Kingdom is not discussed. The literature reviewed is largely from writers in the United States. European writers, as the author explains, having been responsible for masses of descriptive work, have not been concerned with theorising, with the exception of Alan Milward, to whom the book is dedicated. It is an interesting fact that there are no references to the writings either of the leading Member of the European Parliament, Ken Coates, or of Jacque Delors’s economic adviser, Stuart Holland, one-time British MP and adviser to the Portuguese President. Their absence leaves not only a hole in the literature reviewed, but also a hole in the European Union story. By involving the churches as well as the unions in the social argument, Ken Coates won the support of pretty well the whole European Parliament for the Delors proposals with wide popular support, but not with that of the Governments, which had begun to follow Reagan and Thatcher into neo-liberal globalism.

What can we learn, then, from this great tome? In discussing ‘Origins and Outcomes’, Perry Anderson identifies the great gap that has opened up between the dream of a federal Europe, with external political and internal social responsibilities, such as the founding genius, Jean Monnet, once envisaged, and writers such as Jurgen Habermas have espoused, and the reality. What has emerged has been essentially a free trade area – a Common Market – with no more than nominal common responsibilities, where the separate nation states each retain their individual, unlimited sovereignty. Even the rather limited attempts to achieve a federal constitution with a President and some common internal and external policies were rejected in referenda by France and The Netherlands, and a modified ‘Lisbon Treaty’ that followed was rejected also by the only country carrying out a referendum on this Treaty, Ireland, though Ireland was one of the main beneficiaries of European subsidies. The reason for these rejections, the author insists, derives from the ending of moves by Jacques Delors and others towards any form of Social Europe, and the adoption of neo-liberal policies of free markets, resulting in a wholly unequal impact of the Union on a small class of big businessmen and financiers and a governing élite, on the one hand, and, on the other, the mass of the several populations, especially the young, the women and the poor, but increasingly also some middle classes whose social services have been cut.

The three long chapters in the book, respectively on Germany, France and Italy, trace a long process of disintegration of any original commitment to a federal European Union, even as a guarantee of the ending of the appallingly destructive nature of the European wars of the Twentieth Century. Germany was able to unify its Western and Eastern parts within the Union, and rather shakily re-establish its capital in Berlin, with a German at the head of a highly restrictive European Central Bank. France abandoned most of de Gaulle’s independent positions. Italy lost its Socialist commitment in the embrace of Berlusconi. More surprisingly, all three became enamoured of the NATO alliance and its American leadership, even eventually supporting United States military aggression. United States governments had promoted European Union as a counterweight to Soviet Communism, but with the ending of the Cold War still saw the containment of Russia as a major policy objective. From this arose US interest in a base in Cyprus, in the entry of Turkey’s military strength not only into NATO, but also into the European Union, and, ultimately, also of Ukraine. Anderson’s chapters on Cyprus and on Turkey reveal the British policy of divide and conquer between the Greek and Turkish parts of the island, and the desire to use Turkey as a moderate

Moslem ally in containing Russian ambitions in the Near East.

Within this world picture, Anderson raises the interesting question of what had made for Europe's economic, military and cultural world dominance over at least five hundred years. The answer he gives draws from those writers (he quotes François Guizot and Edgar Morin) who saw the very diversity and competitive antagonisms of the European powers, not just military, but ideological – Classical, Jewish and Christian – as the source of Europe's pre-eminent development. With much reduced intra-European competition today and, indeed, with the European Union's subservience to the United States, development might be expected to come from US-Chinese or Indian competition. The threat of terrorism and the migration to Europe of many millions of Muslims is considered in this context, but this is not seen as a stimulus to development, rather as a hangover from colonialism; Muslim immigrants, though often resistant, even rebellious, showing no multi-cultural, multi-confessional, competitive spirit. The class struggles in Europe that emerged in the mid-Twentieth century had died down by the Twenty First; even Social Democratic votes in Scandinavia, let alone in the United Kingdom, Germany or The Netherlands, dropping to 20% or below. So Perry Anderson ends the book with an equivocal question about European dynamic disequilibrium. 'In due course', he concludes,

'a prolonged economic recession might re-ignite the engines of political conflict and ideological division that gave the continent its impetus in the past. So far, in today's Europe, there is little sign of either. But it remains unlikely that time and contradiction have come to a halt.'

