# COMMUNIST HISTORY NETWORK NEWSLETTER  No 12 SPRING 2002

**Welcome to issue 12 of the *Newsletter* — which continues to be made available in three formats: a print-version; an e-version (Word PC file attachment); and a web-version.  The deadline for submissions to the next issue is 30 September 2002.**

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- **'RED CLYDESIDE'**: The Glasgow Digital Library has begun work on a new long-term internet project which will result in 'an all encompassing web-based educational resource on the early twentieth century labour movement in Scotland with the focus on the key events and individuals who contributed to legend of "Red Clydeside"'. Central to the project is the inclusion of digitised images of many important primary source materials from this period. Materials have so far been assembled with the co-operation of Glasgow University Library Special Collections, Caledonian University Library Special Collections and The Mitchell Library's Glasgow Collection. Yet, as project worker Michael Byers explains: 'We are aware that many primary materials and ephemera relating to Red Clydeside are not held in library and archive collections, but have been handed down within families or in some cases held in private collections. What we ask therefore is for individuals or groups who are in possession of relevant material — including booklets, posters, photographs, or election manifestos — to contact the project so that we might obtain digital copies for the web archive.' Visit the site at http://gdl.cdlr.strath.ac.uk/prototype/redclyde/index.html. Contact Michael Byers at: michael.p.byers@strath.ac.uk; telephone [UK] 0141-548-2379.

- *AMERICAN COMMUNIST HISTORY*: Edited by Dan Leab, this new twice-yearly journal from Carfax Publishing declares its aim to become 'the impartial, leading journal for scholarship about the history of the Communist Party in the United States', studying the CPUSA's 'social, political and cultural impact on its members, on its opponents and the public at large.' Additionally, *American Communist History* will include contributions 'which are transnational or international in scope.' Areas of interest include: 'communist infiltration of the mass media in the 1930s; the education of "Red Diaper babies"; anti-Semitism in the American Communist Party; and the role of splinter groups in the CPUSA's history.' Full details can be found at the Carfax Publishing website at http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/14743892.html. The first issue is due for publication later this year, and sample copies may be requested from the website.

- *COMMUNIST CHRONICLES:* 'The first issue of this new e-journal has appeared presenting unpublished documents from the Comintern archives concerning

relations between the Soviet Union and the Norwegian Communist Party (NKP) in the early post-war years and particularly the case of Peder Furubotn. Among the documents presented is one that occupied Stalin on his last working day and bears his pencilled annotations. The same web-site also carries a number of scholarly articles, mostly relating to Peder Furubotn and the crisis in the NKP. This is the first opportunity to read and consult such fully researched writing on Norwegian communism in English. In future the journal will make available further Soviet documents relating to the NKP and also welcomes contributions of serious scholarly work on the history of communism, not necessarily relating to Norway or the other Scandinavian countries.' The website for *Communist Chronicles: Studies in the History of Communism* can be accessed at: http://communist-chronicles.com.

- **FINLAND AND THE COMINTERN**: Under the title *'Kallis toveri Stalin!': Komintern ja Suomi* (*'Dear comrade Stalin!': Comintern and Finland*) a collection of around 150 documents relating to Finland and the Comintern has been published by Edita Publishers, Helsinki. The book is edited by Natalia Lebedeva, Kimmo Rentola and Tauno Saarela and includes introductory articles by the editors. Further details from: tksaarel@mappi.helsinki.fi.

- **HEINRICH MATTHÄUS FISCHER**: David Saunders from the University of Newcastle 'would be glad to hear from anyone who knows anything about Heinrich Matthäus Fischer, a German-Russian who was expelled from the Russian Empire in 1901 and spent the next twenty years in Newcastle upon Tyne and Whitley Bay. After returning to Russia in 1921, Fischer worked in the Comintern and as a provincial factory manager before dying in Moscow in 1935. In Britain he belonged to the SDF, SDP, BSP, and CPGB, and to the Amalgamated Society of Engineers in his capacity as an engine-fitter at Armstrong's of Elswick and Swan Hunter's of Wallsend. The memoirs he published in Moscow in 1922 and 1935 say a good deal about his years in England but need to be checked against independent sources. In particular, it would be good to know what has happened to the papers of the 'Newcastle Socialist Society', a club that certainly existed from 1895 to the mid-1930s. Fischer seems to have made good use of it, but it is rarely refered to in other sources.' Contact: David Saunders, Department of History, University of Newcastle, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 7RU, d.b.saunders@ncl.ac.uk.

- **GEORGE RUDE:** Wilfrid Prest would like to hear from anybody who can provide any information on branch positions held by George Rude in the CPGB, in particular whether Rude was ever secretary of an East Midlands branch of the party. Please contact: wilfrid.prest@adelaide.edu.au or Wilfrid Prest, Department of History, University of Adelaide, SA 5005, Australia.

