

trayal” and “sell out” but evident throughout. Another common example is the use of the “fail to” sentence construction where union leaders or activists “failed to” do “x” or “y”. The problem is this construction assumes that these actors took on the imputed tasks knowingly and willingly but did not carry them out properly or fully, or it assigns an intention and motivation to them which may not be justified and is certainly not substantiated with evidence. It often ends up being a form of counter-intuitive “false consciousness”.

Flowing from this mindset, the book is littered with too many poorly substantiated and poorly explained assertions and statements to make it impregnable to criticism (see, for example, those concerning postal workers, p.19, lack of coordination p.25, Manchester sit-ins p.27, death of MFD p.38, transformation of internal networks p.40, false hope of Bennism p.42, dockers’ defeat p.81, ambulance workers p.98, tugboat action p.122, UPS union ready to stand up pp.125, 126, union growth p.151 and so on). So the essential, if not even critical, “why” and “how” questions are not fully or convincingly answered. (This is not a roundabout way of saying the reviewer does not agree with the explanations put forward.)

Although there is an articulated connection between chapters 1 to 6 and 7 to 9, it is not sufficiently tight as to be wholly convincing and, therefore, Cohen’s argument would have been better served by isolating the issues in a thematic manner throughout the book, from which supporting examples from both sides of the Atlantic could have then been deployed. Finally, in this regard, the source of evidence cited in a significant number of cases like an IMG or SWP pamphlet or a *Labor Notes* article is not sufficiently credible and robust to support the point Cohen is making: too often publications are cited which are well known for “bending the stick” a certain way politically or for being of an activist and interventionist not analytical bent. Because the criticisms of other perspectives are so sharp and so stark, this is an important weakness. It’s tantamount to the shop steward irresponsibly ignoring time keeping and opening him/herself up to management attack.

As stated at the outset, *Ramparts* not only poses the key question for unionists but also tries to provide an answer to the conundrum facing these trade unionists today: how can organised labour’s power be rebuilt? In conclusion, how well does Cohen accomplish these two tasks of explaining why workers lost their power and how they can get it back? *Ramparts* covers many of the key areas and issues but often does so in an interesting but unsatisfactory manner and with some interesting but unsatisfactory outcomes. If what Cohen argued was manifest, in Britain and the US we would be further down the road to rebuilding oppositional, strong and independent union movements. This is far from dismissing *Ramparts* out of hand for two

reasons, in addition to the strengths outlined earlier. First, it can genuinely prompt a useful discussion and dialogue because it moves away, in some major respects, from trite ultra-left formulations and analysis that are common amongst the far left activist milieu. Second, and notwithstanding the critique here – indeed as evidenced by the critique here – *Ramparts* engages with the issues at hand in a far tighter manner than other recent and similar books like Rob Sewell’s *In the Cause of Labour: History of British Trade Unionism* (Wellred, 2003). My message is thus: let *Ramparts* stimulate your mind by allowing it to engage you on the key issues at hand.

LETTER

The AGS and Iraq

IN THEIR diatribe against Tony Greenstein in *What Next?* No.30 (‘Lies, Damn Lies and Tony Greenstein’), Daniel Randall and Sacha Ismail refer to “his recent membership of the Alliance for Green Socialism; an organisation which positively supports the occupation of Iraq by UN troops!”

The Alliance for Green Socialism does not support the occupation of Iraq by anyone’s troops. The policy of the AGS is stated in the following 2005 conference resolution:

“*The Alliance for Green Socialism notes that*

- *the United States and the United Kingdom were responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis by means of sanctions before the 2003 invasion of Iraq;*
- *the US and UK peddled lies about weapons of mass destruction in an attempt to justify their 2003 invasion of Iraq;*
- *the 2003 invasion of Iraq was illegal under international law;*
- *the invasion and occupation of Iraq has already caused an estimated 100,000 civilian Iraqi deaths;*
- *the continuing occupation of Iraq by US and UK forces is illegal.*

The AGS believes that the principal motive for the 2003 invasion of Iraq was an imperialist desire for control of Iraq’s oil resources.

The AGS therefore calls for the immediate withdrawal of UK and other occupying forces from Iraq.

The AGS further calls for the payment to Iraq of reparations by the US and the UK for the huge damages, both to life and property, caused by their illegal invasion.”

Indeed, the AGS was actively calling for the immediate withdrawal of all occupying troops while the Stop the War Coalition was still refusing to back immediate withdrawal.

The Alliance for Green Socialism awaits an apology from Randall and Ismail.

Mike Davies

Chair, Alliance for Green Socialism