

## When Dissenting Becomes an Act of Treason

The Treason Act has been on the statute book since 1351, thirty years before the great peasants' revolt. While the Act remains in force today, Britain has not seen fit to use it since the Second World War.

In recent years during times of social conflict and international tensions, there have been calls from politicians for the Act to be updated or "brought into the 21st century" as the move is usually spun.

### **Aiding the Enemy**

The issue was raised in 2018 by backbench MPs from both Labour and Conservative parties when it was touted as a solution to the threat posed by Islamist terrorism following a spate of violent attacks on British soil. Conservative MP Tom Tugendhat and Labour MP Khalid Mahmood joined a debate titled, *Aiding the Enemy*, organised by the think tank Policy Exchange in July 2018. They demanded the law be updated to recognise "acts of betrayal", such as fighting for ISIS, as distinctive crimes.

In the wake of the current conflict in Ukraine, the clamour for more repressive state legislation has returned with renewed vigour, including raising once again the need to update the 1351 Act. The threat of more severe punishment against those dissenting from the shared narrative poses a real danger to basic liberties that we have long taken for granted.

### **Stop the War**

The Labour leadership has used administrative threats of withdrawing the whip and deselection against a group of its MPs who signed a peace statement against the war in Ukraine. The statement, from the Stop the War Coalition, expressed criticism of NATO's eastwards expansion. The MPs were forced to withdraw their signatures.

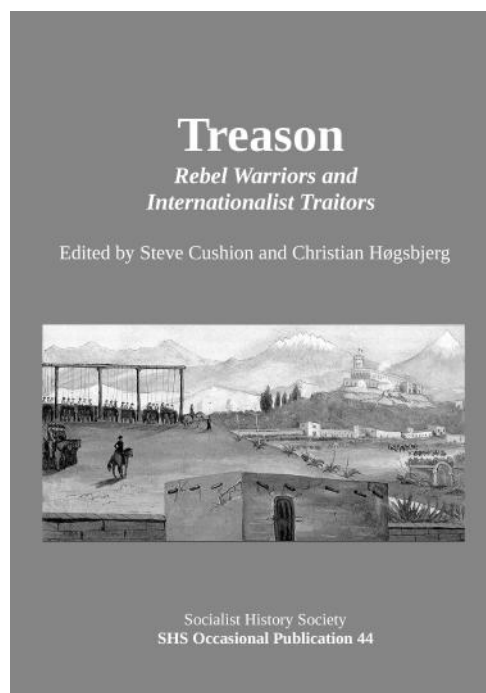
In the heated political climate of 2022, peace activists have even been branded "fifth columnists" by journalists. The threat to our civil rights is now a very tangible one and we need knowledge of history to give us a perspective that will enable us to grasp just how far the politics of the present is shifting rightwards.

### **Democracy**

The threat of severe penalties for the exercise of matters of conscience such as peace activism and expressing criticism of government policy is part of a new intolerance that is the real threat to democracy in this country and across the so-called "free world".

Although those convicted of "high treason" no longer face execution, they can still be sentenced to life imprisonment. One wonders exactly what a new updated Treason Act might have in mind for us.

*David Morgan*



*If anyone missed our Occasional Publication on the subject of Treason, it is still available from [info@socialisthistory.co.uk](mailto:info@socialisthistory.co.uk) price £5 inc p&p*

Book Review

## **Two Hundred Years of Dulwich Radicalism** by *Duncan Bowie*

Who would have thought that Dulwich had such a radical history?

From Brass Crosby, the Radical Lord Mayor of London and friend of the reformer John Wilkes, who lived in the borough between 1756 and 1772, right through to the Labour MP Tessa Jowell, who died in 2018, Dulwich was home to an extraordinary array of radicals.

### **Biographies**

These 60 biographies, written by Duncan Bowie, Co-Chair of the SHS, cover a wide range of political and social activists: Members of Parliament, Republicans, Suffragettes and Pacifists; Communists and Birth Control Campaigners. Some are famous like Jack Jones of the Transport and General Workers Union and later founder of the National Pensioners' Convention, some less well known but equally important to the socialist movement like Evelyn Jones, antifascist activist and peace campaigner.

From the Caribbean we find Sam King who, having served in the Second World War, left Jamaica for England on the Empire Windrush and eventually became Mayor of Southwark and Wilfred Wood, the antiracist campaigner who became Bishop of Croydon.

Everyone will have favourites from the wide range of characters that Duncan describes. My two personal favourites are both women with a French connection.

### **Louise Michel**

The French revolutionary Louise Michel, anarchist and veteran of the Paris Commune of 1871, lived in East Dulwich between 1893 and 1898. Arrested in May 1871, following the suppression of the Paris Commune, she was deported to New Caledonia where she taught the indigenous Kanaks and

in 1878 sided with them in their revolt against the French colonial administration. Returning to France in 1880 following an amnesty, she threw herself into revolutionary activity, was imprisoned for leading women rioters to loot bakeries and fled to England in 1890 to escape another prison sentence. The book concentrates on her time in England and tells this largely unknown period in her extraordinary life.

