SOCIALIST HISTORY SOCIETY

Newsletter

December 2020 Volume 9 issue 3

From Wulfstan to Colston

Severing the Sinews of Slavery in Bristol

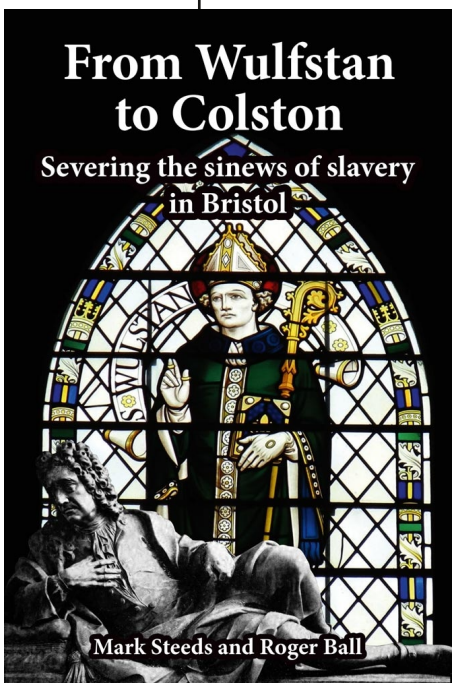
Mark Steeds & Roger Ball, Bristol Radical History Group, £14.00

This book provides both political context and historical background to Bristol's links with the slave trade, and does so in keeping with Bristol Radical History Group (BRHG)'s "history from below" approach. Moreover, it does this in such a way that it serves a number of interlinking functions important to the promotion of decolonising the curriculum.

Starting with the eleventh century Bristol anti-slave trade Bishop, Wulfstan, the book traces and links a whole series of connected histories up to and including the recent protests over the honouring of Bristol slave trader Edward Colston. These include Bristol's pioneers of British colonising, like sixteenth century Hakluyt; the role of Bristol slave trading merchants in sustaining and prolonging both the slave trade and slavery; rebellion and resistance to slavery by the enslaved; the evolution of the British abolition movement and their connections to other social and political movements.

Timeline

To help keep a narrative that moves between continents, periods, themes and historical events clear, the authors use an intermittent timeline within the body of the text. The entries, though brief, are more substantial than a normal timeline, and they supplement and compliment the headings and quotes from historians and others. The effect is to help merge narrative and reference in a surprisingly useful way. For example, understanding of links, themes and events in the 1830s in Bristol, including what became the Reform Act of 1832, and in the Caribbean, including the emancipation rebellions of 1831 and resistance to the 1834 apprenticeship plans, benefit from the way the book is set out. The general aim seems to be to make this very substantial work easier to use for either study or campaigning purposes. It can serve as part of teaching preparatory research, an aid to select a period or theme, or even a model for similar local anti-racist campaigning.



Great Philanthropist

Of course, many potential readers will be most interested in the book's later sections on the creation of the myth of Edward Colston as the 'Great Philanthropist'. The long struggle in Bristol to challenge and expose the truth about the uses of the myth from nineteenth century onwards is both illuminating and instructive. While few places in Britain had anything like a "Colston Day" and its aftermath to deal with, the much more recent campaigns about the 500 year anniversary celebrations of Cabot's 1497 venture and Bristol's 'Festival of the Sea' in 1998, are instructive for those having to deal with the Mayflower 400 Commemorations running now.

This book is a very welcome resource to inform those campaigning against racism, in particular over decolonising education.

More details here:
https://bit.ly/34FQbQ4

Danny Reilly - Plymouth

Book review

Heroes or Villains?

Duncan Bowie on Lilburne and Cromwell

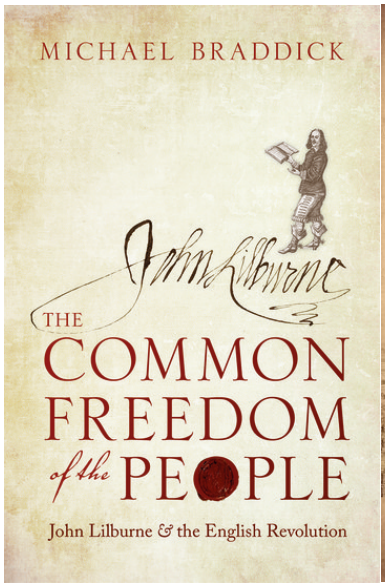
The Common Freedom of the People - Michael Braddick - Oxford University Press

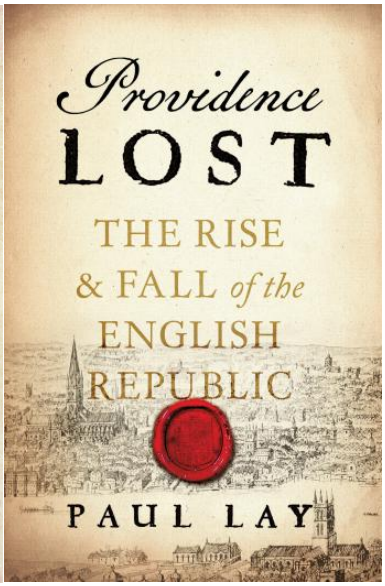
Providence Lost - Paul Lay - Head of Zeus

Braddick's volume is a biography of John Lilburne, the first since Pauline Gregg's 1961 study, Free-Born John. Lilburne is normally regarded as the leader of the Levellers. Braddick however sets his political career within the wider context of the English civil war, the Commonwealth and the Cromwellian Protectorate. In doing so, he demonstrates that Lilburne was not a Leveller, in the sense of believing in economic equality. Lilburne actually believed that there were different classes in society and was proud that he was a member of the gentry and a landowner. He was not opposed to the monarchy as an institution and did not support the execution of Charles I. Lilburne's focus was on individual political liberty. He was not a collectivist and the Levellers were a group of pamphleteers and polemicists, who sometimes collaborated but often argued among each other.

Polemicists

As Braddick shows, they were not a political organisation, despite the later claim of the socialist historian and journalist Henry Brailsford, and certainly not a working-class organisation. As polemicists, Lilburne and other Leveller pamphleteers were however influential in that they had allies within the Army Council and some supporters within Parliament. Lilburne was never elected to Parliament, though on a number of occasions he was tried by Parliament, and his election to the common council of the City of London Corporation was quashed by Parliament on the petition of his fellow councilmen.





Lilburne was a persistent litigant, seeking to defend his own rights against the governments of the civil war era, irrespective of whether the government was reforming or repressive. He succeeded in falling out with most of his political associates, partly through egotism, but also unwillingness to compromise. To him, the Commonwealth and Protectorate were as tyrannical as Charles I had been. Lilburne was certainly not a pragmatist. Once a close ally of Cromwell, he called for Cromwell to be impeached. Fighting against all religious authority, in his final years he was converted to Quakerism. He appeared to be against all civil authority in that he always challenged the authority of those who sought to try him.

Exile

Despite lack of training in law, and the Inns of Court, his legal theatrics outwitted some of the leading lawyers in the country. Twice on trial for his life, he convinced juries to acquit him of offences of which he was clearly guilty. Spending nearly half of his political life in prison, he was finally sent into exile as a result of a personal dispute over property. He then returned from exile without authority to do so, only to face another trial and a further exile. In prison he managed to continue pamphleteering, and was accompanied by his wife Elizabeth and prison did not interrupt his procreational achievements.

