

Deborah Lavin

A Comrade and Friend of Immense Talent

David Morgan pays tribute to Deborah Lavin who died of lung cancer on 23 March 2020

There was a great theatricality and flamboyance about Deborah that could occasionally intimidate on first impression; but as one came to know her better, her true qualities would show through: an essential kindness, tremendous loyalty, capacity for friendship, a strong sense of purpose and a keenness to make a contribution to the collective effort.

Deborah was a serious historian, known as a writer on a wide range of topics, with her vast knowledge of the Victorian era and its political personalities like Charles Bradlaugh, Annie Besant, Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling.

Her effectiveness as a public speaker was clearly enhanced by her earlier career on the stage where she worked as an actress and playwright.

Secularism

She curated some fascinating series of lectures for Conway Hall on topics such as secularism, a free press and the business of slavery, which attracted the participation of many leading historians, several of whom were members of the SHS.

Deborah was an active and valuable member of the Socialist History Society and made an important contribution to its activities, serving on our committee where she always added her unique perspective on the points under discussion.

She will be remembered as an extremely practical person and one who was always willing to



play her part in even the more humdrum tasks such as organising tea and biscuits; selling our publications; taking the collection at meetings and allowing us to make use of her home as an informal storeroom. It is through such goodwill actions and commitment that voluntary societies such as ours can continue to exist for so long. Her contribution and presence are already much missed.

Deborah Lavin also took a more public role in the activities of the SHS as a speaker in our regular talks programme; delivering a paper on Annie Besant at a conference in the University of East Anglia organised by our treasurer, Francis King and in the writing of a well-received pamphlet on the clash between Bradlaugh and Marx issued as one of our Occasional Publications.

Edward Aveling

Deborah had spent many years writing and researching a political biography of Edward Aveling, an ambiguous but strategically located figure in the secular and socialist movements towards the end of the 19th century and who was closely aligned with Engels, William Morris and on a personal level was involved with Annie Besant and Eleanor Marx. She was working on this book-length study right up until the end and left a manuscript that was near completion. When printed her “Aveling book” will become a major part of her legacy as a historian of the early socialist movement. We salute her memory.

If You Got A Boss, You Need A Union.

Review of *Ghosts of West Virginia*

The singer-songwriter Steve Earle has a new album out in which he sings about the worst mining disaster in the United States in 40 years.

On April 5, 2010, the Upper Big Branch mine in West Virginia, owned by coal giant Massey Energy, exploded. Twenty-nine workers. Four years later, Don Blankenship, the CEO of Massey Energy, which had been fined nearly \$400,000 in the year before the explosion for repeated and serious safety violations, was indicted by a federal grand jury for allegedly conspiring to violate mine safety rules, conspiring to cover up those violations, and providing false statements about Massey's safety record. He faced more than 31 years in prison. He ended up being convicted of one misdemeanor and only served a year in prison.

Coal Country

Jessica Blank and Erik Jensen have produced a play about the Upper Big Branch disaster, with Steve Earle writing the songs for the show. Coal Country, based on interviews with miners who survived and relatives of those who did not, opened at the Public Theater in New York City in early March. The work featured Steve Earle as sort of a Greek chorus with a guitar.

Unfortunately, the play was postponed after two weeks due to the coronavirus pandemic. However, Steve Earle and his band, The Dukes, have released a new album, *Ghosts of West Virginia*, which includes these songs and several others.

In the song *"It's About Blood"*, Earle names the dead. He contrasts the underground life of the miners with the vast profits of the company:

"Don't want to hear about the state of the economy / Fiscal reality, profit and loss / None of that matters when you're underground anyway / Damn sure can't tell me nothin' 'bout cost."

At the end of the song, Earle recites a list of the names of the 29 men killed in the Upper Big Branch mine.

Other songs speak of the loss and anger felt by surviving relatives. The Dukes' violinist, Eleanor Masterson, sings *"If I Could See Your Face Again"* which poignantly puts a widow's grief into song. This deserves to become a country music classic.

There is a theme running through the album of the importance of a trade union in preserving the health, safety and lives of workers. Steve Earle reminds us of the radical history of West Virginia miners, "When the union came and tried to make a stand".

"My daddy was a miner / My daddy's daddy too/ They struck the mine/ And walked the line/ 'Cos that's just what you do".

Three Chords and the Truth

Unable to do a proper launch of the album because of the virus, Steve Earle did an on-line, solo performance of the songs interspersed with commentary and explanation, sponsored by the United Mine Workers, the Teamsters and the American Federation of Teachers. Three times he says "If you got a boss, you need a union!".

Steve Earle challenged himself to write songs that would relate to people who may not align with him politically.

