

THE
COMMONWEAL

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE
NEW ZEALAND FEDERATION OF SOCIALIST SOCIETIES
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Editor Martin Crick

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EDITORIAL

MARTIN CRICK

What bleak times we are living in. The genocide in Gaza continues unabated, and similar events are unfolding in Lebanon, as Netanyahu continues to act with impunity. The situation in the Middle East is spiralling out of control, with a regional war ever more likely. Andrew Tait's article gives us some fascinating insights into the Zionist project and the move to the right in Israeli politics. Meanwhile the war in Ukraine grinds on, Putin continuing to flout international rules and norms as he sends thousands of his citizens to their deaths. The Austrian far-right Freedom Party has just won the general election there, the latest success for the populist right in Europe. And, in the face of all reason, an increasingly deranged Donald Trump is still neck and neck with Kamala Harris in the polls. Politics aside, climate change continues to wreak havoc, with parts of Central Europe hit by unprecedented flood waters, and Hurricane Helene inflicting devastating damage across the Southeast of the USA. I am writing this from a dark, dank and dismal UK, hit by floods, high winds, and well below average temperatures for the time of year, and during the Labour Party conference, which has done nothing to lighten my mood.

The Labour Party achieved a landslide victory at the general election on 4 July this year, a majority of 174. So impressed was Chris Hipkins by this that he took himself off to the UK for 14 days, to attend the Labour Party Conference, meet Sir Keir Starmer, and to learn lessons which he could use to turn around the

New Zealand Labour Party's fortunes. He should have stayed at home!!

The UK Labour Party's seemingly stunning victory was due solely to the 'first past the post' electoral system, and not to its overwhelming popularity. It won 64% of the seats with only 34% of the votes, on a turn out of just 59%. Its vote slumped from 10.3 million, the supposed disaster of 2019 under Jeremy Corbyn, to only 9.7 million in 2024. The combined vote for the Tory Party and the far-right Reform Party was 38% of the total, so under a system of proportional representation Labour would have needed to seek minority party support to form a government. Furthermore, its victory owed much to the implosion of the Scottish National Party North of the border, whilst Labour lost four of its own seats to pro-Palestinian independent candidates. Jeremy Corbyn, standing as an independent, swept to victory in Islington North against the Labour Party candidate, and Starmer's own majority was cut from 22,776 in 2019 to 11,572 this time around, again largely due to the intervention of a pro-Palestinian independent candidate.

In 2017 and again in 2019 the Labour Party under Corbyn could fairly be described as at least centre-left, social democratic, and on some policies left wing. It stood 'for the many not the few', and membership soared to over half a million. Corbyn was forced out after shameful treatment by his own MPs and a sustained media campaign accusing him of anti-Semitism, but Starmer promised his continued support for these policies. However, having been elected, he then



instigated a significant lurch to the right, and a purge of the left within the party, including the expulsion of Corbyn, resulting in a loss of some 200,000 members by the end of 2023. And so we have, in 2024, a country governed by a centrist (at best) Labour Party, opposed by a hard right party (Conservatives) and a far right party (Reform). The Liberal Democrats only flourished because of the vagaries of our electoral system and offer no change in the direction of travel. Only a small Green and independent bloc of MPs offer any meaningful opposition.

Since the 4 July election the popularity of both the Labour government and Starmer personally have plummeted, the latter standing at -30 as I write. It has been the shortest lived 'honeymoon' for a new government in electoral history. There are numerous reasons for this. Whilst Chancellor Rachel Reeves promised no

return to austerity the truth is that the Labour Party is still wedded to neoliberal orthodoxy and balancing the books. It has focused on the so-called 'black hole' in the economy left by the outgoing Conservative government, and promises nothing but hard times ahead. Starmer says that his role model is Clement Attlee. Attlee, however, in the aftermath of war, inherited what Keynes called a 'financial Dunkirk', and yet still managed to introduce the National Health Service, establish a comprehensive childcare service, nationalise one-fifth of the economy, and embark upon an extensive house building programme.

Amongst this Labour government's first acts—maintaining the two-child cap on child benefit, and axing the winter fuel payment for millions of pensioners. This, it seems, is preferable to increasing taxes on the wealthy. When seven Labour

COMMONWEAL
EDITOR MARTIN
CRICKIN
BLACKBALL,
WEST COAST

*CANTERBURY SOCIALIST
SOCIETY*

**'SO, WHAT
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MPs voted against the former, they had the Labour whip suspended. So perhaps Reeves meant no return to Conservative austerity, whilst we substitute it with Labour austerity instead. And then Sir Keir, who promised to restore faith in politicians and cut out sleaze, to lead a 'government of service' and to restore faith in politicians, was revealed to have accepted over £200,000 in gifts from Labour peer Lord Ali, including designer clothes and spectacles, corporate boxes, and tickets to glamour gigs. Other members of the cabinet were revealed to have done likewise.

Perhaps Starmer's true colours were revealed when he travelled to meet the far right Italian premier Giorgia Meloni. He appears to be in awe of her anti-migrant policies, praising her 'remarkable progress' in reducing migrant numbers. These include potential processing centres in Albania, limits on the number of humanitarian rescue ships and draconian fines for ship captains who rescue migrants. And, of course, there is his repeated refusal to condemn the genocide in Gaza, his unwavering support for Israel.

The Party Conference was carefully stage managed, critical resolutions weeded out, many potential dissentients already removed from the party. The one resolution that they couldn't really ignore was left until the very last afternoon, when conference overwhelmingly voted against the cuts to winter fuel payments. This seems unlikely to change the government's tack. Starmer's speech was dull, uninspiring, lacking in energy. He promised change but didn't offer a vision of what that might entail or when it might come. There were no 'sunny uplands' to inspire hope for the future. The public is disillusioned, the left is despairing, and there are calls for Jeremy Corbyn to form a new left-wing party.

So, what exactly did Chris Hipkins hope to learn from the Keir Starmer Labour Party? One clear lesson is that a move to the right does not bring increased support; the popular vote was higher under Corbyn, and membership soared. Austerity, however you couch it, does not win votes, especially when voters see the wealthy becoming wealthier still and a venal political class. Suppressing inner-party democracy still further alienates potential supporters. What the UK Labour Party fails to offer is vision and imagination, hope of a changed and better world, it merely tinkers with the current discredited system, and consequently alienated voters either descend into apathy or turn to the populist right.

Here in New Zealand, wealth is becoming ever more concentrated. An IRD analysis of the country's 311 wealthiest families demonstrated that they pay an effective rate of tax of a mere 9.4% as compared to 20.12% for the average New Zealander. There is a massive infrastructure spending gap which is leading to the collapse of our public services. Work is becoming more precarious, homelessness is increasing. Since the general election a year ago we have seen a hard right government intent on eroding workers' rights, and slashing public sector jobs. It is pushing through a fast-track bill that erodes democracy and Te Tiriti, putting development before the environment and the climate. We have a government, under the guise of equality, mounting attack after attack on Māori: disestablishing the Māori Health Authority, cutting funding for Whakaata Māori, for the training of teachers in Te Reo. A government which prioritises tax cuts for the wealthy over reducing child poverty. We have a government mired in cronyism and vested interests, Nicola McKee and the firearms lobby, Casey Costello and the tobacco industry,

Shane Jones and the fishing and fossil fuel industries, the list is a long one.

The coalition government is one which ignores advice, or at least any advice that doesn't agree with its neoliberal agenda. Its directive that public services should be prioritised on the basis of need not race has been called 'an affront to scientific and public health knowledge', with the medical profession clear that ethnicity is an 'evidence-based marker' of need within the health system. It has been estimated that fixing child poverty would cost \$3 billion, less than one per cent of GDP, yet Social Development Minister Louise Upton says this is not realistic. The tax cuts for landlords cost \$2.9 billion!

As Green MP Ricardo Menendez points out, 'poverty is a political choice.' The IMF, the World Bank, the OECD, the expert Tax Working Group, and most mainstream economists, argue that the lack of a capital gains tax is harmful to the country's prosperity. Prime Minister Luxon, who has just made gains of \$460,000 on the sale of two properties, says that 'We don't believe in a capital gains tax or a wealth tax. We think, for people who actually generate wealth in this country, it's a massive disincentive.' Nicola Willis argues that small business owners, who have worked all their lives and paid their taxes, want a little tax-free nest egg when they retire! What about wage earners? National is the party of property. Casey Costello is flying in the face of all professional health advice with her fifty per cent tax cut on Heated Tobacco Products. The axing of the rail ready Inter-islander ferry service can only be down to the influence of the road lobby, when the evidence is clear that the result will be chaos on our roads, price increases and a detrimental effect on the environment and the climate.

New Zealand faces a 'polycrisis', to quote Martyn Bradbury (*Daily Blog* 15 July). What used to be a relatively egalitarian society pre-Rogernomics, he says, is now one haunted by child poverty, a housing shortage, environmental degradation, a cost-of-living crisis, public services in freefall. The country needs fundamental reform, yet our two major parties continue to be motivated by short-term electoralism rather than the national interest. They both persist in arguing for low rates of taxation and relatively high rates of spending, a formula which simply doesn't work. As Gaby Lardier put it in *Spinoff* (26 June), 'New Zealand is one big crappy flat with successive negligent landlords.'

There is a massive disconnect between Hipkins's Labour Party and working -class Kiwis. It has abandoned its social-democratic heritage, putting social progressivism before delivering on a welfare state, the economy and infrastructure, in order to improve people's day to day lives. Both Jacinda Ardern and Chris Hipkins ruled out a capital gains tax or any form of wealth tax before the last election. Inner-party democracy has been eroded here as in the UK, there is no left opposition to hold the party leadership to account. The Party polled under 27% in the 2023 general election, and has failed to improve on that since; Hipkins scores less than 13% as preferred Prime Minister in the most recent poll.

Small wonder then that two recent surveys, (IPSOS and NZES), suggested a rising tide of disillusion, an anti-establishment and anti-elite mood, a growing distrust of politicians, and a belief that the political system is rigged in favour of the rich and powerful. 64% of respondents to the IPSOS survey felt that the country was becoming more divided because of wealth inequality. If the Labour Party

has nothing to offer where then do we go from here?

Frederick Jameson argues that 'It is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism', William Morris, however, said that we must do just that. One of our main tasks as socialists is the 'education of desire'. Workers must want a better world, must imagine a better world, and then use that vision both to identify their aims and to spur them into action. And we must have hope. Morris suggests that 'to be truly radical is to make hope possible rather than despair convincing.' Robert Tressell's novel *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, discussed in this issue, has inspired hope for generations of socialists.

There are signs of that vision, that hope, here in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Hayden Taylor, in the latest of our series 'Why I Am a Socialist', asks us to imagine a future 'where collective well-being is prioritised over profit...a liberated world.' This, he says, will require 'organisation, struggle, and a belief in the power of the people to shape their own destiny.' The Council of Trade Unions is hosting a series of forums across the country where it is asking us to 'Reimagine Aotearoa' on the basis of investing in public ownership, ending inequality, enhancing well-being through good, well-paid jobs, and ensuring a just transition to a low carbon economy in order to protect the environment.

Nikau Wi Neera in his stimulating essay, suggests class politics, that we should 'blast the Red Feds and Te Tiriti back out of our homogenous, mythical nation-time and summon a clear, red dawn to burn off the fog of our dementia and gift us, finally, the hammer, the sickle, and the *patu* to destroy capitalism once and for all.' Eco-socialist campaign group *System Change Aotearoa* agree 'that capitalism is the root cause of the climate crisis; that



extreme inequality is inextricably linked to environmental breakdown; and that a just transition to a fair and sustainable society is only possible if the capitalist system is abolished.' They believe that trade unions and workers must be at the heart of the fightback, alongside the indigenous population. The organisation recently called a meeting to discuss the possibility of forming a new left party in Aotearoa/New Zealand. In Christchurch a campaign against asset sales has led into a series of public meetings on the theme of *Workers Own This City*, 'a worker-led rethink of how we run our city.'

System change requires struggle, and here too the first green shoots are emerging. By the time you receive this issue of *Commonweal* the NZCTU will have organised a nationwide series of hui urging workers to 'Fight Back Together/Maranga Ake against the government's

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assault on workers' rights. As the call to action proclaims, 'When working people unite and fight back against anti-worker policies, we create change and transform society for the better. When we fight back together we win.' There have been two nationwide protests this year under the call 'Toitū te Tiriti' / 'Honour the Treaty'. 35,000 people marched in Dunedin to protest the Government's broken promises over the rebuilding of the new hospital. Health workers have been at the forefront of protests over the state of our public services; it has just been announced that Health NZ has asked the government to explore private /public partnerships for hospitals, and immediately private company Vitality Health has offered to help with Dunedin Hospital. These have been disastrous in the UK, leading to significantly worse health outcomes, and must be resisted at all costs. As former

Health NZ Chair Rob Campbell has said in response, we have the money for health, this is a 'manufactured crisis' being used as an excuse to privatise the health service. NZ Environmental activists, 'blood-sucking vermin' according to Shane Jones, have protested against proposals for seabed mining.

So, as we gather for our second annual conference, what is our philosophy, what are our aims? What part can we play in both imagining a better world and fighting to achieve one? Both Andrew Tait and Paul Maunder ponder these questions in different ways in this issue. Chinese architect and scholar Ziyu Tong suggests that 'The best way to subvert a dystopia is to plan a utopia.' Over to you comrades.

**35,000 PEOPLE
MARCHED
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HOSPITAL**
THEY SAVE WE PAY

REPORTS

TOM ROUD

Canterbury Socialist Society

As we swiftly approach our eighth Annual General Meeting, the Canterbury Socialist Society is waiting with some anticipation for the second National Conference of the Federation of Socialist Societies. It would have been hard for many of us who were involved in the founding period to imagine the Society growing to this stage, and being part of a National body that represents the largest explicitly Socialist group in the country. While some long-serving members in administrative positions are considering stepping back, we are currently reflecting on how things have gone so far and—indeed—what might facilitate the continued growing strength of our Society.

The six months since the last edition of *The Commonweal* have been steady, with a focus on maintaining our core activities. A fair amount of work behind the scenes by the current Executive Committee continues, with the goal of increasing the ways in which members can participate and contribute to the life of the Socialist Society.

Alongside our monthly events (educational and social), the radio show, and the many projects individuals and groups of members are involved in, we added (and just recently concluded) a reading series titled *Capital in History*. This was well attended at every session,

and the opportunity to delve more deeply into theory and philosophy than we have done in the past was appreciated by those in attendance. Participants found themselves discussing the nature of the time we are living in, what makes it distinct yet contiguous with the past, what it means to ‘have a politics’, and how often we take time to thoroughly critique our own assumptions. Our educational events have ranged from guest lectures about the philosophy of our adversaries (Robert Nozick) to that of our allies (Søren Mau), as well as a somewhat tenuous but nonetheless engaging (especially in the wake of twice hosting tech critical thinker Paris Marx) screening of a Werner Herzog Documentary.

While conclusions were not always forthcoming, or seemed like a delicate filigree at times, a theme that revealed itself is the way that history shapes where we are today but does not over-determine it. The self-critical and self-conscious nature of a thoroughgoing socialist politics can feel paralysing at times, and our challenge as ever is to be able to act in some way *regardless* of this uncertainty; to learn from history, while knowing we never ‘step into the same river twice’; to anticipate difficulties, but accept that (if you’ll forgive a strained and extended metaphor about rivers) we can decide to cross many bridges when (and if!) we come to them.

As I write this report we are within spitting distance of 100 local members of the Canterbury Socialist Society. We also no longer make up over half the numbers of the Federation of Socialist Societies. These are small, humble beginnings that

**ACROSS:
MEMBERS OF THE
CANTERBURY
SOCIALIST SOCIETY
IN RUNANGA, AND
BLACK BALL,
WEST COAST
CANTERBURY
SOCIALIST SOCIETY**



are easily overshadowed by efforts in different places and at different times. For today in Aotearoa / New Zealand, however, we hope to continue with the

persistent attitude of radical patience and convivial pragmatism that has served us well thus far.

ANGUS CROWE

Wellington Socialist Society

I began the last WSS branch report by extending our gratitude to our neighbours in Canterbury for hosting a fantastic National Conference in 2023. By the time you read this, I hope that you will either be attending, have just returned from, or be feeling a dose of FOMO from having missed the second Federation of New Zealand Socialist Societies National Conference in Wellington. All signs point to the conference being a huge success and the organising committee has done a great job pulling together a line-up that really does cover all the bases on the left today—union work, parliamentarism, activism, theory, and practice. There will no doubt be something for everyone to enjoy and/or take issue with!

