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Welcome to issue 11 of the *Newsletter*. A full archive of all eleven issues of the *Newsletter* is now accessible on-line at the CHNN website — where colour versions of both photographs used in this issue are available. The deadline for the next issue is 30 April 2002.

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- **'MAKING MOVEMENTS'**: A conference on the theme 'Making Movements: The British Marxists Historians and the study of social movements', to be held at Edge Hill College between 26-28 June 2002, will study the legacy of historians including Thompson, Hill, Hobsbawm, Saville, Torr and others. Speakers confirmed so far include Brian Manning, Bryan D Palmer and Ellen Wood. Conference details are available from: Alan Johnson, Edge Hill College of Higher Education, St Helens Road, Ormskirk, Lancashire; e-mail: johnsona@edgehill.ac.uk.

- **'NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN CPGB HISTORY'**: On February 20 2002 a seminar, arranged by the Institute of Contemporary British History (ICBH), will debate 'New Developments in the Contemporary History of the Communist Party of Great Britain'. Panelists who have so far confirmed their attendance are John Callaghan, Eric Hobsbawm, Kevin Morgan, David Renton, Willie Thompson, Andrew Thorpe and Matthew Worley, with an introductory paper provided by Nina Fishman The seminar will be held between 5.00-6.30pm in the Local History Room at the Institute of Historical Research, Senate House, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HU. It is hoped that the widest possible range of views on CPGB history will be represented at the seminar. Other participants are wecome. For further details e-mail: icbh@icbh.ac.uk; visit http//www.icbh.ac.uk/icbh; or telephone 020 7862 8810.

- **'A MINE OF INFORMATION'**: The Modern Records Centre (MRC) at the University of Warwick is collaborating in a new archival project which aims to 'improve access to research resources relating to the South Wales Coalfield. Funded by the Research Support Libraries Programme, the 'Mine of Information' programme will generate a cross-referenced cross-institutional database of archival sources. The MRC will contribute a catalogue of some 20,000 files from the British Trade Union Congress archive, covering the period 1920 to 1987 and including 'much material of relevance to mining, industrial health, industrial disputes, nationalisation, and records of local Trade Councils.' The MRC's on-line guide to its holdings is accessible at: http://www.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/mrc/

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CONFERENCE AND EVENT REPORTS

Ewan MacColl plaque unveiling ceremony, Salford

On September 22 and 23 2001, a weekend celebration of the life and work of Ewan MacColl was held at the Working Class Movement Library (WCML) in Salford. A city council plaque commemorating MacColl's connections with Salford, now on permanent display at the WCML, was unveiled. Ruth Frow reports on the weekend and reflects on MacColl's life.

The new Ewan MacColl plaque at the WCML

The weekend started on Saturday with a reception at which Peggy Seeger met a number of her old friends and a few Salfordians who remembered Jimmy Miller (Ewan MacColl) from his young days.

Sunday was the important occasion in the Library. The Mayor and Mayoress attended to invite Peggy Seeger to unveil the red plaque which is now permanently sited in the large hall. After the ceremony at which over a hundred people managed to squash into the hall to witness, the audience divided and a performance of Ewan MacColl's songs and a sample of his agit-prop plays was given in both the Annexe and the Reading Room.

Terry Wheelan, a folk-singer and old friend, gathered performers who had been members of the Critics Group and who had known and worked with Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger. They were lively and interesting, and anxious to pay their respects in the way that Ewan would have appreciated. Some of them continued discussing controversial topics unresolved many years ago.

Aidan Jolly and his friends gave a rendering of the agit-prop sketch *Meerut*. In the early thirties, when it was first performed in the streets of north-west towns, the story of the prisoners at Meerut would have been hot news. Street-theatre was Jimmy Miller's first experience of the use of drama to interpret political events.

Jimmy Miller was born in Salford in 1915. His father was an iron moulder and his mother a Scotswoman. Both were active left wing socialists and, from an early age, young Jimmy was involved in the cut and thrust of political discussion.

After leaving school in 1930, he entered the growing army of unemployed. He managed to get occasional work in a variety of temporary jobs but he soon found the Workers' Theatre and realised that his interests lay in the cultural rather than the industrial field.

But he understood that his working class experience needed to be used in conjunction with his newly-found interest. He helped produce and sell news-sheets for workers and developed a talent for writing songs and political squibs. On long rambles over the Derbyshire hills with other like-minded revolutionaries, he would improvise and entertain with songs like *The Manchester Rambler*.

By 1934 he had taken part in hunger marches and been present at some of the unemployed struggles which punctuated his life in the industrial north-west in the early thirties. He met Joan Littlewood and together they set up a workers' experimental Theatre of Action. After moving to London, they started a drama school for working people.

But London did not supply them with the workers whom they wanted to educate, so they moved back to the north and formed Theatre Union. Their work became more ambitious and had such potential influence that in 1939 their play *Last Edition* was stopped by police, and they were both arrested and charged with 'disturbing the peace.' They were fined and 'bound over' not to take part in any dramatic performance for two years. It was during the War, which he spent in Scotland, that Jimmy Miller became Ewan MacColl as a gesture of solidarity with the national school of Scottish poets. Immediately after the War, a number of the participants in the revolutionary theatre movement pooled their gratuities and formed Theatre Workshop. Ewan MacColl was designated the writer, trainer and innovator of the group. Joan Littlewood was the producer.

When Theatre Workshop moved to the West End, MacColl and Littlewood parted and he began to turn his attention to traditional music. It was in that field that he was able to link his social conscience and experience of being raised in a working class industrial atmosphere with his ability to express his ideas in song and music. He became an expert at adapting and interpreting ballads so that they reached the hearts and minds of ordinary people.

Perfomers celebrate the life and work of MacColl at the WCML commemoration

In 1956 he and Peggy Seeger met and started a partnership which proved fruitful, rewarding and which lasted until his death in 1989. They made their name conducting workshops and touring in Britain and abroad as singers of traditional and contemporary songs. They had a notable success in the Radio Ballads in which they collaborated with Charles Parker.

It was that talent for translating his early Salford working class experience into accessible songs and drama that made it so appropriate for Salford City, his enduring influence, to honour him with one of their rare plaques.

Ruth Frow

‘People of a Special Mould?’ Conference, Manchester, April 2001

Historians of communism and communist parties from around the world gathered in Manchester in April 2001 for the three-day ‘People of A Special Mould?’ communist biographical and prosopographical conference. Here Jeremy Tranmer **and** Kerry Taylor **report on their differing experiences of the conference.**

This three-day conference, held in the plush surroundings of the University of Manchester conference centre, brought together specialists on communism from throughout the world. The participants included not only academics, but also some former communists, particularly some ex-members of the British CP.

More than 25 workshops and two witness seminars were held during the weekend, and over 50 papers were given. The papers covered different periods of time, spanning the twentieth century. Nevertheless, most dwelled on the first half of the century. They concerned communism in various areas including South Africa (Allison Drew), New Zealand (Kerry Taylor) and Scandinavia (Åsmund Egge), the emphasis being clearly on countries where communists had not been in power. Great Britain was the country which received the most attention, while Asia was not mentioned.

The biographical and prosopographical approach was followed by most paper-givers, avoiding the potential danger of eclecticism. The lives and roles of leading communists, such as Karl Radek (Jean-François Fayet) and Clara Zetkin (Tania Unludag) were presented, as well as the activities of lesser-known communists like James Desmond Buckle (Hakim Adi). Other categories of party-members, including school children (Margreet Schrevel), families (Kevin Morgan) and women (Karen Hunt), were also analysed.

As was to be expected, the witness seminar about reactions within the British CP to the happenings of 1956 was one of the liveliest debates and led to some interesting exchanges. The participants, Alison Macleod, Bill Moore, John Saville and Dennis Ogden, defended their version of events with vigour, suggesting that it was possible to return to a subject already dealt with elsewhere and still shed new light on it. This session alone proved the usefulness of the biographical approach and showed the impossibility of a definitive version of history. Consequently, it is a shame that it was not recorded.

