



BOOK REVIEWS

Kieran Allen, *32 Counties—The failure of partition and the case for a united Ireland*, 2021, Pluto Press, €17.50.

Dave O'Farrell

In the last few years the national question and the subject of Irish unity have returned to the mainstream of political discussion. A slew of articles, opinion pieces, and even plans for how this might arise have appeared, not just in the Irish media but also in the international press. Against the backdrop of the ongoing Brexit saga, the issue has regained a prominence not seen since the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, forcing many to grapple with serious questions about the history of partition, the nature of the conflict in the North, the role of British imperialism, and crucially, the question of a united Ireland: what it might look like and how it might be achieved.

Kieran Allen's new book on the subject is a welcome and timely interjection into these debates, setting out a clear left-wing perspective on these questions and arguing for a socialist road forward rooted in the tradition of James Connolly.

Allen locates the origins of the partition in the interests of the British Empire and struggles within the British ruling class, in particular within the Conservative Party that latched onto the Ulster Loyalists and opposition to Home Rule for Ireland as a cause around which to unite the party.

When partition became a reality in 1921 following the War of Independence, Connolly's famous observation (made in 1914 when the Home Rule Party first accepted the principle of a 'temporary' partition of the island) that partition would

mean a carnival of reaction in both North and South, would set back the wheels of progress, would destroy the oncoming unity of the Irish Labour movement and paralyse all advanced movements whilst it endured seemed all too prophetic with the emergence of a sectarian Protestant state in the North and, following the Civil War, a 'mirror image' conservative Catholic Free State in the South. Indeed one of the great strengths of the book is how it shows that both states on the island were strongly influenced

and shaped by this process of partition. The emphasis placed on religious identity by the respective ruling classes resulted in a politics vastly different to the rest of Europe, with the Unionist party dominating the North and Fianna Fáil the South—social democratic parties, which played significant roles elsewhere, were relegated to the sidelines.

Yet despite this sidelining of even mild left-wing ideas and the frequent unleashing of sectarian violence, the book is full of examples of working-class Protestants and Catholics uniting on a class basis, most notably the 1932 Outdoor Relief Riots. These examples of class unity across the sectarian divide are crucial to what is probably one of the main arguments of the work, a rejection of the 'two cultures' view of the North with two communities, Catholic and Protestant, locked in a never-ending conflict.

This view of 'two cultures' is increasingly prevalent—even being adopted by Sinn Féin—yet it almost completely ignores the historical and material basis of partition and the role it has played in shaping sectarian conflict. Even today, with Sinn Féin and the DUP governing in Stormont and seemingly in agreement on a—often neoliberal—course of action, such as the corporation tax cuts contained in the Fresh Start Agreement, they clash loudly over issues such as the Irish Language Act, each shoring up their respective voter bases by engaging in an 'auction politics'. They claim to be delivering for their respective communities despite the fact that workers in the North continue to be worse off than workers in the rest of the UK.

This view of the conflict involving two cultures which must both be respected also lets the role played by British imperialism off the hook, allowing the UK government to portray itself as a 'neutral arbitrator' attempting to keep the peace between the warring tribes. Despite claims to the contrary, British imperialism has a most definite imperialist interest in maintaining the status quo in the North. As Allen puts it: 'Politics trumps economics', and the maintenance of Northern Ireland is integral to maintaining the Union—particularly with the issue of Scottish independence never far away.

The book ends with a discussion of the possibilities of a united Ireland and some of the plans put forward as to how it might look. The vast majority of views articulated so far are distinctly neoliberal in their outlook, and some, including one outlined by Michael McDowell arguing for a confederation of the two states whereby very little would change on the ground. Even the Sinn Féin approach, based in large part on the work of political science professor Kurt Hubner, essentially sees the two states combine on the basis of the current southern state with an emphasis on foreign direct investment—essentially a united tax haven.

In contrast to this, Allen sets out a view of what a left-wing campaign for a united Ireland might look like. It would need to be one that is ‘independent and critical’ of the southern state and organised on an all-Ireland basis. Indeed, such a movement is in many ways natural, as seen by the immediate demand following the victory of the repeal movement that ‘the North is next’. Many campaigners on issues from health to the environment see no need to stop at the border.