Aside from the conference, it has once again been a busy few months for WSS. In April we had Executive member Tom Smith present his *talk Summer of Discontent—Two Years on from the Parliament Protests* where he first introduced us to the concept of the ‘dual crisis’ and laid out this thesis of the protests and parliament occupation as an indicator of the interregnum in New Zealand politics. Then in May we had Adi Leason recount his experience as one of the ‘Waihopai three’ who deflated the dome surrounding a satellite dish at Waihopai Station near Blenheim in 2008, as well as providing a

general overview of the Catholic Worker movement. Both talks provoked us to think about the nature of state power and authority, and to consider the horizons and limits of education, propaganda, and activism in Aotearoa New Zealand.

A personal highlight for me was hosting John Dolan of the Radio War Nerd podcast for *How To Read Wars* in July. John recounted the origins of this ‘War Nerd’ character, a pen name he has used to write about conflicts from the perspective of a disgruntled data entry clerk from a nowhere town in California. He emphasised the importance of reading between the lines and picking up on what is not said when looking at conflicts around the globe – AKA the art of questioning why some peoples are elevated to the status of freedom fighters while others are designated terrorists. In short, material power has a lot to do with it, ‘follow the money’ as the oft quoted meme goes.

In August we hosted two events. We were lucky enough to host a panel in conjunction with ‘Justice for Palestine’ with young Māori and Palestinian activists Somaia Daoud, Faisal Al-Asaad, Ella Young, and Nikau Wi Neera, and then another panel featuring historian Jim McAloon, NZNO organiser Justine Sachs, and WCC councillor Nureddin Abdurahman on the Labour Party’s potential to be a force for progressive change and to overcome neoliberal orthodoxy. Nureddin likened the Labour Party to a taxi, explaining that it is up to the passenger to tell the driver where to take the car. In this analogy, the passengers are ‘the people’—whether that’s unions,

civil-social groups, or other interests—they are the ones that tell the driver (the politicians) where to take the car (the party). This is true of course, but what happens if the driver goes too slowly or just won't listen? What if passengers are tempted by another car or decide that they don't feel like going anywhere tonight? I think I've wrung about all I can out of this metaphor, but I agreed with both Justine and Jim who emphasised the importance of ideas as well as interests. Without ideas (and the guts to pursue them), the Labour Party might win elections, but it will not be capable of undertaking and embedding lasting change, as we saw with the Labour-led government of 2017–2023.

It's also worth shouting out comrade Hayden Taylor who has wrangled a couple of outstanding online seminars in the last few months. In May he hosted podcasting powerhouse C. Derek Varn for a discussion on the 'Ghosts of the Millennial Left', and in August writer Jon Greenaway enlightened us with regards to Ernst Bloch and his philosophy of hope.

Another personal highlight was joining Hayden and Sionainn from CSS to talk about the origins and practice of the NZFoSS project on the *Regrettable Century* podcast. I learnt a lot from

Sionainn about how and why CSS was founded and was reminded about how much more embedded they seem in the civic life of Christchurch. Maybe that's just a case of 'the grass is always greener', but it was a good reminder, nonetheless. I'd encourage all members to check out the chat.

That brings me to a couple of challenges I wanted to issue to WSS members. The first is to get more involved with WSS if you can. Whether it is doing a talk, hosting a Little Red Reading Group session, writing something for *Commonweal*, or just turning up a bit early to help set up at events, it would be great to have more members involved in the regular activities of WSS and the wider Federation. Feel free to chat to myself or another Executive member if you are keen. The second is to bring whatever you are doing back to us. Whether that's activism, union work, or research, it would be great to know a bit more about what members are up to, see what common threads there are, and hopefully tie some of those threads together to foster more self-activity and learning-by-doing.

Hopefully our AGM in November will be a good forum to get some of these discussions going.

JASON GREY

Otago Socialist Society

The last six months have seen slightly fewer events directly hosted by OSS, but nevertheless continued strong engagement by various members with other initiatives over that period.

The OSS inaugural Radical & Labour History of Dunedin Walking Tour was held on a brisk but sunny Saturday in mid-April. Several OSS exec members and attendees spoke at multiple sites of interest and importance. This highly illuminating and educational event was an unqualified success and, having 'tested the waters', there is a strong desire to make this a regular OSS event and to further develop the concept. Many aspects of Dunedin's extensive and

varied colonial history, ranging from the work of seemingly benign philanthropists through to sites representing legacy events in our labour history were covered, with the common thread being their impact overall on working class suppression and exploitation.

OSS is sponsoring the *Left from Nowhere* Radio Show, hosted by Tyler West. This airs every fourth Thursday at 10:00pm on Otago Access Radio and is also available as a podcast. In Tyler's own words, *Left from Nowhere* delivers an hour of political news, interviews and reviews from a socialist slant, bringing socialism back to the pubs, cafes, workplaces and radio waves. The inaugural show featured an interview with former Unions Otago convener and long time socialist, labour activist and OSS comrade Andrew Tait. This show fulfils a vital need in bringing relevant local content to the ears and minds of Dunedin listeners, and OSS is proud and happy to continue supporting it.

To warm things up in the depths of a typical* Dunedin winter (*if such a thing exists any more in our rapidly changing climate!), a Chilean themed social event was held. This evening get together featured live music from guest Alejandra Parra (including the stirring music of Violeta Parra and Victor Jara), and the film *El Conde* was shown. Although a comedic take on the horrors of Pinochet's neoliberal coup in Chile, the movie was a salutary reminder for those aware of that tragic, abrupt change in Chilean political history of what extreme power in the wrong hands can produce. All was well appreciated by attendees, although things were hampered somewhat by abysmal weather and a short lead up to the event.

The CTU came to town later in June with an introduction to their *Reimagining Aotearoa* project. This consisted of a brainstorming session held at the Gasworks

Museum facilitated by CTU President Richard Wagstaff and CTU Policy Director & Economist Craig Renney. These nationwide events were advertised as sessions to 'bring together the union movement and progressive communities to develop and implement an alternative vision for the future'. OSS members attended with open minds, and in general the feeling was this was a good preliminary event, so long as we have follow up. Craig then delivered a separate presentation for Unions Otago afterwards, reviewing the coalition government's 2024 Budget announcements, their fiscal implications, and the more evidence based alternative policies we could choose instead. OSS members in attendance agreed this sort of material would have been helpful for the preceding *Reimagining Aotearoa* event!

Future plans for OSS include a summertime version of the Radical & Labour History tour, this time focusing on Port Chalmers and ending up at beautiful Aramoana.

The maritime and ecological history of this part of Greater Dunedin will provide a rich and wide -ranging source of interest to our members. Other upcoming events include a *Monsters and Marxism* lecture at Halloween exploring gothic horror narratives as a way of talking about alienation, and the public showing of the movie *The Time That Remains* as a fundraiser for the Dunedin 'Justice for Palestine' group.

All in all, OSS remains in good heart, and we shall be encouraging members to attend our branch AGM in November with the opportunity to make a 3 minute pitch on "Why I am socialist". This should facilitate some interesting discussion and promote member engagement.

ANGUS CROWE

The Wellington Socialist Society's Ernie Abbott Memorial Lecture

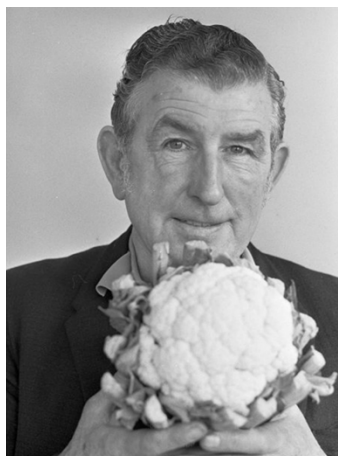
Ernie was an ordinary man who believed that we all should have the right to a safe workplace with decent pay and conditions. He paid the ultimate price for those beliefs.

– Helen Kelly

On 27 March 1984, an explosion ripped through Wellington Trades Hall, killing Ernie Abbott. Ernie was the caretaker of the Trades Hall and inadvertently set off the bomb by picking up the suitcase it was hidden in. Ernie was also the Vice-President of the Caretakers and Cleaners Union. No one has been brought to justice for this terrorist act.

Forty years to the day, on 27 March 2024, the Wellington Socialist Society and Wellington Trades Hall hosted an event to commemorate the bombing and its victim. The Wellington Socialist Society is part of the nationwide New Zealand Federation of Socialist Societies. If you would like more information about our activities, or would like to become a member, visit our website here: <https://www.socialistsocieties.org.nz/>.

The event was held in the foyer of the Trades Hall on Vivian Street, with refreshments served in the adjacent Ernie Abbott



ERNIE ABBOTT,
VICE PRESIDENT OF
THE CARETAKERS
AND CLEANERS
UNION IN 1977

NATIONAL LIBRARY
OF NEW ZEALAND

Room. Doors opened at 4.30pm and the foyer quickly became standing-room only. At 5.15pm Graeme Clarke, President of Wellington Trades Hall, briefly welcomed the assembled comrades, before a minute's silence was held at 5.19pm – the moment the bomb went off 40 years prior.

Rod Prosser from Vanguard Films then screened *The Hatred Campaign* (1985), a 35-minute film made for the Wellington Trades Council as a tribute to Ernie. The film argued that the bombing was the bloody culmination of a sustained period of hostility towards unions fomented by the National government and the populist Prime Minister Robert Muldoon. The film further argued that the anti-union rhetoric was a form of scapegoating designed to divert attention from the government's poor economic performance. There were stark parallels with the current National-led coalition's attacks on Māori as the neoliberal economic consensus comes apart at the seams.

Two former comrades of Ernie, Hazel Armstrong and Peter Cranny, then spoke to us about their experiences with Ernie and the Caretakers and Cleaners Union. Hazel talked through a slideshow

of pictures from the period, detailing various struggles the union had been involved in, highlighting the contributions of the Māori and Pasifika women in particular. Peter spoke to his memories of Ernie and suggested that the event was the moment where ‘we can finally let Ernie go.’

The last speaker was labour historian Toby Boraman, who delivered a stimulating address on the historical context of increased industrial militancy during the 1970s and early ‘80s and the reactionary response of much of the press and the National Party. Like *The Hatred Campaign*, Boraman argued that unions became a scapegoat for deep-seated economic problems that came to a head during the 1970s.

This commemorative event was the first of what will become an annual event in the Wellington Socialist Society calendar focused on labour, trade union, and socialist history in Aotearoa: the Ernie Abbott Memorial Lecture. The Memorial Lecture will be held each year in late March/April at *Bedlam & Squalor*, the Wellington Socialist Society’s main event space on Garrett Street.

The 2nd Annual New Zealand Federation of Socialist Societies Conference, Labour Weekend 2024

Over Labour Weekend 2024 (26-27 October), the New Zealand Federation of Socialist Societies will hold its 2nd annual conference in central Wellington. The theme of this year’s conference is *The Dual Crisis in Aotearoa* (see below for an explanation of the theme).

The conference is open to both Federation members and non-members. The conference will feature, inter alia,

several labour/socialist history related activities. You can find more information about the conference and how to register here:

https://www.socialistsocieties.org.nz/acc_events/second-new-zealand-federation-of-socialist-societies-national-conference-labour-weekend-2024/.

The Dual Crisis in Aotearoa

New Zealand’s state project has always been intertwined with capitalism and the colonisation of the whenua. Often in New Zealand history, periods of societal crisis have been fundamentally crises in both the colonial and capitalist foundations of society. During the 1970s the post-war welfare state began to falter due to global economic shocks, whilst at the same time significant Māori protest over historic injustices emerged. The establishment of neoliberalism required stabilisation of this dual crisis. The state responded by establishing the Waitangi Tribunal and shortly after initiated drastic economic reforms now known as Rogernomics. Today we are witnessing another dual crisis. Post-COVID there has been a resurgence of anti-Treaty politics, while simultaneously the neoliberal economic consensus has come unstuck. The new government has responded to this with attacks on Māori and by launching a desperate new wave of austerity and wealth transfers to the property-owning class. The recurrence of the dual crisis indicates that the neoliberal hegemonic order is no longer dominant but merely leading, that what was once common sense is becoming contestable. In this transitional period we have the opportunity to foster a different solution to the dual crisis, and, through this, begin to imagine an alternative society for the future.

ACROSS:
FUNERAL SERVICE
FOR ERNIE
ABBOTT AT THE
WELLINGTON
TOWN HALL
NATIONAL LIBRARY OF NEW
ZEALAND



OPINION

PAUL MAUNDER

A response to the general theme of purpose.

PAUL MAUNDER
SPEAKING AT
BLACKBALL
MAY DAY, 2024

CANTERBURY
SOCIALIST SOCIETY

The Canterbury Socialist Society recently organised a members' forum to discuss where we are now and where we want to be, to develop a 'general sense of purpose'. A new member, but long-time activist Paul Maunder, responds to this discussion and gives his thoughts on the Society's present and future.

Having recently joined the society and having had two positive encounters: one at Blackball, the other at Kōtuku; and having listened to the recording of the recent discussion as to purpose/constitution etc. I thought I would wing a response to the general theme of purpose.

At the same time I do so hesitantly because I am old enough to realise it is probably time to stop any pontificating, secondly, because I am new to the organisation and thirdly, because I work in the creative sphere and am therefore unreliable when it comes to politics.

Let me start with the third point. As Raymond Williams, a cultural guru of mine, states, Art is useless, for it does



nothing in the way of providing shelter or food. Yet, the species has always made art, from the earliest days of ochre hand-prints on the walls of caves. Williams cuts through all the aesthetic carry-on which has filled bookshelves and states that the purpose of art is simple: to show a kind of people in a kind of place. The real interest, he says, is in the relationships that the producing of art have created and continue to create over the centuries of societal evolution: from tribal ritual and decoration, to court poets who hold the history, to feudal and church patronage, to wandering creatives on the edge of formal society, to the capitalist mediations of publishers and galleries, to the state production of art under socialist states, to the current craziness of social media where everyone can be a brand, to techno feudalism...

I would begin then with the Canterbury Socialist Society as a cultural

institution showing a kind of people in a kind of place; and what is immediately revealed is a kind of people who have a belief in socialism living in an increasingly fraught place. There is a need for safety of belief, which involves others assembling in order to confirm the belief. And if those others increase in numbers there is a further confirmation. A cultural institution will also begin to celebrate the history of the belief system and conduct some education and proselytising. There will be some icons generated, some publications, a digital presence and so on...

The socialist belief system can be simple: the working class should take over the means of production and establish a society based on the principle of: from each according to their ability and to each according to their need. This can simply be an ahistorical belief, in the same way that Christianity is an ahistorical belief in universal hope, fellowship, charity and ultimate salvation. Culturally, both can be seen as romances: good fighting bad and good ultimately coming out on top.

As soon as the belief is historically situated, as lived socialism or lived Christianity, an awful complexity impacts: of social circumstance, of national tendencies, of distortions, of imperialisms, of gross misconducts, of parodies... But there can be moments of grace: the Cuban revolution, the Spanish Civil War (for a time), St Francis of Assisi, some monastic activities, liberation theology, the arrival of the railwaymen to the soviet in Russia... There can be small hopeful emanations: William Morris, the Zapatista, Rojavo...

There can be a myriad of interpretations, interpretations which never cease and which, in themselves, become historically situated: from Marx and Engels and Bakunin, to Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin, to Gramsci, to the French philosophers of

the 1960s and 70s: Debord, Baudrillard, Foucault, Badiou, and of course Sartre, whose *Critique of Dialectical reason* remains a classic; to the modern texts of Jodi Dean and Yanis Varoufakis.

We can take much or little from the above. I would take two points: that for Marx, being a communist was an activity rather than a programme. And from Sartre, that the dialectic is an ongoing process of thought, never settling. That the thesis, antithesis, synthesis process is never finished, but always beginning. If there is an intellectual flaw with communists, it is the tendency to take one episode of the thesis, antithesis, synthesis cycle and to freeze it as 'the truth' and then to introject it. When this freezing is amplified by the state apparatus we get the horror of Stalin. So, thesis: the revolution; antithesis: the reaction from the capitalist West, synthesis: socialism in one embattled country which all other socialisms must support, no matter what... But at a lesser level, it generates the sometimes absurd tensions of identity politics. Thesis: gender is a genetic given; antithesis: gender is a social construct; synthesis: breakdown of struggled-for equality in sport, work, safety...