"One of the dangers that we're in is if people like me keep thinking that everyone who voted for Trump is a racist or an asshole, then we're fucked, because it's simply not true. So this is one move toward something that might take a generation to change. I wanted to do something where that dialogue could begin".

by Steve Cushion

The launch concert is here:

<https://bit.ly/2YKtqXs>

You can listen to the full album here:

<https://bit.ly/30PYAzf>



A New Look at 1848

Catherine Howe has enjoyed a rich and varied career which has included acting from childhood, work as a professional singer and as a television presenter. More latterly Catherine started researching and writing about social history following the completion of a degree in History and Religious Studies at the Open University. Her main interest is in the radical politics of the early 19th century. Two of her previous books have been about one year: 1842.

Chartist Movement in London

The year 1848 is one of the most momentous in British and European history: a year of revolution across the continent and which saw the appearance of The Communist Manifesto. Catherine's focus is on the fortunes of the Chartist movement in London. The book's title, London Story 1848, is carefully chosen and indicates her approach which is good old-fashioned narrative history eschewing too much theorising. The book recounts a familiar story making exemplary use of contemporary witness accounts of the Chartist protests that are most renowned for the mass demonstration on Kennington Common; she quotes David Goodway's estimate that 150,000 people had amassed for the famous rally held there on 10th April 1848.

Her argument is that in 1848 London "came as near to a populist revolution as this country has seen at any time in the last 450 years". Now this is a controversial thesis indeed in that it must ignore the "English Revolution" of 1648 and the establishment of the Republican rule of Oliver Cromwell, as well as the Levellers, the Diggers and the general social ferment of the 17th century, described by Christopher Hill as the "century of revolution".

Leadership

Catherine describes the close connections between the Chartists and the militant politics of Ireland. She also points to the failures in leadership of the movement at critical moments when there was most opportunity for success.

The author, who is a member of the SHS, demonstrates a deft touch in telling a good

story and provides the reader with many human details concerning the characters and physical traits of leading Chartists whose names are very familiar from the works of Goodway, John Saville and Malcolm Chase, to mention but a few.

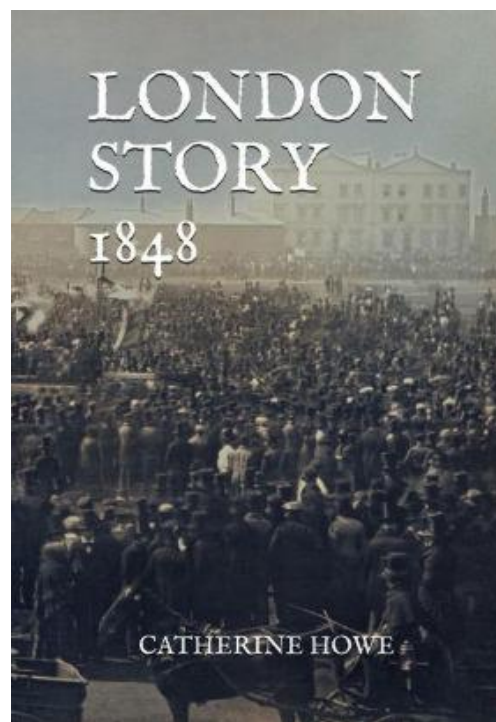
Catherine Howe relies heavily on Goodway's London Chartism and Saville's 1848: The British State and the Chartist Movement, both of which appeared in the 1980s, but neglects Chase's Chartism: A New History, which came out in 2007.

Radical Political History

Nevertheless, the book is an accomplished work that provides an accessible and highly readable introduction to the Chartists and some of its leading activists. The author leaves you wanting to know more and in that it must be judged a success. It should help stimulate a wider interest in this important chapter in the radical political history of the British working-class movement.

London Story 1848 is published by APS Books in paperback and costs £9.99.

David Morgan



To Members

This is a members' newsletter and we welcome your contributions. We reserve the right to edit, please keep it brief and send contributions to:

morganshs@hotmail.com

The Mayflower in Britain – How an Icon was Made in London

Published on the quatercentenary of the Mayflower’s journey, SHS member, Graham Taylor’s book offers a unique perspective on the “Pilgrim Fathers” by placing the story in a wider social context and providing a fresh analysis of why the voyage occurred in the first place.

Author of a recent study of the “ethical socialist” Ada Salter, Taylor explores the economic and religious factors that led to the journey and by so doing he strips away the romantic, more traditional view of the Mayflower. The voyage is usually seen as part of early American history and forms part of the founding myth of American democracy. By contrast, Graham Taylor looks at the events within a British perspective influenced by the work of Christopher Hill and other social historians who uncovered the radical religious groups that emerged from the “English Revolution” of the 17th century.

The tale usually told is of a romantic departure from Plymouth, Devon, and a momentous arrival in Plymouth, Massachusetts. In fact, the voyage arose out of grim and protracted negotiations in London.