While it will be a struggle even to get to the point of a border poll being called, the left needs to be clear, both in supporting the demand for a border poll and articulating a distinct left-wing view of a united Ireland, one that challenges the power of global corporations to avoid tax, one that takes seriously the building of social housing and the creation of an all-island NHS, one where workers rights are protected and enhanced.

There is much in this book to help in articulating these arguments. They will not be easy to make in the face of resistive Loyalist hardliners or a hesitant southern state, but if we are serious about standing in the Connolly tradition, we should remember another of his famous lines: ‘Our demands most moderate are, we only want the Earth’.



Eoin Ó Broin, *Home—Why Public Housing Is the Answer*, Merrion Press, 2019, €14.95.

Rory Hearne, *Housing Shock—The Irish Housing Crisis and How to Solve It*, Policy Press, 2020, €22.45.

Stewart Smyth

Housing remains the central public policy issue in Ireland. A decade after the Celtic Tiger property bubble burst, housing was the number one issue in the 2020 general election. A year later, the news headlines are full of vulture funds (rather than first-time buyers) acquiring whole new-built housing estates, the FF/FG/Green coalition voting in favour of tax breaks for such vulture funds, and then the shambles of the Dáil having to be suspended because no minister was present to speak to their own legislation on affordable homes.

In this context, two recently published books by Sinn Féin TD Eoin Ó Broin and academic/activist, Rory Hearne were much anticipated. Both authors have seen their profiles rise considerably over the past few years as they have been a source of cogent criticism of successive governments’ failed housing policies.

Ó Broin’s Home

While both books cover some similar ground, it is clear they have different motivations driving the authors. Ó Broin’s book *Home* is a comprehensive engagement with housing policy since the foundation of the state. He splits the century of housing legislation into three movements—‘The State Gets Involved’, ‘The State Walks Away’, and ‘The Return of the State?’

During the course of these three movements we learn much about housing legislation, but there is little about housing beyond the policy realm. Maybe this should be of no surprise, after all, Ó Broin has been tasked by his party to be the housing minister *in waiting*, and this book shows he has done his homework.

For those interested in housing policy and legislation there is much to learn from *Home*, but an explanation of housing’s location with the economy and society as whole, the roots of housing crises, and therefore how to stop them from occurring in the future are largely absent. The impression is left that there is little of

relevance beyond the policy realm, with the implicit corollary that a Sinn Féin-led government is the only solution to the housing crisis.

Hearne's *Shock*

Rory Hearne's book focuses on the growing housing crisis since the Celtic Tiger years. The initial chapters explore, in detail, the experiences of generation rent and homelessness, including Hearne's own experience as a community organiser and activist. In the middle part of the book Hearne locates the housing crisis in a framing of neoliberalism (extending market relations over all aspects of housing) and financialisation (increasing the power of financial logics and finance capital in providing housing).

This framing allows Hearne to develop a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of the crisis in comparison to Ó Broin's three movements. These chapters are full of statistical analysis including the impact of REITs (real estate investment trusts), vulture funds, and government policy generally. In a chapter on the 'lost decade' for social housing, Hearne calculates that, using 2009 as the base year, over 40,000 social housing new builds have *not* been built between 2010 and 2019 (p 168). This period includes 2015, when local authorities built just seventy-five new homes.

The Right to Housing

When it comes to solutions, both authors advocate a right to housing as the essential next step to addressing the housing crisis—as Ó Broin states: 'Any serious attempt to fix our dysfunctional housing system must rest on providing a legal right to a home' (p 159). Both books contain plenty of detail on the domestic and international political and legal (Constitutional Convention, UN, and EU) context to support such a right being implemented.

Hearne develops the idea of 'rights-based housing strategies', which are not only concerned with a legal right to housing 'but also a transformative vision for society and a call to action. This vision motivates local and national governments, social movements and communities around the world to act' (p 225).

The causal link between adopting a legal right to housing and the provision of decent, secure, and truly affordable housing for all is not clear or straightfor-

ward. We need to distinguish between a right to housing being constitutional or legislative. Across Europe there are different approaches—Finland, Belgium, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Sweden have a right to housing in their constitutions.

