

REVIEWS

Terrorism and Social Democracy

Paddy Woodworth, *Dirty War, Clean Hands – ETA, the GAL and Spanish Democracy*, Yale University Press, 2002. Paperback, 488pp, £10.99.

Reviewed by Graham Copp

IN *DIRTY War, Clean Hands* Paddy Woodworth carries out an impressive analysis of the roots of conflict within the Basque country and the striking story of how the post-Franco, democratic government made up of Socialists from the opposition movement continued Franco's policy of counter terrorism against the Basque people.

The book is divided into four sections, taking us from the history of the Basque country and its repression to the years of GAL terrorism and then to the judicial investigations that brought down the corrupt socialist government of Felipe González.

The first section takes us, via Woodworth's experience as a young left-wing activist, through a brief history of the Basque country, the vital role of symbols and history in the creation of the Basque nation, its contested nature and historical relationship with the Spanish state. He looks at the use of direct state repression under Franco's dictatorship, the creation of ETA as a reaction to this and the history of unofficial terrorism sponsored by the Francoist state, such as the Basque Spanish Battalion and the Warriors of Christ King. He looks at the question of the constitution of 1977, vitally important to understanding the continuation of violence in the Basque country, and asks why in the Basque country the referendum failed to confer the legitimacy that it gave in the rest of Spain.

The second part looks at one of the most striking episodes in Spanish post-Franco history. A democratically elected government, which came out of the opposition movement and the left, was willing to employ the terrorist tactics that Franco's government had previously employed.

The *grupos antiterroristas de liberación* (anti-terrorist liberation groups – GAL) were active from 1983 to 1987 and hunted down and killed 27 people in the French Basque country, some with no connection at all with ETA, and injured and terrorised countless numbers in its wave of shootings and bombings. Woodworth's account of the murders is both sympathetic to the victims – presenting them not as just ETA members or

supporters, but as complex human beings – and rigorous – he researched the killings through court records, journalism and interviews with protagonists and the families of the dead.

The third part details the equally remarkable investigation into the affair. It tells how it was only due to the work of dedicated activists, journalists and the single-mindedness of a few reforming magistrates, in particular the self-promoting magistrate Baltasar Garzón, familiar to many people in the UK for his attempts to have Pinochet extradited to Spain for trial.

What is stunning about this section of the book is the extent of the involvement of the Spanish interior ministry and the government both in the affair itself and the subsequent cover-up attempt. In this part we see the struggle to bring justice for the families of the dead, initially frustrated for some years by the complicity of sections of the judiciary. As the book progresses, the investigation draws closer and closer to the famous “*Señor X*”, the mastermind of the operation, culminating in the sentencing of José Barrionuevo, the former minister of the interior, and his secretary of state Rafael Vera to prison for directing GAL.

However, the question will always remain – was Barrionuevo really *Señor X* or was that role in fact played by prime minister Felipe González? González has never been found guilty of any of the GAL-related crimes, but many have found it hard to believe that a man so charismatic and in control of his government could really not have known what was going on in the Interior Ministry.

The final section is an explanation of the GAL and its political impact. Woodworth looks at the new naive Socialist government, which expected a ceasefire from ETA leading to negotiations and an end to armed struggle. Instead they faced one of the most ferocious onslaughts in ETA's history. Rather than dealing with fascist sympathisers within the armed forces, they decided to use them as an illegal force against ETA. This, he argues, was the result of the failure to deal with many of the demons left over from the Franco period.

He also explains the political utility of GAL, which, while it had the stated aim of destroying ETA, could perhaps be better explained by the Spanish government's desire to shift the policy of France's government under Mitterand. Woodworth shows that, surprisingly, Mitterand's policy towards ETA refugees did not change at all after the

establishment of democracy in Spain. Despite the dismantling of the state terrorist apparatus under Suarez and Calvo Sotelo's first democratically elected governments, and the establishment of far greater regional rights and recognition of Basque nationality, ETA exiles were treated as political refugees in France. It is therefore feasible that the main aim of GAL was to try to force a change in French policy, towards co-operation against ETA, and to this extent the book makes it clear that they were successful, as the wave of revulsion that followed the GAL attacks was aimed not at its anonymous organisers but at the immigrant victims who were seen as having brought this trouble to France.

