Reviews

Tony Pecinovsky (ed), *Faith in the Masses. Essays Celebrating 100 Years of the Communist Party USA,* International Publishers, New York 2020, 417pp, ISBN 978-0717808267

The Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA) was founded in 1919. Membership peaked in the 1940s, with estimations of between 75,000 and 85,000 members, and declined thereafter. Reportedly, today membership is steady at some 5000 members, with an increase of membership during the era of US President Donald Trump.

In September 2019, the party began a year of centenary celebrations, and *Faith in the Masses* was launched in this context. It was a follow-up to Pecinovsky's well-received biographical collection *Let Them Tremble: Biographical Interventions Marking 100 Years of the Communist Party, USA* (International Publishers 2019).

Born in 1977, Pecinovsky is a post-Cold War communist, an activist-scholar in a political organisation engaged in current and ongoing political, social and cultural issues and struggles. With no direct personal, emotional or experiential stake in the CPUSA's past, he is able to step back and examine it with fresh and critical eyes, something he did in *Let Them Tremble*, and which he continues in this follow-up volume.

Faith in the Masses is a collection of twelve essays. Pecinovsky has gathered a small group of historians and activist-scholars from inside and outside the academy and given them free rein to write on aspects of CPUSA history that have not drawn much attention previously. As Pecinovsky explains in his introduction, because of considerable focus on this subject elsewhere, the party's involvement in the labour movement is not central in this book; nor, as he also explains, do the

contributors trawl the past for the party's numerous historical shortcomings and weaknesses: for example its largely uncritical relationship with the Soviet Union and the Eastern European states; the internal sexism of the CPUSA and its masculinist culture; the inexcusable treatment of LGBTQ+ members; or the bitterness and hurt of internal discord, expulsions and leavings. So this book is not a 'party history'; nor is it an exercise in criticism.

While individual authors do not resile from criticism in the context of their contributions, the book is conceived and conducted as a challenge to one-dimensional historiographies which portray the CPUSA as simply a creature of the Soviet Union; or which portray the party in terms of policies, or via a canon of well-known personages, at the expense of micro-studies recognising, and admitting to the historical record, lesser-known people and initiatives. The book also strongly contests the popular notion that post-Cold War, the CPUSA became a marginal political force.

In his introduction, apart from explaining the purpose of his book, Pecinovsky also provides a useful literature review and a discussion of CPUSA historiography; and he also co-authors, with Norman Markowitz, a chapter overviewing the history of the party from 1919 to the present. This succinctly provides context for the chapters that follow, and for readers unfamiliar with CPUSA history.

Successive chapters cover a wide spread of CPUSA history. These are generally arranged chronologically, although their time frames often intersect and/or overlap. C.J. Atkins contributes a significant political biography of the party's first leader, C. E. Ruthenberg (1882-1927), a crucial personality who has received scant attention from historians. Joshua Morris follows with an account of the party's 1932 Presidential Campaign. Sports journalism, with the emphasis on baseball and the party's involvement in desegregating the sport, is detailed by Al Neal. The party's long history of commitment to African American equality and Black liberation is detailed by Timothy V. Johnson.

The work of the workers' mutual insurance society, the International Workers Order (1930-1954), is resurrected by Robert Zecker. Art and the struggle against racism, focused on the life and work of

Beulah Richardson (1920-2020), is discussed by Denise Lynn. Joel Wendland-Liu sets out the richness and depth of the contribution of communist writers to American letters, recognition for many of whom arrived post-mortem. Cartooning as a political weapon, focused on the work of cartoonist Ollie Harrington (1912-1995) is the subject of an essay by Rachel Rubin and James Smethurst. The transnational friendship between activists Gita Bannerji (India) and Betty Millard (USA) during the 1940s and 1950s, set in the context of the Women's International Democratic Federation, is movingly related by Elisabeth Armstrong. Tony Pecinovsky contributes a further chapter that sets out the many, varied and influential roles of the CPUSA in the 1960s and 1970s, a time when conventional wisdom says the party was no longer relevant. In the final chapter Pecinovsky teams with Marc Brodine for an account of the work of pioneer communist environmentalist Virginia Brodine (1915-2000) from the 1950s onwards. This chapter also establishes the long history of the CPUSA in environmental issues.

