

# REVIEWS

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## Introducing Marx's *Capital*

Francis Wheen, *Marx's Das Kapital*, Atlantic Books 2006. Hardback, 130pp, £9.99.

### Reviewed by Mike Rooke

WRITTEN IN the clear and succinct style of his 1999 biography of Karl Marx, this book offers an account (a "biography") of the genesis and fortunes of Marx's *Das Kapital*. Issued as part of a "Books that shook the world" series that includes the likes of Plato, Darwin, Paine, and the Bible, the aim was clearly to offer a short guide that would provide an introduction for students and the general reader. The book consists of three parts covering the genesis, content and afterlife of Marx's magnum opus. In contrast to the many commentaries that present it as a work of Economics (or Political Economy), Wheen sets out to present *Capital* as a work that extends "beyond conventional prose into radical literary collage" incorporating as it does allusions and references to the "great" works of literature – Classical Greek, Shakespeare, Goethe, Balzac, etc. In other words it can be understood as a "gothic" work of art depicting capital as a devouring monster of human labour (the phrase "capital is dead labour which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour" adorns the back cover of the book). Wheen makes a convincing case in support of this thesis.

In tracing the gestation of *Das Kapital*, the first volume of which was published in 1867, with the second and third volumes appearing only after Marx's death in 1883, Wheen begins with Marx's 1844 Paris Manuscripts, where (under the influence of Engels' 'Critique of Political Economy') he engages critically with Political Economy for the first time, and the category of alienated labour is elaborated. The *Paris Manuscripts*, *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847), the *Theories of Surplus Value* (mid-1860s) and the *Grundrisse* (1857-58), were so many staging posts in the developing work whose intended final product was *Das Kapital*. It was thus a lifelong work in progress, and of course, as Wheen describes, incomplete at the time of Marx's death.

The analysis of the commodity in the opening chapters of Volume 1 of *Das Kapital*, where the categories of use value and exchange value, useful and abstract labour, the labour theory of value, surplus value and commodity fetishism are introduced, is given the standard treatment, but in Wheen's admirably clear and economical prose style. Along the way he disposes of several object-

ions traditionally levelled against Marx – that his immiseration thesis is disproven by the rising standard of living of the working class of the "developed" countries, and that the majority of workers are no longer exploited. Wheen makes it clear that Marx's point was always that the more productive labour became, the greater the domination of capital (as accumulated value) over it. The exploitation of labour and the imperatives it gives rise to – the pressure to work long hours and the intensification of the work effort – remain the driving forces behind capitalist industry and a source of alienation for its workers. But while Wheen takes the view that *Das Kapital* remains relevant because "its subject still governs our lives" (the baleful domination of humanity by the imperative of production for the sake of production), he implicitly rejects Marx's view that the capitalist mode of production contains within it its own negation, the conviction that living labour can become a revolutionary force. There is no appreciation of any logic pointing beyond the continuing domination of capital. Such an appreciation would have required a grasp of the centrality of the dialectic to *Das Kapital*. But Wheen's view of Marx's dialectic is that it was a useful literary device (borrowed from Hegel) that he employed to prevent his predictions being dis-proven by the actual outcome of events. In other words, for Marx "dialectic means never having to admit that one was wrong". This is a hopelessly inadequate position to take, even if it appears to be supported by a cursory remark made by Marx to Engels in their personal correspondence.

While Wheen treats the labour theory of value, abstract labour and alienation as important and central to *Capital*, he does not (along with most other commentators) appreciate their unity. The unity of alienated labour = abstract labour = value can only be understood as a dialectic of social antagonism that drives forms of value (commodity, money) to assert their autonomy from labour (the source of value). This dialectic thus has a diachronic aspect (it develops over time) and proceeds through the struggle of class against class. In failing to grasp this dialectic orthodox Marxism never understood the transformation that was required for the abolition of wage labour. For it is only with the full development of wage labour that the prerequisites for its supersession emerge: the colonisation of all life by value, both spatially in the world market and in the homogenisation of capitalist work. Only as a dialectic does the development of the wage labour-capital relation become intelligible as communist critique. The subjectivity denied living

labour appears as its opposite in the objectivity of value (fetishism), but this objectivity is in turn the (contradictory) foundation for the (reconstitution) of subjectivity at a higher level – the conscious direction of social labour by the associated producers. Without the dialectic understood in this way, the society of capital indeed appears as the end of history, without a subject that can subvert its dominance. Notwithstanding his sympathy for Marx, Wheen's position is one of a resigned fatalism in the face of capital.

