

Peter Ackers and Alistair J. Reid (eds), *Alternatives to State-Socialism in Britain: Other Worlds of Labour in the Twentieth Century*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016 , h/b £66.99 , ISBN 978-3-319-34161-3

The premise of this book is that state socialism in Britain ceased to hold any resonance in Britain around 1989 when the Berlin Wall came down. Since then socialists and the Left in Britain have struggled to find alternatives. The old class-conflict model which drove statist socialist ideas has declined as a way of redistributing wealth, especially as class conflict is less evident and relevant than it was in the early and mid-twentieth century. The middle or third-Way solution operating between state socialism and inequalities of capitalism, offering welfare state benefits to mitigate the plight of the dispossessed and poor has not worked, especially in the environment of dwindling resources, and benefit and social welfare cuts. The Labour Party having lost state socialism did not find an alternative in the New Labour project of Blair and seems to be fragmented and drifting, almost helpless, in the face of the horrendous inequalities being fomented by recent Conservative and Conservative-Liberal governments who, despite their discriminatory actions, are presenting themselves as the parties of the community. What is Labour to do? How in the absence of state socialism is Labour to revive the concept of justice and citizenship which once drove it forward? Are there alternatives to state socialism which attract the sense of enthusiasm and hope embodied in the old phrase 'Socialism, The Hope of the World'. Is there an ethical, civic, or moral dimension which can revive socialism around a concept of what citizenship should involve, and what citizens should expect? These are the type of questions that are being asked and are raised in this book which highlights the pluralist nature of socialist debate in Britain over more than a century and which highlights the debate about the balance between three sectors of the society – the market, the state and civil society.

The editors of this volume suggest that the Marxist roots of state socialism, emphasising the mode of production and its control, dominated the thinking of the Labour Party and the Left in Britain for the best part of three-quarters but has become irrelevant. They offer a collection of essays which examine alternatives to state socialism, from the pluralism of socialism, which has not really been examined in any detail in recent years. I am not entirely convinced by their assertion that some of these debates have received little air in recent years, for apart from the work cited in the essays one must remember that more than forty years ago Jay Winter's book *Socialism and the Challenge of War* (1974) did explain how the Fabian-inspired state socialism at the time of the Great War provided a better alternative than the guild socialism of G. D. H. Cole and the educated-citizen approach of R. H. Tawney, when socialist alternatives were presented and discussed by the Labour Party. Also, despite the large number of alternatives discussed the ideas of the Independent Labour Party on community politics, 'municipal coal', 'municipal milk supply', and similar ideas, are not really examined although it must have some relevance in a day and age when regional and local powers are increasingly emphasised. The ILP's policy 'of Socialism in Our Time' is fairly dismissed in the course of one essay but it had many other ideas, including Guild Socialism, in its locker during the inter-war years. The publicity claim about this collection being a major revisionist text is also somewhat exaggerated since it essentially offers a wide variety of socialist alternatives which have come and gone by the wayside and essentially offers them as food for debate. What then does this collection offer?

Despite some gaps there are some fine essays embodied in this book. The voluntaryist tradition of trade unionism, as opposed to state control, is effectively examined by Richard Whiting, even though at the present time trade unionism seems an increasingly spent force in an age where agencies represent more workers than the trade union movement.. The essay on the co-operation by Rachael Vorberg-Rugh and Angela Whitecross examines the evolution of

the relationship between the Labour Party and the co-operative movement in the first half of the twentieth century suggestion that co-operation has remained a peripheral influence in the creation of a voluntary civil society in the face of an increasingly statist Labour Party. Ruth Davidson suggests that women activists became embedded in the voluntary local community activity as they built socialism from the ground up in their struggle to achieve equal citizenship to men and drawing upon the work of Barry Doyle and others suggest that local citizens were able to work together to produce voluntary social provision that met the needs of the community. It is a commonplace in writings on the Labour Party that that Methodism contributed more to the development of the Labour movement than Marxism and in this vein the importance of Protestant Nonconformity is examined by Andy Vail who established the omnipresence of Nonconformity within the Labour movement and the Labour leadership throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – through the rise of Christian auxiliary movements, Settlement movements, Brotherhood and Sisterhood movement. Indeed, Keir Hardie, Ramsay MacDonald, and many of those who were returned as Labour MPs in 1906 came from a Nonconformist background as David Martin revealed many years ago when examining Labour ideology. Although Nonconformity has declined as an influence in recent years there is a sense in which its activities filled the gaps on social provision in the past and might do so in the future.

A second section of this book deals with ‘the ideas of three ‘other leaders’ – Edward Cadbury, Walter Citrine and Frank Chapple and their ideals in articles respectively written by John Kimberley, James Moher and Calum Aikman. Cadbury focused upon building upon trust between the employers and the workforce, Citrine promoted industrial cooperation, and Chapple a right-wing trade union organiser who sought to modernise the trade union movement Essentially, what the studies of these men indicate is the fleeting ideas of new industrial relationships which have emerged but have never really caught on.

The third section deals with the 'other intellectuals'. G. D. H. Cole and Michael Young are examined, respectively by David Goodway and Stephen Meredith. Neither intellectual felt that state socialism offered sufficient democratic involvement for the individuals. G. D. H. Cole, of course, developed his ideas on Guild Socialism whereby the individual operated as both a consumer through the demands and targets set by the state and also as a producer as a worker. Somehow demand and production would come into balance through the fact that each person acted in the two spheres and it was then assumed that industrial conflict and gross inequalities would inevitably disappear. Cole's driving leitmotif was a belief in the free will of the individual, opposition to centralism, and thus opposition to Communism and social democracy. Whether his vision of society could have worked is open to doubt, largely because it naively assumed that industrial conflict could not occur, and his ideas attracted little interest.. Michael Young, on the other hand was much more concerned about developing bottom-up and communitarian responses located in the forms of network of extended family units. Working through the Mutual Aid Centre, and similar organisations, he argued that this could be developed into 'social co-operatives'. A third essay, by Stuart White, deals with the varied ideas of Colin Ward (anarchy), Sheila Rowbotham (feminism, nurseries and the state), Stuart Hall (Thatcherism and the need for left anti-statism), and Paul Hirst and Hilary Wainwright (association and participation). Peter Ackers and Alistair J. Reid conclude with a short analysis of the book and look forward to civil society after state socialism and neo-Liberalism in an endeavour to engender debate about the future structure of socialist society.

What emerges from all this welter of ideas is the importance of individual rights and citizenship in future discussion about the socialist state. Indeed, it raises the question - if the state cannot redistribute wealth more fairly how is justice for its citizen to be guaranteed? Indeed, what is to be the new concept of citizenships, its duties and expectations in the new

socialist society which Labour might offer? What are the moral, community and individual ideas which might drive forward a new optimistic, citizen-based vision of a socialist society? As Ackers and Reid conclude (p. 334). ‘All this is not to call for a ‘minimum state’ as true neo-liberals do, but to ask what the limits of the state should be and what role civic society should play in a ‘mixed economy; and a free society.’

This collection is redolent with ideas, displays the pluralism of socialism and is a very important start to both the intellectual and pragmatic debate which will inevitably develop over the next few years. It is an engaging and stimulating collection of essays and should be read by those concerned about the future of socialist and civic society in Britain, the need for which might very well develop after Brexit.

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