

THE UNITED FRONT: THE TUC AND THE RUSSIANS 1923–1928. By *Daniel F. Calhoun*. Soviet and East European Studies series. New York and London: Cambridge University Press, 1976. xii, 450 pp. \$27.50.

In hindsight, it is not very surprising that the first attempt to establish a liaison between the British labor movement and the Bolsheviks ended in fiasco. What is surprising, perhaps, is that the convincing arguments against such an attempt were expressed from the start, not only by Labour mandarins like Philip Snowden but equally by rank-and-file unionists. Apparently the exercise had to be undertaken simply to prove its futility. Until practical experience proved otherwise, a substantial body of British socialists firmly believed that their own principles and methods were compatible with those of the Bolsheviks. The Bolsheviks, for their part, saw no contradiction in trying to co-opt a fraternal movement whose leaders they regularly showered with gratuitous abuse. The story does not lack its lighter moments, as when the Soviet delegates to the Trade Union Congress (T.U.C.) at Hull in 1924 had to be persuaded to shed their theatrical disguise of cloth caps and shabby overalls. But the episode produced little more than hot air, and does not warrant lionization.

It may seem questionable, therefore, that Professor Calhoun should devote a volume of this length to just one partial aspect of the problem. By confining his attention to Trade Union contacts, he often leaves the broader context of Anglo-Soviet relations to the imagination of all but the most specialized reader. In this connection, it is hardly respectable to refer the less expert reader to the supposedly "standard" authority of partisan authors such as W. P. Coates and Zelta Coates (p. 26). At the same time, by organizing the material into chapters entitled "Courtship," "Engagement," "Separation," and "Divorce," he indulges in unwarranted poetic license. (It would be fairer to characterize the five inconclusive meetings of the Anglo-Russian Committee, which form the highlights of the story, as an adolescent crush rather than as a marriage.)

Despite the lack of perspective, the study has several strong points. The text is solidly documented from both English and Russian sources. The complex interrelationships of a score of institutions—from the many organs of the British T.U.C., the Labour Party, the National Minority movements, and IFTU on one side, to those of the CPSU, Comintern, Profintern (RILU), the All-Union Trade Union Congress, and the Communist Party of Great Britain on the other—are carefully differentiated. The personalities, from J. H. Thomas to the ebullient Tomskii, are convincingly drawn. The author's standpoint is admirably detached. Some judgments, such as that on the true source and voluntary nature of Soviet contributions to British miners during the General Strike of 1926, may be considered suspect (p. 250); but for the most part the detail is sound and cumulatively impressive.

The most revealing passages deal with the wonderland of Soviet domestic politics. Just as Trotsky believed that the Anglo-Russian Committee should be an instrument of international revolution, so Stalin held that its purpose was to shield his Soviet state from capitalist attack. At this stage, Trotsky's revolution was as imaginary as Stalin's war; but the conclusive rounds in their vendetta were fought out in no small measure over the ideological proprieties of their relations with the British proletariat. Calhoun describes Trotsky's fall from grace in November 1927 as a "glorious irony." It was, in fact, one of the few substantive events of the story.

In an epilogue somewhat bereft of coherent conclusions, the author admits that the United Front was indeed a sham—a tactical device designed to prepare the destruction of the Bolsheviks' temporary allies (p. 413). How he can then bring himself to regret its failure is something of a mystery.

NORMAN DAVIES
University of London