Elizabeth Lilburne

Elizabeth Lilburne was continually loyal to her husband and clearly deserves some sympathy given how badly she was treated by Lilburne who publicly berated her for her perceived weaknesses in suggesting that he should seek allies rather than enemies. She was endlessly petitioning on his behalf. Lilburne however does de-

Heroes or Villains? - continued

serve credit for his determined defence of the rights of the individual against those in power including the right to a fair trial and the right stay silent to avoid self-incrimination.

Braddick, a historian who has taught in American universities, notes how these rights have been incorporated into the US constitution. Lilburne was in essence a democrat. Despite having fought in the civil war, he clearly preferred fighting in the courts to fighting in battles. Moreover, while his activity inspired conspirators, and even riots, he himself appears to have avoided plots and conspiracies, and unlike Leveller colleagues such as John Wildman, did not ally with royalists in their attempt to bring down Cromwell.

Protectorate

Lay's book, subtitled *The Rise and Fall of Cromwell's Protectorate* is, in contrast, rather odd. The author, Paul Lay, is editor of History Today, and the book is written more as a popular narrative than as an academic study. Rather oddly, Lay's initial focus is on Cromwell's 'Western Design', his unsuccessful attempt to capture the Spanish West Indian colonies but much of the rest of the book focuses on Royalist military campaigns and Royalist conspiracies.

Lay seems to have undertaken only limited original research and both of these subject areas have been well covered by more academic historians, such as Carla Pestana and Karen Kupperman on the former and David Underdown on the latter. There is some interesting material on the rule of Cromwell's major generals and on the debate on the succession to Cromwell and the falling out with John Lambert, who had been seen as Cromwell's deputy, but the book is spoilt by repeated comparisons between Cromwell and Margaret Thatcher. No doubt History Today's populist approach requires indications of contemporary relevance, but these footnotes do seem out of place. If you were looking for an analysis of the rise and fall of Cromwell's Protectorate, this is the wrong book.

British Labour Movement and Internationalism

Socialist History Society Zoom Public Meeting

Tuesday 19th January 7pm

Register here

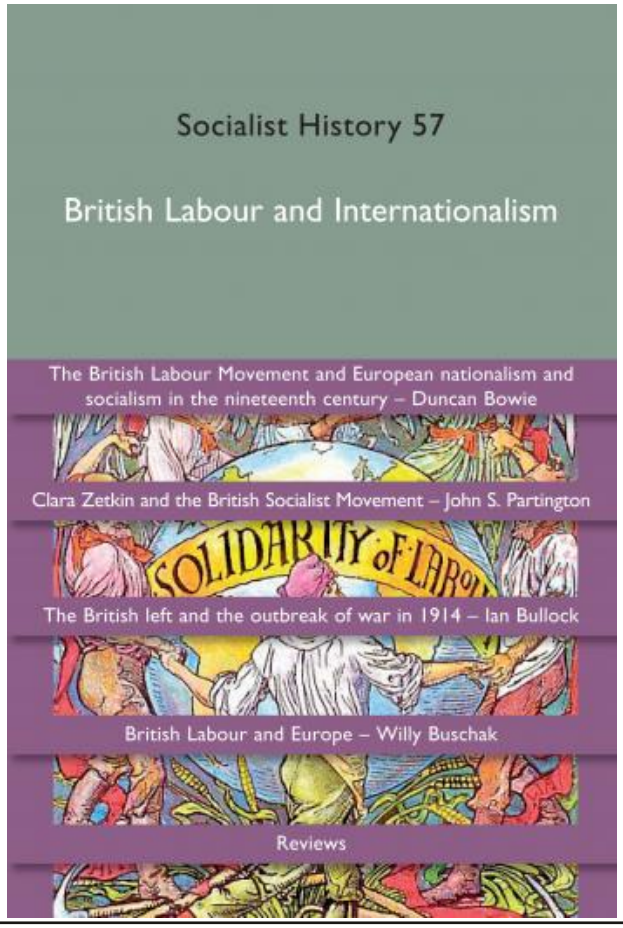
`https://bit.ly/3myTLlc`

In this era of Brexit, the British Labour Party and the wider labour movement face the twin challenges of globalised capitalism on the one hand, and an upsurge in backward-looking nationalism on the other. Siren voices call on Labour to embrace one side or the other.

In this context it seems more necessary than ever to re-examine the internationalist tradition within British labour and democratic movements over the preceding two centuries.

Socialist History, the journal of the Socialist History Society, has produced a special issue, in spring 2020, on the "British Labour Movement and Internationalism".

Duncan Bowie, who guest edited the journal, will give a talk to initiate a discussion on these important issues.



Review of the *Mary Quail Club* Book Launch Anti-Nazi Germans

Having had to cancel the original book launch back in March 2020 because of the virus, the Manchester-based Mary Quail Club provided Merilyn Moos and Steve Cushion with the opportunity to do an on-line zoom launch in November.

The book is divided in two sections, with Merilyn Moos writing on "Enemies of the Nazi State from within the Working-Class Movement". In arguing against the commonly held myth that there was little resistance in Germany to the Nazis, she spoke of the forgotten stories of brave men and women who organised against the Nazis in German towns and villages, as well as in the concentration camps and the armed forces.

Edelweiss Pirates

Her talk concentrated on the Edelweiss Pirates, an extraordinary loose network of teenagers who rebelled against the Nazis and the Hitler Youth, almost all of whom came from a working-class background. They wore outlandish clothes, sang anti-militaristic songs and went in for ‘soft’ sabotage. Julich, a survivor, recalled how he and his friends threw bricks through the windows of munitions factories and poured sugar water into the petrol tanks of Nazis’ cars. There is some limited evidence that they derailed trains which were carrying ammunition and supplied adult resistance groups with explosives. Some stole food and supplies from freight trains. They painted graffiti onto walls: "Down with Hitler". "Down with Nazi brutality". In a few places, they attacked groups of Hitler Youth with brass knuckles and deflated the tyres of their bicycles. On one occasion, they ‘rained" leaflets from the dome of Cologne Station, and occasionally offered shelter to army deserters, escaped prisoners as well as a few Jews.

Gestapo

The Gestapo hated them not just for what they did but for what they represented. The Gestapo hunted them and imprisoned boys and girls as young as 15 or 16 for acts as trivial as not giving the fascist salute or for wearing unconventional clothes. Their songs were also seen as glorifying non-Aryan types. In a single day of raids in December 1942, the Dusseldorf Gestapo made more than 1,000 arrests of those they saw as members of the Edelweiss. Captured Pirates had their heads shaven and were threatened and beaten. They were imprisoned, sent to jails, reform schools, psychiatric hospitals, hundreds went to labour and concentration camps and many lost their lives. In Cologne, a member of the Pirates was publicly hung.

Steve Cushion then took over to speak of "German Volunteers in the French Resistance". There were a surprising number of "foreign" volunteers in the French Resistance, a fact barely recognised today as the history of the Resistance has been nationalised and has become the founding myth of the French Republic, rather as the myths of Dunkirk and the Blitz are used in Britain.

Urban Guerrilla

There was a particularly important urban guerrilla movement based in Lyon and Grenoble, *Compagnie Carmagnole-Liberté*, mainly composed of Yiddish-speaking immigrant workers from Central Europe and commanded by a German Communist Norbert Kugler. Herbert Herz was a Jewish German fighter in *Carmagnole*. He was the technician who planted the Improvised Explosive Device that blew up a platoon of German soldiers as they left their barracks. Similarly, Maz Brings, a German veteran of the International Brigade blew up the Wehrmacht officers mess in Nice, killing numerous Wehrmacht and SS officers.