- **DOUGLAS GARMAN**: Anybody with information or memories regarding Douglas Garman, Education Organiser of the CPGB 1934-47, is requested to contact Garman's biographer — who is especially interested in any details (however small) of the summer camps at Swanage run by Garman, and also his involvement in one of the Rhondda miners' marches. Please contact: C Connolly, Flat 1, Wick Manor, Wick, Pershore WR10 3NZ; tel [UK] 01386 552308; charles.hudson@ukonline.co.uk

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## WORK IN PROGRESS

## THESIS REPORT

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## FEATURES

## Perception and Place in the Interpretation of Communism: A Comparative Analysis of South Africa and Algeria, 1920-1962

I am engaged in a long-term comparative study of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) and the Communist Party in Algeria. This study seeks to compare the development of the CPSA and the Communist Party in Algeria and to explore the relationship of these two parties with their national liberation movements and with the communist parties in their metropolitan counterparts, Britain and France. Its aims are three-fold. Firstly, it seeks to explain how a general model of change propagated by the Comintern was interpreted in different ways with diverse consequences in these two settler societies. Secondly, it aims to explain both the distinctive experiences of the CPSA and the Communist Party in Algeria and the divergent paths of their national liberation struggles against a similar backdrop of political economies that were rigidly divided along national and ethnic lines. Finally, it seeks to illuminate how the perceptions and experiences of being either colonizer or colonized coloured the understanding and practice of socialism — an ideology purporting to be international in scope and applicability.

The Communist International sought to build communist movements and to support movements for national liberation through the imposition of a general model. However, this model was refracted through a variety of social conditions and perceptions, inevitably producing different reactions and outcomes. South Africa and Algeria offer important bases for a comparison of communist parties and of communist interactions with national liberation movements. Both countries were settler societies characterized by rigid ethnic and national divisions between European colonizers and indigenous majorities but they also differed in such crucial respects as the pattern of proletarianization and the nature of the political regime.

The first stage of this project looks at the 1920s, with particular reference to the policies of bolshevization and indigenization. Through a comparative analysis of common and variable factors, I am examining how local communists in these settler societies reacted to and implemented these policies. A goal of bolshevization was the creation of mass communist parties. In settler societies this necessarily meant the indigenization of the local communist party: ie, that the communist party should aim to be demographically representative of the local population.

In both countries there was great variation in the way that individual communists reacted to this agenda, with some communists being supportive of bolshevization and indigenization and others being resistant. While the Communist Party of South Africa was successful in its goal of indigenization, becoming an overwhelmingly black organization by the end of the 1920s, the Communist Party in Algeria remained predominantly European in composition in the 1920s and 1930s. A standard explanation for the failure of indigenization in the Algerian case refers to the paternalistic and racist attitudes of the numerically dominant European members. Yet, by comparison with the CPSA, it is difficult to sustain this argument. A comparative analysis shows that the difficulties faced by the Communist Party in Algeria in indigenizing were more complex. A meaningful explanation must include consideration of the patterns of proletarianization, political traditions and political conditions in these two countries

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during the period of bolshevization. By pattern of proletarianization I refer to the manner and form in which the working class of a particular country was created. For example, South Africa's working class was characterized by a migrant proletariat in which African workers were kept in a continual state of movement between towns and rural areas. By contrast, in Algeria male workers frequently went to and remained in France, remitting part of their earnings back to their families in Algeria. Hence, the Algerian working class was characterized by a displaced proletariat.

By all indications, including the number of cadre imprisoned and duration of prison sentences, the onslaught of repression against communists in Algeria seems to have been greater than in South Africa and impeded the chances of a very small party to grow. Certainly, the different degrees of repression experienced by communist activists in Algeria and South Africa in the middle and late 1920s helps to explain the discrepancies in the two parties' ability to indigenize. However, the starkly contrasting patterns of proletarianization and urbanization in these two cases posed constraints both on the immediate prospects for organizational development in the respective working classes and, in turn, on the perceptions and attitudes of local communists.

I am interested in hearing from other scholars who are examining socialist and communist movements in formerly-colonized areas and can be contacted at: AlliZDrew@aol.com.

**Allison Drew, University of York**

# THESIS REPORT

## The Decline of the French Communist Party: The Party Education System as a Brake to Change, 1945-90

**This PhD Thesis was successfully completed at the University of Portsmouth in 2000. A copy of the thesis has been deposited at the university library in Portsmouth and the People's Archives (Kansan Arkisto) in Helsinki, Finland.**

French communism was in long-term decline well before the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe in 1989, the watershed which finally undermined the relevance and credibility of communist parties throughout Europe. For many years, scholars of French politics had been conducting studies into the decline of the PCF and analysing the main contributory causes, namely the transformation of socio-economic structures in France since the late 1960s; institutional factors, ie, presidentialism resulting in particular from the 1962 constitutional reform, and bipolarisation involving the creation of alternative governing alliances; the rise of the French Socialist Party (PS) since 1974; and the sharp deterioration of the Soviet image in French opinion, in particular since the 1970s.[1] There was unanimous agreement that the party leadership with its orthodox regime and intransigent practices was the one common denominator, *le fil rouge* which ran through the process of decline. The novelty of the approach adopted in this work is that, whilst not denying the importance of the other contributory factors, it focuses primarily on the party leadership's own complacency and inability to adapt to changes which were taking place in the party's social, institutional, political and international environment.

