

Reviews

Richard J Evans; *Eric Hobsbawm: a Life in History* (London: Little, Brown; 2019), 1408707411, 785pp

Biographical advantages

This is truly a monumental biography, well deserving of its subject. At nearly 800 pages, eight-one of them endnotes, it is not likely to be superseded anytime in the near future. Eight pages of photographs are included. Evans himself, if not quite on the same level as Hobsbawm, is a deservedly renowned historian, with among much else, an acclaimed trilogy on the Third Reich, an effective dismantling of postmodernism in history and with David Irving's scalp to his credit.

In his preface he expresses a considerable admiration for Eric Hobsbawm, in both his work and his personality: 'Eric was as far as I can tell entirely without malice or ill will. He was kind, generous and loyal to a fault'. This despite being far removed from Hobsbawm's politics. Evans has always been, in his own words, a social democrat who, 'could never accept the fundamental premises of Communism'. He defines his project in this volume as being to present his subject to twenty-first century readers and allow them to reach their own conclusions.

For this biography Evans enjoyed the cooperation of Hobsbawm's family and access to his enormous archive, including letters and diaries. Thus we also learn of his personal life including his two marriages and longer or shorter liaisons between these, and at one point having admitted to contemplating suicide. He was in addition a relentless globetrotter, mostly but not entirely to Europe and the Americas (he was especially esteemed in Brazil). His ancestors

were immigrant Polish Jews fleeing Tsarist pogroms and his father a British Empire official, hence Hobsbawm's birth in Alexandria in 1917. The family name was originally 'Ostbaum' meaning fruit tree, and took its later forms through mistranscription by an immigration official. Some relatives spelt it Hobsbaum, including a cousin, the poet and critic Philip. Living at the time in Berlin, Hobsbawm briefly joined a communist youth group to combat Nazism, and the family, being British citizens, moved to London, where he was looked after by relatives due to his parents' premature deaths.

'A Freshman who Knows about Everything' is the title of the chapter covering his student days at King's College, where his intelligence was remarked upon and he was naturally invited to join the famous Apostles 'secret society'. Kathleen Cornforth with whom I was acquainted and knew him at that time through the CP, once told me that even then he was evidently a brilliant intellect – and very much aware of the fact. There is no suggestion though that Hobsbawm was in the same category as some slightly earlier Cambridge students who concealed their communist attachments until they could serve as moles for the Soviet secret service. Evans makes it clear however that, when he was a Second World War army conscript it was not long before MI5 took an interest in him and his communist principles, thanks to the wall newspapers he edited and displayed, and that surveillance continued thereafter throughout his career, for a time blocking his academic promotion. Evans knows about this and about his subsequent relations with the CP leadership by receiving access to MI5 records, including those achieved through bugging devices planted in the Party headquarters.

The CP Historians' Group and dissidence

In 1946 the Communist Party, inspired by A L Morton's *A People's History of England*, published in 1938, established an Historians' Group, divided into four sections according to historical theme being concentrated upon, in order to develop Morton's insights, and

Hobsbawm played a prominent role within it. Describing it in later decades, he stated that: 'Both we and the Party saw ourselves not as a sect of true believers amid the surrounding darkness, but ideally as leaders of a broad progressive movement such as we had experienced in the 1930s' (*Rebels and their Causes*, ed. Maurice Cornforth, Lawrence & Wishart, 1978, p32).

Evans however in his adjacent chapters 'Outsider in the Movement 1946-1954' and 'A Dangerous Character 1954-1962' devotes only limited space to the Group, and within that mostly to its role in the creation of the journal *Past & Present* (1954) and the disruption which overtook it, along with the CP in general, in 1956-57 following Khrushchev's revelations about Stalin in February 1956 and the violent military suppression of the Hungarian revolution in November of that year. Up until that point the Historians' Group had been largely exempt from the critical interference from the Party authority that was experienced by other similar cultural organisations such as the Writers' Group. John Saville has attributed this to the fact that pre-1914 British history, upon which the Group concentrated, was of less concern to the Soviet authorities and their explicit 'line' than was imaginative writing, where participants were expected to propound their adherence to 'socialist realism' and campaign for it.

Hobsbawm was in the unusual position of sympathising and sometimes acting with the 1956 dissidents in the Group and the Party while nevertheless retaining his membership. It is clear from the clandestine M15 recordings that the leadership, after unfriendly discussions with him, but preferring to avoid expulsion, wished that he would leave along with other critics. He had after all signed a letter with them and published it in the non-CP press, and the leaders were disappointed when he declined to exit on his own initiative. Back in the thirties nonconformists were regarded even more unfavourably than opponents (heretics worse than pagans) but in the aftermath of 1956-7 matters were very different. After an initial hostile outburst it was plainly stated that resigners would be welcomed back and without being obliged to repudiate their dissidence. I recall myself

and friends being gratefully accepted into membership in 1962 with no critical reference to our previous New Left connections. It is therefore not surprising that Hobsbawm's continued membership was tolerated without public rebuke by the Party leadership, even if somewhat unwillingly; he was, after all, something of an academic asset (Evans, p252). Between 1957 and the 1980s there were scarcely any expulsions from the CP apart from avowed Trotskyists.

If Evans has only minimal comment to make on Hobsbawm's activity in the Historians' Group prior to its disintegration – and the article mentioned above is absent from his index which contains the very full list of Hobsbawm's writings – reference to its CP successor, the History Group, in which he participated, is even less in evidence. That part of the Party organisation lacked the complex structure of the Historians' Group, and though containing some of its leading members along with from Hobsbawm, such as A L Morton and Maurice Dobb, together with some able newcomers, it could not boast a similar galaxy of talent and continued in a role that was comparatively modest even by British communist standards. The later Socialist History Society, emerging in 1992 from the ashes of the History Group, is not mentioned at all, nor the fact that Hobsbawm was its Honorary President until his death.

Aftermath

Another outcome of the crisis years was the monthly CP journal *Marxism Today*, edited by James Klugmann, and Hobsbawm did contribute to that, initially with an article entitled 'History and the "Dark Satanic Mills"' (1958) in which he attacked the notion being then propagated by some economic historians that living conditions had improved for the mass of industrial workers in the early nineteenth century phase of the industrial revolution. This article is referred to by Evans (p509). He continued to write for that journal during the next three decades, with one later article generating a particular sensation.

