COMMUNIST HISTORY NETWORK NEWSLETTER No 10 SPRING 2001

Welcome to issue ten of the *Newsletter*. This issue of the *Newsletter* is also available on-line, along with full-text versions of a number of back issues, at the new CHNN website at: http://les1.man.ac.uk/chnn. In time, a comprehensive archive of all issues will be accessible, supported by a on-line 'search' facility and subject index. In addition to the individual article pages, a 'printer-friendly' version of each complete issue will also be made available. Feedback on the design and functionality of the site is welcomed. The *Newsletter* will continue to be distributed in both its e-mail attachment and on-paper formats as well as being accessible via the website. The deadline for the next issue is Monday October 1 2001.

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- **'PRO-SOVIET SENTIMENT'**. Darren G Lilleker is organising a panel for a European Social Science and History Conference, to be held at the Hague, Holland in March 2002 around the theme 'Pro-Soviet Sentiment in Western Society'. His own research has focused on 'pro-Soviet Labour members of parliament, studying their activities and motivations.' He is keen to get in touch with other researchers working in this area from across Europe. Contact: Darren G Lilleker, Department of Politics, University of Sheffield, Elmfield, Northumberland Road, Sheffield S10 2TU; D.Lilleker@sheffield.ac.uk

- **WORLD FEDERATION OF DEMOCRATIC YOUTH**: Richard J Aldrich is doing research on the World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY) and the British National Union of Students (NUS) in the 1940s and is interested in contacting individuals who were active in those movements. If anybody can help, please contact Richard on: tapir-tapir@ntlworld.com**.**

- **HISTORIANS OF AMERICAN COMMUNISM**: The latest *Newsletter* of the Historians of American Communism designed to encourage 'students of American communism, anticommunism, and related topics to share information' is now available. The new issue including notes on current research projects, latest archive news and an extensive bibliography of recent publications in the field. Subscriptions (and membership of the HOAC) costs $15.00 (individuals) and $20.00 (Libraries) plus

$5.00 for foreign service, and should be sent to: The General Secretary, Dan Leab, HOAC, PO Box 1216, Washington, CT 06793

IN THIS ISSUE

‘Secret Speech’ — A Postscript

I have a postscript to what I wrote in the last *Newsletter* (Autumn, 2000) regarding the leadership of the Danish Communist Party and Khrushchev’s ‘Secret Speech’. A few details have been given in a recently published book, *Bjørnen og Haren — Sovietunionen og Danmark 1945-1965* by Bent Jensen (*The Bear and Hare — the Soviet Union and Denmark 1945-1965*, Odense Universitetsforlag 1999), concerning the meetings between Aksel Larsen and the Russian ambassador in Copenhagen subsequent to the 20th Congress of the CPSU and in particular after the release of the Reuters’ telegram of March 17th on a ‘Secret Speech’ that had been made on ‘Stalin’s mistakes’. Reports of these meetings and what Aksel Larsen said were made by the ambassador, Nikolai Slavin, and sent to Moscow, Bent Jensen has read this material in the Moscow archives and includes a few small quotes from them (Slavin`s conversations with Aksel Larsen which were reported back to Moscow are dated 23.3., 26.4., 5.6. and 18.6.1956). Larsen is reported as saying that the CPSU should have beforehand informed leaders of the communist parties in the capitalist countries of the ‘criticism of Stalin’, ie. that they should have known of the ‘Secret Speech’ prior to the ‘leaks’ and Reuters’ telegram. Slavin gave an account of the DKP leader’s heart-searching, but at the same time refusal to break with the old mind-set:

> ‘Aksel Larsen said that many Party comrades were asking him why one had only begun to talk about Stalin`s mistakes now and why these mistakes had not been spoken about while Stalin was still alive. In the same breath Larsen remarked that to have made any kind of criticism of Stalin, while he was still alive, because of the logic of the revolutionary struggle, would inevitably have led one into the contra-revolutionary camp. He added that personally he had seen a series of incorrect aspects in Stalin`s actions but he had understood that to protect the unity of the Communist movement one shouldn`t say anything about these incorrect actions.’

He was now being asked why he had always without reservation supported all the decisions made by the Soviet leadership and the other communist parties in the People’s Democracies. Larsen requested that he be allowed to come to Moscow to be fully informed, however, initially this was put off and instead he and Alfred Jensen were allowed to read the ‘Speech’ at the Soviet Embassy which, according to Slavin, made a deep impression on them both — Bent Jensen, writes that other members of the DKP leadership were not allowed to see the ‘Speech’. Eventually, in June, Aksel Larsen secretly journeyed to Moscow via a circuitous route, however, the trip was uncovered because the Soviet authorities sent him back on a direct flight to Copenhagen. In contrast a visit by British party leaders, Pollitt, Gollan and Ramelson, to Moscow the following month to hold discussions with Khrushchev and other Soviet leaders was, from the first, openly held and reported, eg. *Daily Worker* 17 July 1956.

Steve Parsons

Communism in the Nordic countries, 1917-1990

For a couple of years a number of Nordic historians interested in communism have discussed the possibility of a research project aimed at producing an English-language monogram on communism in the Nordic countries between 1917 and 1990. The project will begin its work in 2002 and conclude in three years, if the application for funding proves successful.