Catalogue of Mistakes and Mishaps

Taylor looks at how the journey was financed and organised by investors in the City of London and how the religious aspects came out of an underground church in Southwark. It sailed to America probably from Blackwall, while the ship and its chief officers were based in Rotherhithe. The book shows how the voyage became a catalogue of mistakes and mishaps. The ship did not plan to go to Plymouth but was forced to call in there for repairs. On arriving in America, the voyagers were unclear about where exactly to land, and almost provoked a mutiny when they did choose a place.

English Revolution

In *The Mayflower in Britain – How an Icon was Made in London*, Taylor establishes that the radical religious communities in London that had planned the voyage of the Mayflower were the same ones that had been instrumental in waging and winning the English Revolution of 1648 and consequently founding some of the basic liberties that later generations in Britain were to enjoy.

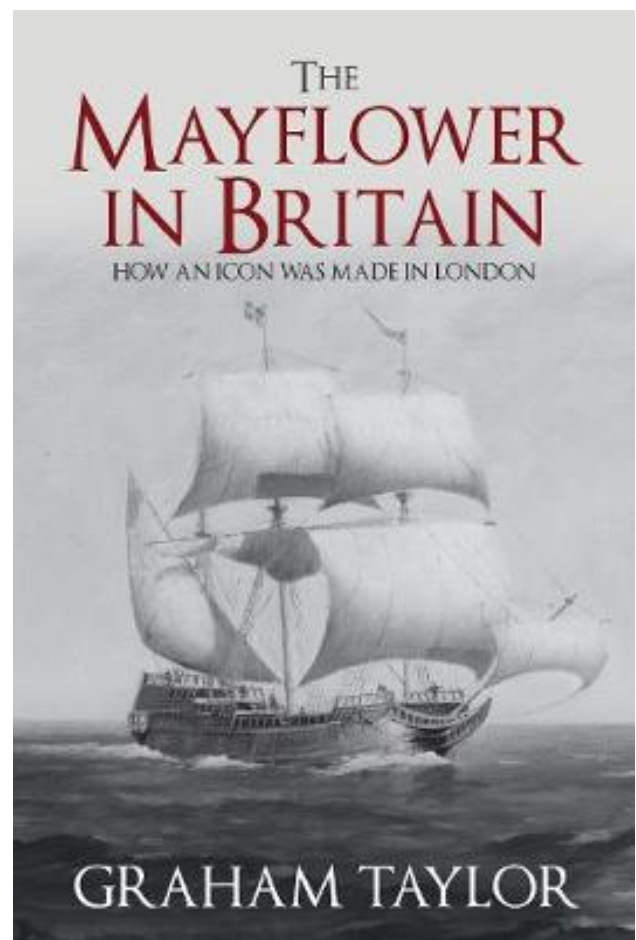
The Mayflower story is of course not without its controversy and there are a variety of per-

spectives on its meaning and legacy. The SHS hopes to hold a debate in the issues as soon as we are can hold public meetings again.

See the publisher’s website for more details of Graham Taylor’s book:

<https://www.amberley-books.com/coming-soon/the-mayflower-in-britain.html>

David Morgan



For an alternative view of the Mayflower

***Telling the Mayflower Story:
Thanksgiving or Land Grabbing,
Massacres & Slavery?***

A *Socialist History Society* publication
by Danny Reilly & Steve Cushion

Buy a copy for

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Steve Cushion reviews *The End of Policing* by Alex Vitale (Verso, 2017)

While we may be shocked by the response of the US police to the protests around the murder of George Floyd, readers of *The End of Policing* will not be surprised.

Early US policing was shaped by slavery, as Vitale shows. Long before the London Metropolitan Police were formed, Southern cities had a paid, full-time police force which were derived from slave patrols. While most slave patrols operated in rural areas, urban patrols like the Charleston City Guard and Watch became a formal paid force as early as 1783. These heavily armed police regularly inspected the passes of slaves and the papers of free blacks. The only limit on police power was that enslaved people were someone else's property, so killing one could result in civil liability to the owner. When slavery was abolished, new forms of policing were developed to deal with the freed black population. Anti-vagrancy laws were used to force black people to accept employment, mostly in the sharecropping system.

Jim Crow

By the Jim Crow era, policing had become a central tool for maintaining racial inequality throughout the South, supplemented by vigilantes such as the Ku Klux Klan, who often worked closely with local police. With the rise of the civil rights movement, the police were used to try to suppress the protests.

The London Metropolitan Police, often thought of as the first ever police force, was created in 1829 by Sir Robert Peel, with the prime intention of managing disorder and protecting the propertied classes rather than fighting crime. Peel developed his ideas while governing colonial Ireland where the Royal Irish Constabulary played a central role in maintaining British rule and the Protestant ascendancy. As Home Secretary, Peel laid down that the main functions of the Metropolitan Police were to protect property, quell riots, put down strikes and other industrial actions, and produce a disciplined industrial work force.

