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## BOOK REVIEWS

BUCHANAN, TOM. *Amnesty International and Human Rights Activism in Postwar Britain, 1945–1977*. [Human Rights in History.] Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2020. xvii, 343 pp. £64.99. (Paper: £21.99; E-book: \$23,00.)

The history of human rights has generally focused on the development of the idea and on its emergence as a global force. The latter concern, exemplified by the work of Samuel Moyn, has engendered a lively debate between those who have pointed to the 1940s and those (like Moyn) who have argued for the 1970s as the moment of maturity. Missing in the historiography has been attention to the way that human rights campaigns and movements are made. After all, though the idea of human rights conveys intense clarity, as a global concern it competes with purely national issues for the attention of those who might be inclined to political engagement on behalf of the betterment of human welfare. So, how does human rights activism emerge?

The classic origin story involves a bolt of lightning, in which a shocking violation of human rights provides moral clarity and a desire to act, using the language of universality. The quintessential example of this is Peter Benenson's story of how, on reading an article in a London newspaper about two Portuguese students arrested and interned for drinking a toast to liberty in a bar, he was moved to issue an appeal, "The Forgotten Prisoners", which gave rise to Amnesty International.

Tom Buchanan debunked that myth – no such news item, no such prisoners – in a 2002 article. In his new book, he recognizes that whether or not the story was true matters less than the fact that origin myths obscure the long years of organizational efforts, difficult discussions, and personal choices that made an international human rights movement possible. *Amnesty International and Human Rights Activism in Postwar Britain* is a closely-observed history of the milieu, networks, and institutions in which Amnesty International, and the ideas that motivated it, emerged and thrived. It joins a small list of histories – those by Lora Wildenthal (*The Language of Human Rights in West Germany*, 2013) and Robert Brier (*Poland's Solidarity Movement and the Global Politics of Human Rights*, forthcoming) come to mind – that ground the universal nature of human rights in the quotidian.

Buchanan's excellent introduction sketches the geography of human rights activism in Britain. He carefully categorizes types of activists and the activist environments from which they emerged – including secular advocacy groups and faith-based groups like the Quakers. This is followed by a quick tour of humanitarian activism and advocacy over the preceding century, stretching back at least to the founding of the Anti-Slavery Society in 1839 and continuing through anti-fascism campaigns in the 1930s. Buchanan is always aware that international campaigns concerning political prisoners involve actors both public and private; that ground-level organizing coexists with charismatic leadership; and that campaigns do not expand inexorably, meeting setbacks and taking new directions along the way.

The role of organic transnational connections is a particular strength of this work. Buchanan shows how African decolonization, and the deep roots that some activists had in Africa, spurred attention to human rights in the 1950s. Michael Scott, an Anglican priest who made South Africa and South West Africa a focus of his ministry and his political

activism, played a crucial role in focusing attention on African affairs throughout that decade. But Buchanan highlights a number of other British figures who knew the continent and worked passionately to raise awareness in Britain, such as Eileen Fletcher, a social scientist and Quaker who worked in Kenya. While African nations – especially those that had been British colonies – figure prominently in the story of human rights activism in Britain, other personal transnational relationships prove crucial as well. In each country that occupied the attention of advocates for political prisoners or other victims of the abuse of human rights – including Greece, Chile, Cyprus, Spain, the USSR, and others – it is not the news that drives British activism. Rather, individuals with deep local knowledge draw others to their cause, often only after years of writing, lecturing, and behind-the-scenes lobbying. Though the scholar unfamiliar with post-war Britain may sometimes find offhand references to minor figures frustrating, the larger point about human agency and contingency is one of this book's most valuable arguments.