One of the many thought-provoking papers was Jason Heppell’s about the relations between Jews and British communism, and in particular about why there was a greater proportion of Jews in the CP than in the overall British population. Heppell went beyond the usual explanations based on the anti-fascist appeal of the CP and the socialist heritage of British Jews provided by East European immigrants. Concentrating on the latter point and using biographical material, he argued convincingly that few direct family links existed between British and East European marxists and that Jewish CPers were just as likely to have had non-communist or non-socialist parents as left-wing parents. Moreover, the relatively extensive integration in British society of Jews resulted in the absence of a Yiddish-based culture able to support a specifically Jewish version of socialism. Heppell concluded that involvement with the CP represented a break with their parent community for second and third generation Jewish people.

The quality and quantity of the papers given will be difficult for future conferences on similar subjects to match. The constant choice between three workshops made for difficult decisions and the frustrating impression that something interesting would be missed no matter what decision was made. Given the range of papers, it was unfortunate that no formal attempt was made to start the difficult tasks of comparing the experiences of communists from different times and places and drawing overall conclusions. Nevertheless, participants had ample opportunity to discuss such matters outside workshops in the course of the weekend.

Jeremy Tranmer, University of Nancy, France

‘People of a Special Mould?’ — An Antipodean View

Travelling from Palmerston North, New Zealand, to Manchester is no easy task, total travelling time approximately 35 hours. There were moments along the way when I questioned whether I really wanted to go the Manchester. Would the conference justify the expense and the effort? Thankfully the answer turned out to be an unqualified yes. The People of a Special Mould conference was a rich and rewarding gathering.

Perhaps it’s a product of smallness, but New Zealanders at major international gatherings often feel themselves to be outsiders. How often have we heard “You've come all the way from New Zealand! You must be mad”? Well perhaps. However, any feeling of isolation did not last long, over a coffee before the conference formally kicked off conversations began which were to continue over the whole weekend. People were talking passionately about their subject, this was going to be total immersion in communist history, Heaven!

Much to my delight there were even a couple of papers, other than my own, which touched very briefly on New Zealand. Karen Hunt in her engaging examination of the making of Dora Montafiore, a founding member of the CPGB, discussed the close political relationship her subject had with Harry Holland, later the leader of the New Zealand Labour Party. Barry McLoughlin and John Halstead, in an excellent paper on British party members at the Lenin School, discussed the less than positive experience of Alan Eaglesham, one time General Secretary of the Communist Party of New Zealand. Both papers lead to extended ‘after-match conversations’, which was something of a characteristic at the conference. People shared ideas, shared knowledge of sources and also just shared enthusiasm.

This open and positive interchange was most welcome. The last time I was in Europe for a conference on communist history was in 1992, a workshop on the National Sections of the Comintern held in Amsterdam. That conference was highly charged, various political lines were reflected in the papers and debated on the floor. Political point scoring seemed more the order of the day than scholarly interchange. Perhaps distance from the collapse of the Soviet block has allowed us to consider communist history less hysterically. Or perhaps the subject matter of social history rather than the political line is somewhat less inclined to sectarian controversy. There’s food for thought here, perhaps the basis for another conference.

This is not to suggest the conference was free from strong debate. Interestingly most of

the moments of sharp debate over interpretation were in my observation associated with papers on individuals or sections of papers which dealt with individuals. There was, for example, some prickliness over Tania Unludag's interpretation of Clara Zeitkin.

There was also significant debate in the papers that touched on the struggle in Southern African. For example Irina Filatova's paper on Africans at the Communist University of Eastern Toilers, Vladimir Shubin's on South African communists in exile and Jonathan Grossman's paper on the struggle within South Africa in recent decades. Again the differences were often over the role, experiences or interpretation of particular activists. Cumulatively these papers served to remind us of the politically charged and highly contested nature of the recent past in South Africa. The politics of history is still very acute here.

Papers dealing with the British communist movement were especially appealing to me, in part because they provide a good basis for comparisons with colonial off shoot populations such those in New Zealand and Australia. There was an embarrassment of riches here. Some papers I had to read rather than attend the presentation, as we were spoilt for choice. Kevin Morgan's reflections on communist families and Andy Flinn's on the CPGB's national branches were rich in both material and interpretation. The number of direct parallels to the New Zealand experience in the family dimension of British communist politics was particularly striking. In contrast the lack of a tradition of organizing ethnically in the New Zealand communist experience was highlighted for me by Flinn's paper, which demonstrated the importance of the national branches, often against the intentions of the CPGB hierarchy. Similarly, Jason Heppell's paper on Jewish communists in Britain was thought provoking as much for how different the New Zealand experience was from Britain.

Perhaps this is the thing I most took from the conference, a renewed sense of the real potential for enriching our work by more extensive comparative reflection. I have to confess a personal bias against comparative work in the past. So often the results of such work are banal and unremarkable. I left Manchester with a renewed sense of its possibility.

Kerry Taylor, Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand

FEATURES

Essentialists and realists: reflections on the historiography of the CPGB

The recent conference in Manchester, 'People of a Special Mould?', was stimulating and thought-provoking for historians of British communism. By virtue of its membership of an international movement, British communism is comparable to the communism of other societies and states in varying degrees. It shares with all of them at least two common reference points, the Soviet Union and the Communist International. However, the significance of these reference points is not always the same. It differs for historians of communism in those countries where communists held or participated in state power compared to countries where they did not. Within each of these sub-groups

there are further sub-sub-groups, eg. countries where communists were routinely repressed and martyred by the state (pre-1939 Japan) so that communists' physical presence was transient and their political contribution apparently limited. There is no single essential pattern to which the history of communism conforms, though such a view also has its advocates and was heard in some of the discussions concerning the CPGB at Manchester.

To describe these different historiographical positions, I favour the terms of 'essentialists' and 'realists'. *Essentialists* seem to hold that it was orders from Stalin which were the predominant factor in determining communists' conduct and formal ideological positions. Thus they argue that the course of CPGB history is above all determined by the *essential* Stalinist nature of all things communist. This proposition seems to avoid: (i) any consideration of *either* the position before Lenin's incapacity *or* after Stalin's death; (ii) all serious research on the dynamics and internal politics of the Comintern and Profintern and their changing relation over time to the CPSU(B); (iii) all serious research on the internal politics of the CPSU(B). *Realists*, on the other hand, insist that events in British communism have to be examined in the light of the real events and people who made them. Parallel conflicts have been taking place in relation to American and Italian communism for some time. The emergence of a realist-essentialist debate here suggests that British communist historiography is also attracting the serious academic interest which the party's significance in British and Comintern history merits. In this article, I briefly set out some of the premises of the realist approach, with particular reference to the party's industrial activities.

I. The problem of intent

Essentialists question British communists' self-definition as revolutionaries because they doubt whether the CPGB leadership ever *intended* to make a revolution. Consequently, they question my own formulation of British communist trade union activists between 1933-45 as revolutionary pragmatists.[1] The same question, 'when is a revolutionary not a revolutionary?', pre-occupied the German SPD from 1896 and the Second International from 1899 in the form of the controversy over Eduard Bernstein's revisionism. This first revisionist controversy repays study by historians of British communism, particularly of the post-1945 period.

My response to the question, 'when they consistently behaved as reformists, how is it possible to describe British communists as revolutionary between 1933-45?' is to cite the aphorism they habitually invoked: revolution would come to Britain when *life itself* turned up a *revolutionary situation*, and they never doubted that life itself would present them with the opportunity to make one. In the meantime, communists played their part in preparing the groundwork, so that when the revolutionary situation appeared, they would be ready to take advantage of it. For British communists, preparations involved embedding themselves in the bowels of the proletariat, specifically in the trade union movement. Harry Pollitt and J R Campbell inculcated a clear vision of communist activists occupying the leadership of trade unions at all levels, from factory to national executive. But they also were clear that communists should provide the progressive, modern policies to enable unions to wage the economic struggle successfully.