In the historiography of communism it has been usual to study the relations between Moscow and one national communist movement. Comparative studies of multiple national communist movements are rare, although these might shed more light on the character of the international communist movement than a study of the relationship between the movement's centre and a single national component.

The communist movements in the five Nordic countries were not identical — neither were their individual circumstances. The project will study how these different circumstances affected each of these communist movements. The main emphasis will be the differences arising from the political environment. On many occasions a dividing line emerges separating the Scandinavian countries from Finland. Iceland also provides an interesting case.

It is our intention to focus this comparative project around five central themes:

- Communism and revolution
- Communism and other social and political forces
- Communism as a bearer of modernism
- Communism as a political camp; and
- Relations with the international communist movement

In addition to this, the project will explore the question of whether a distinctively ‘Nordic’ form of communism developed.

These communist parties were founded in order to make a revolution. The project will scrutinise the kind of strategies Nordic communists had for winning power. This question will be examined through a study of the activities of the Nordic communist movements, and not judged from their ‘programmatical’ documents. The study will also examine communist attitudes towards various reforms.

The project will also study what the Nordic communists did in order to weaken the legitimacy of the prevailing society. The relation between the institutions of the existing system, on the one hand, and the extra-parliamentary activities and the alternatives bodies and institutions created by the communists, on the other, will be discussed.

In order to realise their goal of revolution communists had to win support for their ideas.

The project will explore the ways in which the Nordic communists believed they would be able to secure the support of the working class and how they tried to achieve influence among other strata of their society — the peasantry, intellectuals and minorities. Because of the differences in their approach to the issue, the relationship of the various Nordic communist parties to social democrats and social democracy is one of the important questions the study will address. Communism's status as an 'enemy image' will also be explored.

Communism's revolutionary ambitions were not restricted to the conquest of political power, but involved wider social and cultural questions of beliefs and behaviour. The project will touch upon these questions as part of its exploration of the theme 'communism as a bearer of modernism', studying its relation to modern art, ideas of educational reform, women's liberation, sexual liberation and sexual education, psychoanalysis, jazz, etc.

Under the theme of 'communism as a political camp' the project will explore questions concerning the creation of communist identities, examine the numerical strength of these movements in terms of membership and levels of electoral support, and study other issues including organization, internal disputes, economics, etc. Questions of gender will also be explored.

The project is led by Professor Åsmund Egge from the University of Oslo, with the help of an editorial board on which each of the five Nordic countries has a representative. They and the other participants in the study will work in two-three groups examining the periods before and after the Second World War. The working methods of the project include regular meetings and contacts through e-mail. For more information, contact: asmund.egge@hi.uio.no

Tauno Saarela, University of Helsinki

THESIS REPORTS

The Communist Party of Great Britain and the Thatcher Governments: A Historical and Political Study[1]

This PhD thesis was successfully completed at the University of Nancy, France in 2000. A copy of this thesis, in its original French, is to be deposited at the National Museum of Labour History in Manchester.

During most of the existence of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CP), the historiography of the party tended to be dominated by a pro / anticommunist dichotomy. Although in the 1980s this basic division became less important, the real change came when the CP ceased to exist in 1991. As Eric Hobsbawm has remarked, 'the affairs of the CP are no longer discussed on what was as essentially a political and ideological battlefield'[2]. Despite the consequent renewed interest in the history of the party, little work

has been carried out into its final years. The 1970s and 1980s belong to the recent past and were a period of decline and loosened ties with the Soviet Union. The lack of historical perspective and of obvious points of interest have no doubt deterred researchers. The period is also particularly controversial as it coincided with two splits and the decision to transform the party. The political stakes may not be as high as in the past, but Democratic Left / New Politics Network and the Communist Party of Britain owe their legitimacy to certain interpretations of the 1980s. For political and personal considerations, former members and others may have preferred to concentrate on other decades.

The only published pieces of work dealing with the 1970s and 1980s are short chapters, such as those by Willie Thompson[3] and Nina Fishman[4]. They deal mainly with the divisions in the CP and the decline of the party, but only touch on its actual strategy and activities at the time. My work is an attempt to fill this gap by looking at the final years of the party through its reactions to the Thatcher governments. These reactions include its analyses of the Conservative governments, the strategies it elaborated to fight against them and the activities that it became involved in. My work does not ignore such issues as the divergences within the party and its falling membership, but sees them mainly in the context of its opposition to the Thatcher governments.

Given the small amount of work on this aspect of the CP's history, my research is based mainly on primary sources, that is the communist press (*Morning Star*, *Comment*, *Focus*, *7 Days*, *Changes* and *Marxism Today*), the archives at the National Museum of Labour History (Political Committee, Executive Committee, Yorkshire and London District Committee), and interviews with former members based in Yorkshire and London. I adopt neither a 'top down' nor a 'bottom up' approach, but develop a tripartite model of the party composed of the national level (the Executive and Political Committees), the regional level (the District Committees) and the local level (branches). By studying the interaction between these levels, it is possible to have a detailed vision of the functioning of the party which sheds new light on its final years.

I situate the CP's reactions to the Thatcher governments within a context composed of three elements: the history of the CP, the Conservatives' domination of British politics in the 1980s, and the difficulties of the opposition. I briefly present the main points of the CP's development and particularly the adoption of the 1977 version of the *British Road to Socialism* (*BRS*); the policies of the Thatcher governments; and the direction of the Labour Party and the trade unions as well as the divisions within the opposition.