The problem of political prisoners, or prisoners of conscience, of course becomes the central focus of the work of Amnesty International, especially in its first two decades. Buchanan shows how discussions of imprisonment revolved around two key debates. First, is the political prisoner a universal figure? That idea is widely accepted today; it is nearly always sufficient to say that someone is a political prisoner in Hong Kong, Belarus, or Venezuela to mark them as someone deserving of our support and advocacy. This was anything but clear before Amnesty International. The earliest organizations advocating for the freedom of political prisoners or endeavoring to alleviate their plight were invariably allied with them politically – like the Soviet-sponsored International Organization for Aid to Revolutionaries (MOPR). Buchanan does not take note of an important precursor to Amnesty, unfortunately: in 1924, Roger Baldwin, who had a few years earlier co-founded the American Civil Liberties Union, created the International Committee for Political Prisoners. The ICPP initially focused on leftist prisoners in the Russian Civil War, but quickly broadened its scope to include prisoners in many countries. Like Amnesty, the ICPP aimed to support any prisoner who did not advocate violence; it was not quite universal in its scope, preferring to champion prisoners on the left, but it broke new ground in that direction. Also like Amnesty, the ICPP emphasized the accumulation of facts about prisoners and regimes in order to ensure an objective approach to the problem. Baldwin, too, faced constant attacks both from the Communist left and, more consistently, from those who suspected a Communist agenda. There are no obvious personal connections between the ICPP, whose activities dwindled in the 1940s, and Amnesty International; since Baldwin himself appears a few times in Buchanan's account, a connection is at least plausible.

The second debate, one that bedevils any human rights activism, is how one should act. Is the correct approach to employ formal means and work in official capacities, crafting reforms, delivering speeches, perhaps sending letters? Or do the moral demands posed by cruelty to other human beings, especially those who have merely expressed their beliefs, demand more direct action? This leads to another, yet more difficult question: if action is required, how confrontational should one be in the name of justice? As Buchanan shows, Amnesty emerged out of Benenson's frustration with the reformist approach taken by an earlier organization of British lawyers he founded in 1957. Amnesty, in contrast, prided itself on being fully independent, not only from government, but also from political parties.

The direct action question remains unresolved to this day. Amnesty is best known for transforming the act of letter writing into something active: letters could be written not merely to one's local newspaper but to the faraway prisoners themselves, or to their captors; moreover, participants formed deep bonds as they gathered to write letters and to choose

addressees. Buchanan's accounts of these groups are full of interesting detail about their diverse motivations and local flavors. The other half of the Amnesty recipe, as noted above, was fact-finding. This innocuous-sounding activity brought Amnesty into many difficult situations: entanglements with intelligence agencies; the imprisonment of unwary fact-finders; minor international incidents; and debates over the politics of information.

Buchanan follows Amnesty through the crises it faced in the 1960s and 1970s, until it takes its place as a global leader with the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1977. A portrait emerges of a movement that is surprisingly resilient. Most of its peers from the early post-war period have long since faded away. Some were the creations of individuals and could not survive their founder; others faded as interest in a particular issue or crisis ebbed away; still others were too dependent upon official funding. Amnesty could easily have shared their fate, and nearly did. But campaigning for human rights became, as Buchanan observes "desirable – even fashionable" (p. 179). Political prisoners have not disappeared as a category, and Amnesty has been able to expand its focus as well. Its combination of grass-roots action and committed leadership have allowed it to far outgrow its modest beginnings. Tom Buchanan's deeply-researched, generous study of Amnesty International's origins and flourishing should inspire others to expand our understanding of how universal ideals become transnational movements.

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LINK, STEFAN J. *Forging Global Fordism. Nazi Germany, Soviet Russia, and the Contest over the Industrial Order.* [America in the World.] Princeton University Press, Princeton (NJ) 2020. vii, 316 pp. Ill. \$39.95; £34.00.

In *Forging Global Fordism* Stefan J. Link gives a fascinating account of the ascent of Henry Ford and his famous automobile company, of the alternate fortune of the various concepts of Fordism, and of the significant influence that the mass-production methods of Ford's giant River Rouge factory had in the 1930s on the Nazi economy in Germany and on the Soviet economy under Stalin.

As a mechanical engineer with an anti-liberal and anti-financier approach, Ford created and consolidated a motor company producing a large number of affordable automobiles. He pioneered flow-production methods in the automobile industry and employed a vast number of unskilled or semi-skilled workers under the supervision of a core of engineers and skilled workers, introducing an almost continuous stream of technical and organizational innovations. The very high labour turnover and major social tensions in Ford's factories, due to the high division of labour and the repetitiveness, intensity, and alienation of work at the assembly lines induced Ford in January 1914 to double wages to \$5 a day and reduce the length of the working day from nine to eight hours. This led to a fall in labour turnover and made it possible to prevent labour unions gaining a foothold at the Ford Company until 1941. Moreover, moving from two to three shifts every twenty-four hours led to a great productivity