Overall, this is a worthwhile volume, taking the reader to places less travelled in terms of CPUSA biography, politics and culture, and at times movingly so. The essays are scholarly, based on considerable original research, and have detailed footnotes. While the book has a significant bibliography, it has no index, and this might disappoint some researchers. *Faith in the Masses* demonstrates the broad, creative, at times pioneering, and robust involvement of the CPUSA in the pursuit of, and the struggle for, social justice across the twentieth century and into the present. Particularly if read in conjunction with Pecinovsky's earlier volume *Let Them Tremble*, it strongly suggests there is no reason to doubt that the CPUSA, albeit with its membership a far cry from what it was at its peak, will continue the tradition. Because what is also clear from reading this book is the understanding that historically the party has encouraged, empowered, enabled and required its members to be more than just passive entries on a membership list – which is probably what drew and draws members in the first place.

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Andy Croft, *The Years of Anger: The Life of Randall Swingler,* Routledge 2020, 317pp, ISBN 978-3861536581

As the editor of *Left Review* and the founder of Fore Publications, the poet Randall Swingler (1909-1967) played a central role in British left-wing culture in the mid-twentieth century. In his *Comrade Heart: A Life of Randall Swingler* (2003), Andy Croft drew attention to this undeservedly neglected writer. However, as Croft admits in his preface to this new and expanded edition, Swingler remains largely ignored in the literary history of the period. *The Years of Anger* once again shows that anyone interested in the cultural history of the period should look at Swingler's life and work.

Born into an upper-middle-class clerical family, Swingler was educated at Winchester and Oxford. After moving to London in the early 1930s, he grew up to become an urban poet. He had published three poetry collections by 1933 and befriended other young poets such as Dylan Thomas and George Barker. Around the same time, Swingler developed from a Christian socialist into a Marxist, and joined the CPGB in 1934.

In the late 1930s, Swingler edited *Left Review*, wrote plays for Unity Theatre, and collaborated with composers such as Alan Bush and Benjamin Britten. When Swingler is mentioned in accounts of 1930s literature, he is often portrayed as an orthodox communist who dogmatically stuck to the party line. Croft gives a more complex picture by focusing on Swingler's merit as a poet. In *The Spectator*'s review of Swingler's poetry collection *Difficult Morning* (1933), the reviewer writes that Swingler 'can write a beautiful poem … and he loves words (a test of a poet, though not commonly admitted nowadays to be one)' (quoted on p46). This review confirms that Swingler's talent as a poet was widely recognised from the early days. *Difficult Morning* was praised by contemporary poets such as W. H. Auden, who felt 'a feeling of intolerable jealousy' when he first read it (quoted on p48).

After *Left Review* ended in 1938, Swingler started a new journal, *Poetry and the People*. In the first issue, he warned readers 'against writing only "agitational verse"'; instead, he called for poetry 'designed to make all men and women conscious of their community of interest, and to liberate their social energy for active participation in the struggle to build the new society' (quoted on p86). Swingler saw the same kind

of social function in music. In the preface to *The Left Song Book* (1938), Swingler and Alan Bush write that 'music has the faculty of binding together in a single emotion all those who are united by a common interest and a common purpose' (quoted on p79). With this belief in mind, Swingler collaborated with Bush on the pageant *Music and the People*, and with Britten and Auden on *Ballad of Heroes*, both performed at the Festival of Music for the People in 1939.

Croft shows that there was already a tension between Swingler and the party in the late 1930s. Swingler's understanding of the importance of culture was not shared by the party apparatus. After Britain's war with Germany broke out, and as the party isolated itself from British intellectual life because of its opposition to the war, Swingler saw that literature was one of the party's 'last surviving links with the mainland of British intellectual culture' (p117). When he joined the Army, he obstinately resisted the pressure to apply for a commission because he hated the officer class and wanted to remain in the ordinary ranks. Swingler saw that the party was detached from 'the changes which the war had brought about in the British people, especially in the Forces' (p152). In Italy in December 1943, Swingler's unit was hit, and he was the only survivor. His poem about this incident poignantly illustrates how his experience as a common soldier shaped his renewed faith in communism:

> Not till then can I return to tell you
> The pledge is fulfilled and I can join your rest,
> And sit in this ditch and remember
> With glory and laughter
> The day I saw Communism storm an Italian hill
>
> (quoted p166)

After the war, Swingler was attacked by two influential writers: George Orwell and Stephen Spender. Swingler's debate with Orwell on freedom of expression eventually resulted in his inclusion in the list of 'crypto-communists' and 'fellow-travellers' that Orwell gave to the Information Research Department. In *The God That Failed* (1949), Spender criticised an unnamed 'Communist poet' (clearly referring to

Swingler) for subjugating literature to ideology. And yet, around this time Swingler was, in fact, struggling to defend literature from those at the party establishment who would reduce artistic questions to the issues of political fidelity.

