

This document contains the text and graphics included in Facebook postings relating to the Owen Hatherley event scheduled to take place in Southampton (UK) on Saturday 6th June 2015. The postings went up on Friday 30th May 2015.

<https://www.facebook.com/andrew.jordan.73997>

Trotsky's Handjob

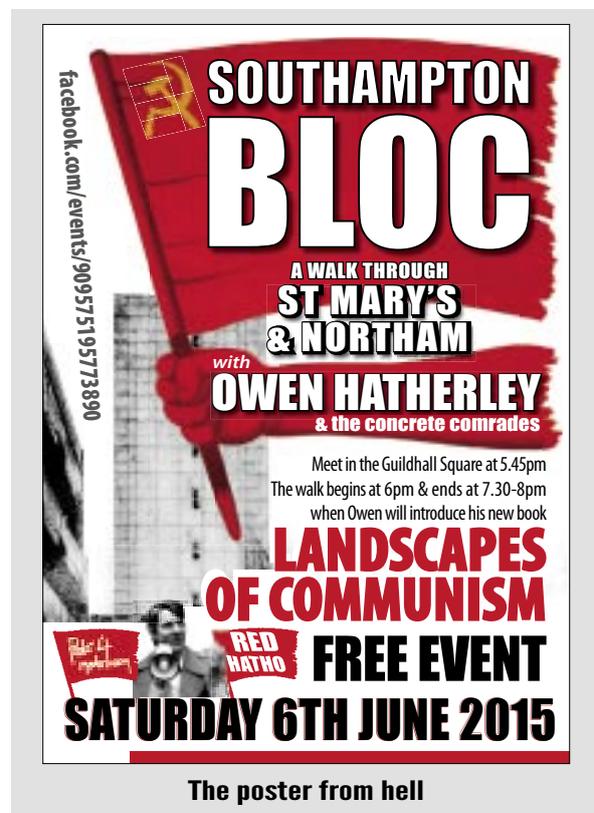
The Blue Rinse Bookshop and the Poster from Hell

1.

This posting will explain an apparent anomaly relating to the Red Hatto event on Saturday 6th June. If you have wondered why the event is being advertised on Facebook twice, or why October Books are concealing Owen Hatherley's politics, presenting him as a celebrity (local lad made good!) devoid of content, read on.

Those aware of both Facebook event pages might have wondered why October Books do not have a leaflet, nor any promotional graphic at all. The only image on their event page is a photo of Owen taken at the first Red Hatto tour of Southampton. It might seem unwise of them to use it, or ironic, given what follows, but that picture is one of several I took on that day. They didn't tell me they were going to use it to promote this event - and I would have objected had I known - nor am I accredited as the photographer.

Those who attended the first event might be aware of the posters and leaflets; I designed those and they went down quite well. If it seems that I have now become oddly possessive about my poster designs and have, on this occasion, declined to share my gifts with October Books, well, I did share them and they rejected the design. They were horrified by the artwork I did for the second Red Hatto event. It took a long time for them to disclose why, and that is what these postings are about. Those amongst of you who are good at guessing might already have concluded that it has something to do with Red Hatto's politics.



But that's silly and how could it be so, for October Books is right on, left wing, radical for fucksake, they wouldn't ban communism, would they? Well, not entirely, not if it comes stuffed up the insides of a slightly well known author, but they might want to repackage said author because, children, we all know that things that are left wing and wadical are very bad and that doing them is like eating poo. So, the blue loo booksellers want to sneak a taste of the lefty poop, but they don't want nice people to know they are doing it.



Events around Owen Hatherley are a bit tricky for the once left wing bookshop that doesn't mind too much if its legacy lefty customers don't notice the gradually emerging blue rinse (each time they get flushed it gets that bit bluer), and this event has ended up forcing them out of the water-closet. Not that they didn't duck and dive along the way, which is a shame. And they didn't need to compromise themselves. Had they been big and bold about who they really are and thus felt able to say what they wanted I would have produced artwork (more cyan, less magenta) that didn't provoke a phobic reaction in the neocon book boutique.