I think this generates a fear of activism. The 'truth' gets frozen and can then be amplified by social media. It is then acted out via rallies, occupations etc. with the 'synthesis' being a 'martyrdom' via the legal system. There is also the motor narcissism of the chanting and banner waving and the false anger and the predictability and seriality (I'm there but I could be anyone) of it all: march and chant, speeches, provoke a tussle with the cops, outrage... But at the same time, there is the public demonstration of a position, without which, there is a void. Have a look at a rural town, and the welcome solidarity if it is an international issue (South Africa and

'THERE WOULD BE EVERY REASON TO JOIN THIS REIMAGINING: AS SOCIALISTS? AS UNION MEMBERS? AS COMMUNITY MEMBERS? THIS INVOLVES SOME STRATEGIC THINKING'

Gaza). There is also the realisation that the establishment takes no real notice of millions protesting and that the only real impact occurs if there is economic damage. Here, trade union activity is of the utmost importance.

But there is also the model of the united front: that socialists or communists, call ourselves what we will, have a sharper interpretation of the political landscape and will join a single issue organisation (housing or environment or whatever) to persuade it to move a little further; past a simple moral stance. Communists became notorious for being 'weasels'... of taking over organisations like the peace movement etc. But, for example, at the moment the union movement is mounting forums for union members and community to reimagine Aotearoa. There would be every reason to join this reimagining: As socialists? As union members? As community members? This involves some strategic thinking.

I think to separate education from activity is a falsehood for any socialist, taking one into the realm of idealism. At a recent Kōtuku workshop, the climate people had the clearest analysis of the current system per se. There was no fudging: capitalism is destroying the means of life. There was an urgency. It has to be stopped. Now. But how to do it? Gluing yourself to a motorway is probably not going to lead to the fall of the empire. But the educative content and the insistence on urgent action were invigorating. Have we any urgency? Can we work with these people?

When it comes to the tiriti, there is the necessity of obligation and decency: if you're invited into someone's home you should be respectful and act decently, even if you're toting some serious firepower. Furthermore, there are some learnings from indigenous knowledge and culture

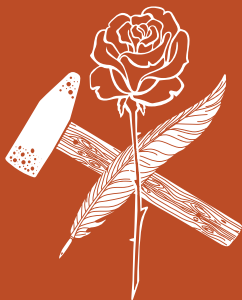
which are useful in problem solving and in relating one to this land and this region. With regard to reparations, then one can watch a period of primitive capital accumulation and see what comes out. But it is, in a sense, none of our business unless it seriously conflicts with values of solidarity which are held precious e.g. the contracting of foreign fishing vessels with slave-like employment conditions. There is a constitutional proposition certainly worth discussing, with the puzzle however, that capitalism is not mentioned as the overall catalyst for ongoing colonialism.

So, these are my immediate thoughts. In terms of my own past, it takes me back to the early 1980s when I joined the Workers Communist League. I was a leftie sort of theatre worker but my politics were not very thought out, more an impulse. I would sit in the weekly meeting listening in some awe at the breadth of knowledge that some cadre had – about the situation in South Africa for example. I would go and try and sell the paper at the factory gate, which I quite enjoyed, write some cultural reviews (at a better standard than normal) and help typeset the paper. Just by being around them, a consciousness was being honed. And I was reading Berger and Benjamin, learning that simply saying the right thing for the literary magazine was not doing much good, and that the way information and culture is produced is the key.

And then the whole thing fell apart as the feminists and then the tino rangatiratanga people made everyone feel guilty about existing. Just in time for Roger Douglas to walk in. I wandered off, always feeling that the falling apart was a bit silly really. But after all, I was just an unreliable artist, too busy with my own subjectivity.

So, here I am again, pondering the same complex questions, hopefully, a little wiser, but wisdom is never assured.

THE END OF HISTORY



The End of History is radio show/podcast produced by the Canterbury Socialist Society. Each month, host Sionainn Byrnes interviews someone with a connection to socialist history, action, and thought.

Recent guests include artist Nigel Brown, archivist and author Jared Davidson, and activist and union organiser Nadia Abu-Shanab. The show also features music, reviews, and more.

Listen to The End of History live on the first Monday of the month at 9PM on Plains FM 96.7 or later via Apple Podcasts or Spotify.



ANDREW TAIT

The Victorian Socialists (VS)

As we look forward to our 2nd Annual Conference Andrew Tait looks back to the contribution of our keynote speaker, Daniel Lopez, at the first Conference in Christchurch and considers what lessons we can learn from his account of the activities of the Victorian Socialists in Melbourne.

Fittingly enough for a federation inspired by William Morris' brand of socialism, the keynote speaker at our founding conference was a more up-to-date Victorian Socialist, Daniel Lopez, of Melbourne.

In 2002, a teenage Lopez looked up socialism in the phonebook and tracked down a shadowy crowd meeting in a dark corner of Victoria's Trades Hall. Socialism was marginal, even on the left. In 2022 though, in Melbourne at least, an openly socialist party was having a very good day at the polls—raking in 60,000 votes across the north and west of Melbourne. The party (VS) was born in 2018, partly out of enthusiasm for and then disappointment at Jeremy Corbyn's meteoric rise and fall in the United Kingdom.

In Australia, as in New Zealand, Labor is the party that introduced neoliberalism in the 1980s. It is now profoundly sclerotic, 'dead inside'. The Greens, a potential alternative to Labor, vary from state to state. In Queensland, decades of defeat for the moderates has resulted in an insurgent left winning power in that party,

and three MPs. Other states have a mixed bag of crypto-socialists, HR Greens and Tree Tories. For socialists looking to have an impact nationally, the Greens offer the advantage of being an established party but the disadvantage of not being explicitly socialist. Lopez said being explicitly socialist was not hampering VS though—'the biggest thing that is holding us back is that we are new.'

The VS project was based on an insight from political journalist Guy Rundle, who identified an opportunity in Melbourne's north. He got together Socialist Alternative, Socialist Alliance and popular local councillor Steve Jolly. The first is a sect, Lopez (a former member) said, in a strict sociological sense. They're pushy, argue hard and are not kind but they have a lot of young members, they like practical activism, and they love campaigns that win (unfortunately often all too rare on the far left). They have about 150 members in Melbourne and 500 nationwide. Socialist Alliance is an older sect, smaller but with experienced members. Steve Jolly is extremely hard working and knows more about local politics than anyone on the left.

Having these three groups on board gave the project momentum and other independent activists joined. Originally the party was a coalition, launched in 2018 with the help of \$20,000 from sympathetic trade unions. From early on, Lopez pushed to make VS a party and not just a project, with a dues-paying membership... and a bureaucracy. With likeminded members, he formed a caucus to establish VS as a multi-tendency party—which recognises the tenacious dedication of quite small socialist sects to very specific positions on working class history and international relations, while creating a platform for joint work. Fighting to move from a coalition to a party was stressful.

Some of the players play hard but in 2020 the strategy started to pay off with the election of Jorge Jorquera.

Lopez was realistic about the scale of their achievement in 2022, kicking off an entertaining account of the campaign in fine style with a quote from Lenin (perhaps to reassure the hardliners among us he hadn't completely capitulated to reformism): 'Politics begin where the masses are, not where there are thousands, but where there are millions, that is where serious politics begin. So we are half serious.'

Victorian Socialists won on average four per cent of the vote for upper house candidates, and 6.5% for lower house candidates. Their campaign was concentrated on the north of Melbourne. South Melbourne has a 'Sydney energy' that makes it a waste of time at this stage, Lopez said—parochialism evidently playing well in local politics. One of the most exciting achievements of the campaign was to break through to the north of Bell St, 'the hipster-proof fence' that protects Labor's rusted-on heartland; in Broadmeadows the socialists won 8.3% there, overtaking the Greens, and 10% in Footscray.

These results were the result not of clever ideas and slick marketing but of a long-term focus on local politics—on picket lines, fighting garbage fires, mobilising to help out when the Maribyrnong River flooded suburbs, saving the Preston market. Victorian Socialists campaigned against the 'cruel and racist' COVID lockdown of housing estates, and collected donations for families trapped by the government in those buildings. 'These are all very detailed local Melbourne issues but there's a lesson in that. You've got to pay attention to local issues. You've got to pay deep attention to those issues because that's what cuts through to people. I love

the Preston Market. It's magnificent. I've been going there since I was a kid. It's cheap, you can get a slice of pizza as big as your head. It's really working class and serves the whole of upper Melbourne.'

Preston market was under threat from developers (of course), who wanted to turn it into a Westfield Mall (of course). The Greens, sometime allies of the socialists, in this case supported the developers, as did Labor, which Lopez characterises as a zombie party peopled by out of touch careerists wearing RM Williams boots. The Greens, by contrast consist of three groups: lefties like Lopez, Tree Tories (our James Shaw is probably a good example), and HR department Greens, as quick with support for a mall as to 'acknowledge country' (paying lip service to indigenous land rights). In the Preston Market's corner though was the diminutive, beret-wearing local councillor Gaetano Greco, running as an independent but one with deep roots in the area. Greco, who everyone loves because he'll 'help your nonna get on Centrelink', came close to toppling Labor in an electorate long taken for granted.

Victorian Socialists may not have the local knowledge of Greco but they are welcome because they can reliably help out in numbers. They are organised. As Lopez commented 'the mass base of major parties has basically disappeared. It's wild but we massively, massively out-campaigned Labor. We don't have money...but we have so many more members and volunteers.' Labor is dominant in the north but so moribund, the dead literally vote at its branch meetings. By contrast, living, breathing humans, knocked on precisely 188,568 doors for the socialist cause. Some 400 activists volunteered on average for six hours each week during the campaign. At 'all-in door knocks', 50 to 100 would meet in a local

'POLITICS BEGIN WHERE THE MASSES ARE, NOT WHERE THERE ARE THOUSANDS, BUT WHERE THERE ARE MILLIONS, THAT IS WHERE SERIOUS POLITICS BEGIN. SO WE ARE HALF SERIOUS.'



block for a briefing from the candidate or an organiser then split up into teams of two to knock on doors, block by block. Lopez was pretty enthusiastic about door knocking—talking to old Greek guys: ‘politicians are all crooks, but you seem nice, I’ll vote for you’; to aged care workers outraged and disgusted by rest home residents left to rot during the pandemic. “The first thing you do is listen. You do not turn up at someone’s door and say “can I tell you about my Lord and Saviour Leon

Trotsky.” You turn up and say what issues are important to you? You listen first and foremost.’

Leaflets were delivered to every household in the electorates targeted and thousands of corflute signs were put up. If real politics only begins where there are not thousands but millions, then data management is crucial—in the first election it was done on google sheets but for this election Vic Socialists splashed out on some serious software that allowed them

to co-ordinate leafletting and door-knocking and painted a sophisticated picture of the electorate.

It helped that socialist candidates were young, working class and diverse... unlike the Labor candidate for Brunswick, an amiable architect but white as the driven snow—‘you don’t want to vote for someone who looks like your landlord.’ Candidates like Steve Jolly, Sue Bolton and Jorge Jorquera brought long-term commitment to local issues. Footscray councillor Jorquera’s campaigns against racist policing of African youth and for Vietnamese language lessons in Footscray high schools were a big part of the reason VS’s vote went from zero to ten percent in that suburb.

Vic Socialists are not just fighting for leftwing politics, it is also necessary to restore the broken trust between representative democracy and voters—‘we get votes from people who I am sure are not socialist but they see we are sincere and we will fight for them and with them.’

Coming up with a set of policies that connected with voters but also pointed past capitalism took a lot of hard work—as you would expect for a campaign powered by a lot of very motivated activists. Perhaps the most popular was a promise to pay MPs only the wage of an average worker. ‘You can’t represent people if you don’t live like them. Privilege is corrupting.’ You can’t go for full communism now—you want sensible policies no other party will offer. Candidates could not own investment properties for instance—obvious on the face of it if you are standing in working class neighbourhoods but not a commitment the Greens could make.

Housing was a big issue. The socialists argued that owners of the top one percent of houses in Victoria should pay a luxury tax of 5% on the last sale price. Affecting roughly 2500 houses worth on

average \$10 million that tax would raise about \$12.5 billion every year. Making Crown Casino and private schools’ yacht clubs pay market rents (they pay joke rents as low as a dollar a year at present) was massively popular. A tougher fight would be placing punitive taxes on empty properties and rewriting tenancy laws to push landlords out of the market. Raising taxes and squeezing landlords would allow the creation of a Victoria Public Housing Authority that could create 15,000 rental and shared ownership homes. Nationalisation of the crisis-plagued electricity and transport systems was deeply appealing to voters, Lopez said.

Lessons

Electoral politics build mass audiences for socialism. Tens of thousands have voted socialist and VS has close to 1000 members. This strengthens pickets and protests. MPs’ offices can become activist centres, and combine protest with a parliamentary strategy—‘to contest bourgeois electoral hegemony.’ We might not like parliament, but if serious politics is not about thousands but millions then socialists have to recognise parliament is where politics is. Yes, there is a danger our MPs will sell out. This danger can be mitigated but not eliminated but, Lopez says, ‘I want to be in a position where we can make those mistakes.’ He gave the example of a battle against strike-breaking cops outside the Baiada chicken processing factory, a glorious victory thanks to some strategic street-fighting by union workers. The neighbourhood around that factory returned one of the highest results for Vic Socialists.

‘That’s the kind of socialist politics we want to do.’

**ACROSS:
VICTORIAN
SOCIALISTS
CAMPAIGNING
IN 2022**
VICTORIAN SOCIALISTS

NĪKAU WI NEERA

NĪKAU WINEERA,
WELLINGTON CITY
COUNCILLOR
SUPPLIED

Echoes of Aristocracy, Cloth, and Colonial Dementia: Class Comprehension in 21st-Century Aotearoa



I.

We walked, handheld, at half-dress, the red light pooling at our feet in hopes we would slip from the pavement and fall into the sky. A passing trio, pissed, already, cooed. Congratulations! Another. A handshake. You know what the secret is, mate? Be a good listener. Another. Grins.

E. P. Thompson, in the preface to his *Making of the English Working Class*, goes to great lengths to stress that class is a *relationship*, rather than a *thing*¹. Historically, ephemerally, class *happens*. It defies operationalist vivisection and insists upon emic interrogation by those *doing* class. Class is an emanation who goes about draped in burnt red veils, numinous and vital. By its soft trappings, which it spins at the

power-loom and bestows lovingly upon us, we come to know each other.

Yet our people have lost the meaning of class. We have made off with the map whilst the territory remains. Since our middle-class settler origins, and the preceding indigenous primogeniture which yet haunts and challenges contemporary power structures, echoes of nobility have reverberated throughout our institutions and our society, vibrating strings in a colonial symphony which resonate in structures of power, right, and belonging. However, we exist ontologically in a dusky twilight between the setting of the aristocrat and the rising of the capitalist; our inheritance of a class language, begotten by our colonial forebears, lacks the grammar to parse neoliberal, global capitalism.

Our dual heritage of cultures steeped in nobility imbue us with an utterly inadequate set of tools to understand the unique double movement of neoliberalism and neocolonialism², and the monopolising capital project

1 Thompson, E. P., *The Making of the English Working Class*. Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1963.

2 Curtis, Bruce, 'Class, Neoliberalism and New Zealand', *Social Space 1*, no. 11, pp. 1-23, 2016.

and increasing ascendancy of foreign, extractive ownership. Even our scholarship suffers from cultural cringe³ and a dearth of local class analysis pervades our intellectual landscape—as does our enduring colonial shame.

Currents flow into this country. We are a gyre, brushed by the mediaeval institutions of Europe, a culture war from the Americas, an unbroken human continuity from Polynesia, and the protean tides of global capital. Class to many is invisible, even as they perform it at the shearing station and the Wellington Club and the corporate office and the WINZ centre. We look in vain for the top hat, the cane, the automobile, the Remuera mansion. The relations which underpin this performance of class remain obscured by our limited cultural ability to articulate domination and exploitation except in antique terms and by caricature, expecting a cartoonish baron twirling his moustache. We expect these markers—a black tie here, a ‘whom’ there—yet the ‘class’ they suggest hearkens to an ancient patrimony which exists far from here, far from now. To our countrymen, a man so attired must either be a lord or a bridegroom—though in truth the sartorial and grammatical customs of the global, untethered bourgeoisie have degenerated somewhat since.

We have fallen into dementia. We recognise the hallmarks of class, yet can no longer grasp the relations they signify. We know the face, but have forgotten the name.