Certain elements of continuity can be found in the CP's attitude to the Thatcher governments. For example, it considered the Conservatives to be linked to sections of the ruling class and to be deliberately trying to divide the working class in order to weaken it[5]. It believed that the governments' opponents should not simply wait for the next general elections to try to defeat the Conservatives, but combine extra-parliamentary and parliamentary activities. The CP allotted itself the task of building a broad movement, including the trade unions, capable of preventing the Conservatives from implementing their policies[6]. It also hoped to develop a positive alternative programme which would cement the movement together. Consequently, the party organised activities such as the People's March for Jobs in 1981, actively supported the striking miners in 1984/5 and participated in movements against the poll tax in the late 1980s. It also stood candidates in

the national elections of 1979, 1983 and 1987, as well as in local elections. At the same time, it launched debates within the Labour Movement about the Alternative Economic Strategy and used documents such as *The Central Issue* to stimulate discussion.

Nevertheless, significant changes also occurred between 1979 and 1990. Rejecting its previous view of the Thatcher governments as being the same as other capitalist governments, it began to stress their specificities. It declared that they did not simply represent the ruling class, but they were reconstructing it and including sections of the working class in a new bloc of support for change[7]. It noted the importance given by Mrs Thatcher to ideological struggle and her espousal of a distinct vision of society and set of ideas. Using the term 'Thatcherism' to denote her singularity, the CP argued that she had reinforced a long-term crisis of the left[8]. Consequently, the Thatcher governments were no longer seen as opportunity for the left to strengthen its position, but as an exceptional danger. The Alternative Economic Strategy, composed mainly of relatively radical economic and social measures, was seen as being inappropriate and was abandoned in favour of a less ambitious 'democratic alternative'. The 'democratic alternative', which also proposed constitutional reform, was seen as the basis for a dialogue between the main opposition parties and for an electoral pact[9]. At local level, such as in Kensington, contacts were made with other parties. The CP's own electoral considerations declined in importance, as did the place of the unions in its overall strategy. At the same it reached out to new organisations such as Charter 88.

Some of these changes began to occur in 1983, but the most far-reaching ones occurred from 1985. A comparison with the work of Stuart Hall and Eric Hobsbawm published in *Marxism Today* from 1978 onwards shows that the new analyses were clearly based on them and integrated their main points. The previous analyses were still expressed in the *Morning Star* from 1983 and developed further in the 1985 pamphlet *Class Politics: An Answer to its Critics*. The year 1985 thus saw the clash of two distinct sets of positions. The existence of two analyses resulted partly from the use of different theoretical concepts. The positions expressed in the *Morning Star* were based on orthodox Marxism-Leninism and their authors concentrated on the economic policies and objectives of the Thatcher governments, while Stuart Hall drew on and developed the work of Antonio Gramsci, Nicos Poulantzas and Ernesto Laclau. Most of his work concerned the political and ideological aspects of the Thatcher governments. Furthermore, the two analyses were based on different definitions of the left. For the authors of *Class Politics*, the left was the left-wing of the labour movement, whereas Stuart Hall and Eric Hobsbawm tended to define it as being the whole of the labour movement. Consequently, although the two analyses of the situation were quite different, they were not entirely contradictory in some respects.

However, it was impossible for the CP to produce a synthesis of them. The divergences over the Thatcher governments crystallised broader differences that had been present for a number of years and were clearly visible from the debates about the *BRS* in 1977. Although supporters of both positions claimed that they corresponded to the overall strategy of the party, their interpretations of the *BRS* were only partial. Those who defended the Thatcherism analysis were able to point to the new Gramscian aspects of the 1977 *BRS*, such as the Broad Democratic Alliance of all those facing exploitation and oppression or the role of ruling class ideas in its domination. The others ignored these aspects and developed an interpretation of the programme which made it little different from the 1968

version. Thus, the differences over the Thatcher governments reveal the tensions within the 1977 *BRS* and the problems of its implementation. They can thus be seen as the continuation of the debates over the *BRS* in another form.

The chances of a compromise were reduced further by the fact that the two analyses were associated with particular groups within the party. Tensions had existed within the dominant centrist grouping for several years concerning the *Morning Star* and the extent to which reformers and their ideas should be integrated. The split within the centrist grouping in 1982 led to a realignment of forces within the party. Some centrists, symbolised by Tony Chater the editor of the *Morning Star*, continued to espouse the official positions of the late 1970s and early 1980s, moving closer to traditionalists who were critical of the evolution of the party since the 1950s. A new alliance also appeared uniting other centrists, such as Gordon McLennan and Ian McKay, and reformers like Martin Jacques. Consequently, the reformers found themselves in a position of strength within the national leadership and were able to impose the adoption of their positions, particularly at the National Congress of 1985.

However, the reformers only made up a minority of the membership and the majority, particularly at local level, opposed significant aspects of the new positions. Many had supported the new leadership alliance out of loyalty or opposition to others sections of the party. Moreover, the reformers themselves were not a homogeneous group. Although they broadly agreed on the nature of the Thatcher governments and the difficulties facing their opponents, they were unable to develop a coherent strategy and role for the party.

