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Book review: Fighting Fascism: The British Left and the Rise of Fascism, 1919-39 - By Keith Hodgson

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Keith Hodgson (2010) *Fighting Fascism: The British Left and the Rise of Fascism, 1919-39*.  
Manchester: Manchester University Press. 242pp, £65, 978 0 7190 8055 5

This valuable book discusses the role of European and, more specifically British left-wing organisations in its understanding of and opposition towards fascism between the inter-war years. Interestingly, it challenges an acceptance that a sole left-wing analysis claims natural legitimacy in the critique the rise of fascism.

This discussion does not focus on any single left-wing organisation, such as the Labour Party or Communist Party of Great Britain. Rather it encompasses an eclectic range of organisations in the historical narrative. This interesting approach provides a useful insight into the plurality of left-wing movements who opposed the fascist ideology, as well as the political agendas of other left-wing groups. A possible criticism could be that a consequence of this approach is that the book does not entirely recover from the lack of focus such an approach creates, but this does not detract.

Hodgson's analysis would be of most interest to those seeking to develop their existing knowledge of anti-fascist movements in the inter-war years. It would also be of significant value to advanced students of European, British and social political movements as it examines the positions of a series of specific under-researched political groups. Its appeal would be to historians with a political slant given its discourse of political and social history. However it has potentially a wider ranging scope for interest across scholars with varying areas of interest such as British and European history.

Hodgson has successfully presented a needed discussion of the role of the left in opposing fascism. The book boasts an analysis that is framed by an evident period of interesting primary research. Despite occasional typing errors, it is an enjoyable book to read despite the undoubted gravity of the subject. It is worth noting, however that not all left-wing groups carried with them the same level of impact in their opposition; some were effectively 'pilot fish' and so to elevate them to the same scale of importance as the Labour movement may be a negative consequence of an analysis drawn from this book.

However, it must be noted the scale of the task which the author has set is extremely vast. He has completed this task by presenting arguments built throughout his work towards the conclusion that left-wing opposition to fascism is more diverse than simply a Labour-centred movement and that the relevance of other groups must be considered significant, if not all encompassing, in their scope.

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