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Joel Wainwright and Geoff Mann

Climate Leviathan: A Political Theory of Our Planetary Future

Reviewed by Rob Winkel

■ *Climate Leviathan* provides a straightforward yet detailed analysis of possibly the greatest crisis facing the world today. Many books have been written on the subject, but few provide the crucial analysis of the dynamics of capitalism as presented in *Climate Leviathan*. The struggle against climate change is, as far as the authors are concerned, the struggle against capitalism. Their book maps out how the impending climate crisis is likely to shape – and be shaped by – the future political economy of the world.

The discussion, using a Marxist framework, presents four distinct potential future responses to climate change based on the possible political paths that face us. The authors term these outcomes 'Climate Leviathan', 'Climate Behemoth', 'Climate Mao' and 'Climate X'.

'Climate Leviathan' is the state the planet would tend towards under continuing liberal capitalist rule. This is a scenario in which the capitalist class achieves stability for itself during a climate crisis. In the world of climate leviathan, there is an emphasis on the 'securitisation' that capitalism will require when faced with the fallout, including the increasing production of climate refugees. In this scenario, which is today already playing itself out, the poor pay the highest price for the effects of climate change, while the wealthiest are the main culprits of the root causes; the world's wealthiest will

be able to shield themselves from a planet heading towards ruin.

The emergence of reactionary regimes and their climate change denial is described as 'Climate Behemoth', which the authors describe as 'the spectre haunting the world's core capitalist states'. 'Climate Mao' refers to the call for a state-led push back against climate change, reflective of some of the measures being taken today in China. Finally, the scenario of 'Climate X' refers to an anti-capitalist path that still needs to be drawn and that is based on solidarity. This path of 'Climate X' involves an analysis rooted in Marxist ideas and a rejection of control from both capital and the sovereign state.

The authors contend that 'it is not just possible but imperative that we imagine the end of capitalism'. Assessing the work completed by the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Mann and Wainwright point out that the IPCC – who have done a great deal of research and much of it very strong – have paid no attention to any work critical of capitalism, which causes a serious analytical problem. Analysing climate change without an understanding of capitalism is, the authors note, like 'trying to model hurricanes without a theory of Thermodynamics'.

The authors quite clearly understand and make a strong case that an analysis that puts 'green capitalism' at the heart of the solution will never suffice. It is this part of the analysis where they differ from authors such as Naomi Klein, who, in her landmark book *This Changes Everything*, has a strong approach towards direct action to stop

fossil fuel exploration but stops short of an analysis of capitalism.

Climate Leviathan provides a strong theoretical grounding and a complex analysis, yet its underlying message is simple: the endless drive for growth in capitalism means that it can never sufficiently tackle climate change. As the book tends in places more towards an academic text, it may not be a strong introduction to anti-capitalist ideas for the fight against climate change, but it certainly provides a detailed analysis for the thousands of people arriving at the conclusion that system change is what is necessary if we are going to meaningfully tackle climate change.

This text is useful for anyone who wishes to flesh out in detail the political arguments for the kind of fight-back we need against the capitalist drive towards climate catastrophe and demonstrates well why the fightback needs to be based on international anti-capitalist popular movements. The book maps out well the arguments against the current trajectory of 'Climate Leviathan'. Perhaps frustratingly for a book on climate change, the authors do not go into detail about what 'Climate X' should look like on the ground. This may be because the challenge is of such a monumental scale and complexity that it still needs to be worked through, but it does make for a slightly unsatisfactory conclusion.

As a whole, *Climate Leviathan* provides a useful analysis for anyone who wants to better understand the political economy of climate change, but readers should not expect from this book many ideas on how best to engage in the struggle against climate change.

Jack Robertson:

The Man Who Shook His Fist at the Tsar

Reviewed by Paul O'Brien

■ This book is about *The Bronze Horseman*, an epic poem written by Russia's greatest poet, Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837), who lived through one of the most tumultuous periods in Russian history. Not only is *The Bronze Horseman* much loved by ordinary Russians, it is also amongst the most politically charged of all his works. Someone once remarked 'if you tell me who you think Pushkin was, I'll tell you your view of Russian history'.

