

Afghanistan by Frederick Engels

The conquest of Afghanistan seemed accomplished, and a considerable portion of the troops was sent back. But the Afghans were noways content to be ruled by the *Feringhee Kaffirs* (European infidels), and during the whole of 1840 and '41, insurrection followed on insurrection in every part of the country. The Anglo-Indian troops had to be constantly on the move. Yet, McNaghten declared this to be the normal state of Afghan society, and wrote home that every thing went on well, and Shah Soojah's power was taking root. In vain were the warnings of the military officers and the other political agents. Dost Mohammed had surrendered to the British in October, 1840, and was sent to India; every insurrection during the summer of '41 was successfully repressed, and toward October, McNaghten, nominated governor of Bombay, intended leaving with another body of troops for India. But then the storm broke out.

Cost the Treasury

The occupation of Afghanistan cost the Indian treasury £1,250,000 per annum: 16,000 troops, Anglo-Indian, and Shah Soojah's, had to be paid in Afghanistan; 3,000 more lay in Sinde, and the Bolan Pass; Shah Soojah's regal splendours, the salaries of his functionaries, and all expenses of his court and government, were paid by the Indian treasury, and finally, the Afghan chiefs were subsidized, or rather bribed, from the same source, in order to keep them out of mischief. McNaghten was informed of the impossibility of going on at this rate of spending money. He attempted retrenchment, but the only possible way to enforce it was to cut down the allowances of the chiefs. The very day he attempted this, the chiefs formed a conspiracy for the extermination of the British, and thus McNaghten

himself was the means of bringing about the concentration of those insurrectionary forces, which hitherto had struggled against the invaders singly, and without unity or concert; though it is certain, too, that by this time the hatred of British dominion among the Afghans had reached the highest point.

Insurrection

Nov. 2, 1841, the insurrection broke out. The house of Alexander Burnes, in the city, was attacked and he himself murdered. The British general did nothing, and the insurrection grew strong by impunity. Elphinstone, utterly helpless, at the mercy of all sorts of contradictory advice, very soon got every thing into that confusion which Napoleon [Bonaparte] described by the three words, *ordre, contre-ordre, disordre*. The Bala Hissar was, even now, not occupied. A few companies were sent against the thousands of insurgents, and of course were beaten. This still more emboldened the Afghans. Nov. 3, the forts close to the camp were occupied. On the 9th, the commissariat fort (garrisoned by only 80 men) was taken by the Afghans, and the British were thus reduced to starvation. On the 5th, Elphinstone already talked of buying a free passage out of the country.

Demoralised

In fact, by the middle of November, his irresolution and incapacity had so demoralised the troops that neither Europeans nor Sepoys were any longer fit to meet the Afghans in the open field. Then the negotiations began. During these, McNaghten was murdered in a conference with Afghan chiefs. Snow began to cover the ground, provisions were scarce. At last, Jan. 1, a capitulation was concluded. All the money, £190,000, was to be handed over to the Afghans, and bills signed for £140,000

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Afghanistan by Frederick Engels - continued

more. All the artillery and ammunition, except 6 six-pounders and 3 mountain guns, were to remain. All Afghanistan was to be evacuated. The chiefs, on the other hand, promised a safe conduct, provisions, and baggage cattle.

Hopeless Confusion

Jan. 5, the British marched out, 4,500 combatants and 12,000 camp-followers. One march sufficed to dissolve the last remnant of order, and to mix up soldiers and camp-followers in one hopeless confusion, rendering all resistance impossible. The cold and snow and the want of provisions acted as in Napoleon's retreat from Moscow [in 1812].

But instead of Cossacks keeping a respectful distance, the British were harassed by infuriated Afghan marksmen, armed with long-range matchlocks, occupying every height. The chiefs who signed the capitulation neither could nor would restrain the mountain tribes. The Koord-Kabul Pass became the grave of nearly all the army, and the small remnant, less than 200 Europeans, fell at the entrance of the Jugduluk Pass. Only one man, Dr. Brydon, reached Jelalabad to tell the tale.

First published: in *The New American Cyclopaedia*, Vol. I, 1858

Chris Birch (1928-2021)

Chris Birch, who died on 1 September, was a long-standing and valued member of the SHS. Born in 1928 on St Kitts, he moved to Britain in 1946, where he joined the CPGB. In the mid-1950s he was in Eastern Europe, and was caught up in the 1956 events in Hungary before returning to Britain to pursue a career in journalism working on various publications including the *Morning Star* and the CPGB weekly *7 Days*. Deeply affected by the early death of former YCL General Secretary Mark Ashton from AIDS in 1987, Chris became closely involved with various HIV-related charities and institutions, including London Lighthouse and the Terence Higgins Trust. In his retirement he worked as a volunteer at Westminster Abbey and researched his family history, one branch of which was part of the British colonial administration in the Caribbean from a very early stage. He wrote an autobiography and two volumes of family history. Mild-mannered and affable, Chris was well liked by all who knew him. He is survived by his wife Betty, also a long-standing SHS member, and his children, to all of whom we send our condolences.