The London model was imported into Boston in 1838 and spread through Northern cities over the next few decades. If a local business-

man had close ties to a local politician, he needed only to go to the station and a squad of police would be sent to deal with the workers. The primary jobs of early detectives were to spy on political radicals and other trouble-makers. Very few thieves ever got caught by the new police.

Pennsylvania was home to some of the most militant trade unionism in the USA during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The mine and factory owners' initial response was to set up a private police force called the Coal and Iron Police. This force committed many atrocities, like the Latimer Massacre of 1897, where they killed 19 unarmed miners and wounded 32 others. Eventually, the state took over, creating of the Pennsylvania State Police in 1905, the first state police force in the country. Their behaviour, however, was much the same, strikebreaking and the killing workers, as in the Westmoreland County Coal Strike of 1910-11, where they earned the nickname "Pennsylvania Cossacks".

Colonial Policing

The Pennsylvania State Police was modelled after the Philippine Constabulary. Jesse Garwood, a major figure in the US occupation forces in the Philippines, brought the colonial methods of espionage and political suppression to bear on Pennsylvania miners and factory workers. Marine General Smedley Butler, who once described himself as "a high class musclem for Big Business", served as police chief of Philadelphia in 1924. He was removed from office after a public outcry over his heavy-handed methods.

The USA also had its own domestic version of colonial policing, the Texas Rangers, who were set up to protect the interests of the white colonists. They were a major force for Anglo colonial expansion hunting down and killing the native population, as well as violently pushing out the Mexican inhabitants, for example the 1918 massacre at Porvenir, in which Rangers killed 15 unarmed locals and forced the remaining community to flee in fear to Mexico. In the 1960s and 70s, the Rangers played a central role in suppressing the farmworkers' union, arresting and beating pickets and union officials.

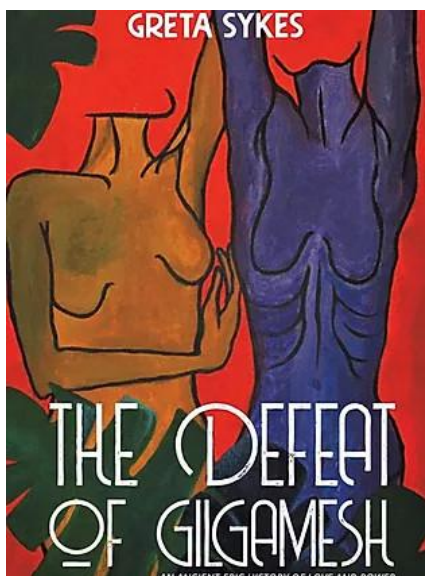
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End of Policing - continued

Today, US police are armed with an amazing array of weapons ranging from semi-automatic pistols and fully automatic rifles to grenade launchers and .50-caliber machine guns. Much of this weaponry comes directly from the Pentagon through a weapons transfer programme that began in 1997. Local police departments can obtain surplus armaments at no cost and now have access to armoured personnel carriers, assault rifles and grenade launchers.

War on the Poor

Successive governments have adopted neoliberal policies that see all social problems as police matters. After decades of austerity, governments have no will or ability to pursue social policies that might address crime and disorder without the use of the police; government has basically abandoned poor areas to market forces, backed up by a repressive criminal justice system. As poverty deepens and housing costs rise, government support for affordable housing has evaporated. As mental health facilities close, police become the first responders to calls for assistance when problems arise. Modern policing is largely a war on the poor that does little to make communities safer. Instead of asking the police to solve social problems we should organize for real justice and fight to produce a society designed to put people before profit.



The Defeat of Gilgamesh

The Epic of Gilgamesh is a poem of ancient Mesopotamia which is reputed to be the very earliest surviving work of literature. It is thus one of the most important historical documentary evidences of human civilisation.

The work was only rediscovered in the 1850s and was not to be translated into a readable format until the 1870s when it immediately aroused controversy because of the story's close parallels with incidents in the Bible. Classical historians also believe that the story influenced both the Odyssey and Iliad of Homer.

As the various peoples and cultures of the world become more interdependent, the story of Gilgamesh has become more widely known and appreciated. It has inspired many works of literature, poetry and art. Greta Sykes is the latest in a long line of individuals who have been inspired by the characters depicted in the Gilgamesh epic, which is a richly suggestive text open to numerous interpretations. For Greta the story represents a struggle between female and male power.

In taking the women as her focus, Greta treads a path laid by recent feminist scholarship which regards the epic as evidence of a transition from matriarchy to a more modern patriarchal society. There are several characters in Greta's story headed by Inanna, goddess of love and war; her grandmother, Ishtar, and the high priestess, Nin, who combine to challenge the supremacy of Gilgamesh.