This is a modern translation of Pushkin's *The Bronze Horseman* by Jack Robertson that provides the accessible edition in English that this great work deserves. The introduction and the poem itself take up less than fifty pages. The bulk of the book deals with the biographical and historical background against which the poem is written. The last part deals with Pushkin's life and the history of Russia up to the end of the 1830s. There is an extensive section on the great literary and political tradition that stands behind Pushkin's work, and the enduring popularity of his poetry.

Pushkin witnessed two successive revolutions that went down to defeat. The first was the Decembrist revolt of 1825 and the second in 1830. Both revolts were against the despotic rule of the Tsar. Pushkin wrote *The Bronze Horseman* in 1833 in support of the aims of the revolutionary movement a few years after both rebellions had been crushed, though for political reasons he had to use the metaphor of a great flood overwhelming the city of St. Petersburg to clothe his political objections to the Tsarist regime in an acceptable manner.

The Bronze Horseman of Pushkin's poem is the equestrian statue of Peter the Great in St. Petersburg showing the emperor extending a protecting hand over the city. But, in Pushkin's politically charged poem, he questions whether this hand threatens, rather than



Original illustration by Alexander Benois from *The Bronze Horseman*

protects the citizens of St. Petersburg. The poem combines admiration for the magnificent city created by Peter the Great, with a hatred of Imperial despotism and the Tsar's indifference to the plight of the poor. The poem opens with a description of the origins of the city:

On this bleak shoreline, woe begone
Beaten and battered by the sea
Was where our great Tsar Peter once
stood.

It tells the story of the terrifying retribution unleashed against Pushkin's anti-hero, Evgeny, who dares to question the Tsar's judgement in choosing a disease ridden marsh prone to flooding as the location for a new capital city. The events described in the poem take

place against the background of the great flood of 1824 when hundreds of its citizens were drowned. In some of the most dramatic passages of the poem Pushkin describes the devastating effects of the flood.

Pushkin's hero, Evgeny, and his family and friends are victims of the flood. The disaster sends him into a crazed delirium, and he roams the streets of the city in despair for months on end. One evening, he arrives in Senate Square in the heart of the city and sees the great bronze statue of Peter the Great on its plinth. He raises his fist in anger at the statue and curses the Tsar for what had happened. In doing so he is also voicing the anger and thoughts of many ordinary Russians who were

aware of Peter's tyrannical excesses. But suddenly, as he stands in front of the statue, the bronze horseman comes to life. It swivels on its pedestal and chases Evgeny through the streets of the city:

Gritting his teeth and clenching his fists
 Seemingly seized by some unexplained force
 He at first starts to tremble, then splutters with hate
 'So be it, miracle worker – just you wait!'
 Next thing, he was certain, the Tsar on high
 Had flown into a rage in the instant gone by
 And, somehow, now, without making a sound
 The head of the tyrant had wheeled right around...

The poem ends with Evgeny's death; the narrator does not describe his death directly, but the poem closes with the discovery of his corpse on Goladay Island in a ruined hut floating on the water. Most likely, Pushkin was paying tribute to the executed leaders of the Decembrist revolt who were buried there in an unmarked grave.

For this political stand Pushkin had to endure exile and censorship. He had already served seven years in political exile, and everything he wrote between 1826, after his return to St. Petersburg, until his death in 1837 had to be passed by the censors. *The Bronze Horseman* fell victim to this censorship and was never published in its entirety during his lifetime.

Pushkin is a household name in Russia, where literature and politics are inextricably linked. He understood that literature needs to tell the truth; but tell it beautifully. Robertson's translation of *The Bronze Horseman* reverberates with energy and excitement and draws us into the story of those traumatic times. This book combines a history of Pushkin's poem, his original notes and Robertson's extensive review of Russian history, and the background to the events described.

Jack Robertson's wonderful new translation and history of the period now gives us the edition in English that this great work deserves.