Chapter One provides an overview of the contemporary decline of the French Communist Party (PCF) and an examination of the exogenous causes to which the decline has been traditionally attributed. This examination of the leadership's own role in the marginalisation of the PCF reveals the extent of the damage inflicted. Under its 'workerist' and anti-PS leadership, the party lost touch with the social realities in France. Moreover, the leadership miscalculated the balance of power on the French left and ignored for too long the institutional threats; these miscalculations also led to serious strategic errors concerning the potential of the rejuvenated Socialist Party. Finally, the unconditional solidarity with the Soviet Union as advocated by the PCF leadership caused the deterioration of the image of the entire communist movement in France. However, there was no *inherent* characteristic of the PCF which forced it to remain a victim of its history and prevented it from responding and adapting to changes in the party's social, institutional, political and international environment. The fact that the party did not in fact make this adaptation, and that its choices turned out to be the wrong ones, was the consequence of the decisions and actions of the leadership at decisive turning points of the party's life. The communist leadership, from 1956 onward, consistently thwarted the emergence of healthier options which might have steered the party into clearer waters, away from its stormy stalinist past. Any significant changes in the PCF's *modus operandi* that might have permitted it to take advantage of opportunities on offer rather than allow these opportunities to be transformed into disadvantages, were always made too late — if in fact they were made at all. Ironically, the PCF — an entity whose aims and very *raison d'être* were built upon the concept of radical revolution — remained an organisation with deep-rooted conservatism at its very core and its collective memory fixated by perceptions of its heroic past.

This suggested that the roots of the decline had to be sought primarily from within rather than without. Chapter Two examines the party's mode of functioning and its internal dynamics and reveals the extent to which the communist leadership was in fact able to make use of the party's organisational principle of democratic centralism in order to retain its disproportionate power.[2] This in turn prompts the question of why and how the communist leadership was able to implement a principle — which seemed in theory to be highly democratic — in such an *undemocratic* way. The answer is simple: it had at its disposal a trained body of functionaries and militants who would unquestioningly apply party policy and thwart any attempt to oppose it. Therefore, while democratic centralism formed the infrastructure and framework for the way the party functioned, it was only permitted to do so within the context of the communist theory and ideology which acted as the 'cement' or discipline holding the party together. Since the discipline of a communist party relies heavily on the conviction and commitment of its members, it is evident that their loyalty to the party would not develop to the necessary degree without a systematic strengthening of their grasp of party theory and ideology. Theory and ideology therefore had to be taught. This provided the *pons asinorum* for our study: by dovetailing the functions of democratic centralism and political education, the leadership succeeded in adroitly securing all the power in its own hands and thus ensured its own succession by ideologically reliable cadres.

The PCF was of course not the only party to set up a political education system; nor was political education the only means used in the process of political socialisation.[3] Chapter Two also investigates political education as one element in political socialisation and reveals that the advantages of an efficient training system had been understood by political movements at an early stage.[4]

The virtual absence of previous scholarly investigation of the PCF's political education system confirmed the belief that my study would indeed fill a major gap. Only one work had dealt with the establishment of the Party's training schools, namely Danielle Tartakowsky's doctoral thesis *Ecoles et Editions communistes 1921-33*, which was completed in 1977.[5] Bernard Pudal's book, *Prendre parti* (1989), also started life as a doctoral thesis, and although it mainly deals with the PCF's leadership group (*groupe dirigeant*) in the 1934-39 period, it also provides valuable information about the communist party training system during that time.[6] The PCF's Education Sector in Paris also confirmed that the postwar period had never been systematically researched, and that its records concerning party education at the *Service central de documentation* (Colonel-Fabien, Paris) and at the *Ecole nationale* (in Draveil, near Paris) had not been exploited to that end. It was therefore clear that the subject was more than ripe for an in-depth investigation. We were also able to demonstrate that it was in fact a precondition of formal political instruction that its recipients should have already been exposed to a number of other agencies of socialisation.[7] This enabled us to establish the crucial importance of the party political education system as the final piece in the jigsaw that made up the fully trained and successfully politically socialised 'ideal cadre'.

The historical origins of the PCF's political education system and its development during the interwar years constitute the principal theme for Chapter Three. The PCF's system for political training was set up in the 1920s. Since the early architects of the education programmes had little understanding of the workings of a communist party and a very hazy idea of marxism, the training of the party cadres was unsystematic and experimental, and mostly supervised by foreign nationals under the watchful eye of the Comintern. Many PCF members received their higher political education in the Soviet Union. It was not until the PCF made the critical transition to a mass-based political party in the Popular Front era that the French party leadership came to fully understand the value and importance of an efficient political education system to satisfy the party's urgent need for trained militants. The setting up of a stable school network was also helped by the fact that by then, the Comintern-imposed bolshevisation process had been successfully completed in the French Communist Party. This resulted in the formation of the predominantly working-class leadership, the *groupe dirigeant fondamental,* with Maurice Thorez at its helm. Thorez's leadership group would remain solid until his retirement some 30 years later. Significantly, the Thorezian regime also bequeathed to its successors the rigidly structured training system which had already made a vital contribution to the creation and maintenance of party unity and cohesion following the turbulence of the earlier decade.

The entire political training network of the PCF perished during the Second World War. An examination of the postwar era up to 1964 provides the backdrop for Chapter Four. As the PCF began to mature as a complex political organisation, it was faced with new responsibilities, both at national and local level, which required ideologically correct leadership skills and a far greater degree of organisational cohesion than hitherto. The party also needed reliable functionaries to operate the vast internal apparatus that had been built up, and trained cadres to direct its mass mobilisation work. By the 1950s, the PCF's network of schools was operating successfully at all three levels. My investigation reveals the tactical logic behind the structure of the party school network: advanced degrees of political training went hand-in-hand with advanced degrees of involvement, commitment and advancement in the party.[8] At the base there were the elementary schools, which provided political education for the new recruits, equipping them with a certain minimum of political education and creating a sense of commitment

and belonging so that their membership would not remain merely nominal. At the next stage, the federal schools were designed for those who had already completed the elementary school programme and had certain responsibilities in the party at cell, section or federal level. The apex of this network of schools was the one or four-month central schools which were intended for those with considerable organisational experience, leadership potential and an unshakeable loyalty to the party. Candidates to the central school programmes were put forward by their federations; however, since the Education Sector of the PCF's Central Committee made the final decision after consulting the student's personal record, it meant that the selection process in the elite establishments was under the strict control of the leadership.

