

## Stan Newens

Stan, who died at his Essex home at the age of 91 on 2nd March, was president of the Socialist History Society, succeeding Eric Hobsbawm in 2012. Stan was a founder member of the Socialist History Society in 1992 and had previously been an associate member of the Communist Party History Group. Stan was by profession a school teacher, his subject being history. Politically active since the early 1950s, Stan was Member of Parliament for Epping from 1964 to 1970 and then for the new constituency of Harlow from 1974 to 1983. He was a Member of the European Parliament representing London Central from 1984 to 1999.

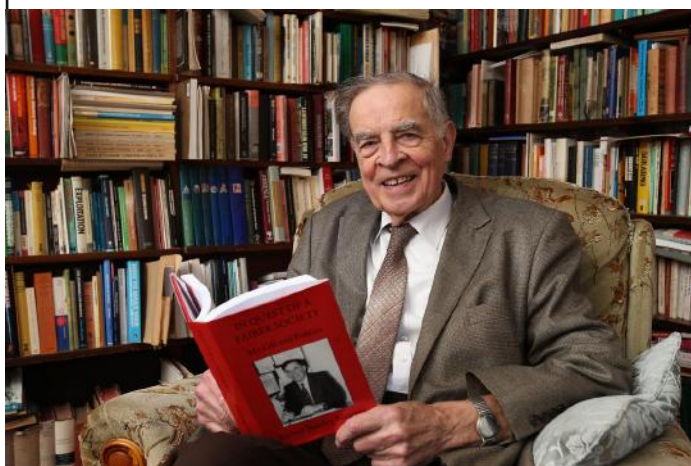
### **Always on the left**

Born in 1930 in Bethnal Green and educated at Buckhurst Hill County high school in Chigwell, Stan graduated in history from University College London and became a schoolteacher. Joining the Labour Party in 1949 in North Weald in Essex, Stan was always on the left of the Party. Stan was a conscientious objector during the Korean war, working as a coalminer in Staffordshire for four years as an alternative to two years National Service. In the early 1950s, having met the Ceylonese Trotskyist (and future Sri Lankan Minister), Anil Moonesinghe, Stan joined the Socialist Review Group led by Tony Cliff. He was a key member of the group, responsible for contacts with Trotskyist groups in other countries. He wrote articles for the *Socialist Review* journal, including an unpublished article on East Germany in 1952 and an article on German re-armament in 1954 which did appear, but left the group in 1959, before the group established the International Socialists as a separate political party. Stan held a number of positions in

the National Union of Teachers. He was a Labour and Cooperative MP and at one time was president of the London Cooperative Society.

### **Nuclear Disarmament**

A critic of successive government's foreign policies, he was an opponent of the British intervention in Suez in 1956, helping to organise the Trafalgar Square demonstration, printing thousands of leaflets surreptitiously on the Epping Labour Party duplicator, and the Vietnam war. An opponent of NATO, he was a supporter of nuclear disarmament. He served as vice chair of the Foreign affairs group of MPs and as chair and deputy leader of the Labour group on Members of the European Parliament. He was actively involved in campaigns to support the independence of British colonies and was for many years chair of the Movement for Colonial Freedom founded by Fenner Brockway, which later became Liberation, a position in which he was succeeded by Jeremy Corbyn. He was a patron of Peace in Kurdistan. A left-winger for all his political life, Stan was a mild and generous advocate of the underdog, whether in Britain or elsewhere in the world. Jeremy Corbyn hosted Stan's 90th birthday celebration in the Leader of the Opposition's office at Westminster.

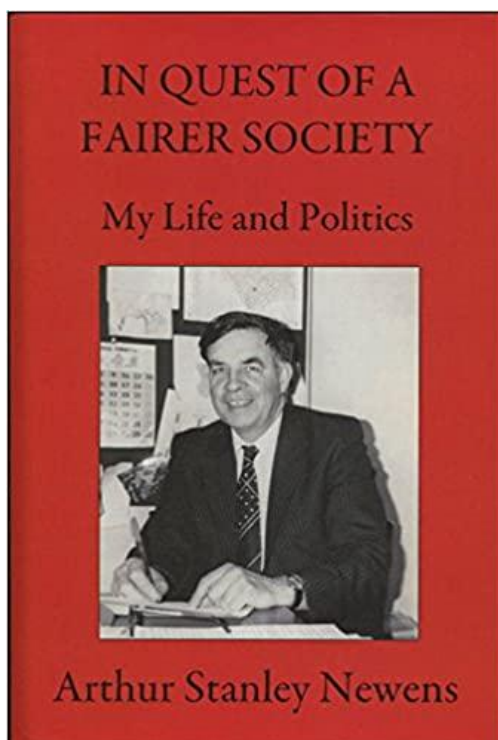


## In Quest of a Fairer Society

He wrote a number of books and pamphlets – a co-authored biography of the socialist MP and educationalist, Leah Manning, a study of Nicolae Ceausescu, histories of the Movement for Colonial Freedom and the London Co-operative Society Political Committee, pamphlets on NATO and a pamphlet on the Kurds. He wrote on the Victorian East End novelist, Arthur Morrison and on the East Ender, Arthur Harding. He also wrote a history of North Weald Bassett in Essex. In 2013, he published his autobiography *In Quest of a Fairer Society*. As well as chairing *Socialist History Society* meetings, Stan gave a number of talks, including a talk on the 1945-51 Attlee government. He had an extensive collection of books and pamphlets on socialist political history. In the 1990s, Stan was an assistant editor of *History Workshop Journal*, for which he wrote a number of articles. He also organised for seventeen successive years, an annual Essex Labour history conference, which attracted the participation of well-known socialist historians and politicians, the most recent one being held in 2018. He was also until recently chair of *Labour Heritage*. Stan was well loved and highly respected and will be sadly missed.