### **French Resistance**

I first came across Frida Knight as the author of the first sensible book on the French Resistance. I was not aware that it was part of

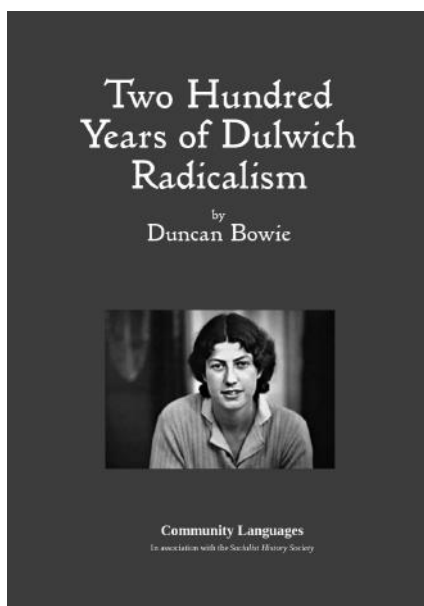
her lived experience. She had been helping the Republican forces in the Spanish Civil War, and worked with Spanish refugees in Paris, where she was overtaken by the German army occupation. Imprisoned by the authorities, she managed to break out of gaol and the French communist resistance smuggled her out of Marseille to London with a message for De Gaulle. She spent the rest of the war working for the Free French in London. Reading

between the lines, she was much more than a simple courier. The trouble the resistance took to get her out in almost impossible circumstances leads one to believe that she was an important go-between, linking the Gaullists in London with the communist underground in occupied France. After the war, she was an active peace campaigner and joint secretary of the Dulwich Communist Party.

This book can be read straight through or used as a biographical reference. While reading it, a thought occurred to me, taking the example of David Rosenberg's "Rebel Footprints", this book could form the basis for a Radical Walking Tour of Dulwich.

Obtainable from local bookshops in Dulwich or directly from the author – [duncanbowie@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:duncanbowie@yahoo.co.uk) – price £10.

*Steve Cushion*



## Death at the Frontier: Border Control, Migration and the Workers' Movement

by Luke Daniels, Nadine Finch and Steve Cushion

In 1895, a pamphlet entitled *A VOICE FROM THE ALIENS* written by mainly immigrant Jewish trade unionists was launched at a meeting in the East End of London at a meeting addressed by Ben Tillet, Eleanor Marx and Pyotr Kropotkin. It said:

*That all alien exploiters, swindlers, blacklegs, drunkards, idlers of all sorts who have money are welcomed here; but that skilful, industrious, honest working men, who have either been out of work for a long time, or have been locked out by their masters for taking part in strikes and boycotts, and therefore have no money, shall be prohibited from coming here.*

This pamphlet, examines the history of border control from the 1905 Aliens Act to the present Conservative government's Nationality and Borders Bill and highlights working class resistance to the inherent racism of such legislation. It argues that, from a working class point of view, we should not be calling for restrictions on migration, but rather fighting to place the maximum restrictions on capital.

The real villain is the British capitalist, not the Polish plumber.

## Sir Robert Geffrye and the Business of Slavery

by Steve Cushion

The debate over the statue of Sir Robert Geffrye (1613–1703) outside the Museum of the Home in Hackney has opened a window onto the slave trade and its role in the creation of modern Britain. As a successful London businessman and politician, Geffrye's life well illustrates the early development of capitalism in England and the relationship between the City of London and the origins of imperialism, particularly the importance of the whole business of slavery.

Diane Abbott MP, Hackney North and Stoke Newington says in the preface:

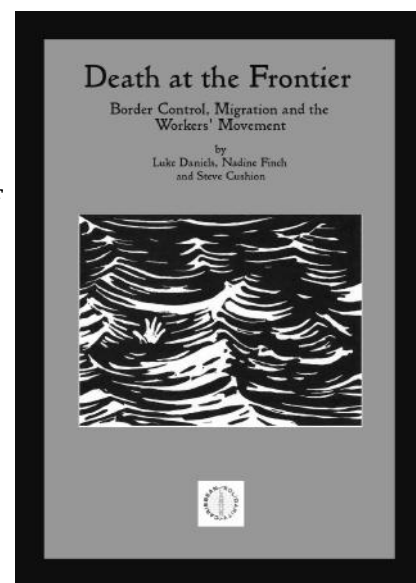
*The opponents of decolonising our public spaces are determined in fighting for the statue to remain. They advance the ridiculous argument that those who want the statue removed are trying to rewrite history. This is hollow. We used to execute people in public in this country. We do not celebrate that by maintaining the hangmen's gallows on public display.*

Kevin Courtney, joint general secretary National Education Union said:

*The National Education Union applauds this booklet which shows why the Geffrye statue should be removed from the museum.... The arguments put forward by government that we shouldn't erase parts of British history miss the point. We don't want to erase history, but we don't need reminders in public spaces of the horrors of the racism that underpinned slavery and colonialism. We want to teach a history which both acknowledges the truth about colonialism and slavery, and which recognises the histories of resistance, achievement and cultures of the global majority.*

First edition sponsored by Hackney Stand Up To Racism, Caribbean Labour Solidarity, Hackney Trades Council and the following Districts of the National Education Union: Hackney, Islington, Haringey.

Both available from [info@cls-uk.org.uk](mailto:info@cls-uk.org)



## Talks on Feminism, Stalin's Library and Definitions of Fascism

Our 2022 programme of events got off to an encouraging start when we hosted fascinating talks from Sheila Rowbotham, Geoff Roberts and Paul Mason, based on their latest books, writes David Morgan.