By the sixties the resonances of the mid-fifties, together with further travails such as the revelation of electoral malpractice by communist leaders in the Electrical Trades Union, the Sino-Soviet quarrel and the challenge of first the New Left and subsequently Trotskyist organisations in the sixties and early seventies, were beginning to work on the character of the CPGB; it was becoming a significantly different organisation. One symptom of this was the leadership's decision to write the Party's own history, a project put in the hands of James Klugmann, with the first volume covering the early days being published in 1968. To this event Hobsbawm responded very critically, writing in *New Left Review* that Klugmann had produced a very inadequate history, merely using 'his considerable gifts to avoid writing a disreputable one' – later reprinted in *Revolutionaries*. All the problematic aspects of the Party's early days had been glossed over, particularly the Comintern influence, with Zinoviev its head mentioned only in connection with the Zinoviev Letter, a British Secret Service forgery. 'He is paralysed', declared Hobsbawm, 'by the impossibility of being both a good historian and a loyal functionary' (Hobsbawm, *Revolutionaries*, Abacus, 2007, pp8-9).

Evans, does not mention this particular episode, but we learn of other political matters in which Hobsbawm was involved, including assistance to Algerian militants in the early sixties during their war of independence. By that time Hobsbawm was embarked on his voluminous historical attainment, of which his renowned tetralogy was only the centrepiece and which we learn about from Evans in great detail. 'Back in England Eric continued to try and build his career as an historian.' (Evans, p329) which included publisher's rejections as well as acceptances.

Intellectual celebrity and rationale

Naturally from the early sixties Hobsbawm's monumental historical output is the focus of Evans's later chapters, with titles such as

'Paperback Writer' and 'Intellectual Guru', all being developed most effectively throughout Evans's sympathetic but balanced volume – his two final chapters prior to his conclusion are 'Jeremiah 1987-1999' and 'National Treasure 1999-2012'. Undoubtedly Hobsbawm lived 'A Life in History' in more senses than one. In the obvious meaning he was a professional historian despite his teenage passion being more for serious imaginative literature. Indeed Evans suggests that interest was important, because: 'He came to the practice of history, having read a vast number of classic works of poetry and fiction in several languages...' giving rise to, '... his ability to illustrate historical argument with contemporary anecdote and quotation ...' (p661). He became a renowned interpreter of global historical change, especially through his tetralogy covering the years from the French Revolution to the extinction of the Soviet Union and its bloc in the years 1989-91.

In another sense of living history he was himself a very conscious participant in much of twentieth century history thanks to the impact of his works. In later life he also made a considerable impact on UK politics following the expression of his analysis of how that was proceeding in the nineteen-seventies and eighties. His interests were not confined to history and politics for he was also, under the pseudonym 'Francis Newton', a well-published jazz critic.

His historical oeuvre, as Evans makes clear and as has previously been commented on by others, was generally appreciated by other historians and even some from oppositional viewpoints, despite also in some instances a few foaming diatribes from ultra-reactionary commentators unable to contain their bile that any unrepentant communist should achieve such public fame and renown. However the general consensus summed up in his 2012 obituaries was, 'great historian, pity about the politics'. Such an attitude, from which Evans is largely exempt, misses the essential point. The conclusion that can be drawn from this biography is that Hobsbawm was intensely conscious of the perennial struggle by subjugated masses and minorities over the centuries against their ruling oligarchies – that was his

passion. He wrote on peasants and social bandits as well as workers, though neglecting women's role – and viewed the communist movement as the culminating expression of that project even if in his latter days he'd largely lost confidence in its effectiveness. In other words he was a great historian because he was also a communist, not in spite of it. 'On the one hand he was wedded at a very deep emotional level to the idea of belonging to the communist movement, but on the other hand he was absolutely not willing to submit to the discipline the Party demanded' (p352).

Controversy and conclusion

The final historical/political tumult in which Hobsbawm participated was the result of a talk of his, later published in *Marxism Today* in 1978 under the title 'The Forward March of Labour Halted', arguing that the apparent contemporary advance of the left during those years in industrial and political terms was based on shaky foundations in view of the numerical shrinkage of the industrial working class, and so in consequence was in danger of being reversed. This drew accusations both from inside the CP and more broadly of pessimism and defeatism if not outright renegacy. Such accusations were strengthened in the following decade when he argued that to defeat Thatcher a united front was needed between the Labour Party and the SDP. He and *Marxism Today* were accused (including by John Saville) of laying the groundwork for New Labour, which is very problematic, but beyond question this development speeded the disintegration of the CPGB.

Although Evans covers these developments, including Hobsbawm's remark that Blair was 'Thatcher in trousers', the closing chapters of his discussion focus more on the controversies occasioned, in the US and France as well as Britain, by Hobsbawm's historical output. The concluding sentences of the volume emphasise that 'His influence is thus difficult to pin down because, while it has been very wide, it has also been very diffuse and many-sided ...his books and essays are

still read and debated today, and will continue to be read and debated long into the future’.

Willie Thompson

Chris Holmsted Larsen, *Den folkekære stalinist: En biografi om Carl Madsen*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2017, ISBN 9788702220353, 543pp

Carl Madsen (1903-78) was not the most central figure in the *Danmarks kommunistiske parti* (Communist Party of Denmark or DKP) and did not hold any important positions in the party leadership. He did, however, achieve some prominence due to his activity as a lawyer who sought to challenge the capitalist system through his performances in the courtroom. Chris Holmsted Larsen’s biography on Carl Madsen is, therefore, an interesting addition to the history both of the communist party in Denmark and the communist movement as a whole.

The biography deals with the whole of Madsen’s life, but the main emphasis is on his experiences of internment during the war and his activities from the mid-1940s to the mid-1970s. Given that Holmsted Larsen regards the year of Madsen’s joining the DKP in 1928 as important for his opinions throughout his life, the book would have benefited from a more detailed analysis of his attitudes in the early phase of his communist career. The early part of the book does, however, include an interesting chapter on a communist as a civil servant in a capitalist country, Madsen having worked in various government departments from the late 1920s.

Holmsted Larsen has with good reason dealt in detail with the arrest and subsequent internment of Madsen and some three hundred other communists at the end of June 1941. The internment, which in Madsen’s case ended with his escape in August 1943, was regarded by him and other communists as an action not in harmony with Denmark’s constitution, and the experience of this

injustice left a permanent mark on Madsen and guided his activities in the years that followed. In this orientation he was supported by the fact that after his escape, living illegally in Copenhagen, he began to work for the Danish Freedom Council which was founded by several resistance groups, communists included, in September 1943. Madsen's task was to prepare the future trials of those who had collaborated with the German occupying forces. After the liberation in May 1945 he was nominated as one of the state attorneys charged with bringing these plans to fruition. The task proved not to be one of long duration, for Madsen was discharged from his post as state attorney in November 1945 having been caught driving his car while drunk.