### **Duncan Bowie**

for the committee of the *Socialist History Society*



## The Defeat of Gilgamesh Book Launch

By *Dr Peter Gerlinghoff*, publisher and peace campaigner from Germany.

I had the pleasure of watching the online book launch of Greta Sykes's new novel, 'The Defeat of Gilgamesh', which took place on 10 December 2020 under the auspices of the SHS.

I was not at all familiar with the history of ancient civilisations and hearing the talk was a bit of an eye opener for me, as Mesopotamian cultural creativity seemed so much closer to modern human societies than one might have thought. Their approach to life appears to reside in a great sense of pragmatism as they moved from horticultural work to planting seeds, to irrigation and canal building. It naturally followed that they invented the plough and the wheel as well as the construction of cities. Once surplus production of wheat and barley was achieved they took the next step and invented writing. At the same time, they display a highly developed sense of spirituality, as Greta explained. Her talk and hearing a passage read from the novel inspired me to read the book myself. A distant history is brought to life and made so colourful that it feels as if you were actually in the story. In particular, I was surprised to find a new function for religion or spirituality that I was unfamiliar with before. In this story religion has none of the threatening, doom-laden and sin implying forms that normally characterise it. Instead, the religious or spiritual experience presented in the book is one of coming together under the awe and inspiration of gods and goddesses.

The novel takes place five thousand years ago, yet it manages to touch on issues and problems that we are confronted with today, such as how men and women relate to each other, their levels of power in relationships and humanity's control over the environment. That is why I consider it an excellent idea for the SHS to have hosted this book launch. Such topics can help to broaden popular understanding and inspire historical studies that address cultures far removed from the preoccupation with the modern western world which can so easily lead to a tunnel vision.

## The Return of Nature

### Socialism and Ecology

David Morgan reports on the Society's recent talk with John Bellamy Foster.

The SHS held what proved to be one of its most successful ever events on 14 February when we hosted John Bellamy Foster for the British launch of his important new book, *The Return of Nature: Socialism and Ecology*. His virtual talk, chaired by SHS co-chair Greta Sykes, attracted more than 200 participants worldwide and inspired several people to join the SHS for the first time, which proves that with the right topics the SHS can make a real impact.

Foster, who is professor of sociology at the University of Oregon and the editor of the journal, *Monthly Review*, has a justified reputation as an expert on the relationship between Marxism and ecology. He convincingly demonstrates that this relationship is not a new phenomenon but is as old as the socialist movement itself.

The destruction of the environment caused by unrestrained industrialisation provoked resistance from workers and their intellectual allies who were appalled by the human misery and harsh social conditions found in the factories and cities.

In his talk and book Foster ranges ambitiously over nearly two hundred years of socialist thinking starting with the Marx and Engels and the connections of their ideas with those of scientific thinkers of their day such as Charles Darwin.

In the book, Foster acquaints the reader with many fascinating political figures, writers and radical thinkers who have been overlooked or largely forgotten. These include the British Marxists and Communists JD Bernal, Christopher Caudwell, Jack Lindsay, Joseph Needham and Raymond Williams. The book shows how each of these thinkers made original contributions towards the understanding of society, the economic forces and the environment by making profound connections between socialism and ecology.

Foster writes impressively of the contribution of Engels to ecological thinking by ex-

ploring works like *The Condition of the Working Class in England* for their environmental ideas. Foster describes Engels's critique of the "sterile bourgeois notion of progress" as central to all his writings on nature and science. Engels was insistent that environmental changes were not simply due to natural causes but were the results of human intervention. As Foster says, Engels fully recognised that humanity possessed the capacity to destroy the natural basis of its own existence, which is a core "green" idea.

As Foster explains, Engels elucidated these ideas in *The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man* and in *Dialectics of Nature*. He goes on to show how Engels provides a radical extension of historical materialism by focusing on the intersections of class and gender in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. Foster praises Engels for lacking any trace of the racist and imperialist ideas that would have been common among many of his contemporaries. This approach is easily explained by the perspective of revolutionary egalitarian materialism that Engels always espoused.

Foster also goes on to show how the plays of Henrik Ibsen influenced Engels's attitudes to the family and women through his close friendship with Eleanor Marx who was a passionate Ibsenite and the first to translate plays like *The Enemy of the People* into English.