In the 1950s, Swingler moved to Pebmarsh, a small village in Sussex. Even though he removed himself from London, however, he was still influential for his younger friends such as E.P. Thompson and John Berger. In 1956, in the wave of de-Stalinisation, Swingler left the party, and his comrades such as Thompson followed suit after the Soviet invasion of Hungary. Thompson insisted on Swingler's joining the editorial board of his new journal, *The New Reasoner*. But although Swingler accepted the position, he found it difficult to be fully committed to the job, and resigned before its merger with *Universities and Left Review* (when it became New Left Review).

Croft's book demonstrates why Swingler deserves a more prominent position in the cultural history of mid-twentieth-century Britain. As academic interest in the period's culture has been growing in recent years, *The Years of Anger* is likely to attract more scholarly attention than *Comrade Heart* did. Croft's account of Swingler's struggle to negotiate the difficult relationship between literature and politics provides a new insight into the transition from the Popular Front to the early Cold War, or from the Old to the New Left. The book is a valuable guide to the radical cultural network of these turbulent years.

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Tuomas Savonen, *Minnesota, Moscow, Manhattan: Gus Hall's Life and Political Line Until the Late 1960s*, The Finnish Society of Sciences and Letters, Helsinki 2020, 496 pp, ISBN 978-9516534513

Today's typical non-leftist has probably heard the name of only one American Communist Party (CPUSA) leader – Gus Hall. Although

Hall (1910-2000, born Arvo Gus Halberg) headed the domestic organisation for more than forty years, historian Tuomas Savonen does not attempt a comprehensive biography. Instead, he traces Hall's 'political line' until the late 1960s, in places carrying the analysis through to the 1980s and touching the 1990s.

Much of the book is built on the FBI's Operation Solo, wherein the Bureau managed to recruit as informants two of the CPUSA's most trusted figures, Morris and Jack Childs. So important were the Childs brothers that they frequently travelled to Moscow to report events affecting the American party, and to collect hundreds of thousands of dollars in Soviet financial support. As of 2020, the FBI had published only the documents from Operation Solo's first ten years, 1958-1968. Accordingly, author Savonen wisely stops short of a complete biography, which would not be able to present inside Bureau and CPUSA material.

Savonen encounters difficulties beyond primary source deficiencies. Halberg looked like the popular image of the All-American Midwesterner, six feet tall and husky. He could help refute the stereotype that immigrants and Jewish comrades ran the CPUSA. Yet he never commanded the respect and adoration that members heaped upon their working-class hero, William Z. Foster, from the 1920s until 1961. Nor did Halberg make any concerted effort to reconcile communism with American democratic traditions as did another Midwesterner, general secretary Earl Browder, between 1932 and 1945.

Despite such limitations, Savonen presents more information on Halberg than any other source. He identifies Halberg's parents as immigrants from Lapua, Finland, who moved to Cherry, in northern Minnesota, where many Finns had settled earlier. There the soil proved acidic, yet the locals preferred farming to Mesabi Range mining. Arvo Halberg's reminiscences contend that his family suffered from desperate poverty. Yet he also claimed that before age eighteen he had read his parents' copies of Marx, Engels and Debs. His favourite, allegedly, was Lenin's *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (p42) – heavy reading for a teenager who had left high school without graduating. Furthermore, poor families rarely have large book collections. More likely Arvo's introduction to radicalism came from his father, Matt, who had joined the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), and, after

Russia's Bolshevik Revolution, the Communist Party. By age eighteen Arvo was an organiser, teaching Marxist-Leninist principles to miners in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan. Before his twentieth birthday, he served as a delegate to the Young Communist League's national convention in New York (p51). When he was in his early twenties the CPUSA sent Halberg to the Lenin School in Moscow. There he spent two years, meeting some of the most promising young communists in the world.