But why, asks Wheen, did Marx not encapsulate his "economic" concepts in a short book the size of *Value, Price and Profit* (1865), rather than the thousands of pages of *Das Kapital*? He quotes Ludovico Silva to the effect that "the delusive nature of things" necessitated a critique of traditional categories and the creation of entirely new ones: "In short, *Das Kapital* is entirely sui generis." This invokes Marx's comment that if the appearance of things coincided unproblematically with their essence there would be no need for science. But this only returns us to the relation of the dialectic and Marx's critique. *Das Kapital* is a massive and at times tortuous working through of categories that express the contradictory workings of the real – the unity of opposites constituted by the value form of social labour. It was necessarily difficult, not because Marx had a penchant for metaphysical acrobatics, but because the object was the inverted, "topsy-turvy" world of the commodity form, whose mode of appearance is necessarily fetishistic.

In covering the "afterlife" of *Das Kapital*, Wheen offers the reader a sprinkling of interesting observations about the reception of the first volume. Only in Russia was there any enthusiastic response, and no English edition appeared in Marx's lifetime. The publication of the second and third volumes was the result of editing work by Engels. But the real point is that the dialectic of labour that animates and structures *Das Kapital* was not absorbed by the first generation of Marxists after Marx. In this way Hyndman, in keeping with most post-Marx Marxists, could celebrate the book (and as Wheen informs us, plagiarise it), but fail to grasp its dialectic. Admittedly readers then did not have the benefit of access to Marx's 1844 *Paris Manuscripts*, and so might justifiably have had difficulty in detecting the alienation of labour that runs below the surface of the entire analysis of *Das Kapital*. This failure however had the consequence of leaving that generation of Marxists with a limited conception of the self-transformation of labour required for its abolition. Marx bears some responsibility too – in seeking to present a work whose "scientific" credentials would disarm the bourgeois critics, he left the dialectic of labour more "hidden" than was necessary.

In the concluding part of the book Wheen takes a justifiable swipe at the plundering of Marx by the contemporary cultural studies brigade, and points

out that much of what passes as radical critique and research in the academy is in fact recycled Marx. The message is – best to refer to the original. For readers exploring Marx for the first time, this book will provide a useful antidote to the overly scholastic exegeses produced by the academic Marx industry. It also comes with a degree of Wheen humour that makes for an entertaining as well as informative read. But it must be treated with caution, lacking as it does any appreciation of the dialectic that is key to Marx's view of revolution. If it whets your appetite, persevere with the opening chapters of *Das Kapital* itself. There is ultimately no substitute.

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## A New and Better Take on 'Rank-and-Fileism'?

Sheila Cohen, *Ramparts of Resistance: Why Workers Lost Their Power and How to Get It Back*, Pluto Press 2006. Paperback, 248pp, £13.99.

### Reviewed by Gregor Gall

THIS BOOK not only poses, arguably, the key question of historical praxis for those who are, and those who might become, highly conscious trade unionists, but it also tries to provide a sustained answer to the conundrum facing these trade unionists today: why and how is organised labour so much less influential now than it was thirty years ago? Its breadth and scope are thus impressive, covering as it does the period since the 1960s and both Britain and the United States. *Ramparts* also seeks to present a specific and idiosyncratic perspective on both academic and practitioner writing and thinking on union renewal and rebuilding by avoiding, in its own words, setting out a programme for instruction and rather relating to the mass of union member activity as it is presently constituted. In this sense, the book can claim to be a refreshingly non-ultra-left – unions are instructed to do "x" or "y" – left perspective.

One of the underpinning strands of Cohen's overall argument is the injunction that workplace struggle over "bread and butter" (as opposed to just "pounds and pence") workplace issues should not be dismissed as being narrow, economic and incapable of generating higher levels of oppositional consciousness. Consequently, she prioritises workplace activists and "rank-and-file" workers and is sharply critical of the "union bureaucracy" (her terms), where her belief is that capitalism will continually compel workers to resist. But, she insists, those seeking union renewal must begin with "forms of resistance as they arise and where they are" (p.3, all page references to *Ramparts*). Another important strand of her argument is that member-led union democracy is crucial for generating membership participation which is itself crucial

for effective unionism. Thus, membership democracy is the crux for both mobilisation of members and their commitment and agreement with a course of agreed action. Here, Cohen mounts an exposition of “unions as institutions” versus “unions as social movements”, clearly favouring the latter. One could then term her perspective a “rank-and-file” one, of a “syndicalist” rather than “Trotskyist” persuasion. Although Cohen recognises the different traditions of US and UK grassroots union activity, the union movements in each country are sufficiently similar for her to be able to argue for her version of a single rank-and-file strategy for both.