Foster has made an invaluable contribution to socialist ideas that opens the doors to a revaluation of Marxism as a central component of modern green thought. The book will be required reading for anyone serious about social change and the future of the planet. *The Return of Nature*, which is almost 800 pages long, has fundamentally transformed the way we look at socialism and successfully refutes the negative and misleading assumptions about "scientific socialism". After the appearance of this book, we can safely declare that we are all greens now.

John Bellamy Foster's talk can be viewed on YouTube: <https://bit.ly/3vhBXk7>



## British Socialists and the Outbreak of the Great War

Duncan Bowie reviews *The Drums of Armageddon* by Ian Bullock (Bonchurch Press, £7.99)

Ian Bullock has undertaken a comprehensive analysis of the content of three British socialist journals in the six month period July to December 1914: The SDF/BSP's *Justice*, Robert Blatchford's *Clarion* and the ILP's *Labour Leader*. The journals have recently been made available online through the British Library's newspaper archive, though Bullock had to work from microfilm, which must have been a hard slog. The book presents the most detailed study yet of attitudes to the war within the various sections of the British labour and socialist movement. As is generally known, the *Clarion* supported British intervention in the war and was at times jingoistic, the ILP was largely pacifist and opposed British participation, while *Justice*, edited first by Harry Quelch and then by H W Lee, both members of Hyndman's 'old guard', was largely supportive while the SDF/BSP was to split with an internationalist group establishing their own journal, *The Call*, in 1916.

### Letters

Bullock does not just follow the editorial line of the three journals and the contributions of the big names but also examines the letters written to the journals by socialists across the country. This demonstrates a diversity of opinions and the extent to which editorial positions were challenged within the journals. For example, the Old Guard SDF/BSP leadership was increasingly challenged by internationalist members who countered the leadership's support for British participation in the war.

### Collaboration

The quality of contributions and the arguments presented within them are generally high and show a good knowledge of international affairs, including the diplomatic ma-

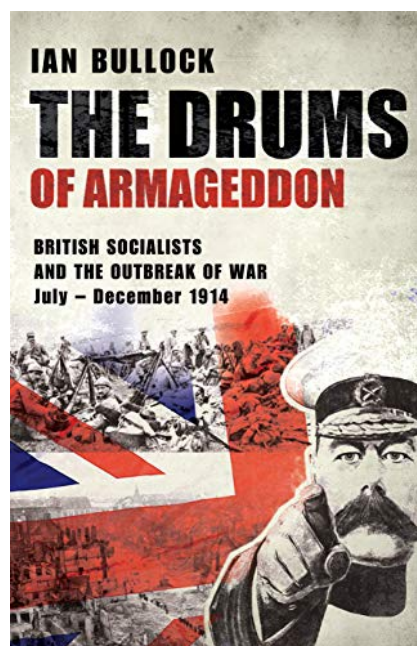
noeuvres of the British foreign secretary, Sir Edward Grey. Bullock also provides useful biographical footnotes on some of the lesser known contributors and on the political context of some of the contributions. While many writers have stressed the divergence between the ILP/*Labour Leader* on the one hand and *Clarion* and *Justice* on the other, Bullock also demonstrates the extent of agreement – for example, the opposition to the campaign for conscription (which was not actually introduced until January 1916), and the collaboration in defence of wartime working conditions.

### Representation

All the journals and socialist parties supported working class representation in the Workers War Emergency National Committee initiated by the Labour Party with Labour's Jim Middleton as secretary. Bullock also tracks the attitude of the different journals to new organisations such as the Union of Democratic Control (of foreign policy) and the No-Conscription Fellowship, both of which were largely led by the ILP cooperating with radical liberals and pacifists. This is an excellent study and certainly adds to our knowledge of the response of British socialists to the outbreak of the First World War. A subject which is as important

as their response to the two Russian revolutions of 1917, which has been the subject of a much more extensive literature, including Bullock's previous book – *Romancing the Revolution*.

Note: The SHS has produced *Occasional Publications* on opposition to the First World War and on responses to the Russian Revolution, copies of which are still available from [s.cushion23@gmail.com](mailto:s.cushion23@gmail.com)



## Universities Are Facing Pressing Issues.

### 'Free Speech On Campus' Isn't One

**While students and staff struggle through a pandemic, Gavin Williamson is spending his time confecting culture wars, writes UCU general secretary *Dr Jo Grady*.**

While university students and staff continue to teach and learn in lockdown, Gavin Williamson, the education secretary, spent his week fighting phantom threats to free speech.

There are pressing issues facing higher education during the pandemic. Hundreds of staff at universities across the country are dealing with the threat of redundancies, after huge numbers of casualised academics saw their jobs axed last year.

#### **Students misled**

Misled by ministers and vice chancellors into thinking they could have a relatively normal university experience, students are struggling too: a recent survey found that 9% have turned to foodbanks during the pandemic, while students have paid £1billion rent for empty rooms over the past year. But instead of addressing these failings, the government has once again decided to distract from them by generating a new round of headlines for its confected culture war.

Williamson's proposals are based on an assumption that there is a crisis of free speech on university campuses, supposedly caused by students and staff eager to shut down challenge and stifle dissent.

#### **Prevent**

There are real threats to free speech and academic freedom at universities. But they come from the government and university employers, not from lecturers and student unions. Indeed, one of the directors of leading human rights group Liberty has argued the single biggest threat to free speech on campus is the government's Prevent programme.

