elections at the local level was by enmeshing themselves in their community and standing as the authentic representatives of it. In the past, Conservatives had achieved this by enlisting the aid, depending on where they were, of prominent civic figures, businessmen, and landowners. After World War I, both sociological and political changes had, however, made this tactic difficult to achieve, as these figures retreated from active partisan political campaigning, and associational life became increasingly nonpolitically aligned. It was in this context that what Thomas calls the National Government's "politics of recovery" was of immense value. Here the very public use of state intervention—be it in the form of tariff protection, regional policy, or government-sponsored industrial rationalization—to demonstrate that recovery would address the specific requirements of different economic sectors and regions was pounced upon by local Conservatives as a means to show the government's competence and their party's commitment to their locality.

Three case study chapters based on different types of constituencies in England—industrial (Stockton and Leeds West), rural (North Norfolk and Devizies), suburban (Birmingham Moseley, Liverpool East Toxteth, Illford, Eppore)—and one each on Conservative and Unionist politics in Wales (Pembrokshire, Gower) and Scotland (Dunbartonshire, Dundee) explore the dynamics of local parties coming to grips with the social and political changes in the period and the opportunities provided by the programmatic politics of the National Government. Each of these case studies are impressive microhistories in their own right, exploring such issues as the politics of unemployment relief, the relations between "old" and "new" suburbia, the breakup of landed estates, and the revival of anti-Tory nationalist politics on the Celtic fringe. They are based on a wealth of carefully gathered and intelligently integrated research taken not just from the archives of the Conservative Party—and its various local, regional, and national levels—but also the archives of its main opponents in each constituency. Indeed, one of the greatest strengths of this book is the way in which the actions of local Conservatives are presented and understood as a product of *interactions* with other political parties and movements. As such, each of these chapters could stand on their own as histories of popular politics in different types of constituencies.

These case studies, which form the central part of the work, are bookended by chapters on national level politics before the creation of the National Government in 1931 and its later phase from 1937 up until the outbreak of the Second World War. The 1920s are depicted, convincingly, as a time of deep Conservative electoral anxiety, with Thomas's argument that the Conservative government of 1924–1929 operated a political economy somewhat similar to that of Edwardian New Liberalism highly intriguing. The chapter on the unraveling of national anti-socialism in the late 1930s is similarly fascinating, with Thomas showing how the National Government's preference for delivering its prodigious social reform efforts via local government created the space—literally, in the case of the sponsorship of town and village halls—for Labour to exploit its own commitment to locality through the revival of municipal socialism. The book's conclusion completes Thomas's intellectual tour de force by arguing that local Conservative's desire for a type of government that would allow them to recapture the politics of place was integral to the development of—and ideological support for—an increasingly nationalistic, autarkic, and expert-driven state. That Conservative contributions to the making of this type of state made possible the actions of the Labour government after 1945 as delightfully paradoxical as the fact that it took the creation of National Government to preside over what Thomas calls "the last great flourishing of localist politics in post-Victorian Britain" (268).

A challenge to the most influential national-level explanations of politics in the period—principally, Philip Williamson and Ross McKibbin, both of whom in their different ways focus on Stanley Baldwin's rhetoric in the party's success—the book also offers a subtle but powerful wider critique of the tendency among "new political historians" to explore the construction of electoral appeals over their consequences for the state.

Kit Kowol King's College London

Peter Sloman. *Transfer State: The Idea of a Guaranteed Income and the Politics of Redistribution in Modern Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019. Pp. xiv, 320. Cloth $88.00.

Can you identify the fact among these fictions? The promise of a guaranteed income has long figured as a progressive fantasy. Indeed, few issues have exerted such an emotional hold on the moral vision of the left. Support from the labor movement, however, proved no match for opposition from the likes of Milton Friedman, Enoch Powell, and the British Treasury. The universal basic income has therefore come nearest to fruition not in the United States or Britain, but in the Scandinavian welfare states. Peter Sloman is a slyly counterintuitive historian, whose study of the basic income in modern Britain reveals the surprising origins of this increasingly visible public policy.