However, the two countries with the highest levels of social housing in the EU have different constitutional housing rights. The Netherlands has the highest level at 30 per cent, followed by Austria at 24 per cent. Yet the Austrian constitution does not contain a right to housing; this right is established in legislation instead.

Trusting the Courts

Hearne and Ó Broin are both in favour of holding a referendum to insert a right to housing into the constitution. They recognise that such a move will not in and of itself directly address the housing crisis, but it will allow the state and the government of the day to be held accountable for the housing policies they pursue. This accountability will be exercised through the courts.

For example, Hearne explains how the Finnish model works through processes of *ex ante* and *ex post* law reviews. Ultimately the Finnish system 'has taken the form of individual rights and individual remedies being enforced through judicial review of decisions of public bodies' (p 223).

Finland is a relevant example because across EU member states it is the only country to have seen a reduction in homelessness over the past decade. It is generally accepted that this reduction is due to the adoption of a housing first policy—whereby homeless individuals and families receive secure housing immediately (with necessary supports), rather than as some sort of 'reward' if they have proven themselves worthy. In Ireland, a right to housing—constitutional or legislative—is not needed in order to adopt a housing first policy; it's a matter of political will.

To the Streets

This critique should not be misinterpreted—socialists are in favour of extending, and bringing to life, rights that enhance the lives of ordinary people. We have a deeper understanding of how such rights are won in the first place and maintained by subsequent generations. It was, after all, the Chartists and the suffragettes who won and extended the right to vote for the vast majority of the population.

This emphasis on social movements is where we can see important differences between Hearne, Ó Broin, and left groups like People Before Profit. On the surface it would appear that all agree on the principle ‘that change can only be achieved through mass social mobilisation and progressive parliamentary action’ (Ó Broin, p 11). Yet it is understanding and pursuing the correct emphasis between mass mobilisations and parliamentary action that is centrally important.

For Ó Broin, despite the above quote, mass mobilisation barely appears in his book—there is little more than a page that focuses on the Raise the Roof demonstration in October 2018. Hearne brings considerably more emphasis, drawing on his personal experience in early chapters and devoting a whole chapter—‘The People Push Back’—towards the end, delineating and exploring housing protests since 2014.

In contrast, a radical socialist approach starts from the activity of the movement and sees parliamentary activity as a basis on which to amplify the demands and aims of the movement. We can see how the differences in emphasis will play out with regards to any future referendum on the right to housing.

Socialists will of course campaign vigorously in favour of including such a change to the constitution, but not on the basis that we believe it will automatically lead to a progressive housing system (especially one based on giving more power to the courts and legal system). Instead, as Richard Boyd Barret has formulated, a successful referendum will undermine the establishment politicians’ current go-to argument that the constitution forbids any radical change in housing policy (because of strong private property rights), and will give a (potentially unparalleled) focus for a national discussion on how to address the housing crisis.

What should be obvious is that, irrespective of the timing or outcome of any referendum, we will still need housing campaigns to stop evictions, enhance existing housing legislation, adopt a housing first homelessness policy, build public housing on public land, implement current rights and funding for Traveller accommodation, end Direct Provision, increase funding to combat domestic abuse—the list goes on.

Both these books provide rich detail and arguments that will be useful to current and future housing campaigns, while the strategies and tactics of such movements will need further clarification.



Jonathan Neale, *Fight the Fire: Green New Deals and Global Climate Jobs*, Published by the Ecologist, 2021. Available for free download from: <https://theecologist.org/fight-the-fire>

Owen McCormack

Neale’s book, written in a non-academic and easy-to-read style is the best and most important book on the climate crisis you could read this year. Beneath the slightly quirky style and the beguiling simplicity is a great and valuable work for anyone concerned with the crisis.

The central question in the book is can we stop the unfolding catastrophe. The central message to take away is yes, we can. For Neale, this is based on the demand for climate jobs and an insistence that solidarity among and belief in ordinary people and workers holds the only way out of the unfolding doom.

The opening chapters lay out the nature of the crisis and relate the basic science behind climate change. This may seem unnecessary for many, but I found these an extremely useful recap. As in every part of the book, the simple and direct relating of the science is presented without fuss but hides an impressive grasp of the most recent scientific detail as referenced in the copious notes at the end of the book. Neale then systematically goes through the major categories of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, where they come from, and how we could, over the next decades, cut these by essentially 90 per cent to give ourselves a fighting chance of limiting warming to under 1.5 degrees.