The Office for Students' (OfS) own figures from 2019 show that at least 2,100 events and external speakers at 65 different institutions were interfered with under Prevent in just one year. And there is evidence for the



'chilling effect' created by this interference: one-third of Muslim students surveyed by the National Union of Students in 2018 felt that they had been negatively affected by Prevent. Of those impacted, 43% felt unable to express

their views or be themselves as a result.

In this context, the proposal for a 'Free Speech Champion' in the OfS looks like another case of ministerial interference threatening free speech and academic freedom, rather than a genuine initiative to protect them.

#### **Academic freedom**

Academic freedom is, of course, a central part of any functioning democracy, and there is no doubt that those working in our colleges and universities must be free to question and test received wisdom. We at the UCU have always been a vociferous defender of academic freedom, while also being clear that it is inextricably bound up with other civil liberties and human rights.

These proposals also completely fail to get to grips with the threat posed to academic freedom by the extent of precarious employment in universities. More than two thirds of researchers and almost half of teaching-only staff in the sector are on fixed term contracts. This proliferation of precarious contracts is closely linked to marketisation and the volatility it causes in undergraduate recruitment. Staff in such insecure jobs risk unemployment by speaking truth to power. Academic freedom is not just about the right to voice unpopular opinions, but the freedom to choose and shape research and teaching without pressure from managers or the government.

Yet the research and teaching goals of precariously employed staff are often dictated by

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## Free Speech On Campus - continued

their managers, who hold power over grants, funding streams, and promotions. The DfE's proposals acknowledge this in passing, but ultimately treat it as an afterthought.

### History of Empire

Williamson's intervention comes amidst creeping state interference in academic research, with the culture secretary, Oliver Dowden, seeking to dictate how the history of the British empire should be written, and ministers attacking student-led attempts to broaden the curriculum.

The marketised model of funding higher education has left staff on insecure contracts unable to speak out, while university leaders and the government are empowered to tell students who they can and cannot listen to.

If it is serious about defending free speech and academic freedom on campus, the government should begin by addressing the central threat: its own policies.

## Organising to Win 2021

Dave Welsh, who will be known to many SHS members through the 'Britain at Work' oral history project

[<https://www.britainatworklondon.com/>], has been working with trade unions in East Anglia on 'Key Workers United', a bulletin by and for key workers in retail, health and other 'key' occupations.

Dave writes: '*Organising to Win 2021 is a new project that's come out of Key Workers United. We want to publish a handbook written by the people who work in the NHS, care homes, rail and bus, fire service, retail, post office, education, social services, science, and the unemployed. Organising to Win 2021 will set out the situation in each sector and suggest how best to organise in 2021. We hope that you will contribute and encourage others to take part; we can all be writers as well as readers.*

If you like to contribute to *Key Workers United* or *Organising to Win 2021*, please email [davidwelsh83@btinternet.com](mailto:davidwelsh83@btinternet.com)'

## White Riot

Directed by Rubika Shah

Featuring: Red Saunders; Roger Huddle; Dennis Bovell; Kate Webb; The Clash; Steel Pulse; Tom Robinson; Poly Styrene; Sham 69; Alien Kulture

Rubika Shah's award-winning and energising film charts a vital national protest movement. Rock Against Racism (RAR) was formed in 1976, prompted by 'music's biggest colonialist' Eric Clapton and his support of racist MP Enoch Powell.

White Riot blends fresh interviews with archive footage to recreate a hostile environment of anti-immigrant hysteria and National Front marches. As neo-Nazis recruited the nation's youth, RAR's multicultural punk and reggae gigs provided rallying points for resistance. As co-founder Red Saunders explains: 'We peeled away the Union Jack to reveal the swastika'.

The campaign grew from Hoxton fanzine roots to 1978's huge antifascist carnival in Victoria Park, featuring X-Ray Spex, Steel Pulse and of course The Clash, whose rock star charisma and gale-force conviction took RAR's message to the masses.

Winner: Best Documentary: BFI London Film Festival 2019

Watch at Home £9:99

<https://www.modernfilms.com/whiteriot/>



## Review of David Horsley on Claudia Jones

There was, perhaps, a time when all the best people – certainly the best political activists – were Communists. David Horsley is having well-aimed shots at providing the basis for abandoning that “perhaps”: doing so with biographical pamphlets. His first is on the remarkable war-hero, lawyer, scholar-activist, Billy Strachan (see *Billy Strachan, 1921-1998, Caribbean Labour Solidarity*, 2019). The second - being reviewed here - is on the quite extraordinary Caribbean Communist, Claudia Jones (*The Political Life and Times of Claudia Jones, Manifesto Press*, 2020). Let’s agree to leave to one side the small size of his ‘sample’. It’s essential to “Feel the quality!” of his accounts.