New President of the Socialist History Society and Two new Vice Presidents

We are delighted to announce the new president of the Socialist History Society and our two new vice presidents

WILLIE THOMPSON - President of the SHS

Willie Thompson was previously our vice president and is a former secretary of the society. He was editor of our journal, *Socialist History*. As a founder member of the SHS, Willie was also involved with our predecessor, the Communist Party Historians' Group and edited *Our History* journal.

LINDA CLARKE - Vice President

Linda is currently Professor of European Industrial Relations in the Westminster Business School (WBS) and is responsible for a distinct programme of research in the Centre for the Study of the Production of the Built Environment (ProBE), a joint research centre of WBS and the School of Architecture and Cities.

DAVID PARKER - Vice President

David is Emeritus Professor at the School of History (Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Cultures), University of Leeds. David Parker's most recent book is *Letters of Solidarity and Friendship. Czechoslovakia 1968-71* (2017). David is a longstanding member of the SHS and was enrolled in the History Group by his father when he was a student in 1963.

Socialism in the English-Speaking Caribbean Call for Papers

Organised workers' movements first appeared as a significant social force in the British Caribbean Region Colonies before the Second World War. Anticolonial movements began to gather momentum in the region around the same time. Socialists and socialist ideas played a significant part in both movements, particularly as they developed and began to see political success in the post-war era. For the most part, these Caribbean socialisms developed organically within their societies, and both their organisational forms and their political ideas often defied the neat categorisations familiar from European socialism: revolutionary or reformist, communist or social-democratic and so on.

To explore the commonalities and differences among the socialisms of the English-speaking Caribbean, their origins, development and achievements, *Socialist History*, in collaboration with *The Institute of Commonwealth Studies* and the *Society for Caribbean Studies* will be holding a series of online research seminars with a view to publishing selected papers from the seminars in the journal.

We are inviting researchers on the history of Caribbean socialist, labour and anticolonial movements to submit proposals for papers on any aspects of this history. Topics of interest may include, but are not limited to:

- The early influence and impact of socialist ideas in the region in the nineteenth century
- The relationship of early Caribbean socialists with socialists in Britain, the US and elsewhere
- The impact of the Russian Revolution and the Communist International
- Garveyism, anticolonialism and socialism
- The Labour Rebellions of the inter-war period
- Women and Caribbean socialism
- The Cold War and anti-communism
- The Caribbean New Left and Black Power movements
- The Grenada Revolution and its legacy
- Leaders and thinkers of Caribbean socialism
- Race, ethnicity and socialist movements
- Religion and socialist politics

We are seeking papers of 5,000 to 10,000 words to be presented at the seminars. Presentations themselves will be expected to last no more than 20 minutes.

Please submit proposals of no more than 500 words to the organisers Steve Cushion, Christian Høgsbjerg and Michael Mahadeo on info@socialisthistorysociety.co.uk by 15th November 2021. Accepted proposals will be presented at one or more online evening seminars in the early part of next year (dates to be agreed).

Authors of those papers selected for publication will be invited to revise them for a special issue of *Socialist History*.

Forthcoming Socialist History Society Meetings [held on-line using Zoom]

14th October, 6:30pm Anne Alexander on
The Workers' Movement and Revolution in Egypt since 1919
and

11th November, 6:30pm G.D.H. Cole: *A Libertarian Trapped in the Labour Party*
Talk by David Goodway, who is the author of a recent book on G D H Cole, *Towards a Libertarian Socialism*.

Bursary in memory of Stan Newens

Labour Heritage committee have decided to honour the memory of Stan Newens by establishing a bursary for a student at Birkbeck College. Stan was the former president of the SHS and chair of Labour Heritage, among his many roles and activities.

The student who will benefit will be from a forced migrant background, who would not have access to public funding to support their studies. Birkbeck is proud to be a place of sanctuary for students. The college was awarded the 'University of Sanctuary Status' in recognition of its work with forced migrant communities.

The aim is to raise £3,000 to provide a bursary for one student, enabling them to afford the costs of study and empowering them to thrive on their course. £1,500 has already been raised, we are informed.