These big numbers and big proposed cuts may seem like a fantasy, but beneath the figures Neale has marshalled an impressive grasp of the science and engineering problems and possibilities. Nothing in this book is guesswork (unless the author explicitly

says so!), and a great deal of research and thought has gone into these proposed cuts.

The cuts do not rely on future technologies or hoped-for massive geo-engineering feats; they are based on what we can do now with what we know works. While these are big-picture chapters, talking nonchalantly about global engineering projects and massive investments, they are not divorced from reality.

The solutions are not new: renewable energy, massive new public transport, and a fundamental shift in agricultural production; but Neale's treatment of them is innovative and informative. Occasionally this may slip into slightly odd premonitions (a future of passenger sail cruises taking weeks and months to traverse the oceans, suitable for young people apparently!) but while inadvertently funny, these are rare detours.

More seriously, he insists that the massive projects and the scale of cuts to emissions needed globally preclude any idea that the market or private corporations can play a role or lead the effort. Many of us have argued this point given our experience with neoliberal reforms over recent decades and the various disasters that came from outsourcing and privatisation. Neale, however, is making a specific point as to why a market-led, privately driven Green deal is a nonstarter.

The scale and speed of investment needed in renewable energy is beyond any private entity. The reworking of energy grids across and within countries and continents could only happen with massive state investment. But crucially, the need to build a mass movement of workers and campaigners behind the climate campaign means we have to have a vision which offers to millions of people the prospect that the change is both possible and can result in a more just and better world, one with decent jobs and better livelihoods for ordinary people. Offering minimum wage jobs in a recycling centre for laid off workers in fossil fuel industries will not cut it.

We know from bitter experience in Ireland with Bord na Móna and others that such moves cut off communities and workers from the climate movement. If all that's on offer are carbon taxes and low-paid jobs in private for-profit companies, vast

parts of the working class will be prey for climate change deniers and well-funded corporations fighting any change. Neale argues that the climate movement could win real working-class support based on demands around climate jobs in new, national, and publicly funded climate agencies established to undertake the massive work involved in cutting emission by 90 per cent across the globe. The point here is not just to build a campaign with working-class support but to ensure the fight against climate chaos has a base in the one force in society capable of taking on and defeating the oligarchs, Trumpists, and corporate interests that will fight every measure needed.

Neale deals with many of the arguments that have arisen in the climate movement in recent years around the focus on changing personal behaviours, meat eating, carbon taxes, reliance on private investors in renewable energy, and whether nuclear energy or carbon capture technology can play a role. There are extremely useful recaps on the debates based on good science and an acute political understanding of the issues. Some of his takes will be contested by activists, such as his arguments around meat eating, degrowth, or the need for dramatic cuts in emissions in the Global South as well as the North, but for me he is broadly correct on these.

What ever quibbles I might have with this or that take on an issue, the overwhelming impression I gained from this book is that it can inspire a new layer of activists in its simple and direct appeal.

The book is also insightful in its depiction of what climate breakdown will look like for many in the coming years and decades. There is a trend among some activists to try depict themselves as more radical because they understand that civilisation is going to collapse. The left are accused by them of still clinging to the hope that we can offer workers more and more consumer durables while the planet burns. Such views lead inevitably to a reactionary stance and a rejection of any possibility of working-class revolution. They are also wrong about what socialists argue, but more importantly they reject any hope of the working class globally playing a role in fighting climate change. Such views are also profoundly wrong about how climate breakdown will happen. Neale looks at what breakdown looks like across the world already for many, and concludes correctly that

it is a process without one cliff-edge moment, even if we pass tipping points. It will at every stage be worth fighting against as the powers and elites cling on to their control and wealth and use greater and greater savagery to do so, probably under a guise of green austerity or resource rationing. He points out:

None of those horrors were committed by small groups of savages wandering through the ruins. They were committed by States, and by mass political movements ... Society did not disintegrate. It did not come apart. Society intensified. Power concentrated, and split, and those powers had us kill each other ... Remember this, because when the moment of runaway climate change comes for you, where you live, it will not come in the form of a few wandering hairy bikers. It will come with the tanks on the streets and the military or the fascists taking power

The antidote to this dystopian future is global solidarity and winning the working class to a fight for climate action. No easy task in the limited time we have, but possible and worth fighting for, and a lot better than waiting for the roaming bands of hairy bikers of your imagination!