The story is told by Enheduanna, high priestess of the city of Ur, who is said to be the earliest known poet ever recorded in history. Her actual existence is established by both archaeological and textual sources. Her hymns composed for reading in the temple have been found inscribed on tablets of stone and represent the world's earliest poetry.

Apart from the feminist perspective, mention should be made of how the green movement has seen the epic as symbolic of humanity's disastrous separation from the natural world. The epic is a richly resonant text that still demands careful study. Through her novel, Greta has drawn the epic to the attention of a wider audience.

The Defeat of Gilgamesh is Greta's second work of fiction and is a powerful book that can serve as a fine introduction to the remote world of this oldest surviving literature and earliest evidence of human creativity.

David Morgan

He's Fallen in the Water

By Steve Cushion

A few years ago, a Cuban historian friend of mine was visiting London for a conference at the Royal Academy. During one of the breaks, I showed him round Trafalgar Square, Piccadilly and the immediate vicinity. He suddenly asked, "What happened in 1857?". He had noticed that many of the statues had this date on them and celebrated an army general on the podium. It was, of course, the date of India's First War of Independence, known at the time as the Indian Mutiny. This made me start to look at statues in public places.

There are class, gender and race issues with nearly all statues, 90% of which are of members of the ruling class of the time. Given the origins of the rise of British capitalism in profits made from slavery and the slave trade, it is inevitable that a very large number of statues will be memorials to businessmen who made their fortunes in the slave trade.

Boris Johnson says that removing statues is 'to lie about our history', but in reality it is the statues themselves that lie about our history. If the plinth of the now famous statue in the river in Bristol had said "William Colston, who kidnapped 80,000 Africans and shipped them to the West Indies where those who did not die on the way were whipped and tortured throughout a lifetime of backbreaking toil before going to an early grave", then there would not have been such local anger.

As historian Louise Raw wrote recently: "As there's talk of removing a statue I've written a lot about, of William Gladstone on Bow Road in east London, we should also consider honouring the women forced to pay for it in 1882. The unveiling took place in 1882 at the behest of their hugely wealthy bosses Bryant and May, who'd forced the matchwomen to pay for the statue from already starvation wages. The firm made workers attend the ceremony – but watched in horror as the women turned it into a protest, attacking the statue with rocks, jabbing their fingers with hatpins to stain it red, and shouting "our blood paid for this!". And, of course, the Gladstone family wealth came from the slave plantations of Sir John Gladstone of Fasque, father of the William Gladstone.

The purpose of statues throughout history has been to reinforce the rule of the elite, to make their dominance look permanent and to sanitise their history for future generations. So, it is no wonder that extreme right-wing thugs are organising "statue defence squads" and mealy-mouthed liberal politicians are wringing their hands saying that, of course, the statues should come down, but it should be done "within the law". Tommy Robinson shouted: "Who gives a shit what it's about and what the man's done? It's part of British history".

For once I agree. British capitalism has its origins in the triangular slave trade that saw the growth in British textile production as cloth was taken to Africa to be exchanged for slaves who were then transported to the British colonies in the West Indies and the US to be exchanged for cotton and sugar to be brought back in order to feed and clothe the urban poor as cheaply as possible.

Racism, which the supporters of the slave trade used as a justification for slavery, has badly infected British society. The racism of the police, the unemployment figures for young black people, the endless discrimination and petty humiliations of everyday life, the Windrush scandal, all of these factors and more have their origins in the wealth and power that the British ruling class gained from slavery.

The protests at the murder of George Floyd have sparked a global response, part of which was the joyful removal of the slave-trader's statue. We need to finish the job and radically change a society that continues to rest upon exploitation of human labour and relies upon racial divisions to maintain the domination of the wealthy few.



Some Sound Advice from Marx

by David Morgan

The fury over public monuments, statues and street names honouring persons with links to slavery that followed the horrific killing of George Floyd rapidly expanded its targets to anyone alleged to have held racist views. Assessing the past is a basic task of the historian but taking direct action to remove tributes to past public figures because their record is judged to offend prescribed political opinions amounts to censorship.

Amid the recent wave of protests, a diverse range of national public figures from politics, history and business have been targeted; statues have been physically attacked and defaced with graffiti; others have been lined up to be toppled. Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Francis Drake, W E Gladstone, Robert the Bruce, Oliver Cromwell and Winston Churchill have come under threat or direct attack.

These actions inevitably provoked reactions and a free-for-all has followed. Tories have weighed in by calling for the grave of Karl Marx in Highgate Cemetery to be removed.

Desecration has become acceptable. Local priests have even gone on television to defend the defacement of family graves to former slave traders that have lain undisturbed in their own churchyard for hundreds of years.