Soviet influence remained strong in the PCF's political education system well into the 1970s and an important number of the major figures in the party were trained in Moscow.[9] The selection process was supervised by both the PCF and the CPSU to ensure that only 'trustworthy' people were sent. It is a testimony to their unshakeable loyalty and the efficacy of the training process that even after seeing the Soviet reality with their own eyes, most of them remained faithful to their ideals.

The study programmes were also drawn up by the Education Sector. As the schools were not 'schools' in the traditional sense of the word, there were very few subjects *per se* (marxist philosophy, political economy and history were central themes common to all eras); instead, the teaching tended to focus on various traditional or topical 'themes' relevant to a particular period. The 'themes' were generally based on the resolutions and decisions of the party congresses and accurately reflected the changes and shifts of party policy as determined by political circumstances and developments in France and abroad (usually, in the Soviet Union) at any given time.

The study programmes were always backed up by an extensive and compulsory reading programme whose contents faithfully mirrored and reinforced the current party line and thinking. The practical side of the course programmes was dealt with the teaching of routine political tasks, *travaux pratiques*, whose content and form hardly changed from one decade to another. Study sessions were also accompanied by debates, discussions and group work the purpose of which was to accustom the students to team work and also to 'supervise' their thinking process. These sessions were directed by experienced party instructors who did not need to fear any challenges from their carefully selected students who shared their basic mindset.

This programme of theoretical and practical study was lightened by a cultural programme which was first introduced in the 1930s by Etienne Fajon and remained subsequently a standard feature of the party schools. 'Teaching culture' — a job carried out by 'reliable' party intellectuals — also followed the trends of the era concerned, from the adulation of socialist realism to more modern cultural concepts in later years.

By the 1950s, the political education system, then, already presented in many ways a mirror image of the party. Like the PCF, it too appeared successful, enthusiastic and dynamic in the immediate postwar era; and just like the PCF, isolated from mainstream politics in France, the political education system then threw itself into the feverish counter-community life style in order to help preserve communist identity and values in the hostile environment. In this activity it proved its worth by maintaining the morale and motivation of party members, militants and cadres and by acting as an invaluable mechanism for safeguarding the leadership's authority, even when that leadership was physically absent (as Maurice Thorez was in the early 1950s). But the early triumphs of

the communist education system also contained the seeds of its own downfall; the training procedures and methods developed in this era still governed the preparation of French communist cadres in the 1980s and beyond.

Chapter Five outlines the development of the political education system during the animated and challenging period 1965-80. Cautious changes in the PCF as advocated first by Waldeck Rochet's leadership were reflected in the political education programmes, as they introduced the concept of a Common Programme to the trainee cadres and guided them on the path towards the Left Union between the Communists and Socialists. This was followed by attempts to change the rigid methods of teaching by allowing more open debate and free discussion; again, this mirrored the PCF's efforts towards more openness and flexibility in the early 1970s. Ironically, the PCF's new strategy of alliance building and openness made the education system's traditional role as a reinforcer of party identity somewhat redundant in the early days of the Left Union. However, this function was quickly reactivated when the communist leadership returned to its isolation and its policy of *centralité ouvrière* (ie, the belief that the working class should play a central and dominant role in society and politics). This policy was reflected in the social origins of the central schools' student population, in particular those of the PCF's elite four-month central schools, where students from working-class background dominated.[10] On the other hand, coupled with the rise of the middle class, this period also saw the emergence of a new type of student and party member, better educated and better informed than in the past, who now began to express criticism of the 'simplistic' study programmes and methods used in party schools.[11] This new development was in clear conflict with the 'reproletarisation' programme which the communist leadership, by systematically favouring the access of working-class students to the higher echelons of the party, was preparing to implement at the precise time when the working class in France was diminishing significantly.

The accelerated and unrelenting decline of the PCF in 1981-90 forms the setting for the sixth and final chapter of this study. An assessment of the study programmes demonstrates how the planners of the education programmes responded to the national and international events: the incoherent and vague strategies which were prompted by the party's needs to survive were simply conveyed to the dwindling student audience in party schools.[12] While the training system had previously proved a useful means of introducing, updating and maintaining the party's strategic choices, it now had nothing coherent to convey. The hastily prepared study programmes were merely responses to the slogans of the party congresses and the Marchais leadership and lacked inspiration and intellectual vision. With the membership in decline, militancy on the wane, and student numbers less than half of those in the previous decade, the whole relevance of the education system seemed in doubt. The final blow came with the collapse of communism; this was the last chance for the party and the education system which it controlled, to engage in a self-critique and respond in a new manner. The party would not, and the education system therefore could not; they thus continued to perpetuate the inflexibility, immobilism and conservatism that had been their trademarks for much of their existence.