Among the strong points that Cohen paints on this canvas are the following insights. First, the defeats and demobilisation that unions have experienced since the 1970s were not historically inevitable or predetermined (although, surely, the ability of some later struggles to win was less than others in the light of the spread of demobilisation, pessimism and demoralisation following a string of major defeats). Second, the dominant hold of the reformist ideology of the labour movement among workers is predicated on the absence of an alternative vision because of worker’s dominant day-to-day material experience. Third, mass, particularly primary, picketing has become fetishised in the two union movements as the key tactic of militancy to the detriment of solidarity action. Cohen recognises the weakness of this tactic (some-times elevated into a strategy), which is based on physical blockading, because it relies on huge, consistent turn-outs in the face of police countermeasures. Fourth, *Ramparts* conceptually identifies the duality of consciousness inside workers’ heads, whereby it can be both subservient and subversive (p.187).

This review will now turn to examine some of the more debatable, less plausible and more contentious points of Cohen’s analysis and perspective. Throughout, the differences and disagreements articulated are within a broad measure of sympathy and agreement with the overall project that Cohen has engaged in, particularly in regard of her rejection of the vanguard, ultra-left, hyper-optimism and sectarian politics of the existing far left (though this reviewer would not go so far as to reject vanguardism *per se*).

Thus, *Ramparts*’ emphasis on the need to make organic connections with workplace struggles (p.169) and to start with where workers are “at” (p.170) is correct in general, abstracted terms. But the understanding needs to be more nuanced to explain that this must lead to a differentiated, varied approach depending on where it is being applied because, within a correct overall analysis of where workers are “at” with regard to time and space, there are some workers who are in advance of others in terms of union consciousness and levels of struggle. For example, over the last decade postal workers, rail workers and some public sector workers (like PCS members) have experienced

higher levels of struggles, and these struggles have generated different issues for each group with regard to capital and the state. Even here, there have been different areas of militancy and moderation within each group. These nuances must inform how struggles are initiated and approached by those on the inside and outside of those struggles.

That said, among CWU, PCS and RMT members the (“political” as opposed to just “union”) left has made some small advances in introducing and relating wider political questions and issues to the struggles of their fellow members. Cohen’s emphasis is unduly dismissive of the existing left’s role here (pp.171, 172). Granted, the introduction of political ideas through a form of idealism will only be successful with a handful of individuals, but this does not mean that “politics” should and can never be successfully introduced into workplaces. For some workers, in some contexts, visions and ideas that inspire, give hope and ideological grounding are relevant (cf. p.209). Moreover, it is to a large degree erroneous to blame left-wing activists for being too consciously “political” and not concentrating enough on workplace resistance (pp.181, 182, 183), because this does not appear to stack up with many of the studies of workplace unionism where these union activists were identified as leading and organising resistance as well as holding the union’s existing organisation together (see, for example, Ralph Darlington’s *Dynamics of Workplace Unionism*, Mansell, 1997).

So whilst there will be obvious sympathy for Cohen’s critical attitude towards the far left amongst some on the left, there is a sense in which she throws the “baby out with the bathwater”. Despite recognition of much of its destructiveness, there also needs to be some acknowledgement that the far left has helped maintain much workplace organisation in very difficult circumstances. Consequently, the existing far left has been, paradoxically, both a strength and a weakness. Ironically, given her criticism of the far left, Cohen falls into the trap that she accuses others of falling into, namely, setting out a strategy or position. This is an erroneous accusation, since the salient issue is not about setting out a strategy or position as such but whether the strategy and position have the social forces behind them to be capable of being successfully implemented, for otherwise strategies and positions are pretty much ten-a-penny. By this, it is not meant that just stating the social force is the “workers” or the “working class” gets the strategy around this issue. Neither is it meant, however, that a strategy cannot be articulated and then the task of winning support for it set about. Rather, it’s that this must be done with some sense of reality.

In several more areas, Cohen shares more with the far left than she might actually want to (for similarity see Ralph Darlington and Dave Lyddon’s *Glorious Summer: Class Struggle in Britain 1972*, Bookmarks, 2001). Chapters 1 to 6 are replete with con-

tinual examples of strikes and struggles over the last forty odd years. What is the underlying point of this? This may seem a strange question, but Cohen's implicit notion seems to be that it supports her thesis of unrelenting rebellion amongst the rank-and-file. This stems from her overly mechanical, determinist view whereby workers will be forced by capital and capitalism to struggle. There is some general truth in this but only up to a point, for it is not based on a view of the micro-processes through which this can happen (see, for example, John Kelly's *Rethinking Industrial Relations*, Routledge, 1998). The far left has suffered long enough, since the downturn, from this type of syndrome of predictions that "two [separate, individual, isolated] swallows make a summer" so this is particularly unfortunate.