II.

*My great-grandfather
was the Mayor, you know,
and his brother before
him. This is his brooch.*

Our colonial experiment coincided with a great productive and semiotic rupture in the British nation⁴. Early Pākehā settlers of the middle classes left the imperial core for the colonies, and brought with them a class essence characterised by property, manners, and a veneration of good works⁵. They saw not the decline of their old nobility and, taking a glut of land, they set out to create an artisanal Arcadia. However, in them was the kernel of the emergent bourgeoisie, which was coalescing across the seas whilst they farmed, in the coffee houses, lodges, and societies of Britain. The signifiers of the old class structure in the mother country would be passed down to us through them, as though petrified at the moment of rupture, disarticulated from the immanent relations of wage-labourers, capitalists, and landlords.

Thus, in the pastoral beginnings of its imperial project, this country was colonised by middling men fluent in the tongue of class. In the very margins, the once-removed scions of the British gentry haunted the foothills and plains of Canterbury, but in their droves the middle-class *qua* entrepreneurial pastoralists sprang upon the bountiful lands of Aotearoa and began to groom her⁶. They, and their industrialist ilk, took

3 Curtis, Bruce, ‘The Performance-based Research Fund, gender and a cultural cringe’, *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, pp. 87-109, 2016.

4 Thompson, p. 191.

5 Morris, R. J., *Men, Women and Property in England, 1780-1870: A Social and Economic History of Family Strategies Amongst the Leeds Middle Class*, Cambridge University Press, 2005.

6 McAloon, Jim. ‘Class in colonial New Zealand: towards a historiographical rehabilitation’, *New Zealand Journal of History* 38, no. 1: pp. 1-21, 2004.

‘...THE SHADOW OF THE ‘CLASSLESS SOCIETY’ WOULD NEVER TRULY BE BANISHED, AND ULTIMATELY MADE AOTEAROA FERTILE GROUND FOR THE COMING NEOLIBERAL EXPERIMENT’

One Tree Hill, Kelburn, Thorndon, City Rise, Māori Hill. Whilst their superiors in the mother country saw their estates diminish at the hand of duties, income tax, rent controls, and an increasingly hostile legislature, these petty artisans organised the means of production triumphantly amongst themselves.

Despite their newfound wealth, their middle-class origins would betray them. Their manners, faith, and familial management of property were hallmarks of the ‘profit seeking and professional values’ held by the English middle classes⁷. However, having found themselves new lords of an immigrant realm, some race-memory awoke as to raise certain of their habits to the old tastes of the forgotten aristocracy. These persisted, in the boarding schools and the hunting estates of the islands’ eastern coasts, and in the Tinakori halls of the Wakefields. Whilst the utopian, middle-class ideal persisted in the imagination of the settlers, the rigid class memory would not so easily be dispelled.

The twin forces of the egalitarian, middle-class myth, and the reality of petty-bourgeois domination inherited from these early men, would go on to form the prevailing class metanarrative of New Zealand. It would ebb and flow, as the unions waxed and waned in power, before the Great Strike of 1913 precipitated a firm shift to social democracy. However, the shadow of the ‘classless society’ would never truly be banished, and ultimately made Aotearoa fertile ground for the coming neoliberal experiment.

The formative, preserved class language of the original settlers, along

with the death of the socialist tradition in the Labour Party, have left us bereft of a common means to describe the complex oppressions of our neoliberal paradigm. We falter at the complexity of the post- and meta-modern condition, and rather than reaching for analyses of class location⁸ we import foreign culture-war ideology to further muddle our own halting understanding of exploitation, as the productive relations grow ever more egregiously entrenched. Our neo-colonial overlords permit us our fantasies, and tell us: *There is No Depression in New Zealand*.

III.

Rain massages the floor-length panes. Mist on my lapels. I sit. A few eyes. A soft squall later, the questions start. So... why are you dressed like that? Like that? Like that?

In whom of us, then, has the present radical tradition manifested, and whence have we got it? From the trade unions of our early settlers, or the later labour movement? From international struggle? From the postwar intelligentsia?

In this historical moment the radicals exist on campus, in the urban centres—though a scant few survive in the rural communes and *papakāinga*. The leftist tradition in the public consciousness has been subsumed by progressivism, championed as an *Ersatzpolitik* by the managerial classes of Wellington’s quays. Lenin’s professional revolutionary cadre now wears a lanyard and cycles to work. The rationalised bureaucrat⁹ has become

⁷ Morris, p. 58.

⁸ Wright, Erik Olin, ‘Foundations of a neo-Marxist class analysis’, *Approaches to class analysis*. 2005.

⁹ Giddens, Anthony, and David Held, eds., *Classes, power and conflict: classical and contemporary debates*. Univ of California Press, 1982.

the showman of the only leftie game in town. The only truly revolutionary *mahi* is being undertaken by young, fed-up rebels, resurrecting the unions, agitating for constitutional transformation, and demanding a place in the politics of respectability.

However, a spectre is haunting our young 21st-century radicals—the spectre of our founding myth. They, like their floral and tie-dyed predecessors, accept the seductive Frankfurt notion that the proletariat is not *utterly* miserable, and only the minorities and outcasts are truly dispossessed¹⁰. Thus, the veering away from scientific, historical materialism and into Therborn's *absolute negation*: rejection of performance, rejection of aristocratic pretensions, rejection of normative forces. Class to our radical comrades still exists in the abstract, other-space inherited from the great dual class myths of our ancestors. When they—we—perceive those markers of a ghostly aristocracy we demand to know why such markers should appear—by whose grace, whose authority are you dressed so? Why do you talk like that? The interrogation echoes in harmony between foes. The conservative asks: why are you dressed like that? The radical asks: why are you dressed like that?

Our young comrades do have one significant advantage over their

progenitors. If indeed Imperialism (and its settler-colonial predilections) is the Highest Stage of Capitalism¹¹, the radical decolonial, constitutional agitation fervently embraced by the next generation represents the most substantial ideological challenge to neoliberal hegemony in the West, enhanced by Aotearoa's unique positionality within the second sphere of the Empire. This challenge drives them, energises them, and allows them a uniquely accessible conceptual framework wherewith to imagine another world—a world which it is but a short leap of the imagination to populate with socialism.

The constitutional project which will emerge in this country in the next decade may well lay aside the tweed and cotton of our petty-bourgeois forebears, forget the fine costume of a metamorphosed elite, and reach for the wool and *kākahu* of those Subjects of our history *doing* class, those downtrodden imbued with Messianic power¹², those redeemers of the constellation of history, those who will blast the Red Feds and Te Tiriti back out of our homogenous, mythical nation-time and summon a clear, red dawn to burn off the fog of our dementia and gift us, finally, the hammer, the sickle, and the *patu* to destroy capitalism once and for all.

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- 10 Therborn, Göran, 'The Frankfurt School', *Foundations of the Frankfurt School of Social Research*. Routledge, 2020.
 - 11 Lenin, Vladimir Ilyich, *Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism*, Zhizn i Znaniye, 1917.
 - 12 Benjamin, Walter, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', *Critical Theory and Society*, pp. 255-263, Routledge, 2020.

ANDREW TAIT

The Oppressed Become the Oppressor: the Demise of the Jewish Radical Tradition in Israel

I arrived at the end of 1972. I imagined that I was landing in a socialist utopia. Instead, the reality of the Zionist project made itself explicit at the airport: European Jews stamped my passport, Middle Eastern Jews manned the luggage carousels, while Palestinians swept the floors and cleaned the toilets. So much for the socialist dream.'

—Lousie Adler

Ideas matter. This may seem a strange assertion in a world where Israel is able to massacre with impunity 40,000 people in a ghetto smaller in size than Wellington city. The only thing that seems to matter in international politics nowadays is military force.

But, as Italian revolutionary Antonio Gramsci argued, hegemony in the long run relies on both force and consent. Hitler was able to invade most of mainland Europe but his nightmare of a 1000-year Reich was doomed despite his military power because his ideology was so repugnant to so many. By contrast, the universalist ideals of the French Revolution, even when refracted through Napoleon's empire, spread like wildfire and remade the world.

When it was founded, the Israeli state pretended to be part of that universalist project. This fraud meant Israel was, in theory, further to the left than any non-Soviet country but in reality

THE RADICAL JEWISH TRADITION

Revolutionaries, resistance fighters & firebrands



Donny Gluckstein & Janey Stone



it was a colonial settlement dependent on foreign powers. The socialist veneer not only helped integrate left-wing Jewish immigrants, it also gave protective colouring to Israel in the decolonisation struggles that swept the post-war world.

However, the socialist veneer was steadily eroded by the racist reality. Now the far-right calls the shots in Israel's war cabinet. The simple explanation is that labels don't matter—that the 'socialists' of Mapai are the same as the religious fascists of Otzma Yehudit (Jewish Power). This is partly true—there was no constitutional rupture because the state from its founding was dedicated to colonising Palestine. Warlords like Moshe Dayan could seamlessly transition from Labour to Likud because the main enemy was always Palestinian, never the Israeli working class. But although all the main currents of Zionism were for an apartheid state built on Palestinian land, dismissing the shift in ideology from left to right misses the demographic shifts that first gave Zionism its socialist colouring and then stripped it away, the brutalising impact of colonisation, and the role of ideology in struggle.

The triumph of right-wing Zionism over the course of the twentieth century required the erasure of another history—that of the radical Jewish tradition. The degeneration of ideology in Israel is instructive and *The Radical Jewish Tradition: Revolutionaries, resistance fighters and firebrands* (Interventions, Melbourne, 2024) by Donny Gluckstein and Janey Stone is a good guide¹. This book tells the story of the radical Jewish working class from fighting pogroms in Russia, to rent strikes in New York and finally to the fraud of the Zionist state, where Labour Zionism provided an illusion of class struggle ‘to placate radical Jewish immigrants until they had adjusted their principles appropriately.’ (Gluckstein and Stone, p. 305).

Ethnic nationalism

The establishment of a national homeland for Jewish people in Palestine has been described as the last European colonial project, which is true, but Israel is a special case not only because of its late arrival. It is also unusual because it is colonialism by proxy, where first the UK and then the USA sponsored Jewish colonisation of Palestine, and because of the central role antisemitism plays in European nationalism.

The zenith of European colonialism, the Scramble for Africa, followed the Berlin Conference of 1884, as mass production of weapons like the Maxim gun finally gave the West decisive military superiority globally. The triumph of capitalism and European imperialism gave birth simultaneously to its opposite—the international working-class movement; May Day was reborn in red in 1889.

One reactionary response to internationalism in Europe was ethnic nationalism. Unlike nationalism inspired by the French revolutionary model (which Benedict Anderson argues emerged first in Latin America), ethnicity, language and land were deemed defining features of the nation. There was no place for pan-European minorities

like the Jews or the Roma. Ethnic nationalism saw a recrudescence of the most filthy mediaeval antisemitism, characterised by the Dreyfus affair in France and state-orchestrated pogroms in Tsarist Russia, and in the inter-war years, modern fascism.

Antisemitism is an inescapable part of the DNA of nationalism. Some on the left have argued that antisemitism is no longer significant, as all legal barriers to Jewish participation in public life have been removed. This is too mechanistic. Antisemitism will continue to be the ‘socialism of fools’ for as long as capitalism exists.

The prehistory of antisemitism

Ruling classes surmount the discontent that privilege and exploitation generates among subordinates through physical coercion and ideology. The latter directs the frustrations people feel with existing social arrangements towards false and innocent targets. The technique is an old one. It is, as the Romans put it, divide et impera, divide and rule. (Gluckstein and Stone, p.18)

Capitalism is not an abstract category. It has a specific history. It is ‘white’, European, for the most part. It suckled as an infant on the blood of African slaves. It sprang from a society where Jews, the ‘Christ-killers’, were a pan-European minority, despised but depended upon.

The mediaeval European economy was centred on agricultural production and had two major classes, landowners and peasants. Jews were excluded from agriculture and forced to congregate in towns and cities where they performed low-status work using skills acquired in the more advanced cultures of the Middle East, particularly in artisan manufacture and commerce (p. 33). The

1 All references in the text are from this book, unless otherwise stated. There is also an edition published by Bookmarks in the UK.

association of Jews with a special economic position, a 'people-class', made Jews a perfect safety valve for discontent.

This was reinforced by separate administration.

To perform its economic function the community was allowed to operate as a semi-independent island supervised by an institution called the Kehillah (community). Though tasked with keeping Jews orderly and segregated, it provided a degree of security and autonomy, education and community services, and maintained social cohesion. (Gluckstein and Stone, p. 35)

As Bundist leader Vladimir Medem put it: 'The Jewish world was locked into itself; closed with two locks: one with which it locked itself off from the outside, strange world and another with which this strange world in turn locked it into a ghetto.'

Jewish responses

The Enlightenment (and its Jewish counterpart, the Haskalah) promised to end this isolation, especially its anti-aristocratic wing, which opposed aristocratic rule in principle: 'Civil rights for Jews was one of its battering rams.' (p. 24). Capitalist urbanisation concentrated the masses in centres of power so that politics was no longer the preserve of the privileged. When the alternative prospect of free self-expression was opened up by the French Revolution, the majority of Jews ran towards it (p. 38).

As capitalists supplanted the old aristocracy and consolidated their hold over society, they became less enamoured of universalist ideals. By the late 1800s, universalist nationalism on the French revolutionary model gave way to ethnic nationalism, the reactionary response to working class internationalism. For Theodor Herzl and other middle-class Jews, the Dreyfus

affair showed the French republican ideal of universal citizenship to be a lie. The first World Zionist Congress, held in Basel in 1897, aimed to solve France's Jewish Problem by enlisting Jews as colonial shock troops for a European empire, any empire.

By contrast, among the Jewish working classes, socialist politics became popular, especially in the east (the Jewish Labour Bund was one of the largest political parties in Tsarist Russia at the turn of the century). Central to the Bund's politics was a celebration of Yiddish culture and 'doykeit' or hereness: 'Instead of Zionist fantasies of reunification in the faraway vacant land of Palestine, the Bund grappled with the immediate reality of Jewish workers' lives *in situ*.' (p. 64) This vision perished in the horrors of Hitler's extermination camps. There has never been such a wholesale, industrialised slaughter of an entire people. The 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising remains one of the most heroic events of our history but it was doomed. In the aftermath of this apocalypse, tens of thousands of displaced refugees, denied easy access to Britain or the USA, fled to Palestine.

Zionism in Palestine

Palestine has always had a Jewish population living alongside Muslims and Christians, but until the twentieth century it was a tiny minority. Zionism sought to portray it as a land without a people but the falsity of that was clear to anyone who went there. As Ahad Ha'am wrote in 1891: 'From abroad we are accustomed to believe that Eretz Israel [the Holy Land] is presently almost desolate, an uncultivated wilderness ... But in truth it is not so. In the entire land, it is hard to find tillable land that is not already tilled. From abroad we are accustomed to believing that the Arabs are all desert savages ... But this is a big mistake. (p. 294)

With no imperialist army to grab land and distribute it for free, land had to be acquired piecemeal through purchase and settlers had to be attracted to work it. The USA, not Palestine, was

the destination of choice for Jews seeking refuge from European antisemitism; between 1880 and 1924, 2.5 million moved there. Only after the US and other countries restricted immigration did significant numbers go to Palestine. Nor were these immigrants an ideal workforce. In a primarily agricultural economy, very few had farming skills and, worse, had subversive attitudes to bosses. As many as half of the migrants between 1919 and 1923 were socialists or communists!

David Ben Gurion, later the first prime minister of Israel, was himself once a Polish migrant labourer. He wrote that: 'The Jewish workers had to stand by the synagogue until the Jewish farmers came to look for a labourer; they'd feel the worker's muscles and take them for work or, mostly, leave them standing there.' (p. 296)

'Conquest of labour'

Employers preferred Arab farmhands, who were already skilled and, as smallholders, were cheaper to hire as they did not depend entirely on wages, whereas Jews were unskilled and needed work year-round. Ben Gurion's solution was to force Arab workers out of the economy in order to 'transform here the Jewish masses into workers.' This was misleadingly called 'the conquest of labour'. Gluckstein and Stone write:

'Conquest of labour' was presented as radical because the fight seemed to be with the landowners resisting the right to work. The slogan was the opposite of progressive, nonetheless. In class terms the sectional interest of one group was being placed over wider working-class interests, Arab and Jew together, and ethnic enmities were being fostered. (p. 298).