The SHS is pleased to inform our members of this appeal which is a fitting means of honouring Stan Newens, who was a staunch internationalist and lifelong educationalist.

Cheques can be made payable to 'Labour Heritage' – please write 'Bursary appeal' on the back of cheque – and post to Labour Heritage at 11 Aylmer Road, London W12 9LG.

or payments can be made by bank transfer to: Labour Heritage:

Unity Trust Bank – sort code: 608301. Account Number: 20149763 Reference : 'Bursary'

Please send by 30th September and as they will be submitted to Birkbeck College at the beginning of October 2021.



A Round Up of Recent SHS Events

By David Morgan

Despite the lockdown imposed on us by the pandemic, the SHS has proved to be extremely active over recent months and it needs to be put on record that we have hosted a diverse programme of online talks. This online format has been successful in attracting the participation of both speakers and audience who ordinarily would not be able to attend the in-person meetings.

Members have been privileged to hear from some leading scholars in their field who have delivered talks on topics of interest to socialist historians and enthusiasts.

These topics have been as varied as the working-class appreciation of classical history, Sylvia Pankhurst's connections with the labour movement of the United States, British conscientious objectors during the 1914-18 war, the role of committed writers in the 20th century and the Communist Party's approach to popular culture and literature.

Our recent speakers have comprised Edith Hall and Henry Stead speaking on their joint book, *A People's History of Classics*, which stimulated a good discussion on the place of the classics in workers' education and political activism. The book is highly stimulating.

Meanwhile, David Margolies spoke of the work of *Red Letters*, a literary and cultural journal that ran from 1976 and 1991. The journal was originally titled the "Communist Party literary journal" but later broadened out its scope to embrace media, cinema and popular forms of culture.

Red Letters was produced by an editorial collective of which David was a leading member and attracted several prominent academic and media commentators, including Arnold Kettle, A L Morton and Edgell Rickword in its early issues. The journal commented on contemporary debates about culture, such as the popularity of romantic fiction of the Mills & Boon variety.

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In a talk titled *Hot Spots and Heartlands*, Cyril Pearce led a discussion based on his painstaking research into the strength of the anti-war movement in different parts of the country during the First World War. Pearce described how he was piecing together a database of conscientious objectors to aid future researchers into this important topic. He issued an appeal for volunteers to undertake research in their local areas. The SHS certainly encourages such work.

On 15 April 2021, the SHS was pleased to host Katherine Connelly who has spoken to the society on a previous occasion several years ago. Her recent talk was based on her book, *A Suffragette in America: Reflections on Prisoners, Pickets and Political Change*, which is a collection of Pankhurst's writings concerning her visit to the US in 1911.

Finally, the society hosted an online launch for its Occasional Publication, *Writers of the Left in an Age of Extremes*, which saw the joint authors deliver presentations on the three writers who are covered in this title, Edgell Rickword, Anna Seghers and Carlo Levi. That publication was produced in the hope that more people would become acquainted with the work of these writers.

All the talks mentioned were recorded and are available to watch via the YouTube platform. The events were chaired by Duncan Bowie and Greta Sykes with assistance from Steve Cushion. We thank everyone who helped organise these events and who agreed to take part.

Any ideas for future talks will be welcome and can be sent to myself as SHS Secretary via email: morganshs@hotmail.com

Bridget Hill a Neglected Socialist and Feminist Historian

David Morgan looks at the work of the historian Bridget Hill, whose main work on spinsters was published exactly twenty years ago.

Bridget Hill was a member of the Communist Party Historians Group and produced some important work on the history of women. As a feminist historian, she specialised in the neglected histories of servants and spinsters about which she produced ground-breaking books. It is ironic that her own work is itself now somewhat neglected and her books are not easy to obtain.

Hill's second husband was Christopher Hill, whom she met when they were both members of the Communist Party. Her first husband, Stephen Mason, a historian of science, was also a member of the Communist Party Historians Group, which goes to show how the group and the wider party provided a vital social network of professional and personal relationships.

Bridget and Christopher married in 1956 only a year before they left the Communist Party. The Hills enjoyed a close and productive partnership, as Christopher Hill was to acknowledge by citing his wife's contribu-

tion to several of his books. They also co-authored an essay, *Catherine Macaulay and the Seventeenth Century*, which appeared in the *Welsh History Review* in 1967. Bridget Hill later wrote a full length study of Macaulay titled *The Republican Virago*, which was published in 1992.