The movement to end racism and achieve greater social justice is a fine progressive endeavour; but the means of achieving the objectives by targeting public statues surely on reflection seems a little bizarre. One thing is certain is that not one single penny of the immense assets held by the public corporations and the City of London will ever be touched by such actions.

Marx himself can still provide sound advice on the issues at stake and guidance on how political struggles can be made more effective.

In the selected letters of Marx and Engels we find two commentaries by Marx that are worthy of serious consideration.

Writing of “accidents” in history and the role of the leaders of political movements, Marx has this to say, which has a bearing on the unpredictable course of events in which we constantly find ourselves:

“World history would indeed be very easy to make if the struggle were taken up only on condition of infallibly favourable chances. On the other hand, it would be of a very mystical nature if “accidents” played no part. These accidents naturally form part of the general course of development and are compensated for by other accidents. But acceleration and delay are very much dependent upon such “accidents”, including the “accident” of the character of the people who at first stand at the forefront of the movement.”

Marx to Kugelmann, 17 April 1871

Specifically addressing slavery, Marx makes these insightful remarks:

“Freedom and slavery constitute an antagonism. I need not speak either of the good or the bad sides of freedom... The only thing that has to be explained is the good side of slavery. We are not dealing with indirect slavery, the slavery of the proletariat, but with direct slavery, the slavery of the black people in Surinam, in Brazil, and in the Southern States of North America.

“Direct slavery is as much the pivot of our industrialism today as machinery, credit, etc. Without slavery no cotton; without cotton no modern industry. It is slavery which has given value to the colonies; the colonies have created world trade; world trade is the necessary condition of large-scale machine industry. Thus, before the traffic in Negroes began, the colonies supplied the Old World with only very few products and did not visibly change the face of the earth. Slavery is therefore an economic category of the highest importance. Without slavery North America, the most progressive country, would be turned into a patriarchal land. If North America were wiped off the map of the world the result would be anarchy, the total decay of trade and of modern civilisation... Since slavery is an economic category, it has existed in every nation since the world began. Modern nations have merely known how to disguise slavery in their own countries while they openly imported it into the New World.”

Marx to P V Annenkov, 28 December 1846

Some Sound Advice from Marx - *continued*

A strong case could be made for demanding that such a point of view be included in the school curriculum if we want young people to be made better informed about the history of slavery and the nature of its economic roots. That makes far more sense than simply erasing aspects of history that offend our modern sensibilities. History with “warts and all” in all its rich complexities is surely the preferred way to approach current controversies and injustices.

Note: I am using the edition of the Selected Letters of Marx and Engels published by the People's Publishing House, Peking, 1973.

Professor Malcolm Chase

Historian of Chartism (3 February 1957 – 29 February 2020)

Our distinguished member, Professor Malcolm Chase, of Leeds University and known as a world authority on Chartism and 19th century political radicalism, died of a brain tumour earlier this year. He is sadly missed by colleagues and friends.

A former president of the Society for the Study of Labour History, Malcolm was inspired by the new approach to research promoted by the History Workshop Movement which emerged in the 1970s.

His most notable work was *Chartism: A New History* which appeared in 2007 which was well received internationally. It was to be translated into French in 2013. Malcolm had earlier produced *The People's Farm: English Radical Agrarianism 1775 – 1840*, which came out in 1988. This book was an exploration of the influential ideas of the radical Thomas Spence in relation to land reform.

For the SHS, Malcolm took part in our public meeting held to discuss the historical legacy of Eric Hobsbawm and which subsequently appeared as Occasional Publication No 36, titled *Eric Hobsbawm: Socialist Historian*, where Malcolm's contribution is accompanied by those from David Parker and Willie Thompson.

Malcolm Chase became a professor in 2009 but was compelled to retire in 2017 due to increasing ill health. He was Emeritus Professor of Social History at the University of Leeds at his death.

Always ready to offer advice and engage in communication about the work of the SHS, Malcolm's outstanding historical research will be greatly missed. He was taken far too prematurely and no doubt would have produced many more works of lasting value.

David Morgan

Mike Pentelow

It is with sadness that we record the death of our member, Mike Pentelow, historian, journalist and lifelong socialist. Mike will be remembered to many as a reporter for the Morning Star where he wrote on sport and industrial relations.

He had varied interests as can be discovered from the subjects of his books. Mike was active in the preservation of Fitzrovia, the famous bohemian area of central London which for many years was his home. This interest led to his book, *Characters of Fitzrovia*, which concerns the famous and infamous residents of the area, including artists, writers, radicals and some notorious criminals. It was published in 2001.

As a historian Mike's lasting contribution will be the 2009 book, *Norfolk Red: The Life of Wilf Page, Countryside Communist*, his political biography of the leading party activist of the rural areas and champion of agricultural workers. The SHS was pleased to hold a meeting with the author when the book came out.