### Centenary

The centenary year of the CP(G)B provides scope for the production of further, equally well-written such pamphlets. Other extraordinary Black - mainly Caribbean - Communist individuals who might be similarly celebrated include Richard Hart (lawyer, historian, linguist and activist-intellectual in Jamaica, Guyana, the UK and Grenada), Cleston Taylor (the untold story there is about Black leadership in trade union struggles in London as well as a major part of the history of Caribbean Labour Solidarity), Chris Le Maitre, Trevor Carter (he left an autobiographical work) and Dorothy Kuya of Liverpool.

### The Belly of the Beast

Claudia Jones (February 1915 to December 1964) is hardly unsung, not given a growing number of books and film documentary items on the woman who - on indisputable merit - is interred immediately to the “left of Karl Marx!” Horsley’s well-chosen focus is Claudia’s life in advanced class, race and gender resistance to the racist system of capitalist-imperialism in what George Jackson called *The Belly of the Beast*. He documents her intense engagement as an activist-intellectual member, first of the Communist Party of the USA (1936 - Young Communist League - to 1955) and then in the CPGB for her nine UK years (1955-64)

following her deportation to these shores. In this short, commendably illustrated pamphlet Horsley handles all this with admirable economy keeping in view her ever-relevant Caribbean background. Claudia’s origins were in Trinidad and Tobago, amongst the people who shortly after her birth were winning Jerusalem for the British Empire’s General Allenby.

### In the USA

Migration to the US (1924) led her into the grinding ill-health-inducing Harlem poverty that was her family’s lot. Her class-based conclusions about the causes and solutions to such social conditions led her into Communism. Horsley captures effectively Claudia’s early training in drama; her rise as a communist activist-journalist; her extensive network of connections to some of the best known figures in the African-American left including Paul Robeson. Claudia’s important contribution to the theorisation of the triple oppression of the Afrikan-American woman is properly recognised. Her deportation from the USA was the final outcome of the system’s ruthless and brutal self-defence. The post-World War 1 Palmer Raids and the persecution of the House Un-American Affairs Committee moment are linked by J Edgar Hoover and it was on his watch that anti-communism justified selling coke into the Black community (Iran Contra).

### Notting Hill

Horsley does justice to Claudia Jones’ UK years. She arrived suffering from long-term chronic illness worsened by imprisonment but embarked on nine years stuffed full of immensely varied militant creative Communist and Caribbean community activism. Here she overcame the challenges of wagelessly mastering a new racist environment; starting and inspirationally running a crucially important Caribbean Community newspaper with wide international links; providing leadership in the aftermath of the Notting Hill and Nottingham anti-Black rampages that get dubbed “Race Riots”; dealing with the murder of Kelso Cochrane;

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## Claudia Jones

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challenging head-on the state and societal racist forces expressed in the 1961 (in force '62) Commonwealth Immigration Act; reaching back - again, but differently, inspirationally - into her background to initiate the Carnival-cultural events that culminate in the street-based Notting Hill Caribbean Carnival. Through all this Claudia was fully active in the CPGB and was one of the major influences if not author of its mid-'60s policy statement in which the party:

*Declared its opposition to all forms of restrictions on coloured immigrants; ... its readiness to contest every case of discrimination; urged repeal of the Commonwealth Immigration Act; and called for equality of access to employment, rates of wages, promotion to skilled jobs and opportunities for apprenticeships and vocational training... Gave full support to the Bill to outlaw Racial Discrimination and pledges its readiness to support every progressive measure to combat racial discrimination in Britain. It also projected the launching of an ideological campaign to combat racialism, which - it noted - infects wide sections of the British working class.*

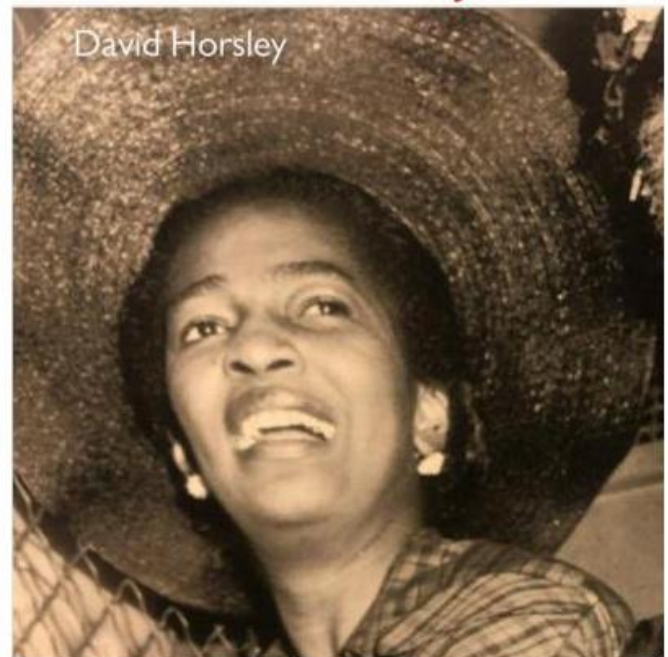
Oh that the British Labour Party had been even halfway there: then or now. Oh that, fifty six years after Claudia Jones' sadly early death, the UK was wholly there. Did someone say: "*Oh Claudia, thou should be living at this hour. Britain hath need of thee?*"

*Cecil Gutzmore*

Cecil Gutzmore is an Afrikan-Jamaican activist and retired academic. He was a member of the CPGB in the late '60s and early '70s.



