Reviews

Michael Braddick, *Christopher Hill. The Life of a Radical Historian*, Verso: London, 2025; 308 pp.; ISBN 9781839760778, £35.00, hbk; ISBN 9781839760785; £15.00, ebook.

Although Christopher Hill's academic career overlapped with mine for fifteen years, our paths only crossed once, many years after he had retired. When I went to university I was already familiar with his 1940 extended and highly polemical essay on the English Revolution, in which he set out to prove that the English Civil War was a class war in which the bourgeoisie overthrew an 'essentially feudal' regime and opened up the way for a 'freer development of capitalism'. Two years later in 1961 I read his *Century of Revolution* which had just appeared. This deceptively descriptive work had a profound impact on seventeenth century studies. Shorn of Marxist terminology it addressed in a fairly muted style the emergence of a 'modern' society and state, and a civil war made possible by a split in the ruling class. Even 'capitalism' did not make it into the index although there were a few capitalists in the text. Nonetheless the picture of merchants, industrialists and gentry engaged in a long and ultimately successful struggle to remodel the regime in their own interests was shaped by the same conceptual framework as the much earlier essay. Around this, Hill also offered chapters on the religious and intellectual history of the revolutionary years. There followed an enormous output over three decades or more in which he related developments in religious, scientific and political thought and above all in literature to the central social and political transformation. Almost single-handedly he set a new agenda for seventeenth century historians. His work has remained a central reference point, even as a shoal of critics and revisionist scholars have challenged his concepts, interpretations and methodology.

Hill's biographer, Michael Braddick, is a leading early modern historian who has devoted part of his own career to writing about the formation of the British state. He was, however, also the editor of *The Oxford Handbook of the English Revolution* published in 2015, a collection of overwhelmingly revisionist articles, which emphasised the short term precipitants of the civil wars and sought to subsume the Revolution in the politics of the three kingdoms over which Charles I ruled, with the effect of almost making it disappear completely. In that *Oxford Handbook*, Hill also disappeared with the Revolution, save for the briefest passage rehearsing old criticisms. In a work of 600 pages a mere eleven offered a systematic appraisal of socio-economic developments.

Fortunately, in his new work Braddick is generous in his appreciation of 'a major historian' whose 'questions remain fundamental to how we think about the significance of this period' (p. ix). Through an assiduous assembly of what was already known about Hill with an array of other sources including his personal papers and the files of MI5, Braddick provides a satisfying and rounded study of the man and his achievements. He paints a picture of a kindly, sometimes diffident person, with a sense of moral purpose, who was caring of his students, liked by colleagues, courteous and hospitable towards even to his harshest critics. Braddick has no time at all for the idea that Hill was either an unrepentant Stalinist and not much for the oft-repeated claim that he was an unreconstructed economic determinist. He is also well aware that it is difficult to separate the apparent decline in Hill's academic reputation in the 1980s from the very nasty mud that was flung around as the country slid rightwards; it was variously alleged that Hill was part of a Marxist plot to subvert academia or a Communist mole whose employment by the Foreign Office during the war had been a major security risk. Braddick spends some time reinforcing earlier rebuttals, helped by the MI5 files which, apart from their unintended value to his biographer, merely confirm that its surveillance of him down to the early sixties was a waste of public money.

It is not clear why Braddick chose to describe Hill as a radical rather than a Marxist historian in the book's title. Although at one point he observes that Hill's Marxism was ill defined, his perceptive treatment rather belies his own comment. For Hill, Marxism was a 'lifetime commitment' which survived his break with the Communist Party in 1957. According to Braddick it was the humanist Marxism of *The German Ideology* rather than the Marxism of *Das Kapital* that appealed to the young Hill as he grappled with the alienation and disassociation felt by so many in the troubled world of the 1930s. Seeking answers in literature rather than economic theory, he also found in Marxism a satisfying way into the dialectical relationship between culture and material life which he later sought to illuminate in so much of his work – not always to the satisfaction of his critics. In the process of becoming a Marxist, Hill, to the great concern of his parents, forsook their Methodism whilst retaining a 'respect for the seriousness of socially engaged Christian belief' which fed into his Marxist humanism and his empathy for seventeenth-century religious radicals, most famously exhibited in *The World Turned Upside Down* (1972). This exhilarating foray into the world of the Seekers, Ranters and Quakers, Braddick also suggests, was Gramscian rather than Leninist in its description of a radical challenge to the cultural hegemony of the ruling class. As Hill did not go in for much theorising there is no way of knowing how directly his work was influenced by Gramsci but his approach lends itself to this supposition. The faltering ideological grip of the monarchical regime can already be discerned in *The Century of Revolution*.

Like many on the Left in the 1930s Hill's hope that his humanist ideals would or could be realised was bound up with admiration for the Soviet Union. After a prolonged visit there from which he returned in May 1936, fluent in Russian and with a remarkable knowledge of Russian historiography, Hill joined the Communist Party. He shared the fundamentalist view that the Soviet regime, by virtue of having abolished capitalism, was *ipso facto* freer and more democratic than the West. Disillusion was slow to come. After the death of Stalin in 1953 he published an article which, apart from admiring Stalin's materialism for its recognition of the role of individuals in history and the power of human agency, included an extraordinary paean of praise to him as leader. The following year Hill accompanied Robert Browning, A. L. Morton and Eric Hobsbawm on a cultural visit to the Soviet Union from which Hobsbawm returned depressed and Hill seemingly invigorated. Braddick observes that Hobsbawm was much better prepared to withstand the shock in 1956 of Khrushchev's revelations about Stalin followed a few months later by the second shock of the Soviet invasion of Hungary. Yet shaken as he certainly was, angry and frustrated by the obstacles to an open and full discussion of these events inside the Party, Hill's first instinct was not to resign. He rapidly became a prime mover in a very public battle for greater transparency and honesty which then turned into a challenge to the Party's democratic centralism. Nominated by the Executive Committee to the Commission on Inner Party Democracy he was one of three signatories to a minority report which was overwhelmingly lost at the National Congress in April 1957. Braddick notes without comment Hill's later claim that the minority report would have become the majority one if the Party chiefs had not sat on one of the commission's members, but a quick check shows that full time party workers occupied ten of the fifteen places. At the time Hill was gloomy about the prospects given the restrictive terms of reference. He was in fact on a hiding to nothing and resigned almost immediately but, unwilling to feed the right wing press, without any public statement. He joined the Labour Party, but was not very enamoured of it, choosing to support an independent socialist candidate in one by-election. Braddick provides no information on how long he remained a member. His subsequent political activity largely consisted in lending his name to a variety of causes from opposition to the Vietnam War to the defence of academic freedom and the treatment of political prisoners in Czechoslovakia.

His name was well worth having. The difficult years of the 1950s, during which he also had to cope with the breakup of his first marriage, were those in which Hill, who had hitherto written mostly for CP-connected journals, began to establish his academic credentials amongst a wider public. Braddick highlights a talk on the tercentenary of the Barebones Parliament given in 1953 for the BBC, which to its credit refused to be intimidated by private warnings from the secret service about Hill's membership of the Communist Party. An article in *History Today* appeared in

the same year. Young academics today might be puzzled as to how Hill, who had not yet published a major book, started to acquire a public persona at this juncture. Part of the answer, Braddick hints, lay precisely in the fact that his Communism combined with a fellowship at a venerable Oxford college gave him a certain cachet. It is clear from Braddick's account that he was also an energetic academic networker, reviewer and letter writer; between 1956 and 1962, for example, he wrote 110 reviews for the *Spectator*, then edited by a former student. Yet the Cold War was into its stride, hostility towards Communist and Marxist historians often not hidden. Hill was aware that without security of tenure at Balliol he might have been thrown out. Even in his undergraduate years he had learnt to be circumspect about his Marxism and that continued when he moved to a lectureship at Cardiff for a couple of years in 1936. His trenchant 1940 essay was a retrospective shock to some of his erstwhile colleagues, provoking questions about whether his views had been concealed at the time of his appointment.

Oxford, however, looks after its own. Actively recruited by Balliol as a student when he was contemplating going to Cambridge, it was assumed that after his two years in Cardiff he would return to his college. There he remained, with an interlude for his war service in military intelligence and the Foreign Office, until retirement in 1978 when he took up a visiting professorship at the Open University. Despite accumulating honorary degrees from other universities, his occasional applications for chairs elsewhere came to naught. Even the former and progressive Master of Balliol, A. D. Lindsay, whom Hill greatly admired, could not bring himself to appoint Hill to the founding Chair at the University of Staffordshire (later Keele) on the grounds that although there was nothing wrong with being a Communist he might make an uncomfortable fit. This was Balliol's good fortune, as its reputation was enhanced as Hill's soared in the 1960s. In 1965 he narrowly won election as Master of the College against an equally distinguished don and proved to be a popular choice with both colleagues and students. He brought in some common sense reforms to the governance of the college, reducing his own powers in the process. An empathetic and egalitarian manner helped him to steer it through the years of student unrest in the late sixties and early seventies, although his colleagues bluntly refused to go along with his ideas for greater student representation. His desire that Balliol should admit women also encountered obstacles of one sort or another, coming to fruition just after he retired.

Braddick fails to connect Hill's growing stature directly to his role in that most unlikely and remarkable achievement of the cold war years, the founding of *Past and Present*, the board of which he chaired until 1968. The inspiration for the initiative came from the classicist John Morris, a fellow member of the History Group of the Communist Party where the launch was discussed and prepared. Yet the journal was never formally tied to the History Group or to the Party neither of which directed

its subsequent development. The intention, as Braddick underlines, was not to produce a specifically Marxist journal but one with a 'pluralist ambition' to provide an outlet for wide ranging but scholarly articles tackling significant issues in a calculated departure from the diet of past politics and narrowly-focussed research offered by other journals. The comrades' feel for what was possible in far from propitious political circumstances was quite remarkable, tapping into and reflecting a wider movement towards a different sort of history. The journal was initially over-dependent on Marxists to write for and manage it, and on a left wing subscription base, but by the late 1950s its future was assured as other front-rank historians joined it.