"This is a political story, but it has personal roots", says Woodworth in the first sentence of chapter one. Explaining his background as a political activist and journalist in the Basque country, he recalls his flatmate, a socialist suspected of being an police-paid agent provocateur, who later, as Director of State Security was found guilty of organising the GAL's campaign of terror and assassination. Perhaps driven by this coincidental connection with the GAL affair, he carries out a thoroughly researched and well-organised survey, combining the best of investigative journalism, academic analysis and normative political analysis. It is well written and accessible to those without a detailed knowledge of Spanish history or politics, whilst providing something new for those who are.

An Alternative to Leninism?

Alan Woodward, *Party Over Class: How Leninism Has Subverted Workers' Council Organisation*, Gorter Press, 2002. Pamphlet, 78pp, £3.00.

Reviewed by Martin Sullivan

ALAN WOODWARD has put a lot of work into researching, writing and self-publishing this pamphlet. In addition to providing a useful short history of the the Council Communist tradition for those of us who can't be bothered ploughing through a full-length study like *The Dutch and German Communist Left*, it also represents the author's attempt to come to terms with what he sees as the deficiencies of the Leninist tradition.

As a member of the Socialist Workers Party and its predecessor organisations for over 40 years, Alan no doubt has extensive first-hand experience of these deficiencies. Certainly, it is difficult to argue with his description of the SWP's mode of operation: "Ninety percent of the members spent 90% of their active time in a dogged effort to 'Build

the Revolutionary Party', a slavish attempt to follow the Leninist path. This policy of pushing the voluntary effort of predominantly young members has resulted in massive drop out rates and the survival of a passive majority."

So it is easy to understand why Alan should be drawn to an alternative political tradition that elevates the spontaneous organisation of the class above the revolutionary party. But as a rightist critic of Leninism I find it difficult to share his enthusiasm for the Council Communist tradition.

Alan argues that workers' councils are "an advanced form of working class organisation in a revolutionary situation which finally throws off the smothering grasp of reformist trade unionism and labourism". Leaving aside the question of what relevance Council Communism can possibly have in an emphatically non-revolutionary situation such as exists in Britain today, the perspective of workers' councils developing in opposition to the established institutions of the class – the trade unions and the Labour Party – even in a situation of the most intense class conflict, strikes me as unreal. If history has taught us anything, it is that when working people move politically they do so through their existing organisations, or through the new organisations that arise as a result of crises, conflicts and splits in those existing organisations.

In bourgeois democracies there is also the matter of the legitimacy that parliament enjoys in the consciousness of working people. In Russia in 1917 there was no parliamentary tradition and the soviets were widely accepted as the representative institutions of mass democracy. Even right-wing historians concede that the Bolsheviks' dissolution of the Constituent Assembly in 1918 met with little popular opposition.

In Western Europe it was different, however. Most of the participants in the German workers' councils that emerged during the 1918 revolution did not see these as the potential building blocks of a new workers' state, and they had no objection to handing over power to a social democratic government pending new parliamentary elections.

So the prospect of workers' councils ever playing the role in Britain that they did in Russia, by forming a system of dual power in which direct organs of working class democracy are counterposed to the bourgeois state, is highly unlikely, in my opinion.

It is true that Alan, unlike the more dogmatic Council Communists, does not in principle reject parliamentary-electoral activity. Writing in *What Next? No.23* about his experiences as a Socialist Alliance candidate for Haringey Council, he argues that, in a non-revolutionary situation: "Any means by which we can talk directly to people about politics should be used, even on the unpromising

ground of municipal electoral activity." At the same time, he sticks to the ultra-left position of "rejecting participation in parliament in a revolutionary crisis". According to this formulation, while electoral activity can be used as a means of propaganda and agitation during periods when the class struggle is at a relatively low ebb, the revolutionary crisis itself will take the form of direct organs of workers' power being built in opposition to a bourgeois parliament.