Back in the United States by the mid-1930s, Halberg stole food from the Armour Packing company before he found a job. Participating in an April 1934 mass demonstration in Minneapolis led to his arrest. At his trial he dilated boldly on the glories of the USSR and thereafter received a 35-day sentence at the county work farm (p90). Once freed, he made speeches extolling his teenage labours as a lumberjack and steelworker.

At the time the CPUSA sought to place bold and robust young radicals in the Mahoning Valley's steel mills, to organise workers there and elsewhere. Halberg, on his way to a job interview, realised that he could not use his real name. He had recently run for Youngstown, Ohio's city council on the Communist Party ticket. He therefore shortened and Americanised his name to Gus Hall. Still young and healthy, he got the job – and went by this appellation for the remainder of his life.

Throughout the decade, Hall was a bold, angry, and frequently arrested roughneck. His speeches often advocated violence and exaggerated his role in the Little Steel Strike, the 'bloodiest [US] labour dispute of the 1930s' (p124). Savonen notes that the husky Hall's talks never mentioned his time at the Lenin School or his relatively few years in American factories and lumber yards.

Savonen explains three, virtually simultaneous, factors that took Hall from impetuous youthful radical to longstanding party leader. First, unlike many of his contemporaries, Hall displayed little careerism. He patiently put spreading proletarian internationalism ahead of sabotaging rival CPUSA comrades. Second, Hall proved adept at sensing the current ideological atmosphere. Under Earl Browder's leadership in the early 1940s, Hall's radio speeches were filled with Americanised communism. By contrast, after Browder's expulsion Hall continually championed the USSR as the model Marxist country. Third, between 1956 and 1958 he remained largely outside the vicious internecine

battles within the CPUSA over Nikita Khrushchev's 'secret speech' and the Soviet Union's crushing of the Hungarian Revolution. None of these battles harmed Hall, who spent the time in prison and emerged as a seemingly fresh face.

One major flaw weakens Savonen's book. Any biography should address the question of character. Four years after becoming CPUSA general secretary, Hall began to display unreasonable grandiosity. According to Savonen, he 'was profoundly angered' that that the Soviet leadership did not inform him in advance of their planned removal of Nikita Khrushchev (p259). At another point, when Hall flew to Moscow, he expected the new Soviet leader, Leonid Brezhnev, to greet him at the airport. Without offering any judgment, Savonen reveals details that would have made Hall unfit to lead any type of party dedicated to socialism. He presents evidence that Hall and the Childs brothers were world-class con men. They embezzled funds from the Soviet Union and exploited FBI director J. Edgar Hoover's boundless hatred of communism to permit themselves to enjoy lives of luxury.

Savonen quotes from Operation Solo to report that by 1965 annual Soviet subsidies to the CPUSA had reached one million dollars. 'Gus Hall took care that he got his personal share of the funds' (p242). Savonen calculates that between 1959 and 1965 Hall's annual budget 'was twenty-eight percent higher than the U.S. family's median income' (p241). In 1967 Hall used Russian funds to buy his son Arvo a brand new Ford Fairlane. A larger gift of Operation Solo money had helped daughter Barbara Conway purchase a new house in 1966. That same year Hall also had acquired 'a pure-bred Arabian stallion from Poland' for his brother Toivo's horse farm (pp242 and 470). Meanwhile the Childs brothers were 'keeping hundreds of thousands of dollars in their secret depositories' (p245). In 1966 Hall had pressed the USSR for an emergency cash infusion. Meanwhile the Childs brothers were holding '1.2 million' mid-twentieth century dollars solely for Hall's use (p243).

Gus Hall's career suggests that an avaricious party leader probably could never bring any form of socialism to the United States.

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Simon Hannah, *Radical Lambeth 1978-1991*, Breviary Stuff Publications 2021, 224pp, ISBN 978-1916158634

Radical Lambeth is primarily a study of the London borough's council during its domination by the Labour left from 1978 to 1991. Lambeth was one of the places where left-wingers attempted to practice 'municipal socialism' in the midst of Thatcherism. Despite their commonalities, local authorities like Lambeth, Sheffield, Liverpool and the Greater London Council (GLC) all had distinct approaches to this project. Simon Hannah's detailed account of the left's time in power in Lambeth, its relationship to wider activism in the area, and its eventual unravelling, is a welcome addition to our understanding of this wave of progressive local government.

