

Socialist History is being made

The biggest strike wave for a generation



UCU strike demonstration Central London



ASLEF Chingford



RCN Guy's Hospital



People's Company presents
Bermondsey Revolution

By John Whelan

26 - 28 Jan 2023 7.45pm

Ticket Prices:

£12.50 | £10 Concession

Book Now:

<https://southwarkplayhouse.co.uk/productions/bermondsey-revolution/#book-tickets>

Alfred met Ada, and together they started a revolution...

The wonderful partnership between these two creative minds, dedicated to public health, social housing and the environment, started a revolution, transforming a deprived inner-city slum into a healthy, green oasis.

This futuristic look at the history of Bermondsey heroes Ada and Alfred Salter will transport you over a century into the future, shedding light on Bermondsey's past and present through an immersive Brechtian experience.

The challenges Alfred and Ada faced more than a century ago are as pressing and crucial to us now, as we look to the future. Are you ready for the revolution?

Bermondsey Revolution is an original play devised by People's Company, a community theatre group based at Southwark Playhouse. Written by company director John Whelan it is one of the first shows opening at Southwark Playhouse's new home on Dante Place.

Post Show Event – Saturday 28 January

Join us after the Saturday performance of *Bermondsey Revolution* for a discussion on how we devised the play working with Graham Taylor, author of *Ada Salter Pioneer of Ethical Socialism*. Come and discuss the project with the actors and partners including Lynn Morris who incorporated their performances from the wider Salter Centenary into our performance.

Discover why it was so important to have the theme of climate change as a key ingredient within our production and find out how we created the Brechtian feel to the performance.

Revolutionary Lives of the Red and Black Atlantic since 1917

David Featherstone, Christian Høgsbjerg, and Alan Rice, eds. *Revolutionary Lives of the Red and Black Atlantic since 1917* (Manchester University Press, 2022) is the second volume to come out of the The Red and the Black – The Russian Revolution and the Black Atlantic Conference held at the Institute for Black Atlantic Research (IBAR), University of Central Lancashire, Preston, 13-15 October 2017, to mark the centenary of the Russian Revolution.

The first volume, David Featherstone and Christian Høgsbjerg eds., *The Red and the Black: The Russian Revolution and the Black Atlantic* (MUP, August 2021) explored the political and social fallout of the Russian Revolution, the creation of the Soviet Union and the Communist International for black and colonial liberation struggles across the African diaspora. As such it dealt mainly with broad political issues. This second volume now looks at the effects of the Russian Revolution on various individuals, some relatively well known, other less so.

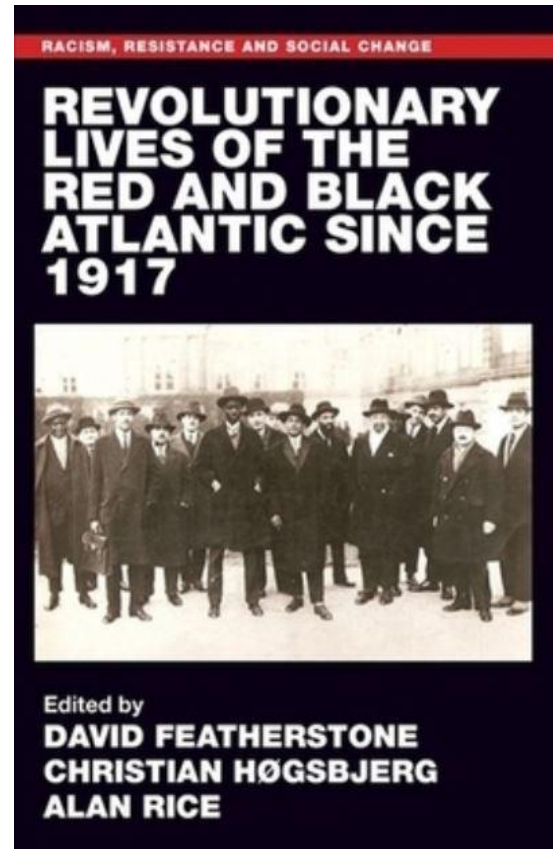
Hubert Harrison was the first Black leader of the Socialist Party of America to actively organise Black workers for socialism. His writings produce a Marxist analysis of the relationship between race and class, white supremacy and capitalism, Black nationalism and socialism. He had a profound influence on the development of Marcus Garvey.

In June 1917, faced with the US entry into the First World War, to "make the world safe for democracy", Harrison argued for the need to "make the South safe for democracy in front of two thousand people in a church hall in Harlem." This was the first meeting of the Liberty League of Negro-Americans, dedicated to the fight against lynching and the Jim Crow laws. He never joined the Communist Party, but worked closely with many Black Communists.

Less well known is Grace Campbell. Her early political activity was in the fight for votes for women, in particular, the right for Black women to vote, recognising that the US women's suffrage movement was dominated by the interests of white middle- and upper-class women, while racist legislation and white supremacist terror prevented many Black men from voting. She was active in organising black women workers which she saw as the most exploited part of the workforce.

She addresses this in an article entitled 'Negro Working Women Must Take Place in the Class War'. She was unusual among Marxists of her time in that she saw the inter-relation of race, class and gender, as well as the importance of non-wage domestic or reproductive work. Her constant campaigning activity in Harlem made her one of the most prominent leaders of the African Blood Brotherhood (ABB), in which she managed to blunt the edges of its male chauvinism. She worked with Cyril Briggs in building the ABB, and when it merged with the Communist Party, she joined with her Harlem comrades, staying in even when the party wound up the ABB.

This volume also has a chapter on Briggs which gives more detail on the ABB, a fascinating organisation in its own right.



Moving across the Atlantic, there is a chapter on Clements Kadalie, leader of the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa (ICU) in South Africa. ICU showed the importance of black leadership and unionised black workers. The success of the ICU helped to change the priorities of Communists in Southern Africa by organising black workers in their hundreds of thousands. This led the CPSA to see the mass organisation of the black working class, rather than the local white labour aristocracy, as the motor of social change. This led the CPSA to attempt to take over the ICU, which in turn caused factional strife and weakened the workers movement in the region.