As against this formulation, essentialists may argue on a teleological basis: 'Pollitt's and Campbell's policy was not *really* revolutionary, because the CPGB was not *really* committed to overthrowing the British state...'. In my view this argument is

unsustainable and reveals a lack of familiarity with the two men's conduct and writing. Had the British state experienced a serious political crisis at any time between 1933 and 1945, Campbell and Pollitt would have immediately brought their political skill, strategic calculation and members' positions inside the trade union movement to bear upon the situation with the intention of producing a revolutionary result. But when *life itself* did not produce this *mise en scène*, because they were not voluntarists, they did not blame themselves or their strategy. They suffered no self-inflicted wounds when the Hunger Marches did not topple successive governments. Nor did they practise self-flagellation when the 1937 London bus strike ended in stalemate. For them, the situation was clear enough. Communists leading political and economic struggles should direct their leadership towards the achievement of material gains and also aim to strengthen the class's self-confidence and self-organisation. This usually entailed negotiating compromise and frequently also an orderly retreat. It rarely involved decisive victory, and never resulted in unconditional surrender from the other side.

II. The conduct of the daily economic struggle

I have argued that Pollitt's and Campbell's approach of revolutionary pragmatism was inherently contradictory, for it held *trade union loyalism* and *rank-and-filism* as coeval organising principles, but that the two men were well aware of this contradiction and made no attempt to resolve it. They had learned that the two conflicting principles could and did co-exist for most of the time when communist activists were waging economic struggle on a day-to-day basis in workplace bargaining, union negotiations and political lobbying. Pollitt and Campbell believed that the need to preserve a continuous and effective form of union organisation was *as important as* the need to inspire workers with the will to resist managerial prerogative and demand better wages and conditions.

I considered four examples of union organisation where communists played leading parts: Dagenham, 1933-45; Pressed Steel, Oxford, 1934-9; Siemens, Greenwich, 1933-9; the Aircraft Shop Stewards' National Council, 1934-7; and the London Busmen's Rank-and-File Movement, 1933-7. In each case, leftwing activists (including communists) adopted a strategy in workplace bargaining and local negotiations which consistently placed greater emphasis on rank-and-filism than union loyalism. In each case, the employers responded by eventually inflicting signal defeats on the union forces, perceiving that the union forces had gone beyond the conventional boundaries demarcating managerial and union prerogative.

In each of these examples, Pollitt and Campbell made no attempt to defend the strategy of the militants (including their own party activists). Instead, they acted to limit the damage done both to union organisation and their own members in the workplaces and union institutions. In any situation of economic conflict, there are, of course, differences of opinion amongst union leaders about how far a particular episode can be pushed before the employer(s) decide to retaliate by inflicting maximum damage on the union side. There is certainly no *a priori* correct way to win either military or economic warfare. But to have a reasonable chance of success, a leader *does* require an objective which is both limited and attainable with the forces at hand. Without these practicalities, any plan of action will fail.

Between 1933-45, many communist union activists acquired the skills requisite for making such calculations and leading successful economic struggle. Many others did not, remaining pure revolutionaries who were simply not interested in either conceiving

or achieving limited practical goals at the workplace. Others still failed because for one reason or another they proved unable to develop the requisite tactical facility. Interestingly and not surprisingly, many communist union activists gained valuable experience from observing non-communist union officials at work on the ground. But others were attracted to communism by the example of outstanding party members who occupied pivotal positions in the workplace union structure. They learned to emulate these communist activists who understood the need to compromise and retreat and practised both successfully.

III. Unions as a vehicle of working-class emancipation and democratising the state

From 1932 the CPGB, guided by Pollitt and Campbell, stressed the importance of communists working inside trade unions. They did so on the basis of the fourth precept of revolutionary pragmatism (the others being life itself, union loyalism, and rank-and-filism): the importance of the working class organising within a *united front*. As Pollitt reminded TUC general secretary Walter Citrine in the *Daily Worker* on 7 March 1934:

> The Communist Party fights for real trade unionism... The Communist Party does all in its power to strengthen the trade union branches, to recruit the unorganised and to develop powerful movements of the rank and file, which are able to conduct the fight against the employers and their allies...Because of the consistent policy of the Communist Party in the interests of the whole working class...the united front of the rank and file against the employing class is becoming stronger day by day.

By concentrating their members' energies on union activity, Pollitt and Campbell were certainly not behaving in either a reformist or an economist mode. In inter-war Britain, unions had two essential functions for socialist revolutionaries. First, many union activists and leaders were committed socialists who envisioned their unions playing an important role in stiffening the Labour Party's socialist resolve. Secondly, many trade unionists viewed the strengthening of unions as mass democratic organisations as an important bulwark not only against fascism, but also as a class weapon in the ongoing political conflict in Britain for democracy.

Accepted under duress, the establishment of a mass franchise in 1918 and 1928 had had a profound impact on the political establishment's perceptions of the political process and their own relation to the electorate. On the other hand, non-communist union leaders, notably Ernest Bevin, were alert to the union's levelling and emancipatory potential. The novel implications of universal suffrage were integral to their perceptions of the unions' role in the political process.

Pollitt and Campbell shared this common political culture with union leaders of the first rank, like Bevin, Jack Little, Ebby Edwards, Jack Tanner, Will Lawther, Julia Varley, Anne Godwin, and Bob Williams. Along with many foundation party members, formed by their experiences of the First World War, they viewed the CPGB as having a special role to play within British political conflict, and staked their own political futures upon it. One of the reasons for their conviction of the CPGB's unique importance was the empirical evidence that the USSR's existence constituted a leftward pressure on British politics, making the political establishment more responsive to organised working-class pressure.

However, they did not behave as if their communism set them apart from British workers. They felt perfectly at ease with the men and women on the TUC General Council and on trade union executives. Moreover, these men and women mostly reciprocated. They might not have liked the communists' politics, but they had no difficulty with most of their union activities. Bevin, unlike Citrine, was by no means a dogmatic anti-communist, and made regular statements about the Soviet Union needing to follow its own path to socialism as well as the importance for British trade unionism of having a culture of militancy at rank-and-file level. In May 1934 the *Daily Worker* quoted without comment a speech he made to the TGWU in Glasgow:

> he warned the members that we were in this country gradually evolving to a system of state capitalism...he often felt he was sorry to say, that there was not the same fighting instinct in the younger men as there was in the older generation...He finished with a passionate plea for unity and the will to win, stating that although he had occasions at times to battle with the left-wingers, well, he did admit that many of them were good trade unionists.

Writing in the TGWU *Record* in August 1933, he observed:

> in the case of Soviet Russia, who is endeavouring to work out a different economic system from that existing in this country, we have fought determinedly against intervention; we have sent deputations to the Government and assisted Russia to obtain export credits, and have done everything in our power to assist her, not withstanding the fact that we have often met with abuse and attack from the Russians themselves. We have done this because we believe that this great economic experiment may considerably influence the development of world planning and social change.

It is important to examine the relation between the CPGB and the Labour Party between 1933-45, and in particular the existence of substantial numbers of dual members, formally denied by both parties. I suspect that communists inside the Labour Party were rarely instructed by the party *apparat* what to do, and routinely relied on their individual judgements as the basis of their conduct. The same was true of their conduct of the economic struggle and union affairs. In this respect, there simply was no bolshevisation of the CPGB. Party members continued to behave much as they had before in their respective socialist groupings.

We also need to know more about the quality of branch life and factory cell life between 1933-45. It would seem that party activists were thinking consistently and in a directed fashion about what they should be doing as communists. They took their lead from the *Daily Worker*, *Labour Monthly*, Left Book Club selections, irregular party aggregate meetings, irregular meetings of their appropriate industrial/union fraction, and above all, perhaps, from a habitual conversations with other party activists (and non-party activists) attending the unending round of meetings of which a labour movement activist's life consisted. *They were not, however, thinking of what they should be doing to push their factory into a revolutionary situation.* In this sense, Pollitt and Campbell had steered the CPGB away from the dangerous shoals of syndicalism.

IV. The significance of the Second World War

The Second World War marked a watershed for the CPGB for several interconnecting reasons which I can only outline here.

At the start of the war, the Politburo's refusal to accept Pollitt's and Campbell's strategy of retaining, whilst trimming and tweaking, the war on two fronts position had a profound and lasting impact on union and Labour Party leaders. Hitherto, CPGB leaders had made substantial progress inside the labour movement towards being taken as their own people, and the Moscow connection was not notorious except for people on the right such as Citrine and Feather. After the dramatic change of line, the seeds of conditionality and qualification were sown in the minds of most union leaders. The impact was slow-burning and cumulative, but I believe it can be seen eventually in men and women as disparate as Jim Bowman, Jack Tanner, Sammy Watson and Anne Godwin. I believe that Pollitt and Campbell were convinced that Stalin and the Comintern would accept a trimming/tweaking fudge, and that this was vital for the party to maintain its credibility and influence inside the British labour movement. They entered the crucial Central Committee sessions of 2-3 October 1939 with every intention of carrying the meeting; and it is notable that it was Gallacher and Horner, also veterans who had experienced the vicissitudes of the Third Period, who sided with them.

