

BOOK REVIEWS

The View from Boston

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Two Views on Return to Cold War, by Robert Legvold. Polity. 187 pp. £14.99.

When Mikhail Gorbachev led the Soviet Union, it was possible to imagine a world in which that enormous country became a force for peace, democracy and order in the world and partnered with the United States and western Europe to make that happen. Gorbachev spoke of a 'common European home' and, it seems, actually meant it. When the Soviet Union broke up in 1991 and Gorbachev left the scene, it was still possible to think that Boris Yeltsin had a similar vision and that a future of cooperative relations between Russia and the West was possible.

These hopes have pretty much disappeared in recent years and relations between Russia and the United States, and between Russia and America's allies in Europe, have soured. The Russian occupation of Crimea and its not so subtle manoeuvres in eastern Ukraine came as a shock and the Russian role in Syria, propping up Assad's murderous regime, turned worsening relations into a genuine confrontation. Recent charges that the Russians meddled in the 2016 US election have added a further and rather bizarre twist. All this has led to sharp exchanges, ominous threats and a tough set of sanctions directed at the Putin regime. Not unreasonably, scholars and pundits have begun to ask if a new Cold War is emerging.

Robert Legvold is among the most qualified people to answer this question and he has sought, carefully and objectively, to do so in his new book. Legvold is professor emeritus at Columbia University and has a long and distinguished history analysing US–Soviet/Russian relations during and after the Cold War. From 1986 to 1992 he was director of Columbia's Harriman Institute for the Advanced Study of the Soviet Union and from 2009 to 2012 he served as director of the 'Euro-Atlantic Security

Initiative' sponsored by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Legvold knows the history of the Cold War and its costs, and he has no desire to see a repeat.

Legvold helpfully reviews developments in US–Russia relations since the end of the Cold War in a manner that makes it clear that there have been continuing tensions that have produced periods of warming and cooperation alternating with periods, or moments at least, of hostility and competition. Despite disagreements over NATO expansion and intervention in the former Yugoslavia, relations between the USA and Russia were mostly amicable during the mid to late 1990s. There was some Western criticism over Russia's actions in the second Chechen War that began in 1999, but it was muted and Russia and the USA grew much closer after 9/11. The American decision to invade Iraq in March 2003, more or less unilaterally, set relations back. So too did the outbreak of various 'colour revolutions', particularly Ukraine's 'Orange Revolution' in late 2004. Earlier that year NATO had added seven new members, including the Baltic republics with direct borders on Russia, and ten states joined the European Union on 1 May 2004, again including the Baltic states as well as Poland and Hungary. These more or less simultaneous expansions of both NATO and the European Union were interpreted by Russian leaders as threats to the country's role globally and, more pointedly, in the so-called 'near abroad'. Such was the background to Putin's denunciation of US foreign policy at the Munich Security Conference in 2007. In the next year Russian forces were deployed in Georgia.

After that, the Obama administration sought a 'reset' in US–Russia relations in 2009. The initiative was partially successful: it established a set of working groups under

the US–Russian Bilateral Presidential Commission; it secured Russian cooperation in creating a northern supply route to Afghanistan; it got the two sides to cooperate in dealing with Iran’s quest for nuclear weapons; and it led to the signing in 2010 of the New START treaty. After that, progress slowed and tensions grew again, partly over the Arab Spring and its effect in Syria and partly over Western criticisms of irregularities in Russian elections in 2012. Putin apparently took personal offence over the latter. Then came the Ukrainian protests in late 2013 that led to the collapse of the regime and the flight of its pro-Russian president, and the seizure of Crimea and the Russian decision to encourage unrest in eastern Ukraine in 2014. The most recent deterioration is thus part of a pattern, even if it seems deeper, more serious, more likely to last and perhaps the start of a new and more antagonistic pattern. It is useful to be reminded, however, that relations were much better just a few years ago. Indeed, Legvold devotes a couple of pages to the Euro-Atlantic Security Initiative, a programme that brought together top policy-makers in Russia, the United States and Europe, and which began in 2009 and continued through 2012. He was himself part of this effort and is keenly aware of how rapidly it unravelled.

There is much debate about what the recent turn means, and overall Legvold would count himself among those who find the new pattern similar to that of the Cold War. In arguing that position, however, he is cautious, adopting the sensible strategy of examining what he regards as key features of the Cold War and then considering how closely the current situation resembles that. He focuses on five elements that distinguished the classic Cold War. The first was that ‘each side regarded the confrontation as exclusively the fault of the other side—not merely because of its behaviour but, indeed, because of its very nature’; ‘Second... neither much believed in looking for common ground. Any agreement, their instincts told them, would inevitably be “your gain is my loss,” not mutually rewarding’; ‘Third... both sides operated with the assumption that the contest could end only with either a fundamental change in the other side or its

collapse’; ‘Fourth, in the rare instances where momentary agreement might be contemplated, this could only be one-off and tactical, not a step leading to further agreements.’ By contrast, the fifth characteristic of the relationship was that ‘while areas of temporary agreement remained highly compartmentalized, areas of conflict did not. From the start, trouble in one area metastasized to others.’

This is not a bad description of US and Soviet thinking and behaviour during the Cold War, particularly in its early stages. But does it fit the current situation? Though Legvold admits that ‘any suggestion that the new Russia–West Cold War duplicates the original would be nonsense’, he nevertheless finds enough similarities to argue that the new reality shares enough with the old to merit labelling it a ‘new Cold War’. Legvold knows enough and is careful enough to qualify this judgement: he acknowledges possible criticisms and alternative views and facts that might be read differently. Still, he believes that the grievances and antagonisms of the past decade or so have had a cumulative effect that has congealed into a fundamental sense of antagonism and a ‘Return to Cold War’.

At the level of rhetoric, it is difficult to disagree with this analysis, but is the reality beneath the rhetoric as stark and the interests dividing Russia and the United States as antithetical and as consequential as the phrase ‘Cold War’ implies? There are reasons to doubt that they are. During the original Cold War each side understood the other as constituting a fundamental threat to its existence. They embodied rival systems that stood in genuine opposition. Equally important, both sides were genuinely expansionist, even if neither was as threatening as the other sometimes imagined. Finally, it is not clear that in the current era either side is in the grip of an ideology that intensifies and deepens geopolitical rivalries. The USA wants to promote democracy and human rights, of course, but that commitment has been routinely compromised in practice even after the Cold War. Is Putin, or are other Russian leaders, moved by ideology? There have been attacks on the USA, and the West, as decadent and amoral and there have been occasional claims echoing traditional pan-Slav

or Slavophile traditions, but these have not cohered into a consistent outlook that could underpin a sustained rivalry. Russia does now offer a kind of model of authoritarian capitalism, but it is not unique in that and it is not an easy model to defend outside Russia itself.

Overall, then, Legvold has written a thoughtful book about a development well worth worrying about. Whether it amounts to a new Cold War is less clear.

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The view from Bologna

Gianfranco Pasquino

Of course, history does not repeat itself (except as farce, Marx would immediately add), but some of its features may reappear in modified form. Their understanding will be facilitated by comparing them with previous events, especially when those events were so important and long-lasting as to characterise almost fifty years of world history. This is the starting point of Robert Legvold's short and sharp book. His overall thesis, ably argued, is crystal clear: in the past five years or so, the US–Russia relationship has acquired all the necessary elements for a return to Cold War. 'If employed with care and due respect for the obvious differences, the framework that offers not only the most subtle insights into this confrontation but also a standard for judging how serious it is, is the earlier US–Soviet Cold War.'

Legvold identifies five features of the old Cold War:

- 1 The essence of the conflict was in the other side's essence;
- 2 The war was not only about conflicting interests, but about 'conflicting purposes';
- 3 'Both countries operated with the assumption that the contest could end only with either a fundamental change in the other side or its collapse';
- 4 Agreements could only be tactical and not leading to further agreements;
- 5 'while areas of temporary cooperation remained highly compartmentalized, areas of conflict did not'.