In sum, then, there emerges a picture of a tightly-knit system controlled by an orthodox and powerful leadership, a leadership who wished above all to ensure that it would eventually be succeeded by purposely trained cadres who would in turn obediently perpetuate the conservative outlook of their predecessors. Stalin's dictum, 'cadres decide everything', was taken seriously: the education system remained firmly as the leadership's private domain. It is important to note that this political training system

was efficiently safeguarded and held in place by the party's organisational principle of democratic centralism and furthermore, both training system and organisational principle were very closely connected: the internal political education system propped up democratic centralism by supplying 'suitable material' to implement it, while democratic centralism in turn provided the framework for the dissemination of the orthodox ideology. The communist political education system therefore formed one of the most important institutions for the perpetuation of the private and all embracing world of French communism, and the issue of how the PCF trained its leadership is pivotal to the understanding of the party's history and evolution.

**Marja Kivisaari**

*Notes*

[1]    See Baudouin, J., 'Le déclin du PCF', *Regards sur l'actualité,* Mensuel no. 170, avril 1991, pp. 35-43. Courtois, S., 'PCF: l'érosion spectaculaire', *Autrement* (1991), pp. 65-72; Courtois, S. and Peschanski, D., 'From Decline to Marginalisation: the PCF breaks with French Society'*,* in Waller, M. & Fennema, M., (eds) *Communist Parties in Western Europe,* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1988), pp. 47-68; Dainov, E., 'Problems of French Communism 1972-86'*, Western European Politics*, Vol. 10, No. 3, July 1987, pp. 356-75; Ranger, J., 'Le déclin du Parti communiste français'*, Revue française de science politique,* No. 36, février 1986, pp. 44-65; Ross, G., and Jenson, J., 'The tragedy of the French Left'*, The New Left Review,* N. 171, Sept/Oct. 1988, pp. 5-46; Tiersky, R., 'Declining fortunes of the French Communist Party', in *Problems of Communism*, Sept/Oct. 1988, pp. 1-22; Wright, V., 'The French Communist Party during the Fifth Republic: the troubled path', in Machin, H., (ed), *National Communism in Western Europe: a third way to socialism?* (Methuen, London & N.Y., 1983), pp. 90-123.

[2]    See Daniels, R., *A Documentary History of Communism, Vol. 2* (I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., New York, 1987); ); Lavau, G., *A quoi sert le PCF?* (Fayard, Paris, 1981); Naudy, M., *PCF: le suicide* (Albin Michel, Paris, 1986) ; Schapiro, L., *The Government and Politics of the Soviet Union* (Hutchinson University Library, London, 1968; Waller, M., *Democratic Centralism* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1981); Waller, M., 'Democratic Centralism: the Costs of Discipline' in Waller & Fennema, *op. cit.*

[3]    Dawson, R. & Prewitt, K., *Political Socialization* (Little, Borwn, Boston, Mass, 1963); Kavanagh, D., *Political Culture* (Macmillan, London, 1972); and *Political Science and Political Behaviour* (Unwin Hyman, London, 1983); Rush, M., *Politics and Society an Introduction to Political Sociology* (Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hemel Hampstead, 2$^{nd}$ Edition, 1992).

[4]    Almond. G. A., *The Appeals of Communism* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1956); Durham Hollander, G., *Soviet Political indoctrination. Developments in Mass Media and Propaganda since Stalin.* (Praeger Publications, New York, 1972); Holmes, L., *Politics in the Communist World* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1986); Kenez, P. *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilisation, 1917-29* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985); ); Meyer, F., *The Moulding of Communists. The Training of a Communist Cadre* (Harcourt, Brace & World Inc., New York, 1961); Propper Mickiewicz, E., *Soviet Political Schools. The Communist Party Adult Education System* (Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1967).

[5]    Tartakowsky, D., *Ecoles et Editions communistes 1921-33.* (Thèse pour le Doctorat du 3e cycle, Université de Paris VIII, 1977) The thesis has also been published as a book, *Les premiers communistes français* (Presse de la fondation nationale des sciences politiques, Paris, 1980).

[6]    Pudal, P., *Prendre parti: pour une sociologie historique du Parti communiste français* (Presse de la fondation nationale des sciences politiques, Paris, 1989).

[7]    Derville, J. & Croisat, M., 'La socialisation des militants communistes français : éléments d'une enquête dans l'Isère', *Revue française de science politique,* 1979, vol. XXIX, 4-5, août, pp. 760-790 ; Gaxie, D., 'Economie des parties et rétributions du militantisme', *Revue française de science politique,* 1977/1 ; and *Le sens caché* (Le Seuil, Paris, 1987) ; Offrle, M., *Les partis politiques* (Presses universitaires de France, Paris, 1987) ; and *Sociologie des groupes d'intérêt* (Montchrestien, Paris, 1998).

8    Interviews with Etienne Fajon (in charge of the PCF's Education Sector 1935-48 and 1974-79); Charles Fiterman (Central School Director 1962-65); Nicholas Pasquarelli (Central School Director 1962-66); Claude Poperen (Central Scholl Student 1954 and 1959-60); and Marcel Rosette (Central School Director 1956-63); Archives of *Ecole nationale du Parti communiste français,* Draveil, Essonne.

9    Interview with Guy Poussy (Student in Moscow 1962-63).

10   Archives of *Ecole nationale du Parti communiste français,* Draveil, Essonne.

11   Interviews with Jean-Marie Argelès (Secretary of the PCF's Paris Federation 1971-79); and Bernard Pudal (sociologist and federal school student in the 1970s); Archives of *Ecole nationale du Parti communiste français,* Draveil, Essonne.