Having completed this *volte face*, the CPGB quickly rowed back towards the 'war on two fronts' position. Pollitt and Campbell regained full credibility inside the party leadership, for in British conditions their strategic and tactical heads were simply irreplaceable. With Hitler's invasion of the USSR, they were swiftly restored to the leadership, and the CPGB formally resumed the position it had adopted at the beginning of the war. Many historians have perceived in this a slavish subordination of domestic political considerations to the higher end of saving the Soviet fatherland. However, the evidence shows that in reality there was a wide variety of responses from individual party activists, ranging from 100% commitment to the USSR war effort (eg. Arthur Exell and Norman Brown in Oxford) to subordinating the needs of the USSR to militant principles (eg. D Llewellyn and others in South Wales). These variations were also reflected within the leadership.

For Pollitt and Campbell the primary aim was to expedite winning the war, *for both the USSR and Britain*. This meant countenancing strikes and go-slows when activists considered them essential to ventilate grievances. It also meant opposing attempts to fan militancy on rank-and-filist principles, as leftist groups like the RCP and its associates were doing, frequently with great success. Nowhere is this clearer than in the coal industry, where the evidence from Hugh Dalton's diary and the PRO suggests that the CPGB, notably Horner and Pollitt, were the decisive influences on the MFGB's strategy, and consequently the Labour Party's thinking. There was literally no one else combining sufficient seniority and knowledge with the same political will inside the PLP or the MFGB. It was the great merit of Ebby Edwards and Hugh Dalton, for the MFGB and the government respectively, to recognise Horner's abilities and to give him his head.

The USSR's role in defeating Germany had a profound impact on sections of the British people. The British did not experience at first hand either the Red Army itself or the aftermath of the war in central Europe, with the uprooting and resettlement of millions of people according with the changing boundaries of the USSR and its neighbours.

Many British people conceived an affection, admiration and respect for Uncle Joe, the Red Army and the Russian people; and this sentimental attachment became a clear tactical consideration in successive British governments' attitude towards the cold war and the USSR. Its effect was to neutralise much of the propaganda emanating from the Catholic hierarchy, the ACTU, the TUC General Council and Transport House.

Although a beneficiary of these changed attitudes, for the CPGB the Soviet Union was also an albatross, fatefully limiting the party's political room for manoeuvre. This was also true of both the French and Italian communist parties, but in the British case the problems were largely self-imposed. With no split occurring in the trade union movement, this terrain was still largely accessible for communists to operate within, while British communists also had the opportunity to take seriously their Stalin-approved programme, *The British Road to Socialism*, and to build upon Stalin's statement to Morgan Phillips that a British transition to socialism was conceivable under the reigning monarch. In the exceptional political uncertainty which obtained both nationally and internationally between 1945-48, it is at least arguable that had the CPGB taken a determined decision to distance itself from the USSR, a transition to a linked but not politically dependent relationship could have been accomplished.

V. The CPGB in the cold war

This course was not taken. The Cominform's inaugural meeting in September 1947 produced no immediate changes in the CPGB's public positions, and it did not take up a clearly oppositional stance towards the Labour government until as late as1949-50. For many contemporary observers, the turning point was the September 1948 TUC, when the CPGB delegates' certainly adopted more militant positions than previously; but the unyielding hostility which characterised the party in 1949-50 is in my view not yet discernible.

The reasons for the shift to a full cold war mode of operation still need to be established. The Soviet Union's conduct of the cold war was certainly a significant factor, and the enthusiastic loyalty which party members both old and new felt towards the USSR was obviously important. Nevertheless, the situation was a complex one. Insofar as Stalin applied his mind to Britain, support for a peculiarly British road to socialism, emulating a sanitised model of people's democracies, remained strong. This path involved taking up a palpably revisionist position towards the state, burying any *a priori* requirement to seize state power or institute the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The development of this line of thought had, of course, been proceeding inside the CPGB leadership since at least June 1941. The May 1944 draft programme *Britain for the People* marked a shift from the previous insistence on the need to seize state power and emulate the soviet model. On the other hand, pure revolutionaries remained in the party who believed that a qualitative political change — though not necessarily a Leninist seizure of state power — was necessary before socialism could be achieved. Despite Stalin's approval, they never accepted the Bernsteinian spirit of Pollitt's 1947 *Looking Ahead* or the *British Road to Socialism*. Others still — Kerrigan, Zinkin, Carritt, Rust — were in the spiritual/emotional thrall of the USSR and everything the CPSU(B) did, while there were any number of positions in between.

Further research is likely to show that at the municipal and community level, party activists continued to make positive contributions: a radical, progressive, democratic

aspect of CPGB life which has been insufficiently emphasised by historians. Particularly in the new towns and suburbs of south-east England, these activists played important roles in politicising, greening and socialising new working-class communities. In the same way, communist union activists continued to play a vital part in the definition of trade union culture and politics, not just in the suburban-industrial girdle around London but in the Midlands, the west of England, the south coast, Yorkshire and Lancashire. These aspects of the CPGB's history remain palpably under-researched and largely unacknowledged.

The CPGB and its union activists

Does revolutionary pragmatism, the term which I applied to communist union activists in the period 1933-45, have any relevance in the postwar period? I believe that it does. The principal change occurred in relation to the concept of *life itself*, which it was accepted was not now inevitably going to turn up a revolutionary situation and seizure of power, but rather some form of people's parliamentary democratic socialism. This, however, became a purely formal change, for with the onset of the cold war the leadership were clear that the *advent* of a revolutionary situation, whatever its consequences, was as far away as ever. The distinction between a people's parliamentary democratic socialism and a soviet Britain was therefore of no immediate consequence.

If we examine the substance of the party's political position in relation to the economic struggle between June 1941 and 1949-50, we can see that it does, in fact, contain a fifth precept, accepting a share of the responsibility for the maintenance of the state in reasonable order, which I will describe as *democratic responsibility***.** When the party leadership made the transition to a cold war position, the *democratic responsibility* factor was silently dropped from its approach without full explanation and apparently without protest from any of the party's union activists. I think it is here that we will find the key to the CPGB's strategy in relation to the economic struggle and trade unions. Given the communist influence inside the trade union movement, its sudden disappearance also provides a key to examining the course of trade union/state relations.

Compared to its pre-war position, the CPGB could function more openly both inside unions and at the workplace. Not surprisingly, it was able to recruit more easily. My impression is that those it recruited at the workplace and through union activity were not dissimilar to comparable pre-war cohorts. They were attracted to the CPGB because it was leftwing, its approach was more intellectually coherent and rigorous than that of many Labour leftwing activists, and also because they admired and wanted to emulate the CP members who were usually exemplary lay and full-time officials. Longstanding problems with the retention of members were probably magnified post-1945, but were partly offset by the important new dimension of personal ambition to get on inside the trade union movement. There were regions in the AEU, areas in the NUM, the ETU of course, arguably also pockets of the TGWU even during the ban on communists' holding office, where communist membership or at least approval was necessary for winning union office, both lay and full-time. This remained the situation at least until 1956, and arguably into the 1970s.

To argue that the CPGB did not concentrate on revolutionary aims and did not seek to organise politically, *qua party*, at the workplace seems to me irrelevant, because at least since 1926 the CPGB had never seriously attempted to do either of these things. Instead, it is more relevant to note that many non-communist union activists retained a

comparable profound belief in socialism as being qualitatively transformative. Their view of socialism was messianic, like so many of the pre-1914 SPD rank-and-file. In this sense, one can doubt the practicality of the CPGB's revolutionary intent, but not its *bona fides*.