The history told in *Radical Lambeth*, however, is as least as much about the increasing centralisation of power in the British state as it is about radical municipalism. The vast cuts during the 1980s in central government grants to local authorities, the process of 'rate-capping' (where central government controlled local taxation), and the unsuccessful attempt at imposing the 'Poll Tax', were all about constricting alternative bases of state power. The Conservative government's commitment to privatisation – most notably in this context the mass selling of council housing – further eroded the role of local authorities.

Lambeth Labour were particularly vociferous in seeking to resist this process. Most famously, attempts to circumvent cuts and rate-capping by delaying the setting of a budget in the summer of 1985 led to a number of Lambeth councillors, including leader Ted Knight, being 'surcharged' and banned from holding office. This was meant to be part of a broader campaign of resistance, a 'second front' against Thatcherism to complement the miners' strike launched in March 1984. However, with the miners' return to work in early 1985, and the quick collapse of the rate-capping campaign, Lambeth was largely isolated.

Hannah argues – and this was perhaps as much a factor as the speedy capitulation of most Labour councils – that the council were unable to popularise the campaign locally. The book is particularly interesting throughout on the shifting dynamics of the relationship

between the council and the local authority union NALGO. In the case of the rate-capping campaign, the hoped-for industrial action to back up the councillors 'failed to materialise' (p101). Wider local support was also fairly limited. The fact that the Poll Tax did ignite more popular resistance at the start of the 1990s demonstrated a miscalculation on the part of the Conservative Party, who failed to understand that a tax hike would be experienced much more directly than funding cuts.

In places the book expands its focus beyond the council to consider broader political cultures, including squatting, LGBT activism and Black resistance. Some of this is comparatively underdeveloped but the politics of race does receive more significant attention. Hannah provides a strong sense of the dense networks of Black political and community organisation in the borough, particularly in Brixton. Especially considering the 1986 election of a Black council leader, Linda Bellos, it would have been interesting to think more about the relationship between Black organising within Labour and wider Black politics in the borough.

Attempts by left-wing councils in the 1980s to connect to broader political movements was a notable feature of the period. Hannah details, for instance, the various forms of support for the 1984-85 miners' dispute organised in the borough, including how Labour councillors provided an office and phones for miners to organise the campaign in the local area. The council also twinned with Bluefields in Nicaragua following the Sandinista revolution, an arrangement which included direct material and practical support. Such municipal internationalism challenged the assumed scales of political activity, and at its best was not merely gestural but a concrete form of solidarity.

If central government's attack on municipal authorities is at the heart of *Radical Lambeth*, there is a parallel story about centralisation in the Labour Party. Most dramatically, the book essentially ends at the point in 1991 when the party's National Executive Committee removed several left-wing councillors from the Lambeth Labour group, including the then leader of the council, Joan Twelves. As always, the internal fight within the party was almost as bitter as the struggle against the Conservatives.

Radical Lambeth resonates with a set of overlapping contemporary debates: an expanding historiography on the 1980s, an interest in the Labour left reinvigorated by the Corbyn leadership, and a revival of municipalism as a basis for socialist politics both within Britain and internationally. Hannah articulates well the attraction of the local state for sections of the left: 'the intention of the local government left during this period was to fight not just defensive struggles but to forge a credible alternative, a signpost to the socialist future' (p18). This book is particularly useful for expanding the view of London municipal politics in this period beyond the GLC.

Yet, while decentring the GLC, in a sense the book ends up reinforcing its central importance. For many on the British left wary of parliamentarianism, the hope of Labour between 2015 and 2019 was that it offered an opportunity to build something on a large scale. Despite its limitations, the GLC under Ken Livingstone - with Fair's Fair, people's plans, the enterprise board, the funding for community organisations, and so on – offered a form of usable past. The programmes of Community Wealth Building developed in recent years by councils like Preston and North Ayrshire feel as if they are building on that tradition.

In contrast, Hannah's book is primarily an account of local government as resistance, as a defensive struggle against Thatcherism. But, while the continuing influence of GLC policies seem clear, no Labour council ever sought a rerun of Lambeth-style confrontation when the Conservatives once again started brutally cutting local government finances after the 2010 general election. *Radical Lambeth* speaks to the problems of left local councils when there is an exceptionally hostile central government. Despite his clear admiration for many of the individuals featured in the book, the futility of their activism almost seems Hannah's point: 'Heroic stands were made against Thatcherism but all ultimately went down to defeat' (p200).