Luger automatic pistol

German and Austrian exiles in France put considerable effort into propaganda among German soldiers, but there was heavy price to pay for this and over 100 activists, mainly women, were executed or died in deportation. Nevertheless, there was some success. Lieutenant Hans Heisel recalls lending his Luger automatic pistol to the communist resistance to assassinate SS Standartenführer Von Ritter.

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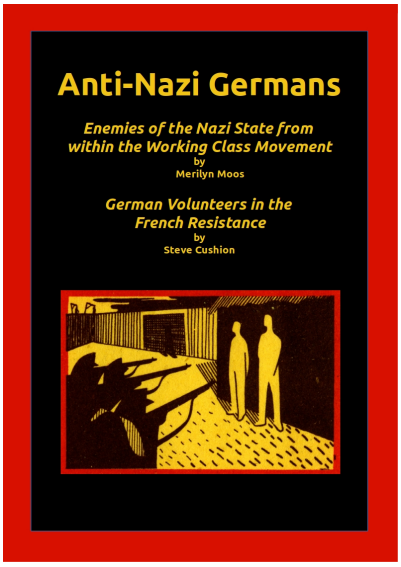
Mary Quail Club - continued



In 1943, Otto Kühne and about 40 of his comrades, mainly German veterans of the International Brigades, escaped internment and fled into the Cervennes mountains, where they became the core of an extremely effective guerrilla organisation, which played an important part in the liberation of the town of Nimes. Otto Kühne himself was appointed Colonel in the Free French Army and led a force of 2,000 fighters, mainly French, but including many Armenian deserters from the SS Ost-Legion who had mutinied.

Not everyone submits to tyranny

Merilyn Moos finished by reminding us how it is possible to try to resist against Nazi barbarity. That it was rank and file communists, socialists and anarchists who regularly risked their lives organising against the Nazi regime. That the Nazis' initial and continuing target was the workers' movement, first in Germany but then in every country they occupied. Ultimately, it reminds us that, despite the likelihood of death, not everyone submits to tyranny.

Anti-Nazi Germans by Merilyn Moos and Steve Cushion.

The book costs £10 [post-free to Socialist History Society members]; more details from: `s.cushion23@gmail.com`.

Edith Kennedy

Book Review

"Andreas Malm, *Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam Power and the Roots of Global Warming*, London: Verso, 2020"

Why did the steam engine come to dominate capitalist development in the early 19th century when waterpower was readily available and cheaper? Andreas Malm narrows this conundrum down to one major factor: control of labour.

Water

At the end of the 18th century, most cotton mills were water powered, but water flow sufficient to power a mill was located far from the major population centres and this gave an edge to labour in its struggle for higher wages and better conditions. Attempts were made to compensate for the shortage of labour by creating "colonies" of workers, model villages around the water driven mill, but these involved additional capital expenditure in their creation and, once the workers organised themselves into trade unions, their very isolation and community solidarity made them harder to defeat.

Thus, "the manufactures are transferred to great towns, where a man may assemble five hundred workmen one week and dismiss them the next, without having any further connection with them than to receive a week's work for a week's wages, nor any further solicitude about their future fate than if they were so many old shuttles".

Resistance

The book argues that, after the economic crash of 1825, the need to extract the maximum surplus value from the workforce became critical in the heightened competition and this was, in turn, dependent on coal powered steam engines. The workers themselves, of course, resisted and, the general strike of 1842 is seen as, in large part, resistance to increased automation, deskilling and unemployment. The book argues that Mick Jenkins in his *General Strike of 1842* underestimates the importance of the anti-steam, anti-mechanisation aspect of the 1842 agitation, concentrating on the political demands for the People's Charter and downplaying the sabotage involved in pulling the plugs on the steam engines. Steam driven mechanisation

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became central to the ideology of the industrial capitalist class. In response the Chartist newspaper, the *Northern Star*, featured a poem called 'the Steam King' by Edward P. Mead:

> *There is a King, and a ruthless King,*
> *Not a King of the poet's dream;*
> *But a tyrant fell, white slaves know well,*
> *And that ruthless King is Steam. …*
> *His priesthood are a hungry band,*
> *Blood-thirsty, proud, and bold;*
> *Tis they direct his giant hand,*
> *In turning blood to gold.*

The upshot of all this is the complete dependence of capitalist industry on fossil fuels, with oil added into the package in the 20th century. Just as employers in the 19th century moved their operations into the cities to obtain cheap labour, in the 21st, they are moving to China to avoid the trade union organisation in the metropolitan countries that pushed up wages.

Docile, diligent and dirt cheap

However, as The Economist declared "*the popular image of the country's workers as docile, diligent and dirt cheap*" had been shattered: "*Recent unrest has put Chinese labour at odds with foreign capital. Firms may have to get used to bolshier workers*". Or move on again.

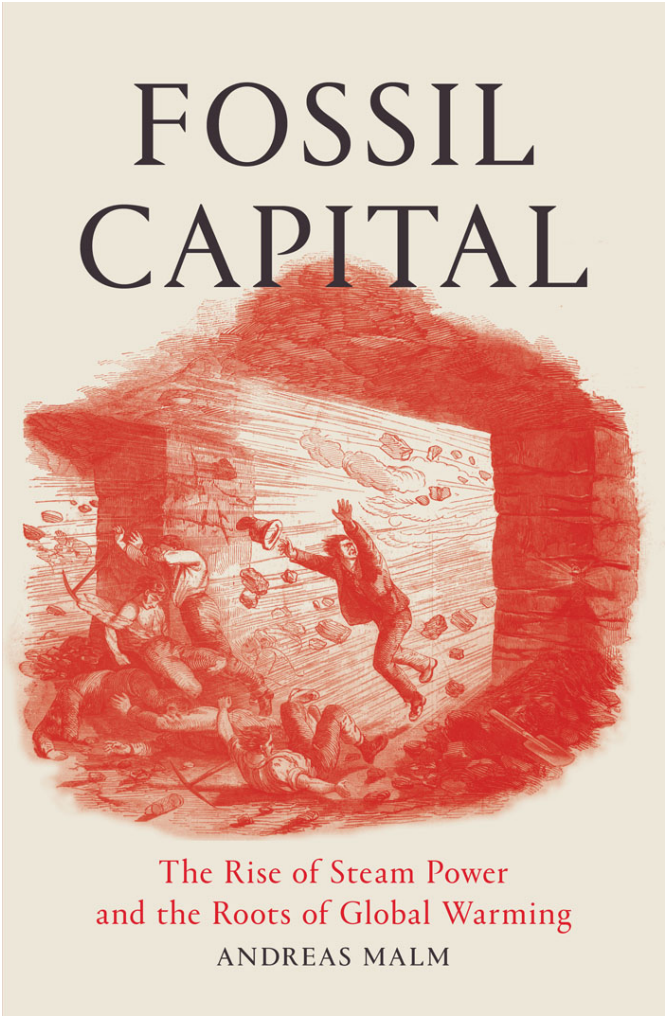
The dominance of fossil fuel-based power is a consequence of the class struggle and an essential driver in capital's need to extract greater surplus value from labour. The stronger global capital has become, the more rampant the growth of CO_2 emissions, as Malm says "*the decisive capitalist victory in the long twentieth-century struggle with labour was crowned by the post-2000 rush towards catastrophic global warming*". Rex Tillerson, CEO of ExxonMobil, said in March 2013: "*My philosophy is to make money. If I can drill and make money, then that's what I want to do*".