Israeli Labour Party politician David Hacohen (1898-1984) described the difficulties he faced convincing left-wing Jews of this colonial socialism:

I had to fight my friends on the issue of Jewish socialism, to defend the fact that I would not accept Arabs in my trade union, the Histadrut; to defend preaching to housewives that they not buy at Arab stores; to defend the fact that we stood guard at orchards to prevent Arab workers from getting jobs there.... To pour kerosene on Arab tomatoes, to attack Jewish housewives in the markets and smash the Arab eggs they had bought; to praise to the skies the Kereen Kayemet [Jewish Fund] that sent Hankin to Beirut to buy land from absentee effendi [landlords] and to throw the fellahin [Arab peasants] off the land—to buy dozens of dunams from an Arab is permitted, but to sell, god forbid, one Jewish dunam to an Arab is prohibited; to take Rothschild, the incarnation of capitalism, as a socialist and to name him the 'benefactor'—to do all that was not easy. (International Socialist Review 24; 2002)

Apartheid communes, apartheid towns

The kibbutz (agricultural commune) movement, though small (only 8% of Palestinian Jews in 1948), served as a flagship for left Zionism as a whole. It inspired volunteers from urban environments to undertake the hardships of agricultural labour and disguised in communist colours the kibbutzniks' dependence on Jewish capitalists to buy the land previously worked by Palestinian peasants. These communes 'skilfully blended four factors—an image of radical communism, retention of immigrants, Jewish exclusivity, and colonial land settlement.' (p. 300)

This pattern was replicated across the embryonic colony. Jewish exclusivity was a

founding principle of Tel Aviv, where by 1939 one in three Jews lived (52% lived in Jewish-only towns). Zionists were deliberately building ghettos while working class Jews in the Diaspora (which was 97% of Jews worldwide at the time) were fleeing the ghetto and enthusiastically embracing working class life and politics in every country they found themselves in. This deliberate insularity was also evident in the campaign to revive Hebrew: 'This made Jews as well as Arabs the problem because at the time just one in 400 overall routinely employed Hebrew. By comparison, 1,000-year-old Yiddish was still the mother tongue for two-thirds of Jews in Palestine and 10 million out of 16 million Jews worldwide.' (p. 301).

'A strange trade union indeed'

If the kibbutz was the flagship of left Zionism, then the Histadrut (the General Federation of Labour) was its heavy infantry. From 1931 onwards, it counted 75% of the Jewish workforce as members, and ran banks, insurance and the largest shipping company: '...at one point, most of the Histadrut's members were employed by subsidiaries of the Histadrut itself. "A strange trade union" indeed.' (p. 303).

Behind the scenes, the entire loss-making Labour Zionist edifice was underwritten by non-socialist Zionists who 'stomached the insults and flowery rhetoric about proletarian mission and the rule of labour because they knew colonisation could not succeed on a profit-or-loss basis ... an economically backward country like Palestine was unattractive to both capital and labour. Workers had to be enticed to stay.' (p.304).

While some left Zionists from Hashomer Hatzair (later Mapam) were in favour of a bi-national state in theory, in practice they were heavily involved in ethnic cleansing in the Nakba and their support for kibbutzim, which provided the elite troops and officer class for the Israeli military.

Soviet support for the early state was also crucial. As Benjamin Balthaser put it in a *Jacobin* interview:

Ironically, perhaps, the Soviet Union did more than any other single force to change the minds of the Jewish Marxist left in the late 1940s about Israel. Andrei Gromyko, the Soviet Union's ambassador to the United Nations, came out in 1947 and backed partition in the United Nations after declaring the Western world did nothing to stop the Holocaust, and suddenly there's this about-face. All these Jewish left-wing publications that were denouncing Zionism, literally the next day, were embracing partition and the formation of the nation-state of Israel.

Zionist socialism was a militarised utopia. In egalitarian agricultural communes, the pathetic 'Yid' would be remade as a wholesome peasant and a super-masculine soldier.

The problem of Arab Jews

The downfall of left-wing Zionism was not only due to the contradiction between Jewish nationalism and socialism; racism towards Arabs, the horror inculcated in immigrants towards the indigenous culture, created a contradiction within the Jewish population as well: racism towards Arab Jews.

The early state faced a basic demographic deficit. In 1947, Jews were only a third of the population of Palestine. Although the majority of the world's Jews lived in Europe, their destination of choice was the USA, not Palestine. Immigration from the Muslim world was essential. From the 1950s, hundreds of thousands of Jews were expelled from Arab countries as a result of a twin process of Israeli provocations and reactionary Arab nationalism.



IRAQI JEWS ARRIVE IN ISRAEL IN 1950. FROM A POPULATION OF ABOUT 150,000 IN 1948, FEWER THAN A DOZEN IRAQI JEWS REMAIN. SURPRISINGLY, IRAQI CLERIC AND POLITICIAN MOQTADA AL SADR, WHOSE COALITION WITH THE IRAQI COMMUNIST PARTY WON A 2018 ELECTION, HAS CALLED FOR THE RIGHT OF IRAQI JEWS TO RETURN, AN IDEA ENDORSED BY 77% OF PARTICIPANTS IN A 62,000-STRONG POLL ON AN IRAQI FACEBOOK PAGE IN 2018

HANS PINN

The destruction of the millennia-old Iraqi Jewish community is a case in point. Iraq's first minister of finance, in 1932, was Jewish, and in 1947 the Jewish population of Iraq numbered 156,000, compared to 630,000 Jews in British-controlled Palestine (most of whom were recent migrants). At that time the Iraqi Foreign Minister Muhammad Fadhel al-Jamali warned the UN:

Partition imposed against the will of the majority of the people will jeopardize peace and harmony in the Middle East. Not only the uprising of the Arabs of Palestine is to be expected, but the masses in the Arab world cannot be restrained. The Arab-Jewish relationship in the Arab world will

greatly deteriorate. There are more Jews in the Arab world outside of Palestine than there are in Palestine. In Iraq alone, we have about one hundred and fifty thousand Jews who share with Muslims and Christians all the advantages of political and economic rights. Harmony prevails among Muslims, Christians and Jews. But any injustice imposed upon the Arabs of Palestine will disturb the harmony among Jews and non-Jews in Iraq; it will breed inter-religious prejudice and hatred.

Despite these prophetic words, al-Jamali was unable or unwilling to stop either Zionist



AUTHORS OF *THE RADICAL JEWISH TRADITION*, DONNY GLUCKSTEIN AND JANEY STONE

DAV GILL / RED FLAG

provocation (including, allegedly, a Mossad bombing campaign *targeting* Iraqi Jews) or the legalised looting of Jewish property by the state, which eventually drove an ancient community out of Iraq to serve as second-class citizens in Israel. The pattern was repeated from Morocco to Iran.

Colonising the Oriental soul

Disdain for Arab Jews, for the East, drew on a deep well of anxiety in the Zionist tradition. In the late 1800s Eastern European Jews were on the move, escaping pogroms and poverty for the West. Baron Edmond de Rothschild, an important funder of Palestinian colonisation, was alarmed 'by the plight of the east European Jewish masses and favoured their resettlement—though preferably not in France, where an influx of poor Jews

from the east might fan the flames of antisemitism and undermine the tenuous place which the Rothschilds, and later other assimilated Jews, had secured.' (p. 52)

This attitude towards the ragged, religious, Yiddish-speaking Eastern European Jew was easily transferred onto Arab Jews. As the founder of right-wing Zionism, Ze'ev Jabotinsky, put it:

We Jews have nothing in common with what is called the Orient, thank God.

To the extent that our uneducated masses [Arab Jews] have ancient spiritual traditions and laws that call the Orient, they must be weaned away from them, and this is in fact what we are doing in every decent school, what life itself is doing with great success. We are going in Palestine,

*first for our national convenience,
[second] to sweep out thoroughly
all traces of the Oriental soul.*

Ironically, Arab Jews ended up voting for the ideological heirs of Jabotinsky.

Life for Middle Eastern migrants was hard. Thousands of years of history was lost. The diversity and richness of their cultures—Moroccan, Egyptian, Iraqi—were invisible to the European Jews who controlled the jobs, the housing, the police and the bureaucracy. Instead, they were seen as lazy and primitive. Strange to think now, but most early Zionists were militant atheists: the religious traditions of Arab Jews were evidence of their backwardness.

Bureaucracy was brutal. Immigrants were shaved and sprayed with DDT on arrival and housed in shanty towns. Children were removed from their parents en masse; thousands were lost, giving rise to a continuing belief that Mizrahi babies were sold or given over to wealthy, secular European Jews. Many migrants, having lost their property and finding no work in Israel, suffered a severe loss of living standards.

The Labour Party, the party that founded the state, ended up being the party of an elite that looked down not only on Palestinians, but on about half of the Israeli Jewish population.

The oppressed turn on the oppressed

Before 1948 there were no Mizrahi Jews. The category was created by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics to lump together Jews from Arab countries. Then, from the 1980s, in reaction to the persistent evidence of discrimination against Mizrahi and protests from Mizrahi, the Statistics Bureau stopped publishing data on Mizrahi Jews. The policy was reversed in 2022, but the general picture seems to be stark and persistent disadvantage in jobs, housing, income, education and incarceration.

The revolutionary wave that swept the world in the late 1960s and early 70s had an impact on

Arab Jews. In the early 1970s, inspired by the Black Panther Party in the USA, frustration among Arab Jewish youth led to the formation of an Israeli Black Panther Party that briefly enjoyed mass support but was quickly marginalised.

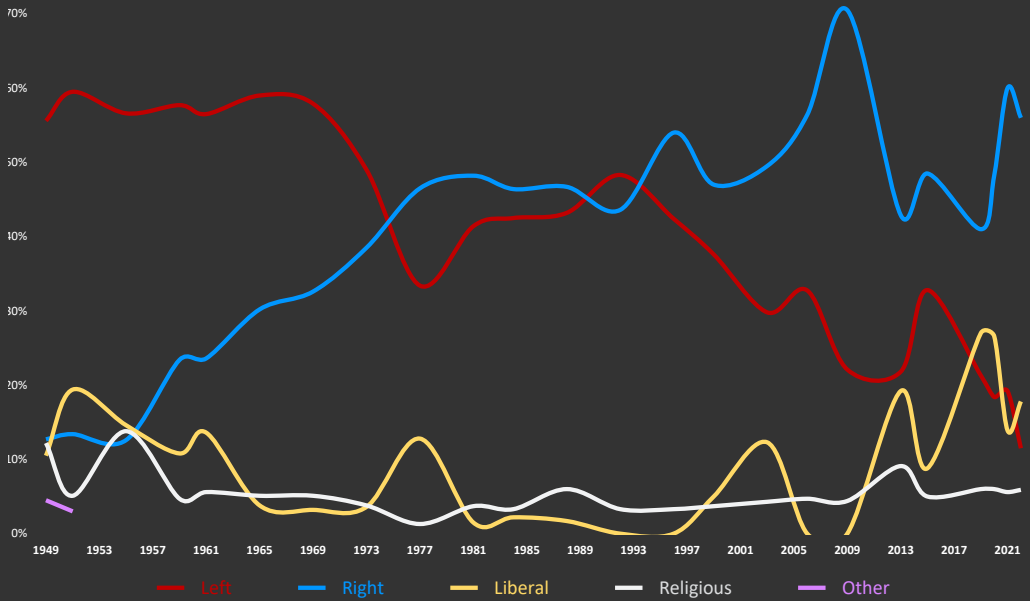
More typical of the Mizrahi political trajectory is David Levy, who, as a young migrant picking cotton for an Ashkenazi-owned kibbutz, organised a strike over drinking water before going on to become a union activist. He helped weaken the power of Mapai in the trade union movement before going on to rally the Mizrahi working class behind Menachem Begin and the right-wing Likud Party, ending three decades of left-wing rule in 1977. Polls showed enormous support for the Panthers, but people were not prepared to vote for them. The person who identified this was David Levy, who was until then almost unknown,' explained Sami Shalom-Chetrit, a scholar of Mizrahi social movements, to *Davar Magazine* in 2021. 'There is no David Levy without the Panthers, there is no Likud as a popular movement without the Panthers.'

Levy's solution to Mizrahi housing shortages? Government incentives for a new Nakba, a new wave of colonisation: settlements in the West Bank.

The absorption of most Mizrahi Jews into the right wing of the Zionist project did nothing to improve working-class living standards. Instead, Likud and its successors deregulated the economy and dismantled the welfare state. All that Mizrahi Jews have got from Likud is a rebranding of hummus as Israeli. The Israeli Labour Party is completely unable to challenge this—it won only 3.7% of the vote in 2022.

Conclusion: Ideology matters

Palestinians and their supporters may question the value of such a detailed account of Zionist politics. It is worth remembering the heroic role played by some left Zionists, such as Mordechai Anielewicz, in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, but



THIS GRAPH SHOWS THE UNUSUAL TRAJECTORY OF ISRAELI POLITICS. THE STATE WAS DOMINATED BY SUPPOSEDLY LEFT-WING PARTIES AT ITS FOUNDING, AS A RADICAL VENEER WAS NEEDED TO ASSIMILATE LEFT-WING JEWS INTO A COLONIAL PROJECT. FROM 1977, THE RIGHT TAKES POWER, IN PART DUE TO MIZRAHI JEWS TAKING REVENGE ON LABOUR. THE LEFT, ALWAYS ILLUSORY, HAS NOW BEEN LIQUIDATED.

JEWISH VIRTUAL LIBRARY

by and large Zionism is a history of the oppressed turning on the oppressed.

Zionism is the story of the disdain of Western European Jews for Eastern European 'Yids', discrimination by European Jews in Israel against Arab Jews (and worse, Ethiopian Jews), and apartheid and genocide against Palestinians. It is the opposite of the radical Jewish tradition which, from Russia to the USA, was at the forefront of the fight against all manner of oppression and exploitation.

However, the erasure of this radical tradition was not easy and is incomplete. More, this account explains how a left-wing mask was essential to the establishment of Israel, to integrate

immigrants and provide protective colouring internationally. The rise of far-right politics in Israel cannot serve the same purpose—rather the opposite. It is likely to lead to accelerating disintegration in Israeli society and to the alienation of international opinion. It is beyond the scope of this essay to examine the contradictory role of religion in Israel—a secular state guaranteed by God! Suffice to say it is not a stabilising force.

Ideology matters because the ruling class cannot do anything by itself. Capital uses other classes—including the working class—as instruments; political labels are how masses are manipulated. The creation of Israel as a militarised garrison state in the Middle East is a huge danger

to the world. Understanding the evolution of ideology inside that state is essential to be able to see possibilities for ending the genocide and defusing the death trap. The absorption of Arab Jews into the right wing of Zionist politics is a warning to those liberals who naively look to Israeli civil society to end apartheid—only the Arab working class of the region and the Palestinians can do that. It is also a reminder that Zionism is unstable. As it lurches to the right it accumulates contradictions, which we can hope will open new possibilities for Palestinian liberation and, internationally, for a revival of the radical Jewish tradition.

Summary

Q. Why was support for left-wing parties so high in Israel in 1949?

A. Israeli electoral politics were unusually left-wing because although Zionism was a colonial project made possible by British and US power, the founding population was disproportionately drawn from refugees from Eastern Europe who brought left-wing politics with them. Zionist politicians used socialist rhetoric to recruit these radical immigrants to their colonial project.

Q. If the 'left' so thoroughly dominated the state and all its institutions, how was it so comprehensively supplanted by the right, without any constitutional rupture?

The apparently left-wing politics of the early state concealed an ethno-nationalist, colonial kernel. The 'socialist' veneer, so necessary to integrate left-wing immigrants and win international support, has been exposed by seven decades of colonial war—and the importation and subordination of Arab Jews by European Jews. Unlike in most countries, the Palestinian people, not the Israeli working class, have always been the main enemy of the 'deep state', whether controlled by the left or the right. The socialist rhetoric used to enlist European Jews to colonisation was exposed as a fraud by the subordination of Arab Jews, who revenged themselves by electing right-wing Zionists—the oppressed turning on the oppressed.

Q. What are the implications for Palestinian liberation?

A. The triumph of open ethno-nationalism and religious fascism has unleashed hell on the civilians of Gaza, but it has also damaged Israel's standing internationally and is bringing tensions between secular, national religious and Orthodox Israelis to a crisis point. The shift to the right in Israeli ideology makes the state more volatile and more unstable. The Zionist project is running out of road—this is a moment of supreme danger.