12   Interview with Francette Lazard (in charge of the PCF's Education Sector 1979-84); Archives of *Ecole nationale du Parti communiste français,* Draveil, Essonne.

# RESEARCH REPORT

## The Moscow Meridian

**The Moscow Meridian: the CPN and the Communist International (1919–1930)**
**Gerrit Voerman Publisher: L. J. Veen Amsterdam/Antwerp ISBN 90 204 4638 5**

This study (developed from an earlier Phd thesis) deals with relations between the Dutch Communist Party (CPN) and the Communist International (referred to hereafter in the abbreviated form of Comintern) during the period from the founding of the international organisation in 1919 to the year 1930. The theme throughout this chronologically constructed account is the party's increasing loss of autonomy as a consequence of the process of 'domestication', instigated by Moscow. The study describes how the CPN as a section of the Comintern, gradually lost its financial, ideological and organisational independence during the 1920s. The CPN's *Gleichschaltung* can be regarded as having been completed by 1930, when the Comintern prescribed in detail how the new party's leadership had to be constituted. The book concludes with a description of the intervention and its after effects.

The decline of the CPN's independence is described against a background of bureaucratisation, centralisation and 'Russification' at the hand of the Comintern: in short, the increasing dominance of the Soviet leaders within the organisation. In turn, this development was strongly influenced by the course of events within the Soviet Union, particularly the struggle for power within the top echelons of the of the Russian Communist Party (RCP) following the death of Lenin in 1924. These developments will only be dealt with cursorily in the book. It then deals with the various methods used by the Comintern in an effort to gain complete control over the CPN, methods such as summoning party representatives to come to Moscow, sending envoys authorised to act on their behalf to the Amsterdam party office, and the provision of financial support.

The loss of authority that all the parties affiliated with the Comintern actually underwent can be particularly well traced within the Dutch section because it was one of the oldest parties with an affiliation with the Comintern. In 1909, the revolutionary wing

of the *Sociaal-Democratische Arbeiderspartij* or SDAP (Social Democratic Labour Party) split itself off from the party and formed the *Sociaal-Democratische Partij*, or SDP (Social Democratic Party). Its leaders, David Wijnkoop and Willem van Ravesteyn, had contacts with Lenin and other Bolsheviks in the years prior to the October Revolution. However, the period during which they were on an equal footing with them came to an abrupt end shortly after the founding of the Comintern in March 1919. The CPN, as the SDP had renamed itself in the meantime, affiliated itself to the Comintern one month later.

**The Process of Domestication**

The process of domestication took place during various partly overlapping periods of time. During the first years it was mainly a matter of bringing the affiliated parties into line in an ideological sense. Towards the middle of the twenties this was followed by a process of making those parties uniform in an organisational sense. In most of the larger national parties, the Comintern was already becoming involved with matters relating to personnel such as the recruitment of those in charge; in the less important sections, this would not happen until 1930. During the whole of this period, the sections were financially dependent on the Comintern following the provision of financial support (for the CPN, this was estimated to be at least NLG 160,000; this would be about NLG 1,500,000 in today's terms — $US 750,000).

During the twenties, developments within the CPN followed this same pattern. After the October Revolution, the expectations of the Dutch party leaders were high as a result of the contacts they had with Lenin. Wijnkoop and Van Ravesteyn assumed that they would come to occupy a special position within the Comintern as a result of that relationship. The instruction to set up a West European branch of the Comintern given to the CPN in 1919 by Moscow seemed to confirm that expectation. The sudden dissolution of the 'Amsterdam Office' six months later brought an end to all the dreams, however. The office had fallen out of favour particularly because of the left-communist position it was taking during a period in which Moscow was attempting to make the Comintern more ideologically homogenous, an operation that was completed by 1921.

After it had managed to enforce ideological conformity, Moscow attempted to effect organisational uniformity within the various sections of the Comintern. A beginning had already been made in the form of the twenty-one conditions that Lenin had laid down. The bolshevisation of the communist party was decreed four years later: they were obliged to adopt the same structure as the RCP. However, at the organisational level, conformity could be enforced less easily than at the ideological level. In many of the parties (including the CPN), this operation was not successful.

The bolshevisation also had the purpose of making the parties more centralised and monolithic. It enabled the leaders of the Comintern sections to strengthen the positions they had within the party. Wijnkoop, Van Ravesteyn and the third party leader, treasurer Jan Ceton, (the so-called trio) attempted to increase discipline for their own purposes. The effect of this was that within the CPN, opposition to the three party leaders increased. There had been opposition to their authoritarian style and what was seen as their hostile position in relation to the *Nationaal Arbeids-Secretariaat*, or NAS (the National Labour Office), a league consisting of anarcho-syndicalist trade unions. The trio were accused of paying too little attention to the Comintern's wishes.

## Recruitment of the Party's Leaders

Discontentment in the CPN with the party's leaders in combination with the relative independence they demonstrated was Moscow's pretext for calling Wijnkoop and Van Ravesteyn to order. This ushered in the third area in which the Comintern was to exercise control during the twenties: selection of the party leadership. In major sections such as the French and German ones, the Comintern had made sure the top echelons had been moulded to their will at a very early stage. Some considerable time passed before the same was achieved within smaller sections such as the CPN. Although in this regard Moscow left the Dutch section to its own devices until 1923, after that year meddling in the CPN's leadership commenced. The form this took can be divided into three phases. Initially, the Comintern played a mediating role in the conflict between the leading trio and the opposition, giving corrective advice or at the most adopting a slightly admonishing position. It functioned as a neutral arbitrator indicating the mistakes made by both parties and looking for compromises. The main objective was the maintenance of unity within the CPN.