All this illustrates to the fatuous nature of European governments talking piously of reducing their internal outputs of greenhouse gases, while their capitalists are busy exporting production to other parts of the world where they can pollute at their leisure. A European does not emit CO_2 by wearing a T-shirt from Bangladesh. The CO_2 has already been emitted from the factory where the T-shirt was made and from the power plant providing the electricity and so on through the supply chain. The actual volume of CO_2 emitted does not respect borders.

Mobility

Capitalist profit depends, in large part, in the mobility of production, which in turn depends on fossil fuel extraction. Thus, there is no capitalist solution to climate change. If we are to save the planet, we shall have to take their toys away. This book is an important asset to those who want to develop an internationalist, socialist response to the ecological crisis.

Steve Cushion



'Wonky, mushy, squishy and stodgy'

Duncan Bowie wrestles with a theological perspective on socialism

Social Democracy in the Making: Political and Religious Roots of European Socialism - Gary Dorrien

This is a difficult book to categorise. Dorrien is an American academic theologian who has been active in the Democratic Socialists of America and a member of their Religion and Socialism Commission. He has written several books on liberal theology as well as studies of Martin Luther King and W E De Bois. His past interests have centred on the religious ethics of Reinhold Niebuhr and Karl Barth and this shows throughout this new study. This is his first book on European socialism. The book's subtitle is 'Political and Religious Roots of European Socialism'. The focus of the book is however limited to Britain and Germany and find it curious how the roots of European socialism can be discussed without consideration of French socialist traditions. This is especially pertinent as Dorrien, as a theologian and professor of ethics, is seeking to study religious influences on the development of social democratic politics and organisations, and it could be argued that religious influences were far more significant in France that in the case of Britain or Germany.

Germany

The chapters alternate between detailed commentary of theological writings and narratives of political organisational development, with apparently little connection between the two. The two long chapters on Germany – on German social democracy and on 'German political theology – nearly 200 pages in total – appear in the middle of the book, sandwiched between four chapters which focus on Britain.

Rather strangely there is practically no comparison between the British and German experience – there is no concluding chapter pulling together the author's argument, with the consequence that the book reads as a serious of loosely connected extended essays. I therefore disagree with the endorsement by another American academic that the book is a 'tour de force' – theologians will probably skip some of the political narrative and the valiant attempt in the German section to summarise Marx's theory (though strangely not fully examining his views on religion), while political historians I suspect however that most political theorists, will struggle as I did with the theological chapter, which discusses Swiss theologian, Karl Barth, the Germans Paul Tillich and Martin Heidegger, and the Frankfurt School, which seem to have marginal relevance to the development of socialist theory or politics as considered in the other chapters.

Revisionism

The chapter on German social democracy is probably the strongest in the book. In the chapter, Dorrien focuses on the political career and theoretical 'revisionism' of Eduard Bernstein. The story of the debates between Bernstein, Kautsky and Luxemburg (with Lenin on the side lines) has been told several times before, but Dorrien is familiar with German sources and the substance of the theoretical debates is clearly explained, although Dorrien identifies with the Bernstein position tradition, which he sees as derived from the English Fabian tradition, rather from any religious or ethical perspective. It is however difficult to see how this chapter relates to the theological chapter which follows. It is if the two chapters have been written as separate stand-alone essays.

Religious Roots

Even accepting the focus of the study as 'religious roots of socialism', I found the author's selection of case studies in the British chapters somewhat curious. The book starts with an assertion that religious socialism in Britain started with Frederick Maurice and the Christian socialists. Leaving aside the debate over the socialistic and communistic views of the mid-17th century radicals of the Civil War period, this assertion completely ignores the socialistic and communistic Christians of the early 19th century – and their role in cooperative enterprises and utopian settlements long before Maurice and his group of university theologians appeared on the scene.

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Theological perspective on socialism

continued.

There is another problematic dimension. Dorrien, as a professor of ethics, tends to treat the terms 'Christian' and 'ethical' as equivalents. In effect he completely ignores secular ethical influences. At the same time, he ignores the whole tradition of ethical socialism, which outside the academic and Anglican based religious organisations on which Dorrien focuses, had much greater influence on the early British socialist movement. Not only does Dorrien in effect ignore the Independent Labour Party, focusing on the more secular and positivist Fabian Society, but the Labour church is hardly mentioned, perhaps because it was both Northern and Non-conformist. Instead, we get a focus on Stewart Headlam and the Guild of St Matthew, a tiny organisation, with almost negligible impact (though Headlam was himself an intriguing character), the Christian Social Union of Scott Holland and Charles Gore, G D H Cole, who was neither a Christian or for that matter an ethicist, R H Tawney and William Temple, who became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1942. Of these, Temple is perhaps the only under-recognised figure. I reread Temple's Christianity and the Social Order Penguin Special from 1942, a manifesto which is more radically socialist than anything produced by the Labour Party in recent decades.

Confusion

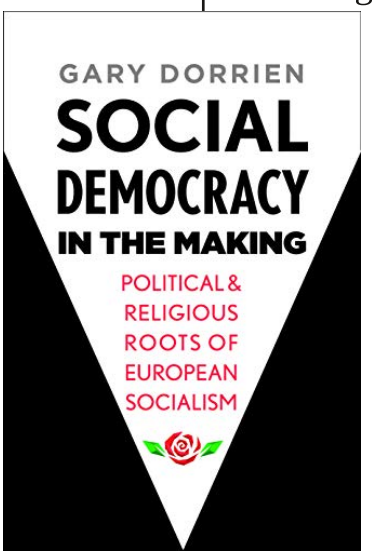
Dorrien's unfamiliarity with British socialist political history shows. At one point he confuses Jimmy Thomas (who joined McDonald's National Government in 1931) with Jimmy Clynes (who did not). The Ethical Union/ South Place Ethical Society, a critical organisation in terms of ethical input into the British labour movement, is referred to as the 'Ethical Culture Society' (a name of an equivalent society in New York).

I found this book hard work – at times interesting and at other times frustrating and even annoying. If you are familiar with British politics, you will find the subjects covered more effectively by many other academics, including many American scholars (I am not biased here). If you are interested in the history of British Christian socialism, there is some interesting material, but Dorrien's approach is highly selective and moreover does not make the case for any significant religious impact on British socialism – had he considered the broader ethical socialist movement, he would have had a stronger case.

Unconvincing

His sections on post-war revisionism tend to conflate the very different views of Crosland and Crossman, while in neither case demonstrating a religious aspect of their positions. While the presentation of developments in German political theory is sound, the argument in the final chapter, so far as there is one, is unconvincing. The German SDP as a Marxist party was until 1959 (the Bad Godesberg conference), largely secular and I would question the relative impact of some of the religious groupings and debates Dorrien considers, on the more centrist social democratic approach of Brandt, Schmidt and Schroder, whose 'co-partnership ' approach, as in Sweden, owed more to a pragmatic response to the realities of the post-war cold war division and then global capitalism than to any concepts derived from Christian theologians.

I do have one final comment. Dorrien's style of writing is confident in the sense that it is full of blunt judgements which are somewhat questionable in that they lack evidential support. He also has a habit of dismissing theories or political positions outside his own range of belief – I discovered him using the terms 'wonky', 'mushy', 'squishy' and 'stodgy'. At one point he refers to orthodox Marxists as 'wingnuts'. I am not sure how this language fits in with Dorrien's role as a professor of social ethics.