Q. Why is a crisis in Zionism so dangerous?

A. Severe crisis in Israel is immensely dangerous for three reasons: its military capability; its importance to US hegemony internationally; the continued danger of antisemitism to the working class internationally.

Q. Why is antisemitism a danger to the working class?

A. Racism and ethno-nationalism are the most potent threats to working class solidarity. Like their extreme, fascism, they claim we have more in common with a billionaire of our 'race' than, say, the Filipina or Indian we work alongside. In times of crisis it can become frenzied. In inter-war Germany, fascists explained defeat in World War I as the work of a fifth column, hidden inside all layers of German society, that aimed to undermine the master race. That fifth column, they claimed, was the Jews, who had inveigled themselves into every country and every class with the aim of undermining the purity (and therefore strength) of the master race by encouraging inter-breeding with other, lesser, races—while jealously maintaining their own racial purity. While any ethnic minorities can be used as scapegoats—the fate of the Chinese in Indonesia is a grim example—the continued international dominance of a European elite means antisemitism is likely to be central to resurgent fascism in core capitalist economies.

MARTIN CRICK

Robert Tressell of Mugsborough: 'The Man Who Made A Million Socialists'¹

Robert Tressell, author of *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, had but a modest ambition: to tell an 'interesting story' and to offer a 'faithful picture of working-class life'. Yet his novel went on to be published in three different versions; it has been reprinted over 80 times by multiple UK publishers; it has been published too in the USA, Canada, Australia, Russia, Germany, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria and Japan but not, to the best of my knowledge, in New Zealand. It has sold over one million copies world wide, and it has also been adapted for stage, television and radio. It became a classic of twentieth century English literature; George Orwell described it as 'a book everyone should read'. He praised its 'ability to convey without sensationalism and almost without plot...the actual detail of manual work and the tiny things almost unimaginable to any comfortably situated person which make life a misery when one's income drops below a certain level.'² Its influence on him is clear, particularly in *Down and Out in Paris and London*. Alan Sillitoe, one of the so-called 'angry

young men' of the 1950s, author of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, and *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*, thought it 'The first great English novel about the class war.' It is, he wrote, 'spiced, witty, humorous, instructive and full of excitement, harmony and pathos.' It has been passed from hand-to-hand on building sites and in factories, it has been sold at countless political party and trade union meetings. Numerous labour politicians and trade unionists have testified to its importance, Tristram Hunt, ex-Labour MP and now Director of the Victoria and Albert Museum, describing it as a 'sacred text', and it has even been credited, somewhat fancifully, as winning the 1945 general election for Labour. Yet there is extensive anecdotal evidence of it being read in barrack rooms and mess halls by servicemen waiting to be demobbed and coming home to vote. Who then was Robert Tressell, and why should all socialists, of whatever persuasion, read this book?

Tressell died on 3 February 1911, in Liverpool Royal Infirmary, and was buried a week later in a pauper's grave, along with 12 others. The book, which he had worked on for the final five years of his life, had been rejected by three publishers and, disillusioned, he had intended to destroy the hand-written manuscript, which ran to some 1700 pages. However, his daughter Kathleen preserved it, and showed it to poet and journalist Jessie Pope. What little was known of Tressell at that time came from Pope's description of him, 'a socialistic working man', 'a house painter and sign writer who recorded his criticism of the present scheme of things until, weary of the struggle, he slipped out

1 Ronan Burtenshaw, 'The Man Who Made a Million Socialists', *Tribune* (online), 24 December 2020

2 Manchester Evening News, April 1946, republished in Orwell, George, *Smothered Under Journalism*, London, Secker and Warburg, 1998, pp.256-7.

of it.' Pope showed the manuscript to the publisher Grant Richards, who agreed to publish it, but in a heavily abridged version, Pope excising two-fifths of the text, including much of the explicitly socialist material. This version of the book achieved some popularity in the 1920s and 30s, but it was the research of Hastings historian Fred Ball³ which uncovered much more information about Tressell and his manuscript, and as a result

he first used, and Mary Noonan, his 'kept woman'. Croker was an inspector with the Royal Irish Constabulary and later a magistrate, a wealthy man. He was 80 at the time of Robert's birth and died not long after. The family, Mary, Robert and his three siblings, moved to England, where his mother remarried. He received a good education, learning to speak several languages and becoming an avid reader. That apart he received



ROBERT TRESSSELL
c1908
HASTINGS MUSEUM

of his work a full and unabridged version was finally published in 1955.

Ball was able to establish that Tressell was a pen name, and that he was not, in fact, originally from England but born in Dublin in 1870. Nor was he of proletarian origin. He was the illegitimate son of Samuel Croker, whose name

little of the inheritance that passed to his mother. It seems that the stepfather 'never took kindly to the children', and Robert left home at a young age, 16 or so, and moved to England. His daughter Kathleen later suggested that, as he grew up during the Irish land wars, he left home because 'he could not live on the income

3 Fred Ball, *One of the Damned: The Life and Times of Robert Tressell, author of The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1979

'HIS MARXIST POLITICS CAN BE SEEN IN AN ANECDOTE RECORDED BY ONE OF HIS WORKMATES. "HOW MUCH DO YOU EARN?" TRESSSELL WAS ASKED. "WELL", REPLIED TRESSSELL, "YOU ASKED ME WHAT I EARNED, NOT WHAT I GOT PAID".'

from absentee landlords', a reference to his mother's legacy from Samuel Croker. He never saw his mother again but he did change his name to that of her maiden name, Noonan. One of his sisters lived in Liverpool, and Robert moved there too. On 10 June 1890 he appeared in court charged with housebreaking and larceny, having broken into the house of his sister's employer, a shipping agent. He was sentenced to six months in prison, and shortly after his release he emigrated to South Africa, landing first in Cape Town, where he married, and had a daughter, Kathleen.

Moving to Johannesburg in 1896 Tressell worked for Herbert Evans and Company, the largest decorating business in town. The foreman there remembered him as 'a very good signwriter, one of the best I have ever known, and he had the makings of a brilliant artist.'⁴ Tressell first became involved in politics whilst in South Africa, not in the socialist movement but in the Irish republican cause. He came to know a number of prominent Irish republicans, supported the formation of an Irish brigade in the Boer ranks, and served on the committee of the Transvaal '98 Centenary Association. He became familiar with the writings of Michael Davitt, founder of the Land League, and the sections in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* referring to ownership of the land by the rich and the plight of tenants are clearly influenced by him. Another influence was James Connolly, and the 1907 Belfast Dock strike is also referenced in the book. Tressell then became involved with the South African trade union movement, and he was elected to the committee of the newly formed International Independent Labour Party. But he

contracted tuberculosis, and decided to return to England. He was divorced by this time, but he had custody of his daughter. One of his sisters, Mary-Jane, lived in Hastings, where the climate was reputedly good for his condition, and he decided to settle there.

Hastings was a town in decline when Tressell arrived, its heyday as a Victorian seaside resort already over. It lacked an industrial base and most of its workers relied on the corporation. The early twentieth century was a period of recession, with stagnant or falling wages, and much of the work was casual. He found his first job, as a painter, with Bruce and Co, a building firm which provided the inspiration for Rushton and Co in the book. According to Ball much of what Tressell writes is autobiographical. Mugsborough is clearly based on Hastings, a place he came to loathe. The company was indeed owned by a tyrant who once sacked a worker for speaking to him in the street. There was an obsequious and bullying foreman, variously called Misery, Nimrod or Hunter, who was eager to short-change customers and reject workers who could be replaced more cheaply in order to get his own share of Rushton and Co's profits. For this 'Misery slaved and drove and schemed and cheated...It was for this that the workers' wages were cut down to the lowest possible point, and their offspring went ill-clad, ill shod and ill fed, and were driven forth to labour while they were yet children, because their fathers were unable to earn enough to support their homes.' The apprentice, Bert, was a real boy named Bill Gower, important because his testimony in later years gives us a picture of Tressell's working life.

Bill Gower tells us that Tressell was in fact a skilled sign maker and a

⁴ Ball, p.16.

decorator of fine rooms, the Cave from the book probably being an amalgam of a number of jobs he worked on in the wealthier parts of Hastings. According to Fred Ball 'His reputation as an artist soon got around and his varied skills placed him virtually in a class of his own among the local house-decorating fraternity'.⁵ Consequently he was on the top rate for Hastings, sevenpence halfpenny per hour. His attachment to his craft can be seen in his chosen pen name, a reference to a painter's trestle table. It was not simply a means of earning a living but a vocation. An article in *The Painters Journal* in the 1920s said that

*He loved his art for art's sake. He shared with William Morris and Walter Crane a desire to give the world the best that was in him, so that the beauty of his work should be an inspiration to all in striving for that which is most beautiful...Nothing distressed him more than scamping on his work. He, like the rest of us, was not permitted to do his work. Everything was sacrificed to the god of profit.*⁶

Morris was obviously a major influence on Tressell, who shared his views on the alienation of labour under capitalism, and the manifesto of the Socialist League found many echoes in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*. Gower remembered him reciting from Morris's works, as well as those of Dickens, Shelley and Byron, and lending their books to his fellow workers.

By 1906 Tressell had become a committed socialist, angered by the injustices of capitalist society. One example, recorded in the book, was the 1905 case of a man who had murdered his children rather than see them starve. Frank Owen, Tressell's leading protagonist, briefly considered this fate for his own family. Fear of the workhouse haunted both Tressell and Owen. In 1906 he, along with leading figures from the local Trades Council, formed the Hastings branch of the Marxist Social Democratic Federation. Putting his artistic talents to good use he designed the branch banner. His Marxist politics can be seen in an anecdote recorded by one of his workmates. 'How much do you earn?' Tressell was asked. 'Well', replied Tressell, 'you asked me what I earned, not what I got paid.' His use of the word 'philanthropists' is fiercely ironic. It is not the rich who create the wealth but the workers who sustain the idle elite by their labour.

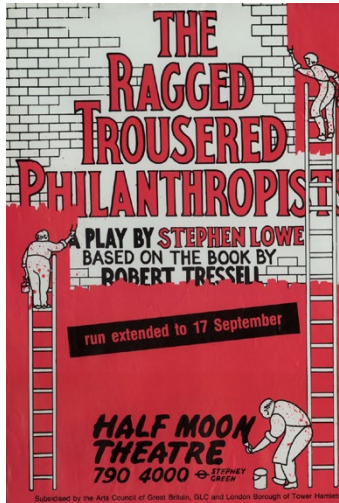
The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists is a long book, and in one sense one in which not a lot happens. Day by day over the course of a year we are introduced to the lives of working men, labouring long hours for a pittance. Well-read in the Classics, this is written along the lines of Plato's *Dialogues*, and built around Tressell's arguments with his fellow workers, as he explores the limits of their class consciousness. What makes it so compelling is the ferociousness of the satire and, says one reviewer, 'the authenticity of Tressell's voice, the sparky dialogue and the passion of its portrayal of a society ensnared in inequality'.⁷ Moreover, as Fred Ball wrote, 'even more important for me the book was about the

5 Ball, p. 33.

6 *The Painter's Journal*, 1922, in Ball, p. 63

7 Alan Taylor, 'How Robert Tressell's Novel *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* Became a Sacred Text for Aspiring Socialists', *New Statesman* (online), 14 October 2020

POSTER FOR
THE RAGGED
TROUSERED
PHILANTHROPISTS
STAGE PLAY
ADAPTATION BY
STEPHEN LOWE AT
THE HALF MOON
THEATRE IN 1983
HALF MOON THEATRE



lives of the working classes, the first book about them I had ever seen, and Hastings working class at that...and Tressell's people spoke like mine.⁸ In this sense Tressell ranks alongside Sean O'Casey, Jack London and Maxim Gorky as great writers from working-class backgrounds who gave voice to their class at the turn of the twentieth century. Tressell captures the flavour of working life, the characters, Crass, Misery, Sweater etc, are instantly recognisable. Owen, the character closest to the author, is an avowed socialist, and also an atheist. How can 'an infinitely loving God tolerate such suffering?', he says. Owen also recognises the influence of the bourgeois press, the *Daily Chloroform* or the *Daily Obscure*, over his workmates e.g. Sawkins, the Sneak, who says 'We're over-run with 'em! Nearly all the waiters and the cooks where we was working last month is foreigners.'

This aspect of the novel can make for uncomfortable reading. Tressell was clearly upset by the apathy of his

God-fearing, forelock-tugging colleagues, and their ability to be their own worst enemy:

As Owen thought of his child's future, there sprang up within him a feeling of hatred and fury against his fellow workmen. They were the enemy. The ragged trousered philanthropists, who not only quietly submitted like so many cattle to their slavery for the benefit of others but defended it and opposed and ridiculed any suggestion of reform. They were the real oppressors.

Dave Harker, in perhaps the best analysis of the book⁹, places it within the context of the changing political debates of the twentieth century, and he demonstrates that this was a view of the working class very much influenced by the Social Democratic Federation, of which Tressell was a member, and one heavily criticised by Engels and others.

However, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* is not simply a novel, it does not merely tell a story. It may, in fact, be 'the best example of socialist educational literature in the English language'. The character of Owen, undoubtedly based on Tressell himself, repeatedly attempts to explain Marxist economics to his fellow workers. The most famous example can be seen in the chapter *The Money Trick*, where he uses slices of bread to represent raw materials, and knives to represent machinery, to set up the problem with capitalism as a system and explain the theory of surplus value. In another chapter, *The Oblong*, he describes the

8 Ball, p.ix

9 Dave Harker, *Tressell: The Real Story of The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, Zed Books, 2003.

social structure under capitalism, whilst in *The Oration* he outlines an alternative, via the voice of socialist orator Barrington.

Owen is a disappointed, disillusioned and dying man, like Tressell himself. He began writing the book in 1906, exhausted after a day's work and recording his experiences at night. His final years were haunted by fear of the workhouse, and worry about his daughter's future. He moved to Liverpool, planning to emigrate to Canada in the hope of improving his health and his circumstances but died there, a pauper¹⁰, his book having been rejected by publishers, unaware that it would become almost obligatory reading for anyone involved in the trade union or labour movements, the first important working-class novel in English literature.

Ricky Tomlinson¹¹, who in 1972 was imprisoned for 'conspiracy to intimidate' after joining the flying pickets in the building workers' strike, has this to say:

This book was given to me when I was in solitary confinement by the prison governor. Its something that changed my whole way of thinking. It's the most important book I've ever read in my

life. Not only did it change my life politically, it also stirred up again in me the beauty of reading.

The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists is of the utmost relevance today. We can easily recognise the 'slob-it-on' work ethic of less resources, fewer people to do jobs, poor wages, part-time work and the constant threat and reality of unemployment. Yet it is a novel about HOPE, about socialist values and their continued importance today, and it is a passionate denunciation of the capitalist system worldwide. It is still, as it always has been, a weapon to be used in the struggle.

I will leave the final words to Tony Benn, who described it as his favourite novel:

Robert Tressell, through the voice of Frank Owen, is addressing us with arguments that are just as relevant now as they were when he first used them. If we want to make progress we have to do it ourselves and believe it can be done. That is why this book should be read and studied by this generation.

10 Tressell's grave was only rediscovered in 1970. In 1977 local socialists and trade unionists erected a memorial stone, listing also the names of the 12 others buried there, and inscribed with verses from William Morris's poem *The Day is Coming*. On 3 February 2019, the anniversary of his death, 600 local socialists and trade unionists marched to the grave, led by a brass band. He is also commemorated by a plaque on his birthplace in Dublin, where an annual Robert Tressell festival is held. He is remembered too in street names in Hastings, Lincoln and Liverpool, and in the Tressell political ward in Hastings.

11 Tomlinson, a Liverpoolian, was originally a member of the Fascist National Front. His experiences as a building worker, and his involvement in the trade union movement, moved him to the left. He was convicted of 'conspiracy to intimidate' along with Des Warren, and they became known as 'The Shrewsbury Two'. A long campaign to clear their names ended with the conviction being overturned in March 2021. After his release from prison he turned to acting and became a well-known figure on stage and screen, perhaps best known for his role as Jim Royle in BBC TV's *The Royle Family*. He became a member of Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party and then a supporter of Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party.

HAYDEN TAYLOR

Why I Am a Socialist.

'The most tragic form of loss isn't the loss of security; it's the loss of the capacity to imagine that things could be different.'

—Ernst Bloch

'You wouldn't abandon ship in a storm just because you couldn't control the winds.'