After his discharge Madsen returned to work as a lawyer. In the 1940s and 1950s general criticism of the bourgeois judicial system and the revelation of the misery, injustice and double standards of capitalist society became an essential part of Madsen's performances in court. Holmsted Larsen has concentrated on cases where Madsen defended persons not connected with the communist party. One of these cases was the defence of Palle Hardrup, who in 1951 had been convicted as a double murderer and bank robber. In 1956 a special appeal court sought to establish whether Hardrup had committed the murders under hypnosis. Not even the fact that Hardrup had been a Nazi and collaborated with the German occupying forces against the resistance movement prevented Madsen from becoming his lawyer. By means of this case Madsen wanted to attack the way in which the police and judicial authorities took advantage of statements by psychiatrists in order to get the accused incarcerated in mental hospitals.

Holmsted Larsen has also included the cases where Madsen defended radical youth activists in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In particular, the case against Vietnam demonstrators in 1968-9 gave Madsen an opportunity to attack the police strongly and speak of their violence and Nazi connections. His rather surprising participation in the defence of Freetown Christiania in Copenhagen in 1976

was for Madsen also a continuation of his earlier criticism of the whole capitalist system.

Thus, Madsen's interest in attacking the repressive institutions of the state had a basis in his experiences during and after the Nazi occupation, but his insistence on focusing on the police and judicial system was also nourished by the general example of the labour movement using the imprisonment of its members and court decisions as proofs of the injustices of the capitalist system. The trials where Danish communists were accused and convicted of espionage and high treason in the 1950s reinforced Madsen's belief that the Danish judicial system was biased. Holmsted Larsen has also carefully analysed how his participation in the congresses and show trials against Nazi war criminals in the GDR and Soviet Union encouraged Madsen to launch a campaign claiming that in the Danish courts there had been and still were Nazi-minded judges who had been guilty of acts against the constitution during the occupation.

Carl Madsen did not only fight for his ideas in the courts, but between 1966 and 1975 also gave voice to them in a number of books. In publishing these Madsen wanted especially to challenge the dominant view of the occupation years in Denmark. The books were a mixture of personal recollections, historical research of a sort, political pamphlets. According to some critics, they were also full of hatred. Nevertheless, they sold well – between 20,000 and 40,000 copies each – due partly to the fact that Madsen, in spite of his puritanical morals, chose a publishing house which specialised in cheap novels and flirted with pornography. The populism of these titles clearly meant setting aside these differences, and the treatment here would have benefited from a deeper analysis of Madsen's populism.

Holmsted Larsen has in his book analysed beautifully the importance of the practice of law for Carl Madsen, but this obviously also had implications for Madsen's interpretation of politics. In particular, the roots of Madsen's dogmatism may have been also lain the study and practice of law. In the title of his book, Holmsted Larsen has characterised Madsen as a stalinist. He does not, however, reflect

very much on the sources of Madsen's stalinism. According to this account, Madsen was a stalinist because he joined the communist party during the so-called third period, adopted its hardline policy and basically followed this policy throughout his life. This strict policy came up in negative attitudes towards cooperation with social democrats and others, work in parliament and condemnation of people who thought differently. Madsen's stalinism was also evident in his appraisal of the system in the Soviet Union and other so-called socialist countries – he was blind to their faults and mistakes.

This was in many ways in harmony with the stance of the isolated DKP. Nevertheless, Madsen, being a kind of an outsider in regard to party politics, was probably even more inclined to dogmatism than the party itself. Chris Holmsted Larsen has nicely drawn the parallel between the hope of Madsen and the DKP's hopes to bring to justice all those who had cooperated with the Germans during the occupation, and the very different developments in practice once the Freedom Council had entered a government with politicians who had collaborated with the Germans. In the 1950s and 1960s the relationship between Madsen's stance and the party's is, unfortunately, given too little attention. However, Madsen's collision with the party leadership from the late 1960s up to his expulsion in July 1975 is covered splendidly.

Holmsted Larsen has succeeded marvelously in his object of demonstrating the nuances in the persistent view of stalinists as persons whose sole aim was the preparation of high treason. Nevertheless, his characterisation of Madsen as *folkeker*, that is, as a very popular person among the people, sounds something of an exaggeration, although Madsen was certainly appreciated by the people he defended in the court and his books sold very well. The aim of the epithet is clearly to indicate that even stalinists were versatile persons.

Chris Holmsted Larsen's book of Carl Madsen and his performances in the courtroom and elsewhere is a good example of the diverse ways in which communists challenged the capitalist system. It also reveals the significance of the connection between interpreta-

tions of history and day-to-day political questions in the communist movement.

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Massimo Asta, *Girolamo Li Causi, Un rivoluzionario del Novecento*, Rome: Carocci, 2017, ISBN 978884309048-3, 327pp

It is difficult to decide whether the life and the political activity of the Italian Communist leader Girolamo Li Causi is more ascribed to the history of the Italian state's struggle against Mafia, or whether it is an exemplary trajectory of the Italian communist movement from its early steps until 1970s. Perhaps the answer is that it is impossible to separate the two themes: it was in fact the activist Li Causi who, in the immediate aftermath of the WW2, refounded the Italian Communist Party (PCI) in Sicily upon the pillar of a radical anti-Mafia politics at times when the international context and the confrontational Italian politics relegated the question to the margins of the democratic discourse. To some extent, it is right to state that for Li Causi the struggle for democracy and Communism could not be split off from the struggle against Mafia culture and practices.

Born in Termini Imerese, near Palermo, in 1896, Girolamo Li Causi's interests in politics were formed during the age of Giolitti and emerged by observing from the South the Liberal regime's inability to realize a real inclusion of workers in national political life. But Li Causi was not a Communist of the first hour: he only joined the party in 1924, leaving the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) in which he had campaigned since 1913 and, most importantly, abandoning his mentor and PSI's Maximalist leader Giacinto Menotti Serrati who had been his professor of economics at Ca' Foscari, in Venice. To Menotti Serrati and his university years Li Causi owed the discovery

of George Sorel, revolutionary socialism and Arturo Labriola, the powerful experience of solidarity during the strikes and the mass protests that spread during the *biennio rosso*, the myth of 'direct action' whose influence constituted the main force in the years of the Resistance against the fascist regime.

A long phase of imprisonment and confinement followed: in the different stages of the detention – Elba, Lucca, Civitavecchia, Ponza, Ventotene – Li Causi had the opportunity to meet other anti-fascists, including the federalist Altiero Spinelli. Together with Pietro Grifone, with whom he shared a cell in the Pontine islands, Li Causi studied financial capital in Italy and the economic policies of fascism. After the fall of the regime, he became a protagonist of the Resistance: he was one of the four members of the Directorate of the Communist Party for the Centre-North and, from 1944 he was transferred to Sicily with the difficult task of combining traditional Sicilian autonomism with Togliatti's new strategy of 'progressive democracy.'