In *Transfer State*, a history of the politics of a guaranteed income in Britain since the First World War, Sloman subverts every premise (save the last) in that seemingly commonsensical paragraph. Joining the

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/ahr/article/127/1/542/6573658 by New York University user on 31 May 2022

history of ideas with policy studies, he sets out to explain how "the idea of a guaranteed income floor has become increasingly central to British social policy over the past century" (249). The policy's recent rise, with support from the Green Party, the Trades Union Congress, and several Scottish councils, is joined by growing interest internationally. Sloman shows, however, that what might initially seem a recent, left-wing, global phenomenon arrives with deep roots in British liberalism. He calls particular attention to the role of Juliet Rhys-Williams, a Liberal policy entrepreneur who proposed a system of cash allowances tied to work in *Something to Look Forward To* (1943). Indebted to neoclassical economic principles and at odds with the universalism associated with William Beveridge, Richard Titmuss, and the postwar welfare state, Rhys-Williams offered liberal Conservatives and conservative Liberals an alternative to Labour's focus on higher wages and universal benefits.

Sloman thus follows John Kay in depicting the basic income as a wing of "redistributive market liberalism." Through a sliding scale of income supplements, its postwar iterations would have reintroduced a form of means-testing, while its promise to address poverty without intervening in the labor market appealed to Milton Friedman and Enoch Powell. Something like this vision nearly came to pass under Edward Heath, as Sloman has shown in *Twentieth Century British History*. And from the 1980s into the 1990s, though derided as a "shirker's charter" by Margaret Thatcher, a guaranteed income promised a means of cushioning the carnage wrought by deindustrialization. New Labour, however, pulled back from the universal income, instead preferring to mirror Clinton Democrats by yoking benefits to work. The 2008 economic crisis scrambled the board yet again, pushing a somewhat convoluted version of the basic income—mainly in the form of Universal Credit, though alongside competing versions from the left—to the front of policy debates. In light of this meandering and unrealized history, the social administrator David Donnison once referred to the universal basic income as "the great North-West Passage of social policy," by which he meant that it "had to be explored," even if its champions could find "no way through" (235).

This technical monograph emphasizes (even as it exhibits) the basic income's technocratic bent. The late Robin Cook worried that Gordon Brown's focus on tax credits amounted to the pursuit of "social justice by stealth" (195). Cook's point was that redistributing wealth through the tax system might be good public policy, but it was poor public relations—effective, perhaps, but not affective. This problem, Sloman shows, has long bedeviled the basic income. The policy has continually failed to attract a popular constituency, whether under Heath in the 1970s or New Labour in the 2000s. In that respect, recent interest in guaranteed incomes domestically and globally amounts to a significant departure. "If cash transfers have sometimes appealed to economists and philosophers as a way of eliminating poverty without confronting the distribution of economic power, this technocratic vision is an illusion," Sloman concludes. "Only when supporters of basic income manage to surmount . . . *cultural and political obstacles* will the idea become a reality" (258; emphasis mine). For a stirring piece of advocacy, the policy's advocates must look elsewhere. But for an enlightening account of its origins and development, historians need look no further.

Guy Ortolano New York University

Katie Hindmarch-Watson. *Serving a Wired World. London's Telecommunications Workers and the Making of an Information Capital*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2020. Pp. xi, 270. Cloth $29.95.

Serving a Wired World is a tightly focused study with broad implications for our understanding of the making of the modern information society. Its topic is the workforce recruited to manage London's telegraph system after nationalization in 1870 and the early years of the telephone system, which came under full state control in 1911. The global dimension reflects London's place as the center of not just the national communications network but the entire imperial network. Whereas the penny post was designed for mass usage, the pay-by-word telegraph and the expensive telephone contracts deliberately confined the new systems to an elite and largely male clientele. The nearest the telegraph came to a popular service was in the dissemination of racing and other sporting results. The technical innovations of the period embodied the liberal ambition of commercial, political, and cultural progress based on the frictionless flow of confidential information. At the same time, it challenged a range of assumptions embodied in the expanding role of the state and its machinery.

The difficulty, which is examined in different dimensions in the book, was that a new kind of workforce had to be recruited to run the services. The stable boundary in the postal system between indoor and outdoor male staff, elite manual workers who had no access to the pay and privileges of clerical grades but were bound by the same obligations to secrecy, was everywhere questioned. It was not immediately clear whether the task of decoding incoming telegraph messages and translating words back into electronic pulses was a manipulative or an intellectual task, or whether it was best suited to male or female fingers. With the exception of the telegraph boys speeding

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/ahr/article/127/1/542/6573658 by New York University user on 31 May 2022