Talat Ahmed

Mohandas Gandhi: Experiments in Civil Disobedience

Reviewed by Seamus O'Kane

Saintly nationalism demystified

■ Mohandas 'Mahatma' Gandhi is a name familiar to households across the world as a man who stood up to the British Empire and won. His enduring popularity sees him cited not only by anti-imperialists and others on the left but by establishment figures. Talat Ahmed points to the United Nations General Assembly declaring the date of his birth an International Day of Non-Violence in 2007 in his honour. His ideas also found purchase in the American Civil Rights movement and, more recently, were cited by an organiser in the Palestinian 'Great March of Return'.

Talat Ahmed's political biography, *Mohandas Gandhi: Experiments in Civil Disobedience*, is an analysis of Gandhi's life which rejects the 'great man' view of history. Gandhi, as an educated middle-class man was able to position himself to be viewed as the voice of the Indian independence movement. Whilst clearly a person of huge influence, able to capture and give voice to the struggles around him, he did not create the mass movement which emerged. Indeed, Ahmed's book is filled with examples of the movement acting beyond and even against Gandhi's intentions. Herein lies one of Ahmed's key criticisms of Gandhi. A strong pattern emerges throughout his life as an activist of constant compromise and demobilisation when he is unable to control events.

Gandhi's period in London provided the foundation for much of his political thought. As the imperial centre grew rich off the crimes of colonialism, it was still ravaged by the stark inequality of the haves and have-nots. A counter-cultural movement existed in London which was aware of these issues, along with

debates on women's suffrage, Ireland and other colonies, and vegetarianism. Gandhi was also introduced to Thoreau's 'Civil Disobedience' through these circles, but the philosophies of these circles were often predicated on bourgeois ideas of changing the individual; notions of 'purity of the self' were able to fit comfortably with Gandhi's confluence of religion and politics.

Ahmed hones in on three of Gandhi's campaigns in South Africa which she views as crucial to his later political thought. In these events we can also see the contradictions and limitations of his philosophy.

The Immigration Law Amendment Bill and the Franchise Amendment Bill were pushed by the government in 1894 and 1895, targeting indentured Indian labourers and limiting the amount of Indians who could vote. Gandhi's first campaign focused on the franchise rather than the indentured labourers and he found support among the Indian merchants. His methods involved letter-writing, petitions and meetings with politicians. Gandhi managed to temporarily delay the bill.

Gandhi's second campaign produced the methods which would come to be associated with him. In 1906, Transvaal's Asiatic Law Amendment Ordinance required all Indians and Chinese people to be registered, fingerprinted and equipped with an ID pass at all times on pain of deportation. Gandhi organised a mass meeting of 3,000 people where he proposed the tactic of mass non-compliance. Gandhi was inspired by the Russian Revolution of 1905, where a general strike demonstrated that "the powerful cannot rule without the cooperation of the ruled". Popular resistance to the law saw 155 Indians jailed. Gandhi met Colonial Secretary, General Jan Christian Smuts, and agreed a compromise of voluntary registration to "prove to the Government that we are loyal and law-abiding". Smuts was meant to repeal aspects of the law in return but he went back on his word. 2,000 protestors burnt registration documents at the Hamidia Mosque. 3,000 arrests were made

during the campaign of non-compliance. Ahmed notes that this (albeit failed) campaign marked a shift away from constitutional politics towards the participation of ordinary people.

Gandhi's third campaign in South Africa was the largest of this period. An annual tax remained, there were restrictions on movement and entry, and Hindu and Muslim marriages were ruled invalid. In April 1913, Gandhi called for a strike and campaign of passive resistance against these laws. Women crossed the Natal/Transvaal border in deliberate violation of restrictions on movement. A strike began with miners and expanded until it affected produce markets, sugar mills, and left many hotels, restaurants and homes without domestic staff, as 20,000 Indian workers joined the campaign. Gandhi entered into negotiations with Smuts, securing the abolition of the unfair tax and of the system of indentured labour, and winning recognition of Indian marriages. This victory elevated Gandhi to a legendary status when he returned to India.