The robust and intellectually challenging discussions of the History Group itself, unsustainable after 1956 if not a little earlier, were nonetheless 'fundamental', in Braddick's words, to post war historiography. This was in no small measure due to Hill. Many years later he reflected that 'everything' he wrote subsequently 'derived' from the Group's debates. Braddick is not as precise as he might have been in unpicking what Hill took from them and what he discarded. The idea encapsulated in Marx's *Preface to Critique of Political Economy* of revolution as a total process by which the mental universe was transformed as well as its economic foundation remained his guiding concept; so too did the view that the English revolution came about when the old regime 'could no longer contain the social forces let loose or accompanying the rise of capitalism'. What was discarded was his initial insistence that the Tudor monarchy was a feudal absolutist regime and the idea that the transference of power had to have a 'nodal point' which was the revolution of the 1640s. This gave way to a more nuanced view of what was achieved then and what remained to be done over the rest of the century before the powers of the State were deployed unambiguously in the capitalist interest. Braddick overlooks the group's discussion on religion and ideology, where Hill's oversimplified view, derived from Engels, about the revolutionary character of Protestantism and its appeal to the bourgeoisie was rigorously challenged. This led him to a more subtle and less deterministic exposition of the relationship between Protestantism and capitalism.

Some of Hill's critics, however, did not recognise the subtlety, finding it difficult to grasp the difference between his dialectical approach and economic determinism. Much of the criticism, Braddick observes, really amounted to an objection to Marxism from historians who were quite happily deterministic themselves in their own way. Yet Braddick does not totally absolve Hill from the charge, drawing attention in particular to the commonly expressed doubts about Hill's treatment of the social complexion of the religious radicals and the assimilation of Milton to the radical milieu. Some, notably J. H. Hexter in a notorious and vituperative review of a collection of Hill's essays, went much further, accusing him of source mining and lumping together disparate quotations in order to support a preconceived interpretation. Braddick's judicious placing of Hill's work in its historiographical as well as

its political context is a suggestive and thoughtful guide to some of the many issues and controversies that his work stirred up. But it is a guide, not a comprehensive review, and I found myself scurrying back via the footnotes to re-read material from long ago, particularly Hill's occasional but significant defences of his own work. Anyone seeking definitive personal clarity on particular parts of Hill's work, on his methodology or his conceptual framework will need to do the same.

Towards the end of his book Braddick makes the interesting observation that Hill's reputation has survived much less well in the historical world than in the literary one where his studies of major figures are well regarded and those on lesser ones have been instrumental in broadening the field of study. He earned a place in the *Oxford Companion to English Literature* from 1985, a remarkable accolade for a historian – and his much praised books on John Bunyan (1988) and the English Bible (1993) were yet to come. But by this time academic historians according to Braddick were paying Hill less attention. In part this was due to the move away from grand narratives and economic explanations of everyday life towards a concentration instead on culture, experience and subjectivity, though this can hardly explain the lack of interest in Hill's later and very cultural works. Braddick also suggests that economic historians, as exemplified by the Cambridge Group for the Study of Population and Social Structure, had developed a more rigorous quantitative approach than that which had informed Hill's work. Hill, of course, was not an economic historian, freely acknowledging his deficiencies in this area. For him the growth of capitalism was a given. He might have pointed up more precisely the ways in which it impacted on political change. Yet others have done this for him and some economic historians who would not describe themselves as Marxists have continued to write in ways which lend themselves to a Hill view. Although the reasons for the development of rural capitalism, which was central to this, have been hotly debated, few have sought to deny its presence nor that of increasingly powerful mercantile interests from at least the end of the sixteenth century.

Braddick is more persuasive when he turns to the impact of the 'revisionist' attack on Hill, supercharged as it was during the Thatcher years by political hostility. Yet Braddick's fairly bald claim that as far as the causes of the Revolution were concerned the revisionists, (who anyway were not of one mind) had the better of it, requires comment. He does not systematically address those planks in revisionist thinking which were most intended to debunk the idea that a major revolution occurred: the claim that there were no long term, (particularly intellectual or religious), causes of the civil war, that all was well until a few years before the execution of the King; that faction was more important than ideology; that local conflicts had little national resonance or vice versa. All these strands of thought have been challenged and remain open to challenge. A more productive alternative view, offered by Conrad Russell and John Morrill, was the idea (in Braddick's words) that the civil war

was preceded by a 'functional breakdown of political institutions'. Yet this perspective could be used to fill out rather than undermine Hill's view of the Revolution and his later formulations about the incapacity of Charles's regime suggests that is what he may have taken from it. It took Russell's subsequent development of the idea of a crisis across all three kingdoms to provide an academically respectable means of circumventing a specifically English Revolution.

That was the aim of the misnamed *Oxford Handbook of the English Revolution*, and given that Braddick edited that volume, his willingness to put Hill back on the stage is striking. He has done so with great sympathy for the man and with a thoroughly fair appraisal of him as a pioneering and controversial historian. He also goes out of his way to rescue him from the ideological and political opprobrium to which he and his work were subject. Is it fanciful to think that his study, coming not too long after Richard Evans' biography of Eric Hobsbawm, might betoken a change in the historiographical weather, a further reconfiguration of the relationship of past and present which Braddick himself deploys to illuminate Hill's legacy? Let us hope so. It is no less than Hill deserves.

David Parker
Holmfirth

Jo Byrne, *Beyond Trawlertown: Memory, Life and Legacy in the Wake of the Cod Wars*, Liverpool University Press: Liverpool, 2022; 256 pp.; ISBN 9781800856554, £91.60, hbk; ISBN 9781837644087, £26.39, pbk.

In this valuable book, the author achieves a notable feat: macrotextual, almost global history is married effectively to very localised social history and psychogeography. From the late 1800s to the mid-1970s, Hull (together with Grimsby), was a major centre for the distant-water trawling industry. Hull fishermen were celebrated working-class heroes, braving formidable obstacles and dangers to bring vast amounts of cod back to Hull for processing and selling. Huge numbers of Hull fishermen were killed or maimed at sea. But the fishermen were only part of a gendered workforce that defined a community of seagoing men, dock workers, processors, vessel engineers, railway workers and merchants – Trawlertown, the area around Hessle Road in Hull. This community was obliterated in the mid-1970s. St. Andrew's Dock, a 'taskscape' once unimaginably bustling and defined by organised chaos, is now a desolate, ghostly, silted-over 'conservation zone' largely bereft of character. Byrne's purpose is twofold. First, she delivers a sweeping and comprehensive account of exactly why the fishing industry collapsed in Hull. Britain's final capitulation to Iceland at the end of the Third Cod War in 1976 is only one of a number of factors that caused the industry to end. Second, Byrne engages with local clashes over memory. The fishermen of Hull were notoriously given tardy and inadequate

compensation – various Conservative and Labour administrations are felt to have badly overlooked the lauded but electorally insignificant men of the industry. How are the fatalities and the survivors of the industry remembered in Hull? The answer is complex. So, the book effectively comes in two sections: the first explains how Trawlertown became Notrawler town; the second accounts for Hull communities and their struggles to properly commemorate the lucrative but perilous tradition of distant-water fishing.

In the 'Preface' and in the 'Introduction,' Byrne accounts for the nature of their research. The macrotextual history of fishing in the northern hemisphere is accounted for with reference to various existing historical studies, various archives of trawling firms and federations and periodicals pertaining to the industry. The local history of Trawlertown is informed by Byrne's local knowledge of the area, with reference to historical local media and with forty-three sometimes poignant oral interviews undertaken by the author. Total respect is always shown to these working-class, usually long-retired interviewees – but Byrne is never afraid to point out the occasional disparity between local *assumptions* about why Trawlertown collapsed and verifiable *facts* about why it collapsed.

The book is based on a PhD thesis. The few inefficacious parts of the book betray its origins. There is a small amount of over-complicated faff in the Introduction (confusingly, also referred to as Chapter One) about, for instance, certain types of histories 'supplanting temporal perspectives, ushered by a constantly unfolding future'. (p.10) That, and the largely unnecessary account of methodologies undertaken by previous historians who have processed and analysed local memories are the sort of things that doctoral candidates are told to do at transfer vivas. It is hard to imagine Hessle Road veterans caring too much about the historiographical and sociological methodologies of social historians of the past. There are a few other flaws with the book – but they are minor and they can be dealt with in a few sentences. A bit of extra proofreading would have been helpful. I think that the author will be embarrassed to have missed the misdating of the triple trawler disaster of early 1968 to 1969 in a footnote (p.195, n.52). And in common with a lot of present-day monographs, the Index is inadequate, with many names and places cited in the text not accounted for in the Index. The work of the historian, Daniel James, is engaged with in the Introduction/Chapter One but he makes no appearance in the Index. Similarly, Robin Diaper, seemingly an important mentor to Byrne, is mentioned twice in the text but has gone missing from the Index. But these are very minor issues. Overall, the book is beautifully furnished with extremely useful information. The tables and appendices about trawler numbers and tonnages of catches are helpful, as are the detailed maps of Hull's dock areas and the visual depictions of trawler movements in the Atlantic. Byrne's own monochrome photographs of the now-desolate St. Andrew's Dock are both affecting and informative. The

Glossary of Fishing and Nautical Terms is useful – not everyone can necessarily always remember the difference between Jigging and Klondyking. The Glossary of Vernacular Terms seemed a bit unwarranted to me – but to be fair I know that a Hull man means 'them' when he says 'em' but perhaps an American or Australian reader will not. The Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Sources is splendid – it is a great starter list for anyone who would want to start researching the topic themselves. And, as revealed in the meat of the book, it is a fascinating and ongoing topic. Because the story of Hull's fishing did not end in 1976. The professional business of Hull's fishing may have ended abruptly – but the world did not end in 1976. The history of Hessle Road did not end in 1976 – it just changed.