This situation had major consequences for the implementation of the new analyses. The party hesitated for several years between standing the largest number of candidates possible in elections and not standing any so as to limit the divisions in the opposition. It did not find a coherent solution to the problem, calling for an electoral pact from 1989 and continuing to have a small presence in local elections. In trade unions such as NATFHE (National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education) some communists refused to put in practice decisions taken at National Congresses, believing that they impinged on the traditional autonomy of communist trade unionists and went against the party's traditional strategy and practices, in other words what Nina Fishman has called 'revolutionary pragmatism'. Consequently, Broad Lefts tended to fragment, but no other solid grouping appeared in their place. In spite of the leadership's support for Charter 88, few communists joined it or participated its activities. Thus, the absence of a clear line from the leadership and the passive resistance of many at local level led to a decline in activity and an atmosphere of confusion within and around the party. Ironically, thus situation was compounded by the increasingly open attitude of the leadership which did not try to hide the divisions.

The partial implementation of the new positions inevitably had an impact on the influence of the CP. The party's direct influence within the unions and extra-parliamentary organisations had been on the wane for several years mainly due to its falling membership. It had to a certain extent been hidden in the unions as a result of the Broad Left alliances which had allowed communists to reach positions of influence[10]. The economic situation of the 1980s, and particularly the decline of heavy industry and manufacturing, reinforced the decline of the party's direct influence, as did the adoption of new positions in 1985. It

alienated some former allies in the Broad Lefts who had already showed their hostility to the ideas of Hobsbawm and Hall when they were first published in *Marxism Today*. It had the same effect on some former allies on the left of the Labour Party. However, the party's indirect, that is intellectual, influence rose dramatically during the 1980s. From the late 1970s onwards articles published in *Marxism Today* by Hobsbawm and Hall received approval from different sections of the labour movement and beyond[11]. Statements made at the time and since by leading figures suggest that ideas expressed in *Marxism Today* contributed significantly to the new direction of the labour movement from 1983. Nevertheless, the articles did not reflect the party's official views until 1985, so it is problematic to see this influence simply as that of the CP.[12] Moreover, the very nature of this intellectual influence and the parallel decline in its direct influence meant that the party had no impact on how others implemented its ideas. Despite playing a role in the emergence of new thinking in the labour movement, it was unable to have any impact on how it was put into practice.

The changing attitude of the CP to the Thatcher governments also had an impact on the transformation of the party into Democratic Left. Once the defeat of the Thatcher governments became its overriding aim, the CP concentrated increasingly on short-term projects which became separated from its long-term objective of socialism as set out in the *British Road to Socialism*. Seen from this perspective, the adoption of the *Manifesto for New Times* merely confirmed this trend. The importance of the present also corresponded to the philosophical stance of many reformers. At its heart lay a belief in pre-figurative forms, that is the need to organise activities and create structures that embodied the values of a future radically transformed society. The predominance given to short-term thinking was also reinforced by the uncertainty surrounding the party's vision of socialism. Given the importance of the present in the party's thinking and strategy, its failure to make a significant contribution to the fight against the Conservative governments was a major factor in the crisis over its role in British politics. Some reformers concluded that the party had to radically change if it wished to play the role it attributed itself.

In addition, the CP's changing position concerning the Thatcher governments was closely linked to attempts to renovate the party. The new positions adopted in 1985 were not only a response to the political situation, but also part of an attempt to reform the CP largely based on a particular interpretation of the 1977 *British Road to Socialism*. Consequently, the party's incapacity to develop and implement a coherent strategy against the Conservatives showed its inability to reform itself. Some reformers concluded that it was impossible to reform a communist party and that the only solution was to go beyond that form of party. The doubts over the party's future coincided with the collapse of the Soviet bloc in Eastern Europe which strengthened the convictions of many reformers and persuaded some centrists at all levels of the need to put an end to the party.

The 1980s were a crucial decade in the history of the party and deserve greater attention. By looking at the CP's reactions to the Thatcher governments, it is possible to go beyond the usual portrayals of decay and division and examine the important debates over theory, strategy and activities as well as their consequences. This approach shows that the CP was no longer able to translate theory into practice and that the ideas that allowed *Marxism Today* to be an intellectual catalyst within the labour movement contributed to hastening its transformation into Democratic Left.

Jeremy Tranmer, University of Nancy, France

[1] The original French title is *Le Parti Communiste de Grande-Bretagne face aux gouvernements Thatcher: une étude historique et politique*.
[2] E Hobsbawm, 'Afterword', in G Andrews, N Fishman and K Morgan (eds), *Opening the Books. Essays on the Social and Cultural History of the British Communist Party* (London 1995) pp. 251-252.
[3] W Thompson, *The Good Old Cause: British Communism 1920-1991* (London 1992).
[4] N Fishman, 'The British Road is Resurfaced for New Times : From the British Communist Party to the Democratic Left', in M J Bull and P Heywood (eds), *Western European Communist Parties after the Revolutions of 1989 (London 1994).*
[5] CPGB, 'Defeat Tory Attacks — win left and communist advance', *Comment*, 1 December 1979, p.395.
[6] CPGB, 'Defeat Tory Attacks', p. 395 ; CPGB, 'The New Challenge Facing Britain's Labour and Democratic Movements', *News and Views*, December 1987, pp.4-5.
[7] CPGB, 'Unite Behind the British Road', *Congress Report*, (London 1985) p.7.
[8] CPGB, 'The New Challenge Facing Britain's Labour and Democratic Movements', p.3.
[9] CPGB, *British Politics in 1989. The Central Issue* (CPGB 1989).
[10] As late as the early 1980s, there were three Communists on the General Council of the TUC.
[11] Neil Kinnock, for example, openly expressed his support for Hobsbawm's appraisal of the labour movement's situation.
[12] The CP was clearly aware of this, organising meetings under the banner of *Marxism Today*.