Legvold's preliminary conclusion is quite neat. The New Cold War is with us because 'all these qualities are present'. After having analysed, assessed and disproved all the arguments contrary to his thesis, the author anticipates what is his major policy preoccupation: that none of the most important problems facing the world, today and tomorrow—'illicit flows of counterfeited goods, trafficked humans, endangered species, laundered money, and illegal arms'—will be solved without the cooperation of China and Russia.

Chapter 2 contains the best short description and balanced interpretation of the Cold War that I have ever read. Two special features deserve to be highlighted because they are at the root of the contemporary Cold War. First, that war was the product of many misperceptions and misconceptions on both sides: 'each misread the threat posed by the other'. Second, it was a confrontation of 'ideologies', world-views, models of government, lifestyles that could not at all be reconciled by temporary and tactical agreements having a transactional, not a transformational, quality.

The old Cold War ended with the 'collapse' of one side, but it left a legacy: a 'thick residue of mistrust and unreconstructed thinking'. Because of the author's approach, largely and significantly focused on the mutual perceptions of the leadership of both countries, I believe it would have been appropriate to explore in more depth who holds mistrust and how 'unreconstructed thinking', and of which kind, on both sides affects their policies. There are only a few hints regarding the 'durability of mentalities' and their policy impact. Repeatedly, however, the author puts the emphasis on the absolute need to establish a relationship based on mutual trust and to consider Russia 'a trustworthy security partner'. Of course, this goal was largely undermined by the decision to include former Soviet 'satellites' in an unprecedented, and probably unnecessary, enlargement of NATO.

The turning point came when Putin and his closest advisors convinced themselves that the United States had not simply stumbled into Iraq, Libya, and Syria but had been pursuing a conscious, systematic strategy of

regime change as a means of achieving larger strategic objectives’—and this is a point of the utmost importance for Putin (in Legvold’s narrative)—so that ‘Ukraine was the latest and boldest instance, with in this case Russia as the target’. Indeed, many Russians can be justified in thinking that, though indirectly, US policy-makers may be pursuing the goal of regime change also in their country.

In Chapter 4, titled ‘Where To’ (could I suggest that a more appropriate alternative title might be the well-known ‘What is to be done...?’), Legvold focuses on a number of sensible policy suggestions whose background badly needs to be constructed by doing the following:

- 1 Identifying areas of cooperation and setting out a framework for policy-making.
- 2 Monitoring implementation of agreed policies and identifying log-jams.
- 3 Creating a venue within which sensitive issues could be discussed candidly and in confidence.
- 4 Finding areas of competition and ways of reducing their effects.

Of course, most, if not all, of these suggestions are addressed to less than receptive US policy-makers (and, subordinately, seem intended to affect the scholarly debate).

By way of conclusion, I will first make one criticism and then stress what I consider to be two excellent points made by Legvold. The criticism has to do with the lack of any appreciation of the political and personal costs to be incurred by the protagonists if they engage without any assurance in a ‘dynamic confidence building process’ that inevitably entails some—I have to be very vague—risks and, possibly, short-term negative consequences. The two excellent points made by Legvold are as follows. First, the ongoing confrontation between the USA and Russia does bear a significant resemblance to the classic Cold War, though it is deprived of its ideological component, but obliged to deal with an ideological enemy—that is, Islamic terrorism. Second, in Legvold’s own words, both for the USA and Russia, ‘the challenge will be to integrate the pursuit of immediate policy objectives into a larger framework preserving long-term goals’. So

far it is very difficult to determine the long-term goals of both countries and their leaders, but I cannot refrain from asking the author of this lucid book: what if those long-term goals are head-on conflicting?

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Terror: a longer view

David Loyn

The New Threat from Islamic Militancy, by Jason Burke. Bodley Head. 288 pp. £16.99.

After Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi made his dramatic entrance onto the world stage in June 2014, declaring himself the leader of a new ‘caliphate’, the world scrambled to understand what was going on. Within months a consensus emerged that Baghdadi’s violent organisation, the self-styled ‘Islamic State’, had been spawned in US detention centres a decade before, when Sunni radicals were rounded up in their thousands in Iraq, and some faced the humiliations of Abu Ghraib.

One of the strengths of Jason Burke’s exhaustive account of Baghdadi’s group is that in his search for causes, he reaches further back before 9/11, into the chaos of the 1990s in Iraq. This is the most important lesson that policy-makers should remember. In those years Iraq was deliberately impoverished by Western sanctions, and it was then that the resentments were bred that led to IS.

Too often we see ‘intervention’ only as the decision to take military action. The wider context is rarely investigated—including the effects of not taking military action (such as in Syria) or of other policies, such as punitive sanctions. The appearance of IS was not a direct consequence of the mistakes made after the US-led invasion of Iraq, but should be seen against a far wider background.

Burke shares the view of the ex-MI6 agent Alastair Crooke, whose 2009 account, *Resistance—The Essence of the Islamist Revolution*, sees much of modern Islamic militancy as attempting to regain influence and power lost after the enforced end of the caliphate by the new secularist government in Turkey in 1924. This rip in time after 1,300 years of

Islamic material power was a psychological calamity.

Burke is a confident guide through familiar ground—the emergence of modern Islamist resistance thinking under Sayyid Qutb in Egypt in the 1950s, the importance of Abdullah Azzam's call to global jihad in Afghanistan in the 1980s, then the spread to Bosnia, Chechnya and Kosovo in the 1990s. In previous books he charted the rise of al-Qaeda, and here he puts Osama bin Laden into context, following not leading until 9/11, although bin Laden made one crucial innovation in focusing his fight against the 'Far Enemy'—the West. The main distinction between al-Qaeda and IS is that Baghdadi's principal target is the 'Near Enemy', the failing regimes of the Middle East.

And while the 'Islamic State' is unlike most other jihadi movements in taking and trying to hold territory, it is not really a state, but looks beyond borders. It uses the media with the same ambition as any global corporation. Until very recently, insurgent groups have needed the mainstream media directly to carry their messages, or relied on them to report their atrocities—the 'propaganda of the deed'. Now this can be bypassed by social media, and no militant group has been as competent as IS at spreading the word online. Their best-known messages are extremely violent, to captivate impressionable recruits and subdue opponents in occupied territory. But much of their online presence shows an idealistic society of happy people, with children in playgrounds and modern infrastructure, designed to draw in families. One of their most surreal adverts is an adaptation of an NHS promotion showing a gleaming hospital, with the logo changed, in the same font, to IHS.

So what's the best way to respond to the 'New Threat' to our lives, which gives Burke his title? Theresa May was the architect of a new, more hardline approach as Home Secretary, and it seems likely this will be followed by the government she now leads. This sees non-violent extremism as the gateway to violence—a controversial connection in academic circles, which has led to the Prevent agenda turning schoolteachers into thought police. But its supporters can show

that Prevent has led to some highly successful instances of deradicalisation.

There are no easy answers, and Burke does not pretend there are. His idealistic appeal is for a world of tolerance and harmony—the 'Grey Zone', as defined by IS in their desire to draw a black-and-white distinction between Islam and the decadent Western world. But while arguing for a nuanced understanding of the different motivations and strands of discontent among some Muslims, at the same time he points out that the apparently unconnected 'lone wolves' who attacked the soldier Lee Rigby, police officers in France and the Boston Marathon all used strikingly similar language. He may warn against the West turning in on itself, and castigate politicians who have 'systematically exaggerated the involvement of IS in local violence in their own countries to obscure their own failings', but the appeal of IS, in recruiting fighters and jihadi brides from Western countries and inspiring attackers in the West, cannot be wished away. Disaffected citizens of countries that were once the 'Far Enemy' are now turning on them.