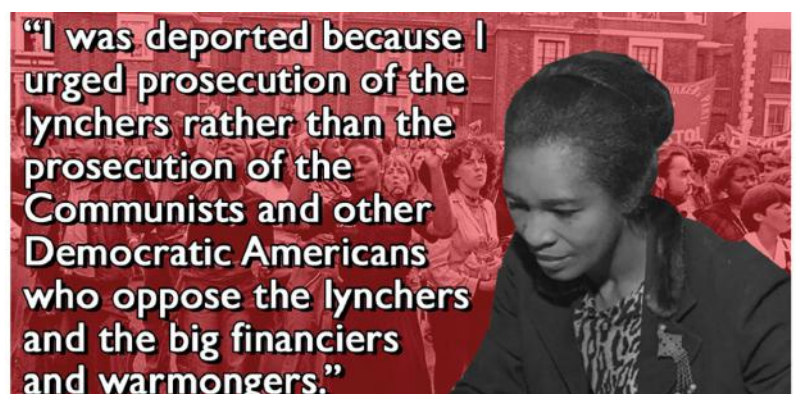
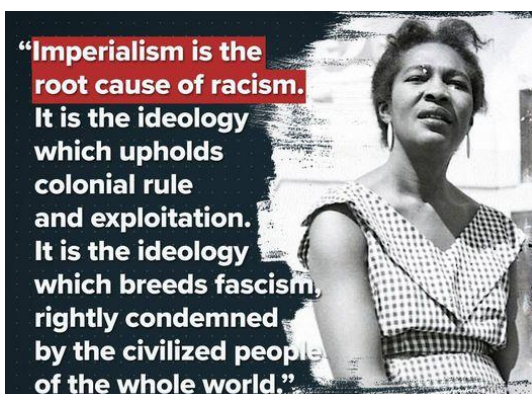
## The political life and times of Claudia Jones



Read *The Political Life and Times of Claudia Jones* 60 pages with colour photos, written by CLS 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





## Hywel Francis (6 June 1946 - 14 February 2021)

*The Socialist History Society is saddened to learn of the death of Hywel Francis, historian of the South Wales miners and a former Labour MP. He had been a member of SHS and its predecessor, the Communist Party Historians Group. A few years ago, Hywel hosted the launch at the House of Commons of the late Nina Fishman's biography of Arthur Horner.*

*What follows is an extract from an appreciation published by Swansea University:*

Hywel Francis, adult educator, historian, activist and parliamentarian, who has died at the age of 74, is mourned by his innumerable friends within and beyond Swansea University.

A Swansea graduate, Emeritus Professor of Adult Education and Head of DACE (the Department of Adult Continuing Education), MP for Aberavon from 2001 to 2015, and latterly a driving force in developing the university's civic vision, South Wales Miners' Library and Richard Burton Archives, and centenary commemorations, Hywel Francis was a truly remarkable embodiment of the values and history of the south Wales from which he came and which he represented so tirelessly.

Born in Onllwyn in the Dulais Valley, the son of Dai Francis, General Secretary of the South Wales Miners' Federation, Hywel was later brought up in Cardiff. After graduating from Swansea with a BA in History in 1968, he threw himself into work as an historical researcher, a trade union organiser, an adult educator, and a political and social activist.

He published *The Fed: A History of the South Wales Miners in the Twentieth Century* (co-authored with Dai Smith, 1980) and then his PhD, based on extensive oral history interviews, as *Miners against Fascism: Wales and the Spanish Civil War* (1984).

Further publications included *Do Miners Read Dickens?: The History and Progress of the South Wales Miners' Library 1973-2013* (co-authored with Sian Williams, 2013), a centenary history of *Seven Sisters Rugby Football Club* (1997) and *History on Our Side: Wales and the 1984-5 Miners' Strike* (2009).

Hywel Francis was part of a notable group of radical scholars and activists who established *Llafur*, the society and journal for Welsh labour history, in 1970. Over the next three decades, his indefatigable pursuit of funding and grants allowed him to establish the South Wales Coalfield History Project and its successors, which created the Coalfield Archive (now part of the university's Richard Burton Archives) and established the South Wales Miners' Library.

All his life Hywel remained rooted in the Welsh-speaking, communist, working-class community of his upbringing. After a few detours, he and Mair brought up their family in the Dulais Valley and lived there at the heart of the community until his sudden death. His passion for the place, its people and its history shines through writings like the 1994 essay *'My Community, My Valley: Onllwyn, Cwm Dulais'*, just as they always did in his conversation and storytelling.

Hywel's instincts as a human being were truly admirable: he was deeply engaged in social issues such as the legacy of the NHS, the rights of carers, and end of life care. A self-confessed obsessive, Hywel, quite rightly, never lost a chance to advance the cause of the Miners' Library, most recently in partnership with Neath Port Talbot. And he never lost sight of the ideal of Prifysgol y Werin – the People's University – nor of the vision of a democratic partnership between the university and the community which it serves.