Polemic – Competition Time

Probably the Worst Television History Programme Ever Made

The television presenter Alice Roberts has always irritated me. Aside from her bizarre title "Professor of Public Engagement in Science at the University of Birmingham", when presenting BBC programmes like Digging for Britain and The Celts: Blood, Iron and Sacrifice, she continually talks about "our ancestors", completely oblivious to the fact that nine and a half million people living in the UK, who presumably pay for a television licence, were born outside the UK and that a third of children born in England and Wales have at least one parent born overseas. Historians have always mocked French colonial schools in Africa teaching about "our ancestors the Gauls", but this is just as fatuous.

But such minor irritations aside, she has surpassed herself with "*Britain's Most Historic Towns*" on Channel 4. Series 2, episode 4, "Civil War Oxford", which looks at the English Civil War from the point of view of the town that was the headquarters of Charles I of England. We are told that the dispute was between an authoritarian King and a rebellious Parliament that broke out because the King lost his temper and tried to arrest five MPs. There is some suggestion that there was a difference between the Parliament that was Protestant and saw the King as far too close to the Catholics, but then analysis takes a break and we are treated to five minutes about the game of Real Tennis, which was apparently the favourite pastime of King Charles, then another five minutes about military technology which ends with Professor of Public Engagement Roberts shooting a matchlock rifle and blowing a melon to smithereens.

"Ordinary people" are mentioned, but only to hear how they suffered: "*The Greatest Human Catastrophe*" and "as a nation we paid a terrible price". Once the King has fled from Oxford and been captured because "*the Scots did the dirty on him*", we are treated to a 10-minute discussion of the way in which the Puritans suppressed Christmas, "*the most special day of the year*" and, shock-horror, told that women were not allowed to wear makeup.

But then, "*the radical experiment of the new republic was too much for a traumatised nation*" and the country welcomed Charles II as a symbol of new hope. We are then treated to a view of the ceiling of the Sheldonian Theatre in Oxford, designed by the staunch royalist Sir Christopher Wren, a painting of "Truth descending on the Arts and Sciences to dispel Ignorance" and told that this re-established Oxford as a prestigious centre for academic learning.

Professor of Public Engagement Roberts then has the nerve to tell us that we now understand the English Civil War. It is as if Christopher Hill, Brian Manning or even Austin Woolrych had never lived and written so authoritatively about the English revolution.

I am sure that there have been worse television history programmes, but I have not seen one. So, I am proposing a competition. Describe, in 500 words or less, the worst TV history programme that you have seen. The winner will receive a copy of the pamphlet "*Our Pagan Christmas*", by R.J. Condon, National Secular Society, 1984 and the runner up "*Hell, Devils and Damnation or the Blood-Stained God and his Pioneer of Priggery, Jesus Christ, If True*", by Dan Chatterton, Freethought History Research Group.

Steve Cushion

Karl Marx on Slavery

Steve Cushion

Karl Marx's first published writing to mention slavery is the *Poverty of Philosophy* published in 1847. In it, Marx argues the centrality of slavery to capitalist economic development;

Direct slavery is just as much the pivot of bourgeois industry as machinery, credits, etc. Without slavery you have no cotton; without cotton you have no modern industry.

One particular statement in this work is sometimes used to claim that Marx was prepared to support slavery because it was essential to the development of capitalism and that was somehow "progressive".

Without slavery North America, the most progressive of countries, would be transformed into a patriarchal country. Wipe North America off the map of the world, and you will have anarchy – the complete decay of modern commerce and civilization.

This is to take the paragraph completely out of context. In fact, Marx is attacking Proudhon and parodying his approach. "*After these reflections on slavery, what will the good Mr Proudhon do? He will seek the synthesis of liberty and slavery, the true golden mean, in other words the balance between slavery and liberty*".

Progressive?

Marx did not use the word "progressive" in the sense used by many later socialists and communists, as a way of avoiding accusations of class-collaboration when justifying alliances with bourgeois or petit-bourgeois movements. When Marx speaks of the achievement of the ten-hour day, he does not see it as progress, but rather "*the victory of the economy of the labouring class over the economy of the bourgeoisie*". The only progressive thing about capitalism is that it has produced its own potential grave digger, the organised working class.

This meant that Marx was frequently scathing in his contempt for people who called themselves progressives. He criticised bourgeois abolitionists in 1853 in an article attacking the Duchess of Sutherland for her hypocrisy in concemning slavery in the USA, while her family had made its fortune in expropriating the Scottish peasantry during the Highland Clearances.

Some Marxists have insisted that slavery was somehow "pre-capitalist". This led the turncoat, renegade Eugene Genovese to criticise "*the retreat of Marx, Engels, and too many Marxists into liberalism*" when it came to the Civil War. Genovese argued that Marx's *"burning hatred of slavery and commitment to the Union cause interfered with his judgment*".

This is to mistake internationalist solidarity for liberalism.

Essential

That slavery was an essential part of 19th Century capitalism has been well established in recent years by Walter Johnson, Edward Baptist, Sven Beckert, to name but a few, who of those who have built on the work of WEB Du Bois, CLR. James and Eric Williams. Marx was indeed quite clear that the chattel slavery of his day was essentially part of the capitalist mode of production and the international market serves to transform all forms of labor into commodity production.

Marx's involvement in the campaign against slavery in the USA, led him to reorganise the writing of *Das Kapital*. He argues that the fight against slavery as part of the class struggle was as important as the role slavery played in the development of capitalism. In fact, the veiled slavery of the wage labourers in Europe needed the unqualified slavery of the New World as its pedestal.

It was, however, the actual struggle of the enslaved themselves that really began to excite Marx's interest and revealed the revolutionary possibilities. Following news of the failed uprising led by John Brown in 1859, he write to Fredrick Engels:

In my view, the most momentous thing happening in the world today is the slave movement - on the one hand, in America, started by the death of Brown, and in Russia, on the other . . . I have just seen in

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Marx and Slavery continued

the Tribune that there's been another slave revolt in Missouri, which was put down, needless to say. But the signal has now been given.

When the Civil War finally broke out, Marx and Engels supported the North wholeheartedly. Marx and Engels held that the secessionist counter-revolution had to be crushed in order to emancipate US society from the domination of the Southern slave oligarchy. The support that Marx and Engels gave to the North during the Civil War came from their conviction that the abolition of slavery was necessary to the development of an independent *working class movement in America. "Labour cannot emancipate itself in a white skin where in the black it is branded*". So long as slavery "*disfigured a part of the republic*", industry could not flourish and the development of an independent labour movement was not possible.

British Textile Industry

Yet while the British textile bosses, finance capital and the aristocracy argued for armed intervention on the side of the slave-owners, the British working class stood in solidarity with the Union struggle and Marx and Engels were part of a mass movement against British intervention. In the second half of 1862 a series of pro-Union working-class rallies were attended by thousands of people in Lancashire and Yorkshire, adopting anti-slavery resolutions and denouncing any sort of British intervention in support of the Confederacy.

For Marx and Engels, the European workers' movement's resistance to British and French intervention on the side of the Confederacy demonstrated the possibility of giving organisational form to the revolutionary socialist politics that had been so lacking since the defeat of the 1848 revolutionary upsurge. It was in this atmosphere that the International Workingmen's Association (IWA) was formed.