Here, Li Causi was wounded in a Mafia attack during a public rally, suffering permanent damage to his knee. This was only the first of a long list of Mafia attacks against the rising Sicilian peasant movement which culminated with the massacre of Portella della Ginestra, on 1 May 1947. The urgency of these events convinced Li Causi to reaffirm a clear stance on the part of the PCI against the Mafia and to foster a strong union between the working class and the peasant movement, and uphold reasons for the struggle against organized crime. From 1945 to 1960 Li Causi was the secretary of the Sicilian PCI, leading the party, between successes and defeats, in crucial years for the construction of a democratic institutional framework and for the conquest of basic rights for workers. He was a member of the first Parliamentary anti-Mafia Commission (1962) and his last political act ten years later was to underwrite, along with Vincenzo Gatto and Libero Della Briotta, two long-standing anti-Mafia MPs, a document calling for the need to support a public awareness project against the links between Mafia and the political process. After twenty-four years in Parliament Li Causi did not run for the 1972 general elections; like

him, also other communists of his generation such as Pietro Secchia and Emilio Sereni, were not chosen as candidates. Thus, began a new and completely different phase of Italian Communism which would end with the fall of the Berlin wall.

To use Kevin Morgan's categories (2016), Li Causi was, for the powerful Italian communist political culture, a 'tribune' and, at the same time, a 'martyr'. To some extent he personified what today we might see as a sort of libertarian and 'Red populism'. It is not by chance that during the key 1948 elections, among the records of speeches the PCI decided to distribute, together with those by Palmiro Togliatti and Giuseppe Di Vittorio there were also speeches made by Girolamo Li Causi.

Biography studies is not a very common genre for Italian historiography, especially in PCI and Communist historiography, so Massimo Asta's book is a welcome contribution. Through the prism of Li Causi's biography we are able to read the matrix of political opinions, organisational practices, decision-making processes, cultural traditions and ideological positions during the years of Italy's 'democratic literacy'; at the same time, through the lens of his experience we can appreciate the tensions between centre and periphery, national and regional, societal and teleological dimensions of political culture, and the complexities and contradictions of one of the largest Communist parties in Europe.

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Katherine Verdery, *My Life as a Spy. Investigations in a Police File*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018, ISBN9780822370819, xvi + 323 pp

In 1973, a 25-year-old American ethnographer was travelling around Transylvania on motorbike in search of a locality whose kinship

networks and customs she could study for her doctoral thesis. Unwittingly, she had strayed into a military zone forbidden to foreigners and was stopped by a Romanian policeman. Unbeknownst to her, this marked the beginning of a Securitate file that, over the next quarter of a century, would expand to nearly 3,000 pages and which she would only consult in 2008. In this extraordinary work – ethnographical and political, as well as autobiographical – Verdery explores with emotion, humour and humility the mechanisms of a vast surveillance system which, while tenaciously invisible, extended into the most intimate corners of her being. With the help of informers, many of them Verdery's friends and objects of study, the Securitate created a 'doppelganger' which ends up destabilising her sense of personal identity as well as trust in the people she had acquainted.

Never without nuance, the acclaimed author of *Transylvanian Villages* and *National Ideology under Socialism*, places her surveillance in discrete historical contexts. In the mid-seventies, Ceaușescu's Romania was still relatively open and prosperous. The state was concerned to thwart and root out foreign spies, but was also keen to cultivate economic relations with the West, and especially the United States with its coveted 'Most Favoured Nation' status. Securitate officers were concerned by the fact that a number of inhabitants of Verdery's chosen village worked in a nearby factory serving the military. But they also wanted to make her 'love' Romania and, unconsciously, serve as an ambassador in her future publications. As the author admits, her own ethnographic research could be construed as a form of 'spying', creating her own web of 'informants' as she sought to find how much collectivisation had really transformed Transylvanian rural society. The fact that many academics, East and West, were also working for their respective intelligence agencies meant that the officers meticulously building up a file on 'Vera' were not lost to delusional paranoia.

The officers concluded that Verdery was a bona fide ethnographer and not spying for military secrets. However, the atmosphere

had changed considerably when she returned to Romania in the 1980s. Ronald Reagan had vowed to destroy the Eastern Bloc, while Ceaușescu, terrified by recent events in Poland, was accelerating payment of the national debt, aggravating shortages in food and fuel. Spy chief Ion Pacepa had defected to the West, dishing dirt on dynastic communism in his memoir *Red Horizons*, while the arrival of Mikhail Gorbachev signalled to an increasingly Ubu-esque *Conducator* that the enemies of Romanian socialism were, indeed, everywhere.

Verdery had not helped her cause by including in the published version of her doctoral thesis some Transylvanian jokes that seemed to slight the Romanian character. She appeared even more suspicious because of her interest in historiography, a central obsession of the regime at that time. Her research in Budapest and consultation of Hungarian sources in Cluj indicated that she must be ‘a friend of Hungary’, whose relations with Bucharest were becoming less and less ‘fraternal’ as the last decade of People’s Democracy unfolded in agonising fashion. Now based in the Hotel Continental, Cluj, Verdery is not only the ‘target’ for ordinary ‘human’ intelligence, gathered notably by academic colleagues, but also listened to and watched by hidden devices. A picture of the author in her underwear adorns this book’s cover.

Indeed, this image of intimacy unknowingly displayed points to the great sense of betrayal and humiliation that Verdery feels as she reads the reports on her and works out the identity of the informants. This is accompanied by guilt: by her very activity in Romania, was she a ‘radioactive’ agent who unintentionally contaminated and poisoned the lives of those she encountered? Verdery will eventually confront former informants and their Securitate handlers, but in a typically thoughtful and humane manner. She resists encouragement from her Romanian colleagues, notably at the Securitate archive CNSAS, to wreak revenge and publicly ‘out’ those who had tracked her movements and words. Informants, she argues, could be recruited out of fear rather than malice, with Securitate officers playing on a

compromised family past or uncertainty about a professional future. Perhaps her American sense of 'friendship' was more superficial and therefore more dispensable than Romanian kinship. Surveillance, the ethnographer also argues, is essentially social: for some, it was a harmless pleasure to spend time with a Securitate officer who took you to a restaurant for a boozy meal and a chat.