For the present, the SHS continues to hold talks exclusively online via the Zoom platform. Like everyone we were compelled to adjust to pandemic lockdown measures, which to a degree came a blessing in disguise as online events can attract more speakers and a wider audience who are freed from the inconvenience of travel.

Sheila Rowbotham, a pioneering feminist and socialist historian, spoke to us in January on her latest memoir, *Daring to Hope*, which continues her story into the seventies started in *Promise of a Dream*, which is her account of the sixties.

### Sheila Rowbotham

Both books are no ordinary autobiographies, but records of her experiences in social campaigns and political struggles. Sheila discussed her activism in the women's movement as it emerged at the end of the sixties and which led to the first Women's Liberation Conference in the UK held at Ruskin College in 1970. The excitement of the times, Sheila said, has been vividly conveyed in a film that was made of the Ruskin conference.

As well as writing several landmark books on women's history, such as *Women, Resistance and Revolution* (1972), Sheila was preoccupied with grassroots politics, helping to organise women workers into unions, including the badly paid and poorly represented night cleaners in London. During this decade, Sheila was also active in women's campaigns for nurseries, refuge centres for women victims of domestic violence and rape crisis centres. Such activism was part of a vision to develop alternative values that could lay the basis for a new communal way of living, much of which might seem highly impractical in retrospect.

During her informative talk, Sheila's integrity shone through as she discussed her main influences such as the "black power"

movement and Franz Fanon, as well as the British Marxist historians especially E P Thompson's writings on working-class education. Sheila pointed out that feminism had inspired the wider left to adopt new and more imaginative methods of political protest.

Sheila's talk attracted around 100 people and provoked a very lively discussion.

### Geoff Roberts

In February, we invited Professor Geoff Roberts to speak on the role of Stalin as an intellectual which was based on his research into Stalin's personal library of mostly books on political theory and historical works. The existence of Stalin's library, which amounted to around 25 thousand volumes, only really came to light internationally after the opening up of the USSR under Gorbachev.

Roberts paid tribute to the Communist Party Historians' Group, of which he had been a member, and which had published his first serious historical essay. Roberts has since produced several important studies of Soviet history, mostly concerning the Stalin period. His latest book, *Stalin's Library: A Dictator and His Books*, was the occasion for his talk.

Roberts explained how Stalin's book collection was of interest as a source of information for the historian of the Soviet Union because of the numerous entries and commentaries that Stalin had made in the books. Roberts established how Stalin had annotated the books he was reading when he was writing his own speeches and editing official volumes in preparation for publication in the USSR.

Unique glimpses of Stalin's view of the world and character can be grasped from a study of the markings in his books, Roberts argued. The talk also covered a history of the fate of the library itself, with Roberts describing how it was collected, catalogued and preserved.

The talk attracted about a hundred people and stimulated a lively debate.

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## Paul Mason

Our third talk of the year so far was delivered by journalist and commentator, Paul Mason, author of a new book, *How to Stop Fascism*. Mason's talk on 26 February was titled, A Materialist Approach to Fascism – Past and Present.

Mason's motivation was to issue an urgent warning about the threats posed by incipient fascism in contemporary politics which he associated with the rise of populism as seen in Modi's India and Bolsonaro's Brazil.

During the talk, Mason described his use of historical sources and research into classic theories of fascism. He focused largely on fascism as a social movement and the people who were attracted to the ideology, rather than how fascist parties exercised state power.

In seeking to construct a "materialist theory of fascism", it was perhaps slightly surprising that Mason did not refer to much of the notable contemporary historical historians of fascism such as Ian Kershaw and Richard Evans. His namesake, the late Tim Mason, was quickly dismissed. Mason also disagreed with Western Marxists such as Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Max Horkheimer and others. Bizarrely, Mason redefined the Frankfurt School's theory of the "authoritarian personality" as the "authoritarian rebel personality". One was left wondering why.

Instead, Mason cited the work of non-Marxists such as Roger Griffin, Robert Paxton, Ernst Nolte, Karl Mannheim and others, also referencing Nietzsche and Spengler.