In a month where we have seen billionaires compete in vanity space projects and waste billions in doing so while the vast majority of the globe remains without a Covid vaccine and the Far Right have mobilised around an anti-science banner, Neale's book has a portentous ring to it. While not saying explicitly that only revolution can save us, and while insisting that revolutionaries should work openly and without prejudice with non-revolutionaries, it is hard to escape the conclusion that the solutions outlined and possibilities explored to avert the coming catastrophe require revolutionary change. The book invites a new generation of activists to figure out what this will mean in the years ahead.



Judy Cox, *Rebellious Daughters of History*
Bookmarks, London, 2021, €11.50

Rebellious Daughters of History is an introduction to many women throughout history and the narrative they have produced.

Emma Hendrick

This book is a collection of the author's Facebook posts on the history of radical women made during the Covid-19 crisis, which lends itself to the short, sharp style normally confined to social media. A wide array of women are included, often those forgotten by mainstream history. It is also very welcome that there is a good representation of women of colour and women who would not usually be included or represented, together with more well-known women activists.

What is unique about this book is that it covers women from a wide timeframe who all have one thing in common: that they didn't look to parliament for change but rather organised or engaged in militant, collective action. This is particularly important to recognise at the present time when class consciousness is relatively low and women in elected positions and CEOs have been championed as 'girl bosses' with a call to individuality rather than collective action.

Dating from 1800 up to the present day, many of the women included in this volume have passed but a few are still alive. It is among the latter that I discovered Assata Shukar. Born in 1947 in the US, Shukar identifies as African and is a Black Liberation activist. She spent time in US prison, escaped, and is on the FBI most-wanted list. She has been granted political asylum in Cuba where she currently resides. Cox offered me a short snappy insight into the life of this fascinating woman that has encouraged me to go find out more about her life and experiences.

As someone who is always looking for information on radical women in history, the format of two-page-long digestible chunks of information was extremely helpful and motivating. This format means the book is an easy read and pleasant experience, especially for those of us who don't have the time or academic training that is sometimes assumed by books on historic figures.

Although not specifically marketed at teens or preteens (it could be), Cox offers a brilliant opportunity to learn about thoroughly radical women through the lens of struggle and collective action.

Out of the Covid crisis and social media posting, a book has emerged that does something rare, bringing forward rebellious women, often forgotten by history, and making their stories accessible to all. Due to the unique conditions around the creation of the book, it has ensured that the women featured really are rebellious, militant, collective change-makers, not merely appropriate liberal feminist icons.



Larissa Reisner, *The Hammer and the Anvil: Dispatches from the Frontline of the Russian Civil War 1918-1919*, trans. Jack Robertson (Redwords, 2021) €11.75

Mary Ryder

This is a thrilling read of an eyewitness, activist account about a period during the Russian Revolution.

Larissa Reisner came from a Russian family of progressive ideals who befriended Lenin. They fled to Germany to escape tsarist police attention but returned after the 1905 Revolution. She lived through the two revolutions of the early 20th century, the Russian and German revolutions.

Reisner was a formidable character who presented herself for action at the time of the October Revolution, saying: 'I can ride, shoot, reconnoitre, write, send correspondence from the front and if necessary die'. Her seemingly simple, tight writing brings to life this energy, commitment, and belief in socialism by the masses, for the masses.

The dispatches are about ordinary people who fought, died, and triumphed during the revolution. The dispatch from Sviyazhsk is a masterpiece of literature which elicits

the excitement, comradeship, and ingenuity of people during this revolutionary period. Reading her own and Trotsky's accounts from Sviyazhsk, also included in this book, will show clearly how revolutions can be

lost or won through simple acts by ordinary people.

This short book is packed with the details of everyday life for activists and those they encounter—from police chiefs to jailers and comrades. She vividly describes the subterfuge she used to support the Red Army while doing everything to avoid arrest. She writes warmly of people who supported her in escaping from police custody. 'They saved people like me, humbly and resolutely, just like they saved thousands of other comrades scattered all over the Russian highways'.