Gandhi's third campaign, while a success, demonstrated how his concern was limited to Indians. He rejected the idea of black workers joining the strike and he called off a mass march when white railway workers went on strike. Indeed, Gandhi expressed racist views on multiple occasions during his time in South Africa as he identified with European ideas of civilisation. He was opposed to separate entrances for white and black people in the post office and during his time and prison. Rather than campaign for one entrance, however, he wanted three entrances as he did not see why Indians should be classed with the native African population. Gandhi's views in this regard are inextricable from his constitutional nationalism which does not challenge supremacist notions of empire. He advocated for Indians to fight in World War I as "British citizens of the Great British Empire" and viewed Queen Victoria as "that noble lady" who possessed "the whole-hearted affection of India's millions".

Ahmed notes that, during Gandhi's time in South Africa, indentured labourers were never high on his



Studio portrait of Gandhi from 1931

agenda. Similarly, although Gandhi often spoke in favour of better treatment for the "Untouchables" in India's caste system, he continued to lecture them on hygiene and diet and did not call for abolition of the caste system. His brand of nationalism did not challenge class society in any serious way as his philosophy posed questions of inequality in moral, often religious, terms, leading to criticisms from other campaigners and the left.

A key criticism from the left emerged in the famous Salt March, a campaign of defiance against the British monopoly and tax on salt. This saw huge popular resistance as millions broke the salt laws by making and buying illegal salt. The campaign also inspired wider disobedience and opposition to British rule, with some areas campaigning

against forest laws and forms of taxation. However, it was also met with brutal resistance by the British state, with up to 250 people murdered by British troops in Peshawar as they fired into an unarmed crowd, 60,000 arrests in a month, and horrific scenes as 3,000 marchers to the Salt Works were greeted with police clubs and fractured skulls.

Although support for Indian self-determination had expanded significantly and more radical voices (including Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhash Chandra Bose) wanted to push ahead, Gandhi entered into talks with Viceroy Irwin. Here, Ahmed is scathing of Gandhi's penchant for compromise as "the price of his partial victories was to be measured in the bashed-in heads and broken bodies of his non-

resisting followers". It was the sacrifice of these masses which allowed Gandhi to elevate himself into sainthood and global iconography.

One tragedy of Gandhi's life was his inability to prevent the partition of India and the horrific carnival of reaction which was central to this process. Religious massacres and a huge exodus of people saw between 1 and 2 million people killed. While Gandhi preached unity between Hindu and Muslim, his philosophy and status as a religious figure limited his ability to bring people together. Ahmed poses an alternative to Gandhi's nationalism: that of a popular movement from below. The strike and subsequent mutiny by the Royal Indian Navy united Hindu and Muslim against racism and poor food rations. The Union Jack was replaced with the flags of the Indian National Congress, the Muslim League and the Communist Party of India. Protests and strikes in Calcutta saw intermittent strikes and massive intercommunal unity, pointing to a different path from that dominated by elites in the arena of electoral politics. We can only speculate on whether or not partition could have been averted but Ahmed's book illustrates instances of class struggle which could have united people from all religions against the common enemy: the British Empire.

Gandhi's "experiments in civil disobedience" saw him mobilise people for his own objectives yet he was unable to control the movement which stretched beyond both him and his intentions. Within these acts of popular resistances there lived the potential to challenge not just the daily injustices but the system which created them. Gandhi has been comfortably embraced by establishment figures but popular resistance remains a threat to those rulers who now oversee a world where India and Pakistan are locked in a nuclear stand-off and hundreds of millions of people in the region still live in abject poverty. Changing that will require more than the respectable nationalism of the negotiating table and it is India's tumultuous history of struggle from below, not a mystified saint, which points the way.



Catherine Merridale

Lenin on the Train

Reviewed by Willy Cumming

■ A sealed train left Zurich for revolutionary Russia on Easter Monday, April 1917. On it were Vladimir Lenin, his wife and a small group of his exiled comrades. The world war was stalemated, and the US was about to join it. The German regime, that facilitated the train, saw it as an opportunity to undermine the Russian army and ease the pressure on its eastern front.