Here I find myself far more in sympathy with the views of Harry Ratner, who has argued: "So long as parliamentary democracy exists, and with it the possibility of a socialist party winning a majority in parliament, it is madness to reject the parliamentary road in advance. The probability of reactionary military coups – as happened in Chile – has to be warned against and prepared for. In the process of defending itself, a socialist government will have to call up popular support and encourage the formation of mass popular institutions. It will in the process have to transform and democratise the state machine." (See his review of Ted Grant's *History of British Trotskyism* in No.23 of this journal, and also his articles in the collection *Is There a Future for Socialism?*, which can be found in the Publications section of the *What Next?* website.)

Trotsky, interestingly, writing in 1925 in *Where Is Britain Going?*, put forward a perspective for revolutionary change in this country that was not a million miles away from Harry's analysis. He argued that a Labour government elected through parliament, and committed to a genuinely radical programme, would be faced with the resistance of the possessing classes and would therefore be forced to mobilise the masses against bourgeois counter-revolution, in the course of which soviet-type bodies could be expected to arise. In other words, direct organisations of workers' democracy would emerge out of the defence of an elected majority in the House of Commons.

Of course, we are a long way removed from such developments at present. Nevertheless, those of us who are committed to replacing capitalism with a socialist society should give some at least some advance thought to the means by which this might be accomplished.

In conclusion, then, while Alan Woodward's arguments represent a healthy dislike of the sectarian "party"-building approach of groups like the SWP (of which, oddly enough, he apparently continues to be a member), his adoption of the Council Communist tradition doesn't offer a viable alternative. Rejecting the methods of the Leninoid sects, he has turned to a form of utopianism which, because of its distance from political reality, present or future, is no less sectarian than the tradition he is trying to escape from.

The Freedom Principle

David S. Ware Quartet, *Freedom Suite*, CD, AUM Fidelity AUM023, 2002, £13.99.

Reviewed by Robert Wilkins

THE ORIGINAL "Freedom Suite", of which the latest CD by the David S. Ware Quartet is an impressive reinterpretation, was composed and recorded by Sonny Rollins back in 1958. An extended composition which took up a whole side of the LP to which it gave its name, "Freedom Suite" is now regarded as a ground-breaking recording and a classic of late '50s jazz.

The piece was inspired directly by Rollins' own experiences as an African-American in a white-dominated world. Over the previous decade he had established a successful career in music, achieving recognition as the leading tenor saxophonist of the period, but he was still unable to escape the racism endemic to US society, as he found out when he faced blatant discrimination while trying to rent an apartment in New York City. "Here I had all these reviews, newspaper articles and pictures", Rollins later explained. "At the time it struck me, what did it all mean if you were still a nigger, so to speak? This is the reason I wrote the suite."

The LP sleeve featured a short note by the artist making the same point in more restrained, but nonetheless unambiguous language: "America is deeply rooted in Negro culture: its colloquialisms, its humor, its music. How ironic that the Negro, who more than any other people can claim America's culture as his own, is being persecuted and repressed, that the Negro, who has exemplified the humanities in his very existence, is being rewarded with inhumanity."

This sort of plain speaking from jazz musicians was uncommon in 1958, and evidently caused some anxiety at Riverside Records, the label on which *Freedom Suite* appeared. The album was issued with a long sleeve note written by Riverside's co-owner Orrin Keepnews, which sought to dilute the clear anti-racist sentiments expressed in Rollins' short statement by waffling on about how the album's title was a reference "in one sense ... to the musical freedom of this unusual combination of composition and improvisation; in another it is to physical and moral freedom, to the presence and absence of it in Sonny's own life and in the way of life of other Americans to whom he feels a relationship".

In short order, the album was withdrawn and reissued under the innocuous title *Shadow Waltz* (named after another, less contentious piece that appeared on the album). Keepnews subsequently claimed that this had been a purely commercial

decision – the album hadn't sold well, and it was decided to try a new format to increase its appeal. But his argument was disingenuous, to say the least. As far as Riverside was concerned, the main obstacle to sales was quite obviously the album's up-front anti-racist message.

David Ware studied under Rollins back in the 1960s, at a time when most tyro tenor saxophonists were intent on imitating the style of John Coltrane. This period of study clearly had a big influence on Ware, and it is still possible to hear some of Rollins' sound in his playing today. But Rollins' music, for all his readiness to engage with the '60s avant garde on an album like *Our Man in Jazz*, remained rooted in post-bebop developments, while Ware was drawn to the "new wave" – the free movement in jazz headed by Coltrane, Albert Ayler and others.