Working Class Self-activity

The abolition of slavery would not only benefit the freed slaves, it would also benefit the white workers. By weakening their identification with their own ruling classes, the abolition of slavery would help enable white working class self-activity. Marx recognised that solidarity across national borders strengthened working-class movements, he opposed all forms of nationalism and working people's identification with the ruling classes of their nation.

The workers have no country. We cannot take from them what they have not got.

Workers of All Countries, Unite!

4th United States Colored Infantry Regiment. The regiment was raised in Maryland taking part in the Richmond-Petersburg Campaign, the capture of Fort Fisher and Wilmington, North Carolina

Tastes of Honey: Shelagh Delaney, class and feminism in post-war Britain

***David Morgan* reports on a recent online discussion led by Selina Todd, author of the book, Tastes of Honey, which concerns the life and work of the Salford born playwright.**

The British film, Charlie Bubbles, released in 1968, features Albert Finney as a successful writer from Salford who seems to have all the luxuries that money can buy. He carries bundles of cash around, drives a Rolls Royce, has a housekeeper and a butler. He dines with the social elite in the most expensive London restaurants, but cannot refrain from childish acts of rebelliousness: in the opening scenes he engages in a slapstick cake throwing contest with an old friend, much to the annoyance of the fellow diners. Despite these outrageous antics, they are not asked to leave the restaurant: all Charlie needs to do is to pull out his cash to make the waiters smile and look away. He then visits a top tailor to acquire a new outfit. Although he enjoys wealth and adulation from the public – he has an American student working as an unpaid assistant because she loves his work - Charlie is not a happy man. Separated from his wife and son, who still live up North, he is alienated and rootless.

Autobiographical

The script for the film was written by Salford born playwright, Shelagh Delaney, the subject of an illuminating talk, delivered to the SHS via Zoom by Professor Selina Todd, on 26 September. Todd pointed out the autobiographical elements in the story of Charlie Bubbles. The film concludes with Charlie, having taken a trip back to Salford, and failing to reconnect with his estranged wife and son, flying away up into the sky in a hot air balloon. In this fantasy conclusion, Delaney demonstrates a trademark combination of social realism and surrealism which is a feature of her writing.

Delaney, brought up on Salford council estate, achieved enormous success with her first play, A Taste of Honey, which became an instant hit when it was staged in London in 1959 and was later made into a successful film directed by Tony Richardson. The play features a single mother, a pregnant teenager who has an affair with a young black man and an openly gay character, who are all portrayed positively. This was bold and radical for the time.

Delaney's own life was to be transformed by the financial security that the play and film's success brought her: it became a set book in schools and was frequently produced in regional theatres. She enjoyed her life in London mingling with actors, writers and celebrities. She became an independent woman, bringing up a daughter on her own and remaining unmarried. Her newfound wealth enabled her to realise her dreams. She joined political campaigns such as peace rallies and was filmed alongside the likes of Doris Lessing, John Osborne and Vanessa Redgrave in Trafalgar Square.

Post-war optimism

She had found her voice as a teenager when she realised that she had an ear for dialogue and could "write as people talked". Her material was the Salford people she met, worked with and lived among. As Todd explained, Delaney came to prominence in an age of post-war optimism with new opportunities for ordinary people to choose their careers. Working-class school leavers could become actors and writers, which is the option pursued by Delaney who joined the Salford Players before writing the script for A Taste of Honey, which she sent off to Joan Littlewood, director of Theatre Workshop, based in Stratford East in London.

The Lion in Love

Her second play, titled, The Lion in Love, was not as well received by the critics and Todd contrasted the media portrayal of Delaney as an independent working-class woman with the media's attitudes shown towards her male counterparts, who could get away with bad behaviour.

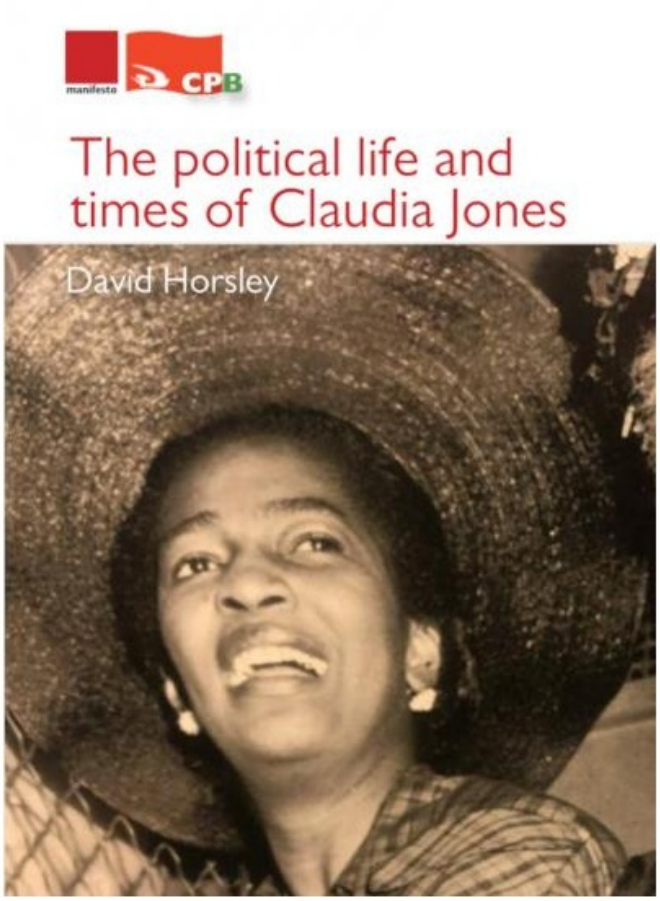
Delaney continued to write radio plays and scripted the film, Dance with a Stranger, but was not as prolific as contemporaries like John Osborne and Arnold Wesker, who also put working-class life on stage. She died in 2011.

This was the first talk that the SHS had delivered via Zoom and it proved to be popular.

Selina Todd's talk can be viewed here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dLQ-uFaDR2n0&t=2195s

Members' Publications



Read The Political Life and Times of Claudia Jones 60 pages with colour photos, written by SHS member David Horsley.

The book charts her life from a child in Trinidad, her struggles in the USA, repression and deportation to Britain and her struggles here, against racism and imperialism.

Available from the

Communist Party of Britain website

https://bit.ly/3rky63D

£4:95 post free

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

Letters from England, 1895:
Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling

In 1895, Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling were two of the best-known socialists in Britain, mixing with the most influential figures of their time, from Keir Hardie to William Morris. The couple were committed to building a socialist political force based on the 'scientific' theories of Eleanor's father Karl and his collaborator, Friedrich Engels.

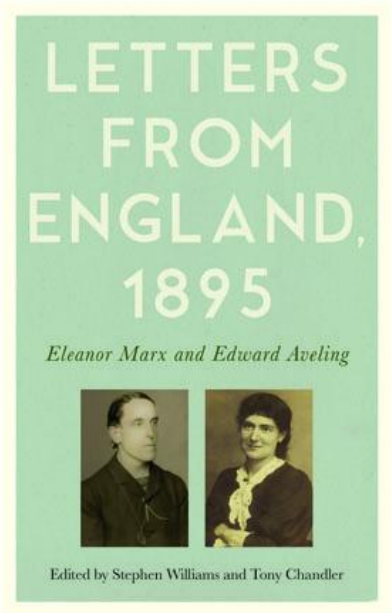
Marx and Aveling's 'letters' to Russia from England offer a unique perspective on British socialism as it entered its crucial phase, which culminated in the foundation of the Labour Party in 1900. As they reported from the heart of capitalist Britain, a Liberal government fell, having failed to keep its promises to labour. The remainder of the year saw the election of a Conservative-led Unionist administration, an underwhelming general election performance by socialists, and the death of Engels.