Late Flowering

Most of Bridget Hill's work appeared long after she had given up active politics, although her commitment to social history remained undiminished. Her published works marked a late flowering in her career which professionally was spent as a tutor in history at the Open University.

Born in 1922, Hill's major books saw print when she was well into her retirement. The main volumes are *Women, Work and Sexual Politics in Eighteenth-Century England* (1989); *Servants: English Domesticity in the Eighteenth Century* (1996), and *Women Alone: Spinners in England, 1660-1850* (2001); the latter was published within a year of her death.

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Bridget Hill - continued

In *Women Alone*, Bridget Hill addresses the challenges facing a historian of spinsters given the lack of source material about the lives of women generally, and which, she says, is compounded by the fact “all too often in the records no distinction is made between married and unmarried women”.

Spinster

Spinsters were a social minority often difficult to identify largely because of the stigma that was attached to the unmarried status, she argues, while “old maid” was a commonly heard expression that was only ever used pejoratively. As Hill states, “The very shame and scorn with which spinsters were regarded in the past often makes them virtually invisible”.

In the book, Hill explains how women were often compelled to marry men for whom they had no real affection simply to avoid the precarious existence of spinsterhood and because of the fact that very few opportunities for employment were open to them.

The book contains fascinating chapters on the experiences of single women across the social classes covering women in agriculture, in various industries, women as teachers and governesses, women running their own businesses, as domestic servants, and, finally, those women who were forced into lives of crime and prostitution simply to make ends meet.

Hill is preoccupied throughout with the social controls imposed on single women and the degrees of surveillance they suffered

over the centuries from the authorities, the law and within the domestic sphere.

One aspect of Hill’s approach that is worth mentioning is her creative use of literary sources. Given the scant and sporadic evidence, Hill relies greatly on examples from literary fiction, novels, diaries and plays, to embellish her account of the position of spinsters over the two centuries when huge social and economic transformations were occurring.

Organised Women’s Movement

The eighteenth century novelist, Samuel Richardson’s tragic heroine, Clarissa, is cited by Hill as a prime example of the lack of freedom endured by young women confronted with the tremendous pressures to contract a marriage that would be favourable to their families. In Richardson’s novel, Clarissa is torn between duty to her family and being true to herself. Clarissa’s struggle ends only in her death, but Hill’s history concludes on a positive note with the beginnings on an organised women’s movement in the mid-nineteenth century.

Bridget Hill relies heavily on women authors, many of whom themselves were spinsters, for their observations on the plight of the single woman. The writers she cites read like a roll call of the history of English literature: Aphra Behn, Fanny Burney, Maria Edgeworth, Sarah Fielding, Jane Austen and Elizabeth Gaskell, are just a few of the more prominent names who feature in Hill’s book. Bridget Hill’s work deserves to be more widely known and read.

Frating Hall Farm, an Alternative Community in 20th Century Colchester

By Ken Worpole

No matter how many skies have fallen: back to the land in wartime Britain

is published by Little Toller Books, £14.

In April 2019 I gave a talk at the Essex Book Festival in Colchester on alternative communities in 20th century Essex, focusing on back to the land projects inspired by Tolstoyan, socialist or Christian ideals. After the talk two women came up to me and asked me what I knew of Frating Hall Farm? Other than it had been a breakaway from John Middleton Murry’s socialist communitarian project, The Adelphi Centre, at Langham (1934 – 1942), I knew very little. Shortly after my wife and were invited to visit the farm, and were shown the most amazing collection of archive photographs, newsletters, and many

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other documents relating to what had been a successful Christian socialist and pacifist community of more than fifty members between 1943 and 1954. Unfortunately, under-capitalisation forced the farm to relinquish its co-operative structure towards the end, and it was bought out by a Quaker member, whose family lives and farms there this day, still proud of what had been a remarkable episode in the life of the farm.

The breakaway was led by a charismatic former steel-worker, Joe Watson, who had fallen under the spell of D H Lawrence and John Middleton Murry in the 1920s: 'I first heard of Middleton Murry in 1923. A gang of us were erecting a headgear and screening plant for a new pit, working long hours, seven days a week, and during the meal times politics, religion and books were discussed, and the name of Murry and his new *Adelphi* magazine was introduced. A number of working men were gathered around Murry by this time. I was a blast-furnaceman, and cotton workers, plasterers, railwaymen and others were there.'

Like other working-class *Adelphi* readers in his circle, Watson was not only a socialist but a devout Christian. A self-educated man who had left school at the age of twelve, he ran a weekly book group at the steelworks in Consett where the workers read and discussed Keats and Shakespeare, Lawrence and Marx: 'Our books, like our religion, had to stand up to the fire of the furnaces and the darkness of the pits.'