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John T. Sidel, *Republicanism, Communism, Islam: Cosmopolitan Origins of Revolution in Southeast Asia,* Cornell University Press 2021, 309pp, ISBN 978-1501755613

Virtually every scholar of Southeast Asia has read and re-read Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities.* Anderson's elite-centric study explained the emergence of the 'anomaly' of nationalism as the by-product of a constellation of forces that he coined as 'print capitalism'. His book analysed the form of national identity – itself a colonial construct – and (as a riposte of sorts to Ernest Gellner's state-centric, top-down and bureaucratic explanation for the pervasiveness of nationalism in *Nations and Nationalism*) replaced a focus on the state with a focus on print media. But, as Anderson's one-time student John Sidel notes in the early pages of his book: '… an account of modern, educated, literate, dandyish nationalist elites somehow harnessing the energies of Filipino, Indonesian, and Vietnamese masses with traditional, culturally distinct imaginings and aspirations leaves open a yawning, seemingly unbridgeable gulf of (mis)understandings and (mis)communications … [which] hardly clarifies matters with regard to the processes and outcomes of revolutionary mobilization' (p5).

Sidel, who is Sir Patrick Gillam Chair in International and Comparative Politics at the London School of Economics, is an established authority on bossism in post-independence Philippine politics (*Capital, Coercion, and Crime,* 1999) and religious violence in Indonesia (*Riots, Pogroms, Jihad,* 2006). In *Republicanism, Communism, Islam*, he unites his interests in political, religious and intellectual histories in positing his study as an attempt to 'rescue history from the Nation' (a nod to Prasenjit Duara's 1995 study), rather than to reproduce the teleological narratives that underpin 'official nationalism' (Anderson's term). His book, then, presents itself as a corrective to both top-down and bottom-up explanations for the emergence of nationalism in Southeast Asia, in its examination of three rich case studies: the Philippine, Indonesian and Vietnamese revolutions. Each of these cases, Sidel argues, highlights the ever important yet oft-overlooked cosmopolitan internationalist facet of nationalism in Southeast Asia.

The principal argument that Sidel's ten chapters carry throughout is that it was cosmopolitan and commercial 'common drivers' within

Philippine, Indonesian, and Vietnamese societies – more than state institutions – that laid the foundation for the revolutions under analysis (p288). The book then tracks nationalist emergences across these three cases genealogically. Sidel's principal aim is to propose a 'composite picture' of nationalist revolutionary mobilisation and revolutionary praxis in the three countries under consideration, but one that goes deeper than extant appraisals of these revolutions as 'nationalist in nature'. Indeed, Sidel stresses early on that his book is a 'denationalized, transnationalized, and internationalized descriptive account of the Philippine, Indonesian, and Vietnamese revolutions', which he counterposes to the backdrop of extant 'nationalized, nationalist, and nation-centred narratives' (p17). Sidel's study also seeks to account for, and push against, what he terms the 'various strands of the growing body of literature on the various cosmopolitan connections' that his introduction explores in breadth and depth (p14). In so doing, he hopes to provide both a novel 'descriptive overview' and an 'overarching framework' that explains more fully the diverse patterns of nationalist revolutionary mobilisation across the region.

The book's first two chapters, on the Philippine Revolution, seek to answer Sidel's question in the introduction: 'Why … did the Philippines experience its revolution so much earlier than the rest of the region, but after its defeat show so little in the way of revolutionary mobilization during most of the twentieth century?' (p6). Chapter 1 contends that the forcible integration of the Philippines into the world capitalist market combined with late nineteenth-century pre-capitalist 'cosmopolitan forces' (republicanism, liberalism, Freemasonry and anticlericalism) and institutions to spur the beginnings of the Philippine revolution. Antecedent events that set the stage for the Philippine revolution, including the rising tide of anti-clericalism and critiques of the Catholic Church, set in motion a 'transcontinental if not global conflict pitting "anticlerical" scientists, Freemasons, liberals, and republicans against the Catholic Church in its ultramontane incarnation' (p44). Chapter 2 highlights the revolutionary brotherhood for which the previous chapter provides the *mise en scene*. Unlike extant work that mainly focuses on the *Ilustrado* (the Philippine enlightened elite), Sidel foregrounds an emergent network of Freemasons that coalesced at around the same time

as the arrest of national hero José Rizal, which, alongside the Katipunan society, laid the organisational and mobilisational foundations for the larger Philippine revolution (p64). The author emphasises rightly that a Philippine revolution 'became imaginable' because of the confluence of local events, 'cosmopolitan crosscurrents', and the rare connectivity enjoyed by Filipinos of that era to major events that were unfolding elsewhere, notably in Spain, the United States and Cuba (pp67, 70).