The image of the friendly secret policeman is perhaps one of the most disconcerting aspects of this book, at least for those, in Romania and elsewhere, wedded to the myth of totalitarian terror 'behind the Iron Curtain'. Even in the darkest days, people could refuse to work for the Securitate (who, admittedly, had no shortage of potential recruits). Informing could be negotiated in exchange for a favour, especially in the hunger years before 1989. In one case, an officer gets so close to his 'target' that he ends up attending his funeral. In some of the most riveting pages in this book, Verdery tracks down her former officers, armed only with a bunch of flowers. At last visible, these men are charming and intelligent – essential skills for the job – usually well-off from business activities facilitated by their bulging address books, and unashamed of their past lives as 'patriots'. 'I did you no harm' is their insidious refrain. Indeed, Verdery concurs that, from the mid-sixties onwards, Securitate techniques were a far cry from the brutality and thuggery of high Stalinism (often committed by recruits with a past in the Iron Guard). The confusion and sometimes comical communication breakdowns she finds in her own file also problematize the image of a sinister totalitarian monolith.

But the emotional and existential upheaval caused by confronting the file – expressed stylistically by the interweaving of narrative, informer's reports and private journal and correspondence in different fonts – points to a trauma which, we can imagine, would be even more acute for a Romanian after 1989 than for a distinguished visiting scholar. There also remains the question of what really changed after the 'revolution' that the Securitate, for all its ingenuity, could not, or did not want to, prevent (indeed, contrary to myth, and against Ceaușescu's orders, the Securitate were suspiciously consigned

to barracks during the events). At least 40 per cent of Securitate personnel were re-integrated into its successor, the Romanian Information Service, and Verdery even has a brief encounter with two of her past tormentors, still in employment. As the Romanians say: 'The blue-eyed boys are always watching'.

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Balazs Apor, *The Invisible Shining: The Cult of Matyas Rakosi in Stalinist Hungary, 1945-1956*, Budapest: Central European University Press, 2017, ISBN 9789633861929, 415pp

Matyas Rakosi was the undisputed ruler of Hungary for a relatively short period, between 1948 and 1956, but in that time he was the object of one of the most extensive personality cults to flourish in the shadow of the Soviet leader Stalin. Despite a number of factors that might have counted against him, including his petit bourgeois origins, his Jewish family background and his unprepossessing appearance, he was turned by the machinery of cult construction into the infallible leader and guide of the Hungarian people. His name was greeted with rhythmic applause at party gatherings, his birthdays were widely celebrated, many achievements were attributed to him and his portraits were everywhere. His aura, or, in the title of this volume, 'shining', is held to have been invisible because it disappeared after his resignation, leaving as much of a legacy as melted snow.

It would be easy to see the Rakosi cult as an epiphenomenon of the Stalinist one, a fact of limited interest due to its highly derivative nature and monotonous forms. In this fascinating study, Balazs Apor shows us that it is deserving of close attention for at least four reasons. First, the cult was one of the most pervasive in Eastern Europe. Second, it took on, as cults often do, elements of nationalism, which were combined carefully with the international ideology

of the Communist movement. Third, It served a vital purpose in consolidating the hold of the Communist Party on power at a time when it needed build popular support and bind the population to it on an emotional level. Fourth, it was an important factor in the way the party sought to anchor itself in national traditions while positioning itself as a force for modernization that was bringing change to the country.

Apor shows us that it mattered little that Rakosi was not a very exceptional man. He had had his moments of glory when he was put on trial in the mid 1920s and again in the mid 1930s and he had spent fifteen years in prison, but he had few striking personal qualities or gifts. Though the process of cult construction required a physical person to be placed at its centre, it did not particularly matter who that person was. Indeed, Apor goes so far as to argue that the cult of personality was more of a cult of impersonality in which the leader was really an abstract symbol. Though biography was a vital element in the cult, little was ever known about the early life of Rakosi, his family, his tastes or indeed his personality. He was first and foremost the embodiment of a movement and a party and then of a country. When he was described or portrayed, it was somewhat generically as a leader, a teacher and a father. Apor acknowledges that Rakosi may have had a certain personal magnetism and he did not disdain meetings with the people, but there is no evidence that he was genuinely popular. Charisma and popularity, the author asserts, are not indispensable preconditions of cult construction.

Three aspects of this book deserve special comment. First of all, an insightful treatment is offered of the processes of cult creation and perpetuation. Apart from biography, the integration with national traditions and the occupation of space are shown to have been vital parts of the process. The leader's carefully crafted, and substantially falsified, life story was both a justification of his prominence and an example for others. In a political culture in which autobiography played a notable part, the life of the leader served as a model. Hungary had a notable pantheon of leaders and martyrs dating back

to the Middle ages and reaching down to the heroes of the nationalist movement. Rakosi was placed in this noble line while he was also associated with Lenin and Stalin. In official demonstrations, his portrait was always placed in the middle between the two Soviet leaders. Public space was occupied by the regime and innumerable portraits of the leader provided visual confirmation of his centrality in everyday life.

Second, the book provides a useful picture of cult mediators and practioners, that is to say the people who, at different levels, contributed to its workings. Fundamentally, there were three levels of action. At the top, there were Rakosi himself and his close collaborators who had primary responsibility for forming the divine aura of the leader. Below them was the heterogeneous group of party functionaries, bureaucrats, propagandists, intellectuals, artists and teachers whose task was to project the image of the leader towards a wider audience. Finally, there were the low level agitators, grass roots representatives and local officials who were expected to popularise the image of the leader in micro-environments and lead local ritualised expressions of devotion. The most interesting of these levels, in some way, is the intermediate one. Apor does not lump together the people in it in his treatment, but rather looks closely at the place of each category, with the intellectuals and artists having a special function of crafting texts and manufacturing images.

Third, the book assesses the impact of the cult. This is not an easy topic to reseach and Apor is fully cognisant of this. He is sceptical of studies of popular opinion under dictatorships and prefers to refer to 'popular mood'. He explores a number of interesting phenomena including jokes and satirical treatments of the leader, the problem of apathy and monotony, and spontaneous manifestations of the cult. In some ways, the last of these is the most surprising of its aspects. Despite efforts to maintain control over all aspects of it, the cult involved a degree of 'spontaneity and happenstance'. On the one hand, it was good that local artists, amateur poets and shopkeepers wanted to pay their own tributes to the party leader. This was proof

that the effort to diffuse the cult was succeeding. But, on the other, imperfect portraits, exaggerated tributes and shop window creations could easily tip over into ridicule. The butcher who placed a bust of leader made of pork fat in his window had to hastily remove it when the fat began to melt.

This is a volume based on extensive research and reflection that makes an outstanding contribution to the study of personality cults. Illuminated by many comparative references to communist and fascist cults, it provides tools for anyone wishing to understand the mechanisms of leadership and consent in dictatorial regimes.