Chapter Two delivers a superb overview of the century of Hull's preeminence as a distant-ground fishing port. Technological changes are accounted for very well – Byrne explains the changes in trawlers clearly. By the Edwardian age, Hull's fishing industry was a behemoth. All of the trawlers were now steam operated. Eighty Hull-based trawlers made regular three-week trips to Icelandic waters. They caught vast amounts of cod, bringing it back to Hessle Road – an exuberant, around-the-clock place of fish processing plants, offal workshops, offices, cafés, shops, bars, clubs and heroic status for the fishermen themselves – the 'three-day millionaires' who were well paid with standard wages and bonus 'poundage' for their cod-gathering ingenuity and their ferocious battles against bitter Atlantic weather. There seems to have been a sense that the cod would last forever – few men seemed minded to save money. Byrne suggests that there was even a sense of fatalism – death might come on the next mission so enjoy the money while it lasts. That might also account for the apparent disinterest in unions. Work was plentiful and, certainly, masses of working-class people were addicted to abundant, cheap, fried white fish – would that fish and chips were so common and so cheap now.

The trawlermen seemed to feel that economically at least, they had no fear for the future. But the sense of a Damoclean sword is constant. As early as 1932, quotas were introduced to arrest stock declines and technological developments made the battle between hunting fishermen and hunted cod ever more one-sided. Radar and diesel engines were available by the 1950s and in the 1960s stern trawlers were replacing the cumbersome side trawlers – and factory ships and large-scale maritime freezing possibilities were changing the international fishing scene markedly. Britain, as usual, was slow to adapt to the new technologies; nor could it accept the confidence of the recently independent Iceland. In 1958, Iceland extended its territorial waters to twelve miles, outraging British trawlermen who, ignoring the claim and Icelandic Coast Guard crews, continued to fish, now with the protection of an armada of Royal Navy ships. It was the First Cod War – the first of three.

The three Cod Wars are explained in detail in Chapter Three. Truthfully, it is the finest summary of the arguably ludicrous confrontations between Icelandic Coast

Guard vessels and Royal Navy destroyers and frigates and/or the heavy trawlers themselves that I have ever read. The First Cod War ended in 1961 when Britain, after spending millions of pounds on Royal Navy support for the trawlermen, backed down and accepted Iceland's new, unilateral twelve-mile limit. The Second Cod War ended in 1973 when Britain, after spending millions of pounds on Royal Navy support for the trawlermen, backed down and accepted Iceland's new, unilateral fifty-mile limit. The Third Cod War ended in 1976 when Britain, after spending millions of pounds on Royal Navy support for the trawlermen, backed down and accepted Iceland's new, unilateral two-hundred-mile limit. The repetitive pattern is almost laughable. But there was no laughing in Hull after the great climbdown of 1976. The British Government accepted that British trawlermen would never fish in Icelandic waters again. With no access to their prime hunting ground, the trawling companies and their employees – the men and women of Hull's Hessle Road – were left almost literally high and dry.

But Byrne stresses that losing the three Cod Wars was, although catastrophic, not the only reason for the collapse of the Hull industry. The British joined the EEC in the early 1970s – that opened up British fishing grounds to previously excluded foreign fishermen. Almost overnight, British trawlermen could not fish cod around Iceland and they faced massive competition from other nations' fleets to fish in British waters. Other factors damaged the industry: for example, oil prices rose dramatically in 1973 and 1974 and, again, later in the 1970s. The reality is that various global crises conspired to stop trawling being a profitable enterprise. The swiftness of the decline is described with sensitivity and with a great sense of place and atmosphere. Many trawlers were instantly decommissioned and left to rust at St. Andrew's Dock – which became a sort of maritime equivalent of Dai Woodhams' famous steam locomotive scrapyard in Barry. But Byrne insists that the trawlers were doomed anyway – they were mainly side trawlers – they were obsolete. And some trawlers were simply life-expired. The decommissioned trawlers seemed to summarise the end of British fishing – but that was merely optical. As explained in upbeat detail in Chapter Four, many trawlers, especially newer models, found new leases of life in other contexts – fishing in various parts of the world, serving the giant new North Sea oil industry. Byrne does tell a few largely unsubstantiated anecdotes about one-time heroic fishermen giving up on life, resigning themselves to the dole and succumbing to drinking cider on Hull park benches – but the overall post-1976 story, accounted for in Chapter Five, is quite a dynamic one. Many one-time distant-water fishermen fished for pelagic mackerel off British waters. They knew that cod stocks were not as plentiful as they were and accepted that the Icelanders had been right to preserve and conserve the fish. Scientists were right: cod was simply being over-fished. Enlightened owners of trawlers and some of their employees knew that: as one former deckhand tells Byrne succinctly, 'We was catching miles too much

fish'. (p.69) But it was hard to tell British consumers that non-cod fishes could be enjoyable dinner-table staples – some of Byrne's particularly witty sentences describe the difficulties of selling 'scabbard, monkfish, rabbit fish [and] rat-tail' to an average British shopper. (p.113)

If one can handle Atlantic Seas and aggressively-captained Icelandic Coast guard vessels cutting one's trawl wires, then one can handle anything maritime. Many physically able and mentally sharp Hull trawlermen found well-paid seagoing work in waters as far off as those of western Africa, Gulf States, New Zealand and the Malvinas. It is unambiguously true that the one-time dynamic community of Hessle Road was gutted – fish processing pun intended. So, Chapter Six is a fairly bleak chapter about the 1980s and 1990s – when Hessle Road and its environs became an ex-fishing port, a deathly, silent emptiness of decay and neglect. Fishing activity continued to operate from the nearby Albert Dock – but on a smaller scale and, there, the focus was on the processing of fish caught by efficient, internationally-minded crews from vessels belonging to other nations. Sometimes workers even processed fish that had been caught by Icelandic trawlers – an irony not lost on some local publicans who refused service to Icelandic fishermen. (pp.136-137) The days when Hull workers processed fish caught by Hull-launched trawlers just ended. After 1976, it was just not the same culture. So, Byrne writes sepulchrally of 'The Death of Trawlertown.' Indeed, on a civic level, Hull seemed content to consign the proletarian, rough world of Hessle Road to a forgotten past. Some politicians and writers in the local media even downplayed the significance of fishing to Hull's cultural and economic history. Planners, certainly, when clearing Hessle Road of its more dilapidated housing had no nostalgia for the heritage or 'character' of slums once peopled with cod-dependent labourers' families.

Some people of Hull have fought to maintain an oral, pictorial and physical memory of St. Andrew's Docks and its environs and the thousands of men who risked everything to bring millions of specimens of the sainted cod to it. It is a determined campaign to push for memory and history 'from below.' It has partially succeeded: although St. Andrew's Dock itself is now a silted-over embarrassment, the general area now has a museum trawler, a mural, a 2017 memorial to men lost at sea and some protected physical remnants on the land. Locally-written literature and drama presents creative versions of narratives from fish-centred workers of the past. Much of this is due to the efforts of a group called STAND – the St. Andrew's Fish Dock Heritage Park Action Group. I confess, though, that I struggled not to laugh when Byrne described the split that led to a breakaway group, the Hull Bullnose Heritage Group. The description of the split between the two factions reads like a parody of a split between factions of an Irish paramilitary group. But, arguably, Irish paramilitary groups had internecine fights for good reasons and those who seek to remember Hull's once-great fishing industry have good reasons for

wanting to remember men and women of the past as well as the remaining physical infrastructure of the Docks in the way they want to. Celebrating fishermen and the women in supporting jobs was important to Ewan MacColl and it is important to Jo Byrne. This is, overall, an excellent, detailed, passionate book about the heyday and extraordinarily speedy decline of a unique working-class community, one that was both of and not of Hull, one that existed on some sort of philosophically liminal world that was as doomed as it was vital. It is a dense, imperfect but compelling book. It takes a long time to fully engage with and to fully comprehend the book's technical information about trawlers and trawling, the statistics, the scale of its global coverage, the comprehensiveness of its attention to local detail, its description of fish shoal behaviour and the range of its oral and written printed sources – it is worth every minute.

Kevin De Ornellas
Ulster University

Max Farrar and Kevin McDonnell, *Big Flame: Building Movements, New Politics*, Merlin Press: Dagenham, 2024; 374 pp.; ISBN 9780850367959, £30.00, pbk.

Big Flame was a short-lived (1970-84) but distinctive organization on the British left, variously described as revolutionary, socialist, feminist and libertarian in its organization, perspectives and ethos. Drawing from a range of Marxist traditions, it was always somewhat idiosyncratic and hard to categorize, being neither Trotskyist, communist, anarchist nor Maoist. Emerging in Liverpool in 1970 with a name inspired by the eponymous Loach/Allen/Garnett TV play about workers' control in the Liverpool docks, it subsequently spread to other large Northern cities such as Leeds, Manchester and Sheffield as well as to London. Its members included Paul Thompson and Lynn Segal, both of whom later became famous academics, whilst the sociologists Huw Beynon and Tony Lane were briefly associated with the group in the early 1970s though never actually joined.

The current book has been produced by two former members of Big Flame, one of whom maintains the group's website, but it also includes around forty short extracts of up to several thousand words each from many other ex-members, describing their first contact with the group, their modes of involvement and retrospective assessment of their experiences. In addition one of the book's nine chapters dealing primarily with women and Big Flame was authored, appropriately, by three women from the group. The book is organized both chronologically and thematically and is generally well written. There are detailed appendices covering the national committee composition and the group's publications whilst the detailed

evidence in the text is thoroughly backed up by over 500 endnotes as well as two indexes.