The book has 11 chapters in all, each dealing with a significant activist, ranging from Wilfred Domingo to Walter Rodney. Clements Kadalie is the only real workers' leader in the volume, most of whom are campaigners, journalists and party activists. They are also, with the exception of the Paris based Lamine Senghor, all English speakers. None the worse for that, but it suggests the possibility of another such volume that looks at working class activists in the wider African diaspora, US dockers, Cuban cane cutters, West Indian and Haitian migrants working on the Panama Canal or Senegalese railway workers. This should not be seen as a criticism, the book does very well in what it sets out to do and is a valuable addition to the rich history of African-Atlantic Marxism.

Steve Cushion

A Plaque for C.L.R. James in Southwick

The black radical Trinidadian historian and writer Cyril Lionel Robert James (1901-1989) was one of the twentieth century's most remarkable Caribbean thinkers. He is perhaps best remembered as the author of two classic works – a semi-autobiographical cultural history of West Indian cricket, *Beyond a Boundary* (1963), and *The Black Jacobins* (1938) about Toussaint Louverture and the Haitian Revolution, which analysed the only successful mass slave revolt in human history, the transformation of colonized slave society of Saint-Domingue into the world's first independent black republic outside of Africa.

Writing *The Black Jacobins* on the South Coast

It has long been known that one key period in which James wrote *The Black Jacobins* was spent writing while residing on the South coast during 1937. In his 1938 Preface to the work, James describes how while the Spanish Civil War raged and he was writing the work, 'it was in the stillness of a seaside suburb that could be heard most clearly and insistently the booming of Franco's heavy artillery, the rattle of Stalin's firing squads and the fierce shrill turmoil of the revolutionary movement striving for clarity and influence'. James's publisher Fredric Warburg also lived fairly close by in West Hoathly during the 1930s, and testifies to James sometimes visiting them at weekends and playing cricket for the local side.

Yet until the Special Branch files on C.L.R. James were released in 2005, it has been difficult to ascertain whereabouts exactly James stayed and wrote. We now know from these files that one address CLR James stayed at on 19 July 1937 was on Old Shoreham Road in Southwick, due to an intercepted letter James wrote from this address.

Southwick Society

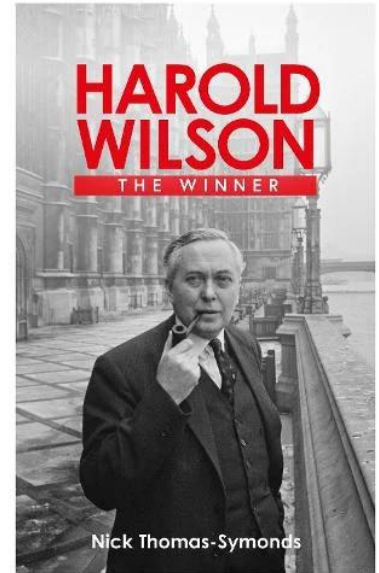
In a campaign supported by the local Southwick Society, we plan to raise £1000 to put up a plaque to C.L.R. James at the address to which he stayed in 1937. We hope all those who admire and appreciate James's life and work will be able to support us in this project. We plan to unveil the plaque in 2023 to help mark the 85th anniversary of the publication of *The Black Jacobins*. All details about the event to mark the unveiling will be published on this project page in due course and we would hope all donors and supporters who are able would be able to join us then.

More details: <https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/p/plaque-for-clr-james-in-southwick>

Harold Wilson

Nick Thomas-Symonds - Weidenfeld and Nicholson £25

Wilson has been the subject of two previous substantive biographies – the classic study by Ben Pimlott, published in 1992 and the authorised biography by Philip Zeigler published a year later. There were also a number of contemporary studies – an early illustrated portrait by Michael Foot, a more critical study by his Trotskyite nephew, Paul Foot and Andrew Roth's characterisation of Wilson as 'Walter Mitty'. Recent years have seen a number of volumes of essays seeking to re-evaluate Wilson. Thomas-Symonds study is an attempt, and a largely successful one, to rehabilitate Wilson. Thomas-Symonds is an Oxford historian, who now sits on Labour's front bench as shadow international trade secretary, having briefly served as shadow Home Secretary. He has written biographies of Bevan and Attlee. I have always been puzzled how leading MPs find the time to write biographies and carry out the research required to say something new about a former leading politician.



Wilson is now a largely forgotten figure. The new biography is subtitled 'The Winner', which sums up Thomas-Symonds' perspective. The cover blurb by Keir Starmer – 'Puts Harold Wilson in his rightful place' is perhaps open to interpretation. Wilson won four out of five general elections, losing to the Conservatives under Heath in 1970. I remember that election – I had a poster of Wilson in my school bedroom window, which just happened to be visible from the street Wilson would have walked down from his house in Lord North Street on his way to the House of Commons. I remember being in the front row of the crowd in Downing Street when Heath arrived at No 10, appearing in a newspaper photograph as someone just behind me threw some paint at the new Prime Minister.

Defeated George Brown

What is often not acknowledged is that Wilson was on the left of the party, a follower of Nye Bevan, and defeated the right-wing trade unionist George Brown in the contest for the Labour Party leadership in 1963.

Thomas-Symonds is not the most exciting of biographers and reading the book is something of a slog, as it tracks Wilson's eight years as premier, as well as his early political career (as a member of Attlee's cabinet at only 31), his years in opposition and his retirement. Although unable due to space constraints, to present a detailed analysis of successive crises, Thomas-Symonds nevertheless effectively demonstrates Wilson's successes – managing a cabinet of highly skilled politicians including Roy Jenkins, Jim Callaghan, Barbara Castle, Richard Crossman, Tony Crosland and Denis Healey, not short on egos; maintaining sound relations with trade unions (and reaching solemn and binding agreements with leaders such as Hugh Scanlon, Jack Jones and Joe Gormley in a context of increasing trade union militancy and power – it was the miners who brought down Heath in 1974 and returned Wilson to No 10. Wilson avoided dividing the party over Europe – the party was to split with the Social Democratic Party founded after Wilson's retirement. Wilson also kept the UK out of the Vietnam war, despite the tensions this position created with successive US presidents.