Jews in the Communist Party of Great Britain 1920-1948: Ethnic Susceptibility, Generational Divergence and Party Strategy

This PhD thesis was successfully completed at University of Sheffield in January 2001.

Jews have been disproportionately represented in socialist and communist parties throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In Britain, approximately 7-10 per cent of Communist Party activists in the early 1950s were Jews even though they formed less than one per cent of the national population. My thesis, 'Jews in the Communist Party of Great Britain 1920-1948: Ethnic Susceptibility, Generational Divergence and Party Strategy', sought to explain the Jewish-communist relationship and explored in general the relationship between ethnic and political identity within modern European political history.

The basis of my research was the development of a model of interaction, which was used to explain what has been termed by Professor Jaff Schatz 'The Riddle of Jewish Radicalism': why were so many communists Jews. but also why were so few Jews ever communist? The proposed model identified the factors of ethnic susceptibility and generational divergence within the British Jewish community which led to communist sympathies. However, the critical aspect in determining why Jews did or did not join the CP was the interaction between these factors and those of the Communist Party's own strategies of recruitment.

My approach is interdisciplinary; it synthesises the thematic and contextual sensitivities of historical methodology with the structural and model driven dynamics of political science. It offers not only a solution to the question of why Jews joined the Communist Party but also why people join political parties in general. The emphasis is on the processes of

recruitment and the degree to which these are shaped by prevailing social, cultural and political conditions. It is not sufficient to discuss only the ethnic dimension but also those elements that relate to the activities of the political party. The party was the physical embodiment and organisational nexus of the communist ideology. It alone was responsible for acquiring a membership with which to pursue political goals. The range and complexity of Jewish communist personal histories can be contrasted with the singularity of the party. The party is not just another factor to rank alongside those of anti-Semitism and socio-economic conditions; it is of a very different nature. All Jews that joined the Communist Party did so because they were recruited in one way or another. The emphasis is on the approach of the party towards recruitment: the methods and techniques used to build a membership. It is the pattern of variance of recruitment methods, in effectiveness and scope, in differing contexts of susceptibility that determines, within the limits set by probability, why some Jews do not join and others do.

It is surprising how infrequently the role of party recruitment is discussed by historians and political scientists, and how little stress is placed upon it when it is mentioned. The belief appears to be that only the individual is the historical agent in decisions over party selection not the political party itself. The assumption is that the party will recruit whoever turns to it. In fact, this is far from the case, as recruitment is a complex process of interaction between individual and institution and one that depends as much on party context as it does on personal choice. The concern of academics is generally with party policies, ideology, personalities, and the impact of historical events. There is little discussion of the organisational and structural features of a political party in relation to context. The fact, for instance, that the actual number of members is always far smaller than the number of potential members or supporters is usually given only a cursory acknowledgement and is not regarded as of considerable significance. However, to the British Communist Party the evidence that it always had a significantly higher number of sales of its daily newspaper, the *Daily Worker*, and more electoral votes than its membership count, was a crucial issue. The great hope of the Communist Party was that it could turn support into membership and so build the party into a mass party. It was the Communist Party's strategy to turns the hostile into the neutral, the apathetic into the aware, to guide the interested into activity and, crucially, to transform the supporter into a member. Where it failed to do this the potential recruit became the lost recruit.

My research demonstrates that the Jewish communist phenomenon must be understood within the political structures and historical context of the Communist Party. This emphasis is not to diminish the importance of Jewish identity but rather to view it through the prism of a political organisation. It is only through an analysis of how the political party develops its policies and strategies and how it responds to external and internal pressures that the complex subject of ethno-politics can be properly addressed.

Jason L Heppell, Department of History, University of Warwick

CONFERENCE REPORT

History of American Trotskyism

The conference on the 'History of American Trotskyism' took place in New York University (NYU) on 29 September to 1 October last year. It was sponsored by the Tamiment Library which is part of NYU.

Although always small the American trotskyist movement (principally the Socialist Workers Party [SWP]) has always been considered to be of the utmost interest to the world trotskyist movement. This being due to its place in the centre of capitalism and to the very close relations between it and Leon Trotsky during his final years in exile in Mexico. The movement had been in existence for over 70 years so the organisers felt it was due time to explore its history. The conference attracted participants who had been in the movement for much of that time as well as far younger militants.

One of the main speakers was Pierre Broue well known as an historian of the trotskyist movement and one of Trotsky's biographers. Broue raised three questions: Was Stalinism in Europe in the post-war period revolutionary or counter-revolutionary? Was the expectation one of social peace? What was the role of the American SWP leaders in the Fourth International at that time? Unfortunately Broue was not able to answer these questions.