Much of Big Flame's worldview was shared with the bulk of the contemporary British far left: the capitalist system was a dysfunctional, destructive and oppressive system which could only be overthrown by a mass revolution emerging from protracted and escalating class struggles, both at the workplace and around broader issues such as anti-racism and anti-imperialism. Consequently Big Flame members were active in the Anti-Nazi League, the Chile Solidarity Campaign and the Troops Out Movement. The group was also committed to the view that a socialist society would be built by workers themselves, not by union or party leaders acting on their behalf, and it could not be created through an incremental process of reforms.

However, Big Flame departed from conventional revolutionary thinking, especially Trotskyist thinking, in at least three respects. First, it was strongly influenced, especially in the early 1970s, by an anti-elitist, Italian Marxist current known as *operaismo* ('workerism'), the idea that the frontline of class struggle was now centred around militant, direct action by the mass production workers of the world's giant car assembly plants. The role of revolutionaries in this context was no longer to act as a class conscious vanguard, directing workers according to party schema, but to engage collaboratively and directly with workers in shared learning and practice, whilst steering clear of involvement in workplace union structures and committees. Big Flame members were therefore especially active in some of the Ford Motor Company's largest plants: Halewood on Merseyside, Dagenham in Essex and Langley to the west of London. Second, Big Flame also engaged seriously with the idea of multiple forms of oppression and whilst not downgrading battles over exploitation at the workplace, acknowledged that other struggles were equally salient. The prime examples involved housing, childcare and reproductive rights and the centrality of women to all three domains suggests why almost 50 per cent of Big Flame's membership in the early 1970s were women. Third, many Big Flame members were committed to an idea of 'prefigurative politics', the notion that the organization of their daily lives should reflect their socialist values such as communal living and shared responsibility for childcare. This combination of features perhaps explains why so many of the recollections of ex-members are exceptionally positive, as they recall the genuine pleasures of shared campaigns, a fair degree of autonomy from centralized structures, the successes (and the setbacks) as well as the comradeship of the close-knit groups and the regular summer schools that characterized Big Flame.

Yet the authors of the book are equally keen to identify the downsides of Big Flame's *modus operandi*: its decentralized and loose structures provided few incentives, or pressures, to recruit and induct members, levy and collect regular dues and sell the group's regular newspaper. Whilst these staple activities helped propel the

contemporary membership of Britain's leading Trotskyist groups (International Socialists, Socialist Labour League/Workers Revolutionary Party and the Militant Tendency) into the thousands, Big Flame's membership probably never exceeded 160 or so and it struggled to break out of its largely white, middle class, ex-student milieu. Moreover as members burned out or moved on with their lives, the organization struggled to replenish, yet alone expand, its membership base. From the mid-1970s it therefore launched a series of initiatives to try and expand its influence, beginning with the 1977 manifesto calling on the revolutionary left to begin discussions on the formation of a new, revolutionary organization. This hopelessly optimistic venture picked up a handful of dissidents from a couple of organizations but was clearly doomed to fail as it collided with the rigid structures and deeply-ingrained sectarianism of the Trotskyist left. A few months later Big Flame and the International Marxist Group launched an electoral coalition called Socialist Unity but after 14 ineffectual campaigns over the next few years it too was wound up. By this time the organization was in the grip of a long-running debate over its relationship with the burgeoning Labour Left and although only a small minority of members switched from Big Flame to the Labour Party in 1981, the group was now locked into a process of decline and disorientation from which there seemed no obvious exit; three years later it was wound up.

Yet forty years after its demise some of the themes pioneered by Big Flame now look quite prescient. Its emphasis on collaborative working in social movement-type campaigns around a range of workplace and non-workplace issues chimes well with much contemporary organizing literature. Its emphasis on women's reproductive rights and sexuality arguably anticipated the growth of movements and identities beyond those of social class. And its trenchant and comprehensive critique of Trotskyism and the Leninist vanguard party – Thompson and Lewis' *The Revolution Unfinished?* – remains as relevant today as when it was first published in 1977. Nonetheless, as the authors ruefully observe towards the end of their text, 'Big Flame is an example of a left group whose politics bore the imprint of the 1960s but was unable to survive the 1980s.'

John Kelly
Birkbeck, University of London

John Foster, *Languages of Class Struggle – Communications and Mass Mobilisation in Britain and Ireland 1842–1972*, Praxis Press; Glasgow, 2024; 202 pp.; ISBN 9781899155194, £25.00, pbk.

It is refreshing to see, following too many years of neglect among researchers of history, that class and class struggle are firmly back on the agenda. Clearly, for a historian such as John Foster class has always been a central preoccupation;

undeterred by changing academic fashions, he has ploughed a steady furrow for half a century with his writings on English labour and trade union studies. He was an unflinching critic of the 'linguistic turn' in history a few decades ago, when he made an influential contribution to the debate, in 'The Declassing of Language', an essay published in *New Left Review*.

In his latest book, Foster returns to debates on language and its relationship with class and class struggle, a preoccupation first signalled in his landmark research into the cotton manufacturing town of Oldham, published as *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution* some forty years ago. He writes in detail about the Clydeside shipyards in the early 1970s and in 1919, the Belfast General Strike of 1919, the Councils of Action in 1920, and the General Strike of 1842; all examples of acute class conflict and growth of working class organisation that had a lasting impact.

Class struggle, as Foster shows, is always about collective action, the organisation of a mass movement, and represents an acute awakening of political consciousness among individuals who grow to realise their shared interests and that common conditions can only really be modified by engaging in collective struggle. He provides detailed case studies to examine the aforementioned notable episodes of accentuated class struggle in British history where the circumstances provided the conditions that raised the level of consciousness and activity among workers and their communities. He looks at the powers marshalled by the state and the ruling class to suppress and dissipate workers' unrest, the enduring wider outcomes of social conflict, whether real social advances were made, the demands won and how even a partial victory could act as a vital lesson for future action.

The likes of E. P. Thompson, Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart were pioneer social historians who set out to explain changing working-class behaviour, attitudes and culture in all their developing permutations from the era of the pre-Industrial Revolution to the modern consumer society and on towards a deindustrialised present and uncertain future. Writing in this Marxist tradition, Foster explores similar territory as his distinguished predecessors but with an eye firmly fixed on drawing lessons for contemporary political struggles. He shows how any successful concerted action involves a radical shift in attitude among workers. How this change comes about is a central focus, and is the reason for his choice as case studies of five landmark episodes drawn from nineteenth and twentieth century British working class history that form the core of his book.

Foster introduces his readers to the important work of Soviet linguists, such as Volosinov, Vygotsky, Luria and Leontiev, who in the 1920s researched how class consciousness was shaped by development of language, experience and social circumstances. Using their theories, Foster discusses how revolutionary transitions within society are brought about by human activity, centred on class awareness and articulation of social grievances from a clear class perspective. He cites Volosinov:

> Consciousness takes shape and being within the material of signs created by an organised group in the process of its social intercourse. The individual consciousness is nurtured on signs; it derives its growth from them; it reflects their logic and laws. The logic of consciousness is the logic of ideological communication, of the semiotic interaction of a social group.

Furthermore, the 'inner dialectic quality of the sign comes out fully in the open only in times of social crises or revolutionary changes'.

For Foster it is always essential to address the true purpose of studying and knowing your history. With a distinguished reputation for academically grounded research, he never forgets that he is writing for an audience beyond the world of refereed journals and university seminars. The essays in the book are all grounded in the details of actual past and present struggles of working people and their self-made political organisations, movements and social institutions, such as trade unions and parties. He is concerned to explore how working-class activists and leaders of movements succeed in articulating popular demands and communicating effectively with the wider masses.

Foster seeks to examine what it takes to speak in a clear voice that resonates with the people and one that is capable of lifting up people's horizons from the mundane level of existence, 'the daily grind'. He challenges the caricatures and stereotypes of working class culture found in popular television drama and comic strips like Andy Capp, who first appeared in the 'Labour newspaper' *Daily Mirror* in 1957 and is still going strong. The need to critique what the media and education define as working class behaviour is a necessary ideological struggle. It takes on additional significance during periods of acute social conflict, like the episodes discussed in this important book, which has opened up new, vital and necessary avenues of research for socialist historians and made a major contribution towards reviving labour studies.

David Morgan
Manchester

Michael Hughes, *Feliks Volkhovskii: A Revolutionary Life*, Open Book Publishers: Cambridge, 2024; 336 pp.; ISBN 9781805111955, £35.95, hbk; ISBN 978185111948, £22.95, pbk. E-book free on: https://www.openbookpublishers.com/books/10.11647/obp.0385

Feliks Volkhovskii was one of the lesser-known but important Russian revolutionaries from the 1860s to the early 1900s. First a nihilist, then a Narodnik, he was one of the founders of the Socialist Revolutionary Party – the party which focused on the needs of the peasants for land reform. Volkhovskii until now has tended to be a footnote in the biographies of more prominent revolutionaries, including Petr

Lavrov, Sergei Stepniak-Kravchinskii and the SR theorist Viktor Chernov, who later served as agriculture minister in the February 1917 provisional government.

Hughes' research is impressive. Using archives held across several European countries and Russia, he traces Volkhovskii's revolutionary career, from his youthful involvement in student unrest collaborating with Sergei Nechaev (he was acquitted of conspiracy) and membership of the Chaikovskii circle in St Petersburg in the early 1870s. Volkhovskii was active in revolutionary circles in Odessa, was arrested and imprisoned in the Peter and Paul Fortress in St Petersburg, before being exiled to Siberia, where he met the American explorer George Kennan, who was researching for his classic study of *Siberia and the Exile System*, published in 1891. Volkhovskii managed to escape, travelling from the Mongolian border to Vladivostok and Nagasaki in Japan, then on to Vancouver and Toronto where again he met Kennan. He then gave lectures on Tsarist oppression to a wide range of groups before travelling to London in the summer of 1890. London had been the base for Alexander Herzen in the 1850s and 1860s. Lavrov, Nechaev, Bakunin, Stepniak and Kropotkin all spent time in the city.