Responsibility to help the most vulnerable

Thomas-Symonds also records the numerous social reforms achieved under the Wilson regime, supported by Wilson despite his own social conservatism. Wilson was a pragmatist but, despite his academic and technocratic background, he also believed in basic socialist values, in the Beveridge tradition of believing the state had a responsibility to help the most vulnerable. One of his few polemical writings was his book 'The War on World Poverty: An

continued on next page

Appeal to the Conscience of Mankind' published in 1953. Some regarded Wilson as devious, or even 'unprincipled', but whatever criticisms one may have of his leadership style, his achievements compare with those of his successors, including those of Tony Blair, who was certainly less rooted in traditional Labour values than was Wilson.

Bugged by MI5

The last couple of chapters in Thomas Symonds book shift somewhat from the chronological narrative. In one, he spends considerable space re-examining Wilson's suspicion of the security service and the so-called plot to bring Wilson down. This story has been the subject of several books as well as a chapter in Christopher Andrews' authorised history of MI5. Another chapter focuses on Wilson's kitchen cabinet and the relationship between Wilson, Marcia Williams, Joe Haines and Bernard Donoghue, revisiting the gossip that Williams had an affair with Wilson or at least claimed to have had an affair with him. Again, there is no substantive new information here (other than a reference to No 10 being bugged – apparently by MI5 rather than by the Russians). There was a widespread belief at the time that Wilson retired because some scandal was about to emerge. Wilson had always planned to retire and he was becoming quite seriously ill. Like Thatcher, he had dementia, and the story of his final years is a sad one. I am not sure what the author was trying to prove in his final chapters and in his very odd conclusion which focuses more on Marcia Williams than it does on his nominal subject.

Duncan Bowie

Riding Two Horses: Labour in Europe

A Socialist History Society on-line public meeting

Speaker: **Glyn Ford**

12th January 2023 19.00

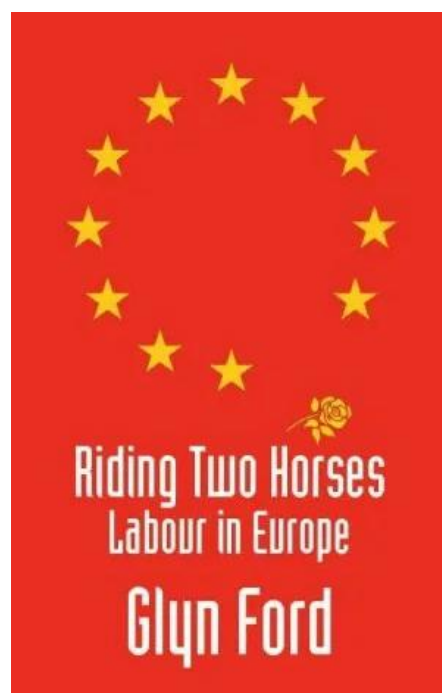
Free to attend, but you will need to register:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZMrcuGhqDgvHtNoJuowWzIK-zMp0nEnKrId>

Riding Two Horses traces the eventful life and career of Glyn Ford, Member of the European Parliament for 25 years and erstwhile leader of its European Parliamentary Labour Party. Ford's leadership coincided with a period when the Left was in the ascendancy across much of the globe.

The influence of Europe's Left during this era is examined by an active participant with a unique standpoint: a frequent visitor to East Asia; frontrunner in pushing for anti-racist legislation in the European Union; practitioner of 'soft' power and balanced relationships with Asia and the USA; advocate of progressive science and technology policy; political representative and activist in pursuit of an accountable and democratic European Union.

More details: <http://www.socialisthistorysociety.co.uk/?p=1474>



Zionism During the Holocaust

A Socialist History Society Zoom Meeting

Speaker: **Tony Greenstein**

19th January 2023 at 7pm

Free to join, but you will need to register in advance:

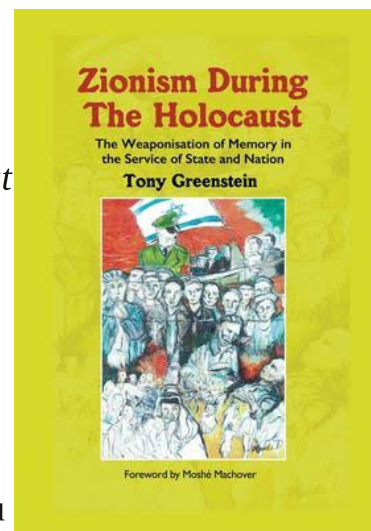
https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZwrdOuopjMqEtV31MqXNpEbt_62dH5rGVQS

Also livestreamed on YouTube <https://youtu.be/4ZSdiq6Wd4Q>

Tony Greenstein will talk about his new book *Zionism During the Holocaust: The weaponisation of memory in the service of state and nation*

Tony Greenstein is a longstanding Jewish anti-Zionist and an anti-fascist activist from Brighton. He is the author of *The Fight Against Fascism in Brighton and the South Coast*. He has written extensively on Palestine and Zionism for, amongst others, the *Guardian's Comment is Free*, the *Journal of Holy Land and Palestine Studies*, *Tribune*, *Jacobin*, *Open Democracy* and the *Weekly Worker*.

“Tony Greenstein offers a comprehensive and incisive analysis of the indissoluble nexus between anti-Semitism and Zionism. This connection is exposed in its ugliest form during the Holocaust. You can trust a courageous and committed fighter against anti-Semitism, such as Tony, to guide us through this particular dark moment when Zionism and anti-Semitism interacted in Europe’s darkest hour to educate us about its historical manifestations and implications for our time.”



Ilan Pappe, Professor of Middle East History, Exeter University

The Drax Family Dynasty & the Business of Slavery

Reparations for Enslavement as a trade union issue

A *London Socialist Historians* seminar at the *Institute of Historical Research*

Speaker:

Steve Cushion is a Senior Research Fellow at University College London – Institute of the Americas

On-line with Zoom on **23 January 2023, 5:30pm – 7:00pm**

Free to attend, but you must book in advance:

https://sas.sym-online.com/registrationforms/ihrbooking_socialist_history48277/

The Drax family pioneered the plantation system in the 17th century and played a major role in the development of sugar and slavery across the Caribbean and the US. They were able to generate extraordinary wealth through the cultivation of sugar by enslaved Africans.

Richard Drax, Member of Parliament for South Dorset, has recently been in the news as the Government of the Republic of Barbados is considering legal action against him to recover the Drax Hall Plantation and seek further reparations for enslavement.