There are a number of salient aspects here. First, the degree of qualitative and quantitative rank-and-file strength in the upturn is also overestimated on many occasions. For example, in Britain in the late 1960s 95% of all strikes were not unofficial (p.10). Rather, 95% of strikes were not official at the time of their inception. This seemingly arcane and pedantic distinction highlights the potentially close and dynamic relationship between members and full-time officials of unions at the time. When workers struck, union strike authorisation was often sufficiently centralised and union organisation sufficiently cumbersome as to mean that the small, workplace-based strikes would invariably be unconstitutional "wildcats". But this did not mean these strikes would be remain "unofficial" or that the strikes were hostile to or independent of all union full-time officials. Large proportions of these strikes would subsequently be made "official". Neither should it be taken to mean that the strikes represent unbridled rebellion. They said as much about bargaining structures and payment structures (the latter point of which Cohen does acknowledge) as they did about unresponsive unions. Second, and of the current period and recent past, there is a mistaken analysis that workplace union organisation and struggle are greater and stronger than they actually are (e.g. pp.131, 212). For example, no account is taken of the choice of which workers are balloted for action nor by whom when Cohen argues her point about ballots in the 1980s (p.95).

Just like one of the texts Cohen frequently cites, namely, Peter Fairbrother's *Unions at the Crossroads* (Mansell, 2000), *Ramparts* engages in a vast overestimation of the actual and potential workplace struggle (p.204). There is no resurgence at the moment, nor is there much prospect of one (or certainly not any more than there has been in the last ten years). This on its own must limit the basis of Cohen's arguments about a renaissance of the rank-and-file. But on top of this, the very limited extent to which the strikes Cohen discusses have the power to enable a transformation in the major-

ity of the involved workers' consciousness (p.205) is apparent and contrary to what she argues. (On this point see, for example, Gregor Gall's *The Meaning of Militancy? Postal Workers and Industrial Relations*, Ashgate, 2003). If this is not case, the type, context and nature of strikes and struggles (e.g., mass/non-mass, indefinite/discontinuous, successful/unsuccessful, in a downturn/upturn etc) must be either clearly specified or theorised, because too much faith is placed in the instrumentalism of struggle producing a higher degree of class-consciousness despite some of Cohen's comments correctly qualifying this (see p.27).

This misplaced faith appears to be derived from the belief that workplace worker resistance can pose a fundamental challenge to capital (pp.175, 177, 180, 181 but cf. p.195) even though it may be of an "instinctive" rather than "explicit" rejection. While there is a kernel of truth here, it is only a partial truth. Moreover, what happens to transformed worker consciousness when it does develop? It is likely to be a house built on sand if the level of struggle falls back or does not widen or the struggles are defeated. This Cohen does belatedly acknowledge (p.208). So linked, it would seem, to the vein of the overly mechanical and determinist view of the *quantitative* element of workers' workplace union struggles is one which is an overly mechanical and determinist view of the *qualitative* element of those struggles. Ironically, this means Cohen does not stick to the framework she set herself in starting with where workers are "at".

Cohen's analysis of "unions as institutions" and "unions as movements" usefully highlights a key tendency of unions, but she labours this distinction too much as it is only a tendency. Unions are far more multi-layered, both horizontally and vertically and across time and space, than she recognises, so that what she posits should be seen as archetypical, and not all-encompassing. Indeed, under the structures and processes of deploying representative democracy, unions engage in specialisations of labour so that some of the most salient issues become how members use and control experts or whether they, the experts, use and control the members. Setting this aside, what is the role of the "union as institution" in a downturn? Apart from the possibility of holding back any emerged struggle, as Cohen would argue, can it not play a useful role in holding an organisation together when the struggle has subsided and is not successful? Can it not give a useful permanence and stability to union organisation through its routine? So there can be tensions between the two forms of union without them necessarily being threats to each other as Cohen argues.