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Russell Campbell, *Codename Intelligentsia: the Life and Times of the Honourable Ivor Montagu, Filmmaker, Communist, Spy*, Stroud, History Press, 2018, ISBN: 9780750987059, 448pp

Nicholas Griffin, *Ping-Pong Diplomacy: The Secret History Behind the Game That Changed the World*, New York, Skyhorse Publishing, 2015, ISBN: 9781634505567, 336pp

Ivor Montagu, aristocrat, film-maker, journalist, author, communist and (as we now know) spy is usually attributed with a minor part in the histories of British communism: and in some accounts is not mentioned at all. Could it be that this man of many roles was an unremarkable communist, despite having links to some of the fascinating figures in British political history, culture and sport? Unfortunately, Russell Campbell's *Codename Intelligentsia* adds little to refute this, despite some interesting commentary on Montagu's connections with Leon Trotsky, Alfred Hitchcock and John Strachey. In his prologue the author himself alludes, perhaps, to one of the book's central problems, when he describes it as a 'deliberately partial' biography,

focusing mainly on Montagu's work in film and his communist politics. He leaves (in his own words) a 'skimpy epilogue' to deal with the second half of Montagu's life. This makes for a frustrating read at times, (not helped by poor editing) and some of the key aspects of Montagu's life and politics are ignored altogether; we don't hear about his thoughts on China, or his pivotal role in the development of international table tennis. Areas that are discussed often warrant further exploration, including the difficult relationship with his high-flying brother Ewen. While the author alludes to some of the conflicts and dilemmas facing twentieth century communist intellectuals like Montagu, these might have been used to frame story more coherently.

Montagu's espionage, regarded as of sufficient importance to capture the book's title, is disposed of in a penultimate chapter alongside a more interesting discussion of Montagu's polemical interventions during the period of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, which included his denunciation of Chamberlain and the appeasers in his book *The Traitor Class*. He helped stimulate an important discussion both inside and outside the CPGB and this surely merited a chapter of its own. As Campbell himself makes clear, Montague was not a particularly promising recruit to Soviet intelligence given that he held no position in the government, Civil Service or Foreign Office. Indeed, even his Soviet controllers seemed to question his use as an agent and they considered dropping him at an early stage. It appears that he passed on to the Soviets some 'important' information 'that a girl working in a government establishment noticed in one document that the British had broken some Soviet code or other'. MI5's initial interest in Montagu was due to his membership of British-Soviet cultural associations (notably through his promotion of Soviet films). Subsequently, they managed to prevent the 'Honourable Ivor' from entering Russia on a journalist pass in 1940 and helped remove him as leader of the Invasion Committee in his Hertfordshire village. The release of MI5 files has delivered to researchers a combination of ethical dilemmas and important questions over the reliability of using

official sources whose purpose is to gather evidence for surveillance purposes. On occasion, they have also presented fruitful new avenues for research. In some cases the files have revealed valuable evidence which have helped illuminate or challenge existing research findings. Sometimes they have revealed hitherto hidden aspects of the lives of leading communists. However, this biography does not make clear where espionage fits in the packed life of Ivor Montagu and its inclusion does not enhance the overall story.

By contrast, Nicholas Griffin's *Ping-Pong Diplomacy* is a fast-moving account crammed in to fifty two chapters. It is an absorbing tale of politics, sport and espionage before and after China's Cultural Revolution, even if Montagu's own role in the story diminishes with every page. The book introduces Montagu as the privileged son of a millionaire aristocrat whose passion for Table Tennis (a game he had played at Cambridge University) enabled him to forge a whole range of international connections. Montagu, 'the man who first wrote down its rules', co-founded the International Table Tennis Federation (becoming its first president), and, according to Griffin, played a pivotal role in its transformation from a recreational game into an organised international sport. The Swaythling Cup, founded by his parents (Lord and Lady Swaythling), became the World International Table Tennis Championships: a title it still attaches to its men's team event. In addition to widening his own circles, Montagu, argues Griffin, set in place a series of far-reaching diplomatic and geopolitical developments in which 'Ping Pong' assumed a multifaceted political role: to win favours, to cover up the excesses of China's Great Famine, to persecute opponents during the Cultural Revolution and – most improbably – to re-establish diplomatic relations between China and the US. This story is told here with verve and flair but if there is one figure who stands out among its intriguing personalities it is not Ivor Montagu but Glenn Cowan, a teenage hippy from the suburbs of New York who, as a member of the US Table Tennis Team during the 'Ping Pong diplomacy' of the early 1970s, had helped ease potential political tensions by a mixture of arrogance and innocence.

If espionage revelations do not add much to an understanding of the life of Ivor Montagu, then an observation made by his Soviet controller, Simon Kremer, probably takes us closest. Montagu could be useful, Kremer reported back to Moscow, because he had 'contacts through his influential relations'. These contacts were remarkably wide-ranging and Montagu's ability to influence, lobby and propagandise among political, film and sporting circles will probably be his lasting legacy.

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Geoffrey Swain, *A Short History of the Russian Revolution*, London, I. B. Tauris, 2017, ISBN 9781780767932 (pbk), 9781780767925 (hbk), 256pp

Geoffrey Swain's *Short History of the Russian Revolution* can be read in two ways. On one level, it is a concise and lucid account of the events of 1917-1918 and their background. On another level, it is a polemic arguing a) that 'the Russian working class was consistently revolutionary rather than reformist in outlook' and that the predominance of 'reformists' in Soviet politics for the first few months after 1917 should be seen as an 'aberration' (p3), and b) that a major turning point in the history of the revolution was the Bolsheviks' gerrymandering of the Fifth All-Russia Congress of Soviets in July 1918, to forestall a likely majority for the Party of Left Socialist-Revolutionaries. It was, Swain suggests, this 'electoral fraud' (p204) which set Russia irrevocably on the path of civil war and terror.

As a textbook account of the revolution, Swain's *Short History* is excellent. Anyone teaching the period in further or higher education will find it an invaluable resource. Over eight chapters, it sets the scene for the events of 1917, and then takes the story forward through the different phases of Russia's political life during that year and

after – the formation of the first Provisional Government after the fall of the Tsar in March 1917, the crisis which led to the formation of coalition governments between socialists and liberals, the crises these coalitions faced in turn, the Bolshevik overthrow of the government and the establishment of ‘soviet power’, and the brief experiment with a Bolshevik-Left SR coalition in early 1918. This story is told with admirable clarity: the account of the ‘Kornilov revolt’ of late August 1917 in particular shows Swain’s skill at making a very complex and confusing episode comprehensible.