I have one quibble with Burke's language. He chooses to talk about 'Islamic' violence or militancy throughout, which many writers avoid, preferring 'Islamist', to separate this narrow politicised world-view and avoid tarring the peaceful Islamic majority. But if you want to read only one book about the Islamic State phenomenon, then read this.

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More on the absurdities of political life

Richard Briand

Coalition: The Inside Story of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government, by David Laws. Biteback. 594 pp. £25.00.

David Laws has followed his account of the Coalition's formation (*22 Days in May: The*

Birth of the Lib Dem–Conservative Coalition, 2010) with this insider's history of the Coalition itself. Nick Clegg allowed Laws access to his private papers but the tone of this book is far less bruised compared with Clegg's own memoir, *Between the Extremes*. While weighty and detailed, at more than 500 pages, it is far from heavy going. Apart from his inexplicable fondness for dreary corporate clichés such as 'incentivise', Laws writes with a pleasing wryness and eye for the absurdities of political life. Liberal Democrat ministers, for example, ponder the news of the Crown Prosecution Service's decision to prosecute Chris Huhne while being photographed with a man in a giant bee costume at an away day in Eastbourne. Owen Paterson suggests replacing migrant fruit pickers with old age pensioners paid below the minimum wage.

What also distinguishes the book is its portrayal of relationships within the Coalition. Laws certainly is not sparing in his details of clashes, including those between Clegg and Cameron, and between himself and Michael Gove in the Department for Education, but, as he notes, many of the worst relationships were within, rather than between, the Coalition parties. His own most disparaging words are reserved for Vince Cable, who is described as 'a little dull and fairly shy' and 'like the bright unpopular boy travelling in the front on the school bus on the way to a rugby game, while the in crowd occupied the back seats'. Michael Gove's sacking from the Cabinet by Theresa May looks even less surprising after Laws' description of just how fractious relations were between the two. Despite clashing with him over issues such as the financing of free school meals and free schools, the author says that he regarded Gove as a good colleague and friend. Indeed, while the book is reasonably light on self-justification and self-righteous partisanship, it is notable that one of the author's more tendentious moments is when he attempts to justify Gove's downgrading of vocational qualifications—which included good-quality ones, such as the well-regarded engineering diploma, as well as poor-quality ones. Laws' assertion that the English Baccalaureate's focus on core subjects will benefit students from poorer backgrounds overlooks how its

sidelining of arts, music and drama in state schools will impede more creatively talented students from those backgrounds and damage creative industries worth billions to the UK economy.

If Laws' high regard for the socially liberal Gove and the europhile Ken Clarke is no surprise, what is more surprising is the way in which both Laws and Clegg consistently have a higher regard for George Osborne than David Cameron. Clegg describes Osborne as 'having a core belief there to engage with', whereas Cameron is routinely criticised as a relentless tactician and a 'quicksilver politician'. All the same, Cameron and Osborne are portrayed as one in their ruthless desire to stay in power, whether in Osborne saying to Laws that he never wants to return to the opposition benches, or Cameron cheerfully admitting to Clegg, after quashing a return to the particular formula of the 2010 leadership debates, that he will do 'whatever it takes' to stay in power. George Osborne repeatedly suggests to Laws a 'Coupon' election in which the Liberal Democrats would have been unopposed by Conservative candidates in the West Country. This would have denied the Conservatives their first majority government in twenty-three years. Might it, though, have kept Cameron and Osborne in office through a Liberal Democrat veto giving them an excuse to junk their promise of an 'in/out' referendum on EU membership? The author and Clegg are far from convinced, asserting that Cameron's party would not have allowed him to go back on it, even if the Liberal Democrats had held the balance of power last May.

When Laws lauds 'long overdue' Post Office privatisation as a Liberal Democrat achievement, refers to the 'so-called' bedroom tax and was regarded with great suspicion by what he calls the 'so-called' left of the Liberal Democrats, it is tempting to suggest that, in the event of a party realignment in the UK, the author might easily join Gove and Osborne in an economically and socially liberal party in the mould of the Republic of Ireland's Fine Gael or Poland's Civic Platform. Laws, however, who describes himself as at the 'economically literate' end of his party, is quick to emphasise where he

differed with even socially liberal Conservatives such as Gove and Osborne. If part of his enthusiasm for free school meals was grounded in improving work incentives, he also believes they delivered wider social justice for the low paid. And this intertwines with his bullish account of what the Liberal Democrats achieved in government, including the pupil premium, Theresa May taking up Lynne Featherstone's campaign for equal marriage, pensions reform, preventing George Osborne from cutting billions more from social security and reducing the NHS budget to fund a penny cut in income tax. Even regarding the fateful issue of tuition fees, Laws concedes the politics of the decision was 'lousy', but argues that the policy itself was better than the original Lib Dem policy. Missing, though, is any admission that Laws' underhand decision to make public the humorous private note left by his predecessor as Chief Secretary to the Treasury ('there is no money') hurt the Liberal Democrats as well as Labour, when the Liberal Democrat wipe-out in areas such as the West Country was due partly to fear among floating voters of letting in a Labour party seen as economically profligate.

Laws' summing-up on Cameron and Osborne has, inevitably, been dated by Brexit. His verdict that Cameron will be remembered as a good rather than great Prime Minister is far too generous. In this case, the last word goes to Nick Clegg: 'He always believes that he can get out of a tight corner. One day he won't.'

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Israel and American Jews: there may be troubles ahead

Antony Lerman

Trouble in the Tribe: The American Jewish Conflict Over Israel, by Dov Waxman. Princeton University Press. 328 pp. £22.95.

In the early years of the Zionist movement, at the end of the nineteenth century, very few Jews supported setting up a Jewish homeland or state in Palestine. The

movement grew both in organisational strength and in numbers, but even in 1939 Zionism was still a minority cause among Jews. The Holocaust changed all that. By 1948 Jewish opinion had swung in favour of the establishment of a state. But some of the significant Jewish organisations in Western countries, which had opposed Zionism and now accepted the birth of Israel as a necessity for Holocaust survivors, still remained unconvinced of the ideological or religious imperative of Zionism.

Given the current popular image of American Jewry as Israel's stoutest and most loyal, long-standing and influential supporter, it may come as a surprise to learn that most of the unconvinced and reluctant organisations were American. But, as Dov Waxman is at pains to point out in this thoroughly documented study, if there was ever wall-to-wall support for Israel among American Jews, it was only during the period between the 1967 war and the outbreak of the second intifada in 2001. Broadly speaking, 'Israel used to bring Jews together', but the current reality is 'an internecine battle over Israel among American Jews', and 'now it is driving them apart'.

Waxman seeks to explain how and why this deep rift has come about and what it means for the future of the American Jewish community, or rather communities—for, as he makes clear, there is the community of Jews who are affiliated to mainstream, establishment Jewish organisations, such as synagogues and Zionist or pro-Israel groups, and the wider Jewish population, which includes unaffiliated self-identifying Jews who are part of a myriad of informal Jewish social, cultural, political and religious networks, pursuing a do-it-yourself Judaism, alienated by the establishment and often deeply critical of Israel's political trajectory.

For Waxman, the importance of this close look at the internal workings of American Jewry is not just to assess where the largest Jewish community outside Israel is heading. Jewish groups are a 'strategic asset' for Israel and have had significant influence over the US–Israel relationship, which for years has been at the heart of America's Middle East strategy. So if the rift undermines the claims of the powerful lobby, the American Israel

Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations to speak for American Jews, a change could theoretically occur in US policy that sidelines, and reduces military aid for, Israel. Bear in mind that on 14 September 2016 the USA and Israel signed an agreement giving Israel \$38 billion in military assistance over the next decade, the largest such aid package in US history.