David Comissiong, Barbados’s ambassador to CARICOM, said of the Drax family:

“You can’t simply walk away from the scene of the crime. They have a responsibility now to make some effort to help repair the damage”.



Utopianism for a Dying Planet: Life After Consumerism

How the utopian tradition offers answers to today's environmental crises

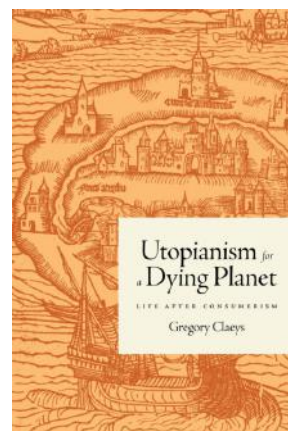
23 February 2023 on-line public meeting

Free to attend, but you will have to register:

https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZYkcuqvpzgrH9WCI9mVhyk-sYoZ0J_E5WFU

Speaker: **Gregory Claeys** - Professor Emeritus, University of London

Our talk will be based on Greg's latest book, *Utopianism for a Dying Planet: Life After Consumerism*. (Princeton University Press, 2022), which examines the ways the expansive history of utopian thought, from its origins in ancient Sparta and ideas of the Golden Age through to today's thinkers, can offer moral and imaginative guidance in the face of environmental catastrophe. Claeys argues that the utopian tradition, which has been critical of conspicuous consumption and luxurious indulgence, might light a path to a society that emphasizes equality, sociability, and sustainability.

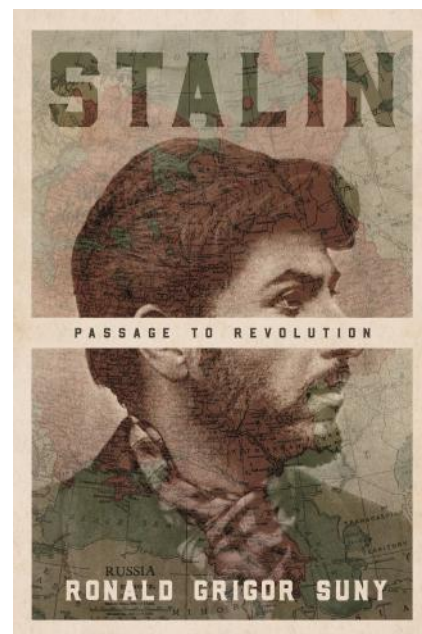


Stalin, Passage to Revolution

Ronald Suny

Princeton University Press £35

This is Suny's magnum opus, the product of decades of scholarly research. Suny is an American academic of Armenian descent, who is one of the leading writers on Armenia and Georgian history, the nationalities question in the Soviet Union and Stalinism. The book demonstrates a wide knowledge of Russian, Georgian primary sources. The book, which only takes the narrative to October 1917, has 700 pages of text and a further 150 pages of notes, bibliography and index. It took me most of a week to read, and as a hardback is hardly portable or light reading. There are previous studies of Stalin's youth and early political career, most notably by Simon Sebag Montefiore, whom Suny in a historiographical discussion at the end of the book dismisses as a 'popular historian'.



What surprised me most in reading this new study was the amount of detail of every stage of Stalin's early life, based on the memoirs and reminiscences of the hundreds of individuals who crossed paths with him. Suny is careful in his use of hagiographical sources which sought to enhance Stalinist myths. He is also critical of those authors who have sought to cast the early Stalin as a bandit or terrorist, without glossing over a number of incidents which could be categorised as violent or otherwise unpleasant. Stalin grew up in a violent world, especially in his youth in Georgia.

Development of Russian Social Democracy

What Suny does best is set Stalin's early career within context. The development of Russian social democracy is covered in detail, even when Stalin was on the margin of political developments – he was after all in exile for much of the period, though being in exile with other exiles, often of different political persuasion, allowed more time for writing and ideological development, even in the most primitive of living conditions. Suny is especially good on the fluctuating relationships between Mensheviks and Bolsheviks as well as on the differences

within both factional groups. Stalin was largely a loyal follower of Lenin, and though not always agreeing with Lenin, generally followed Lenin's tactical shifts, being known at one time as the 'Georgian Lenin'. Like Lenin, he was a pragmatist. But Suny also demonstrates Stalin's independent theoretical capacity and in one chapter provides a detailed exposition of Stalin's writings on Marxism and nationalism, which is of course an area of study in which Suny is himself pre-eminent.

New Russian Tsar

Suny rightly avoids the temptation of trying, as some authors have done, to explain Stalin's later career as autocrat and oppressor, the new Russian tsar, from an analysis of Stalin's upbringing and youthful experience. He is critical of the more psychological biographies of Robert Tucker and Stephen Kotkin. Though not ignoring Stalin's private life, it is not his central focus as is the case with Montefiore. However as a comprehensive study of Stalin's 'passage to revolution', it is unsurpassable, as long as it is recognised that it is not seeking to explain Stalin's 'passage to autocrat', which would require a detailed study of the post-revolutionary period and Stalin's struggle to be the dominant individual within the Soviet government – other authors have sought to provide that narrative and analysis, and it would take Suny at least two more massive tomes, which at the age of 82 is probably beyond him.

I was fortunate to attend Suny's recent lecture at which he was presented with the 2021 Deutscher memorial prize for the book. Suny sought to explain the complexities of Stalin's Marxism. The lecture was part of the Historical Materialism conference, dominated by Leninist and Trotskyite students whose perspective was largely theoretical and at times rather philosophical, who could have done well to have listened more carefully to the lecture before expounding their own narrow and often obscure ideological positions. Such contributions demonstrate an inability to listen to differing views or different methodological approaches to historical study.

Respect the Scholarship

One short review of Suny's book on the AMAZON website from a 'Chris Remington', who appears not to have himself published any work on Stalin, but who presumably considers himself to be more Leninist than Suny, reads as follows:

"Seemingly regurgitated Menshevik recollections of Stalin, lots of academic studies from the 1960's-1970's quoted as sources ignoring the extensive information released from the archives in recent years. Several hundred pages but little not already promoted by the dead hand of US / UK Kremlin."