He died on 1 April 2020 aged 73 years old.

German Left-Wing Exiles in the UK 1933-45

Merilyn Moos writes about her new project, which can be found on-line here:

<http://community-languages.org.uk/?cat=3>

A very small group of anti-Nazis escaped to Britain and even fewer settled here. While around 55,000 people fled Germany in 1933 alone, only about 2000 came to the UK: Britain gained from Germany's loss; amongst the refugees were a galaxy of leading scientists and many cultural figures. But, out of the roughly 10,000 political refugees who fled in 1933, probably only a few hundred active anti-Nazis of any political hue came here.

The largest group were the Communists: the group especially hunted in the first months of Nazi rule. But even up to 1939, only about 200 German Communists were allowed into Britain and only around 1,000 Communist refugees from all across Europe. Few Communists fled Germany as early as 1933/1934, and then the more popular destinations were Prague and Paris, not foggy insular Britain, lying on the edge of the world, speaking a very foreign language, with a strange culture, and too far away to facilitate clandestine organising in Germany.

Political Involvement

All the political refugees were heavily circumscribed by the government's ban on political activities. Their fear of being thrown out was kept well alive by the government's system of only offering short-term visas which might not be renewed if there was evidence of political involvement. Indeed, Helmut Goldschmidt, the first leader of the exiled SAP group here, was deported in February 1934 after he had been overheard speaking at a political meeting. The early low numbers of Communist exiles were also in part a consequence of MI5, the Home Office and the British immigration authority's hatred of German Communists and desire to keep them out.

The political groupings were all infiltrated by spies, mostly German, some of whom had been left activists in Germany, who provided information for the British government. Their motives were mixed but for many, it was a way of ingratiating themselves with the government so as to increase their chances of being allowed to remain.

More serious were the spies for the Gestapo. There had been a history of collaboration between the German and British secret services prior to 1933 which however continued after the Nazis seized power. They were united in their hatred of communism. For example, Wilhelm Koenen, a KPD deputy in the Reichstag, had been refused entry to the UK in 1932, though admitted in 1938. MI5 then bombarded the Home Office with memoranda about the danger of allowing in men such as Koenen, who should be interned forthwith.

A handful of the refugees did stay in the UK. But why did more not stay? Most of them had in the years they lived here got jobs and some had families. On the other hand, Germany was in ruins. But living in a 'borrowed' land is never easy. The new language does not roll off one's tongue. There is a strangeness to living in a foreign land: their anti-Nazi activities were rooted in a different soil. Germany was also the enemy which meant (as I discovered in other research) that some people, especially women stuck at home, felt themselves always as the outsider. But, I suspect, more than anything, these comrades had already risked their lives trying to stop Nazism. That is what gave their lives meaning. Now they saw a new beginning in which to build a socialist Germany.

I have started publishing the stories of some of these German anti-Nazis on our website. This work builds on the book "German Anti-Nazis" written by Steve Cushion and myself. The vast majority of our protagonists did not live to see the fall of the Nazi regime. Here are details of a few who did.



Hans Eisler

MARXISM IN ART

Greta Sykes reports on a conference held in Berlin in February.

In the nick of time before the Coronavirus struck, I travelled to Berlin to attend a fascinating conference organised by Dr Katja Bernhardt from the Humboldt University in cooperation with colleagues mainly from East European countries. Nevertheless, the conference had attendees from many countries, including Germany, Italy, Poland, Estonia, the US, Croatia, Belgium, Spain, Argentina, the UK, Czech Republic, Brazil, Russia, Canada and France. It took place over three days at the university and by focusing on a particular artist, art movement or art activity each speaker shone a light on how such work had been influenced or was still influenced by a Marxist perspective.

Renato Guttuso

Marica Antonucci (Italy) spoke about the first retrospective exhibition of the work of the artist Renato Guttuso held in Parma in 1963. It caused an intense critical debate in the left cultural press about the meaning and expression of socially engaged art. Like Carlo Levi, Guttuso remained within the sphere of socialist realism, which was associated with the Soviet Union and received concomitant sharply critical views. The disparity of perspectives on such art indicated the unresolved issues among the left as to what is progressive art.

Folk art

Marina Dmitrieva spoke about 'In search of collective consciousness: Folk art studies in the Soviet Union in the 70s' and related how vital folk art was at the time for art and art historians. She illustrated how it was considered the basis of world art per se. It covered the following aspects: Festiveness, utilitarian, commercial, communicative and aesthetic purposes. It helped to revive icons and linked tradition with progressive development in Marica's view.

Dominic Rahtz, from the university for the creative arts in Canterbury, presented a talk entitled 'Marx' 1857 'introduction' on the social history of art. He argued that Marx's Grundrisse was an important influence on British art historians like T J Clark, Fred Orton and Griselda Pollock. He wondered what kind of

practices we need to use in order to ensure that our representations are representing the real world, and how pleasure in art sits ambiguously with a critical approach.