When in 1941 Murry asked Watson to leave the North-East and come and help him rescue the ailing *Adelphi* Centre, Watson rushed down to Essex. It was too late however, and so Watson set off to Frating to try again.

As a result of our initial visit to Frating, I was able to trace a number of those who had grown up on the farm, and subsequently recorded their memories in person or by telephone, and together with their own personal collections of photos, letters, diaries generously shared with me, have attempted to tell the full story in *No Matter How Many Skies Have Fallen: back to the land in wartime Britain*, published in June 2021.

I am not a trained historian, though I have been involved in several community history projects. This time, however, I had to deal with a substantial number of original documents, which I am trying to digest, and in some cases find a home for. In the course of contacting people and meeting up with some under Covid restrictions, I have been lent 65 original letters from John Middleton Murry to Joe Watson, Watson's unpublished autobiography in 200 closely typed pages, letters between him and Sid Chaplin (who, along with Jack Common, was a fellow Geordie and lifelong friend of Watson), Watson's essays, many photographs, farm newsletters and miscellaneous hand-written letters about pacifism, daily life on the farm and much else. These I am now trying to catalogue.

It made me aware of just how much personal history is still out there in attics, suitcases, and large, split brown foolscap envelopes. And even though the book is now published, I am still receiving further documentation and fascinating leads to original material from the heady days of 'the great experiment'.

Ken Worpole is a writer and social historian, whose work includes many books on architecture, landscape and public policy. He is married to photographer Lorraine Worpole with whom he has collaborated on book projects internationally, as well as in Hackney, London, where they have lived and worked since 1969.

www.worpole.net



Anti-Nazi Resistance

Merilyn Moos has written three sequels to her previous "Anti-Nazi Germans". All three are available as free PDF downloads.

Anti-Nazi Exiles: German Socialists in Britain and their Shifting Alliances 1933-1945

The refugees included here almost all fled Germany as political activists, most from a working class background. They risked their lives again and again in Germany, often escaped arrest and probable death without knowing where they would end up. Hans Jahn, who had become President of the Railway Union, remarkably continued to try to organise the anti-Nazi resistance amongst railway workers, even when exiled in the UK. Some of the exiles risked their lives all over again, working with the Allies, and in particular with SOE (including Jahn). A small group of German refugees, almost all of whom had fought in Spain, fled to France and then were sent by the French Government to camps in Algeria, then also 'volunteered' to fight with the British. The final section (which is not yet up) will look at the hundreds of Germans who were conscripted into the 999 'Death battalions', a sub-section of the Wehrmacht, made up largely of resisters, who either deserted to the partisans in Greece or clandestinely supported them. The SOE were working alongside the partisans to defeat the German troops. But many of this brave group of conscripts then stayed with the partisans when they took on the British armed forces. Some German anti-Nazis only worked with the Allies to defeat Nazism.

Of those who lived, many returned to Germany, both East and West, though a few settled in the UK. Their extraordinary lives deserve more attention than they have received.

Hans Jahn: Biography of an Anti-Nazi Trade Unionist

One of the most remarkable and almost unknown figures in the German resistance was the secretary of the railway union, Hans Jahn, who became a key figure in organising the anti-Nazi underground struggle amongst railway workers and can teach us a thing or two about how to organise an underground. A study of his life also demonstrates that at least a small number of left trade-union bureaucrats, faced with the Nazis' attempt to break working class organisations, organised at a rank and file level. Much later, he was to say that "one of the greatest tragedies is that German unions did not fight to prevent Hitler taking power in 1933"

German Anti-Nazis and the British Empire: The Special Operations Executive, Deserters from the German Army and Partisan Movements in Occupied Europe

Active anti-Nazi Germans from within the working class movement who chose an often uneasy alliance with the British military in an attempt to stop Nazism. Rather than being a 'fifth column' or the 'enemy within' as they were frequently presented, many of these anti-Nazi Germans were more ferociously anti-Nazi than many at the time in the UK. With the wisdom of hindsight, it might appear evident that defeating Nazi Germany was such a priority that allying with the British state was an obvious decision but, in the years immediately before the outbreak of war, many on the left saw the impending war as an imperialist war, indeed an extension of World War 1, as much as a war against Nazi Germany.

Some of the German refugees who fought with or alongside the British armed forces were far from unambiguously pro-British. The tensions within British policy between being anti-fascist and pro-imperialist, are sharply exposed during the Greek civil war when the German deserters who were fighting with the partisans alongside the British, then fought with the partisans against the British.