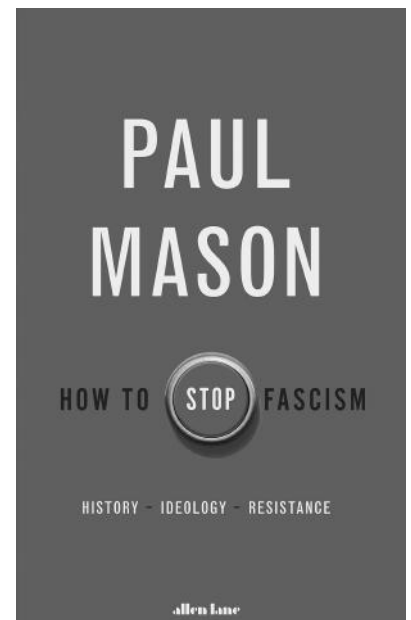
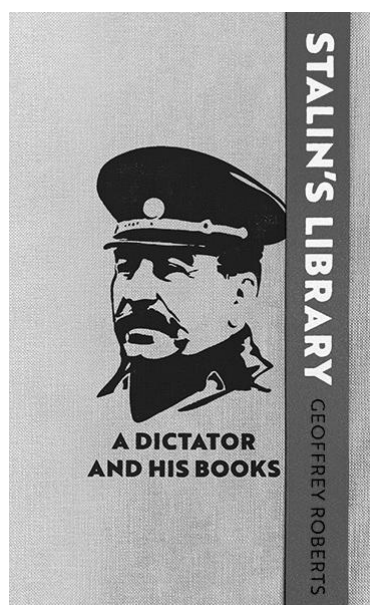
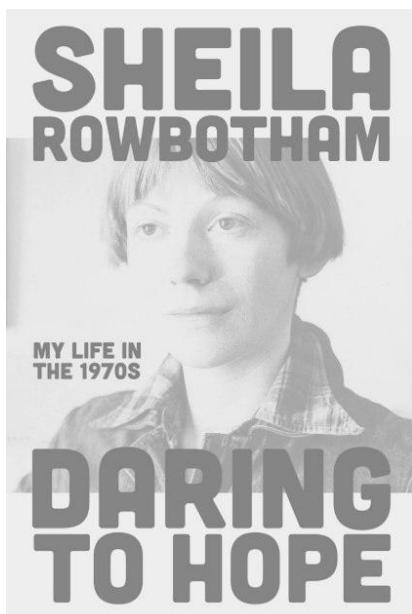
He argued that "Stalinist" thinking on the left continued to debilitate understanding of fascism because it meant the left still relied on the theory of Georgy Dimitrov and the Comintern which had seen fascism as a "pure reflection" of the economic interests of capitalism in crisis.

Mason also criticised "Utopian" thought for its "rejection of evidence" and cited the adoption of wildly irrational theories by the far right which he also associated with "Utopianism".

The talk concluded with Mason setting out his views of the conditions for the rise of fascism today including factors such as the growth of "middle class panic", the erosion of the rule of law and the emergence of populist politics. Mason argued that for modern fascism the main enemy was liberalism and its "Western democratic model". The implication seemed to be that these needed to be defended as a political priority.

Mason's arguments stimulated a fruitful debate on the nature of fascism and what still needs to be learned, such as the necessity of popular resistance led by an organised workers' movement.

All the talks mentioned were recorded and can be watched on YouTube.



## Book review

### Edward Aveling, 'Son-in-Law of Karl Marx': A Victorian Enigma by Deborah Lavin

David Morgan reviews the posthumous work by a much missed society member.

The late Deborah Lavin, who died of cancer in 2020, was a longstanding member of the SHS who took a serious scholarly interest in the Victorian socialist, secular and radical milieu. She came rather late to historical research and lecturing following a long stint in the theatre and a career break as a mother of three children.

For many years Deborah was hard at work on a historical study of Edward Aveling and what she viewed as his destructive influence on the socialist movement in Britain. She did not initially set out to produce a conventional biography, although she did aim to challenge some of the misunderstandings that she believed could be found in the approaches of others, such as Yvonne Kapp, author of the celebrated two volume biography of Eleanor Marx. The book we have today is based on the unfinished manuscript that Deborah left behind and has been lovingly prepared for publication by her brother, Michael.

Deborah's great passion for tracing ancestry is reflected in the book, where in painstakingly piecing together the antecedents of her subject, she uncovers much that is new about Aveling's father, the Congregationalist minister, Rev Thomas Aveling, and earlier members of the Aveling family. Deborah, for example, questions the motivation behind Rev Aveling's assiduous "networking among the rich and well connected," and seeks to establish a direct connection between father and son in how they embellished their careers and sought personal advantage.

It is true that there is nothing unusual in people seeking to gain social advance through cultivation of personal friendships, but when it comes to Edward Aveling, there was much more at stake than simple social climbing or "networking". He is portrayed as ruthless, un-

trustworthy, conceited, avaricious, concupiscent; a combination of stage villain and charismatic Svengali.

Why, then, if Aveling is so unattractive a figure, should any historian choose him as a subject for a lengthy biography? It took Deborah well over a decade to produce this book which runs to well over 500 pages.

An outcome of her tireless historical investigation, the book often reads like the detective novel that Deborah often expressed a wish to write. She decided to concentrate on Aveling for several reasons. First of all, nobody else had written a book about Aveling, although he inevitably features in the many biographies of Eleanor and in books about political figures with whom Aveling was closely linked like William Morris and Friedrich Engels.

She saw Aveling as a malign influence on the direction taken by socialists and wanted to understand why he became so influential.

She was also keen to take a new look at the tragic circumstances that led up to Eleanor's death and sought to question the standard narrative that she was depressed and committed suicide. Deborah traces the role of Aveling in his partner's demise and finds new circumstantial evidence to suggest he was more closely involved than he ever admitted.

If Edward Aveling was a "Victorian enigma" as the book's title proclaims, the author has gone a long way to shedding light on his career, character and motivations. It is an excellent study and well worth reading, but it most certainly would have been an even better book if Deborah had been given more time to finish it completely.

The paperback version can be obtained from the usual online outlets priced £19.99. It is also available as an e-book. It is published independently by Michael Wicks.