She worked as a lady officer (a type of warden) in her neighbourhood. When the Red Army attacked police headquarters nearby, she assured the residents, the police chief, and his family: 'They are more like a band of hooligans, a rabble ... which would flee at the first shot from a Russian gun'. And then her real feelings are revealed: 'My heart began to quiver with the wild dance of lively red devils'.

Her contempt for the police chief's behaviour at the time is clear: he is described as having abandoned 'his strategic reason until another time, put on a second pair of comfy trousers and hid in the bath'. The full description nearly spits at his wealth and cowardice.

Leon Trotsky in his autobiography, *My Life*, when describing Reisner's escape from custody, writes: 'This fine young woman flashed across the revolutionary sky like a burning meteor, blinding many ... Her sketches about the civil war are literature'.

Trotsky's review alone is reason to buy this immensely readable book. Miss it at your peril!



Joseph Andras, *Tomorrow They Won't Dare to Murder Us*, Verso, 2021, €10.75

Willie Cumming

In a century of terrible colonial wars, the Algerian Independence War (1954-62) was one of the most brutal. The figures for the number of Algerians killed are disputed but range from French figures of 300,000–500,00 to Algerian figures of one to one and a half million. By comparison, there were 27,000 French military deaths. These figures don't take into account the thousands of Algerians killed in over a century of colonial rule.

Sixty years on, the war is still an issue in French politics. History, it is said, is written by the victors, but in the case of Algeria, France—the loser—is still trying to control the narrative. On a visit to Algeria during his 2017 presidential campaign, Emmanuel Macron described colonialism as a 'crime against humanity' and said 'it's part of a past that we need to confront by apologizing to those against whom we committed these acts'.¹ Facing re-election in 2022, he is now for 'no repentance nor apologies' but 'symbolic acts' to promote reconciliation.²

In this context, French author Joseph Andras's recently translated first novel is particularly significant. It is a short, very simply but beautifully written book telling the true story of Fernand Iveton, a young 'piednoir'³ communist militant. Iveton supported Algerian Independence and joined the FLN, the liberation movement. He carried out an attempted bombing of his factory, but on the express condition that it would be against property and that it would be placed where no one would be killed or injured. The bomb failed to detonate and Iveton was arrested, brutally tortured, and following a one-day 'trial', was sentenced to be guillotined. He was advised that a reprieve was likely as no one had been killed. But Iveton was seen as a killer despite there having been no deaths or injuries arising from his actions, and as a European and a 'traitor', a reprieve was unlikely.

The novel explores not the fact that he was guillotined but why the state saw Iveton as a significant threat that had to be silenced. Throughout there are small indications of solidarity with Iveton.

The support of his Arab cell mates and the other prisoners in the jail, anonymous letters of support to his wife Hélène, a prison chaplain who tells him that he supports the cause of Algerian Independence, and his boss who writes to the president for a reprieve.

His execution was necessary as a warning to others.

The sorry role of the mainstream left, both socialist and communist, in the Algerian War is also addressed. The minister for justice was François Mitterrand, later Socialist Party president of France. As minister he recommended against clemency in 80 per cent of Algerian cases, resulting in forty-five executions. Iveton was advised by his lawyer that the support of the Communist Party would be critical in winning a reprieve. But when trying to find reports of his situation in his Party's daily paper *L'Humanité*, the story was always, at best, a small one buried on the inside pages. With the Cold War politics of the period, it suited the French state that Iveton was a communist, allowing it to explain away the liberation movement as one controlled and driven by Moscow.

The author, Joseph Andras, was awarded the Prix Goncourt for Debut Novel, which he refused to accept on the basis that 'competition and rivalry were foreign to writing and creation'.

There is an endorsement on the cover by author Éric Vuillard: 'A very beautiful book to reflect on: when a "traitor" preserves our "dignity".' Couldn't put it better myself.