I don't see how this reviewer could have actually read the book, rather than skimming through it, or checked the 120 pages of evidence in the notes. Even if you disagree with the biographer's conclusions, which admittedly are fairly nuanced, you should at least have the decency to respect the scholarship of the author.

New Information

One final point. The biography gives much new information on the roles of other Bolsheviks and Mensheviks in the pre-1917 period. While so many writers focus on Stalin and Lenin, and we have single biographies of Martov and Tsereteli, surely it is about time we had a biography in English of major activists in the revolutionary period such as Lev Kamenev, the Armenian and Stepan Shaumian and the Georgians Noe Zhordania and Nicolai Chkheidze. The one biography we have of Molotov, by Geoffrey Roberts, focuses on his time as Stalin's foreign minister in World War 2 and the cold war, ignoring his central role in 1917. Despite thousands of volumes on Russia's revolutionary years, there remain serious gaps in the literature.

Duncan Bowie

Living with Shadows by *Merilyn Moos*

On the cover of this book is a photo of Ossip Zadkine's statue in Rotterdam called The Destroyed City. Merilyn's parents took her to see it as a ten-year-old child. She was never quite sure why they had crossed a stormy sea and walked through a rainy city to reach it, but it showed "screaming defiance against those who had torn out its heart". To her, it also appeared to be holding up an invisible world. These are two determining factors in the author's own life: defiance and the struggle to build a better world.

Merilyn Moos has spent her life haunted by shadows. "Not," she writes, "B- movie ghosts in gothic hallways, but something emanating a sense of death." A distant relative of Albert Einstein and daughter of German refugees, she was born into a home of secrecy and paranoia. Her parents had lived under Nazism and Stalinism. Her father, Siegi, was a member of the Red Front and was a leading figure in anti-fascist agit-prop. He witnessed sailors declaring a Soviet on the steps of Munich Town Hall in 1918. After the Reichstag fire, he escaped the Gestapo by walking across Germany.

Her mother, Lotte, followed her Irish communist lover to the USSR and felt guilty that she may have contributed to his death. He was sent to Spain at the time of the Civil War there. In a postcard she wrote to him, she praised the leftist, anti-Stalinist POUM. He was kidnapped, sent back for 'trial' in the Soviet Union, accused of Trotskyism and died in the gulags. She never stopped mourning him, or blaming herself, for what she had innocently written.

Cultural and Political Shadows

Her parents arrived separately in the UK where, in 1940, Lotte was incarcerated in Holloway Prison as a German spy. Merilyn's parents were burdened with regret and guilt. Her mother shut her bedroom door and found refuge in writing plays and poems, while her father expressed himself with painting. This short memoir is a penetrating and personal reflection on her early life in Durham. She communicates to the reader how much of our lives are determined by the cultural and political shadows we inhabit and absorb.

"For my father culture and politics were inseparable . . . our house was a bit like an expressionist museum. On one wall was a relief bust of the revolutionary, Alexandra Kollontai . . . over other walls hung my father's paintings. Dark and dramatic . . . they were clarion calls against injustice and inequality." Of her mother she writes, "If annoyed my mother would not speak to me for days, sometimes weeks . . . she did this without telling me what she was upset about. I was terrified . . . I felt unreal and without any right to exist . . . I learned not to speak to her. Sometimes, as the three of us sat eating a meal, she said to my father, 'Tell Merilyn,' and then he would."

Merilyn found her own comfort in books and, as an adult, in her sculptures and her own political activism. She thought she was rebelling against her parents' politics, only to discover how similar hers were to theirs. She acknowledges that she has spent her life carrying the baton passed to her by her parents.

Militant

After many years as a trade union militant in further education, Merilyn started to write about her family history. She first wrote about her parents in an earlier book, *The Language of Silence*, but in recent years, she has dealt with the history of anti-Nazism within the German working class to help counter the view there was no significant German resistance.



David Wilson

"It wisnae us" - Scotland and enslavement

Little River by Velma McClymont

Until the work of Stephen Mullens brought it into the light of day, there was a myth that the Scots had not been greatly involved in the business of slavery, thus the title of his first book, *It Wisnae Us: The Truth About Glasgow and Slavery*. Stephen continued his work, eventually, last year, producing *The Glasgow Sugar Aristocracy: Scotland and Caribbean slavery, 1775-1838*. Despite his work for the Glasgow City Council and the University of Glasgow, this knowledge has largely been restricted to scholarly circles.

This is hopefully set to change. Velma McClymont has just published a novel based on the Scottish section of the Jamaican slave-owning oligarchy. The field of historical novels about plantation life has been dominated by a sort of "Gone with the Wind" concentration on luxury, romance and intrigue, wherein the enslaved workers have, at best, walk-on parts. This novel looks at both sides of the plantation class divide as human beings with all the frailties that implies.

Crimes Against Humanity

The slave owners were greedy, lazy, brutal and selfish. That much we know, what comes over in the book is how the British imperial system produced, rewarded and enhanced that greed and brutality. If it were not for the armed force of the British Army and the Royal Navy, without the backing of the financial services industry of the City of London, the enslavers would not have had an opportunity to commit their crimes.

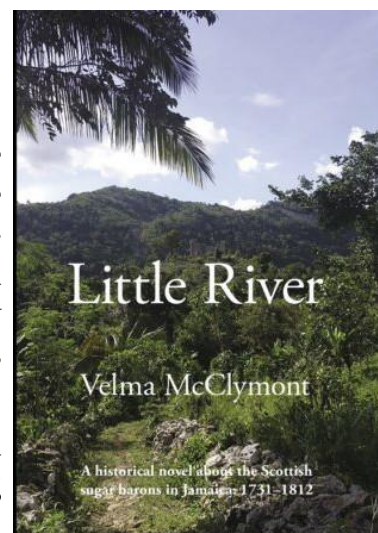
There were massive contradictions at the centre of the business of slavery and this is particularly evident in the case of the Scottish plantocracy. One of the main characters in the book is politically a Jacobite, far from being a supporter of the English King. Yet he depends for his safety on the same redcoats who butchered his comrades on Culloden Moor. Many of the poor whites, upon whom the system depends as drivers and minor administrators, were themselves victims of the Highland Clearances, but who had been convinced that their skin colour made them superior to the enslaved Africans they helped to oppress.