These lively, accessible letters include sharp reflections on Victorian cultural figures including Oscar Wilde, Annie Besant, and the 'new woman' novelists.

The collection is edited by Stephen Williams and Tony Chandler, and translated by Francis King.

Obtainable from Lawrence and Wishart

https://bit.ly/3rmWeTd



Marxism and the Mayflower

David Morgan reports on the talk delivered via Zoom on 7 November 2020 by historian Graham Taylor, author of a new book on the Mayflower expedition of 1620.

Graham Taylor, a member of this society and its predecessor, is an accomplished historian with several publications on the history of the British labour and socialist movement to his name. In his latest book, which formed the basis for his talk, Graham addresses an important episode in the history of the growth and international spread of the English Nonconformist religious movement, in many ways seen as antecedents of later political movements.

Brownists

Based on archival research into those who formed the nucleus of the "pilgrims" who set sale on the Mayflower for the New World in 1620, Graham looked at the core group known as Brownists who were persecuted for their independent beliefs in England and explained that their persecution, which included jailing, execution and mutilation, was the main motive for their flight in search a new life overseas. Graham does not neglect the other forces that helped facilitate the expedition, such as City financiers and the mixed motives of the various interests involved.

Given this focus, Graham did not extrapolate too much about the events that unfolded in later centuries with the emergence of America as a world power and the part played by settlers and colonisers in the growth of the slave economy founded on the plantations of the American South and how this was propped up by labour derived from trafficked human beings taken from Africa. These issues rightly remain matters of high controversy and were raised in the lively discussion that the talk inspired.

Reviewed

Graham's recent book, The Mayflower in Britain, has been reviewed in places like the Times Literary Supplement. He has also delivered a Gresham Lecture on the topic of the Mayflower. In his talk to the SHS, Graham explained how in the story of the first settlers has been seen by the different perspectives of conservatism, liberalism and Marxism.

Graham's approach to history has been greatly influenced by the work of the Marxist historians such as Christopher Hill who reshaped how we look at the seventeenth century and reassessed the role and legacy of the independent religious sects that flourished during the revolutionary middle decades of that century when a crucial turning point occurred in British history. It was out of these struggles that the principles of freedom of thought, a free press, religious toleration and parliamentary supremacy first gained real traction. These same principles shaped the beliefs of the Mayflower pilgrims.

Revaluation

Graham undertakes a significant revaluation of the Mayflower story which is more commonly approached from an American patriotic perspective and seen as part of the construction of that nation's founding myth. He switches the focus geographically to London and historically to the religious and political struggles in England and Europe starting from the late Elizabethan period to the rise of the English Republic under Oliver Cromwell and ending in the misnamed Restoration when a monarchy with circumscribed powers was re-established.

London

Much of central London, Graham shows, had strong connections with the Mayflower: the voyage was a London expedition, using a London ship, a London crew; it was financed and organised by the City of London. About 65 of the final 102 passengers were recruited in London, Graham shows. The ship sailed from London via Southampton, Dartmouth and Plymouth. The only other location equal in importance to London for the expedition was Leiden. These facts explain the book's subtitle, "How an Icon was made in London".

More importantly, Graham argues, that the "founding of New England by the Pilgrims was perhaps the City's greatest achieve-

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ment" and a particularly insightful aspect of his research is how he traces the commercial interests behind the expedition.

Graham establishes the connections between the event and the history of religious radicalism which are an important part of the story. The intricate links between Levellers, the Brownists and the pilgrims is especially interesting for those inspired by the work of Christopher Hill, A L Morton and others who have looked at the radical religious groups that made the English revolution of 1648 and which are seen to be forerunners of modern radical political movements.

In large part the discussion that followed the formal talk became distracted with events that occurred two or three hundred years after the Mayflower set off on its journey. Vitally important though the slave trade, imperialism and anti-colonialist struggles are, these issues did tend to obscure the central themes of Graham's talk and book. Fortunately, the book is easy to obtain and is well worth reading. It provides a refreshingly new perspective.

HEGEL FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Die Sprache ist das Dasein des Geistes' (Speech is the existence of the spirit/mind)

By Greta Sykes

Called 'the philosopher of modernity', Georg William Friedrich Hegel was born 250 years ago (27th August 1770 to 14th November 1831). His birthday is an invitation to explore some of the major ideas that led to his prominence. At the present time we find ourselves in the fascinating and uncomfortable situation of watching the solidity of the Western world crumble and diminish to something not unlike a walnut shell being rocked on the ocean of time, lost and about to sink. It might be useful to find out what we can learn from the founder of dialectics which had such a profound influence on Karl Marx's work and that of many other philosophers who followed him.

French Revolution

Born only nineteen years before the French Revolution that became such a determining feature in his thought, throughout his life Hegel celebrated the storming of the Bastille. He regularly raised a glass on 14th July and declared the event to be the principle of his philosophy. Whether as private tutor, grammar school director, university professor of philosophy or newspaper editor, Hegel praised the revolution even when it metamorphosed into a dictatorship and the deaths of Robespierre and many others. Its influence on his thinking was as fundamental as Emmanuel Kant's theories.

In 1806 Hegel commented: 'Like a dream image did previous conceptions and notions of reality fall apart, the restraints of the world have been dissolved.'

These ground-breaking words sound strangely modern, as we are entering a phase of late capitalism's decay into filth, treachery and lies with the dollar close to its downfall as the global trade currency.

Freedom

Hegel's focus on the concepts of 'freedom' and reason', which he forged into an almost holistic dialectical whole, grew into the central paradigm of German Idealism and the Enlightenment. Rather than engage in explorations focused on the individual, Hegel viewed the individual as part of the larger whole of their social context. As Jurgen Habermas explained, 'only when Hegel had tied the revolution to the beating heart of the world spirit, did he feel less anxious in the face of its grandeur'. It is likely that the powerful and catastrophic nature of it taught Hegel that death was nothing in the face of the huge potential freedom it entailed. Hegel declared that the French Revolution with its people battling for freedom 'had eliminated for ever the emptiness and vagueness of the meaning of the word freedom: The concept of freedom is being made in the process of the revolution.'

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Hegel continued

Hegel explained to his students at the Berlin university that, 'As long as the sun stands at the firmament and the planets spin around it, we have not seen a moment when humans start with a thought and build a reality out of it.' He saw it as a situation in which rigid, routine ways of life have given way to a galvanism in which a thought has brought about a reality and changed itself and the reality in its course.

Reason

Hegel's other key term is reason. He viewed reason as being linked to freedom in the sense that the latter can only be achieved by a route leading through reason. He castigated 'beliefs, wishes, and subjectivity as hopelessly inadequate: Everything has to bow to reason'. To achieve that one needs insight. He recognised that the freedom and chaos unleashed by the revolution could lead to a 'self-destroying atomisation of needs and wants among the people.' In other words what holds a society together can be destroyed through individualisation and atomisation. How can individuals be reminded to pay attention to society as a whole without which they could not function?