By the beginning of the following decade both Coltrane and Ayler were dead, and the new wave itself had apparently run its course. But a few brave souls like Ware soldiered on, keeping the tradition of free improvisation alive. In the 1970s and '80s Ware made a minor reputation for himself playing in groups led by pianist Cecil Taylor, but recordings under his own name were few and far between. It wasn't until the mid-'90s that he gained wider recognition with two albums, *Cryptology* and *Dao*, issued on Homestead Records, the New York label responsible for launching Sonic Youth. As he entered his fifties, and after years of being ignored by all but the free jazz cognoscenti, Ware suddenly found that his music, now dubbed "ecstatic jazz", had won an audience among the indie rock crowd.

The stir caused by these recordings brought Ware to the attention of Branford Marsalis (the saxophone-playing sibling of trumpeter, composer, Lincoln Center jazz director and all-round pain in the arse Wynton Marsalis), who held the post of "creative consultant" in the jazz department of Columbia Records, a division of Sony. Branford doesn't share the dogmatic conservatism of his evil younger brother, who regards all free jazz as *entartete musik*, and he was greatly impressed by Ware's playing. (Indeed, no saxophonist could fail to be gobsmacked by Ware's technique – listen to the stunning display of circular breathing on the title track from *Dao*, for example.) At Branford's urging, Columbia agreed to record Ware.

The folks at Columbia were less than enthused about Marsalis's new signing. "Can't you get him to play just one song people know?" one of them asked despairingly at a recording session for the 1997 album *Go See the World*. Ware obliged with an off-the-wall rendition of Barbra Streisand's "The Way We Were"! Another album for Columbia, *Surrendered*, which appeared in 2000, did make some concessions to accessibility by easing up on the free improvisation in favour of a more melodic

approach. But by that time Branford Marsalis had parted company with Columbia, having found that artistic principles and big business don't mix, and Ware's contract was not renewed.

An album on AUM Fidelity, *Corridors and Parallels*, followed in 2001 and received some favourable notices, though in the opinion of this reviewer the incorporation of electronic sound through the use of a synthesizer, while interesting, was only a partial success. But I have no hesitation in thoroughly recommending *Freedom Suite*.

At just short of 40 minutes, Ware's version is almost double the length of the original, which allows for extended passages of improvisation around Rollins' simple but memorable themes. And whereas Rollins performed the piece accompanied – if that is the appropriate word for the playing of Oscar Pettiford and Max Roach – by just bass and drums, Ware's version is given a very different, much fuller sound by the addition of a pianist, the excellent Matthew Shipp, who has been a member of Ware's quartet for many years. (It's worth checking out his recent album, *Equilibrium*, on the Thirsty Ear label, incidentally.)

There would appear to be no particular political motive to Ware's decision to re-record the Rollins classic. This is perhaps not surprising, for interviews with Ware suggest that his ideological inclinations, like Coltrane and Ayler before him, are towards religious mysticism rather than politics. Instead of railing, as he would be fully entitled to do, against the injustices of a profit-grabbing music industry that for so many years turned its back on an artist of his stature, Ware prefers to welcome what he terms "the instability of the artistic lifestyle", seeing this as necessary to acquiring "the wisdom of uncertainty" (the title of a 1996 album) which he believes is essential to the spirit of free jazz.

Perhaps mindful of the controversy that followed the release of the original *Freedom Suite*, Ware has issued his album without any sleeve notes at all, apart from a basic list of the musicians involved (in addition to Shipp, these are bassist William Parker, another Cecil Taylor alumnus, and Guillermo E. Brown on drums). Ware's primary concern seems to be to pay musical tribute to his former mentor Rollins, and in this he succeeds brilliantly. In contrast to Wynton Marsalis's sterile approach to the jazz canon, Ware shows that it is possible to revisit the past achievements of the music's major figures without any loss of fire and spontaneity.

However, whatever Ware's own intentions, I would argue that a full appreciation of this recording requires not only a recognition of its musical brilliance but also an awareness of the political background to Rollins' composition. In any case, go out and buy this CD.