The trilogy will be launched at a meeting of the London Socialist Historians Group on 29 November 2021

All are available from: <http://anti-nazi-resistance.net/>

Book review

Hero or Bandit?

Duncan Bowie reviews *Nestor Makhno and Rural Anarchism in Ukraine, 1917-1921* by Colin Darch, Pluto, £19.99

Why yet another book on Makhno? Darch is a South African librarian and writer who has previously written on Mozambique, Tanzania and freedom of Information. I was puzzled as to what he could add to the contemporary books of Makhnovistas Arshinov and Voline and the three later comprehensive studies by Michael Palij (1976) and Michael Malet (1982) and Alexandre Skirda (French edition 1982, English edition 2004) as well as the numerous studies in Russian and Ukrainian. The justification for the new book, though not explicitly stated by the author is that previous studies were partisan, mostly written by anarchists and sympathisers, or in the case of Russian Soviet era writings, overly critical in presenting Makhno as a bandit and thug. Makhno in his long exile, mainly in France, sought to perpetuate his own myth. And given the Makhnovist insurgency was one of the few historical examples of organised mass peasant anarchism, it is perhaps not surprising that contemporary anarchists have looked to Makhno's achievements for inspiration and also to support their criticisms of Soviet communism.

Southern Ukraine

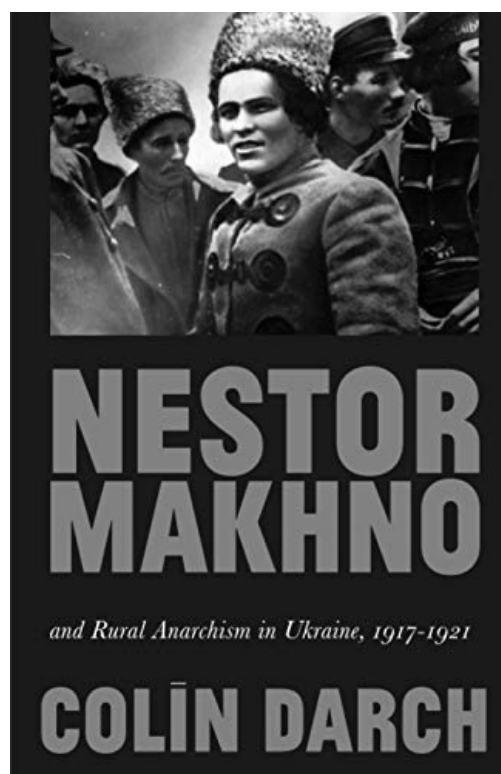
Darch presents the narrative of Makhno's insurgency in the short period of 1917-1922, where in the Southern Ukraine a range of different groups competed for land and power in one of the most complex arenas of the Russian civil war. He presents the brief backstory of rural discontent and of Makhno's involvement in a local anarchist group. There is very little in the book about Makhno's political ideas, which appear as opposition to any form of government by external bodies – that is external to the Ukrainian peasantry and even less about how the 'free peasant soviet communes' were operated in practice and different from the communes managed by other soviet bodies, including those of the communists.

There was little voluntary about Makhno's approach to military conscription - in one of his rare interventions in the politics of the urban proletariat, he insisted that trade union membership was compulsory.

Tactical Alliances

Makhno was clearly opposed to political parties who imposed policy decisions, yet at different times he collaborated with Left Social Revolutionaries, Bolsheviks and various groups of Ukrainian nationalists or other local atamans such as the anti-Semitic Cossack Nikifor Grigoriev (who he or his associates murdered). The only soviets he supported were the ones he controlled. The central narrative of the book provides a detailed chronology of Makhno's battles and temporary alliances – including four temporary alliances with Bolshevik armies in the battle against the White armies led by Denekin. Makhno's alliances were clearly tactical rather than principled, despite a curious negotiating style of killing the envoys of potential allies – a tactic which tended to be reciprocated.

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Hero or Bandit? *Continued*

Cruel, Thuggish and a Drunkard

Despite Darch's attempt to demonstrate that because of his political principles, that Makhno was not just an ordinary bandit leader, the limited information provided about his behaviour makes it clear he was cruel, thuggish and a drunkard. Admired by followers when he was winning battles, most of whose followers deserted him when he was losing, and his flight across the Romanian border with a tiny residual group, he comes across as a more pathetic figure than presented by previous biographers. He attempts suicide, is arrested for drunkenness. And in his final years in Paris, writing his memoirs, he is abandoned by his wife.