Since Anderson's last writings, the financial crisis in Greece and similar problems of debt in Spain and Portugal, and German resistance to bailing them out, have put the whole future of the Union into question.

Perry Anderson's essays are full of interesting information and imaginative questions, but the book is hard to read, not only because of its great length, its many references and convoluted sentences, but also because of his use of French, German and Italian words, and even of English words whose meaning is not clear. Just three examples of the latter which I baulked at were 'conflictuality', 'catalaxy' and 'decathexis', but there were others which may be in common use in American academia, where the author now resides, but do not appear in standard dictionaries. We have learnt so much from his writings in the past that is a pity that this book was not subjected to some friendly editing for the general reader.

*Michael Barratt Brown*

## On the Broo

**Christopher Harvie, *Broonland: The Last Days of Gordon Brown*, Verso, 224 pages, paperback ISBN 9781844674398, £8.99**

Fiddled statistics on employment and public debt, catastrophic distance-learning projects, ditto for computerisation schemes, raids on pensions funds, selling off gold cheap, mud-wrestling with Tony Blair, yet bankrolling his delusions. Taxes that are baffling but real; tax credits that are baffling but illusory. Programmes to cut public sector jobs; programmes promising more public sector jobs. Transport, higher education, public culture: all kept anorexic. This is before we get to the motor itself, the property-and-retail/VAT fraud carousel which sucks in imports, piles up trade deficits, then attempts to correct these by ‘inward investment’, a euphemism for foreign takeovers and, less seductively, international hot money. Welcome to Broonland.

From these musings in *The Guardian's* ‘Comment is Free’ blog, Chris Harvie has expanded *Broonland* from blog to book. It is more a sort of biography, less the obsequious interviews of the official sort, and the confectionary of quotes from the unofficial sort. Written before the great leader’s exit from Number 10, it almost charts Gordon Brown’s trajectory back to earth, but I would defy any satirist to have the imagination to dream up the head in hands contrition over ‘that bigoted woman’.

I have read two types of book by Chris Harvie, the heavy analytical academic, and the humorous commentary. *Broonland* is at times an uneasy compromise between the two. But with his subject moving from a self-confident Calvinist and ambitious young politician to senior croupier at Blair’s Downing Street casino, and the lack of quotable and attributable comments on Brown, the character has to be squeezed out of dry facts and statistics sometimes created by Gordon Brown and at other times created by the activities of his finally-to-be-worshipped free markets, which eventually surrounded and ambushed him.

For those who may think that Harvie is being harsh on Brown, I came across a copy of his speech (typed in caps as is his wont) to the Scottish Labour Conference on 12<sup>th</sup> March 1995 in Inverness. As the applause greeted him, a banner was unfurled from the balcony calling for the retention of Clause 4, prompting Jack McConnell to creep up and down the aisles posing the question ‘Who did that?’ to likely culprits. Meanwhile, Brown, oblivious to this diversion, delivered this speech specially tailored for his Scottish audience:

'When they're planning to sell off our stations our

Rail track

Our trains

Our bridges

Even the Forth Railway Bridge

When 600 million pounds has been spent in city fees to donors of the Conservative Party

With John McGregor, the former transport minister who privatised rail, now standing as a director of a company advising on the sell off of British Rail

Let us be clear about the motivation of all those involved – in this the second great train robbery.

The only network they're interested in protecting is the old boys network

The only track they want to be travelling on is the inside track

The only connections they're interested in making are city connections

And the only train that really concerns them is ... the gravy train

Not service they're interested in ... but self service that's the Tory Party.