Church of Scotland

Religion played an important role in the ideological offensive that committed the poor whites to the system of slavery and attempted to reconcile the enslaved workers to their condition. There has been some important work recently on the role of the Church of England in this process, eg *Christian Slavery* by Katharine Gerbner. The Church of Scotland is only slowly waking up to its historic responsibilities, The Legacies of Slavery Project Group will not be able to report its findings to the General Assembly until 2023. In considering the potentially oppressive role of organised religion in a Scottish context, this book is ahead of the game. But there are contradictions here as well, the African religions that came over in the slave ships and were adapted to the new conditions provided a basis for resistance to enslavement. Part of the reason the slave-owners feared them so. And we see in the book how the enslavers lived in constant fear and anxiety.

Gender played an important role in maintaining slavery and there are distressing scenes in the book demonstrating how the system allowed sexual predators free range. The serial rapist Thomas Thistlewood is known today because he had the arrogance to keep a diary. Many others used their power to indulge their perversions, but were not so public. Sexual violence and paedophilia were part of the mechanism of control, but sometimes they were the final straw that produced a rebellion. No spoilers, buy it and read it, get your local library to buy it. It is a historical novel that accurately reflects the latest scholarly research, while taking a stand against the whole business of slavery.

buy it at: <https://womanzvue.com/product/little-river-book/>



Horatio Bottomley and the Far Right before Fascism

David Renton, Routledge £34.99 (pbk); £120 (hbk)

I was puzzled to know why the socialist historian and barrister had decided to write a biography of the fraudster Bottomley, given there have been a number of previous biographies. Bottomley was a Liberal MP, who only became active in far right politics for a brief period at the end of the First World War. As Renton admits, he was not a fascist and his patriotism during the war, was of an extreme anti-German form rather primarily anti-Semitic. After all anti-Semitism was fairly common in the political left as well as on the right at that time (as it is now).

London radical

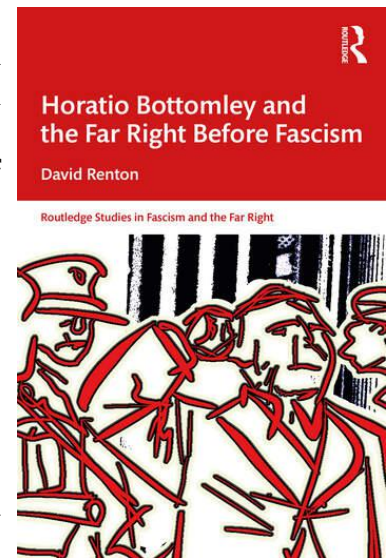
Bottomley's early career was in radical and secular circles. His mother was the sister of the secularist George Jacob Holyoake, and the Holyoake connection brought him into contact with the secularist republican, Charles Bradlaugh. Bottomley encouraged gossip that Bradlaugh was actually his father and even the absurd proposition that Annie Besant was his mother. Moving in London radical circles, Bottomley became a journalist, his initial project a newsheet which reported on the discussions on the local parliament in Hackney, called the Hackney Hansard. Another newsheet reporting on the Battersea local parliament was then published, followed by *The Debater*, which sought to report on the local parliaments movement which emerged in London. These local parliaments were debating societies for local artisans, which mimicked the House of Commons, with political parties and Ministers and acted as a training ground for would be local politicians. They were separate from the vestries and borough councils (established in 1899) and were not part of any formal governance structures. To my knowledge no academic as yet has studied them they are a lost part of London's political history and I would have welcomed more material on Renton's book on this. The only previous reference I have seen is the involvement of some early Fabian socialists, such as Henry Champion, in the local Charring Cross parliament.

Liberal MP for Hackney South

After mitigating a number of journalistic projects, mainly papers focusing on financial scandals and company speculation (in which Bottomley was himself directly involved), including a period as chairman of the *Financial Times*, Bottomley was elected as Liberal MP for Hackney South in 1906. In parliament, Bottomley posed as a radical but seems to have been ineffective as a politician, as he focused on his journalistic activities, establishing the paper *John Bull* as his mouthpiece. This activity was combined with financial speculation and company promotion – Bottomley had been in court for alleged fraud as early as 1893. In 1912, he was declared bankrupt and had to resign his parliamentary seat. With the outbreak of war in 1914, Bottomley (having initially supported Austro-Hungary against Serbia) used his populist *John Bull* to promote an extreme form of anti-German patriotism, touring the country using the crudest tropes to promote army recruitment. He encouraged false rumours that he was to be invited to join the war cabinet, though it was the ultra-patriotic journalist, Lord Beaverbrook, who was brought on board by Lloyd George in February 1918.

John Bull

Back in parliament after the 1918 general election, after standing as an Independent, Bottomley established a Peoples League, which he hoped to turn into a new political party. Opposing both organised capital and organised Labour, he posed as the 'soldiers' friend'. The initiative, promoted in *John Bull* was however unsuccessful, and Bottomley then joined with a number of other independent MPs, including *John Bull*'s deputy editor, Charles



Palmer, to participate in an ant-waste campaign initiated by the Daily Mails' Lord Rothermere. This attacked government spending, including the Homes for Heroes programme and opposed taxation.

Financial speculation

Renton's book however, despite its title, says little about Bottomley's actual involvement in right wing politics, instead focusing on his financial speculation, such as his fraudulent promotion of 'Victory bonds' and his personal life (he had a series of mistresses and had a flamboyant high spending lifestyle). leading to his bankruptcy conviction in 1922, which led to his expulsion from parliament for a second time. As a barrister, Renton gives a blow-by-blow account of the bankruptcy court case, which bluntly I found unnecessary and tedious. Fortunately, Renton passes over Bottomley's post -bankruptcy career briefly, with Bottomley ending up on the stage of the Windmill theatre recounting his reminiscences to an audience who were waiting for the dancing girls to come on. Bottomley died impoverished and largely forgotten in 1933, which was bluntly what he deserved.

In the final pages of the book, Renton tries to justify why Bottomley is worthy of study, and why though not a fascist, his legacy as a right-wing populist ultra-patriot was significant. I was not convinced. He was primarily a crook and an opportunist who used his journalism to promote himself. He was a blustering fraud who was found out. We have parallels today, but I doubt that they have ever heard of Bottomley.