# ***Marxism as a Tool for Liberation***

Book Review

***Making Our Own History – A User’s Guide to Historical Materialism* by Jonathan White**  
(Praxis Press, 2021, £9.95).

In this stimulating book, Jonathan White sets out to explain the continuing value of Marxist thought to help us in making sense of the world. He starts from the view that there has been a resurgence of interest in Marxist ideas within the context of a global capitalism lurching from one crisis to another.

This book takes the form of a study guide for militant activists and is written in an attractive non-academic style. The author himself is a former university lecturer who later became a trade union official.

## **Academicized**

White’s discussion of the aims, origins and achievements of the Communist Party Historians Group (CPHG) will be of much interest to SHS members. While the book is very useful in foregrounding the familiarity of British Marxists with debates within Soviet historiography, White stops short in bringing the group’s own history up-to-date; there is not even a passing glance at its successor, the Socialist History Society. White states that the CPHG tradition later fell victim to becoming “academicized” as “history from below”, a view propounded by Harvey Kaye. While this perspective has exerted an influence, it is only a partial view of the matter.

## **Cultural materialism**

The influence of historical materialism has been more diverse and far reaching than White’s account would suggest. Mention could have been made of the History Workshop tradition, socialist feminist historians such as Sheila Rowbotham, Catherine Hall and Leonore Davidoff, as well as the contribution of Raymond Williams, whose concept of “cultural materialism” surely falls within the scope of Marxist ideas. All are missed.

There is also no reference to the ideas of William Morris which seems odd given White’s recognition of the impending environmental crisis. Morris’s views on social organisation, cooperation, the nature of work and production processes are remarkably prescient for the modern era.

White does however provide an extended discussion of the contribution of the Hungarian Marxist Georg Lukacs and situates his ideas fully within the context of the shifting fortunes of the international working-class movement. Lukacs remains an exemplary intellectual whose work continues to help us understand the world and the forces that shape it.

White is prone to using the term “professional historian” pejoratively; in itself, professionalism is surely not to be judged negatively. David Parker, a veteran of both the SHS and the CPHG, receives a mention as a professional historian “unusual” for his willingness to take account of the class struggle. But there is no indication that Parker has produced works of distinction on issues like French absolutism.

The works of Maurice Dobb, Christopher Hill, Eric Hobsbawm and Rodney Hilton are given full credit for their contributions to the development of Marxist history, and their work on the seventeenth century is given central place in the discussion.

## **Unnoticed**

It is somewhat surprising however to see no mention of Victor Kiernan’s equally impressive work on empire; likewise, George Rude’s original studies of popular movements receive not a mention and Rude’s name is consigned to a footnote in relation to Hobsbawm. In addition, E P Thompson’s extensive writings on the moral economy and customary rights go unnoticed.

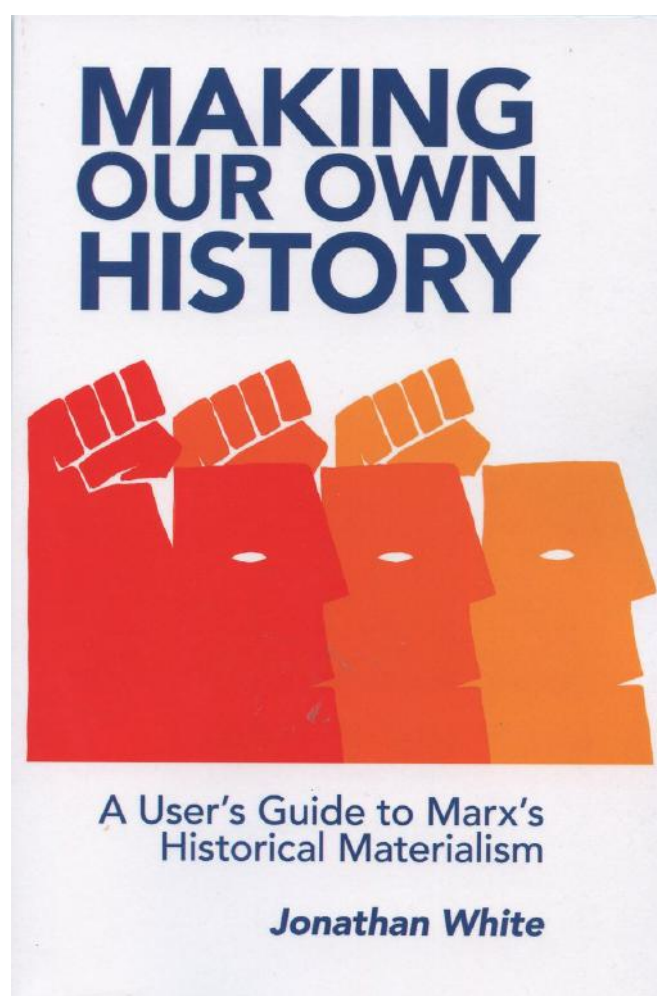
White’s general criticisms of the weakness of much academic history writing are perfectly valid, particularly the arcane terminology that transforms historical studies into an exclusive club. He attributes the weaknesses of modern socialist history to the detachment from the working-class movement of its practitioners. In this respect, the SHS deserves credit for its success in bringing together professionally trained specialists and self-taught enthusiasts. *continued on next page*



## *Making Our Own History* continued

Despite identifying some minor gaps, I welcome warmly this excellent introduction to historical materialism for its conciseness and clarity of writing. That it omits aspects that I would consider to be vital is not really a criticism as such because each author inevitably adopts a different approach. That the book stimulates discussion and thought is surely a mark of its success. White's positive elucidation of Marxist ideas and their utility as a tool for human liberation is a refreshing position to adopt in these bleak times.