The brevity of this book means that its focus is necessarily highly selective. Although Swain pays tribute to the social historians of the Russian revolution of the last few decades, and their part in debunking the traditional Western Cold War-era narratives of the revolution associated with Richard Pipes and Leonard Schapiro, there is relatively little social history in his account. The focus is very much on politics as it played out in the main centres, chiefly in Petrograd. Similarly, there is little attention paid to the ways the revolution played out in the provinces, or in national minority areas. Ukraine features only to the extent that its politics impinged on events in the centre. These, and other, limitations are inevitable in any short history. Conversely, the consistency of Swain’s focus is arguably one of the book’s strengths – it does not try to do too much, and the areas it does cover, it covers in detail and extremely well.

As for the thesis Swain advances in the book, there are various objections which can be raised. First and foremost, the leaders of the post-March 1917 Petrograd Soviet would not have recognised themselves as ‘reformists’ as opposed to ‘revolutionaries’. ‘The Revolution’ was an object of almost fetishistic veneration for everyone in soviet politics. The Menshevik and Socialist-Revolutionary leaders imagined they were defending, consolidating and advancing the Russian revolution in very difficult circumstances. The differences between them and the Bolsheviks were over the ‘tasks of the revolution’ and the way in which ‘the revolution’ itself was envisaged. Both sides would freely, and probably sincerely, denounce each other as ‘counter-

revolutionaries' – the most damning charge in the lexicon of the time. As for Swain's venture into counter-factual history, in which an alliance of Left SRs and Left Bolsheviks avoided the civil war, terror and ultimately the horrors of Stalin's rule by ditching Lenin and the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in July 1918 and restarting the war against Germany – this is intriguing but ultimately unconvincing. By mid-1918, Russia was in a state of social, political and economic breakdown. It had not yet reached rock bottom, but the momentum towards collapse and disintegration was almost certainly unstoppable. These were the circumstances which gave rise to terror and rule by naked physical force – those who would exercise power had few other options remaining.

However, a great merit of this book is that its value and utility are in no way dependent on acceptance of the author's thesis. In its own terms, as an account of the events of 1917 and early 1918, concentrating mainly on central politics, it is a most impressive achievement, and a worthy addition to the literature on 1917 in Russia.

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Kristen Ghodsee, *Second World, Second Sex. Socialist Women's Activism and Global Solidarity during the Cold War*, Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2018, ISBN 978-1-4780-0181-2 (pbk), 978-1-4780-0139-3 (hbk), 328pp

Kristen Ghodsee's book *Second World Second Sex* focuses on a contribution to women's emancipation and advancement that is often overlooked: the activism of women in what used to be called the Second World, women in former socialist countries. Their activism, the book argues, was vital in the run-up to and during the 1975 United Nations (UN) International Year of Women and subsequently the Decade for Women. The main objective of the book is not only

to demonstrate how important these contributions were, but also to show how this activism has been written out of history in particular at the UN (but also in feminist historiography more generally), as visibly very profoundly at the Beijing Platform for Action at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, a time by which the Cold War had ended and the Second World did no longer exist.

As such, the book – divided into two parts on *Organizing Women under Socialism and Capitalism* and *The Women's Cold War* respectively – makes a valuable contribution to uncover women's activism beyond the often dominant reading provided by liberal feminism, and in subtle ways shows how development of the latter was only possible in different ways through the former. It also reminds us how during the Cold War, a time when different paths to modernization were on offer for the Third World, the degree of women's emancipation served as an indicator for social progress to ultimately prove the superiority of one system over the other (p131). This competition was not least played out behind the scenes and partly openly at the various UN gatherings for women, but also resulted in concrete acts of solidarity and support between Second and Third World women activists for whom a socialist agenda in a broad sense was a more promising way forward in the global political environment at the time (detailed in various empirical data-rich chapters in part II of the book).

The book presents socialist women's activism through a focus on two particular case studies, women's activism in Bulgaria, a socialist country in Eastern Europe, and Zambia, a non-aligned Third World country with socialist leanings. It thus in addition explores linkages to the ways in which the Second World shaped politics in the Third and vice versa during the time of the Cold War and its competing narratives of societal progress and change. Methodologically Ghodsee has conducted fascinating oral history interviews with former key activists in both countries and beyond, and consulted relevant archives.

For a reader of my generation, old debates about the supremacy

of women's issues versus wider political change, as well as individual rights versus collective and social rights come back to the fore. While reading I was reminded of long discussions in socialist leaning circles at the Free University Berlin in my student days, where hot debates were fought about whether women's liberation was a main contradiction of capitalism in that capitalism required women's subjugation, and thus an overthrow of capitalism would lead to women's liberation, or whether such a view degraded the oppression of women mainly to the productive sphere.

Here the book makes a valuable contribution not only in narrating the complex stories of women activists at the forefront of socialist or socialist leaning societies, women largely unknown or forgotten in the historiography of women's engagement that is dominated by 'Western' feminism. The stories of women like for example Elena Lagadinova and Krastina Tchomakova from Bulgaria, and Chibesa Kankasa from Zambia, to name just a few, are fascinating to read and told in an engaging way that avoids imposed interpretations.

But here also lies one problem with the book: It is not always clear how comparisons between individual histories can say something more profound about the potential progressiveness of women's achievements in the former socialist block in comparison to e.g. US American feminism (a theme of chapter three that focuses on *Emancipated Women and Anticommunism in the American Political Imagination*). This is not to say that women in the former Second World had not indeed achieved much more in many areas at the time, but one would have wished for a more profound discussion of what exactly it is the individual stories show in the wider scheme of things.

In addition, it feels as if Ghodsee sits on the fence and does not quite believe her own argument: Too often it is stated – which is of course true – that the former socialist countries were top-down states, dominated by usually male party-hierarchies that left little space for activism not in line with party dictums. The author in many ways does not fully trust her own analysis, outlined based

on her interview data so expertly: That indeed there was room for autonomous activism even if not all things attempted succeeded – which of course is also the case for the feminist movement and its multiple undercurrents in the ‘West’. In addition, in emphasizing the often rehearsed argument that women’s progress in (former) socialist nations should be ‘compared with that of nations at similar levels of economic development (and not with that of advanced capitalist countries)’ (p113), women’s issues are indeed subjugated to a particular interpretation of the productive sphere, a view that has been aptly critiqued by Marxist feminists – and it is probably interesting to note that any engagement with influential scholar-activists like Frigga Haug is absent.

Having said that, at a time of increasing global inequality and where activism of any kind seems to focus more on the figure of the celebrity activist than on real solidarity – the latest example being the climate change protests around Greta, who also happens to be a young woman but who has (probably against her own will) become an oversized celebrity schoolgirl aimed at triggering the consciousness of the world, the book is a powerful reminder that ultimately structural conditions are of prime importance if women’s emancipation is to succeed.