Similarly, the dichotomy between the rank-and-file and the bureaucracy is posited as an iron rule rather than a tendency, with the consequence that this weakens its analytical and explanatory power. It is also a tad ahistorical, for while the distinction

may have had a clearer basis in an upsurge of struggle when the rank-and-file could be said to palpably exist, this has not been the case in the later period of the downturn. It has often been pointed out before that a bureaucratisation of shop stewards took place as they achieved full facility-time, leading them to engage in a *modus operandi* separate from but not necessarily in contradiction to membership participation and mobilisation. More widely, is it not the case that the bureaucracy can mobilise members, even in conspiratorial sense, to protect its own position (cf. p.152) and that organising campaigns are often initiated and directed by full-time officers (cf. p.153)? Can the bureaucracy play a different, and more positive, role in a downturn (see above and below)? Therefore, *Ramparts* provides an insufficiently deep and extended discussion of bureaucracy and its relationship to the rank-and-file, given the bureaucracy is so central to the thesis, and even though it examines several theories of bureaucracy. That said, *Ramparts* is on stronger ground when it examines the relationship of ideology, bureaucracy and internal balancing of interests within unions.

For a book that attributes crucial importance to the rank-and-file, the reader is left facing some significant omissions concerning exactly how the rank-and-file is to be organised and what the rank-and-file would look like. These are reasonable questions, because it is not clear if the members are or should be the preferred rank-and-file or whether there is a separation of the rank-and-file from ordinary members (pp.62, 96, 115). On other occasions in *Ramparts*, the rank-and-file appear as the activist milieu. So, the “real” rank-and-file remains insufficiently defined and the reader is left unclear as to whether it currently exists or, if it does not, how and when it will come into being. Moreover, Cohen’s own criticism of the rank-and-file (as they are?) suggests they need some educating. By putting rank-and-file resistance on something akin to an ideological pedestal which is neither justified nor substantiated (pp.183, 198), *Ramparts* does not sufficiently scrutinise whether the rank-and-file has before, or can in the future, generate stable, strategic and coordinated resistance.

When it comes to explaining why the downturn happened and why the ideology of the counter-offensive was so persuasive, *Ramparts* offers an explanation based around several factors, primarily unemployment (p.33), the timidity and betrayals of reformist and bureaucratic union leaders, and the *de facto* left reformism of the far left (see, for example, pp.183, 184), in addition to those reasons which can be surmised from the preceding discussion. While the former factors are of use, in themselves they do not fully explain the quiescence for, in the case of unemployment, workers have sometimes fought rising unemployment during the downturn in major battles. On the bureaucracy, if it did “sell members out”, on what basis was this?

Lack of morality and character? Where is the role for union leaders backing down because they feel their union is isolated and will not get the necessary support to embolden them even when it is promised to them by a fellow union? Even if their calculation was wrong, is it any more in this regard than a wrong calculation? Where is the role for strategic and tactical retreats?

Again, a further, more elaborated and contextualised discussion of individual factors is needed. The limited development of working class political consciousness in the 1960s and 1970s (and the left’s role here) must be assigned some role in explaining why the counter-offensive was transformed into a downturn beginning in the mid-1970s and why it intensified after 1979. Paul Smith’s book *Unionisation and Union Leadership: The Road Haulage Industry* (Mansell, 2001) has some useful insights here. Nonetheless, Cohen’s discussion of the sullen worldview underlying workers’ statements like “What can you do?” and “It just ain’t gonna happen” is instructive of the ways workers rationalise their stance after a downturn has begun.

In asserting that Bennisism (and left social democracy) was a divergence from the “real” or “proper” struggle, Cohen suggests that workers would otherwise have been receptive to revolutionary ideas, which is not proven in any (including a counterfactual) sense. Not all the left was “infatuated” with the Alternative Economy Strategy, for many of the Trotskyist organisations did focus on rank-and-fileism. Broadly speaking, with less competition from other (reformist) ideas, revolutionary ideas should have had a clearer run, but this does not imply they would have been more successful in being taken up by workers. Furthermore, a deeper exploration of workers’ consciousness might have unearthed the possibility that reformist ideas can play a transitional role (which Cohen does later acknowledge, p.218) and that workers may not differentiate between reformist ideas *per se* and the reformist goals of revolutionary ideas. This would have countered the way in which Cohen argues the conspiratorial notion that struggle is being held back by various people and processes, where workers’ consciousness was destined to grow but for this and that. Nonetheless, Cohen’s discussion of strategies to prefigure socialism is important, but it needs further elaboration in terms of its transitional and transformational potential (pp.43, 44 and later), because Cohen does not convincingly prove that such AES strategies were either counterproductive *per se* or just in the context of Britain in the 1970s (particularly given subsequent developments in South America since the late 1990s which can be said to be prefigurative of socialism).

There are also several epistemological and methodological weaknesses in the overly agitprop and polemical style of the book. One is the Dave Spart language of exaggeration and hyperbole, seen most obviously in the use of the terms “be-

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.

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## LETTER

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### 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