Deborah

David Morgan

## **Book review**

### **Utopia in Essex?**

*A New World in Essex*, Victor Gray, Campanula Books, £9.99

*No Matter How Many Skies Have Fallen*, Ken Worpole, Little Toller Books, £14

Gray's book presents a detailed study of the Purleigh brotherhood colony between 1896 and 1903. Gray was the Essex County Council archivist and his book sets the colony within the local context. He also gives the prehistory of the colony which originated in the Croydon brotherhood church led by the Tolstoyan, John C Kenworthy. Kenworthy was an anarchist communist in the Tolstoyan Christian tradition and in 1902 was to publish a study of Tolstoy as well as *The Anatomy of Misery: Lectures on Economics* in 1903. He had travelled to Russia to meet his mentor in 1895. As with many other agrarian settlements, while the initial pioneers were enthusiastic, few had experience of farming. While the Brotherhood Church had established a bakery and a haberdashery in Croydon, a self-sufficient farming community in an Essex village was more challenging. Most of the funds to purchase the farm were actually provided by a Brotherhood member Arnold Eilhart, who had been an academic chemist from an inheritance from his father, a London solicitor, rather than from Kenworthy, though Kenworthy was seen as the colony leader, despite living in a separate house from other colonists and spending much his time on other projects.

The colony attracted other intellectuals – the Russian exiled Tolstoyan, Victor Tchertkoff (who later set up a base for British Tolstoyan publishing at Tuckton house in Hampshire) and Aylmer Maude, director of the Anglo-Russian carpet company, who had also travelled to Yasnaya Polyana to meet Tolstoy. Both Tchertkoff and Maude had their own houses in the village. Tchertkoff and Maude both were drawn into Tolstoy's campaign to support the Doukhobors, a dissident Christian sect in the Caucasus who rejected both state and religious authority. Doukhobor delegates visited Purleigh, adding to the already exotic nature of the Purleigh settlement. One of the Brotherhood colonists, a former soldier, Arthur St John, was sent to the to the Caucasus to help the Doukhobors, ending up in a Tsarist prison, while another, Herbert Archer, together with Maude, escorted the Doukhobors to Canada, after a failed attempt to settle the group in Cyprus.

The Purleigh colony flourished in its earlier years, but in giving more than half its assets to the Dukhobor cause, struggled and a breakaway group including many of the original Brotherhood settlers, including Eilhart, opposing Kenworthy's direction of the colony, split off in 1898 to establish a new anarchist colony at Whiteway, near Stroud in Gloucestershire, a colony which still survives, though is no longer anarchist in its structure. The Purleigh colony struggled on till 1903, Kenworthy having moved away the previous year, before suffering a mental breakdown and spending his final years in and out of mental asylums. The farm was acquired by the colonists' horticulturalist, William Hone.

Worpole's book is a study of a later settlement project in Essex, led by the Christian communist and literary critic, John Middleton Murry, during the Second World War. Murry, editor of the *Adelphi* magazine, with the support of Max Plowman, poet, pacifist and founder (with Dick Sheppard) of the Peace Pledge Union, had established in 1934 a centre known as The Adelphi Centre in a large property, the Oaks, in the village of Langham, as an experiment in communal self-sufficiency and socialist education. The initiative to be self-sufficient as a farming community failed, as few members of the community had farming experience, and in 1937 the property was handed over to the Peace Pledge Union and was used to house a group of fifty refugee Basque children and then for a group of elderly evacuees from London.

When these had moved on, Max Plowman recruited members of the Peace Pledge Union to form a farm group and re-establish a farming project and Murry brought in Joe Watson, a pacifist and socialist who had been a blast-furnace-man in Consett, as manager. This survived until 1942, when the Oaks was sold to Essex Council and became a school for children with special needs. In August, Plowman having died the previous year and Murry having moved on to other projects, the surviving farm group members group left Langham to establish a communal farm at Frating, a few miles away.

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While many of the settlers had professional rather than agricultural backgrounds, the Frating Hall farm was a success. It attracted visiting volunteers including the young Shirley Williams (then Shirley Catlin) who appears in an idyllic photograph on the book's cover.

Commercially viable, the community had a choir and performed concerts and plays, building up relationships with their neighbours by inviting them to events. The children went to the local primary school, so the settlement was less alienated from its neighbouring village community, than had been the Purleigh project. There was a strong Christian ethic, with the local vicar leading services in the farm barn. The community survived until 1954, but the farm continued under the ownership of one of the original settlement children, Martyn Thomas.

Worpole has undertaken impressive research, interviewing many who as children had lived on the farm. Worpole uses the experience of Langham and Frating as the basis of an argument for rural self-sustainability. Both his narrative and argument are compelling, making this a book well worth reading.

Duncan Bowie

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**Kennett, Richard et al., (2021) 'Bristol and Transatlantic Slavery: Origins, impact and legacy', A textbook for schools, Bristol, Bristol Books and Mshed, part of Bristol Museum. Price £11.95**

The eight teachers who authored this book have produced a very, very, useful resource for teaching year 8 students. One of its strengths is the layout and the division into seven sections – Timeline; Origins; Impact: places; Impact: people; Abolition; Legacy; Glossary. The longer sections are further divided into short chapters, each of which is well illustrated and laid out in clearly labelled and separated parts. The two page Abolition section consists of inter-linked boxes of text, and functions partly as a second timeline. Importantly, both Timelines avoid the over simplified narrative (all too frequently taught) which centres around Wilberforce. Moreover, the Abolition section includes post 1833 apprenticeship, slave owner compensation and British continued involvement with slavery.

