BOOK REVIEWS


Reviewed by John Pateman

This is vital reading for those who want to liberate the planet from the grip of transnational capitalism. *A World to Win* shows how corporate-driven globalisation has penetrated every corner of society. It offers ideas and proposals for freeing economic and cultural resources from the grip of profit and capital accumulation. The book suggests not-for-profit solutions to the ecological crisis and proposes a restructuring of the state in favour of democratic participation and control.

**Globalisation and its Consequences**

Anyone who is under any illusions that neo-liberal capitalism is unsustainable and contains the seeds of its own destruction should read this book. It is packed with information, statistics and case studies which demonstrate the unequal allocation of power and resources around the planet. For example, the richest 5% of the world’s people receive 114 times the income of the poorest 1%. And the richest 1% receive as much as the poorest 57%. The connections between issues such as alienation, privatisation, poverty and the power of transnational corporations are clearly made and there is a good analysis of the transition from the welfare state to the market state. There are sections on the health service, housing and education.

The chapter on all consuming culture is of particular relevance to library and information workers. The role of the internet, the digital divide and the concentration of media ownership are considered. The use of branding and the role of sport in big business are also covered. The conclusion is that all forms of culture – from libraries to fine arts – are being converted from public goods into tools that service the needs of global capital. The solution offered is culture for all, wresting creativity back from the corporations and establishing democratic ownership, funding and control of the arts. This would lead to greater development and wider access accompanied by cultural education.

The chapter on the environment is perhaps the most powerful of all, and there is a very strong ecological theme running through the whole book. The effects of climate change are explained in graphic detail and I particularly liked the description of global warming as a Weapon of Mass Destruction. The effect on human health and genetically modified food is also explored. It is made clear that science is now at the behest of big business, who fund and dictate research and distort its results to meet bottom line imperatives. The program for action includes production under the control of the workforce, social ownership of agriculture and the land, research for human understanding not profit and science for human development not capitalism.

**Ideas for the 21st Century**

The authors offer a stimulating collection of suggestions as to how the world can break free from global capitalism and work to meet human needs rather than generate ever increasing profits. This will require a transformation of the economy. The China syndrome is given as an example of pitfalls to avoid, but I would argue that China is
modernising its economy in order to develop its people. The commanding heights of the Chinese economy are still in the hands of the state, which continues to be dictated by the principles of Marx and Lenin introduced by the Revolution in 1949. In some senses China has lost its way and departed from the path set by Chairman Mao – such as the concept and reality of the “iron rice bowl” – but in other respects China stands as a socialist alternative to western capitalism and is able to influence major institutions such as the WTO.

Another country which we can learn from is Cuba and I was very surprised to see no references to Cuba – or Venezuela – in the index, despite the success of these countries in challenging neo liberalism and building socialist alternatives. For example, the authors argue in favour of local, regional and national Assemblies to ensure that sufficient capacity exists to satisfy needs. This is exactly what has been happening in Cuba since the 1970s when a system of Peoples Power was introduced. Many of the revolutionary ideas promoted in this book are already being delivered by revolutionary Cuba who have demonstrated since 1959 that socialism in one country is possible. Witness the Cuban education, health and social welfare systems, plus their assistance to other countries on the developing world. Capitalism is a world system and should be replaced with a new world system. But to say that “there is no national solution to the crisis” is a false analysis.

One section of the book which I particularly enjoyed – and which did mention Cuba – was the transatlantic dialogue on education and the future between Glenn Rikowski (Senior Lecturer in Education Studies in the School of Education at University College Northampton) and Rich Gibson (Associate Professor of Education at San Diego State University, California). Glenn Rikowski, a highly respected and influential UK educational practitioner and activist, asks for some examples of “actually existing forms of socialism, or attempts at creating socialism.” In his reply Rich Gibson says that “the efforts for revolution were the Paris Commune, the Russian Revolution, the Chinese Revolution, and the Cuban revolution. Each of these battles built on the other. The Cuban revolution showed that a revolution was possible even at the fingertips of the empire, and the potential role of socialist education for a new kind of humanity.”