No longer a party of the whole nation – now exposed simply as a run-down branch of network south east

Let us be clear

It is not our trains that should be driven off the tracks – it is rail privatisation itself and we're going to keep the railways in public hands just as we stopped the VAT rise

It's time to call a halt to the privatisation hand outs

It's time to blow the whistle on the boardroom excesses of the great and the greedy.

It's time to call an end to the share option millions, the insider dealers, the dubious tax exiles

These people never needed to wait for the Saturday National Lottery Draw

Every day of the week they've been awarding themselves all the biggest prizes on offer

It's not a National Lottery.

It's a National disgrace and we'll stop it.

Because it is wrong that one hundred and ten million pounds of privatisation share options are given tax privilege while middle and lower income families are taxed more to receive less

We will end the tax privilege and use the money to help the many not the few

Because it is wrong that telephone number salaries are paid to executives

When BT added ones to their telephone numbers they didn't tell us they'd also added noughts to their salaries

We will give the privatisation regulators power to cut prices for millions of consumers where there is abuse and so redistribute resources from these powerful interests to ordinary people in this country

Because it is wrong that unbridled speculation is threatening the livelihoods of thousands of men and women ...

Wrong that a bank can virtually become a betting shop  
 Wrong that some bankers are more obsessed about their bonuses than the jobs  
 and savings of those affected by their bankruptcy ...'

Chris Harvie's *Broonland* relates the actual onward route march of Gordon Brown from Inverness, through the bonfire of the pledges in 1996 and his irresistible rise to the top of the Labour Party. A Labour Party which was reduced to fighting the recent election that lead to Brown's dénouement with the old policy-free slogan 'If you vote SNP you'll let the Tories in – Only Labour can beat the Tories!'

Chris Harvie will not miss the irony of English voters sending Brown homewards to think again, this time with further empirical evidence to ponder that, if Scotland votes Labour to keep the Tories out, and England votes Tory, you get a Tory government. Will the old slogan work the next time and put the frighteners on the Scottish electorate as before, or will the electorate get fed up that Labour just does not deliver. Adding to the electoral evidence on Labour's inability to deliver is *Broonland*, which lays bare the collapse of the faux ideology that the left can manage capitalism to produce fair outcomes. I'm afraid that vulgar wealth at one end of the axis and grinding poverty at the other are both prerequisites of a capitalist society, and the outcome of its theory being put into practice.

*Henry McCubbin*

## Benn

**Tony Benn, *Letters to my Grandchildren: Thoughts on the Future*, Hutchinson, 224 pages, hardback ISBN 9780091931261, £18.99, paperback ISBN 9780099539094, £8.99**

Tony Benn has ten grandchildren, which might keep him busy enough as an adviser. Not all of us are as successful as he has been in motivating other people to do things which involve them in considerable efforts, and some of us, at any rate, have had sufficient cause to doubt whether their own advice, whether to children or grandchildren, might not be too assiduously received. But Tony Benn's most recent previous book was called *Dare to be a Daniel*, and he is once again living up to that instruction.

Here he sets out his opinions on civil disobedience, on nuclear war, and on non-alignment. Far from talking down to the grandchildren, he presents



them with a serious argument. He also tries hard to set a serious example, of optimism and confidence in the possibilities contained in our futures.

He transmits the thoughts of American Presidents:

‘I have seen war on land and sea. I have seen blood running from the wounded. I have seen men coughing out their gassed lungs. I have seen the dead in the mud, I have seen cities destroyed. I have seen 200 limping, exhausted men come out of line – the survivors of a regiment of a thousand that went forward 48 hours before. I have seen children starving. I have seen the agonies of mothers and wives. I hate war.’

So said President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Roosevelt was echoed by Dwight Eisenhower, ‘himself a general’.

‘Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies in the final sense a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. The world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children ... This is not a way of life at all, in any true sense. Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron.’

And yet, in spite of these warm words, more recent Presidents have given us the doctrine of full spectrum dominance, and the brutal wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

That was how Benn entered his eighties as Chairman of the Stop the War Coalition. This was an affirmation, which it was entirely right to make.