Bryan Palmer spoke on the American SWP leader James P Cannon. He gave an interesting talk which I am sure will be reflected in his forthcoming book on Cannon. Peter Drucker spoke on another early American trotskyist Max Shachtman who later became the leader of the Workers Party (WP).

Christopher Phelps spoke on trotskyism and African-Americans. Whilst a lot has been written about black communities and the American Communist Party little has been written on black activists' engagement with the trotskyist movement (except on CLR James but this tends to concentrate on him personally). Especially important was the work amongst the black Detroit car workers. Phelps' work is to be published as a book.

Kim Moody spoke on the trade union work of the trotskyists and the Communist Party. He went in some detail into the role of the trotskyists in the strikes of the 1930s and also the role of Shachtman's Workers Party in the 1940s. Kathleen Brown spoke on women in the Minneapolis strike in 1934. This showed how the trotskyists undervalued the contribution of women in support of the struggle.

Victor Devinatz spoke on the work of the trotskyists in the key auto union the UAW. He compared the roles of the SWP and WP after the war. Susan Weissman spoke on 'Trotskyism and the Intellectuals'. This will be elaborated in her forthcoming book *Victor Serge and US Intellectuals*.

Alan Johnson spoke on 'Hal Draper and the Third Camp'. Maurice Isserman spoke on the roles of Michael Harrington and Irving Howe, especially in relation to their views on the Vietnam war. Kevin Anderson spoke on 'Theoretical Contrasts: Burnham, Novack, James and Dunayevskaya'.

A number of veterans spoke of their experiences in the SWP. Among them was Dorothea Breitman and Theodore Edwards. I thought the most interesting contribution was by

Bernard Goodman who spoke of his experience in the maritime industry in the 1930s. Alan Wald spoke on the actions of the SWP in resisting the Vietnam War. Grant Farred spoke on the role of CLR James in the American trotskyist movement.

Esteban Volkov spoke on the history of the Leon Trotsky Museum in Mexico City (Volkov is Trotsky's grandson and was living with the Trotsky family at the time of his assassination in 1940). Annette Rubenstein spoke as an ex-member of the CP who worked with SWP members in the Independent Socialist Campaign of Corliss Lamont in the late 1950s. An especially impressive speech from this 90 year old. Dan Georgakas spoke about the role of the Johnson-Forrest Tendency (CLR James/Raya Dunayevskaya).

There were other contributions which I have not mentioned so the above is, of course, only a brief sketch of what was discussed at the conference. Like all such conferences the quality of the presentations and the contributions from the floor was like the curate's egg. And, of course, there was never enough time for discussion (not helped by some of the participants trying to hog time). It is to be hoped that the conference proceedings can be published either in book form or at least on the net.

The Tamiment Library should be congratulated for the fine effort they put into organising the conference. But for me the outstanding contributions to the conference came from the 80 and 90 year old veterans. After listening to their accounts of their decades of experience it dawns as to just how impressive these comrades must have been in their heyday.

Barry Buitekant, *Revolutionary History* journal

FEATURE

Red Graves of Paris

The French like to honour their dead leaders in the grand manner. The tomb of Napoleon is housed in the magnificent Domes des Invalides in the centre of Paris, and the remains of France's most distinguished citizens, including the assassinated Socialist leader Jean Jaurès, are deposited in the Pantheon. Many of those who do not qualify for the Pantheon are nevertheless found a place in Paris's Cimetière de l'Est better known as Père Lachaise, taking its name from the confessor of Louis XIV who once had a house on this site.

This cemetery, located on a hill in the 20th arrondissement of Paris, covers over a hundred acres and is packed with the graves of eminent people. The first interments were those of La Fontaine and Molière in 1804, and several of Napoleon's marshals are buried here. Oscar Wilde's body was transferred here in 1909, from an obscure grave in Bagneux where he had been buried nine years before, and deposited in a striking tomb designed by Jacob Epstein. Edith Piaf's tiny body is buried quite near, marked by a simple headstone. In more recent times Jim Morrison, the lead singer of the cult pop group The Doors, was buried here in 1971 and his grave is a place of pilgrimage for many of his fans.

In the south eastern corner of the cemetery is the Mur des Fédérés, the wall against which 147 Communards were shot on 28 May 1871. Fierce fighting took place amongst the graves of Père Lachaise during the last stand of the Paris Commune. After the battle the surviving Communards were lined up against the wall and shot. They were buried where they fell in a mass grave. The original wall, bullet holes and all, survived until the 1960s when it was replaced by the present memorial in the form of a wall bearing the words:

Aux Morts de la Commune 21-28 May 1871

On plots of land adjacent to the wall are grouped a number of memorials to: Jews and others who perished in the death camps; political prisoners who died in Nazi prisons and concentration camps; workers who died on wartime forced labour projects; and members of the Resistance who gave their lives in the liberation of France. Some of the memorials follow traditional patterns but others are more modern and abstract. For example, the memorial to the women who died at Ravensbruck concentration camp is a giant pair of clasped hands.