It is a sign of how contentious the issue of Israel is among American Jews that Waxman goes to great lengths to prepare his ground before venturing some opinions that many outside the community bubble would find unexceptionable, but engaged, pro-Israel activists would pounce on.

Waxman argues that what has changed in American Jewish attachment to Israel is how it is expressed. It is still strong, but 'American Jews are becoming more critical of Israeli government policies and more willing to express this criticism'. Unconditional support has been replaced by critical engagement. However, Waxman has no time for what he calls 'the common claim that the American Jewish community is intolerant of dissent and tries to silence all criticism of Israel'. The legitimacy of public criticism of Israel is 'increasingly accepted', he writes, but this only goes so far: 'there are still communal "red lines" and dissident Jewish groups still get blacklisted.'

No one can seriously deny that 'Israel has become a fraught topic of discussion in local Jewish communities', to the extent that 'civility initiatives' to encourage 'more productive conversations about Israel' are increasingly common—a 'clear acknowledgement that the growing conflict over Israel is threatening to tear Jewish communities apart'.

The broad political consensus has not entirely disappeared, however. Waxman says most American Jews are 'ambivalent centrists'. But challenges to that centrism from left and right have grown and strengthened. Younger, secular and liberal Jews are more likely to be 'dovish'; older, conservative, religious Jews far less so. This has led to increasingly partisan and contentious lobbying on both sides, which challenges the so-called 'centrist' Jewish lobbying groups' claims to speak authoritatively on behalf of

America's Jews. 'There is no longer a single, widely accepted meaning of the term "pro-Israel"', Waxman argues, and he suggests that 'This development may weaken the political influence of the pro-Israel lobby in the future'.

But it is wrong to think that the Jewish establishment has weakened primarily because of divisions over Israel. It is out of touch because younger American Jews are identifying with new types of niche organisations, many focusing on social issues and the environment.

Contrary to the impression given by some of his critics, who see Waxman—a regular dovish commentator on Israel–Palestine issues—as biased at best and as a 'self-hating Jew' at worst, the book's conclusions are nuanced. Waxman does not predict an unrelenting collapse of American Jewish support for Israel, but rather sets changing opinion on Israel in the context of the cultural–religious polarisation among Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jews. This divide is likely to grow, as younger Jews become more secular, less tribal and less emotionally attached to Israel, but the growth and strengthening of Orthodoxy will pull in the other direction, quite possibly ensuring that support for Israel remains strong. Waxman's main concern is that American Jewry will become ever more fractured and divided. He concludes: 'American Jewish debate and division concerning Israel is unlikely to disappear, and... Israeli and American policymakers, American Jewish leaders, and American Jews themselves must come to terms with this.'

That Waxman should finish with such a cautious conclusion is understandable. But he has earned the right to make some informed speculation. For example, with Israel successfully avoiding answering to anyone for its actions and unwavering support for the Jewish state now an article of faith for all Republican and also most Democrat politicians, will this mean that the internal Jewish debate on Israel's political trajectory only continues to have any relevance within the Jewish community? It's highly likely that a far-right Israeli government will effectively annex the West Bank, while the main players in the international

community, preoccupied elsewhere, may say a few tough words and do nothing. And a powerless US administration, even if it wanted to act, would have no appetite to go against most domestic political and public opinion. What then for the future of the 'tribe' in America? Some exploration of these possible scenarios would have been welcome. But nevertheless, Waxman has still performed a valuable service by confining himself to putting this account on record, and probably saved himself from further vitriol he could well do without.

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Hobsbawm's insight into Latin America

Richard Gott

Viva La Revolución: Eric Hobsbawm on Latin America, edited by Leslie Bethell. Little, Brown. 470 pp. £25.00.

Eric Hobsbawm was a brilliant economic and social historian and a fine jazz critic, but he was also, as this posthumous collection of his essays on Latin America reveals, an excellent journalist, writing for the most part in magazines that now, alas, like their contributor, no longer exist: *New Society*, *The Listener* and *Labour Monthly*, a publication of the British Communist Party.

Hobsbawm had a unique insight into the countries of Latin America which derived both from his interest in their history and, importantly, from his friendship with local Communists. He was invited to Cuba in 1960, when teaching at Stanford, by Fidel Castro's Marxist guru and jazz lover, Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, who had joined Fidel in the mountains of the Sierra Maestra in 1958. He was also to become friendly with Jacobo Arenas, the most serious Communist theoretician in Colombia, who went on to found the Communist guerrilla movement known as the FARC and became the political

commissar to its leader, Manuel Marulanda. Later, Hobsbawm was attracted to Peru by the fact that the local Communist party (and Fidel) was supporting the reformist military government that seized power in 1968. These and other contacts gave Hobsbawm's writings an unusual angle denied to most Western journalists covering the continent, who remained bound by the conventions of the Cold War.

Like many people in the second half of the twentieth century (including this reviewer), Hobsbawm was captivated at an early stage by the successful Cuban revolution and by its future relevance to the continent of Latin America itself. He wrote about its early revolutionary years, but after his initial euphoria, like many European intellectuals, he abandoned it, looking elsewhere for inspiration. After the 1960s, he never returned to Cuba. Partly, I suspect, this was due to his downright hostility to the Castro–Guevara foreign policy of the early years, which consisted largely of active support for guerrilla movements in countries throughout the continent, until the death of Che Guevara in Bolivia in October 1967. Hobsbawm drew a very fine if hostile portrait of Guevara in *New Society* in 1968, and he dismissed my own book, *Guerrilla Movements in Latin America* (1969), with faint praise, noting with disapproval that 'the author sympathizes with the Guevarists'. Elsewhere, Hobsbawm is scathing about the 'naiveté' of the guerrilla enthusiasts. While this disappointed me at the time, I can now admit that he was right.

Although Hobsbawm never became a 'Latinamericanist', he was in at the start of the vogue for Latin American studies in Britain in the mid-sixties, which was based initially at Chatham House in London, at the famous seminar set up by Claudio Véliz. It then spread out, in the wake of the Parry report of 1965, to half a dozen Latin American centres created in universities throughout the country. Hobsbawm delivered a mould-breaking paper to Véliz's seminar in 1963 (first published in *The World Today* in June 1963 and republished in the volume under review) on 'The Revolutionary Situation in Colombia'. Hobsbawm argued that Colombia, like most of Latin America, contained 'the raw material for a social

revolution', though he found it problematic 'to explain why it has not yet burst into flames'. More than half a century later, with the peace accord between the government and the FARC signed in the middle of 2016, the problem is no nearer solution.

In this paper, and in an accompanying article in *New Society*, Hobsbawm revealed the extent of his interest in peasants and in rural society, which would become the chief focus of his concern during the thirty years that he spent looking spasmodically at Latin America. He had long been fascinated by bandits in southern Italy; now he had a wider background for his ongoing research. Colombia, and its prolonged experience of *la violencia* in the countryside, was of lasting interest, but he had soon moved on to Peru. There he found, with growing excitement, that the military involved in crushing a hydra-headed outbreak of guerrilla rebellion in the early 1960s had rapidly decided that the programme of the guerrillas should become their own solution to the country's problems. The military coup led by General Juan Velasco Alvarado in October 1968 introduced a wide-ranging revolutionary project, including an extensive land reform, both in the wealthy coastal areas and in the impoverished sierra; the nationalisation of the US-owned International Petroleum Company's oil fields; and the expropriation of the lucrative fishing industry. The military also sought to include the Indian population within Peruvian society, introducing major changes in the country's education system and promoting Quechua as an official language of the state.

