humor, soldiers on opposing sides were in fact telling almost exactly the same jokes about the quality of their food. Following this suggestive lead, we might ask what elements of World War II British humor were symptoms of wider European or global phenomena, and to what extent they reflected specific feature of national culture, politics, and distinct wartime experience.

Finally, what about the laughter of historians? In the introduction to a 2004 article on "gender and secret dynamics of British corporatism," James Hinton explained the process by which his own shocked laughter at a piece of 1940s doggerel opened up a range of questions and explanations that had been unexplored in his previous work. The introduction to this book notes how much the participants enjoyed the 2019 colloquium that led to its creation: it would be interesting to know more about the shared humor of that event and the ways in which it shaped the resultant volume.

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Daisy Payling. Socialist Republic: Remaking the British Left in 1980s Sheffield

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In 2023, a TV reboot of the *Full Monty*, the 1997 hit film about laid-off steelworkers turned strippers in post-industrial Sheffield, caught up with the characters "seven prime ministers and eight northern regeneration policies later," as they navigate the disastrous consequences of more than a decade of austerity that saw local government budgets contract by some £15bn. The real Sheffield City Council, avoiding the fate of other local authorities forced to declare effective bankruptcy, managed a balanced budget for 2023/24 at the price of 47m worth of cuts. Cut back 40 years to 1983 and Sheffield was in the mid of an experiment in "local socialism," a deliberate effort to resist and mobilize against Thatcherism that saw city council expenditure rise by 83% (23% in real terms), much of it funded from increased local tax levies ("rates"). The last council to hold out in the 1985 rebellion of a string of Labour-led authorities against Conservative government measures to forcibly curb "grossly extravagant" spending through rate-capping in councils caricatured as "loony-left," Sheffield has featured in diverse literatures on "local socialism" and the "new urban left" of which the Greater London Council (GLC) is the most famous exemplar. Such experiments are now attracting renewed attention from scholars and activists exploring the possibilities and limitations of contemporary "new municipalisms," "progressive localism," and "rebel cities."

Daisy Payling's valuable historical study of the rise and fall of Sheffield's "socialist republic" takes a different but ultimately complementary approach to those focused on activist strategies in broad comparative perspective. Drawing on a wide range of sources including the personal collections of activist "hoarders," interviews with activists and politicians including council leader and later Labour MP David Blunkett, campaign group and council archives, she focuses on the interactions between "different streams of activism and local politics" in a single city whose strong labor tradition and "vibrant history of radicalism" both enabled and limited

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the novel radicalisms associated with new urban leftism (6, 7). An early chapter shows how in Sheffield (unlike some of the other councils), the experiment with municipal socialism was deeply rooted in local Labour and trade union politics and retained a strong orientation to Labour as a national electoral force. A cohort of "homegrown activist" councilors led by Blunkett sought to reverse a declining Labour vote in the context of rising unemployment and de-industrialization by fostering community action and political education; encapsulated in the title of the 1983 pamphlet "Building from the bottom." Popular practical measures on cheap bus fares, community development and housing were combined, especially as the city's radical reputation "emboldened activists and brought more to the city," with more symbolically leftist ones—Sheffield declared itself a "nuclear free" and demilitarized zone and the Red Flag flew from the Town Hall on International Labour Day (although as Payling is careful to show, peace politics was already deeply rooted and was inflected to economic and class concerns). Blunkett's role and position is carefully traced, as he sought to balance a genuine commitment to bottom-up social democracy with pragmatic moderation and an alert, yet wary, interest in experiments elsewhere: interviewed alongside Ken Livingstone for a collection on *Local Socialism* (M. Boddy and C. Fudge: *Local Socialism: Labour Councils and New Left Alternatives*, Macmillan, 1984) he was polite but lukewarm "it'll be interesting to see how it goes"; other sources report him as privately thinking the GLC "bonkers" (33).

As this suggests, local socialisms became battle grounds for different left agendas in the 1980s. Activist intellectuals associated with the 1968 generation of New Leftism and autonomism developed positions in key contributions such as "In and Against the State" that sought to show how socialists might work through and against existing architectures of public and state power to surpass and transform them. Local socialism also attracted far left revolutionaries associated with organizations such as the Socialist Workers Party, International Marxist Group, and Militant Tendency, whose influence in Liverpool Blunkett deplored. Payling astutely avoids debating the ideological merits of these positions but effectively shows how and why Blunkett's attempt to distance Sheffield's "responsible" "firm left" politics from those dubbed "loony" and "hard" left came under pressure from within and without. Outside pressures were ultimately decisive—the collapse of the rates rebellion and impact of the 1985 Local Government Act, which abolished the GLC and metropolitan county councils, led to a "retrenchment" of the new urban left and in Sheffield, the eclipse of local socialism by public–private partnerships. While the fate of the experiment is traced, Payling's main focus is on its internal politics. She argues that "in trying to keep a lid on the more radical elements, Sheffield City Council denied certain activist movements space" (2). Her central argument is that the laborist orientation of the socialist republic meant that class politics and material concerns were accorded priority over what she describes as "identity politics." This is developed in a series of chapters focusing on experiences of grassroots activists in the women's movement, lesbian and gay activism, and campaigns around peace, environmentalism, and anti-racism. These are sensitively done, indeed at times I found the nuance and detail of these careful and sympathetic portrayals of how different causes intersected and overlapped sitting a little awkwardly with unambiguous claims that "class politics trumped all" (77).

If the strongest suit of the book is its lively and detailed narrative of this "complex, inchoate, rich and diverse" politics (15), Payling's book also addresses itself in interesting ways to recent historical scholarship that challenges decadal narratives defined by the ascendancy of Thatcherism and neo-liberalism. In this context the Sheffield experience is viewed as demonstrating the persistence and creativity of social democracy, while its project of "left renewal" is also situated in relation to familiar reference points including debates around the "crisis of the left" and "New Times" analysis associated with Marxism Today, as well as some aspects of social movement theory. There is much, in short, to recommend the book to readers from a wide range of disciplinary fields.

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