The Russian Tsar had been overthrown in February. The book brilliantly captures the reason for, dynamic and energy of that revolution – a process seen in all popular revolutions, most recently in Sudan. Merridale writes "It was the

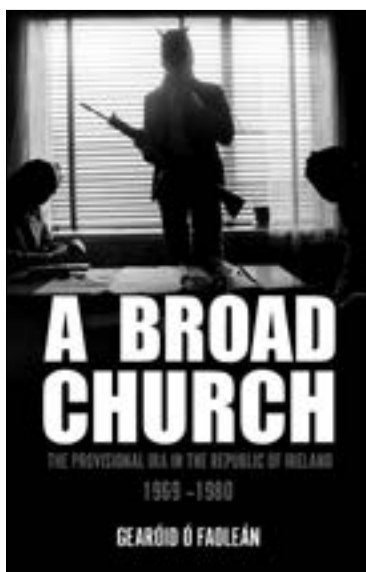
people's raw emotions that made some onlookers nervous. They felt its power – the sound of trampling feet beat out the requiem for the old world – but no one could be sure where it might lead."

A mass spontaneous movement overthrew the regime. But that success raised the question of 'now who rules?' A provisional government was established, but a government that was continuing with the hated war. And now there was no Tsar to take the blame.

Lenin was clear, the Provisional Government should not be supported. His arrival at the Finland Station, Petrograd, was met by cheering crowds. He concluded a speech that night to the Bolshevik leadership, 'You comrades have a trusting attitude to the government. If that is so, our paths diverge. I prefer to remain in a minority.' There was no possibility, he argued,

that the bourgeoisie would turn into a revolutionary force. The only alternative was for the working class to take power – full power to the Soviet, or workers' council, of Workers' Deputies. That night only one person, Alexandra Kollantai, spoke in his support. But the debate he started was ultimately to lead to the successful revolution that October.

Many books have been written about the period. Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* is still by far the best, but at over 1200 pages it can be intimidating. This book, despite a final chapter which suggests that the failure of the ideals of the revolution was inevitable, is a very readable introduction and recommended.



Gearóid Ó Faoleáin

A Broad Church. The Provisional IRA in the Republic of Ireland 1969-1980

Reviewed by Willy Cumming

■ What level of support did the IRA have in southern Irish society during the 'Troubles'? This book makes the case that it was significant and 'instrumental' to their longevity. It suggests that support came from across all political

parties, the army, Gardaí and the courts. It details bank robberies, training camps and the refusal of juries to convict those charged with IRA membership.

In the Belfast Newsletter, Ulster Unionist Party Justice Spokesman Doug Beattie commented that the book will help 'redress the balance' in how the story of the 'Troubles' is currently being recounted. The implication being that if there was collusion between British state forces and loyalist paramilitaries, there was similar collusion between Irish state forces and the IRA. The book is not arguing that, but leaves itself open to that interpretation.

The television footage of the RUC attack on the Derry Civil Rights march of the 5th October 1968 was the first indication for many of the reality of Northern Ireland. We had seen similar footage of black civil rights protests in the US, but this was happening just up the road. The following year, in August 1969, following attacks on nationalist areas, thousands of refugees came south for safety.

I clearly remember the reaction to Bloody Sunday. Arriving into college on the Monday nothing else was being talked about. At a mass assembly of students and staff it was decided to march to the British Embassy on Merrion Square, joining thousands of others coming from workplaces all over the city. For the next three days the country closed down. Over 100,000 marched in Dublin, with tens of thousands marching in cities and towns throughout the state. Eamonn McCann described it as 'the highpoint of 32-county nationalism in the southern state'.

In that atmosphere there is no doubt that there was a significant growth in at the very least sympathy, but also, it is true, membership of the IRA. But the sympathy was primarily that of passive, uninvolved observers. As the republican movement's strategy was primarily military, the significant growth in Sinn Féin only occurs after the ceasefire.

The book I would suggest overstates its case, but does contain interesting background information.