Stepniak was already active in London's socialist and radical Liberal circles, working closely with the Newcastle-based Robert Spence Watson, president of the National Liberal Federation, to whom he had been introduced by the Fabian Society secretary, Edward Pease. They established the Society of Friends of Russian Freedom, which published a journal, *Free Russia*, edited by Stepniak. Spence Watson, a Quaker who was also president of the Peace Society, considered that terrorist acts were justified in Russia given the oppression of the Tsarist regime. Volkhovskii arrived in London in time for the story of his escape to feature in the second issue of *Free Russia,* and he soon became a close collaborator of Stepniak, giving a lecture tour on behalf of the SFRF. After Stepniak's death in December 1895 (he was run over by a train while crossing the railway line near his home in Chiswick), Volkhovskii struggled to keep together the alliance of radical Liberals and socialists around the SFRF and *Free Russia*. He was also affected by a series of controversies around spies and informers in the Russian emigration, including the trial of the Russian London émigré, Vladimir Burtsev, who had published an article justifying regicide in 1897. The nihilists were also caught up in controversies over the actions of various anarchists, such as the German Johann Most and the French Auguste Coulon. The support of Liberals and socialists for acts of terrorism tended to weaken, once they were taking place on British soil.

In 1904, Volkhovskii became involved in the revival of revolutionary agitation, helping to obtain false passports for revolutionaries travelling to and from Russia. He did this with the help of British radicals such as Samuel Hobson and Henry Brailsford; the latter was arrested and fined £100. Working with the Finnish revolutionary and author Konni Zilliacus (father of the Labour MP of the same name)

and N. V. Chaikovskii, he sought to bring together revolutionaries exiled in various European capitals. This led to conferences in Paris and Geneva, which were funded by the Japanese secret service – this being the time of the Russia-Japanese war. Volkhovskii then joined the Socialist Revolutionary Party (PSR), comprising agrarian socialists and former narodniks, and became a member of their Geneva-based Foreign Committee. Volkhovskii missed the first Socialist Revolutionary congress as he was ill in Switzerland. He however moved to Helsinki to work with Zilliacus on his newspaper, before returning to London in the spring of 1907. He continued with propaganda activity and poetry – he was not a theorist and so was not involved in the development of the PSR's agrarian theory. He attended the Socialist International conferences in 1904 and 1910, though he missed the 1907 Stuttgart conference, which was attended by a large PSR delegation. As a veteran, he opened the PSR conference in Paris in August 1908 (the more senior Ekaterina Breshko-Breshkovskaia was in prison). The party at that time was divided between those who supported terrorism and those who focused on parliamentary work in the Russian Duma. Shortly thereafter Vladimir Burtsev was to expose Evno Azef, the head of the SR military organisation, as a government provocateur and spy.

Back in Britain, in 1908, Volkhovskii and *Free Russia* were criticising the implementation of the 1905 Aliens Act, and campaigning against the planned state visit of Tsar Nicholas to London. The 1909 outrages by Latvian anarchist exiles in Tottenham and at Sidney Street did little to help the cause of the émigré Russian revolutionaries and the PSR's journal *Za Narod* struggled to distance its party from the anarchists. William Melville of the Metropolitan Police Special Branch kept the Russian secret service agents based in London aware of the activities of Volkhovskii and his colleagues. When the Russian Prime Minister P. A. Stolypin was assassinated in 1911 – not at the behest of the PSR – Volkhovskii nonetheless had to be cautious in what he wrote about it, given the risk of further damaging the PSR's standing in British public opinion.

Volkhovskii, who had developed a reputation as the PSR's expert on military matters, died in London in July 1914, just as the First World War was breaking out. While he was less significant than his colleagues such as Stepniak and Chernov, Hughes has used Volkhovskii's life as a means of tracing the narrative of the Russian revolutionary movement, and its relationship with British radical politics, over an extensive period. It therefore provides a useful addition to the existing literature, such as Senese's work on Stepniak in London and Robert Henderson's recent study of Vladimir Burtsev. It is well worth reading and the publisher is to be congratulated for making the study available in paperback at a reasonable price as well as making the book available on-line for free. If only other academic publishers could follow this example!

Duncan Bowie, UCL

Margarite Poulos, *Refugee to Revolutionary: A Transnational History of Greek Communist Women in Interwar Europe*, Vanderbilt University Press: Nashville, TN, 2024; 276 pp., 16 illus; ISBN 9780826507167, $34.95, (pbk), ISBN 9780826507174, $99.95, (hbk).

In *Refugee to Revolutionary,* Margarite Poulos undertakes a remarkable 'act of historical recovery'. (p.161) As she notes at the outset, a few Greek women communists achieved 'iconic status' (p.8) for their roles in the World War II resistance. Yet almost nothing is known about the women who joined the party in the interwar years. Fundamental to Poulos's approach to making these women visible is her insistence on taking them seriously as historical actors.

Drawing on the Comintern files of thirty-one women (usefully summarized in two tables, pp.88-96), Poulos documents their 'critical' but 'by design invisible' (p.120) contributions to the illegal interwar Communist Party of Greece (KKE). This restoration mission does more than fill a gap in the historical record; it reveals the degree to which the party's ability to mobilize resistance to the Axis occupation relied on the women and girls who 'entered the communist movement in the 1920s' (p.166).

Although Poulos tracks her protagonists through the whirlwind of the Great Terror, the wartime resistance, and the Greek Civil War (1946-1949), she locates the pivot of their lives in the years between 1924 and 1934, when the Comintern's policy of 'Bolshevization' intersected with the Greek refugee crisis. It was only the Comintern's efforts to 'Bolshevize' member parties – to bring them more fully under Moscow's sway – that pushed Greek party leaders to recruit women. The young women who joined the KKE in this period were 'often poor and semiliterate refugees' from Anatolia; in 1924, the party began admitting them to the 'cadre education program', (p.55) opened three years earlier. Only in 1935 did the male leaders appoint a woman to the central committee, Chrysa Hatzivasiliou, a member since 1925. Careful to affirm that Bolshevization was not a 'feminist panacea', (p.55) Poulos underlines the policy's 'paradoxes': even as Soviet 'conceptions of women's emancipation shrank in scope,' culminating with the recriminalization of abortion in 1936, 'the Comintern's agenda presented new and concrete opportunities' (p.56) for women.

Granting that the life stories women penned for their Comintern files were often both 'fragmentary and contrived', Poulos nonetheless deems them 'invaluable primary sources' that 'illuminate the agency of people who for the most part remain in the shadows'. (p.13) Thus, for example, she takes Olga Papadopoulou's description of a childhood dominated by relatives who 'did not particularly want me to live' (p.116) as not only a means of claiming a politically expedient impoverished social background, but as motivating a genuine and deeply felt desire to avail herself of the upward mobility afforded by a communist education. Indeed, Poulos's analysis gives more weight to the 'aspirational and pragmatic' goals suggested by the

women's biographies than to their 'varying degrees of ideological conviction'. (p.114)

The book's cover, featuring photographic portraits of a half dozen Greek communists, signals the focus on recovering the lives of women activists. The stories behind the photographs bolster Poulos's argument that experiences of displacement, poverty, and industrial labor underpinned women's radicalization. Among those pictured are Chrysanthi Kantzidou and Stella Vamniazidou, born to refugee families in 1912 and 1910, respectively. Kantzidou's "'middling" Greek peasant family' (p.127) fled from Eastern Thrace to Drama during the Balkan Wars (1912-1913); Vamniazidou's 'poor peasant family' (p.129) left Anatolia for Kavala in the wake of the Greco-Turkish War (1919-1922). The two followed the same path as many of the party's women cadres from preteen years spent working in the tobacco industry to activism in the Red Tobacco Workers Union to, by the early 1930s, membership in the KKE.

Membership in the party offered young women like Kantzidou and Vamniazidou unique 'opportunities for education, work, and advancement'. (p.164) Although Kantzidou had only one year of elementary schooling and Vamniazidou not even that, the party dispatched both to the prestigious International Lenin School in Moscow, where both successfully completed several years of study before returning to Greece on the eve of the Axis occupation. Poulos argues that for Kantzidou and Vamniazidou, as for the 'vast majority' of Greek students who studied in Moscow, the Comintern's 'universities were without a doubt a vehicle for upward mobility, perhaps the only vehicle available to them'. (p.110) The graduates served as 'mid-level functionaries' and 'underground operatives' in Greece and in the 'Greek minority zones of the Soviet Union' (p. 110) – the areas around the Black Sea to which Anatolian Greeks had migrated or fled in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Communist women's life trajectories call attention to what Poulos deems 'the fundamentally transnational character of Greek communism'. (p.3) The Comintern universities connected women from Greece, who were often Anatolian refugees, with so-called Soviet Greeks, people like Lidiia Ivanovna Petrova (Cherman). Born in 1897 in the Donbas region of Ukraine, Petrova was a Soviet citizen, whose native language was Russian, and whose Greek was 'poor', (p.93) but because she was the descendant of Anatolian Greeks, the 'nationality' inscribed in her Soviet passport was 'Greek'. She had taken full advantage of the opportunities that the Russian Revolution opened to national minorities, training as a teacher, joining the Soviet party in 1927, and attending the Communist University for National Minorities of the West (KUNMZ). In 1931, she moved from KUNMZ to the newly opened Greek sector of the International Lenin School. Although 'unable to read Greek newspapers', (p.99) she undertook a Comintern assignment in Greece in 1933-1934. Upon her return to the Soviet Union, she became the head of the Lenin School's Greek sector,

a post she held until 1937, when she was purged. During the Stalinist terror, transnational connections became dangerous, as both Greeks in the Soviet Union and Soviet Greeks 'were regarded as suspicious and unreliable national minorities'. (p.111)