On land directly opposite to the wall are the graves of three men whose lives encompass a very large slice of the history of French communism. Their gravestones contain the following inscriptions:

MAURICE THOREZ
1900 – 1964
Secrétaire-Général
Du Parti Communiste Français

JACQUES DUCLOS
1896 – 1875
Eminent Dirigeant
Du Parti Communiste Français

WALDECK ROCHET
1905 - 1983
Deputé 1936 – 1973
Secrétaire Général Du PCF
1964 – 1972

It is inconceivable that the graves of Harry Pollitt, Palme Dutt or John Gollan would be accorded a similar position of honour in a major British cemetery. But then the Communist Party of Great Britain never acquired the power and influence enjoyed by the Parti Communiste Français. The PCF was a force to be reckoned with in early post-war politics. In the general election of November 1946, the first to be held under the new constitution of the Fourth Republic, the PCF won 169 seats (with 28.6 per cent of the poll), the Socialist Party 101 seats (17.9 per cent) and the Christian Democratic MRP won 158 seats (26.4 per cent). Maurice Thorez became deputy-premier in a coalition government under a Socialist premier, Paul Ramadier, with four Communist colleagues serving alongside him in the cabinet. The CPGB for all its efforts never managed to win electoral support on this scale and it was destined to operate on the margins of British political life, although it made some notable advances inside Britain’s trade unions.

The south eastern corner of this famous cemetery is still a meeting place for left-wing groups, who assemble here on appropriate occasions to honour their dead. The numbers in attendance, however, are much smaller than they used to be. Gone are the days when PCF meetings drew thousands of people who came to listen to speeches by Thorez or Duclos. In any case, the space in front of the Wall of the Communards is now much more cramped than it was in the 1940s and 50s as new memorials have encroached upon previously open ground and there is no longer room for the old-style mass rallies.

Near the graves of the former leaders of the PCF there are several memorials to members of the International Brigade, including an impressive marble memorial to Dr Domanski Dubois, a medical officer with the Brigade who was killed by a sniper on the Aragon front and his body brought back to France for burial. Opposite is the grave of Largo Caballero, leader of the Spanish Socialists and Prime Minister of the Spanish Republic 1936-37. He fled to France after the fall of the Republic in 1939 and afterwards spent four years in a German concentration camp. He died in Paris in 1946.

It is surprising to find a memorial to Imre Nagy in the Père Lachaise cemetery. Nagy, a veteran communist, was Prime Minister of Hungary in 1956 and the head of the government that sought to introduce a multi-party system and take his country out of the Warsaw Pact. After the suppression of the Hungarian uprising by Soviet forces Nagy was arrested and held prisoner in Rumania. He was executed on 16 June 1958 and his corpse buried in an unmarked grave. In the 1980s the Hungarian refugee community in Paris sought permission to erect a memorial to Nagy in Père Lachaise. Their request was granted and the present memorial erected. It is a metal structure of abstract design and is decorated with ribbons in Hungary's national colours. In 1989 Nagy's body was recovered from a pauper's burial ground in Budapest and reburied with full state honours. Although Nagy now has a marked grave in his own country the memorial to him in Paris remains in place.

Inside the grounds of the cemetery is a crematorium nicknamed 'the Mosque' because of its oriental style. Crematoria are usually bleak, functional buildings but the crematorium at Père Lachaise is heavily ornate. The bodies of Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre were both cremated here and their ashes taken to Montparnasse Cemetery on the Left Bank. Léon Blum's body was also cremated here and the old Socialist leader's ashes taken to the cemetery at Jouy-on-Josas.

Near the crematorium is a columbarium set in a garden of remembrance, where the ashes of the famous are deposited in concrete boxes built into the walls, each one marked with a name plaque. It is possible to arrange flowers in front of each plaque and many people do so. The plaques of Maria Callas and Isadora Duncan attract the most visitors, but the ashes of several prominent figures of the Left are deposited here and they are not neglected. There is the plaque of Pierre Mendès-France, one of the Fourth Republic's few Prime Ministers of any distinction, who served in the office 1954-55. He secured the withdrawal of French troops from Indo-China and set Tunisia on the road to independence. There is also the plaque of Richard Wright, the black American writer. Born in Natchez, Mississippi, Wright moved to Chicago in the 1930s where he joined the Communist Party. After leaving the Party in 1944 he settled in Paris, where he died in 1960. In addition to his

works of autobiography and fiction he is remembered for his contribution to *The God that Failed.*

The ashes of Jean Moulin the Resistance leader were deposited at Père Lachaise for several years until he was elevated to the Pantheon, and André Malraux, left-wing writer, aviator, Resistance fighter and de Gaulle's Minister of Culture 1958-69 died in 1976 but was not admitted to the Pantheon until twenty years later, although there were some who doubted whether he rated such an honour. However if there is promotion in French burials there is also relegation, and Jean-Paul Marat the 'Friend of the People', who was assassinated in his bath by Charlotte Corday in 1793, was first buried in the Pantheon with full revolutionary honours but after three months, when the Terror began to wane, his corpse was quietly transferred to the nearby cemetery of St Étienne-du-Mont.

Both the Pantheon and Père Lachaise are well worth a visit. The Pantheon is located in Paris's Latin Quarter, and Père Lachaise can be reached by Métro on the Pont de Lavallois – Gallieni line. It is advisable to buy a map of Père Lachaise from the kiosk at the entrance to the cemetery for there are thousands of graves and the cemetery's layout can be very confusing.

Archie Potts

BOOK REVIEW

Andree Levesque, *Scenes de la vie en rouge: l'epoque de Jeanne Corbin, 1906-1944*, Montreal: Les Editions du Remue-Menage, 1999.