*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](mailto:morganshs@hotmail.com)

### **Recent Work in the Early Years of the Communist Party in Britain**

The second of two articles commemorating the centenary of the British Communist Party is now available and should be of interest to all socialist scholars:

John McIlroy and Alan Campbell, "The Socialist Labour Party and the leadership of early British Communism", *Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory*, 48, 4 (2020), pp. 609–659: <https://bit.ly/2NeQWde>

Starting from the work of historians Walter Kendall, Ray Challinor, James Hinton and Richard Hyman, the article addresses a long-standing historiographical issue: the role ex-members of its main constituent organisations, the BSP and SLP, played in the early Communist Party. It progresses past controversy by analysing the 19 former SLP activists who sat on the CPGB Executive in the 1920s. It compares their impact within the party with their comrades from the BSP. The article concludes that the idea of competing political identities based on earlier allegiance persisting into the 1920s has been exaggerated and fails to facilitate our understanding of the development of British Communism between 1920 and 1928.

See also John McIlroy and Alan Campbell, A. (2020b). "The early British Communist leaders, 1920–1923: a prosopographical exploration". *Labor History*, 62, 5–6 (2020), pp. 423–465: <https://bit.ly/3ldldEG>

### **100 Years of Anti-Fascism – Between Class Struggle and Social Movement**

Call for papers, deadline 9 May 2021

Call for Articles for a special issue of *Arbeit – Bewegung – Geschichte. Zeitschrift für historische Studien*

One hundred years after proletarian self-protection groups in Italy called themselves «antifascisti» for the first time in 1921 and defended themselves against the fascist Blackshirts («camicie nere»), it is high time to take a comprehensive look at the history of antifascism.

<https://bit.ly/30JMMx2>

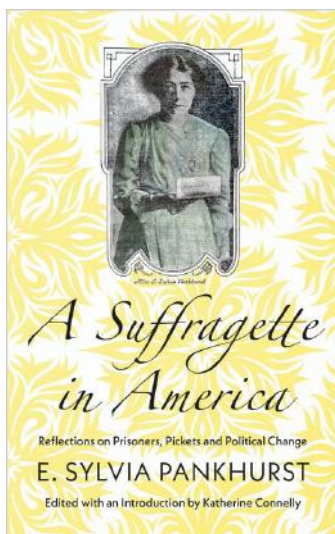
## Meetings

### SYLVIA PANKHURST IN AMERICA

A talk by Katherine Connelly hosted by the SHS

On 15th April starting at 6.30pm via Zoom  
About the speaker

**Katherine Connelly** is a historian, writer and activist. The author of the biography *Sylvia Pankhurst: Suffragette, Socialist and Scourge of Empire* (Pluto Press, 2013), she most recently edited and introduced Pankhurst's hitherto unpublished manuscript about her tours of the United States: *A Suffragette in America: Reflections on Prisoners, Pickets and Political Change* (Pluto Press, 2019). Kate is a lecturer at the London centres of Arcadia and Lawrence universities.



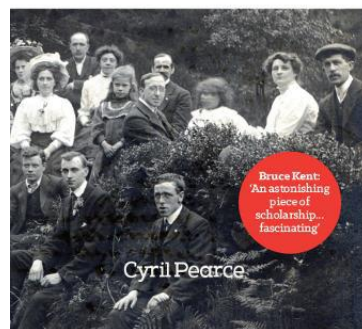
### 'Hot spots' and 'Hinterlands' – a local history of Britain's war resisters 1914-1918

The SHS will host speaker Cyril Pearce for an online talk at 2pm, Saturday, 24th April. For a hundred years the received wisdom has been that Britain's part in the First World War was universally popular and that those who opposed it were at the margin and of no account – eccentric and a little odd.

Using the research on which his book *Communities of Resistance* (Francis and Taylor, 2020) is based Cyril Pearce will identify these 'eccentrics' and suggest a different story where communities and groups of neighbouring communities had within them more and more active war resister than the received view might allow.

### Communities of Resistance

Conscience and Dissent  
in Britain during  
the First World War



### Writers of the Left in an Age of Extremes

Launch meeting for the SHS's latest  
Occasional Publication

6.30pm, 29 May

[On-line meeting, details on our website]

The joint authors of the publication will discuss why the writers who are featured still matter.

*David Morgan* will speak about Edgell Rickword and *Greta Sykes* will speak about Anna Seghers and Carlo Levi. Followed by discussion.

SHS members will all have received a copy.

### Writers of the Left in an Age of Extremes

Edgell Rickword – Anna Seghers – Carlo Levi  
by Greta Sykes & David Morgan



Socialist History Society  
SHS Occasional Publication 46