Interestingly, the gallery of portraits on the book's cover includes one non-Greek, the Bolshevik feminist Inessa Armand. Although a generation older than the Greek communists, Armand, with her short hair, austere dress, and serious gaze, appears to be their peer – or perhaps their inspiration. Indeed, the best known of these Greek communist women, the eventual central committee member Chrysa Hatzivasiliou, took the alias Alexandra Nikolai Armand when she studied at KUMNZ in the late 1920s. Poulos uses this invented bond with Armand and the prominent Bolshevik feminist Alexandra Kollontai to raise the critical question of how and to what extent communist women aspired to become 'honorary males' or to resist 'the masculinist cast of Bolshevik political culture'. (p.152)

Poulous gives Hatzivasiliou the last word. An appendix with the full text of Hatzivasiliou's 1946 essay 'The Greek Communist Party and the Woman Question' is an outstanding teaching resource. Lamenting the 'many backward perceptions about women that continue to prevail … even among communist men', (p.194) Hatzivasiliou emphasized that during the Civil War, the party 'nurtured' (p.191) Greek women, who effectively 'smashed their own sense of inferiority'. (p.190) The essay never really reconciles the party's 'vanguard' role, communist men's 'backward perceptions,' and communist women's efforts to 'free themselves'. (p.194) A similar tension runs through Poulos's study, which underscores the KKE's vanguard role in offering women education and meaningful work, but explains that it did so primarily at the Comintern's behest. Skeptical that women communists managed to remake the party's masculinist culture, Poulos provides a well-documented and timely reminder that, whatever the immediate outcomes, women's efforts to free themselves carry profound political significance.

Lisa A. Kirschenbaum
West Chester University

Raphael Samuel, *Workshop of the World: Essays in People's History*, ed. John Merrick, Verso: London, 2024; 304 pp.; ISBN 9781804292808, £25.00, pbk.

Perhaps uniquely amongst the celebrated British historians of his generation, Raphael Samuel is remembered as much for his relationships to others as for the content of his own scholarship. As a tutor for over thirty years at Ruskin College, he inspired generations of students, including the historian Sally Alexander who recalls that 'he scarcely "taught" so much as encouraged, engaged in conversation, led us to the libraries and archives'. (p.15) After launching the History Workshop movement in 1966, Samuel was a frequent collector, curator, and editor of other historians' work,

whether in the proceedings of annual Workshop conferences or in the *History Workshop Journal*, set up in 1976 and now both a print and online journal. More generally, his infectious enthusiasm, intellectual openness, and the warm welcome kept at his Spitalfields home stimulated colleagues in their own work for decades, as is brilliantly rendered in Alison Light's memoir of her marriage with Samuel, *A Radical Romance*. With this legacy, it is unsurprising that Samuel's biographer Sophie Scott-Brown wrote in an earlier issue of this journal that his significance was not the advancement of any 'notable historical argument or theory' but rather that 'he changed what it was to *be* a historian'. (*Socialist History* 61, p.76)

But Samuel was an innovative and compelling scholar in his own right, as Verso's new volume *Workshop of the World: Essays in People's History* makes abundantly clear. Conceived by Alexander and by Alun Howkins, another of Samuel's early Ruskin students, and edited and introduced by John Merrick, *Workshop* brings together five of Samuel's most important journal articles and book chapters and one lecture, all from the period 1971-1985, and some of which have until now been difficult to access. Collectively, they showcase Samuel's eclectic interests, the curiosity and empathy with which he approached his subjects, and the lyrical quality of his prose.

Like many of Britain's left-wing postwar historians, Samuel was concerned with the social and economic history of the nineteenth century. This was, after all, the classic era of industrial and urban transformation, emerging class consciousness and conflict, and the birth of socialism as a means of understanding these phenomena. But Samuel was more unique in his focus on the 'ragged edges' of Victorian society (variations of the phrase appear on pp. 56 and 74), where he thought more revealing discoveries could be made than in the great factories and trading houses of the age. The most famous example of this approach, 'Workshop of the World: Steam Power and Hand Technology in mid-Victorian Britain', is the longest chapter in this collection. First published in *History Workshop Journal* in 1977, it surveys fields as diverse as mining, food processing, construction, and leatherworking to show that, contrary to easy assumptions about the nature of technological change, 'mechanisation in one department of production was often complemented by an increase of sweating in others'. (p.126) Steam-driven pumps flushing water from mines did not relieve miners of their pick-axes and railway haulage at quarries did not ease the process of breaking rocks; they simply created more demand for backbreaking labour. Poring over the era's relatively unknown technical literature, Samuel gives thick descriptions of working conditions and showed that steam power was adopted much more slowly and unevenly than was often assumed. Samuel's analysis of late and uneven mechanisation, pointing to employers' reluctance to invest in expensive machinery, the resistance of some trades to steam power (pearl button-making, for example), and customers' abiding preference for quality handmade goods, convincingly

demonstrates the shortcomings of overly abstracted accounts of economic change and remains one of his more notable historiographical contributions.

Those at the 'ragged' edge of the economy were often highly mobile. 'Comers and Goers' focuses on nineteenth-century Britain's 'wandering tribes', from navvies, pedlars, and builders to Roma, Irish, and Italian migrants. Seasonality was central to the practices and explored in the chapter, and Samuel traces life patterns determined by the warmth and relative plenty of summer and the search for shelter and relief in the lodging houses, soup kitchens, night refuges and other 'nooks and crannies' (p.75) of the city during winter. Pairing the findings of social investigators like Mayhew, Booth, and Rowntree with working class autobiography, Samuel peers into lesser-known corners of the Victorian economy, recounting the strategies of migratory thieves and the existence of 'fugitive callings' (p.104) like street-selling. For Samuel, tracking fugitive callings required 'fugitive sources' (p.124). 'Headington Quarry: Recovering a Labouring Community' was a pioneer work of the then-marginal field of oral history. An 'open village', Headington grew up unplanned as an economic satellite of Oxford. This liminality was reflected in its physical layout as its 'sand pits, working and abandoned, twisted and turned the physiognomy of the village into ups and downs'. (p.49) Since such 'open villages' were by nature 'so deficient in records', Samuel argues that they could only be studied through local oral tradition. The essay therefore concludes with interviews Samuel conducted with casual labourers, squatters, poachers, 'vagrants', Roma, and other transient or marginal figures of Oxfordshire, many of whom were introduced to him by Howkins. It thereby demonstrates the potential of marrying archival sources with oral tradition.

In the 1980s, Samuel was dismayed and fascinated by Thatcher's political ascendancy and by popular support for the Falklands War. His work therefore began to grapple with popular belief, eventually resulting in the only sole-authored book produced in his lifetime, *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (1994). Early indications of this shift can be seen in 'People's History', Samuel's introduction to *People's History and Socialist Theory* (1981), the proceedings of one of History Workshop's most infamously acrimonious conferences. As part of *Workshop*, the chapter is sometimes an awkward fit, referring to contributions which are collected in another volume and delicately managing the conference's divisions on the merits of continental structuralist theory. But it is also an engaging piece of intellectual history, tracing lineages of conservative, liberal, and socialist writing on the history of 'the people' that include Guizot, Thorold Rogers, and Marx. And one catches a glimpse of Samuel's growing interest in the folkloric with his observation that the 'remote origins of people's history in England are lost in that no-man's land of ballad tradition where myth and historicity cross'. (p.43)

Identity and belief are also at the heart of the final chapters of *Workshop*. 'The Roman Catholic Church and the Irish Poor', is an exploration of Catholicism's

function as 'a national church for the Irish poor' (p.218) in Britain. Priests served as social as well as spiritual authorities, while Catholic schools and services sustained Irish community and identity in exile, even helping to preserve the Gaelic language. Moreover, Catholic belief provided an intellectual framework for criticism of the Protestant British, denounced as both persecutors and heathens. For those 'stigmatised alike by religion and by race', faith and national identity 'reciprocated one another's claims'. (p.230). Samuel subjected his own political milieu to similar analysis in his lecture 'A Spiritual Elect? Robert Tressell and the Early Socialists'. Driven by the electoral defeats of the Thatcher era to think of socialism as being for but not quite of the people, Samuel highlights the tendency of socialists to see themselves as a 'minority elect'. (p.196) From the Jacobins and Owenites to the early history of the Labour party, 'socialism was conceived as a kind of moral cleansing of society' (p.207) in which the ordinary worker was not always interested. If 'Spiritual Elect' is much more about the intellectual and moral culture of socialism than its programmatic responses to the economic hardships described in 'Workshop of the World' or 'Comers and Goers', a winking connection between Samuel's earlier and latter interests can be seen when he refers to many socialists, with their earnest if heterodox religiosity, as 'spiritual vagrants'. (p.209)

Merrick and Alexander recently discussed *Workshop of the World* on the *History Workshop Podcast* (28 February 2024). They emphasised Samuel's foresight as a historian, noting his focus on migrancy in 'Comers and Goers' and interest in technology in 'Workshop of the World'. One might also add to these his defence of oral history in 'Headington Quarry', concern with the climate in 'Comers and Goers', the 'four nations' approach in the 'Roman Catholic Church and the Irish Poor', or his discovery of the religious roots of socialism in 'Spiritual Elect'. But Samuel's conviction that history 'was far too important to be left to professional historians alone' (p.1) has dated differently. Current claims of historians' obsolescence resonate on a political right determined to decimate an ailing higher education sector. Meanwhile, Britain's professional historians are overworked, underpaid, and often on strike. Nevertheless, eager to engage with the public and seeing history as a collaborative and democratic pursuit, many of them are ultimately the products and inheritors of Samuel's legacy.

Thomas C. Jones
University of Buckingham

Helena Sheehan, *Until We Fall: Long Distance Life on the Left*, Monthly Review Press: New York, 2023, 357 pp.; ISBN 9781685900274, £15.99, pbk.