The CPGB and the British trade union movement

With the war there occurred a decisive change in the balance of class forces which remained of relevance until the 1980s. The trade union movement was now accorded an integral and central place in the social order and this changed situation provided the rationale for the CPGB's adoption of democratic responsibility as a fifth precept in its approach to the economic struggle. The party leadership agreed with Bevin and Citrine that unions should accept a share of the responsibility for orderly industrial relations and tailored its policies accordingly. However, from 1949-50, the CPGB leadership stopped addressing the real world at the national political and economic level. Instead, it adopted a position which avoided dealing with the overall balance of class forces. Its tactic was to stress instead the micro level, at which there were still an abundant number of examples where workers at individual workplaces were badly paid, worked under poor conditions and treated arbitrarily. At the aggregative, general level, party pronouncements became dogmatic, stressing the kind of absolute verities of *Capital* Vol I about the inevitable collapse of capitalism for which Bernstein had attacked the SPD in the 1890s.

This evasion/avoidance strategy rendered party union activists *incapable of thinking realistically* about the situation of the trade union movement in British society. Although they could still assess realistically the situation in a single workplace, moving beyond the micro, cabbage-patch horizon became problematic. The absence of *democratic responsibility* from the precepts required of a communist trade unionist effectively stifled any open and productive thinking about the situation of trade unions. A talented ideologue with Campbell's experience and finesse could deftly manoeuvre around the dogma when dealing with topical issues such as automation. But many, if not most, party union activists were content to follow a political lead adhering very closely to a view of British capitalism in which the organised working class had no power and therefore could not be called upon to exercise any responsibility. They were content to do so because most of them were rarely called upon themselves to be responsible beyond the workplace. At the workplace level, there has been too little detailed research to adequately describe what party shop stewards and convenors were doing, beyond observing that the four precepts of revolutionary pragmatism were clearly observable in their behaviour.

The politically vexed question of unofficial strikes and party activists' attitude towards them is interesting. To suggest that any party shop steward or convenor who did not positively encourage unofficial strikes was class collaborationist is either syndicalist or disingenuous. A speculative conclusion might be that party members were not generally inciters of unofficial action, though even the most conservative communist would not always rule out such action, while from the 1960s concerns about being outflanked by trotskyists would obvious have pulled in the same direction.

The effect of the disappearance of *democratic responsibility* from revolutionary pragmatism is notable. The political situation required that all union activists understand and observe the importance of acting responsibly, in the interests of the working class as a whole and in order to safeguard its historically unprecedented position of power and

influence. There were certainly communist activists who understood the need to operate with this sense of responsibility, notably those in the NUM dealing with a non-capitalist National Coal Board, or those who had developed a non-syndicalist perspective of collective bargaining from negotiating alongside outstanding union officials and empirical observation of the vicissitudes of economic struggle. Examples of the latter are the engineering union activists Les Ambrose and Dick Etheridge.

In this connection, the contrast between former communists Jack Jones and Hugh Scanlon is striking. Jones had probably evolved his own sense of the need for democratic responsibility, based on his own acute powers of observation and analysis, independently of the party and largely isolated from contact with socialist thinking going on at the time. His close relations with the party during the war would have been reinforced by the party leadership's own adoption of democratic responsibility, and his wartime experiences as a TGWU district officer in Coventry were evidently formative in this respect. Bill Wedderburn, who served with Jones on the Bullock Commission, was impressed with Jones's frequent recollection of Joint Production Committees. Scanlon, however, remained a strong advocate of *laissez faire* industrial relations, in stark contrast to the positive statutory framework for trade unionists at the workplace advocated by Johnnie Campbell, Jack Tanner and communists in the AEU between 1942-7.

VI. Closing thoughts

The impact of 1956 on the CPGB's influence in the British trade union movement has yet to be fully assessed. One clear piece of evidence is the adoption of a 'broad left' approach to the pursuit of full-time and lay positions inside unions and at the workplace. Already adopted by many party activists in the pre-1939 period, this in effect was a continuation of earlier pre-1920 practices. This overt, newly reformulated 'broad left' approach was also in accord with the *real united front* of revolutionary pragmatism. There is evidence for thinking that on the ground 1956 made little difference on the recruitment and retention of members. Union activists were mostly concerned with workplace and institutional union matters, and in these areas, the impact of the CPSU 20th Congress and Hungary was not great. After all, why should young toolmakers in Southall, Clydebank or Dagenham be more concerned with Budapest than his AEU District Committee? On the other hand, at a national political level, the impact was critical and long-lasting. Woodrow Wyatt's decision to broadcast about communist influence in trade unions created a very strong impression in Westminster. It also increased the turnout dramatically in the 1956 AEU Presidential elections. Heightened Conservative interest in trade union matters must also be traceable in part to their own partisan feelings about Hungary. Communist industrial policy in this neglected period is just one crucial area for future research.

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[1] See Nina Fishman, *The British Communist Party and the Trade Unions 1933-45*, Scolar, 1995.

Michael Shapiro in China

Michael Shapiro went to China shortly after the foundation of the People's Republic. He married there and worked there, mainly as an advisor on the English translations of Mao's works and as a correspondent for the British Communist Party's (CPGB's) *Daily Worker*. Unable to return to Britain as a result of his activities during the Korean War, he died in China in 1986. Though the speaker at his memorial meeting in Peking claimed that he had for decades dedicated himself to the "cause of the British [Communist] Party,"[1] Shapiro in fact fell out with the British party after taking the Chinese side in the bitter polemics which erupted between it and the Soviet party in the 1960s. His letters from China provide a fascinating insight into this and other matters.

Shapiro went to China with Allan Winnington, well known for his reporting from the Chinese and Korean lines during the Korean War. In his *Breakfast with Mao*, Winnington provides a fascinating account of their clandestine journey to China via the Trans-Siberian railway. Their arrival and appointments as press advisors to the China Information Bureau were announced by Radio Peking.[2] Given that Winnington had been sent to work in China by the CPGB[3], it seems very likely that Shapiro too had been.

Shapiro had been a prominent member of the London District of the CPGB. In the 1930s he lectured on housing and allied matters at one of the colleges of London University. Working closely with Phil Piratin, later to become one of the two Communist MPs elected in the general election of 1945, he then put his professional knowledge to good use as the Secretary of the Stepney Tenants Defence League. After the war Shapiro was one of twelve Communist councillors in Stepney. Piratin wrote warmly of him in his *Our Flag Stays Red*.[4]

Like Winnington, Shapiro was a war correspondent for the *Daily Worker* during the Korean war. Though undoubtedly noted by the British security forces, this alone would probably not have led to serious consequences. However, they and other British communists had some involvement with British prisoners of war. The British Ministry of Defence (MoD) alleged that they had been complicit in ill-treatment and torture of the prisoners and that Shapiro had threatened to have one prisoner shot. These allegations first surfaced in 1955 in a MoD 'Blue Book', *Treatment of British Prisoners of War in Korea*, and led to demands in Parliament that they be hanged if they returned to Britain.[5]

The British party claimed that Shapiro and Winnington had merely given talks to prisoners and facilitated correspondence home and stoutly denied the MoD's charges, publishing rebuttals by Winnington and by ex-prisoners. Shapiro dismissed the allegations as "rubbish", whilst Neal Ascherson has pointed out that "nobody has ever come forward to substantiate [the charges] and many have stoutly denied it."[6] It is noteworthy in this respect that MoD reports on the debriefing of prisoners of war make no mention of Winnington or Shapiro, referring only to the activities of "English speaking Chinese". Their names surfaced only a year or so later, when publication of the 'Blue Book' was first mooted. This project was a response to government anxieties about the effectiveness on returned prisoners of communist "indoctrination". We will probably never know the truth of the matter. But Ascherson's point, an opinion from the government's law officers pointing out that there was no hard evidence that Winnington and Shapiro had been involved in the ill-treatment of prisoners and a letter to the MoD

from Winston Churchill's private secretary, indicating that Churchill believed "the sooner the booklet is published the better", all suggest that the allegations are best treated as black propaganda.[7]

Willie Gallacher, the old Clydesider and founder member of the CP, corresponded with Shapiro and other British communists in China for a number of years. The correspondents included Dave Springhall, expelled from the British Party in 1943 for spying for the Soviet Union. Whatever had happened in 1943,[8] he was clearly at least a *de facto* member by 1950. A letter from Springhall and others in 1950 spoke effusively of the Chinese Party:

> More than anything else, we are learning from the remarkably developed style of work of the Chinese comrades…We feel in many ways as though we were back in the infant stage re-learning our lessons and there is so much to learn and one is never too old to begin again.[9]

But within a few years the British colony was to be divided by polemics between the Chinese and Soviet parties (CPC & CPSU). Shapiro became an ardent supporter of the Chinese in their struggle against Soviet 'revisionism', whilst Winnington, already sharply critical of the Chinese road to socialism after the upheavals of the Great Leap Forward of the late fifties, took the Soviet side.[10] Personal relations clearly became strained and perceptions coloured by the increasingly bitter divisions between the two parties. Shapiro is conspicuous by his absence from *Breakfast with Mao*, but Winnington's gratuitous sneer that one of the "foreign friends who flocked to China…an East Londoner, was called 'holier than Mao' by a woman veteran of the International Brigade"[11] surely refers to him. One wonders also how objective was Shapiro's caustic assessment of Phil Piratin — "arrogant and autocratic, with little or no theory and principles, but plenty of bossy determination to be obeyed."[12]

Inevitably, Shapiro's once warm relations with the party at home in Britain were also affected, given that the great majority of British communists supported the CPSU (it is noteworthy though that Shapiro claimed that during his visit to China in 1959 Harry Pollitt endorsed the Chinese Party's views[13]). An initially comradely and frank correspondence between Gallacher and Shapiro on these matters descended into abuse. In their last exchange (only part of which survives), they discussed the Chinese view that imperialism was a 'paper tiger'. Shapiro compared this concept with Lenin's notion that imperialism was a "colossus with feet of clay". Gallacher, drawing on his non-conformist roots, referred Shapiro to the bible: "I should mention that Moses tactically took his enemies seriously, and made his plans accordingly."[14] A short time later a further letter from Gallacher caused Shapiro to rebuke him — "your words are intended to wound, almost like a physical blow… It won't go, Willie, working yourself up into a rage is no answer to the hard facts I put to you and the points I made." — and to urge him to search his conscience. Gallacher's reply was terse in the extreme:

> Some time back, in the course of a discussion on Communism and religion… a Catholic gent expressed concern about my soul. I told him he had no need to worry, "my soul", I said, is in good hands — MY OWN. And that, Mr. Shapiro, goes for my conscience. P.S. How about your own? Are you still palming yourself off as a member of the Party here in Britain?[15]

There seem to have no further exchanges. But Shapiro continued to correspond with

two communist friends in London and with their son. This correspondence began not long after the dispute between the Soviet and Chinese communist parties had become public knowledge. Like the principal protagonists, Shapiro was initially reticent in his views. But his statement that "the Chinese party is not well understood in Britain... I'll only say that China refuses to allow itself to be blackmailed by the US threat to use nuclear weapons", clearly alludes to the Chinese view that the Soviet Union was capitulating to this threat. Later, his criticisms of the Soviet party became explicit. In 1964 Shapiro was adamant that Khrushchev had done "a lot of wrecking in the communist movement as he moved away from the teachings of Marx and Lenin. He has done a lot of damage to the Soviet Union by opening the door to capitalist trends and movements there." By 1975 Shapiro, like the Chinese communists, believed that the Soviet Union had "taken the road back to capitalism and imperialism."[16]

It would be easy to conclude that Shapiro simply knew on which side his bread was buttered. But quite a number of British communists were attracted ideologically and politically to the Chinese side of the dispute. Shapiro had joined the CPGB in 1934, before the Popular Front had set in train the reformist process which led to the adoption of the *British Road to Socialism* in 1951. Though there is no evidence that Shapiro was one of them, quite a few British communists were critical of the war-time and post-war politics of the British party[17] and sympathised with the Australian party's fierce polemics against these politics in 1948.[18] To Shapiro, the Chinese may well have seemed to be offering a return to a revolutionary purity which had been tainted by the experience of the Popular Front. Moreover, they had mounted a stout defence of Stalin, the lodestar for communists of Shapiro's generation. For him, Stalin had "carried forward the work of Lenin" despite "weaknesses".[19]

Shapiro eventually became convinced that the British party had become incorrigibly "revisionist". He was angered by the refusal of the editor of its journal *Comment* to print articles explaining the Chinese position. He attacked John Gollan, the Secretary of the CPGB, for "dishonesty" during a visit to China. In 1965 he claimed that the British party, by "soft-peddling" in its attitude to the United States and its hostility to the Chinese party, had "sold out".[20]

Though Shapiro made little attempt to woo his principal correspondents, TK and LK, away from the British party, he was clearly heartened by the refusal of their son, MK, to follow his parents into the Party. MK was repelled by the dogmatism typical of communists of his parent's generation and was sceptical of marxism. Shapiro made great efforts to win him for the cause. To some, Shapiro's insistence that marxism "is a science" will be evidence that he too was a dogmatist. But Shapiro's marxism was remote from that of those who looked first to the texts. He was adamant that "Marxism is not a religion" [21] and, in correspondence on such matters as Nixon's visit to China, favoured analysis and argument, rarely quoting Marx or Lenin. Like many of his generation, MK found the CPGB thoroughly reformist and was attracted to the extreme left groups that proliferated in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s. But much to Shapiro's dismay, he joined (briefly) the quasi-Trotskyist Internationalist Socialists (IS), the forerunner of today's Socialist Workers' Party, rather than one of the small maoist groups.

Of these groups, Shapiro rated the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) (CPB[ML]) highly. This organisation had been founded by Reg Birch, an erstwhile comrade from the London District Committee of the CPGB and in the 1970s a member of the National Executive of the Amalgamated Engineering Union. Perhaps the

organisation's gross overestimation of the prospects for revolution in Britain — during the February 1974 general election the party's paper, *The Worker*, urged its readers not to vote but to "prepare for revolution" — appealed to his eternally optimistic spirit. Shapiro, unsurprisingly, seems to have been completely unaware of how hard was the going for the maoist groups of the sixties and seventies. At a time when there were perhaps 600-700 maoists in the whole of Britain, Shapiro was convinced that "there must be one or two such groups by now in E[ast] or S[outh]E[ast] London, or it shouldn't be difficult to form one."[22]

One wonders also how accurate his accounts of life in China were. Shapiro was highly impressed by Chinese socialism. His chronicles are notable (and an interesting contrast with most traveller's tales from Stalin's Soviet Union) in that what impressed him was not so much China's economic achievements, remarkable as he found these, as transformations in relations between people: "I wish you could see how people discuss problems and work out solutions here — quietly, sensibly, without fuss — everyone drawn in to give their opinions and all opinions respected and thought over". The author can vouch for these claims from personal experience, but Shapiro painted a picture of a workers' and peasants' nirvana. There is no reason no believe that he was untruthful, but Shapiro did tend to toe the party line. China's grave economic difficulties of 1960 were attributed entirely to "drought" and withdrawal of "Soviet experts", with no mention whatsoever of the problems wrought by the Great Leap Forward. The letter offering this analysis was written in 1963, when food was still rationed in many parts of China, yet Shapiro wrote of "wads of good, cheap food on the market." It is perhaps relevant to note that he led, by Chinese standards, a privileged life. In the early 1960s he lived in a "lovely one storey bungalow, with its own garden" and paid "no rent or electricity or rates, as all this is reckoned as part of the pay for work. In addition, the place is kept clean. So that both my wife and I can concentrate on our work without many household worries." [23]

Shapiro was imprisoned for a while during the Cultural Revolution, but this does not appear to have shaken his basic convictions. In the mid-seventies he wrote glowingly of the effects of the Cultural Revolution. His last letter, which seems to have been written shortly after their arrest, claims that the Gang of Four "did a lot of damage which is being rapidly put right."[24] What Shapiro made of the new course adopted by the Chinese Communist Party after Mao's death, we don't know, for there were to be no more letters. Perhaps this was due to the stroke he had suffered a few years before the last letter. But perhaps not. According to the speaker at his memorial meeting he continued after his stroke to "read carefully the English version of Xinhua's daily news bulletin and to put forward written suggestions for improvement."[25] Given Shapiro's views, it is quite likely that his silence can be attributed to disapproval of the CPC's post-Mao policies.