Hobsbawm was captivated by the military's agrarian reform, more particularly because he had already spent time in the early 1960s in the valley of La Convención, down river from Machu Picchu, and was familiar with the revolutionary peasant pressures that were building up. He had written then, in July 1963, that 'if any country is ripe for and needs a social revolution it is Peru'. He now (in 1969) found himself defending the Peruvian military against critics on the ultra-left, developing his arguments in *New Society* and in two riveting pieces for the *New York Review of Books*, as well as in more academic articles for the *Journal of Latin*

American Studies and *Past and Present* (all reprinted here). Much of his material came from the magnificent CIDA reports on individual countries (published by the Comité Interamericano de Desarrollo Agrícola based in Santiago, Chile) and the work of Maxime Kuczynski Godard, the father of the present President of Peru, on the eastern slopes of the Peruvian Amazon.

Hobsbawm was also excited initially by developments in the Chile of Salvador Allende. 'Chile is the first country in the world that is seriously attempting an alternative road to socialism', he wrote, perceiving it to be 'a thrilling prospect and a politically valuable one'. Yet strikingly, in comparison with his enthusiasm for the peasants of Colombia and Peru, Hobsbawm's views on the Chilean countryside were at best abrasive, at worst disinterested. He dismisses the Chilean peasantry as 'a rapidly shrinking force', and he does not approve of their feeble attempts at rebellion. He clearly supports Allende's view, in his message to Congress in 1971, that 'the indiscriminate occupations of estates and farms are unnecessary and prejudicial'. He notes that 'on this point Allende (supported by the Communist Party) clashes with the left opposition of the MIR and also with elements in the left wing of his own party'. Unfortunately Hobsbawm had had little opportunity to travel into the rural areas of Chile, and was dismissive of the sit-ins and farm takeovers that he got to hear of—'peanuts by the usual Latin American standards of peasant land occupations'. He concludes that 'the *tomas de fundos* make foreign headlines, because they suggest riot and anarchy and because some fairly colourful figures on the uncontrollable fringes of the ultra-left are active in them, but at present Chile is a long way from rural insurrection'. This was, of course, true, but Hobsbawm might have been a tad more sympathetic to the plight of the peasants.

Though impressed by Allende as a political operative, Hobsbawm recognised at an early stage that the cards were stacked against him. When the Chilean leader was eventually overthrown in September 1973, he confessed it was no surprise, although he thought that Allende had probably

‘miscalculated the reluctance of the Chilean bourgeoisie to plunge into’ civil war. ‘The left has generally underestimated the fear and hatred of the right, the ease with which well-dressed men and women acquire a taste for blood.’

Hobsbawm also had an interesting and unusual take on the USA’s support for the Pinochet coup. ‘The Americans knew perfectly well that it was a test case of something much simpler than whether socialism can come without violent insurrection or civil war. The issue for them was, and remains, the maintenance of imperial supremacy in Latin America. This had begun to be eroded in the past five years by a variety of political regimes not only in Chile but also in Peru, Panama, Mexico and, most recently, with Perón’s triumph [and return to Buenos Aires in June 1973], Argentina. Perón rather than Allende probably finally tipped the scale towards encouraging a military coup.’ Hobsbawm was always careful, even verging on the conservative, in his views about the countries that he observed. When first visiting Cuba in 1960, he noted that ‘though the cautious and the dashing are to be found in all groups, my guess is that (paradoxically) the *Fidelistas* incline more towards speed, the Communists to caution’. In Peru, in 1971, he noted that although critics on the left regard ‘the declared aims of the [military] government as so much window dressing, designed to make the new version of dependent capitalism more palatable to the masses’, ‘left-wing supporters somewhat more cautiously take the view that the anti-imperialism is genuine, the reforms so far “progressive”... and that the logic of their position may push the regime to the left’.

This volume is brilliantly edited by Leslie Bethell, the doyen of British studies of Latin America (and specifically of Brazil), and he provides an intelligent and heart-warming introduction to his (remarkably comprehensive) selection of Hobsbawm’s essays, with many revealing anecdotes about his forty-year acquaintance with him. The book is essential reading for anyone with a taste for Latin America, and more generally for those inspired by the global reach of Hobsbawm’s earlier histories.

For a Latinamericanist of my generation it is wonderful to read the thoughts and arguments of an intelligent observer whose experiences overlapped with my own. We were all conscious of the miserable state of the continent when we first arrived there, and we all endlessly sought for ways in which matters might be improved. But this is all now history. The countries that pioneered fresh movements for change in the twenty-first century—Venezuela, Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador and Argentina—do not much feature in Eric Hobsbawm’s *Latin America*. And the ‘red tide’ that buoyed them up for several years is also now beginning to recede.

Richard Gott’s books include Cuba: A New History and Hugo Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution

Liberalism: its flesh and blood

Georgios Varouxakis

Liberalism: The Life of an Idea, by Edmund Fawcett. Princeton University Press. 468 pp. £18.95.

In the 1990s, *The Economist* published a number of memorable essays on the nature and future of ‘Liberalism’. It seemed to me that someone was thinking intelligently about the ubiquitous-yet-elusive concept of liberalism in what used to be Walter Bagehot’s magazine. Those articles, unsigned as is the custom with this journal, may well have been written, it turns out, by Edmund Fawcett, who worked for many years for *The Economist*. As Fawcett admits from the beginning, the word ‘liberal’ is ‘notoriously slippery’. There is no stable, uncontested understanding of the concept *liberalism*. To start with, not all thinkers, politicians or parties that Fawcett considers ‘liberal’ according to his criteria called themselves ‘liberal’. You can only define what has no history, as Nietzsche warned us, and liberalism does have a long and complex history; hence the challenge of describing its nature. But one cannot help trying, and Fawcett does come up with a modicum of a definition, stating that he takes liberalism to be ‘a practice guided by

four loose ideas' which he names, in short-hand, 'conflict, resistance to power, progress, and respect'. Together they compose what he takes to be 'the liberal outlook'. Fawcett's ambition is not to define liberalism conceptually in the way academics such as Michael Freeden do in works on political ideologies and political theory. Fawcett's book is more focused on analysing liberalism as a practice and as a lived experience, and in capturing the variety and diversity of people and ideas included under the vast liberal umbrella. This book might well have been entitled *Liberals*. For its great virtue is not in abstract theorising but in its valiant attempt to paint the flesh and blood of liberalism, the people he takes to have been the most prominent liberals in thought, philosophy, political economy and political practice since the emergence of 'liberalism'. The book contributes a series of judiciously balanced mini-intellectual biographies of a great number of people, some better known than others. It does so in beautiful prose, with evident passion and a desire to capture the diversity and nuances of the ideas and practices discussed.

Fawcett is right to begin the story in the early nineteenth century. Not only did the word (which came from the Spanish *liberales* through the French *libéraux*) emerge with its political meaning only during the first couple of decades of the nineteenth century but, besides the word to describe it, the thing described did not exist before the combination of overwhelming transformations that culminated in the early nineteenth century. In a compelling first chapter Fawcett uses the life-span of the Prussian diplomat and thinker Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835) to highlight the striking transformations that occurred during the decades leading up to the 1830s and which led to the emergence of liberalism.

It is inevitable, in a book dealing with so many different people over two centuries in four different countries, to find small problems of detail here and there. Louis Napoleon Bonaparte was not 'president from the summer of 1848'—the presidential election of the French Second Republic took place in December 1848. Mill had not exactly 'lived' in Avignon in retirement—he spent half of each of his last fifteen years there in order to

be near his wife's grave (and Mill did not spend 'six months in southern France at twenty'—though six months had been the initial plan, he liked it enough to spend more than a year in the end; also, he was 14 years old, not 20). An unfortunate error has slipped on the cover of the paperback edition. The names of a number of the most prominent liberals who feature on the cover are given at the bottom of the jacket. The last one is referred to as 'John Mills' (that error was not there on the cover of the original hardback edition, where the name reads: 'John Stuart Mill').