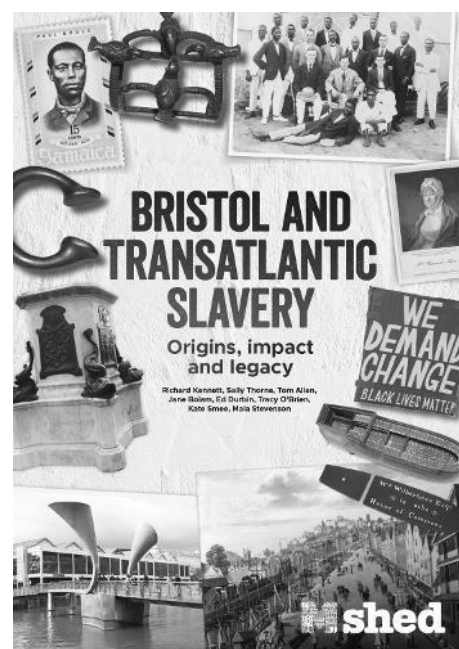
This after Abolition story is continued in the legacy chapters, with accounts of 'the realities of emancipation', British Colonialism in the Niger Delta and Palm Oil trade and indentured Indian workers. There is even a section of recent campaigning against racism in Bristol, from the Bristol Bus Boycott of 1963 to the removal of Colston's Statue in June 2020.

The central place given to Bristol and Colston's legacy is, very adeptly, not allowed to detract either from its relevance for non-Bristol students or the wider account of racism and forms of resistance to slavery. For example, the 'How did enslaved Africans resist their treatment in the Middle Passage' chapter touches on the frequently omitted role of women in slave rebellions.

<https://www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/blog/teaching-bristols-history-transatlantic-slavery-textbook/>

Schools can purchase copies from at £8 per copy (ensuring that they are affordable compared with many school textbooks) [museumbookings@bristol.gov.uk](mailto:museumbookings@bristol.gov.uk) or [museumretail@bristol.gov.uk](mailto:museumretail@bristol.gov.uk) for reduced price offer, or via Formal Learning | Bristol Culture & Creative Industries team (Jane Hack, Senior Officer, Formal Learning | Bristol Culture & Creative Industries

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery, Queens Road, Bristol BS8 1RL, T: 0117 922 3619)





## Revisiting EP Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters: the Origins of the Black Act*

As we approach the 300th anniversary of the "Black Act", it may be instructive to compare the state of governance, law and corruption, then and now.

The Black Act was passed by Parliament in May 1723 with no serious debate or objection. At a stroke it introduced 50 new crimes for which the death penalty could be applied, almost all relating to forms of game poaching. In particular, the law was aimed at those who blackened their faces in disguise - thus the title of the Act.

Were these poachers such a threat to the lives and property of the ruling class of the time that such extraordinary legislation was necessary? Thompson found no evidence of any such emergency in contemporary printed media, indeed the perceived threat seems to have been restricted to the forests of Windsor, Enfield, Kingston and Waltham in Hampshire. Aside from the fact that the main hunting grounds affected seem to have been the private domains of the King, the Prime Minister, Horace Walpole, and their cronies, we have to look elsewhere for the real reason for the law.

For it was not just the notoriously corrupt Walpole and his circle that supported this heavy handed Act; its easy passage through Parliament seems to indicate that it struck a chord with the perceived interests of the ruling class in general. As the increasing dominance of the capitalist economy and the enclosures of common land deprived peasant farmers of their means of subsistence, the old methods of class control were becoming ineffective and were replaced by terror: poverty wages and the death penalty. With the changing nature of the economy and the impoverishment of ordinary country folk by advancing capitalist agriculture, poaching was not a luxury, but essential to put food on the table for so many rural households.

Crime became less an offence against the person and increasingly an offence against property as, with the generalisation of so-called "free labour", the product of that labour became the absolute property of the employer, defended by the gallows. And the new law was

immediately used to prosecute all manner of other offences against property and bourgeois order. If you give the police new powers, they will act like police with new powers.

There also seems to be a direct connection between authoritarianism and corruption. Not only responsible for an absolutely draconian increase in the use of judicial terror, but the Walpole administration was also noteworthy for institutionalising the means of corruption. The Duke of Wharton asked why a highway robber "*committed, perhaps for a trifle, or the mere relief of his necessities should be executed, whilst another, who has enriched himself by continual depredations, for a course of some years, at the expense of his country, shall not only escape with impunity, but, by a servile herd of flatterers and sycophants, have all his actions crowned with applause*".

Which brings us up to date. The 2021 Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill is not the Black Act but, to quote Justice: "*several of the Bill's core proposals pose a significant threat to the UK's adherence to its domestic and international human rights obligations, while also lacking an evidential basis to justify their introduction*". The proposed increased police powers to impose restrictions on peaceful procession, assembly and protest, will introduce a broad statutory offence of "public nuisance" with a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison. Not quite the death penalty, but 10 years seems completely out of proportion for a "public nuisance". Are Extinction Rebellion such a threat to the capitalist order? Or shall we see the extension of this legislation to all forms of opposition to government?