His last letters make it clear that Shapiro would have liked to have returned to Britain for a visit. That he was unable to do so was the price he paid for his activities as a professional revolutionary. He applied for a passport in the 1950s. He was advised that he could not renew his passport but could be provided with documents to return to Britain, where he would be liable to prosecution for his activities in Korea.[26] Shapiro turned down this enticing offer and continued his revolutionary activities. He had a full and rewarding life. He was one of those rare beings whose revolutionary fire does not dim with age. For this, he deserves our respect.

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[1] Verbatim account of speech in author's possession.
[2] *Times*, 13/4/50.
[3] Winnington, A., *Breakfast with Mao* (London, 1986), p. 45.
[4] Piratin, P., *Our Flag Stays Red* (London, 1978), pp 38-46.
[5] Her Majesty's Stationery Office, *Treatment of British Prisoners of War in Korea* (London, 1955), pp. 26-7; *Times* 8/3/55.
[6] *Daily Worker*, 28/2/55 and most editions over the next two weeks; Michael Shapiro to MK, 28/2/65 (unless otherwise stated, all letters from Shapiro are in the author's possession); Introduction to Winnington, op cit, p. 11.
[7] Public Record Office: WO/208/4020 'Report on the Success of Communist Indoctrination of British Prisoners of War in Korea'; DEFE/7/1805 'Publicity for Chinese and North Korean Communist Treatment of British Prisoners of War in Korea'.
[8] As Andrew Thorpe as pointed out (A. Thorpe, *The British Communist Party and Moscow 1920-1943* [Manchester, 2000], pp 269-270), it is quite possible that party leaders were aware of Springhall's activities. In which case it is quite likely that he was not actually expelled.
[9] Shapiro, Winnington, Dave Springhall and Janet Springhall to Gallacher, 1950. Communist Party Archive (CPA) at the National Museum of Labour History, Manchester (CP/IND/GALL/01/06).
[10] See the later chapters of Winnington, *op cit.*
[11] Shapiro to TK & LK, 17/12/1962.
[12] Shapiro to TK & LK, 30/6/63. Interestingly, this portrait is very similar to that in Edward Upward's *The Rotten Elements*, (Harmondsworth, 1969), his novel about his struggle against "revisionism" in the CPGB in the late 1940s, wherein a thinly disguised Piratin appears.
[13] Shapiro to A?, 10/7/75.
[14] Gallacher to Shapiro, 2/6/63 (CPA, CP/IND/Gall/01/06).
[15] Shapiro to Gallacher, 12/6/63 & 31/7/63. Gallacher to Shapiro 24/8/63. (CPA, CP/IND/GALLl/01/06).
[16] Michael Shapiro to TK and LK, 17/12/1962; Michael Shapiro to MK, 28/2/65; Michael Shapiro to A?, 10/7/75.
[17] See the debate in *World News and Views* prior to the November 1945 Congress of the CPGB. See also N. Redfern, unpublished 1998 Manchester Metropolitan University PhD thesis, "The Communist Party of Great Britain, Imperialism and War 1935-45", pp. 178-192, for an analysis of this debate.
[18] An edited version of the correspondence between the two parties can be found in *World News and Views*, 7/8/48.
[19] Shapiro to MK, 28/2/65.
[20] Shapiro to TK & LK, 30/6/63; Shapiro to TK & LK, 17/3/64; Shapiro to MK, 20/12/65.
[21] Shapiro to MK, 28/2/65, 20/12/65 & 21/11/74.
[22] Shapiro to TK & LK, 15/6/74.
[23] Shapiro to TK & LK, 17/12/62 & 3/6/63.
[24] Shapiro to MK, undated.
[25] Verbatim account of speech in author's possession.
[26] *Times*, 22/11/54.

BOOK REVIEWS

Gavin Bowd, *L'Interminable Enterrement: Le communisme et les intellectuels français depuis 1956*, Digraphe, Paris, 1999, ISBN 2-84237-029-5, pp224, 120 FF.

After the wave of largely sympathetic literature devoted to French communism in the 'eurocommunist' era (from the mid-1970s until the early 1980s), there was a distinct reduction in the scale of journalistic and academic interest from the mid-1980s on. There are several interlocking reasons for this.

First, the French Communist Party (the PCF) simply became of less significance in the domestic party political landscape. During the post-war decades, up until the end of the 1970s at least, the PCF had consistently won more than 20% of the popular vote, except in the special circumstances of the election of 1958, which consecrated de Gaulle's Fifth Republic, and for much of this period was the best-organised, best-funded French party, with more members than any other, and more influence in national life. Indeed, the highly polarised character of French political life during these years is illustrated in André Malraux's famous comment that there were only two political realities in France during the 1960s, the Gaullists (Malraux was one of the General's most loyal ministers), and the Communists. This huge influence existed in spite of the fact that the PCF had not played a role in government since it was expelled from the national unity administration in 1947. By the time of the 1986 parliamentary election, held under a proportional system that ought to have benefitted the communists, the PCF was reduced to less than 10%, and it has struggled, generally without success, to climb above that figure subsequently.

Second, many of those on the left in Britain, Ireland and the US, who were captivated by the potential of eurocommunism, and followed the discussions and debates between the PCF, Enrico Berlinguer's Italian CP and Santiago Carrillo's Spanish CP, had their hopes for a radical departure in Western communist theory and practice dashed. In the French case, by 1984, and in fact well before that, the PCF had definitely turned its back on this strategic *ouverture*, summed up by the decision of the party to withdraw its ministers from the Socialist-dominated government. There were two dimensions, international and domestic, to this phenomenon: the PCF, under General Secretary Georges Marchais, flirted with a genuine break from Soviet tutelage in the decade between 1968-1978, and many members did reassess their political and emotional relationship with the international communist movement, and 'actually existing socialism'.

However, increasingly concerned that the PCF's revolutionary vocation and distinctiveness was in danger of being watered down, so the party was coming to resemble the 'social democratic reformism' that it had so long maligned, the leadership moved to re-establish its credentials as the most 'loyal' and orthodox of the Western parties. Marchais, in a live broadcast from Moscow, resolutely defended the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and then lent his support to the Polish imposition of martial law. In domestic terms, the PCF had worked tirelessly to construct the Union of the Left and the Common Programme, only to see it bring Mitterrand's PS to effective power. After 1981, the PCF found itself with little or no influence over the direction of government policy, and its 'workerist' base increasingly found itself at the sharp end of Mauroy's austerity. In these circumstances, the PCF seemed less relevant, and less attractive, to many observers, even sympathetic ones.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, interest in the party, and the historical tradition of communism in France, was on the wane. Some commentators, particularly gleeful anti-communists, sought to explain the decline, whether in terms of the failure to respond to socio-economic change, political marginalisation, an internal culture that remained marked by incomplete 'deStalinisation', or the crisis of international communism. Others, especially those who had invested a great deal of hope in the capacity of Western communists to innovate and renovate Marxist theory for a new historical era, decided to draw a discreet veil over the painful case of the PCF, preferring instead to follow the transformation of Italian communism. For both groups, the decline was either explicitly (the anti-communists) or implicitly (the 'reform' communists) viewed as irreversible. The French communist tradition was in the process of dying, and while it might be instructive and necessary to pick over the bones of the carcass, it was understandable that this wasn't a job that appealed to everybody.

The 'endless burial' referred to in the title of Gavin Bowd's study of communism and French intellectuals since 1956, is a phrase used by François Furet, historian and ex-communist (he left the PCF in 1956). According to Furet, the endless burial began in 1956 with Khrushchev's 'secret speech' denouncing aspects of Stalinism, and finally concluded in 1991 with the demise of the Soviet Union. In his introduction, Bowd underlines his refusal to accept the prevailing opinion of writers such as Furet (in English, the most interesting examples include Sudhir Hazareesingh, Tony Judt and Sunil Khilnani[1]), who effectively see the decline of communism in general, and in France in particular, as a 'normalisation', involving the 'exorcism' of the very idea of revolution. Furet draws a parallel between the experience of communism in the twentieth century, and the legacy of the French Revolution of 1789. Stalinism and Jacobinism serve a similar function in Furet's schema, as a 'totalitarian' betrayal of the true spirit of the utopian dream.