Marxist Art Theory

Boris Roehrl from Germany explained his views on Marxist art theory and post-war Italy focusing on the value of art history for historians. He illustrated his views with pictures and details about how art encompasses more of life in its representation than much of written history dominated by men; art history includes women, children, animals, buildings, architecture and more of social life.

While the views tended to be eclectic and diverse, speakers shared a common thread, suggesting that a Marxist analysis had contributed much to our understanding of art and history and that it was able to continue to do so. Roehrl ended on a disappointing remark that although the interest was there few scholars could engage in Marxist studies, as the universities were not keen on such research.

For me the conference was an enjoyable experience. It was good to see Berlin on these cold, bright February days. It was good also to be allowed into the hallowed halls of Humboldt University and to meet so many scholars from different countries with a shared esteem for the political and cultural Marxist heritage.



Renato Guttuso's Neighbourhood Rally, 1975

Duncan Bowie reviews *Insurgent Empire* by Priyamvada Gopal, Verso, £14.99

Gopal is a reader in literature at Cambridge University. This book is in effect an analysis of the literature (as opposed to the political history) of British anti-imperialism. There is now an extensive literature on British anti-imperialism, of which two of the most recent studies are Gregory Claeys's *Imperial Sceptics* (2010) and Mira Matikkala's *Empire and Imperial Ambition* (2015). There is also an extensive literature on specific historical episodes, including a growing literature on pan-Africanism. I was therefore interested in whether Gopal's substantive work of 600 pages (including 140 pages of notes and bibliography) had much new to say. For a historian familiar with many of the primary sources, reading what is in effect a literary analysis was hard-work but actually very rewarding.

Resistance and Insurrection

It was time consuming as I kept checking the original sources, some of which were more familiar than others, as well as reading or re-reading some of the secondary works, including biographies, on which Gopal draws. I found the book stimulating, but perhaps not as novel and controversial as Gopal claims. Gopal's conclusion is that decolonisation was not granted by British advocates of reform but was won by resistance and insurrection. However this conclusion is drawn from an examination of the anti-colonial literature rather from an analysis of historical events.

The book, based on extensive reading of both primary and secondary sources, comprises a number of case studies: the 1857 Indian Mutiny (or First War of Independence) and the writing of the Chartist, Ernest Jones; the critique of British foreign policy and the 1867 Jamaica suppression by the positivists Richard Congreve and Frederic Harrison; Wilfred Scawen Blunt's writing on the Egyptian nationalist movement of 1882 and on the Indian swaraj movement of 1905; the critique of British government in India in the 1920s by the Communist MP, Shapurji Saklatvala; the agitation of the League Against Imperialism focusing on the Meerut conspiracy trials; London based Pan-Africanism with a focus on the Haarlem poet Claude Mackay; C L R James and the campaign to defend Ethiopia; George Padmore's contribution to the Independent Labour Party's New Leader; and finally the

agitation led by Fenner Brockway and the Movement for Colonial Freedom on British policy in Kenya and the Mau-Mau uprising in the early 1960s, which also focuses on the role of Kenyan trade union militant Tom Mboya and the Oxford academic Margery Perham. The final section argues that Perham, the academic imperialist and biographer of Lord Lugard (former Ugandan and Nigerian governor and author of *Indirect Rule*) finally recognised the impossibility of imperial reform and the case not just for self-government but for independence.

Brockway

The book is extremely ambitious and much of it comprises textual analysis of the writings of the various anti-colonialists, with a continued focus on whether they were advocates of imperial reform or of national independence. I would question some of the arguments in the book – for example that resistance and insurrection was a reformer only converted later in life to amore 'revolutionary stance', a view which I think understates Brockway's lifetime support for militancy and independency (though a continuing commitment to non-violent means). Gopal rightfully gives attention to some of the writers and organisations, whose roles have been previously under-recognised – for example Ernest Jones, Shapurji Saklatvala, Fenner Brockway and the ILP and the League against Imperialism.

Interestingly, Gopal gives little attention to the Fabians and the Fabian Colonial Bureau, who are seen, quite rightly, as defenders of imperialism and then of a reformed imperialism. I would have perhaps expected some consideration of other post-WW2 campaigns, such as Michael Scott's Africa Bureau and the earlier campaigns to support Black trade unionists in South Africa and against apartheid, including the role of Winifred Holtby, but this would have significantly extended the work, which does tend to give more attention to India than to Africa. This is perhaps understandable given this is the author's previous research focus, which has produced two books on Indian literary radicalism. This new book however is certainly worth time and effort to read in that it not just provides an overview of the subject but a useful guide to further reading.