Meanwhile, the link between increased authoritarianism and corruption also seems to have a parallel as the present government privatises public assets, distributes contracts to their cronies and allows a free rein to property speculators, developers and the financial services industry. The Bishop of Rochester wrote of Walpole: "*His whole administration is built on corruption and bribery, which he has carried to a greater height than any of his worst predecessors ever did...*".

Those words could well have been written yesterday.

Steve Cushion

## Report of Socialism in the English-Speaking Caribbean seminar series

The *Socialist History Society*, *The Institute of Commonwealth Studies* and *The Society for Caribbean Studies* jointly organised a series of online research seminars on the subject of Socialism in the English-Speaking Caribbean on three consecutive Wednesdays in March 2022. There were nine responses to the call for papers, of whom eight made spoken presentations. One hundred and forty persons registered in total, eighty-five of whom registered for all three. The seminars were broadcast live on Zoom and YouTube, with a fair number catching up later on YouTube.

**Ozzi Warwick**, Chief Education and Research Officer of the Trinidad Oilfields Workers' Trade Union, got us off to a good start with a general overview of the History of Socialism in the English-speaking Caribbean. Starting with establishment of the Trinidad Working Men's Association in 1897 he took us up to the struggles of the 1970s.

**Ben Gowland**, Post-Doctoral Research Associate, University of Glasgow then gave us a very detailed description of Black Power movements across the West Indies in the late 1960s and early 1970s, highlighting the Jamaican Black Power journal *Abeng*.

**Chris Campbell**, Lecturer in Global Literatures, University of Exeter and **Michael Niblett**, Associate Professor in Modern World Literature, University of Warwick gave a talk on Caribbean Socialism, Revolutionary Literature, and the Education of Feeling, taking as an example the journal *The Beacon*. They trace the continued entanglement of regional literary production in the development of Caribbean socialism in the immediate post-war era.

**Loraine Thomas**, Postgraduate Researcher, Anglia Ruskin University continued the literary theme speaking on Politics and Caribbean Literature. She drew attention to the literature of St Vincent and the Grenadines (SVG) during the era of independence 1940-1980, demonstrating how the island's literature not only reflected what was happening in political contexts, as well as analysing the relationship between literature, socialism and nationalism.

**Tennyson Joseph**, Senior Lecturer in Political Science at Cave Hill, University of the West Indies, gave us a run-down of the Caribbean Left since the Collapse of the Grenada Revolution. This comple-

mented Ozzi Warwick's presentation, taking up the story where he left off. Concluding that the present possibilities for the left are far greater than any moment since the mid-1980s, but given the weight of historical reversals, the Caribbean left may be experiencing a crisis of "will".

**Matt Myers**, History Faculty, University of Oxford looked at Transnational socialisms and black workers' newspapers between the Caribbean and Britain, using the example of *Flame*, 1975-1979. His detailed investigation of the contents of this important but neglected paper examined a black internationalist and socialist alternative to global capitalist crisis and protracted post-colonial transition.

**Marsha Hinds** of Operation Safe Space, Barbados gave a spirited address affirming that Marxism and socialism as philosophical spaces still hold lessons of import for the Caribbean, but that the erasure of women and their issues has been detrimental and needs addressing. She argued that the treatment of women in the construction of plantation society, caused significant deleterious effects for the burgeoning Caribbean project.

Finally, **Anne'el Ethel Bain**, PhD Candidate, The University of the West Indies St Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago, presented her research on *Cooperation As A Survival Mechanism Among Leftist Cuba, Grenada And Nicaragua, 1979-1990*. She examined the manner in which Cuba, Grenada and Nicaragua engaged in supportive exchanges to secure the survival of their respective revolutions, which were constantly under the threat of US destabilisation.



## **Review of ‘Eva & Otto. Resistance, Refugees, and Love in the Time of Hitler’**

by Tom Pfister, Kathy Pfister and Peter Pfister, Purdue, 2020

While Communists were generally in the leadership of the resistance to the Nazis, even less recognised are the activities of a small group, the ISK (the Internationaler Sozialistischer Kampfbund, the International Socialist League), under Hans Eisler. The ISK were originally a left-breakaway from the SPD, a small organisation of a few hundred members and a periphery of at most 1000, who were deeply committed to resistance work, supported a united front, and, unlike the major left parties, introduced a tight conspiratorial method of organising early on. Despite the enormous risks from 1933, their members in Germany distributed anti-Nazi leaflets widely and specialised in anti-Nazi graffiti.

### **Resistance to the Nazis**

This is a book which finally sheds light on the activities and bravery of a few of the ISK's members, in particular Eva and Otto Pfister, the parents of the three authors. So much of the resistance to the Nazis, including by the ISK, has been written out of history, largely a consequence of long-lasting Cold War ideology and this book is a very welcome addition to our knowledge of the resistance. Eva and Otto, both activists, left behind volumes of remarkable contemporary letters and documents relating to their political and personal activities which the authors have drawn upon and woven into their text.

### **International Transport Workers Federation**

Eva and Otto had to flee Germany early and went into exile, at first in Paris. Otto had contacts with Hans Jahn, the leader of the German railway union, and with the ITF (the International Transport Workers Federation), led by the Dutch General Secretary. Edo Fimmen, a highly unusual trade-union leader who a Nazi prosecutor described as ‘Germany’s greatest enemy’. (See my ebook on Hans Jahn and Steve Cushion and my book On Strike against

the Nazis, in particular: The International Transport Federation and Working Class Resistance to the Nazis for more details). Fimmen and the ITF joined with the ISK in its resistance ‘without reservation’. The – personally perilous- cooperation of members of the ITF enabled the ISK to smuggle their literature on boats, barges etc into Germany.