A revolutionary change is necessary
Notions that humans are inherently selfish and that we have reached the “end of history” are deconstructed. The ideas of the status quo and the all consuming ideology – that there is no alternative to capitalism – are also challenged. A theory of knowledge is presented along with a rough guide to materialist dialectics and concepts such as negation and contradiction. Questions such as “do we live in a post modern world ?” and “is globalisation just a policy ?” are posed and answered. It is at this point that the politics of the authors become apparent and it is clear why there are no references to Cuba (which they regard as state capitalism). “The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) are presently the most influential Left Group in Britain, and what they say and do is considered by significant numbers of people as an expression of Marxism”. I would challenge this statement on both of its assertions. The authors then go on to criticise the SWP for regarding corporate driven globalisation as a policy question first and foremost. “Their aim is to try and change the policies of the capitalist nation state rather than striving to overthrow this state. This is the reality behind the radical rhetoric.”
A case is then made for “a truly revolutionary party”. The role of this party is defined in terms of training and development, democratic discussion, political intervention, a rallying point and the struggle for power. The way that a party functions is described – such as developing new policies – and “the real origins of Stalinism are explained.” By now it is clear that the authors subscribe to yet another strand of Trotskyism and belong to the faction known as the Movement for a Socialist Future (MSF) which “campaigns to defeat capitalist globalisation through policies of social ownership and mass democratic control.” If you visit the MSF website at msf@socialistfuture.org.uk you will learn more about the movement and its other publications including Gerry Healy: a Revolutionary life.

Gerry Healy was a controversial British Trotskyist leader, born on 3 December 1913 in Cork, Ireland. He received a minor education from the Christian Brothers and emigrated to Britain at the age of 14 to work as a radio operator on freighting ships. While working on these ships, he joined the Communist Party of Great Britain's (CPGB) youth wing. He made a reputation for being a good speaker and organizer. In 1939, he joined the Trotskyist Workers International League (WIL) and was consequently expelled from the CPGB. Angering the WIL leaders, he was expelled from that organization as well in 1943 for "personal opportunism and political degeneration." Healy then founded "The Club" and advocated "entryism," a campaign in which a small number of well-organised and disciplined revolutionaries would join the Labour Party, in power after winning the 1945 general election, and win over militant workers to Trotskyism. His entryist tactics found a hearing in the leadership of the Fourth International (FI), and in 1950 the FI ordered their Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) to dissolve into Healy's Club, forming the Socialist Labour League (SLL).

In 1953, Healy broke with the FI's "revisionist" leadership (Pablo's International Secretariat) and became a leader of a rival organization, the International Committee (IC). He centralized the SLL's membership, expelling dissident factions of Trotskyists. Within the Labour Party, the SLL railed against the "anti-working-class" Labour leaders. In 1959, the SLL was expelled from the Labour Party. Healy's organization grew during the 1960's, gaining the support of influential celebrities which included Venessa Redgrave and (reportedly) John Lennon. In 1969 he began publishing Workers' Press and in 1973 reorganized the SLL as the Workers' Revolutionary Party (WRP). In 1985 he was expelled from the WRP and the International Committee and Healy subsequently formed a rival organization in 1987, the Marxist Party. He moved away from Trotskyism, supporting the policies of Mikhail Gorbachev in the Soviet Union. He died in London on December 14, 1989. His ashes are buried in Highgate Cemetery, London, near the grave of Karl Marx.

So the Movement for a Socialist Future is the latest in a long line of opportunist, divisive and sectarian Trotskyist ventures which have split the Left into ever smaller and divergent factions. Instead of uniting to defeat the real enemies - capitalism, neo liberalism and globalisation – these tiny parties spend all their time, energy and resources fighting each other. However, I do not want to end on a negative note or detract from the many fine arguments and analyses put forward in this book. To quote from their concluding paragraph “You have the opportunity to make a difference, to contribute to a new chapter in human history. You should take it and make it. In 1848,
in their stirring *Communist Manifesto*, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels penned two famous sentences that still have real significance for today: “*The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.*”