The cover of part two of Helena Sheehan's autobiography, *Until We Fall: Long Distance Life on the Left,* is inspired by Geliy Korzhev's iconic painting 'Picking Up the Banner'.

It is an apt image for a remarkable and courageous woman who remained resolutely on the Left despite the many defeats inflicted on the cause to which she devoted her life. Hers is an epic story. This second part of her autobiography – the first covered her journey from anti-communist Catholicism to empathy with communist causes and activism in Cold War America – interweaves personal history with social and political upheavals. It begins in the late 1980s when hopes were high owing to glasnost' and perestroika. The story then proceeds through the bitter disappointments of the subsequent brutal counterrevolutions, before proceeding to address ensuing world-shaking, transformative events right up to the present day. Perestroika, intended as the renaissance of socialism, initiated a dizzying series of events that culminated in its demise. Sheehan became a front-row witness to the retreat of socialism on all fronts. She succinctly captures, and provides compelling insights into, the multifaceted transformations that turned the world upside down. She writes with verve, passion, and humour, making impressively detailed recollections a riveting read.

Intellectually committed to the Left, Sheehan was also a staunch activist constantly engaged in a wide range of leftwing struggles for justice, freedom, equality and the eradication of poverty. She became a veteran anti-war campaigner deeply opposed to western imperialism from the Vietnam war on. She stood firmly against the imposition of neo-liberal austerity and the devastation it wrought at home and abroad. She inadvertently found herself embroiled in the Arab Spring. She chose to be directly involved in the Occupy movement. Her research trips to South Africa and the activism she undertook there, provide profound insights into the post-apartheid regime's descent into corruption and cronyism. Sheehan incisively dissects and critiques South Africa, never neglecting context and history and, of course, western culpability, from colonial exploitation and neglect to present-day misunderstanding and misrepresentation. The latter evoked her acid wit. Sheehan's wealth of knowledge and experience made her a sought-after political commentator, even though she was a trenchant critic of western media. She particularly derided the Irish media's approach to the African continent: 'Make sure to mention Bob and Bono and Live Aid. Great Irish angle here: our guys telling world leaders what to do. Sure, where would Africa be without them'. (p.238)

Well-known and respected in left-wing circles, Sheehan's scholar-activism and international standing facilitated access to key players in the socialist arena, as evidenced by her inimitable insights into the era's tumultuous history as it unfolded around her. The narrative reverberates with astute observations about the impact of triumphalist capitalism. Revelling in 'victory' and consumed by hubris, the United States moved swiftly and recklessly to consolidate western hegemony. Sheehan poignantly captures the psychological havoc wreaked on the Left by the unanticipated 'defeat'. She revealingly reflects on the myriad responses of her comrades as the system crumbled around them, first in Eastern Europe and then the USSR.

Some were simply overwhelmed, some silent, others apologetic, guilty. There were suicides. Tellingly, however, as power shifted, so did people, indeed whole parties: 'some left parties moved so far to the right as to jump centre, learning not only to live with the market, but to love it'. (p.33) Nonetheless, for many the sense of loss was profound. Personally, Sheehan notes she grieved for something in herself. She did not grieve the likes of Honecker or Ceausescu, 'or the lesser-known cynics or careerists who kept them in their place', but she 'grieved for the honest communists who lived and died for this movement'. (p.34) Sheehan vividly recalls both the pain and confusion as well as the opportunism and apologism, that marked this period of turmoil inflicted on the Left world-wide. Communist regimes were deeply flawed and far from the utopian societies to which socialists aspired. Nonetheless, the systemic collapse crushed deeply held convictions that socialism promised a meaningful alternative to the capitalist order. It punctured post-Second World War aspirations that the consequences of capitalism, slump, fascism and war, could be overcome. The Czech Marxist philosopher Jindřich Zelený told Sheehan: 'We have to admit failure, but it was failure of an attempt to make something great'. (p.56)

Further understanding of the significance of these unprecedented events derives from Sheehan's accounts of her various encounters at numerous international conferences. Sheehan never shirked an argument or a cerebral challenge. A celebrated philosopher who made groundbreaking interventions in the philosophy of science and the history of ideas, Sheehan's views on the prevailing research methodologies such as positivism and post-modernism, mattered. Her assessments carried weight. Whatever the academic trends and intellectual conceits of the moment, Sheehan never relinquished her convictions concerning the strength she discerned in the explanatory power of Marxism. Her passionately argued papers and publications provoked notable responses. Sheehan skilfully supplements revealing conference discussions with the stimulating conversations and exchanges she conducted with an array of leading intellectuals, activists and academics. Her acquaintances were a veritable *Who's Who* of leftwing intelligentsia, political activists and serious scholars from across the globe. Forthright and fearless in speaking out, Sheehan inevitably courted controversy. At a time when former comrades and colleagues were either abandoning Marxism or concealing their adherence to it, Sheehan maintained that Marxism remained 'the most coherent, credible, and comprehensive mode of thought, capable of coming to terms with the complexity of contemporary experience' (p.18). She deeply regretted what she perceived as the decline of class analysis and class struggle with the shift toward what were categorised as universal human values, along with a 'de-ideologization of culture, politics and economics' (p.19).

Now a professor emeritus at Dublin City University, Sheehan clearly relished teaching and the opportunities university life entailed. However, she became a severe critic who openly resisted the marketization of universities, and the cuts imposed

upon them. It was a stance that brought her into direct confrontation with management as she bombarded them with written complaints, mobilised students and appealed to external examiners. Her concerns will undoubtedly be shared by numerous academics who experienced the process of intense neo-liberal commodification reflected in the transition to a discourse of strategic plans, the emphasis on innovation, networking, entrepreneurship, external funding, patents and commercialization projects, performance management, full economic costing, and so forth: all accompanied by a plethora of unfathomable associated acronyms. Sheehan bemoans how the quantity of research rather than the quality became the path to promotion, leading to 'bland, trivial, useless' studies, driven by market demand and fast track careerism. She is scathing about the impact on theory, much of which she considered 'obfuscatory, postmodernist nonsense' (p.162). She opposed what she viewed as the downgrading of epistemological and ethical norms, their displacement by market norms, the undervaluing of teaching, the overvaluing of inconsequential research, 'driven by questionable priorities' (p.158). These she felt led to a waning of philosophical and historical consciousness and an erosion of public service ethos, along with a lot of baloney.

Sheehan was possessed of an indomitable will and indefatigability, searing honesty and immense generosity. She was determined that her book record the stories of others whose lives converged with hers, especially those who left no accounts. She concludes her history with an expression of gratitude to the international Left: 'for the community of enquiry and endeavour that is unrivalled in intelligence and purposefulness, giving each of us strength we could never have alone' (p.343). With a strong sense of her time running out, Sheehan unsurprisingly longs to see the Left rise again. She insists its presence remains a source of light and hope amidst a decadent yet still dominant capitalist system. With reference to Gramsci, she observes the old is dying and the new cannot be born, giving rise to a time of monsters. She counsels against despair and leaving the terrain uncontested, advising the battle for truth and justice is the only life worth living.

An inspirational book that is informative and entertaining and ought to be widely read. Highly recommended.

Dianne Kirby,
Las Casas Institute for social justice, Blackfriars College.

Mike Squires, *Class Against Class*, Manifesto Press: London, 2025; 190 pp.; ISBN 9781907464553, £17.50, pbk.

Back in 1993, Mike Squires wrote a short article for *Socialist History* entitled 'The CPGB and "Class Against Class"'. In it, he argued against the then prevailing opinion that the policy of 'class against class' – enacted by the Communist Party of

Great Britain (CPGB) as directed by the Communist International (Comintern) between its sixth and seventh world congresses (1928 and 1935) – was a flawed theory and a failed strategy. Presented as a response to a proposed 'Third Period' in capitalist development since the 1917 Bolshevik revolution, and following a designated 'second' period of relative capitalist stability worldwide and the New Economic Policy (NEP) in the Soviet Union, the slogan of 'class against class' was underpinned by an analysis that predicted capitalism was entering into crisis. Communists, in response, were directed to work tirelessly in revealing the treachery of social democracy and 'reformism'; to build and develop an independent leadership of the working class; to support the Soviet Union unreservedly as it defended against capitalist and, increasingly, fascist aggression. In other words, the class war was once more deemed to be approaching its height and, especially in the wake of Wall Street's crash in late 1929, revolution was again at hand.

The fact that fascism/authoritarianism more often than communism won out in the 1930s – and capitalism elsewhere remained in place – meant that the politics of 'class against class' have rarely been given credence. Stalin's brutal trouncing of his adversaries and the upheavals of rapid industrialisation and collectivism ensured that the Third Period has often been interpreted as a mechanism for Stalin to assert his unassailable authority over both the Soviet communist party and the Comintern (not to mention the people of the USSR). Communist parties across the world entered a period of internal conflict, mirroring the power struggles inside the Soviet party. As a result, communist memberships often suffered from decline in the late 1920s, while the label of 'social fascist' levelled against social democrats who held fast to gradualist/reformist/parliamentary politics further antagonised already fraught relationships between communists and the wider labour movement. More generally, the policy has been seen as a major contributing factor to the left's inability to resist the rise of Nazism in Germany; that is, working class disunity in the face of fascism was the fault of Stalin and the supine communists who bent to his will. Indeed, from 1933, with Hitler in power, communist policies and perspectives were necessarily (if somewhat protractedly) realigned by the Comintern. United and Popular Fronts were on their way.