This diplomatic approach gradually made way for a sterner approach after the mid-twenties. The Comintern demanded that the opposition be given an equal representation on the party's board and the list of candidates for the Lower House elections. The trio defied Moscow by refusing to accept this proposal, thereby marginalising themselves politically. In the meantime, the Comintern representatives were busy forming a middle group loyal to Moscow within the CPN. This group's task was to help get the Dutch section back to taking the Comintern's line. Despite the fact that Moscow had stressed that it was up to the CPN to choose its own leaders, the trio's successors, being mainly from the middle group, came to the fore under the auspices of the Comintern.

By 1930, the Comintern was no longer showing any leniency. Moscow was dealing with all of the sections in a heavy-handed way. The second generation leaders of the CPN who had helped to ditch the trio were themselves axed. They had to be removed because Moscow, whether correctly or not, doubted their unconditional loyalty. The Comintern was now also appointing the party leaders openly and in an authoritarian way. The policy of mediation had been replaced by one of confrontation.

With this, Moscow's policy of domesticating the CPN was complete. Moscow already had the last word in several important areas, including its trade union strategies, its position with respect to social democracy, colonial politics, the party's organisational structure and the nomination of candidates for the national parliamentary elections. Now the Comintern itself was appointing the party's leadership.

## Opposition to the 'Moscow Meridian'

Justification of the ideological, organisational and personal 'forcing into line' of the Comintern's sections was based on the presumed superiority of the Russian revolutionary experience. As Lenin saw it, the importance of the October Revolution went far beyond the Russian borders; it was a revolution with universal relevance. Just as geographical positioning is based on the standard of the Greenwich zero meridian, the Moscow meridian became the frame of reference within the communist movement: the opinions of those in power in the Soviet Union had become the standard of the international communist movement. The 1917 successes gave the Bolsheviks the right

to function as the Comintern's guiding light and to dictate how all the national parties were to operate.

As a consequence of the increasing Bolshevik domination within the Comintern, a number of prominent party members left the party during the twenties. Herman Gorter was the first to do so, followed by Anton Pannekoek, Henk Sneevliet, Jacques de Kadt and Henriette Roland Holst. They had initially put all their hopes on Moscow. Had not the October Revolution ushered in a new era? All salvation seemed to come from the east; the moral prestige of the Bolsheviks was great in those early years. However, one by one they rebelled against the all-encompassing validity of the Russian Revolution model. Essentially, what they thought was that Moscow was not entitled to take over the spiritual leadership of the revolution in Western Europe since the circumstances in this part of the world were so totally different from those in Russia. As they saw it, there could be no question of a uniform strategy; the western European labour movement had to go its own way, with no meddling on the part of the Bolsheviks. The Comintern had to be completely independent of the Kremlin. The treatment that was meted out to Trotsky after Lenin's death was another reason for Sneevliet, De Kadt and Roland Holst to draw away from Moscow.

It was not only in the CPN but also within the NAS that Moscow's dominance functioned as a divisive element. In 1923, when the trade union federation decided to join the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU), one of the Comintern's subsidiary organisations, a number of anarcho-syndicalists left the federation. They too rejected Moscow's claims to leadership of the international revolutionary labour movement. After all, once NAS had joined the RVI at the end of 1925 it was confronted virtually immediately with what it regarded as Bolshevik pedantry and meddling. In the summer of 1927, NAS turned its back on the RILU, having decided that it was not going to give up its independence. Sneevliet, the chairman of the NAS, claimed that the Bolsheviks were having too great an influence on the RILU.

Wijnkoop's, Van Ravesteyn's and Ceton's clashes with the Comintern mainly had to do with Moscow's policy of organisational centralism. This conflict should also be seen in the context of the polarity between western Europe and Russia. From the time of the founding of the party, the three had seen it as primarily their own. As mentioned above, the party leaders embraced the Comintern's centralist policies if their own interests could thereby be promoted. However, when their independence was put in jeopardy, Wijnkoop, Van Ravesteyn and Ceton rebelled against what they saw as 'meddling.' This was the main issue in their conflict with the Comintern: discipline at the international level and acceptance of the Bolshevik's claim to leadership. Although the trade union question was a major part of the polarity, it was not the crucial issue, even though it has been represented as such within the CPN's historiography. It was simply one of the areas in which the trio permitted themselves a point of view that deviated from that of Moscow.

In 1925, Wijnkoop, Van Ravesteyn and Ceton resigned after they had rejected interference by Moscow in the nomination of candidates for the Lower House elections. One year later the CPN expelled them from the party, a decision later endorsed by the Comintern. The trio formed a new party, but it did not take long for Van Ravesteyn to completely reject communism. As he saw it, the western European labour movement could not possibly be run from Moscow. In 1930, after the new leaders of the CPN had taken up their posts, Wijnkoop dissolved his dissident party and again affiliated himself to the Comintern and its Dutch section, though it was not until he had made a full

confession of his political crimes that he was allowed to be admitted as a member again. Wijnkoop's submission was symbolic of the fact that the CPN had become dependent on Moscow.