But the future? Who knows? At a time of meltdown in human institutions, old verities become fluid, or have even evaporated. The Labour Party, to which Benn devoted his adult life, (and he began precociously) may indeed be part of the present meltdown. What will not melt down is the commitment which arises from the understanding that we are members of one another. Being members of one another, we learn, one from another. That is why it is fitting that Benn himself, ‘living as I do “in a blaze of autumn sunshine”’ can realise that ‘I have learned more from my children and grandchildren than I did from my parents and therefore look with love and thankfulness on the human family’.

Perhaps the grandchildren will listen. But whether they do or not, there will be others who find this message acceptable.

*Ken Coates*

## Later to Win?

**David John Douglass, *The Wheel's Still in Spin*, published by Read 'n' Noir, an imprint of Christie Books of Hastings, East Sussex, distributed by Central Books Ltd, 99 Wallis Road, London E9 5LN. 466 pages with end notes, 120 photographs, a glossary and a list of organisations, paperback ISBN 139781873976364, £9.99**

This second volume of autobiography by a Durham and Yorkshire miner and scholar was described by the publisher as part of a trilogy, 'Stardust and Coaldust'. The first volume, *Geordies – Wa Mental*, appeared in 2008, and my review appeared in *Spokesman 108*, on page 65. I apologise here for misspelling the author's surname then with a single 's'.

The volume reviewed here describes David Douglass's life in the decade 1969 – 1979. He was born in Tyneside in 1948. The title is taken from the Bob Dylan lyric *The Times They Are A-Changin'* quoted in the introduction.

*And don't speak too soon  
For the wheel's still in spin  
And there's no tellin' who that it's namin'  
For the loser now will be later to win  
For the times they are a-changin'*

The introduction, which has no named author, also refers to the Vietnam War and the worldwide revolutionary struggles that followed. The author's account places him in that struggle, and this volume, like the first, describes the social background of a politicised coal miner if not a typical one. The Vietnam War and the civil war in Northern Ireland must have influenced the author strongly. His perspectives moved through many associations from Young Communists through the 'Revolutionary Workers Party (Trotskyist) Doncaster Regional British Section Fourth International – Posadist' (the title of a home-made mineworkers style banner made with the help of his artistic wife Maureen) to being a member and organiser for Sinn Fein, an armed supporter of an expected revolutionary armed struggle, and an applicant for membership of the IRA.

It is no surprise to the reader that the stress of pit work and the intensity of his studies and political activities led to a serious nervous breakdown which a warm social life, sometimes lubricated by drugs, his love of music, and his impromptu singing of folksong at *céilithe* were unable to

prevent. Sexual freedom didn't seem to work too well, either.

It is worth mentioning that among his early influences are two members of the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation. Michael Barratt Brown was at Sheffield University's Extra Mural Department, where David Douglass was a day-release student of economics, political theory, social history, maths, statistics and English. The author also mentions our late and deeply mourned Ken Coates who was then opposing the sale of gunboats to Chile's General Pinochet.

The author's consistent commitment in these two volumes is to the ultimate and, as he saw it, inevitable success of the working class in a Marxist-socialist revolution. He was one of those working hard for it, even to the extent of organising military training of comrades with live ammunition on the moors of Northumberland. In this context his choice of Bob Dylan's verse as a title deserves examination. Who was losing in the 1970s, and who was seen then as later to win? In 1972 and in 1974, NUM strikes were successful, but only in restoring miners' earnings against rapid inflation. They were later to lose and lose heavily in 1984, and the author knew all about that in 2009 when this volume went to the printers. So did he choose Dylan's verse for the comfort of a promise of success yet to be delivered? And if he did, what will volume three have to say about the likely route of that success when the author has described the awful, premeditated attack on the labour movement, on democracy and on civil liberties that was 1984?

We will need more than a roulette wheel or even dialectical materialism to make the world sustainable for people, democracy, justice and peace. When we have overcome the distraction of the war on terror we will need some clear thinking about equity, differentials, resource depletion, carbon footprints, lifestyles, population, human rights and the better regulation of the military industrial complex.

*Christopher Gifford*