—Thomas More

Each edition of the *Commonweal*, the editor asks one of our members for a short contribution on the question of 'Why I am a Socialist.' For those unfamiliar with the historical tradition from which this newsletter draws, this question was responded to by William Morris in the 16 June 1894 issue of *Justice*. I'm glad we've adopted this practice as I believe it has two functions for the publication. First, it allows our members to share with each other their own stories and trajectories politically, and it also provides some fertiliser for debate and discussion about our relationship to socialism as a political tradition we all inherit. With that in mind, I'd love to see our editor's inbox flooded with offers for the next edition in 2025.

Before giving my own answer to the question I want to lay down a very simple concept of socialism that comes from none other than William Morris himself. When writing to this question, Morris described Socialism as a condition of society. It is this socialism that I inherit, and like Morris, one I hope to die with.

'where there are neither rich nor poor, neither master nor servant, neither idle nor overworked individuals, neither brain-sick intellectuals nor heart-sick labourers; in a word a society where all people live in equality and manage their affairs efficiently, with the full awareness that harm to one means harm to all—the realisation of the true meaning of the word COMMONWEALTH.'

Unfortunately, since Morris's writing on this question, the potential to realise such a utopia, and the socialist political sphere itself, have experienced a dramatic regression. Strangely though, technologically speaking, bourgeois society has made the practical task of organising production towards the political ends of socialism more realisable. Yet this political regression has made us (the left) moribund. It's not just that the technology is in the wrong hands. The problem is deeper than that because even if we got our hands on the technologies we wouldn't know what to do with it. Our problem lies in our lack of imagination and the outsourcing of our right to utopian dreaming to the new techno barons of industry. The right to utopian dreaming is a right that socialists must reclaim if we are to even begin to recover a politics fit for our times.

Why, then, am I a socialist? When I first sat down to write my musings on this question, I couldn't help but engage in a biographical diatribe that amounted to an exercise of explaining myself to myself. In a sense I was justifying my 'radical' proletarian politics in relation to my middle-class ignominy; but who I am, and where I come from, is unimportant when answering this question. For me,

what's more important in trying to answer this question of 'why' I'm a Socialist is the consideration of where I think we find ourselves historically, where I think we should be aiming for as a society, and what it is about the tradition that I've chosen to inherit.

Despite the lofty aims of classical liberals in the 19th century, those great midwives of modernity, today it seems that we've found their Prometheus standing on the brink, alone, not with his fire but a smouldering pile of ash. We are saturated by spectacular images of climate change, endless wars, and domestic social decline, images that induce an inescapable feeling that we are living in a sort of end times. This saturation of the spectacle inevitably leads one to have a justifiable scepticism towards the myths that our society has constructed for itself—especially when that society, in its emergence from one of the most regrettable centuries in human history, started the new century the same way it ended the last: in tragedy.

Despite such growing scepticism in society, with times as disjointed as these, rather than organising to change it we feel powerless in the face of the spectacle and try to turn away from it. But we can't seem to escape the spectacle's gaze. This powerlessness leaves us with a very reasonable and individualistically rational temptation to retreat into what Christopher Lasch, in his book *Minimal Self*, calls strategies of psychic survival in troubled times. These strategies should be familiar to all.

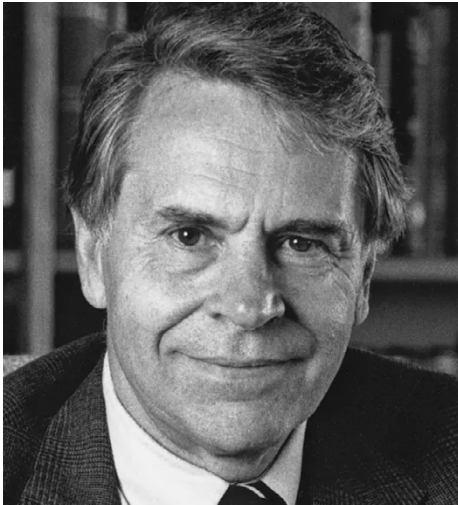
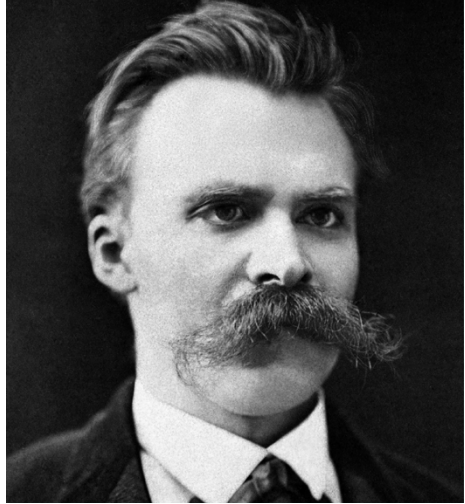
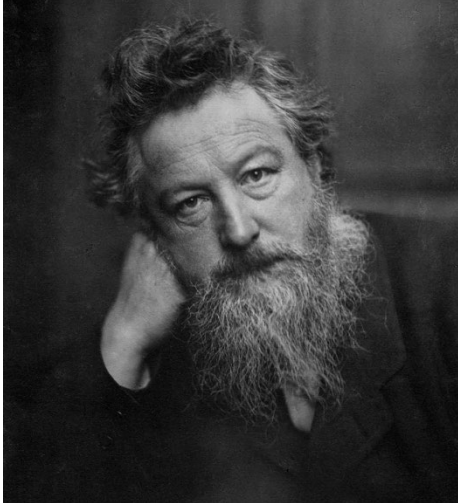
The most common survival strategy is what may be termed 'daily routinising'. This involves taking each day as it comes, with the primary aim of ending one day while setting up the conditions for surviving the next. A less prevalent but still notable strategy is narcissistic spiritual voyeurism, which involves

embracing a monadic existence that oscillates between religious practices (often Eastern traditions, especially in the Anglo-American context) and self-help courses or literature: a romantic escapism that tries to live 'outside' or 'against' society, living on one's own terms, in harmony with Mother Nature. Lastly, the oldest survival strategy is in fact pre-modern—doomsday prepping. Driven by concerns over religious beliefs, potential economic or political collapse, or climate change. Ironically, these survival strategies are readily serviced by capitalism, and they transcend any specific political ideology. In fact, the proliferation of such strategies is symptomatic of increasing apoliticism. At its core the issue lies in the absence of a clear political project that offers a vision of a future better than the present. Without such a vision there is little to organise around collectively, leading to a lack of civil or social imagination and, consequently, a pervasive sense of hopelessness. In the absence of something greater than the self, the only option left for sustaining personal subjectivity is a retreat into the private self.

The retreat into individualistic survival strategies calls to mind a remark made by Slavoj Žižek in his book *Living in the End Times*. Žižek argues that 'it is better to take the risk and engage in fidelity to a Truth-Event [i.e., revolution], even if it ends in catastrophe, than to vegetate in the eventless utilitarian-hedonist survival of what Nietzsche called the "last men".'

However, in my own naïveté, and perhaps as a means of my own psychic survival, I embrace Nietzsche's notion of *amor fati*—I have chosen my fate, and that fate is socialism. I am a socialist because I reject the idea that history is finished with us; far from it. The history of the modern world is, at its core, the history of the

'I HAVE CHOSEN MY FATE, AND THAT FATE IS SOCIALISM. I AM A SOCIALIST BECAUSE I REJECT THE IDEA THAT HISTORY IS FINISHED WITH US; FAR FROM IT.'



proletariat—the working class that built the dams, the roads, and the machines that have shaped our societies. The task for the future, laid out by those who came before us, is clear: global emancipation and the universalisation of freedom. This is the legacy inherited by Marx and the socialists who preceded him, drawing from the highest ideals of the Enlightenment. I am under no illusion that this will happen

in our lifetime. The honour of our age as socialists, at present, is to graciously be the manure, the fertiliser for new seeds to grow. Which isn't a call to do nothing. It is a call to act, but not action, *per se*.

Socialism, for me, is not merely a political stance but a commitment to the belief that history is an ongoing process, shaped by the struggles and contributions of the working class. The proletariat, has

always been at the centre of this historical narrative. Their fight for dignity, rights, and recognition is inseparable from the broader arc of human progress.

To accept socialism is to recognise that our collective liberation is still an unfinished project, one that stretches back through the revolutions, uprisings, and demands for justice that have defined modernity. This task—global emancipation and the universalisation of freedom—is the responsibility we inherit from those who came before us. It is the continuation of the Enlightenment's radical promise: that all human beings are entitled to freedom, equality, and the full expression of their humanity.

Socialism, then, is not just an economic or political arrangement but a call to take up the unfinished work of history. It offers an alternative to the alienation and commodification that capitalism perpetuates, and it provides a framework for imagining a future where collective well-being is prioritised over profit. This vision of a liberated world is not a utopian dream but a real possibility—one that requires organisation, struggle, and a belief in the power of the people to shape their own destiny. To be a socialist is to reject the passive acceptance of a system that thrives on exploitation and, instead, to embrace the fight for a future that offers true freedom for all.

Despite these grand claims, being a socialist today requires an act of faith. For those less religiously inclined, it requires fidelity to a politics that does not yet exist. This doesn't mean a turn to irrationalism and immediacy—a turn many on the left today have embraced as they prepare to combat the tide of right-wing authoritarianism that is once again washing over Europe and the Anglo-American world. Alas, as an ancient desert sage once said, fear is a faith killer. Of course,

there is nothing about the state of things today that should give one optimism for a world beyond this one. We absolutely live in a time of monsters. But contending adequately with these monsters won't look like rolling street battles with right-wing thugs. The monsters of our age are not found among us. They are largely anonymous and intend to remain that way. These are the people who have everything but still want more. They look to the heavens and say to themselves, 'That should be mine, too.' They are the true wretched of the earth.

The defeat of this growing threat—what writer Richard Seymour calls *disaster nationalism*—can only come through the rediscovery of society and civic life politically. It will not come by turning to the already existing authoritarian state to protect us. There is a need to accept that things are what they are, and that they must be traversed through rather than around, or ignored completely. A sober reckoning, rather than hyperbolic sloganeering, is our immediate task.

I am a socialist because I have faith in humanity to overcome the obstacles and impositions that halt the world-historic tasks the Enlightenment set forth, and the proletariat took up. I am a socialist because I believe that we can come to understand the riddle of history. I am a socialist because to be otherwise is to accept that barbarism should be our fate.

ACROSS,
CLOCKWISE
FROM TOP LEFT:
WILLIAM
MORRIS,
FRIEDRICH
NIETZSCHE,
CHRISTOPHER
LASCH &
SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK

OUR HISTORY

MARTIN CRICK


THE GREAT STRIKE OF 1913

After the defeat of the 1890 Maritime Strike the subsequent election of the Liberal government saw them introduce a series of welfare reforms and labour legislation, including the establishment of an arbitration court. This Lib-Lab alliance led to a period of industrial peace. Prior to 1913 New Zealand attracted many overseas visitors, keen to see what was regarded by many as a 'social laboratory'. The British Liberal Charles Trevelyan arrived in 1898 and reported to W P Reeves, the architect of the industrial legislation introduced between 1891 and 1896 but then living in London, that the 'working classes are thoroughly contented with the vigorous land policy of Mackenzie and the labour laws which Seddon keeps bringing in'. The Fabians Sydney and Beatrice Webb, who accompanied Trevelyan, suggested that workers were confident of the advantages brought by the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act, and that New Zealand was a working democracy. French sociologist and politician Albert Metin, thought that New Zealand was a country which practised 'socialism without doctrine'. Other more radical visitors, such as British socialists Ben Tillet, Tom Mann and Keir Hardie, may have had reservations about the reforms and been critical of the moderation and conservative attitudes of the trade unions, but up until 1908 all commentators seemed to agree that New Zealand was a relatively

prosperous country, that the legislative reforms were working, and that it was 'a country without strikes.' Yet five years later the country was hit by a two-month strike, involving 14-16,000 trade unionists nationally, with Auckland and Wellington particularly hard hit. What had happened in those five years?

A 1905 amendment to the Industrial and Conciliation Act (I C & A) had made strikes and lockouts illegal where there was an award in place covering both employers and workers. An amendment in 1907 extended the penalties for striking illegally. However, unions which registered under the 1908 Trade Union Act were allowed to strike, leaving unions to choose between arbitration and direct action. There had been growing disillusion with the I C & A, a feeling that it favoured the employers and that the Liberal Party had been captured by the enemies of trade unionism. The Auckland Tram Workers went on strike in 1906 and the Wellington bakers in 1907, but the real turning point was the 1908 Blackball Strike, where miners argued for a 30 minute as opposed to 15-minute lunch break. A group led by Paddy Webb, Bob Semple and Pat Hickey decided to take the 30 minutes and were sacked for doing so. The union went on strike in defiance of the Act, but lost their case before the Arbitration court, although miners and their supporters noted that the Court adjourned for a 90-minute lunch break. However, the court lost face when bailiffs were only able to raise a small amount of money from a sale of miners' goods. Employers eventually conceded the half hour and the strikers, much encouraged, formed the Federation of Miners, which became the New Zealand Federation of Labour in 1909, the 'Red Feds'.

1 Quoted in Melanie Nolan, '1913 in Retrospect: a laboratory or a battleground of democracy?', in Nolan, M. (ed), *Revolution: The 1913 Great Strike in New Zealand*, Canterbury University Press, 2005, p. 25



FRED EVANS
THE MINER
BRUTALLY BEATEN
BY STRIKE
BREAKERS IN
WAIHI ON 12
NOVEMBER 1912.
HE DIED THE
FOLLOWING DAY.

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By 1911 35 unions had withdrawn from the arbitration system, and by 1912 the NZFL had 43 affiliates and almost 15,000 members. The number of industrial disputes rose from one in 1909 to 24 in 1912 and 73 in 1913. This wave of industrial militancy coincided with an upsurge in socialist ideas and militancy in the United States, Australia and Europe. The trans-national influences on the New Zealand militants must not be under-estimated. Socialist ideas, books, pamphlets and newspapers, and even leaders were being transported around the world. Itinerant seamen were particularly prominent in this spread of ideas, as were miners who often moved from pit to pit and even overseas in search of work, whilst emigration from Great Britain brought many radicals to New Zealand shores, including the Clarion settlers, who were instrumental in the

formation of the New Zealand Socialist Party in 1902. Others, from the USA and Australia, the likes of J B King, W T Mills, and Harry Scott Bennett, were influenced by syndicalist ideas, which became prominent in the NZFL. Hickey, Semple and Webb, the leaders of the Blackball strike, were influenced by the Industrial Workers of the World, the 'Wobblies', proponents of one big union and the general strike to overthrow the capitalist system. However, Eric Olszen cautions us against seeing 1913 as solely the result of an imported ideology. He argues that rank and file grievances, the battle for control of the workplaces, was a key factor in the outbreak of militancy, which was often beyond the control of the union leaders. Other factors were the impact of new disciplines of work, and the widening gulf between worker expectations and their real wages.



THE BATTLE OF FEATHERSTON STREET

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The stage was set by the Waihi strike of 1912. In August 1912 the gold miners of Waihi deregistered from the IC&A Act and registered under the Trade Union Act. A group of engine drivers seceded from the union and registered under the IC&A Act, and were recognised by the employers. A strike was called, supported by the NZFL, but it was violently suppressed by police, scabs, and 'specials', largely from rural areas. Strike leaders were assaulted, and miner Fred Evans was beaten to death by strike breakers as he defended the union hall. The NZFL, alarmed by the defeat, sought to unify the labour movement, with the resulting formation of the United Federation of Labour (UFL) and the Social Democratic Party, in July 1913. In September of that year management at the Huntly mine dismissed 16 workers, including three union officials, leading to a miners' strike

on the West Coast. A seemingly insignificant dispute was developing in Wellington, where 40 shipwrights had their travelling allowance revoked and went on strike. In May 1913 they cancelled their registration under the IC&A Act and affiliated with the Wellington Waterside Workers' Union. Management refused to recognise that the watersiders were party to the dispute and so on 18 October the shipwrights went on strike. When the union held a stop work meeting on 20 October management declared this to be a breach of the industrial agreement signed the year before, locked the workers out, and recruited alternative labour.