Imprisoned on a number of occasions, he escapes extradition to Soviet Russia and is never convicted of his crimes, being

seen as a political refugee. How anyone can draw positive messages from the life of Makhno puzzles me. Makhno and his followers were just one element of a chaotic and violent civil war, and their behaviour was probably no better or no worse than many rival groups.

Darch's book is however an impressive study, based not just on a knowledge of the extensive secondary literature but on a comprehensive use of the primary sources, including those in Russian, some of which were not used by previous biographers. For this he is to be congratulated.

I was however disappointed that his study lacks a conclusion – but that is perhaps due to wishing to avoid both partisanship and contributing to the continuing polemics between contemporary anarchists and communists of various tendencies, who sometimes are so fixated in arguing over interpretations of the historical past that they lose sight of contemporary challenges.

Book review

A poor study of a half-forgotten politician

Duncan Bowie reviews *Peter Shore* by Kevin Hickson, Jasper Miles and Harry Taylor, Biteback, £25.

This is the first biography of Peter Shore, an important but neglected Labour politician, who was a Minister in the Wilson and Callaghan governments. In opposition, he was shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer and Shadow Foreign Secretary. He stood twice for the Labour Party leadership, though few people would remember that. This biography is however very disappointing, despite the positive endorsements from Bryan Gould (who writes a preface), Kate Hoey, Austin Mitchell, Bill Cash, Larry Elliott, George Galloway and Rod Liddle. This bizarre group gives an indication of the focus of the book, and why it is so poor.

The book's main author, Hickson, is an academic at Liverpool University, whose numerous books include edited volumes

on Wilson and John Major. For this volume – his first biography, he has been aided by two students. In an introduction, Hickson explains that his interest in Shore arises from his own involvement in the Labour Leave campaign in 2016. Peter Shore was active in the campaign to leave the EU in the 1975 Referendum. The book's subtitle is 'Labour's Forgotten Patriot'. The conclusion on Shore's legacy refers to the so called 'patriotic' case for rejecting the EU as well as endorsing the attempt of Maurice Glasman's 'Blue Labour' to revive a notion of English patriotism. Hickson's website reveals that he is no longer a member of the Labour Party but has joined the Social Democratic Party, a tiny fraction that did not merge with the Liberal Party – Hickson is apparently now national chairman of the SDP, which according to its website claims to be a

A poor study of a half-forgotten politician *continued*

‘communitarian, ‘red and blue’ centre/centre-left political party’ and one that ‘strongly advocates the ‘Social Market’ economic model and holds a pro-nation-state, eurosceptic outlook.’

As a biography, the study tells us little about Shore’s political beliefs and nothing about his personal life. For those who remember Shore, it is fair to acknowledge that he was not the most charismatic politician. But that in itself should not make the book tedious. Educated at Quarry Bank High School with John Lennon and Bill Rogers, before going to Cambridge to read history (and join the Apostles secret society) Shore started his political career as head of research at Labour Party headquarters and drafted the 1951 and 1955 election manifestos.

Wilson’s lapdog

His first attempt to get into Parliament in 1950 for St Ives was perhaps not surprisingly unsuccessful. In 1964 he was selected for the safer seat of Stepney, mainly thanks to his fellow technocratic moderniser, Anthony Wedgwood Benn. In Parliament, he was closely associated with the new Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, to the extent that he was sometimes referred to as ‘Wilson’s lapdog’. When George Brown’s National Plan collapsed, Shore took over the Department of Economic Affairs, and when the department was abolished, Shore was made a Minister without portfolio. In opposition, Shore held shadow posts for Europe (when Labour was opposed to the EU) and then for trade.

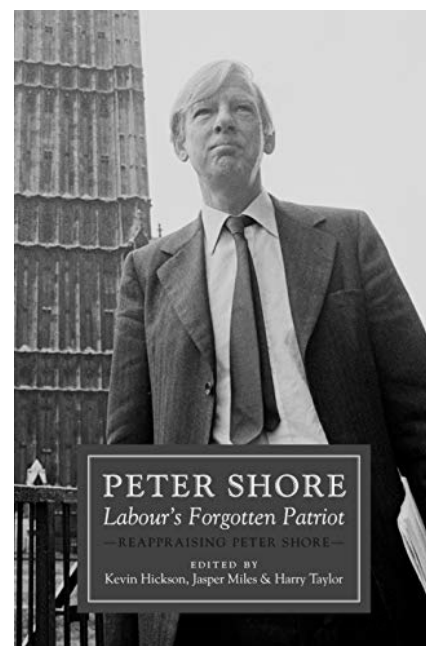
In the 1974 government, Shore had environment, his most useful output perhaps being the 1977 Inner Cities White Paper. Back in opposition from 1979, Shore gradually moved down the hierarchy from treasury (where he opposed the Alternative Economic Strategy), foreign affairs (where he supported Thatcher on the Falklands War), to employment and then Shadow Leader of the House.