My position is that I can respect most anyone or anything uncompromised and not compromising of others; I like the force of a thing at ease with itself. What pisses me off about the shifty (or shitty) farce that October Books have become is that in attempting to avoid telling me to avoid a red 'n' proud poster design for Hatho they wasted my time. The new blue baby October Books can take what follows as potty training. (And pretending to like the link to the online red flag seller I posted earlier is truly sad. The dodgy blue bookshop shames itself.)

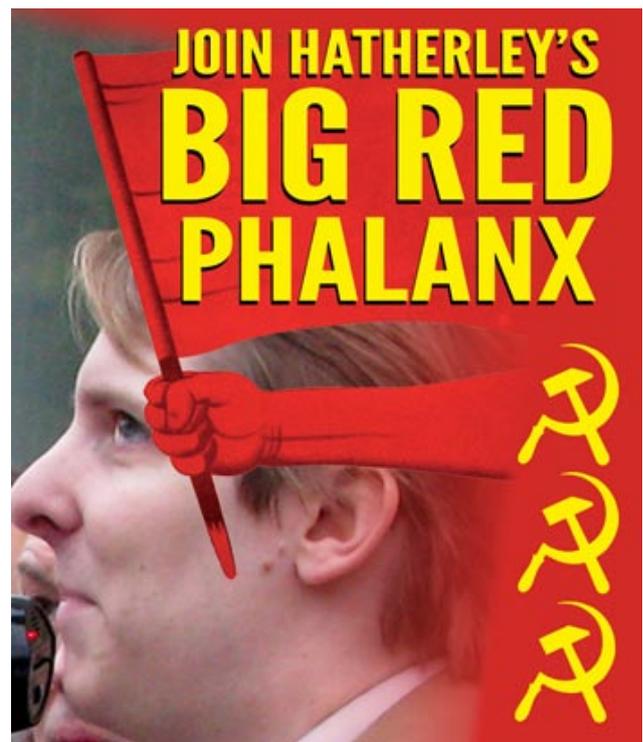
2.

Owen Hatherley has a new book coming out and it is called *Landscapes of Communism*. Ideally it would have been called *Landscapes of Conservatism*, but the world is, as we know, fallen. He's a commie (there, it is said). Red Hatho walks tall, but the bookshop supposedly organising his roving book launch event think if they are really evasive and vague about it they can get away with collecting some money (for what they can't explain, they have contributed nothing to this event), and then get back to being nice. The remaining left wing relics who still shop there won't (they hope) notice that Hatho has been ideologically deracinated in the process. Unaware, I got on with designing stuff to suit the working class wonder and his dangerous book and, being too embarrassed to say anything, the *laissez-faire* book emporium instead opted for being

shifty, apparently in the hope that they could ineffably transmit their poster spec. They made some bizarre comments, but nothing that revealed what they meant.

Hatherley's new book explores urban landscapes of the long lost Eastern Bloc, the architecture and historical contexts (taking in class and ideology and grown up shit like that), and the point of the Southampton walk is that he will compare that world with places in St Mary's and Northam, the council estates in particular; and the similarities are there to explore. These Southampton places are where Hatho is rooted, both personally and politically, and you can't airbrush that from the man or his book without doing political violence to both. Not that October Books, so very ethical, as we all know they are, will let concerns about that stop them, not when there's a few quid to be effortlessly absorbed.

The first I knew of a problem was when I heard that the design would not be used because "Those that are not very familiar with the shop might think the wrong sort of things- that it's a political march and that we are extremists, which we are not." Now, fuck me but I'm not out to encourage people "to think the wrong sort of things", anyone who knows me will vouch for that, I have always been against error, and 'terror', and thoughtcrime, etc. Hatherley



himself had signed off that leaflet (which was an early draft too, I have added a bit more graphical oomph on purpose since then because it improved the design and to piss off the thought police at OB).

And 'extremists'? That word cannot currently be used that way without the image of ISIS - beheading videos and all - popping into the mind. It indicates that paranoid groupthink inside October Books, far from reinforcing their supposedly moderate niceness, has drawn them further away from qualities usually associated with ethical practice. They tell big ideological lies for very petty practical reasons.

3.