There is almost unanimous agreement amongst historians that the Conservative Reform Party government under Prime Minister William Massey and the employers

deliberately chose Waihi and then 1913 to move against the UFL and the Red Feds, the class enemy, in order to prevent them becoming even more powerful. The watersiders referred the dispute to the UFL, and the strike spread to seamen, building workers, drivers and other UFL affiliates, closing all the ports in New Zealand. It quickly became violent, as the government called upon the military to assist the outnumbered police force, and recruited 'special' constables, largely from rural areas, soon to be known and hated as 'Massey's Cossacks'. The most serious encounter was in Wellington, where the Royal New Zealand Artillerymen fired rifles and machine guns from barricades on Buckle Street, several people being wounded. One historian has argued that 'the years 1912 and 1913 witnessed the most violent scenes since the Anglo-Māori wars'². Others suggest that New Zealand came closer to a class war at that time than at any other time in its history, although it should be noted that it was not in the strict sense a general strike but a series of strikes. The UFL did call a general strike on 10 November 1913, which some unions answered, and in Auckland this was particularly effective, unionists staying out until the 23rd of that month. The harsh state clampdown, including the arrest of prominent UFL leaders, and activists like the Wobbly Tom Barker, eventually defeated the strike. Most of the ports re-opened on 18 December and the miners had returned to work by early January. One sad and disquieting aspect of the strike at Waihi, and the larger confrontation in 1913, was the willingness of sectors of the New Zealand population, particularly in rural areas, to be co-opted by the state as strike breakers and scab labour.

One school of thought sees the events of 1913 within the context of 'the forward march of labour', a tradition well established in British labour historiography. Thus, it was a temporary period of militancy, but one which shifted the

political spectrum to the left, in what was a chronological narrative of political radicalism, leading to the election of a Labour government in 1935. The militants of 1912 and 1913, and indeed of the wartime period, accepted parliamentary politics and a constitutional road to socialism, they became the Cabinet ministers of 1935, instituting the welfare state for the benefit of the working class of New Zealand. The election of 1935 was revenge for the defeats of 1912 and 1913, and it marked the triumph of parliamentary politics over a revolutionary road to socialism. This is to simplify what happened in 1913 and thereafter. It was indeed a power struggle between employers and the state on one side and the working-class movement on the other. It was also a struggle within the movement, between 'moderates' who remained wedded to arbitration and radicals who subscribed to revolutionary and particularly syndicalist ideas. The founding of the Social Democratic Party after the Unity Conference of 1913, and of the New Zealand Labour Party in 1916, were met by dissenting voices. The left wing of the New Zealand Socialist Party, and particularly its Wellington branch, would not compromise, nor would smaller groups such as the Petone Marxian Club and remnants of the IWV. These carried the revolutionary tradition into the Communist Party of New Zealand in 1921; indeed, the CPNZ argued that the key lesson of 1913 was the need for a new revolutionary party, and that they were the heirs of the Red Feds. The CPNZ and subsequent groups continued to provide an opportunity and a space for an alternative discourse to labourism. That space has become much diminished since the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s and the demise of the Alliance, but it is one which the New Zealand Federation of Socialist Societies can and must fill.

2 Keith Sinclair, *A History of New Zealand*, Middlesex, 1969, p.209, quoted in Nolan, p.25.

**'MASSEY'S
COSSACKS'
ON HANSON ST,
WELLINGTON**

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REVIEW

MARTIN CRICK

KEN LOACH

It has been widely reported that Ken Loach's latest film *The Old Oak* will also be his last. His has been an unrivalled career in film spanning almost 60 years: homelessness and poverty, the 'gig' economy, Irish republicanism, modern football, the damning and demeaning failures of the Welfare State – no other film maker can match Ken Loach for this range of subject matter, and for the quality of the film making. His 1969 film *Kes* was voted the seventh greatest film of the 20th century by the British Film Institute. Amongst an astonishing 117 awards are a *Palme D'Or* in 2006 for *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* and in the same year the award of a BAFTA Fellowship; the Cannes Jury Prize in 2012 for *The Angels Share*; a second *Palme D'Or* in 2016 for *I, Daniel Blake*, one of only nine film makers to win the award twice, and a film which also won the 2017 BAFTA for outstanding British film of the year.

What we will most remember him for are those films where he mixed comedy with socialist-realism. A life-long socialist, Ken Loach exposed society's failings, but always provided a lighter touch to lift our spirits, getting away from what left-wing writer David Widgery once termed 'miserabilism' as the fundamental cultural failing of left-wing politics. But above all his work has been rooted in an unashamed class politics, focusing on working-class

and community solidarity and the liberatory potential of collective action

Not once in his long career of film making has a reviewer or a film jury accused Loach of antisemitism, yet shamefully he was expelled from the Labour Party in the summer of 2021 as part of Keir Starmer's witch hunt against the left in general and supporters of Palestine in particular. He has been a long-time supporter of the Palestinian cause, and has advocated an academic and cultural boycott of Israel. Leading Labour figures have repeatedly claimed that he was expelled for antisemitism, but in fact he was kicked out for signing a petition protesting against members, many of whom were Jewish, being expelled on the grounds of antisemitism. A former Director of Public Prosecutions is replacing the right to protest with guilt by association! As former Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell said, 'to expel such a fine socialist who has done so much to further the cause of socialism is a disgrace.'

If *The Old Oak* is indeed his last film then what a way to bow out, greeted with near universal praise. *The Guardian* made it its film of the week, describing it as 'a ringing statement of faith in compassion for the oppressed.' *The London Evening Standard* proclaimed that 'we need someone with Loach's righteous fury to make films about the deplorable treatment of Britain's often invisible and maligned underclass.' Who else but Ken Loach would choose as the happy ending to this film Syrian refugees and a former mining community coming together to make a banner to parade behind at the Durham



Miners' Gala; a banner inscribed with the words *Strength, Solidarity, Resistance* in English and Arabic?

My own personal favourites? As a Yorkshireman *Kes* has to be up there, a biting indictment of the British educational system at the time and the limited career options available to working-class, unskilled workers. One of my favourite film scenes of all time sees Billy on the football field, swinging from the crossbar, as Mr. Sugden, the PE teacher, acts out his unfulfilled dreams of footballing glory. As a historian *Land and Freedom* and

The Wind Shakes the Barley are gripping and epic historic dramas, but above all Ken Loach's unflinching depictions of working-class life in Britain, from *Up the Junction* and *Cathy Come Home* in the 1960s through to *I Daniel Blake* (2016) and *Sorry We Missed You* (2019) must take pride of place). And the way in which he always contrives to leave us with a sense of hope, our spirits lifted, as they were when watching the Syrian refugees and ex-miners marching together under the banner of *The Old Oak*.

**KEN LOACH AT A
SCREENING OF
JIMMY'S HALL
IN 2014**

CREDIT: CHRIS PAYNE

AMELIA BYRNES

Blood and Dirt: Prison Labour and the Making of New Zealand

Jared Davidson

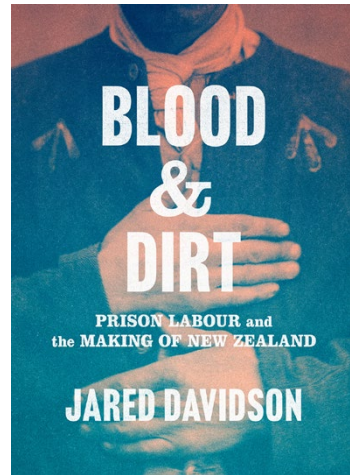
Bridget Williams Books, 2023
ISBN 978-1-991033-40-6

*‘Capital comes dripping
from head to foot, from
every pore, with blood and
dirt.’—Karl Marx*

Jared Davidson’s *Blood and Dirt: Prison Labour and the Making of New Zealand* tells the history of New Zealand and its Pacific empire through the lens of prison labour and its profound role in the literal construction of modern Aotearoa New Zealand.

While a student at Te Herenga Waka/Victoria University’s Māori Studies department, I did learn some history of the ways in which our physical spaces are entrenched in a colonial past. That said, the history of prison labour is not one I was familiar with prior to reading this book. Now, it is hard to imagine a day that I have not walked a street, passed a building, or looked out on a sea of pines, at least one of which was built by the hands of forced labour.

Fundamentally, this book explores the extensive ways in which our landscape, natural and unnatural, has been shaped by incarcerated workers in the name of improvement. Davidson cites a shift from corporal punishment to hard labour as a



means of resourcing the colonial project and its need for vast public works—roads, buildings, farms, forests. Capital venture too is intrinsically entwined. The whole concept of Improvement was one of enclosing, shaping and exploiting the natural world in ways that could maximise profit. We see too the enclosing, shaping and exploitation of bodies. Indeed, Marx’s phrase, which gave title to this book, feels harrowingly apt when reading the detailed descriptions of what hard labour truly means. Davidson illustrates very well a continuum of free and unfree labour; seamen subjected to dodgy employment laws and fixed term contracts, sometimes even being sentenced to hard labour for just long enough that a ship could be stocked or repaired; or men doing the same backbreaking work alongside one another, one day as a convict, the next a free labourer upon release.

I did find it interesting to think about the collective experience of incarceration, with a lack of individual cells, prisoners living together, working together, striking together. Of course, this class solidarity is muddled, with even working-class warders enacting systems

of control intrinsic to an institution concerned with progressing broader structures of power.

Blood and Dirt navigates intersections of class and indigenous struggle with real care. I think that conversations about class struggle and its relationship to the colonial project of Aotearoa | New Zealand are often avoided, for fear of feeling awkward, of undermining, or being dismissive of, a purely indigenous experience of colonisation. This is understandable given the continued disenfranchisement of Tangata Māori and the longstanding desire to forge or forget our history, as reflected in many people's experience of formal history education in this country and in ongoing 'political debate'. That said, I do think that genuine conversations had in good faith are vital to decolonisation and the liberation of the working class. I appreciated Davidson's genuine and tactful contribution to this conversation.

The labour of incarcerated women is acknowledged, painting quite a different picture from the broader story's relationship to land, public spaces and collective experience. Rather, we see confinement and solitude, reflective of women's labour more generally and the enforcement of domesticity on women 'led astray'. This is one theme that I would have loved to read about in greater detail. That said, I do think that focused content in any book is a strength, and I therefore could not expect this one book to address all aspects of a complex history in exhaustive detail.

Content aside, I really enjoyed Davidson's writing style. The book carries a cohesive narrative throughout, whilst being structured into parts that make sense as a reader. I was particularly drawn to the way that Davidson's thoughtful placement of archival material constructed the history in meaningful

and human terms. It reminded me of a quote from Tony Ballantyne's 2015 Hocken Lecture, *Archives, public memory and the work of history*:

...archived texts and objects are the product of human life. They are also full of life as they record—often in fleeting snatches—moments in the past, when things happened, actions were undertaken, words were spoken, written or heard that seemed significant enough to record... encountering these records of the past is powerful and often full of intense interest... you are full of hope that you find something compelling or important, but also know from experience that many files contain only the ordinary and the routine details of past lives. But even those most mundane sources can cumulatively enrich a historian's understanding of the past as our image of the past is really a patchwork composite made up of the accumulation of fragments, fragments that rarely fit neatly together to offer a comprehensive and coherent image of the past

This beautifully captures how archives connect us to life and history, and at the risk of sounding overly sentimental, I really felt this sense of connection throughout *Blood and Dirt*. Davidson utilises his archival selection to paint immersive vignettes that tell history in real terms and enrich the overarching narrative, never feeling disjointed.

I thoroughly enjoyed *Blood and Dirt*, both in matters of content and style.

The sheer physical scale of this history—in earth moved, roads built, trees planted, bodies broken—is telling enough of the importance of this book in understanding how colonisation and capital has shaped the spaces we inhabit. Davidson succeeds in illustrating intersections

of labour, capital, colonialism, empire, and the natural and unnatural world. I highly recommend this book as a vital addition to colonial and workers' histories and as a broader history of Aotearoa | New Zealand.

ANGUS CROWE

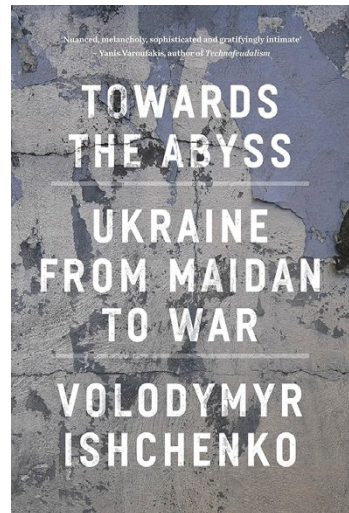
Towards the Abyss: Ukraine from Maidan to War

Volodymyr Ishchenko

Verso Books, 2024
ISBN 978-1-80429-554-0

The newly published book by Ukrainian Marxist sociologist Volodymyr Ishchenko is a collection of previously published essays split into two sections—‘2014’, written during the 2013/14 Euromaidan Revolution, and ‘2022’, written during the Russian invasion of Ukraine. It provides an insightful and highly readable socialist account of events in Ukraine and the wider post-Soviet space in the last decade or so and is well worth picking up.

The book’s preface—titled ‘A Wrong Ukrainian’—outlines some of the key themes of the book, while also giving the reader some background to Ishchenko’s life to help frame the discussion. Born in 1982, in the final years of the Soviet Union, Ishchenko’s family was of mixed ethnic background, including



Russians, Poles, and Belarussians, as well as being mixed Russian- and Ukrainian-speaking from both eastern and western parts of Ukraine. Over the fits and starts of the social revolution in Ukraine, which began in 1917, his family were able to improve their lot, rising from low-level worker in his great-grandparents generation to having parents working in STEM at the highest level in the USSR (his father worked on modelling the movements of Soviet spaceships).

Ishchenko himself grew up in Kyiv, eventually teaching sociology and playing an active role in the Ukrainian new left, which temporally came later



than what we think of as the new left in the West. However, as far as I can tell, it played a similar role in that they came both after and in reaction to the official communist left.

All this is to say that Ishchenko has a complicated identity, describing himself as a ‘Soviet Ukrainian’—a group that doesn’t fit neatly into modern Ukrainian society because they are both insufficiently nationalist, and articulate a vision of modernity at odds with their peers. As a result, they are outcasts from the body politic of Ukraine, so much so that Ishchenko, now living in Berlin, questions whether the country he left still exists.


A key insight of the book is to reframe the Ukrainian conflict from one along ethnic lines, that of the Ukrainian-speaking west vs the Russian-speaking east, to a class conflict between national-liberals and ‘political capitalists’. National-liberals tap into the aspirations of the predominantly western-Ukrainian middle-class via civil society groups and NGOs, and push a more pro-NATO, pro-EU agenda. This is in response to being locked out of the patronage networks of the ‘political capitalists’—the

section of the bourgeois who exploit their privileged access to the state and its resources in order to enrich themselves, often with the passive consent of their eastern-Ukrainian working-class base in mining and heavy industry.

Notably, political capitalism is also the dominant mode of capital accumulation practiced by the Russian ruling class. Viewed through this lens, the conflict between Russia and the West becomes less of a civilisational struggle and more about which mode of capitalism will prevail in the post-Soviet space. Currently, Ukraine is the battlefield on which that conflict takes place.

The book also provides insights into and questions dominant narratives of the post-Soviet condition generally, describing movements for democracy in many post-Soviet countries as ‘deficient revolutions’. There are also reflections on the presence of the far-right in Ukraine, the relative support for integration with Russia vis-a-vis NATO and the EU, and the general narrative of events during Euromaidan and the Russian invasion from the heart of the conflict.

**BARRICADE
AND POLICE IN
HRUSHEVSKY
STREET, KYIV
DURING THE
EUROMAIDAN**
ЛИМАННА ХИКАРН



This newsletter is published by the New Zealand Federation of Socialist Societies. The Federation is an organisational body that facilitates the formal affiliation of branches and groups that carry a common cause across New Zealand. First established in Canterbury, the Federation has grown and has affiliated organisations in Wellington, and Otago.

Founded on simple socialist principles, the Federation aims to be a political home for people with a variety of views who come together around a common vision of socialism. By socialism we mean, in the broadest sense, “the political goal of bringing the working class to power at all levels of society in order to establish a system where production is organised rationally to meet human need, rather than for the accumulation of private wealth.” (Federation Charter, 2021).

The content of this newsletter reflects diverse socialist perspectives, not necessarily the views of all members or an official position of the Federation as a whole, and we encourage open and robust discussion and debate on all topics of interest.

If you are interested in subscribing to *The Commonweal* for \$20 a year, or in joining the Federation of Socialist Societies as a member, please contact canterburysocialistsociety@gmail.com, or visit www.socialistsocieties.org.nz for more information.

Our immediate aim should be chiefly educational...with a view to dealing with the crisis if it should come in our day, or of handing on the tradition of our hope to others if we should die before it comes.

—William Morris, 1884