But these are, most literally, minor quibbles for a book of this scale and range. Its qualities and strengths are much more striking. One might have expected more on the famous 'Lippmann Colloquium' in Paris in 1938 and its begetting of the term 'neoliberalism', but what is said is most accurate. Fawcett is absolutely right that the people assembled in Paris for that colloquium shared little in common other than 'the spectre of an antiliberal Other' and that there were sharp differences between participants such as the German pioneers of the social market, Hayek and von Mises, and Lippmann (or Raymond Aron, who was also a participant). Fawcett's judgements on Hayek's polemical best-seller, *The Road to Serfdom*, are characteristically judicious and balanced. 'Even sympathizers regretted Hayek's weakness for overstatement and slippery-slope alarms', he comments. But he also explains the rhetorical appeal of the tract. Fawcett emerges throughout the book as a subtle, balanced and convincing judge. He does not try to conceal his liberal sympathies, but he does not go anywhere near writing a eulogy or hagiography. He shows himself fully aware of the many pitfalls to which liberal attitudes and liberal feelings might be liable—'Those liberal feelings had darker counterparts', as he puts it. He comes up with sharp criticism against liberals who succumbed to the temptations of all-embracing explanatory formulae (including the blind reliance on unregulated markets that some of them adopted in the past three to four decades).

Some readers will take issue with some inclusions—Michael Oakeshott and Jean-Paul Sartre are not the first people that come to

mind when thinking of liberalism. But Fawcett is explicit that he is aware some eyebrows might be raised and does explain these inclusions. His range of *dramatis personæ* is spectacular. It is one of the book's many strengths that it analyses the thoughts and actions of people who are completely forgotten today, yet important to his story. It is refreshing to see a book addressed to a broader intelligent public pay as much attention as this book does to people such as the French historian and politician François Guizot. Specialist historians of nineteenth-century thought are aware of Guizot's importance and influence throughout Europe and the world over some decades, but I doubt that non-specialists think much of him. And yet even the maligned and despised Guizot comes alive in Fawcett's beautiful prose. Few people now remember or take seriously Walter Lippmann, but he was arguably the twentieth century's most influential journalist. Examples could be multiplied. Another major strength of the book is its focus on thinkers and practitioners in equal measure and from four major Western countries (France, Germany, Britain and the USA). The erudition and quality of research displayed is most impressive. This is a book that anyone interested in politics should read, in expectation of great delights awaiting them.

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A la carte intervention

Joseph Devanny

The Conceit of Humanitarian Intervention, by Rajan Menon. Oxford University Press. 256 pp. £18.99.

At the core of Rajan Menon's *The Conceit of Humanitarian Intervention* is the persuasive, if relatively commonplace, argument that states 'rarely move from words to deeds when circumstances lead them to conclude that acting in the service of overarching moral principles, as opposed to concrete interests, will be costly in terms of blood, treasure, and strategic goals'.

Menon's book is a pragmatic appraisal of what affects states' decisions on humanitarian intervention, and the ambivalence of public opinion in both Western and non-Western states. His major contention is that states will only intervene abroad to save lives when it is consistent with their national interests and appears cost-effective: 'they will not do so when leaders consider the costs and risks excessive or conclude that intervention would harm important national interests; they will watch people perish instead... Neither among citizens nor leaders, even in democracies, is fellow feeling, cosmopolitan sentiment, or ethical commitment sufficient to make the body count the criterion for intervention.'

Menon effectively marshals opinion-polling data to argue that humanitarian intervention is less popular in Western nations than its proponents would care to admit. Even where support exists, such as for intervention in Libya in 2011, it can be fragile, fade quickly and invariably preclude the significant deployment of Western ground forces, or 'boots on the ground', meaning that intervention is all too often 'post-heroic' (using a term coined by Edward Luttwak in a 1995 article in *Foreign Affairs*, 'Toward Post-Heroic Warfare'), comprising high-altitude bombing or, latterly, the 'drone strikes plus special forces' combination that was a signature theme of Barack Obama's interventions.

Menon also observes that humanitarian intervention, especially limited operations, can create 'perverse incentives' and 'unforeseen consequences', either by encouraging oppressed groups to commit violent acts in the hope of provoking regime reprisals that, in turn, lead to Western intervention (e.g. the terrorist campaign of the Kosovo Liberation Army prior to the Kosovo intervention) or by causing perpetrators to intensify and escalate killing sprees before their capacity has been degraded by high-altitude bombing (e.g. Milosevic's Serb forces prior to the same intervention).

Menon rejects the notion, central to arguments for humanitarian intervention and the developing norm of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), that an 'international community' exists in any normative sense. Interventionists delude themselves by ignoring the

significant cultural and political barriers to the creation of a rooted sense of cosmopolitan community. Menon lists several examples of this cosmopolitanism deficit in action, from the lack of concerted support for the International Criminal Court's efforts to bring perpetrators of atrocities to justice (and the US government's decision to opt out of the ICC, which further fuels the perception of the Court as a Western tool), to the shortcomings in the global response to the refugee crisis. A real international community would act more decisively and with greater common purpose.

There should be a high bar for new books on this topic. As Menon writes at the outset, one 'could build a small mountain from the books and articles devoted to mass atrocity and humanitarian intervention'. Menon's argument is cogent and plausible, but hardly new to anyone who follows the news in more than the most cursory manner. He also makes some peculiar choices about what to cover, which distorts and undermines the shape and impact of his book.

Some may find it incongruous, for example, that Menon anchors his appraisal of the current state of humanitarian intervention in so many examples from the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, without sufficient bridging argument to explain precisely what India's 1971 intervention in East Pakistan or Tanzania's 1978 intervention in Uganda can really tell us about the decisions of today's statesmen about intervention in current conflicts.

Menon would have been better advised to pare back this historical material—and the middle chapters' treatment of several rather ponderous theorists—to create space for more direct engagement with the views and practices of current policy-makers. There is, for example, an extensive and expanding literature of reflections that have emanated from recent US and other governments, including the Obama administration, with memoirs already from Clinton, Panetta and Gates, as well as several lower-ranking officials such as Derek Chollet or Jeffrey Bader. Menon's failure to address this material more substantively makes for a less policy-relevant, less interesting book.

Menon can sometimes frame issues tersely, to good effect, creating uncompromising,

discomforting prose: 'no convincing evidence suggests that people are willing to undergo major hardships, spend a lot of money, or see many of their soldiers die in order to save strangers.' For Menon, 'the issue is not what good people are capable of, but the degree to which a universal ethic of care has or could become a powerful influence on the conduct of states. Humanitarians are more sanguine on this point than the facts warrant.' This is a sensible and well-evidenced judgement, but one that, overall, could have been made more briskly.

There is a gnawing feeling that, unless you are a professional, card-carrying humanitarian interventionist with a Whiggish confidence in human perfectibility, this book isn't really meant for you, so earnestly does Menon seek to emphasise the continuing relevance of power in international politics and the limited prospects for consensus in favour of a uniform and binding body of rules to govern when and where intervention must occur.

For Menon, while passionate advocates for R2P are 'smart, well-meaning people who are serious about saving lives and should be commended for their commitment', they need the benefit of his book-length counsel: they 'want a binding legal and ethical commitment to stop atrocities, not a weak-kneed plan to be implemented when convenient. Their fate will be to oscillate, according to the whims of democratic citizens and their leaders, between the euphoria of Kosovo and the despair of Syria.'

It is obvious that states must balance competing values and interests in deciding when and where to intervene. Books such as former Obama national security official Derek Chollet's *The Long Game* (2016) provide more insight than Menon's into the debates that have shaped such decisions in recent years. *The Conceit of Humanitarian Intervention* is a book aimed less at those interested in understanding the dynamics and mechanics of these decisions, and more at readers who need to be persuaded that, to use Michael Mandelbaum's incisive phrase about Bill Clinton's early years, 'foreign policy as social work' is a concept sharply at odds with the realities of national security decision-making.