Some elements in the leaflet/poster design are there at the Red Hatho's own suggestion, but them in the shop seem to think that he is in error. Like a bunch of repressed aunts and uncles who want to stop a boy from wanking but can't bring themselves to refer to his cock, what followed was a ridiculous and at times hilarious series of emails. It just shows what can happen when a group of people start thinking the same things and, if they feel enough emotion around it (in this case I think the emotions were fear and prefigured shame), find that they cannot adjust their perspective or get a sense of proportion. The image of the red flag fills them with existential terror.

I'm not a Marxist, I just worked with an author (both of us working for free) to design material suitable for him and his book. I like him, and one element of that regard is that he seems to me to be fully the thing that he is, he is not one thing in one direction and another when looking the other way. He says what he thinks.

Undeterred by the reactionaries, preparations for the event continued whilst Ian and Laure trembled behind their counter (what if the Daily Mail found out? Imagine that!). As I said to the dubious duo:

"The attached file is the latest version of the perky and entirely harmless Red Hatherley event poster.



Though cowards flinch and traitors sneer, etc. it is one of the ironies of the postmodern world that revolutionary iconography now most often appears on leaflets and posters advertising nightclub promotions. No-one is going to think this event is extremist. Those old enough to know will feel the warm glow of the cold war (I myself often look back with nostalgia upon those decades of geopolitical stalemate and the pending three minute warning) and those too young to have enjoyed those days will thrill to the overly familiar kitsch of retro imagery. The kids think that Lenin's is a nightclub in Onslow Road and that Trotsky Beat were a band in the 80s.

And yes, perky was a reference to Pinko & Perky, the famous Czechoslovakian revolutionaries who fucked up my head when I was young.

nb. I don't think the reference to an October Books fighting fund will cause Special Branch to start watching the bookshop, but if there are any small changes to the wording as it relates to the bookshop that might help you to sleep at night then I will include them if feasible."

(from Me, email to the Dubious Duo, copied to Comrade Hatho, 2nd May 2015)

Did the closet Tories see the funny side?

Did they fuck.



4.

A note on the name: unbelievable though it might seem, they only went and named their small business after the Great October Socialist Revolution, aka the Bolshevik Revolution - blimey and sail me away on a Morning Cloud, what were they thinking? My ludicrous probing of October Books paid off in the end.

"I'm not a communist and I don't see why I should be ashamed of not being one and not wanting to be mistaken for one." (Laure, 12 May 2015)

I can't see why she should feel ashamed about not being a communist either, her shame is entirely self-inflicted, but I wonder if they all might feel more comfortable in their skins if they changed the name of the bookshop. That way those people who do mistake it for a left wing bookshop (and who could blame them if they did) would be less likely to be misled. Given the state of the book trade, no-one would blame them if they were to change the name of the business. If they think it would help, then get honest with your customers and make a decision. Otherwise, in the distant past it was traditional to put dishonest traders in the stocks and throw their rotten stuff back at them (they can live that way if they choose to, it just depends on how backward they want their conservatism to be). It is the lying that I have a problem with. That and the waste of time their embarrassed manoeuvring caused . . . and that really has pissed me off.

The boy Hatho, who did his school 'work experience' there when the book shop was inner city and at red end of the spectrum, shows a touching attachment to the place in its current bankrupt form (actual, symbolic, moral, etc.), and yet he addressed the worker (me) like this:

"I find the idea that this will scare people off deeply bizarre, and I'm wholly ok with the flyer in its current form." (Red Hatho, 4 May 2015)

". . . that they would be so nervous as to worry this would 'damage the shop' is mental. And surprising. So yes, given that you've always been driving all this by all means print it up. If they want me to do a thing to directly help the

bookshop they can always get me to a reading or something, but given their general timidity I guess that might not happen for another couple of years."

(Red Hatho, 14 May 2015)

5.

(from Ian, email to Comrade Hatho, copied to Laure and myself, 5th May 2015)

"It would be so easy for people to misinterpret Andy's poster as lining us up with Stalinism, and in some people's minds bring back the 'communist bookshop tag' . . . After the huge success of the last walk - (which the brilliant poster contributed a lot to). I suspect we'll get huge numbers whatever the poster looks like, so when I saw the poster my thoughts were along the lines of, 'is it worth possibly damaging the shop when we don't need to'. . . But I felt a similar worry when the Highfield Residents Association (who's newsletter has a regular slot from a property lawyer) shared Owens article on Facebook with all their members ('October Books as an outpost of revolution in suburban southampton' - the nearest we come to revolution these days is a shelf of tatty Trotskyite newspapers that almost never sell, and Russel Brand's book)."