Against such a reading, Squires argued for the validity of the Comintern's analysis of the Third Period and to posit that the years of 'class against class' saw membership increase overall. Rather than bow easily to Stalin's will, Comintern sections – including members of the CPGB – recognised the analysis that informed what was then called 'The New Line' and engaged in its development and application. In terms of party growth, moreover, the years between 1930 and 1933 were actually 'very good ones' for the CPGB, Squires argued, reversing a downward trend evident from late 1926 (i.e. before 'class against class' was implemented). Now, in *Class Against Class*, Squires extends his argument via a detailed reconstruction of the Third

Period's evolution. Using newspapers and party documents, he moves from resolution to resolution, conference to conference, plenum to plenum, recording the ebbs and flows of the theory and the expected practice. Again, his objective is to show first that 'class against class' was not simply imposed on the CPGB at the whim of Stalin and without its basic premise chiming with the perspective of many in the party; and, second, to point to an upswing in party support from 1930; that is, once the line was fully implemented.

In the time between Squires' article and this Manifesto Press book, work by me and by Andrew Thorpe has endeavoured to afford complexity and nuance to the Third Period and the associated policy of 'class against class'. While not concurring with Squires, our accounts nevertheless sought to avoid any overly reductionist reading of the 'period' and to circumnavigate the big-P political sideshow of subsequent political 'battles' across the left. Others, too, have looked at the party in and around these years in ways that do not fall into the binaries of right/wrong, good/bad, correct/incorrect. Even so, Squires evidently feels more can be said on the party's experience and campaigns during the late 1920s and early 1930s, emphasising the 'struggle against imperialism' and the campaigns for the unemployed. To this end, his underlying broadbrush points remain valid: the CPGB did not adopt 'class against class' in a wholly unquestioning manner (as 'dupes of Moscow'); the party did recruit and enact campaigns during the late 1920s and 1930s that kept its presence visible to workers and others in Britain and abroad. At the same time, Squires shows little interest in more recent work on the CPGB nor on critically engaging with questions as to the measurement of CPGB 'success'/'failure' or the ways by which Stalin and his allies undoubtedly did use and abuse shifts in Comintern theory and practice for their own ends. The book, then, recovers materials from the archive and lays them out. But wider interpretation remains the preserve of the reader. Ultimately, too, the marginality and limits of the CPGB's appeal are never seriously considered against the admirable energies of its active members.

All in all, *Class Against Class* will not convince anyone that the Third Period was anything other than a difficult one (at best) for the CPGB and communists everywhere. It does provide a wealth of factual information; it scratches an itch that has long irritated Squires. In many ways, therefore, the book might best be seen as an exercise in attempted justification rather than a critical analysis. Squires offers a blow-by-blow account of the CPGB's ebb and flow into the 1930s as the world all around it buckled and bent.

Matthew Worley
University of Reading

Mike Taber, ed., *The Founding of the Red Trade Union International. Proceedings and Resolutions of the First Congress, 1921*, Brill: Leiden, 2024; 766 pp.; ISBN 9789004712850, €182.00, hbk.

The Red International of Labour Unions (RILU, aka *Profintern*), was founded in Moscow in July 1921. It was by far the most significant of the auxiliary bodies spawned by the Communist International (CI), although it has generally been dismissed as a political failure. Mike Taber disagrees. He considers that RILU was an 'important international movement', (p.3) and has collated the proceedings and many of the documents of RILU's founding congress into an admirably solid and scholarly volume. In his editor's introduction, he sets out the historical background, summarises the discussions of the congress and makes a political case for taking RILU seriously. The volume is copiously annotated, with a chronology, potted biographies of congress participants, a bibliography and a detailed index.

The RILU project was conceived at a conference in Moscow in July 1920, attended by G. E. Zinoviev for the CI, Bolshevik trade union leaders including S. A. Lozovsky (Dridzo), a delegation of Italian trade unionists, and two prominent British communist trade unionists, Robert Williams and A. A. Purcell. The CI and Zinoviev were particularly concerned about the reestablishment in 1919 of the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU), headed by non-communists and based in Amsterdam. To Zinoviev, the IFTU was 'a political weapon in the hands of the Entente, the strongest the Entente has ever possessed', (p.674) and the need to destroy 'Amsterdam' is the central preoccupation of almost every speech and document in this volume. Zinoviev's initial proposal, for a trade union section of the CI, was amended by Williams to a call for a congress of revolutionary trade unions which would itself decide on its organisational form. (p.678) This opened the door to non-communist currents, such as the revolutionary syndicalists. It also ensured that RILU's founding congress was the site of a genuine political struggle.

The Russian Bolsheviks wanted a vehicle for spreading communist ideas and influence in the international trade union movement. They had come to believe that their experience in Russia provided a template for the impending proletarian revolutions across the capitalist world, and that correct (i.e. communist) political leadership was paramount for the success of these revolutions. In party politics, the CI since 1919 had been gathering those revolutionary socialists around the world who were willing to accept Moscow's lead, and organising them into communist parties, on a 'take the best and discard the rest' basis. But that approach, which often entailed splitting existing organisations, made little sense in trade union politics.

The RILU project faced a dilemma. It needed some revolutionary trade unions outside of Russia to affiliate to it. But tiny 'revolutionary' breakaway unions were of little use. In parts of Europe there were individual communist-led unions with some mass support. However, the largest 'revolutionary' unions, particularly in Spain, were

syndicalist rather than communist, and were not prepared to accept the political tutelage of the CI. Ideally, RILU needed a major national trade union federation to affiliate, but nearly all of them already belonged to the great enemy, Amsterdam.

So the RILU congress brought together sundry communist trade unionists, and representatives of various non-communist trade union organisations. The largest of these was the Italian trade union confederation CGL, which was affiliated to the IFTU but whose leadership stood some way to the left of the Amsterdam majority. The CGL delegation was there 'for purposes of information'. (p.311) Then there were the syndicalists, most notably the main Spanish trade union body CNT, but also the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in the USA. Finally, there were the breakaway revolutionary trade unions created mainly in Germany during the upheaval of 1918-1920, associated with the 'ultra-left' Communist Workers' Party (KAPD). Most of them were tiny groups with huge pretensions.

The ringmaster of the frequently chaotic debates was the 'indispensable' Lozovsky. (p.12) An urbane veteran Bolshevik and trade union functionary, well acquainted with West European labour movements, he had the authority, and occasionally the tact, to navigate through the political disagreements, to try to win over any awkward delegations which represented significant bodies of workers, and to quash those who did not. If Lozovsky was, as Taber suggests, (p.30) ultimately unsuccessful in winning over many syndicalist organisations for RILU, it was surely because the communists did not want to *co-operate* long-term with syndicalism, but to *destroy* it as a rival revolutionary current and win its adherents for communist ideas.

The congress itself held seventeen sessions over two weeks, consisting primarily of policy debates. A few questions took up most of the time: RILU-CI relations covered five sessions, tactics took up three sessions, while two were devoted to the 'Italian Question'. The Russians sought to force the issue for the Italian CGL: Amsterdam or Moscow? The CGL stayed with Amsterdam, but the obligation to choose one centre or the other created a different problem: what should communist members of Amsterdam-affiliated unions do? To the delegates from the breakaway German unions, the answer was clear: 'out of the trade unions – your place is in the factory committees', (p.365) as Arthur Bartels, the main spokesman of this tendency, put it. However, most delegates rejected this call for communists to detach themselves from the main bodies of organised workers. British delegates such as Tom Mann and J. T. Murphy argued successfully for communists to work in the mass unions and attempt to win both their members and, eventually, their structures for RILU's positions.

The debate on the relationship with the CI was the most contentious. The independence of trade unions from political parties was a fundamental principle of syndicalism, and although all the syndicalists who had travelled to Moscow were prepared to *co-operate* with communists, most of them were not prepared to take orders

from the CI. The Spanish CNT was a genuinely mass organisation, it was keen to affiliate – but not at the cost of its own political independence. Its lead delegate Hilario Arlandis made a case for an 'organically independent' RILU, (p.197) and was as conciliatory as possible towards the pro-CI majority at the congress, but in vain: the Bolsheviks wanted RILU as a CI subsidiary organisation. After the congress, the CNT rejected affiliation. The statute eventually adopted by the RILU congress not only established the closest connection with the CI, but the conditions for membership included points about 'submission to international proletarian discipline' and 'recognition and application of the decisions' of the RILU congress. (pp.650-651) This was not an autonomous international of revolutionary trade unions. Instead, in countries where communists could work openly in the labour movement, RILU fostered the development of party-led factions which affiliated to it, such as the National Minority Movement in Britain, headed in the 1920s by Harry Pollitt.

The resolutions of the congress, on workers' control, factory committees and so forth, reflect the underlying Bolshevik view that the Russian revolution provided a template for others to follow. It is also very noticeable that the Russian trade unions were hardly discussed at all, and where they were mentioned, they were presented as a model of revolutionary organisation. In reality, during the civil war the Russian trade unions had been completely subordinated to the Communist Party and the state, becoming part of the apparatus of labour mobilisation. How far the foreign delegates understood this is not clear. There was, however, one issue which gave rise to serious criticism of the Soviet hosts – the arrest and incarceration of a group of Russian anarcho-syndicalists from the *Golos truda* group, who had declared a hunger strike in protest. The French syndicalists and others – including Tom Mann – had taken up their case, and so N. I. Bukharin came to address the congress on behalf of the Bolshevik Central Committee. In a brazenly disingenuous speech, he tried to conflate the prisoners with Nestor Makhno's armed bands in Ukraine. This led to uproar among the delegates. (p.522) In riposte, the French syndicalist Henri Sirolle observed: 'now we have been shown we have no right to be trustful'. (p.524)

Despite everything, the RILU congress did succeed in establishing a trade union international embracing some communist-led unions and communist minority organisations. It also helped clarify the differences between Bolshevism and syndicalism, which in Spain in particular had been poorly understood. But its primary goal of destroying and replacing the Amsterdam International was unfeasible. It was also at odds with the logic of the CI's new 'united front' line, and before long the Soviet trade unions themselves were seeking relations with Amsterdam affiliates.

The volume is part of the *Historical Materialism* series, which means it will soon appear in a much more affordable paperback edition. It is a welcome and worthy addition to the published documentation on the early years of the CI.

Francis King