### **Sabotage**

Jahn, a trade-union bureaucrat, was also unusual in actively organizing his members to undermine the German war effort. Railways were crucial to the Nazi regime for transporting military stuff and ‘prisoners’. Railway workers also smuggled into Germany ISK literature. In November 1940, explosives caused at least one German goods train to be blown up, explosives which, it appears from Eva and Otto’s documentation, Otto delivered to Jahn by hand in Luxembourg. He also delivered bombs to Jef Rens, the Belgian labour leader, to sabotage trains carrying Nazi military supplies, though, typically, it is not known whether successfully. Such evidence is exceedingly rare: the Nazis concealed such events and most saboteurs did not live to tell the tale. The authors are a touch ambiguous about this role of their dad’s, leaning more towards non-violent interventions.

### **Perilous escape**

Until they were finally reunited after the end of the war, Eva and Otto had two very separate wars. For a time, Eva managed the ISK office in Paris after her escape from Germany, working closely with the amazing, and largely unheard of, Swiss anti-Nazi, Bertholet, who built up an extensive network of anti-Nazis across occupied Europe. Bertholet, who was willing to work with many types of anti-Nazi though this is not brought out, was later to provide Eva and the American OSS (see below) with much critical information. Eva’s next perilous escape was from France to Portugal via Spain, across the Pyrenees, along with Hans Jahn and two others.

*continued on next page*

## Office of Strategic Services

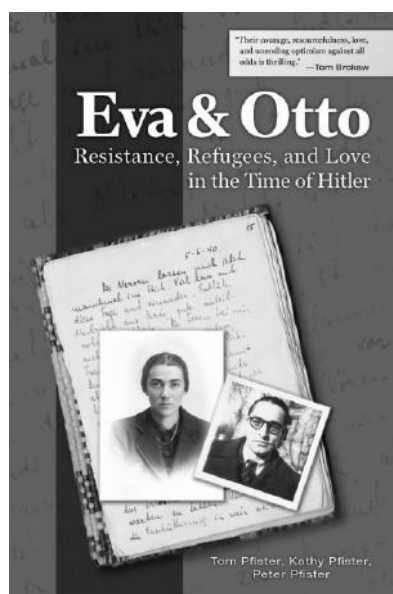
Eva managed to get to the US. Unlike, most (though not all) Communists, members of ISK were willing (or maybe eager?) to work with OSS, the Office of Strategic Services, the American equivalent of SOE, who, especially under Arthur Goldberg, the Head of OSS's Labour Section, realised the value of German socialist refugees with their contacts in German working class organisations. Goldberg saw them as excellent sources of information but also as a conduit, for example to workers in the Lubeck navy yards and in the Ruhr and to railway workers in France as well as Germany.

Otto was interned by the French in 1939. Released in February 1940, he was then captured by German soldiers and taken to prison in Trier and from there to Silesia. Released again, he returned to Paris and then on to Montauban, where so many Spanish and German refugees hid. Largely thanks to Eva's campaigning, he got into the US. But the OSS sent him back to Europe, an incredibly hazardous mission in 1944, to be parachuted into Germany. But this didn't occur. (Kappius, another ISK member, was sent instead and miraculously survived).

## Impossible personal demands

It is not possible to give a full sense of this long book in a short review: there are sections for example on Otto and Eva's relationship and the difficult decision about whether to have a child given the political circumstances. (Eichler was strenuously against: anybody recognize that stricture?!) Although the book's focus is almost entirely on the role of the ISK and, in particular on Eva and Otto, it gives the reader a sense of what resistance was like during the Nazi regime and the impossible personal demands it made on the brave men and women who participated.

*Meryl Moos*



## P&O Not the first time

by *Mark Metcalf* - full text here <https://libcom.org/article/1988-1989-po-seafarers-strike>

In December 1987 P&O told the National Union of Seamen (NUS), that they intended to reduce the annual wage bill of £35 million by £6 million by cutting 500 out of 2,300 jobs and reducing earnings by an average of £25 a week with a work rota where some people would be working for 72 hours continuously.

The seafarers refused to accept these ultimatums, voted to strike and stopped work in February 1988. Mass picketing initially had some success and a number of lorries booked on rival ferry operator Sealink were 'turned back'. However, the deployment of very large numbers of police soon assisted the scab lorry and bus drivers to break the lines.

For almost 2 months P&O ferries lay idle. They only sailed after an elaborate operation involving the flying of scabs to the continent, a brief training programme for new crewmembers, and the sailing of ferries with a skeleton crew.

Sealink NUS members in Dover, recognising that this was an attack on the union and the rights of seafarers to defend themselves, decided not to cross the P&O picket lines. Sealink management took the NUS to court for secondary picketing. The courts ordered the sequestration of the NUS assets. But after just 9 days, and only 3 days after a 2,000 strong supporters' march in Dover, the union purged its contempt and ordered Sealink workers back to work. Sealink workers reluctantly agreed, leaving P&O workers on strike on their own. The dispute dragged on until it was formally abandoned by the NUS after 16 months.