

the leopard may have changed its spots, but it is still a leopard. *The New Depression* fails to engage with the monopolistic nature of the multinational companies that stride our planet, with the socialist theory of capitalist crisis, or to see the world-embracing hegemonic role of the US and its stake in global inequality. It is an interesting book, however, crammed with tables and statistics, together with insights into the economic policy of the US and the mind-set of Ben Bernanke. It is definitely worth a read if you have the opportunity and the time.

John Daniels

Socialist Register

Leo Panitch, Greg Albo and Vivek Chibber (editors), *The Question of Strategy: Socialist Register 2013*, Merlin Press, 320 pages, ISBN 9780850366310, £16.95

The 2013 edition of *Socialist Register* is titled *The Question of Strategy*. However, because of the themes which this edition addresses, it could be titled ‘What is to be Done?’ The editors have designed this volume in conjunction with the *Registers* for 2011 and 2012. The aim of those two volumes was to analyze the global financial and economic crisis. The 2013 volume extends that analysis, but offers a more concentrated focus on the ‘choices faced by the Left today, the models of strategy available to it, and the innovations that are being made by groups as they organize in diverse settings’. (SR2013, p.ix)

The editors’ preface is particularly appropriate. It offers the reader a guide through the nineteen essays which make up the volume, but it also draws the important political lessons from recent political history, and offers a conjunctural analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of post-2007 opposition to the continuing neo-liberal assault. It notes, firstly, that mobilizations against the neo-liberal solution have, ‘for the first time since the 1980s, put the question of capitalism back on the political agenda’, and secondly, that class politics are beginning to exercise their power. The power of neo-liberalism is confronting ‘the ninety-nine percent’ (pp.ix-x). The weaknesses of the Left are noted; firstly, the limitations of political organizational forms, including European social democratic parties, trades unions and Leninist parties, limit the responses available; secondly, the enduring strength of the capitalist state has contributed to the failure of the Left to analyze adequately a response. The editors write:

‘For now, in this world, the hard reality is that capitalism is in economic crisis, but politically secure – even if some regimes are experiencing instability.’ (p.xi).

The essays in *The Question of Strategy* address three related themes, drawing from a wide range of actual historical global experiences. One is to contrast the practices and ideas of ‘horizontalism’ – mass, popular movements and anti-bureaucratic activism such as the ‘occupy’ and ‘uncut’ – with traditional forms of organization such as political parties and trades unions. Social democratic governments across Europe are seen by many, active in the ‘movements’, as part of the problem, failing to contribute acceptable solutions. In addition, Left activism in response to the crisis of capital during the late 1960s to mid-1970s has not left a lasting legacy, it is contended. More recent examples include countries such as Egypt where mass movements have played an important role in opposing or removing reactionary governments but have, so far, failed to consolidate a continuing political solution.

A second theme focuses on the relevance and success (or not) of European style parliamentarism in contrast with Leninist models of political organization. Charles Post defends the Leninist model, as it was conceived and functioned in Russia before 1923, and argues that detractors either draw on the Stalinist (post-1923) practice or confuse Leninism with Blanquism. The model offered in the essays by Charles Post and Michael Lebowitz argues that the party of Lenin emerged in synchronicity with the actions of workers and peasants and sought to co-ordinate their diverse activity into a coherent political project; the revolutionary party should lead through its consistent practice, gaining leadership because of its organic links with the working class.

The third theme considers the continuing relevance and importance of recognising whether ‘the state’ should be at the heart of socialist theory and practice. The modern history of European labour movements has witnessed the combination of parliamentarism and extra-parliamentary struggle, which succeeded in building the social state with direct taxation at its core. The recent historical failure to defend the importance of fair and direct taxation for social need has allowed the argument to move to a focus on the individual and to be characterised as unfair taxation. Opponents of the shared burden of taxation have pulled on this loose thread in the centre of the network of social provision, to the detriment of social provision and the ideas which underpin it. Neo-liberal theorists and politicians do not mistakenly ignore the state. They have taken advantage of the political conjuncture, including the general silence of the Left, to employ the state to secure their advantage. Private finance initiatives, public private partnerships, and privatisations are state aided strategies that subsidise capitalism.

Greg Albo's opening essay, 'The Crisis and Economic Alternatives', reprises and examines the principal arguments, including the approach adopted in France under the leadership of François Hollande. He elaborates the continuing strength of the global neo-liberal approach and considers the failure to develop a viable alternative. For example, in the United Kingdom, the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) remains overwhelmingly committed to the Blairite accommodation with neo-liberalism. Critical voices offer only mild variations to 'austerity', and none offers a vision which leads beyond capitalism. The PLP strategy is mainly limited to rejecting government policies. Meanwhile, outside Parliament, public demonstrations called by the Trade Union Congress engage millions. The ideological power of parliamentary democracy and of the wider economic system continues to exercise its influence. The capitalist state, Sam Gindin writes, 'constitutes a specific field of political power and struggle; it cannot be evaded in strategizing exits from the crisis' (p.19). An effective strategy requires the Left to build the struggle in workplaces and communities, 'institutionalizing and collectivizing struggles while deepening democratic controls' (p.19). His essay, 'Rethinking Unions, Registering Socialism', suggests that the dominant practice of the Left is to revert to economic reasoning and assume that every economic crisis erupts into a crisis of the state, whereas the state is a complex economic, political and social formation, transformation of which requires multiple ruptures.

It is immaterial how many national demonstrations or general strikes are organised. As Eli Zaretsky says in his essay, 'Reconsidering the American Left', 'it is not enough to say "no" ... an accumulation of loudly screamed no's' is never sufficient if they fail to represent actual challenges to the hegemony of the state in all of its dispersed forms (p.346). Proletarian demands for democracy, in communities and workplaces, have never been more relevant.

Malcolm Ball

Pecuniary Temptation

Bernard Shaw, *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism, Capitalism, Sovietism and Fascism*, a new edition with a Foreword by Polly Toynbee, 446 pages, Alma Classics 2012, hardback ISBN 9781847492432, £12.99

This famous book of Shaw's was first published in 1927, with a revised edition published by Penguin in 1937, when it was that I first read it.