For reasons that some future historiographer might like to ponder, women have made an unusually significant contribution to the recent rewriting of the history of Canadian communism. Andree Levesque of McGill University, Montreal, must be considered the doyenne of a group containing Ruth Frager, Carmela Patrias, Joan Sangster, Mercedes Steedman, Merrilee Weisbord and others. She has followed up a monograph on communists and socialists 'et leurs ennemis' in the province of Quebec with this valuable study of the life and times of middle-level Communist Party of Canada (CPC) cadre Jeanne Corbin. She has thoroughly excavated archives in Russia, France and Canada for biographical material on Corbin, but there is simply not enough of it to sustain a full-scale biography on the order of David Frank's recent fine work on Cape Breton communist James B McLachlan. Instead, splicing together mainly biographical chapters with a general chapter on the CPC in the Third Period and a thematic chapter on 'des femmes dans un parti d'hommes', she offers a view of the party from its middle levels.

Jeanne Corbin was an ethnic oddity (and something of a prize) in the CPC. Born in France, raised from an early age in Alberta, and completely bilingual, she was quintessentially 'Canadian' in a party almost entirely comprised of 'foreigners' who spoke neither of Canada's two native tongues. In her early twenties she gave up a career as a schoolteacher

to become a full-time party activist, in which position she remained until hospitalised with tuberculosis in 1942. Levesque portrays her as a typical female militant of the first generation of Canadian communists; a woman who (very much in the manner of her mentor, Rebecca Buhay) appreciated the rough-and-ready sexual equality practiced by the CPC (at least towards women like her, who were 'sans souci domestique, sans enfants a elever et sans mari a qui render les comptes'); who generally subordinated gender issues to the class struggle, and who deferred readily to the highest Stalinist obligation — to defend the Soviet Union. She comes alive most vividly in Chapter III, 'Montreal, 1930-32', which draws heavily on party records seized by the Canadian state in August 1931. Corbin spent these Third Period years mainly in Montreal as secretary of the Quebec provincial section of the Canadian Labour Defence League (CLDL), the national section of Willi Muenzenberg's International Red Aid. Her job was hectic: the party's constant emphasis on the need to make a political breakthrough in 'la belle province' was more than matched by the Quebec authorities' determination to keep it out by any means necessary. Party cadres to tended to look on this particular posting rather in the manner of ambitious British politicos sent to the Northern Ireland office.

Writing in the sympathetic vein of much recent American and British historiography (but with full cognisance of the imprint of Stalinism on the CPC), Levesque manages to convey Corbin's ebullience and good humour as she and her comrades (including the very able Glaswegian — and needless to say, unilingual — district secretary Jim Litterick) tried to make bricks with very little straw. A photograph of the CLDL offices in Montreal 'après une descente de la police' deftly captures the particular difficulties of organizing in 'District Two'. Yet, while sympathetic to men and women struggling to impose themselves on intractable situations, the author is sensitive to their submission to the party's evasions and untruths. She shows how the party press could turn a near-fiasco of a demonstration in Montreal into a near-triumph, even as the organizers of the demonstration were subjecting themselves to fierce 'self-criticism' over 'their' failures when they might more properly have been scoring the party line. Indicting the Comintern's tactical invasiveness in prescribing what industrial and 'red union' cadres could and couldn't do, she cites Brigitte Studer in concluding that 'Cette perte d'autonomie s'observe dans tout le movement communiste' at the time. However, she perhaps exaggerates the Comintern's ability to bend local cadres to its will. She actually notes a textile industry strike at which some of Jeanne Corbin's Montreal comrades (notably future Communist MP and 'Atom Spy' Fred Rose) adapted and even ignored nonsensical central directives based on the sectarian international line.

Levesque continues her discussion of such issues into a useful account of Corbin's work among the hardrock miners and lumberworkers of Northern Ontario between 1932-39. (There is clearly a rewarding local study of the CPC in Timmins, the 'reddest' of the Ontario mining towns, waiting to be written, by the way.) However, once the book enters the Popular Front years, it is generally less satisfactory. Corbin melts more and more into the background, and one suspects she was not a natural Pop Fronter. Levesque notes that unlike some who joined the CPC at this time (membership rose from 5,500 in 1934 to 15,000 in 1937), Corbin displayed little anxiety about the Moscow Trials and none about the Nazi-Soviet Pact. Instead, she took these blows in her stride, secure in the knowledge that the Soviet comrades knew best. Between 1939 and 1942, Corbin disappears entirely, though that is not surprising given that the party, having rather uncomfortably swallowed

the USSR's 'imperialist war' line, had gone underground voluntarily in November 1939 and been declared illegal in June 1940. She surfaces again in 1942, when she entered hospital in a vain attempt to recover from tuberculosis; she died in 1944 — the year Streptomycin was discovered. Levesque's chapter on this period brings out some of Corbin's interior life through a collection of personal letters to a woman comrade, but it sits rather oddly with the rest of the book, and I found myself thinking that here the 'life' should have been complemented more by the 'times', which were very interesting ones for the CPC, resurrected as the Labour-Progressive Party.

That criticism apart, I have learned a good deal from *Scenes de la vie en rouge* (not least that my knowledge of French has grown shakier over the years), a book which makes a significant contribution to the burgeoning historiography of Canadian communism.

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