Duncan Bowie

Horatio Bottomley and Modern Politics

Socialist History Society meeting

David Renton spoke about his book at an on-line meeting of the *Socialist History Society*, back in November of this year. Part of the discussion was about the relevance of Horatio Bottomley to today's politics. Perhaps 20 years ago, when the extreme-right in Britain was dominated by openly Nazi bands of thugs, one would have struggled for a comparison. Today, the extreme right is far closer to Bottomley than to Oswald Mosley.

Renton described Bottomley's political position as expressed in his newspaper, *John Bull*: "The suffragettes had no place on John Bull's island. Nor did the trade unionists... Also excluded were the Jews, all migrants. Bottomley's conception of a valued crowd had no place for any of these social movements." Not a thousand miles away from the *Daily Mail*.

Of course, the targets have changed. Russia has replaced Germany as the main overseas enemy. Antisemitism has been replaced as the principal politically significant racism by Islamophobia and anti-Black racism. But migrants and trade unions are still the main scapegoats. Suella Braverman and Nigel Farage, the contemporary face of the far right, bear a more than passing resemblance politically to Bottomley. Ferdinand Mount, writing in the *New Statesman*, described Boris Johnson as "the greatest patriotic blowhard since Horatio Bottomley". And, of course, allegations of corruption are never far away from extreme right politics; the Michelle Mone PPE affair is just the latest in a long line of political scandals.

Nor is it just in Britain; Erdoğan, Netanyahu, Bolsonaro, Modi and Trump are all cast from the same mould.

Bottomley's politics live on in today's right-wing populist movements and the obsessions of the reactionary Brexiteer, along with the xenophobic nationalism of the "Hostile Environment" being implemented by the Home Office. They pose an even bigger threat today than they did 100 years ago.

Steve Cushion

THE JULIAN ASSANGE HUMAN CHAIN

Greta Sykes joins the human chain for the imprisoned journalist.

On 8th October campaigners for the release of Julian Assange formed a human chain around the Houses of Parliament in Westminster. When I signed up to the request by the Julian Assange Support Group, I was given a personalised number, 2339, to join the chain. It gave them an idea of the numbers of people signing up and gave me a feeling of involvement in joint action. The day was bright and blustery. I made my way down to Parliament early and had time for a cup of coffee in the Red Lion pub. Looking about me I thought a number of my fellow travellers had the same idea. It was a chance for a warming up before our task. On that day another group had gathered on Parliament Square who seem to be enacting a Commonwealth ritual with quiet singing all in red jackets.

The Assange group gathered near the Churchill statue was busy handing out badges, vests and posters. I had offered to be a steward. Within moments I was handed a yellow steward's vest and a loudhailer. Instructions were given on our work to guide people where to go and what to do. We were to spread out around the square and along the road and over Westminster and Lambeth bridges.

International event

It was astonishing how many people had travelled from far and wide. We spoke to a Dutch woman who had travelled to London by ferry to be here. She was going back to Holland by ferry in the evening to Hook van Holland. Later I spoke to a group of people from Switzerland. At one point I was interviewed by a young woman who told me she was doing a report for a small French radio station. Needless to say, our British media failed to cover the event altogether.

A constant flow of people arrived from the Tube station and made their way over to the fence circumference of the Houses of Parliament. Many people asked where to go and what to do. They wanted the event explained and were grateful for any information. Basically, it meant moving to the next empty space after the last person in the chain along up the bridge. A lot of people were needed to complete the chain all the way between Westminster and Lambeth bridge and the streets on either side of the Thames. Jeremy Corbyn, Stella Assange, Julian's wife, and others gave speeches while we were getting ready to link the chain. There was some confusion, because while we were meant to link up people were still making speeches. Finally, the speeches ended and we could get on with lining up along the bridges. It was not a speakers' day. There was no platform or even much room to stand. It was an action day.

Yellow Ribbons

As we arranged ourselves along the fence which had yellow Julian Assange ribbons tied to the bars, I saw police demanding that the yellow ribbons down be taken down. I moved fast to tell people to remove them so the police would not take them. They could then fit them back after police had left. It was a cat and mouse game. We had to wait for a signal to hold hands to complete the chain. From Westminster Bridge I could see that the link was complete all along the southside of the Thames and along Lambeth Bridge. The signal came when a steward came running along calling out 'link hands now'.

It was a thrilling feeling of mass action and reminded me of Greenham Common years ago, when we made a huge chain around the perimeter of the RAF military base with slogans like 'Arms are for linking' and 'Fight war not wars'. In April 1983 we completed an 'Embrace the Base' chain with 30,000 women holding hands. Today we are still fighting the same battles. Because the battle for justice for Julian Assange is also a battle for truth about the continuing arms race and its use to perpetrate violence around the world. Today "cancel culture" with the support of the media has brought about a complicity of silencing any dissenting voices, even those that are demanding peace in Ukraine. As it happens Chelsea Manning's book has just been published where she details exactly how this move to silence people works. It is hoped that her book may help Julian Assange in his case not to be extradited.