For Bowd, however, this belief in the triumph of Anglo-Saxon neo-liberalism, and more specifically the unfettered law of the market, ignores the continued existence of elements of French 'exceptionalism'. Tony Blair's exasperation at Lionel Jospin's 'plural left' government, and his misunderstanding of the political lineage it encapsulates, can be traced to real historical and theoretical differences; when Stéphane Courtois (the main editor of the monumental *Black Book of Communism,* a study of the crimes committed by communist regimes and movements over the course of the last century) claimed that there was a 'totalitarian' correspondence between fascism and communism, that the latter was responsible for 100 million deaths (four times as many as Nazism), and that therefore a 'Nuremburg' process is required for communism and communists, Jospin replied that he was proud to have PCF ministers in his cabinet (p.210). It is certainly hard to imagine Harry Pollitt and the CPGB being 'rehabilitated' by new Labour in a similar vein! Bowd points out that in spite of their hatred of 'totalitarianism', many of these authors, when they write about the defeat of French (and international) communism, display a 'totalising' vision of the world. There is no alternative, in this conception, to the global new world order, and the Left must adjust its sights to this '*pensée unique*'.

The public and political role of intellectuals in French life, and their relationship to the PCF and the minor, yet significant, strand of 'communists outside the PCF', is the subject at the core of this book. Bowd takes a basically chronological approach, but implicit in much of his exposition, is the argument that the role of the politically-committed intellectual, and the specific role of communist intellectuals, has not

disappeared, even in the apparent wreckage of the 'post-communist' decade since 1989-1991. The question that really needs an answer in Bowd's view, is not why the 'endless burial' of French communism took so long to finally be completed, but why it is that, ten years after the collapse of communism, the French party survives, even though not exactly in rude health.

Bowd takes some critics to task for their tendency to see French intellectuals in the PCF *only* through the prism of developments in the East, though of course he recognises the crucial importance of Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Afghanistan and Poland (not to mention Solzhenitsyn, Sakharov, and others). Bowd's aim here is not to deflect attention from the deceptions and self-deceptions of many communists throughout these years, for he casts an unflinching eye over the 'mental acrobatics' performed by some intellectuals in their desire to avoid some of the truths of 'actually existing socialism'. No, what he does argue is that to understand the overall balance of judgment to be made by communist sympathisers during the 1950s and 1960s, the Manichean character of Cold War politics must not be excluded. Neither, especially in the French case, should the trauma of decolonisation, the bloody war in Algeria and the conflict in Vietnam, be left out of the reckoning. Bowd recognises that these examples can be used as a device to neutralise the stains of socialism, but he is surely right to argue that a broader geo-political perspective is necessary if we are to explain the continuing attraction of the PCF even after the tanks rolled into Budapest and Prague.

Another theme that runs throughout this fascinating study is the difficult and uneasy position of intellectuals within a party that was avowedly 'workerist' in nature. In a revealing analysis of the roles played by Louis Aragon and Louis Althusser, Bowd investigates the way in which intellectuals could be 'instrumentalised' by the PCF leadership, as prestigious symbols for the defence of the party line. However, the PCF failed to come to terms with the growth of intellectuals as a social category, who needed to be addressed and won over with distinctive social and economic policies. This was perhaps unsurprising, given the fierce attachment of the PCF to its self-identity as a proletarian party, a '*parti-guide*' to lead the 'masses' towards revolutionary consciousness. Nevertheless, with intellectuals as a social category growing markedly in French society, particularly from the late-1960s on, and the number of 'genuine' proletarians in sharp decline, this attachment had severe consequences for the popularity of French communism.

Bowd has painstakingly traced the trials and tribulations of French communist intellectuals, and the political polarisation of intellectual life in France for much of this period. He has conducted revealing interviews with some of the major protagonists, and it is to be hoped this work reaches a wide audience. For the PCF, there was no simple way out of the core dilemma that faced the party from the mid-1970s on. As Jacques Derrida, cited by Bowd (p.116), acknowledges, the party could retreat into a hardline posture, but retain much of its identity and structure intact, or it could soften its stance, increase its distance from the international communist movement, but risk being conflated with the PS. Either way, there was a strong likelihood that the French people would begin to ask themselves whether they any longer had a need for the PCF. Under Marchais's leadership, despite the brief dalliance with eurocommunism, the PCF chose the former strategic direction, with disastrous consequences in terms of the party's marginalisation from mainstream French society, and waves of internal dissent that severely weakened the party from 1978 until 1994. After Marchais's retirement, and the accession of Robert Hue, the PCF has moved much further than ever before towards the '*mutation*' of its revolutionary identity. As Bowd states, the self-proclaimed role of the

party as Leninist avant-garde, as sole representative of the French proletariat, has been unceremoniously dumped, but whether this represents the prelude to the discovery of newly-creative revolutionary thought for the twenty-first century, or as simply a means of staving off the still-inevitable defeat and final 'burial', remains an open question.

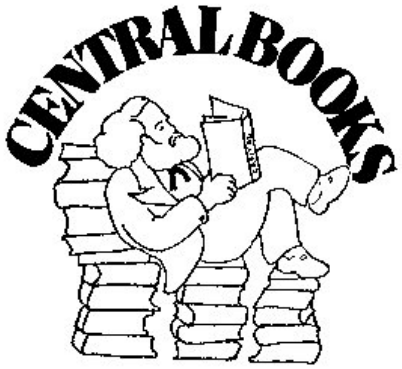
Stephen Hopkins, University of Leicester

This review will also appear in a forthcoming edition of the Irish political review *Times Change*.

[1] The authors mentioned here have all written on Marxism and Communism in France: Sudhir Hazareesingh, *Intellectuals and the French Communist Party: Disillusion and Decline* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); Tony Judt, *Marxism and the French Left* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1986); Sunil Khilnani, *Arguing Revolution: The Intellectual Left in Post-war France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

Dave Cope, *Central Books: A Brief History, 1939 to 1999*, Central Books, London, 1999, ISBN 07 147 32907, pp80. (Available at £5.99, post-free, from: Dave Cope, 7 Hambledon House, Cricketfield Road, London E5 8NT)

Spreading the good word by selling polemical literature has been a fascinating part of our history. In the seventeenth century, the ideas of the English Revolution were exchanged in pamphlets and, in much later years, the literature seller with a tray of material slung round his neck was a familiar feature of the propaganda scene in the early days of the socialist movement.



A distinctive Central Books' logo from the 1970s

The Communist Party of Great Britain, which had been formed in 1920, struggled to maintain its propaganda distribution within the party organisation. But in 1939 it decided to set up Central Books as its retail and wholesale outlet. The aim was to "persuade the people of Britain, by the power of the written word, to join the cause of world revolution" (p5). Dave Cope correctly points out that the project was totally unsuccessful.

But what he has not understood is the important part that the distribution of literature played in the life of the Communist Party. In both factory and local branches, it was the literature seller who went to the bookshop to collect supplies and exchange gossip and then did the 'round' passing on valuable information, selling stamps for the party card and establishing a rapport based on shared ideals and ideas. In the early chapters, Dave Cope manages to capture the comradeship and determination within Central Books, but he fails to follow that along its trajectory into the life of the party. Histories too often reflect life at national level and rarely penetrate into the lower regions where life often looked very different. A chapter on Central Books' relationship with local bookshops and literature sellers would have been useful.

As an aspiring seller married to an addict, who once sold a hundred copies of an issue of *Marxism Today*, I know how much the distribution of literature contributed to the influence that the Communist Party maintained over so many years. It might be called the superglue that held the party together. After 1991 the Communist Party split and Democratic Left, which Dave which commendable honesty points out "did not see itself as a political party" (p68), became involved in developing Central Books as a viable business. The changes made both reflected and influence the political scene.

Central Books has managed to survive in the face of world-wide difficulties in both publishing and distribution. The company has consolidated and expanded mainly by handling an ever-increasing number of journals representing a broad political spectrum. It has survived and is there — if the politics of the day ever needs it. But the forum for the exchange of ideas is becoming less through the printed word and increasingly through the internet.

Dave Cope is a skilled writer who has compiled a readable history of an important aspect of political life in the twentieth century. Aged activists like myself will recognise their past as in a mirror, and will find it compulsive reading. Hopefully younger people will read it and learn from our mistakes.

Ruth Frow, Working Class Movement Library