King's College London

The silliness of voters and the cleverness of political scientists

Paul Sagar

Democracy for Realists. Why Elections Do Not Produce Responsive Government, by Christopher H. Achen and Larry M. Bartels. Princeton University Press. 390 pp. £22.95.

More Sex, Lies & the Ballot Box: Another 50 Things You Need to Know About Elections, edited by Philip Cowley and Robert Ford, with a foreword by Isabel Hardman. Biteback. 308 pp. £14.99.

Achen and Bartels' *Democracy for Realists* is in important ways a restatement of Joseph Schumpeter's infamous thesis that democracy is only, and can only be, the process of selecting between rival elites, enthroned through competition for the popular vote (see *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, 1942). This view, however, is expanded and reinforced with extensive social data, coupled with an important further contention: that voters select on the basis of group identifications and loyalties. As a result, Achen and Bartels effectively out-Schumpeter Schumpeter. The latter thought that voters were at least tolerably good at tracking their own interests, albeit only on the few specific issues they actually knew something about (namely, ones that related directly to them). Achen and Bartels claim they're not even any good at that.

The authors' main targets are two distinct groups of theories about how electoral democracy works. The first they call 'the folk theory of democracy'. This says that elections work by voters picking candidates who best uphold or promote their existing interests or preferences. Ballots are tallied, and the majority winner gets to implement policy, which has a legitimate mandate insofar as it is treated as the prevailing will of the people. Yet this, say Achen and Bartels, is codswallop. Using a barrage of data, they show that in fact voters are far more likely to adopt a policy position after they know what their already favoured candidate advocates, retrospectively tailoring their views accordingly. Or they simply assume that the

candidate they are supporting shares their preferences, often despite overwhelming evidence that this is not so. And that's just the voters who claim to have views on policy or government performance. On a host of basic issues—the size of the national deficit, or a prominent US candidate's position on abortion—the majority of voters are completely ignorant about even the most basic of facts, let alone policy stances or track records. On Achen and Bartel's account, it's not only a myth to think that democracy works by implementing the preferences of voters via a majoritarian process. It's a myth to think that most voters have preferences, if that means any sort of stably aligned, factually based, explicitly organised, intelligent opinion regarding political reality.

Achen and Bartels are relatively convincing in that the folk theory is common currency in lay political culture. Whether rival academic theorists ever upheld it in quite the way that they say is, however, open to question. As a claim about empirical reality, it seems unlikely that anybody even tenuously connected to the facts could have believed it. But the point is that the bare facts of empirical reality were never the crucial point, at least to many theorists. Achen and Bartels are contemptuous of so-called 'ideal' accounts of democracy that posit something like the preferences-into-policy-via-ballots model, painting belief in such a thing as a simple and naïve category error. But this is to unduly underplay the role that some ideal might have in helping us to get clear on what kinds of values democracy might uniquely embody—and that might hold even if, in practice, democracy is an altogether shoddier affair.

The 'folk theory' may be a bad way to proceed in empirical political science. But empirical political science by itself cannot simply knock out the value of non-empirical evaluative theorising, as the authors seem to think. The authors are doubtless right that the empirical record shows that attempting to introduce more 'deliberative' and 'direct' democracy into electoral practices (think US presidential primaries, or Californian referenda on public services) tends to create less efficiency, and arguably less democracy, as powerful elites take over and manipulate the

process. But their overly fast dismissal of the role of the ideal matters. For what proponents of more direct democratic methods are typically suggesting is not simply that we at present do live under the 'folk theory', but that we need to create an electorate that more resembles the ideal of participatory equals. Such proponents of direct democracy may be misguided about the prospects of this working out well (indeed, Achen and Bartels give sobering evidence that this is so). But the authors overbalance by having a tendency to treat electorates as static monoliths of cock-eyed self-interest. In turn, they are too quick to dismiss those who suspect there is—or might be—more dynamism in the offing.

Achen and Bartels' second main target is the theory that voters act 'retrospectively' at election times: judging incumbents on past performances and rewarding or punishing accordingly, thereby projecting past experiences onto future expectations. This is more or less what Schumpeter thought was going on, and be considered that democracy's great advantage was that it kicked out underperformers and rascals. But Achen and Bartels claim that voters are actually terrible at making accurate retrospective judgements about government policy, as well as at inferring future performance probabilities based on available evidence. Two of their findings are striking. The first is that events entirely outside government control can have an enormous impact on electoral performance. For example, in the 1912 US presidential election, Woodrow Wilson suffered a massive 10 percentage point drop on the Jersey Shore due to a spate of shark attacks, something he could have done nothing about. More generally, and consistently throughout the twentieth century, whether the preceding year had been too wet or too dry was one of the strongest and most consistent predictors of how incumbents would perform amongst rural American voters. In other words: it doesn't matter what governments do, they'll get blamed for the bad things and (albeit less consistently) credited with the good things—even if they played no role in either.

The second striking finding is that one of the most decisive factors in whether incumbents are re-elected is if individuals personally became better off in the six months prior

to a vote. Not so much 'it's the economy, stupid', just 'how's my back-pocket?' Yet incumbents are seldom responsible for the short-term income fluctuations voters experience in the run-up to elections. So even if electorates are trying to reward or punish government via retrospective voting (which, it would seem, many aren't even doing anyway), they frequently just get it wrong.

Again, much of what Achen and Bartels says is convincing. But they risk overcooking the thesis if we are supposed to infer a wholesale abandonment of retrospective voting theory. It may be true that individually voters are bad at tracking what is and is not an incumbent's fault. But if they get it wrong individually, they also surely also sometimes get it right en masse. This is a feature, not a bug: democracy is geared to get it right like this, even if imperfectly and in a roundabout way. Whereas a stopped clock tells the right time twice a day by accident, democracy stumbles its way to the right outcomes imperfectly, but purposefully. Although some good incumbents may be unfairly pilloried, and some bad ones undeservedly rewarded, overall the system is structured so as to promote the general interests of the ruled. Governments may get blamed when they don't deserve it. But chances are, in the long run, they will get blamed when they do deserve it. And then the rascals get thrown out. The real-world manifestation is imperfect, but the idealised modelling isn't as catastrophically redundant as the authors imply. The data may all be exactly as Achen and Bartels present it, but the final interpretation has to take a more comprehensive view, because democracy is best assessed in the round, not case by case.

There is a risk here that we tip over from scepticism about rose-tinted theories of elections into cynicism about democracy as a form of government. Such cynicism risks being deepened by the fifty-one snappy essays constituting *More Sex, Lies, and the Ballot Box*. Each penned by a separate expert on some feature of the electoral process and made accessible to lay readers, these punchy entries are often highly informative, as well as interesting. Many also seem grist to the Achen and Bartels mill: election

campaigns make little difference to final results; time of year has a big impact on turnout (winter is bad); voters are inconsistent between what they claim they want and their support of the policies needed to deliver it; in one US poll 82 per cent of Democrats thought Jesus would support tighter gun control laws, versus 67 per cent of Republicans being sure that he wouldn't. And so on.

More Sex, Lies and the Ballot Box, like its predecessor volume, *Sex, Lies and the Ballot Box*, does not set out to be depressing. But it risks having that effect. Achen and Bartels are, by contrast, forthright in describing their results in such terms. But from there, it's easy to slide into cynicism: that the electorate (including, as Achen and Bartels emphasise, supposed experts) are partisan and irrational; that it's still the economy, stupid; and hence that democracy is, if not a sham, then so shoddy as to be suspect.