NOTES

1 <https://www.france24.com/en/20170216-france-presidential-hopeful-macron-describes-colonisation-algeria-crime-against-humanity>

2 <https://www.france24.com/en/france/20210120-no-repentance-nor-apologies-for-colonial-abuses-in-algeria-says-macron>

3 Piednoir was the name given to European settlers in Algeria.

Peter Weiss, *The Aesthetics of Resistance, Volume I & II*, trans. Joel Scott, Duke University Press, London, 2020, €24

Chris Beausang

Peter Weiss was born in 1916 in a small town outside of Berlin. His childhood and adolescence were peripatetic and he moved between London, Prague, and Switzerland. He was actively involved in the Eurocommunist Left Party in Sweden, his adopted country. Like many Western intellectuals and avant-gardists in the sixties, the United States' imperialist war on the Vietnamese people spurred Weiss into a political awakening, and it is to this that we can attribute the extraordinary body of prose and drama which he produced in the years before his death in 1982, the most well known of which is probably the play *The Persecution and Assassination of Jean Paul Marat As Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton Under the Direction of Monsieur de Sade*, a cinematic adaptation of which is available on YouTube and is a must-watch for anyone even slightly interested in the relationship between revolution and culture.

Peter Weiss's two primary themes across all three volumes of his novel *The Aesthetics of Resistance* are revolution and art. Focalised around an unnamed narrator who has self-consciously interwoven the project of his own political and intellectual development with that of the international working class, we encounter historical figures from the European communist and social democratic left in the years leading up to the Second World War. Vladimir Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, and Bertolt Brecht appear, as well as more obscure figures such as Max Hodann, Charlotte Bischoff and Jakob Rosner, who would only occupy the background were *The Aesthetics of Resistance* a more conventional historical novel in which big names are represented as the sole protagonists of immense, complex, and contradictory historical processes. Intimate portraits of their personal and political lives, their experiences with art, their involvement in underground agitation and anti-fascist resistance are rendered against a vast world-historical background of failure, defeat, and betrayal as the social democratic parties and the popular front

are in turn quashed by fascism and no upsurge of working-class power successfully breaks the political deadlock in the worker's state.

Weiss's capacity to marshal all this material within an immensely readable text would be miraculous even if throughout the novel we did not encounter some of the most serious considerations of works from within the canon of Western art, all rendered within a prose style of great clarity, quality, and political commitment held at a pitch and stretching over a duration that is unmatched in any work of fiction of which I am aware. *The Aesthetics of Resistance* wears its complexity and erudition lightly. Though there are no paragraph breaks within a section, each is limited to between five and twelve pages in length, and each clearly differentiates its central concern from those previous. It would not be too much of a stretch to suggest that *The Aesthetics of Resistance*'s structure is itself dialectical; it moves in tandem, associatively and in opposition through the attempts of the liberal capitalist powers of Western Europe to fulminate war between the Third Reich and the USSR, the difficulty of conducting underground political work under constant threat of deportation and imprisonment, a defence of the works of the French novelist Eugène Sue, and the history of Théodore Géricault's painting *The Raft of the Medusa*.

While the first volume features considerations of Franz Kafka's novel *The Castle*, the paintings of Bruegel, and Dante's *Inferno*, the second has the narrator only briefly travel to Paris to consider the architectural legacies of the Commune and art produced under the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy before these topics begin to recede in favour of a focus on a fictional Brecht play about the Swedish nobleman Engelbrekt Engelbrektsson, who led a peasant-worker rebellion against the Danish and Swedish bourgeoisie then taking shape in the fifteenth century.

One discerns within *The Aesthetics of Resistance* a road not taken for an aesthetic programme rooted in dialectical materialism. One continually expects a repudiation of the party and its supposedly authoritarian structures in preference for a pessimism or culturalism which, as Perry Anderson notes,

characterises much of the postwar Marxist tradition in the West, but this never materialises. The narrator's commitment to the historical destiny of the working class is rigorously maintained, and the relationship, or prospective relationship, of the masses to any given work of art never disappears from view. This relationship, between culture and revolutionary politics, has always been a fraught one within Marxist philosophy and practice. A separation of the base and superstructure, demoting cultural expression to the domain of the latter, is wholly necessary in formulating an immanent and scientific critique of the laws of the capitalist mode of production which moves beyond the limitations of idealism, but is hardly sufficient as an aesthetic framework when what is most noteworthy, both for Weiss and presumably for the rest of us, is the particularities at work as opposed to the mere fact of their being embedded within historical processes; their role in this abstract capacity can only take us so far. One of the great strengths of Weiss' outlook is that he never attempts to force the issue by attempting to render culture and revolution synonymous.