In 1980 with Kinnock’s resignation after the 1979 election defeat, Shore thought he would be the left candidate to defeat Denis Healey, but Michael Foot’s candidacy sidelined him.

On Foot’s resignation in 1982, Shore stood again but with a new electoral college voting system, he obtained only a miserable 3% of the vote, with not a single constituency party supporting him – not even his own, and he was perhaps fortunate that Kinnock kept him in the shadow cabinet. He failed to get elected to the shadow cabinet in 1987, but hung onto his parliamentary seat until 1997, despite challenges from the left in his constituency (there is a whole chapter on this –Hickson clearly has an obsession with *Militant*) – by then Shore was seen as on the right, having become co-chair of the right wing faction, Solidarity. Shore was then given a peerage, and focused his attention on criticising the EU, including in his book *Separate Ways*, published in 2000. Shore died in 2001.

Largely forgotten

It is perhaps not surprising that Shore is largely forgotten, and is the last of his generation of Labour leaders to receive a biography. Shore clearly thought he deserved greater prominence. His only other substantive published work *Leading the Left* is a study of Labour leaders since Ramsay MacDonald, and he has little positive to say about any of them. His book is however far more readable than this biography, which I have to say is probably the duller I have ever read. I’m not sure whether Shore deserves another biography, but hopefully it will be better than this one.



Love and Labour / Romance and Revolution

A review by Steve Cushion of the first two volumes of *The Red Button Years* by Ken Fuller

Red-Button Years, by Ken Fuller, is a trilogy about building trade unionism on the London buses in the first years of the 20th century. So many novels of this period are stuck in a kind of Downton Abbey upper class world, where the only workers are depicted as obsequious servants, or else as poor suffering victims appealing to the better nature of employers to improve their lot.

A book that treats workers as living human beings trying to master their own destiny makes a pleasant change. It is not only a novel about class, but about the class struggle, but not in a cardboard cut-out, stereotyped manner as the world Fuller creates is completely believable and peopled with human beings who have failings as well as virtues. The scene where John Maynard Keynes gets a walk-on part as a moaning, arrogant passenger is particularly entertaining. The lively nature of strikes and union meetings is well portrayed.

I think he has the political debates well documented. The author obviously has his own political views on these debates but does not use his characters to force them down our throats. However, I thought he was a little harsh in his representation of Sylvia Pankhurst, although I am aware that she had a reputation for being "difficult".

First World War

Romance and Revolution, which follows on where *Labour and Love* left off, is an interesting study of the way socialist trade unionists operated in the difficult situation of the First World War, faced with the repression of the imperialist state, the violent hostility of the nationalist right-wing, including some trade unionists like the vile Havelock Wilson and the shilly-shallying of the moderate wing of the trade union bureaucracy.

My favourite section is the 1918 strike for equal pay for women conductors, which starts as an unofficial walkout by the women who appeal to their male

colleagues for support and get it. Maybe the first strike for equal pay for women in England. Of course, this is not the sort of history we were taught in school, so I looked around and, there it was, true. Of course, the fictional description of the exchanges on the picket lines are just that, fictional, but the events themselves are well established, as are all the major events in the book, for they are based on the solid research that Ken Fuller himself did when writing the history of the London Bus workers' trade union movement, which he published in 1985 as *Radical Aristocrats: London Busworkers from the 1880's to the 1980's*.

Influenza epidemic

Two other topics in the book also have a contemporary relevance. The handling of the 1918-19 Influenza epidemic was if anything worse than the current government's institutional manslaughter over Covid-19. Also of contemporary interest is the discussion as to whether the new Communist Party should try to affiliate to the Labour Party or not. The author obviously supports the majority line of attempting to affiliate, as he gives the most convincing speech on the topic to his most likable character. Nevertheless, he puts both side of the argument fairly, almost hiding his dislike of Sylvia Pankhurst.

Novels of working class life, when they are not painting us as stupid lumpens, either concentrate on misery and poverty or the success of the one or two who manage to promote themselves through individual, often selfish, effort. It is rare indeed to have a novel which celebrates collective action and solidarity, while also being believable. Anyone who has ever worked in a bus garage will recognise many of Ken Fuller's characters.

The book brought to mind the 1935 novel *The Stars Look Down* by A. J. Cronin, high praise from my point of view.