Sidel then shifts his focus for the next five chapters to the Indonesian Revolution. These chapters explain why the Indonesian revolution (*Revolusi*) won independence and experienced fewer enduring colonial vestiges than its archipelagic neighbours, yet perplexingly became the site of the attempted coup of the Thirtieth of September Movement (G30S) and a three-decades-long authoritarian military dictatorship. The third chapter, by means of a 'comparative historical perspective', links early-twentieth-century cosmopolitan Baku – then a meeting ground of avant-garde intellectuals – to the 1945-1949 *Revolusi*. Baku (today the capital of Azerbaijan), which once hosted, *inter alia*, left activists, unafraid and unabashed labour unionists and Bolshevists … 'foretold the possibilities of organized politics and mass mobilization in the Indonesia of the early-mid twentieth century' (p83). Chapter 4 sets the backdrop for the rise of Sarekat Islam – the focus of Chapter 5 – by tracking revolutionary brotherhoods forged by republicanism, Communism and Islam, through newspapers, novels and Istanbul-style comedy (*Komedie Stamboel*), as it emerged during the Dutch East Indies' long nineteenth century. The sixth chapter guides the reader through the years between the Communist Party of Indonesia's (PKI) revolt and the years just before the *Revolusi*, which is the focus of the seventh chapter. In this section's penultimate chapter Sidel highlights the PKI's nearly two decades of underground operation through the activities of Tan Malaka, as well as important trends in Islamic educational and associational activity. The 1942-5 Japanese occupation, the chapter concludes, both spurred and hindered the animating mobilisational and organisational forces in Indonesia, but nonetheless paved the way for the unity that Sukarno sought to forge – which he and other Indonesian nationalists then used to propel forward the 1945-8 *Revolusi*.

The Vietnamese revolution comprises Sidel's focus in the final three chapters. As Chapter 8 intimates, Guangzhou (formerly Canton) played a broadly similar role in relation to the Vietnamese revolution as Baku did for the Indonesian one: people could immerse themselves in 'the urban cosmopolitan milieu of Guangzhou, where new forms of knowledge and sources of news were circulating amidst China's ongoing revolution in modern print culture' (p236). In the bigger picture, Vietnam's propinquity to, and kinship with, China, as well as its links to French colonial cities in Porto Novo and Antananarivo, show clearly that one ought to understand the mobilisational and intellectual energies behind the Vietnamese revolution 'within the full ambit of the French colonial empire and within French colonial Indochina' (pp208-209). Chapters 9 and 10 track Ho Chi Minh's Thanh Niên network, the important role that Guangzhou played as a 'base for Communist indoctrination' (p254), and the interconnectedness of Communist and nationalist political organisations in Vietnam with developments and parties in China.

Republicanism, Communism, Islam is a landmark book that deserves plaudits for its ambitious recasting of the rise of the mobilisational 'isms' that worked coevally with – and were sometimes subsumed by, either wholly or partially – nationalisms and Communisms. The introduction provides a lengthy historiography, and situates Sidel's work as a corrective to the limitations in extant Southeast Asia scholarship on the 'origins and animating energies' of these three revolutions. But the novelty of this study in terms of the primary sources upon which Sidel frames his thesis – which is itself somewhat elusive in the Introduction, but explained better in the Conclusion, on page 288 – is unclear. Entirely to his credit, Sidel acknowledges that his study 'synthesized the works of successive generations of historians' – from Anderson and Woodside to Chatterjee and the 'Cambridge School' – to propose a 'unifying and illuminating template for the framing of the modern history of Southeast Asia as a whole' (p288). *Republicanism, Communism, Islam* thus brings all the major post-Anderson scholarship into immediate dialogue. But a few pages in the Introduction that shed light on, and problematised, Sidel's exciting sources would genuinely situate for the reader what is novel and paradigmatic about this book. Aside from that rather minor critique, the

book is highly recommended to anyone, whether an academic reader or someone generally keen on world history, as a milestone study that links the three nationalist revolutions in the region to events, ideas, spaces and currents across the world in a seamless and convincing way.

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