Actually, Achen and Bartels are clear to stipulate that they do not think that democracy is a sham, or even suspect—only that we should see it for what it is, heroically endorsing it, warts and all. This is, again, Schumpeter-redux. It is also subtly wrong. The image of the heroic theorist climbing down from the cleanliness of the ideal into the dirt of the real only works if we cling onto the folk-theory assumption that what would be most favourable is indeed a world of virtuous civic participants, meaning that the grubby one of irrational and selfish messiness that we actually have is necessarily a lamentable second-best. But that's like being an atheist who judges everything by the standard of what God would have commanded, were He real. It is true that in the case of democracy, the virtues of the system lie not at all in the virtues of the citizenry. A genuinely realist proponent of democracy, however, does not lament, but celebrates, that fact.

King's College, Cambridge

The educational road to socialism

Simon Mohun

Socialist Optimism: An Alternative Political Economy for the Twenty-First Century, by Paul Auerbach. Palgrave Macmillan. 522 pp. £29.99.

The deadweight of the historical experience of the Soviet experiment continues to hang heavy today. First, there is confusion as to what the term 'socialist' means. Thus prominent Labour opponents of Corbyn and McDonnell at the party's conference in September 2016, on being pressed by BBC's *Newsnight* to agree or disagree that they were 'socialists', would not own the appellation without it being qualified by the adjective 'democratic', as if 'dictatorial' or 'authoritarian' or 'totalitarian' socialism were not an oxymoron. Second, there is confusion as to the guiding principles of a socialist economy. Fairness and equality, to which most would vigorously assent, are not at all straightforward on detailed examination, and are difficult to combine with any generalised operation of markets; yet serious guidance, intervention and regulation of markets has never been conspicuously successful in the UK, and neither has any attempt to replace markets with some other mechanism of resource allocation. And third, there is confusion as to how socialism can be achieved. While most would blench at much of the historical experience of Bolshevism, its alternatives have hardly been crowned with stunning success.

All of this is part of the 'crisis of social democracy': on the one hand, why should voters be convinced by those arguing for 'capitalism-lite' when they can vote for those advocating the real thing? Yet, on the other, if there is no alternative to capitalism-lite, then it becomes an argument over who can manage capitalism better, those in favour of capitalism or those against it, and that is hardly any contest. So arguments morph into those of what policies can best promote economic growth, since increasing the pie attenuates the problems of its division, with

barely lip-service paid to any reconciliation of growth with looming environmental catastrophe.

Paul Auerbach has plunged into this maelstrom with *Socialist Optimism*. His thesis is that despite the failure of Soviet-style central planning, Western social democracy has failed to develop any sort of alternative, seeing its role as rather to alleviate the worst excesses of capitalism. But alleviation has always drawn back from confronting the realities of class power, so that practical policies in support of a commitment to fairness and equality have always ended in disappointment. Auerbach suggests that what is needed is not an 'alleviationist' approach, but a developmental one, centred on developing the full range of human potentialities. A socialist trajectory then is one of a growing capacity and aptitude (the two developing together) to take democratic control over all aspects of human existence, from the most mundane parts of daily life to the higher reaches of public affairs. This requires in turn very radical reforms of how the young are brought up, both within the home and outside it (in preschool, school and post-school education).

The first third of the book considers the historical record of top-down planning. On the basis of the emergence of very large corporations within which planning was essential for both administrative and competitive survival, a 'technocratic' view of planning emerged towards the end of the nineteenth century and onwards. This technocratic view, absorbing such developments as Taylor's 'scientific management', celebrated plan rationality and efficiency, with tight control over workforce activity. It was this view that was absorbed by the Bolsheviks (despite some lip-service to workers' control) and it was integral to the subsequent Soviet construction of the 'developmental state'. But its association with brutal and murderous dictatorship can hardly be argued to have advanced the socialist cause, and Auerbach neatly details its failure on every planning dimension but the crudely quantitative. Moreover, the foundation of this technocratic planning in the development of the large corporation in capitalism turned out to be misplaced, because the era of the large

corporation as monopoly was historically specific. Post-golden age, competition has intensified, large-firm hegemony has unravelled and knowledge and technique have become much more widely dispersed. With this transformation of the technological environment, advocates of top-down planning have come to be seen as irrelevant. And since top-down technocratic planning was some distance from the free association of the direct producers as (elliptically) envisaged by Marx, this was perhaps no bad thing.

One of Auerbach's major themes is that the failures of central planning must be disentangled from issues such as the lack of democratic traditions in pre-1917 Russia, or the psychopathology of Stalin's personality. Central planning, he argues, has failed whenever and wherever it has been tried. And yet it was not a free market lack of planning that bested the Soviet system. It was rather a particular type of capitalism. In some countries (Japan and South Korea, for example), state planning played a critical developmental role. No less important were countries such as the USA, in which technological advances were driven by non-market forms of finance and organisation—indirectly via funding of scientific training in universities, and directly via procurement of and payment for scientific and technological advance through Department of Defence grants. So for Auerbach, the historical record suggests that genuine progress towards a better society involves large-scale and radical state commitment to education and human development. That such states have been capitalist states is less important; what is more important is the separation of policies promoting education and human development from the logic of the capitalist employment of labour. Where that separation has occurred—indeed, been promoted—capitalist societies have done much better than traditional centrally planned economies, and much better than those capitalist societies where that separation is absent. When the left has ignored this reality, seen education as superstructural and opposed human capital-inspired reforms based on market mechanisms, it has too often confined itself to supporting an often insupportable status

quo, with no alternative emancipatory programme to offer.

The second third of the book pursues this theme by considering how policies structured around education and equality have been successful in the past in promoting human development, and likely will remain so in the future. After surveying the statistical evidence relating education to growth rates, successive chapters contrast the individualistic approach to education with a social and historical perspective, explore the role of learning outside schooling in work and in the general process of living, examine US public policy towards education, technology and industrial enterprise as exemplifying a socially embedded and complex process somewhat distant from unbridled individualism and consider how the 'education causes economic growth' argument is better seen in terms of 'human development causes economic development', with human development being seen as an end in itself.

If the second third of the book makes the case that low levels of inequality and high levels of economic security foster human development, its final third considers the obstacles to the vision proposed of socialist optimism within a capitalist market economy—of, that is, combining a socialist focus on economic and social equality without neglecting the requirements of a capitalist market economy. How difficult is it to pursue such a combination? The obvious remark is that in capitalist societies there are severe resource constraints to the provision of an education (treated broadly from early childhood interventions to postschool work-related learning) that is developmental and transformative rather than alleviationist—an education that is not contingent upon household circumstances but rather compensates for social deprivation and economic insecurity. Consequently, Auerbach surveys the sorts of government policies that might seriously bear down on those resource constraints that ensure the continuation of

deprivation and insecurity. The list is not unfamiliar: full employment, the active pursuit of equality, guaranteed income programmes, decent and affordable housing, a reorientation of taxation, the proper provision of social care, the curbing of the power and importance of the financial sector, the democratisation of the work environment, and so on.

This, for Auerbach, is not a revolution, a quick fix, a discontinuous change. It is rather a long-term developmental path which seeks, via the transformation of education in its broadest sense, to enhance human capacities, social justice and democratic control. This he regards as a socialism that is both aspirational and achievable, but it does require an avowed optimism about human potentialities, to set against the more cynical pessimism that is currently fashionable.

Auerbach has presented a densely argued book which surveys a vast literature and argues for an approach that builds upon a variety of nascent trends in capitalist society. Ultimately, he presents a convincing picture of what socialism might mean. But it remains a set of arguments about possibilities, and there is no discussion of how those possibilities might be realised in practice. Seriously eroding the power and privileges of those who currently benefit from inequalities, from the lack of social justice and from the hierarchical organisation of economic life might possibly generate resistance from capitalism's beneficiaries, and Auerbach does not present any political analysis of how a gradualist approach might nonetheless prevail. While this is a book well worth reading for its arguments and its vision of what might be possible, and few can quarrel with the necessity for such a vision, actually achieving it in practice is something else again. In that sense, Auerbach has only given us half the story.

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