Socialism in the English-speaking Caribbean

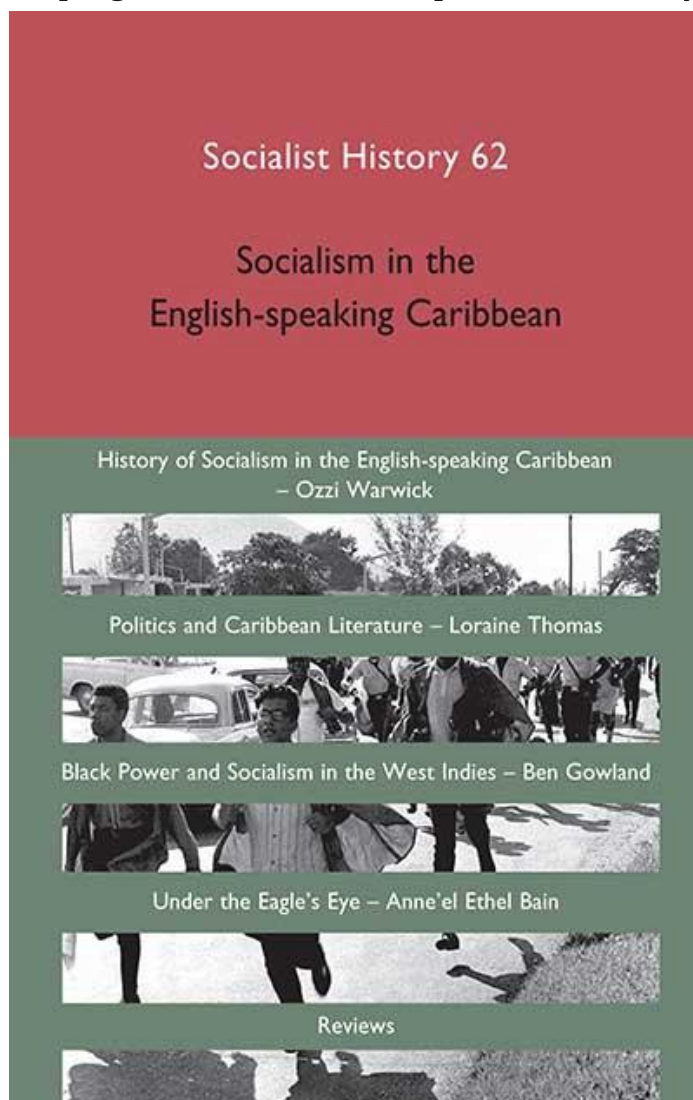
This special issue arose out of a series of online seminars on ‘Socialism in the English-speaking Caribbean’ organised by the *Socialist History Society*, the *Institute of Commonwealth Studies* and the *Society for Caribbean Studies* in March 2022.

Ozzi Warwick, himself a leading trade unionist in Trinidad and Tobago, opens our volume with his rich historical overview of socialism in the Caribbean as a current within the wider anti-colonial movement and then challenging neo-colonial domination in the post-war period. He draws our attention to the complexities involved in the formation of these societies and the many challenges both historical and contemporary, confronting struggles for a just social order against the ‘aggressive neoliberal present’, and locating the key activists and movements well, in their national and regional contexts.

Loraine Thomas in her essay explores the literature of St Vincent and the Grenadines during the era of independence, showing how the radicalism of the 1960s impacted here on the little magazines and journals. This is a uniquely interesting piece, dealing with a subject not often in the spotlight of many ‘on the Left’. Literature! Here Loraine has shown in detail, the importance of this genre in raising consciousness and the continuous impact such activism has had. It is all the more important in reflecting what media meant in times different from today’s mediascape.

Ben Gowland examines the politics of Black Power in the Caribbean in more depth, noting what made this current of Black Power distinctive, owing to the influence of, among other things, Rastafarian cosmology, Garveyism and earlier histories of slave revolt. He examines in detail the rise in racial consciousness and the progressive turn into the political economy of the region in relation to past and present imperialist order. Ben also skilfully shows the tensions between cultural awareness and the move to more class-based Party politics. Within the narrative, the role of Dr Walter Rodney is so important here, at a time when his politics is the subject of a number of new publications.

Finally, **Anne’el Ethel Bain** reminds us that with decolonisation during the Cold War, the Caribbean became an American sea, and the neo-colonialism of the United States forced the left-wing leaderships of Cuba, Grenada and Nicaragua from 1979 onwards to work more closely together for state survival. The challenges in trying to carve out at the level of state policy, an alternative path to that of imperialism’s historical legacies, in the face of its current global hegemony, is plainly set out here, demonstrating the guile and co-operation engendered by a common experience of US hostility. Such stories are not part of mainstream consciousness relating to inter-Caribbean co-operation during the Cold War, thus Anne’el’s research at this time is vital to fill this gap.



Enough is Enough demonstration Kings Cross



CWU Postalworkers - Leyton



RMT Seafarers



Strike photos thanks to Mick Holder, Sean Wallis and Steve Cushion

Leyton & Wanstead Constituency
Labour Party invites you to

Saving the People's Forest

With **Mark Gorman** in conversation
with Richard Price
Saturday 14th January

Leyton & Wanstead
 **Labour**

Published and promoted by Leyton and
Wanstead Constituency Labour Party

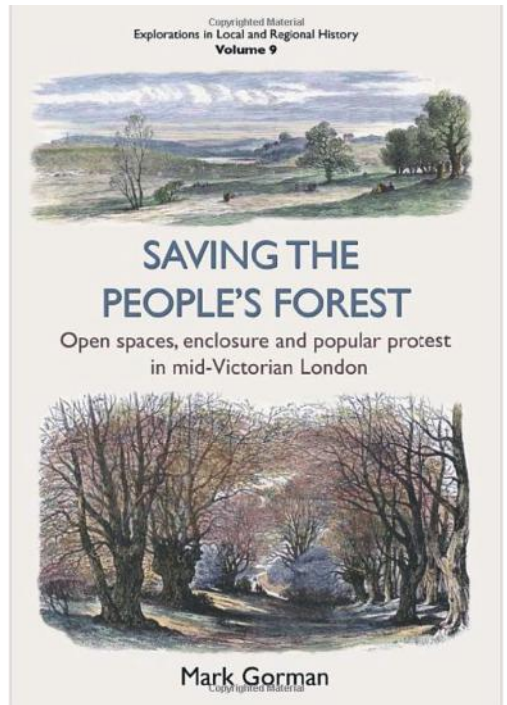
leytonwansteadclpsecretary@gmail.com

Author Mark Gorman's book *Saving the People's Forest* is the first to fully document the role of East London artisans and workers in protecting Epping Forest from enclosures and development.

He writes that: "The story of the preservation of Epping Forest and other metropolitan open spaces has been told almost entirely from the perspective of ... elite campaigners, who conducted parliamentary and legal campaigns

Location

Saturday 14th January,
3pm
Wanstead Quaker Meeting House
Bush Road, London,
E11 3AU



against enclosures and development.” He shows that the campaign was driven by popular protest, ranging from lobbying local MPs, agitating in the press, demonstrations, public meetings to rioting on Wanstead Flats in 1871. It involved not only the communities around the Forest, but many from working class communities of the old East End, who valued the Forest for leisure, entertainment and as a venue for public meetings.

Transport

Buses: 257, 308, W19
Central Line Underground:
Leytonstone (11 min walk)
Overground: Leytonstone High Road
(plus 257 bus)