Cancel Culture

At a time when late capitalist developments, such as cancel culture, is destroying the freedom to debate, silencing discussion and expression of diverse views, Hegel's double notion of freedom and reason seems highly pertinent. Every week one individual after another is cast outside the social dialogue, exposed to a storm of online abuse (J K Rowling, Margaret Attwood) or even imprisoned for exposing scandalous abuses of power (Julian Assange). In this context, what can we learn from Hegel and how can we best use his ideas to achieve progress?

The relevance of Hegel's thinking is portrayed in his main oeuvre 'Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts (Fundaments of Philosophy of Law and Natural Law). Hegel's ground-breaking ideas led to the conjecture that the law, politics and morality exist all in a relative relationship to each other within a particular context in a particular society within the wider global context of what he called the Weltgeist. It is possible to interpret the Weltgeist as akin to a holistic, Gaia (as defined by James Lovelock) like a construct in which all things are relational to each other and thus interdependent. The Chinese concept of yin and yang can also be seen as a way of interpreting activities on earth as being in a balancing act with each other. Yin and yang are dialectical entities requiring each other to produce a whole. Recently phases of the moon phases, originally researched by Frank Brown (1959) have re-emerged in scientific thought as forces affecting all living creatures. In this sense Hegel's ideas sit well with philosophies and meditative theories from diverse corners of the globe.

Gegenwart und Wirklichkeit (The Present Time and Reality)

Hegel lays great stress on the notions of 'Gegenwart' und Wirklichkeit. Philosophy is nothing but an expression of the current time in thoughts.' It considers the present time and reality in its time and can therefore be understood as being practical and concrete. Political action consequently derives from an understanding of the present time. Hegel criticised legal specialists like Karl von Savigny for declaring that whatever law existed was good and worth preserving. In contrast, Hegel argued that just because something is there does not mean it was good forever. He said getting rid of slavery and feudalism was a way of giving up something that was formerly declared right and proper. Hegel also protested against those student organisations that engaged in emotional pleas for liberalism calling them 'a broth of the heart'. He found that their language quickly led to resentments and a corruption of rational debate about freedom and reason. He compared both

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left-wing students and reactionaries as having much in common in that they did not treat people as citizens but as a rabble, thus denying them as human beings, instead they were viewed as ‘a Catholic, Jew or German or Italian’.

Hegel’s dialectics (thesis – antithesis – synthesis) is described as ‘a form of speculation’: It must not be applied too rigidly so that it can be applied to living situations: One part needs to be understood as a part of a whole. A human being possesses a body and a brain; both are part of the whole person.

Sitte und Sittlichkeit (Habit)

Hegel sees habits as formed for most activities that humans do and they become part of our natural way of doing things through repetition. We take them for granted as good and necessary. Hegel finds that they can make us free on the one hand and enslave us on the other. We become used to them and they become routine actions that make us become mechanical and so enslave us. Or they can lead to us becoming well organised and aware in our actions leading to our intellect gaining freedom for thought and reason. At this point Hegel shows that reasoned thinking is also linked with ethical action. In the original German, this sounds clearer, as you can say that ‘Sitte’ has to do with Sittlichkeit, meaning caring, ethical behaviour. For example, it is something we are doing at present when the Coronavirus has affected humanity severely. We are using masks and social distancing to prevent each other from falling ill, an ethical action that we have learnt to do.

On the role of conscience, Hegel gives us a surprising insight into the reality of its minimal place in most people’s lives: A sense of wellbeing, a sunny day, the prospect of a good meal, can all submerge feelings of a bad conscience.

Ungluecklich es Bewusstsein (Unhappy Consciousness)

This term is fascinating in Hegel’s work as it merges into psychology. It is not unlike the conception of ‘The One-Dimensional Man’ as expressed by Robert Musil, Kafka, Beckett, Joyce and many others. It is a very modern feeling. It is an intuitive awareness without content when a sense of self is not fully developed and made one’s own. A feeling of being different, being other than someone else, but not knowing one’s true self. This can lead to confidence when feeling well, but can change to brooding melancholy when feeling low while comparing oneself to others. Hegel’s analysis is always focused on Gegenwart and Gegenwaertigkeit (the present time). Thus, the mood swings of the overconfident are rooted in their undeveloped awareness of themselves while feeling separate and different from others in a particular Gegenwart.

Honour/Status

In the 19th century honour was paramount in social relations. Today we would call it status. Oliver James in Britain On the Couch has analysed the importance of status in detail and concludes that a focus on status is detrimental for the individual who engages in self-absorption. It invariably means one will find a person who has more status, more money, property or a position one envies, leading to status anxiety. Similar to the notion of the ‘unhappy consciousness’ it is being aware of one’s status while feeling unsure of oneself and struggling to have identified one’s true self and direction. This can then lead to brooding melancholy and anxiety. Hegel recognised this and declared that honour, seen as ‘a ‘Scheinen in mir selbst’ a feeling of shining in myself, still has to fit into the sense of honour that one receives from others in a social context. He called this the ‘inner’ and the ’outer’ honour, both requiring each other. It reminds us of Dostoevsky’s ‘Crime and Punishment’ where protagonist has killed a woman and feels guilty. He can calm himself while being on his own, but when meeting anyone else his shame and guilt overwhelm him and threaten to lead him to further guilty deeds. Hegel sees a person as having the freedom to act using their own free will through having a strong sense of self. Nevertheless, such a person is also part of the social world in which they live. This point is very close to

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Hegel continued

Marx's premise that we create ourselves as our actions affect the situation around us through a dialectical process of interrelational activity, thus changing ourselves in the course of that activity.

Man and Woman

Hegel finds that in a social situation where a man or woman acts according to rituals, habits and rules of the social context their honour/status experience is likely to be an easy one. In this context his mentions the difference between men and women where women have to follow a much stricter code of ethics in terms of their status than men.

Metaphysics

When tackling the subject of metaphysics Hegel applies humour while speaking to his readers by making fun of their hatred of abstract thought, showing the reader that by no liking abstract thinking, thinking for itself, the reader rejects something they most likely do not know: 'Das Bekannte ist darum, weil es bekannt ist, noch nicht erkannt' (The known is not necessarily understood, just because it is known). Such metaphysical thoughts were difficult for people to stomach in Hegel's days, and they are still alien to us in the 21st century. Climate change is forcing us to see the planet as a whole and by so doing we can slow down global warming. We need to understand the complexity of many systems interacting, seeing the earth as a Gaia or living organism and our individual and social responsibility as part of it. This is a task affecting us universally, a notion ignored by much of the media. The perspective runs counter to the neo-liberal fetishism of the individual currently dominating public debate.

Working together

Hegel spoke about the 'Einarbeitung der Freiheit in die soziale Ordnung' (working to place freedom into the social order in existence). He saw in it not the spontaneous activity of a single person, but the ability of a person to work together with others and a subject matter to find oneself through the other by tuning into oneself and the other. He addressed many issues of the day and made judgements but requested from his students and readers to hold back from an early judgement of his thoughts until they had read sufficiently in his lectures. Freedom is for Hegel 'die Energie des Begreifenwollens' (the energy to comprehend). With these key ideas Hegel has much to teach us. Our social realm needs individuals to experience themselves as part of a larger whole and as part of a society obliged to act together for the greater good in terms of work, nutrition, travel, health, education and the very survival of our planet.

Further reading

New biographies about Hegel:

Klaus Vieweg, *'Der Denker der Freiheit'*, Beck, Munich, 2019

Slavoj Zizek, *'Hegel in a Wired Brain'*, Bloomsbury, 2020

Storming the Bastille

Hegel had a special sympathy for the French Revolution.