Thus, what we can learn from the forgotten women activists of the Second and Third world who often have died largely forgotten in poverty, is to not lose focus of the collective rights into which women’s rights are being embedded. The way towards women’s liberation is not to follow Facebook’s Sheryl Sandberg route of a ‘hyper-individualized programme for women to succeed’ (p19) in corporate structures, but in working collectively to address social injustices through a politics of redistribution.

Ghodsee’s book ultimately reminds us, through the often moving testimonies of former activists she has collected, that women’s activism, also when attached to or even dominated the state, can be effective and progressive. The decades since the end of the Cold War with their focus on independent organisation against the

state have, in fact, seen a closure of progressive spaces for women's activism.

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Jeremy Friedman, *Shadow Cold War: The Sino-Soviet Competition for the Third World*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015, ISBN 9781469645520, x + 294pp

The fall of the Soviet Union and the subsequent opening of state archives in the countries of the former Eastern Bloc unleashed a flurry of activity on the part of historians faced with the opportunity to explore aspects of the Cold War that had until then been constrained by secrecy and censorship. Out of this activity, emerged a multifaceted trend known as the New Cold War History, which seeks to offer new interpretations of the conflict, not least by placing its reach and scope in a global context that examines geopolitical connections and international relations beyond simply the competition between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Writing within this trend, Jeremy Friedman's *Shadow Cold War* turns the historical lens away from the traditional divisions of East-West and Cold War Europe. Instead, he offers an examination of the Sino-Soviet split in the context of the competition for influence and leadership within the parts of the world emerging from the bonds of colonialism. Indeed, this recent global character of research has meant that historians have had to account for the ways the two historical processes of the Cold War and decolonisation overlapped and interacted with each other. The wave of armed liberation struggles after the Second World War brought a mass of hitherto marginalised peoples to the world stage. The aspirations of these new nation-states were articulated by the delegates to the Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung in April 1955, where the concept of the

Third World, itself a European construct, was adapted and embraced by some of the attendees.

The Third World was conceived as a large area composed of the majority of the worlds, mostly non-white, peoples. What united this disparate group was their experience of colonialism and the perception of their place as occupying a space between the competing economic and social systems of the capitalist West and the communist East. Yet beyond the capitalist-communist division, the Third World proved to also be a battleground between the major players within the communist camp. During this period, the leadership of the Soviet Union was openly questioned by the People's Republic of China (PRC), as they both attempted to attract the potentially revolutionary forces of Asia, Africa and Latin America to their own brand of world revolution. This battle constituted a parallel Cold War, operating at first in the shadows, before erupting as a split on the international scene at the end of 1961. Ultimately, the Soviet Union would emerge successful, but the Chinese challenge would leave its mark as it forced the Soviets to adapt their policies and stances in reaction to the pressure from the Third World.

Friedman's main argument is that the Sino-Soviet split is best understood as the consequence of the confrontation of two different, but intimately linked, revolutionary agendas: anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism. This was not the only reason for the conflict, but the one that had the most far-reaching international significance. The linking of these agendas was not new, as they were conceived as a single struggle by Lenin in his framing of imperialism as being the highest stage of capitalism. This legacy was part of the ideological heritage of both the Soviet Union and the PRC and, therefore, lay at the basis of the communist world revolution centred on these two states. The revolutionary aspirations of the newly liberated nations shifted the focus away from an industrialised but discouragingly stable Europe to the Third World, fundamentally altering the communist movement's orientation. No longer would the anti-capitalist project of building socialism within a given nation be adequate.

The asymmetry of power between nations would be called into question, and Beijing was keen to style itself as the champion of the rights of the new nations.

Fundamental to Friedman's interpretation is his treatment of ideology. As part of the New Cold War History project, Friedman takes into account not only the power dynamics of the geopolitical conflict but the very real presence of ideological worldviews. These ideologies are considered 'a prism through which information about the world is received and deciphered.' (p21) Though perhaps ambiguous, this conception of ideology allows Friedman to explore the differences and debates *within* the ideology of Communism while avoiding the assumption of the necessity of ideological purity. The strength of this approach lies in the author's ability to explain apparent doctrinal inconsistencies, such as Beijing supporting the CIA-backed National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) or Moscow's patronage of the 'petit-bourgeois' Nasser, as expressions of ideologically-driven assessments of the changing global situation. In the PRC's case, rapprochement with the US in the 1970s to combat Soviet expansionism made sense if the latter was considered another 'white, industrialised, imperialist power' (p201) and indicates a shift from a class-based worldview to a racially-based one.

Friedman locates the disagreement between the two communist states as emerging from the different, specific trajectories of their national revolution. The experience of the new rulers of the PRC was informed by their less than friendly interactions with the West and, as such, their priority was firmly centred on the latter of the two revolutionary agendas with the supporting of armed anti-colonial struggles. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, through their policy of 'peaceful coexistence' with the West, would focus on building socialism both at home and abroad through the giving of aid. Though the separation of the two revolutionary agendas may at first seem to sacrifice nuance for analytical clarity, Friedman is aware of the exchange that took place in the adaptation of policy and strategy. He skilfully describes how the PRC succeed in getting their

rhetoric adopted by the Soviets as leaders such as Nasser and Castro exerted pressure on the USSR to balance their arguments for peace with expressing support for armed struggles in both word and deed.

The impressive global scope of the book, based on extensive and multilingual archival research, is a credit to the author. Friedman examines the correspondence and reports from various embassies as well as the different institutions that dealt with foreign affairs in the Soviet Union and the PRC. Additionally, he looks at the battlegrounds of the various non-governmental bodies, most importantly the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organisation (AAPSO). This was a key arena as each side attempted to control the various Afro-Asian conferences starting from early 1962, after which all future conferences would be characterised by 'two set lines.' (p89) Their complex interactions were sometimes belligerent, sometimes accommodating, and the agency of Third World leaders acting through these networks is apparent. The wave of violence unleashed by the Cultural Revolution after 1966 meant that Beijing would recede into itself and would slowly begin to distance itself from the struggles of the Third World.

In a chronological narrative, *Shadow Cold War* details the course of various crises and events that took place between 1956 and 1976, ranging from the Cuban Missile Crisis to the Vietnam War, while also including some perhaps lesser known details regarding Ghana and Mali. Despite the impressive scope, Friedman only sparingly discusses the impact of the Sino-Soviet split and the emergence of 'Third Worldism' among European radicals and not at all among African-American activists. His narrative successfully illustrates the complex interactions, conflicts and exchanges between the Soviets and the Chinese, as well as the role that leaders from the global South played.

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