While the present reviewer lacks the language skills to assess the quality of Joel Scott's translation, or indeed locate the work within its entire three-volume span as it deserves, I can say there is no noticeable difference in the quality of the writing as it appears in the first volume, and that the appearance of the second volume of Weiss' *The Aesthetics of Resistance* in English, thanks to the efforts of Duke University Press, confirms its reputation as one of the twentieth century's most unique and distinctive works of literary art.



Peadar O'Donnell, *Salud! An Irishman in Spain*
Friends of the International Brigades in Ireland, 2020
€15.00

Paul O'Brien

In February 1936, after years of instability, a left-wing Popular Front government was elected in Spain. Workers celebrated the victory and immediately raised demands for reforms and organised strikes in

support of better wages and conditions. On 17 July 1936, army officers, led by General Franco, staged a military coup against the Republican government. What Franco had not anticipated was a spontaneous, revolutionary anti-fascist uprising. Workers formed anti-fascist committees and organised militias. They managed to repel Franco's army, and in the process took control of several major cities.

Volunteers came from all over the world to join the International Brigades in the fight against fascism. About 32,000 people from over forty countries volunteered. About two hundred volunteers came from Ireland, mainly from the ranks of the Communist Party, the Northern Irish Labour Party, the IRA, and the Republican Congress.

In early 1936, Peadar O'Donnell went to Spain hoping to find an environment that was free of the oppressive nature of the Irish Catholic Church to write a novel that was 'crumbling in his mind from neglect'. He settled in a fishing village just south of Barcelona. A few months later he found himself in the midst of a civil war and the novel was thrown aside.

The war in Spain had a terrible similarity with the events in Ireland just fifteen years earlier; the idealism and sacrifice of ordinary people caught up in the same great events, the same self-organisation, and sometimes the excesses of brutality that are inherent in any civil war.

Salud! was first published in 1937, and reprinted here in a new edition by the Friends of the International Brigades in Ireland. O'Donnell's record of events in Spain was hastily composed and as a consequence is uneven and episodic. *Salud!* lacks the political cohesion and objectivity of George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*. However, O'Donnell's account has the advantage of the novelist's eye and feel for the collective emotions of the participants. He was in Barcelona when the fascist uprising began, and witnessed the street fighting and the sometimes chaotic formation of the local militias:

Girls walked hurriedly through the streets carrying rifles at short trail, with the air of people bent on everyday tasks ... A column was being assembled for the Aragon front ... Here and there goodbyes were being said. The lad who was going was bursting with pride and impatience, and the father was aglow with pride for his boy.

He describes the turmoil and divisions among the communists, socialists, and anarchists at the outbreak of the war, but also the debates and discussions that took place in the village café. His descriptions of the aerial bombing of Madrid have the feel and urgency of a newspaper report and were a harbinger of what was to come during World War Two.

O'Donnell's book was written to influence public opinion in Ireland and Britain. He describes his return to Ireland in 1937 and the anti-communist hysteria that gripped the country. The Christian Front, led by Paddy Belton, organised mass rallies in support of Franco with grotesque stories of burning churches, nuns systematically raped, and priests crucified. O'Donnell went to great lengths to tell the truth about these events, which helped to dispel the image of the war as a contest between Christianity and a godless communism.

O'Donnell was also one of the first to hint at the possibility of Franco's victory. In the first year of the war O'Donnell helped to procure recruits for the International Brigade; but as the tide turned in Franco's favour, he was reluctant to send young men out to fight for a cause which already seemed lost. He believed that Irish revolutionaries should stay at home in readiness to take up the fight again.

O'Donnell's book is different from other Spanish Civil War books in that there is little emphasis on military battles or tactics; rather, he describes what life was like for the local villagers, farmers, and fishermen caught up in the war. This is history from below at its best. O'Donnell's book describes the outbreak of a conflict that was to shape the political landscape of Europe in the years to come with an honesty and compassion that was the trademark of the man.