What strikes me upon re-reading that is that I should never have put Owen in touch with them in the first place. October Books does not want to remember him. But they do want any cash they can collect from people who come to hear what he has to say (that is, by asking for donations rather than by actively selling books to those potential punters, many of whom are also fake lefties). Having a left wing past is not shameful, but being forced into a position where you feel it is something that you might be unable to avoid owning up to is. Having been, say, a Nazi executioner, that would be shameful. When reading the squirmy reasoning behind the rejection of that ruddy poster, I feel that I am in the presence of the wrong kind of thinking (see section two).

The ailing bookshop, in its death throes, has a tendency toward categorical error and catastrophising. Cognitive behavioural therapy,



that would help. Cutting loose from the past and leaving October Books behind - its red rag proudly waving at the capitalist bull - uncompromised, as a part of Southampton's radical history, unbesmirched, that would be good too. Changing the name of the shop would protect that past, carrying on as they do now pollutes it with a shifty present and the elective shame they currently predict as they try to avoid it. Be bold. Call the place Acorn Books.

6.

(from Me, email to Comrade Hatho, copied to the Dainty Duo, 11th May 2015)

Dear Owen

Having drilled down into the dark and rather sad heart of October Books, it seems that there is nothing in there at all apart from irony. And so you wrote an article about an imperilled and yet surviving left wing bookshop that isn't left wing! Whilst I can see that they might have needed to change their brand image to stay in business, using two faces has made an entity with an honourable past into a form without integrity. That, not the impulse behind the need to change, is shameful. They allow people who knew them in the past to think they are what they once were whilst presenting a different and, it seems, more honest aspect to others.

So, when I - in good faith and thus deceived - put them in touch with you, this created a dilemma and the situation developed to the point where you published the Guardian article that some of their other customers read. No wonder Ian says he can't remember you. You are Trotsky's hand.

Had one of them told me that - whilst creating the artwork to publicise an event involving a left wing author and his commie book - I should not include any left wing imagery, humorously or otherwise, then I would have done you a poster they could have used and they would not have wasted my time. All the weird things that have been said about the design now make sense, those who uttered them lacked the courage to honestly describe their discomfort and instead sought to conceal the contradictions that caused them.

I can understand their discomfort. It turns out your article was a source of embarrassment. And now one of the consequences of the article is that it has exposed some of their contradictions to both sides of their world. As with any behaviour to do with avoiding a feared and unavoidable consequence, it would have been better if they had just come out as the 'radical bookshop' equivalent of Acorn Antiques. There are worse things to be than involved in a small business.

It seems that Laure's crazy comments contained some real horror and revulsion, though perhaps that was connected to the fraud at the heart of their enterprise, or the danger of its exposure, rather than at the supposedly extremist content of the leaflet. But perhaps she was trying to shield Ian. I guess all of the contradictions come home to roost in him, for he was, after all, once a Marxist.

I guess those they canvass via social media will be unaware of and thus untroubled by the politico-temporal monsters that stalk the hinterland of this event, seeing the politics in your book as something not contradicted by those who seem to be promoting it. I wonder what they would think if they knew the truth?

If you want me to do any design work for you in the future, let me know. If that work is aimed at 'promenaders' (and you, being informed, are aware of the fact) do tell me in advance and I will be sure to include images of half-timbered tower blocks with thatched roofs and lovely sentimental roses around the entrances.

Do you think it would be in keeping with the spirit of this event if we included a flag burning in the Guildhall Square? I expect Ian has some red flags in his closet that he no longer needs . . . Lots of burning red flags, that would be a meaningful spectacle and it would exorcise that irony, I reckon.

See you

Andy

PS. October Antiques is described on its Wikipedia page as involving " . . . wobbly sets, overacting, appalling dialogue and wildly improbable plots." I think that sums up Acorn Books quite well . . .