## The Communists' 'Moral Community'

This study is mainly concerned with describing the relationship between the CPN's leadership and the Comintern. How the party members at the grass root level reacted to Moscow is dealt with in the final chapter. That it was not terribly difficult for Moscow to gain power over the CPN had partly to do with the attraction it had for a part of the Dutch labour movement, though admittedly only a small part: in the twenties, the CPN could boast of a mere couple of thousand supporters and never achieved more than 2.3% of the vote in the national elections. Hero worship of Lenin and all that the October Revolution symbolised, along with warm feelings towards the Soviet Union, had laid the foundation for a subculture with a specifically communist orientation which mainly constituted the CPN's supporters. This 'moral community' had an identity all of its own. Fostered by Moscow, an insider world of subsidiary organisations came into being, symbols were set in place, and traditions were manufactured. The party was central to this community's existence, and it played a major role in the life of its members.

In the metaphor of the 'Moscow Meridian,' the two elements that dominated the relationship between the CPN and Moscow — the political and ideological magnetism exerted by the Soviet Union and the politically and morally based centralist leadership of the Comintern — came to expression. They were to form the basis for the stalinisation of the CPN that got underway towards the end of the twenties.


## New Sources of Information: the Comintern Archives

There is virtually no archive material on the CPN dating back to the period between the wars. When Hitler sent German forces into the Netherlands in May 1940, the party archives were destroyed. The archives of the internal security service, which almost certainly would have contained material relating to Dutch communism, were also destroyed during that period. The scant personal archives of the leading CPN members of the time are silent when it comes to relations with the Comintern. In the absence of source material, it has thus so far been impossible to obtain a good and accurate view of relations between the CPN and Moscow in that interbellum period.

The opening up of the Comintern archives at the beginning of the nineties has changed all that. This study is largely based on material that originates from the Comintern archives filed at the *Rossijski Tsentr Chranenija i Izoetsjenija Dokumentov Novejsjej Istorii* (RTsChIDNI: The Russian Centre for the Conservation and Study of Documents relating to Modern History), since 1999 called the *Rossijski Gasoedarstvenny Archiv Sotsialno-Polititsjeskoj Istorii* (RGASPI: Russian State Social and Political History Archives). For the first time it has become possible to obtain documents relating to the main organs (*Präsidium*, *Sekretariat*, *Politisches Sekretariat*, *Politische Kommission*), regional offices (*Anglo-Amerikanisches Ländersekretariat*, *Mitteleuropäisches Länderse-kretariat*, *Ost-Sekretariat*) and regional bureaus (*Amsterdam Büro*, *West-Europäisches Sekretariat*) in order to reconstruct the relationship between the Comintern and the CPN as seen from Moscow's point of view. The RILU's archives have also been consulted.

The enormous volume of information make one thing obvious: during the twenties, Moscow was constantly tightening the Comintern's reins, a process that had already started under Lenin. At the same time, it is clear that the Comintern was less of a monolith than has been assumed until recently: in the middle of the twenties, those Comintern bureaucrats who were responsible for the CPN had quite a considerable amount of personal input in what happened. Right up to 1930, the leaders in Moscow were to a certain extent delegating decision-making in respect of the composition of the party leadership to their office in Berlin. This combination of centralisation and decentralisation should really be analysed in greater detail: what is needed is a thorough study on the Comintern's central apparatus in Moscow and its relations with the sections elsewhere.

**Gerrit Voerman**

# FEATURES

## The CPGB and the national question in post-war Wales: the case of Idris Cox

This article explores the attitude of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) to the Welsh national question in the post-war period. It particularly focuses on the departure of CPGB Welsh organiser Idris Cox to take up a position with the party's International Department in London in 1951. A number of writers have suggested that Cox's removal was due to his understanding of Welsh nationalism and his subsequent desire for the CPGB to address it in a positive fashion.[1] The article is a revised version of a chapter in my Masters thesis 'The Communist Party in South Wales, 1945-70', which also considers some of the issues involved in the CPGB's turn toward a more serious engagement with the national question in the late 1960s.[2] Neither in this article nor in the thesis have I been able to consider the organisation and views of the Communist Party on a national (Welsh) basis in any great depth. A small North Wales district of the party was set up in 1937, its first All-Wales congress being held in 1945. However, even in considering the party's attitude to the Welsh nationality, this is not necessarily a glaring omission. The organisation of the North Wales CPGB in the post-war period remained modest.[3] The strength, tradition and weight of the Communist Party remained in South Wales and this had a noticeable effect upon the developing attitude of the Welsh party as a whole to national demands.

### The CPGB and the Welsh National Question: the Historical Context

The Communist Party first broached the national question in the Popular Front period of the mid-to-late 1930s. Idris Cox produced a pamphlet entitled *The People Can Save South Wales* (1937), following his return to South Wales as district organiser. Subsequently, the CPGB's Central Committee recognised that it had neglected the Welsh dimension and the right to self-determination was asserted, alongside support for the continued use of the Welsh language and Welsh devolution. A speech by Cox at the first all-Wales congress of the Communist Party in 1945 reflected this turnaround:

Wales needs to be treated as a nation, not only to enrich its language and culture, but to develop its rich natural and mineral wealth, to increase its productive forces, to revive its agriculture and to guarantee its future prosperity.[4]

It was however at this congress that some divisions within the Welsh party became apparent. Arthur Horner, president of the South Wales Miners' Federation (SWMF) and chairman of the Communist Party's Welsh Committee, opposed the demand for a parliament for Wales, after Cox had proposed it.[5] It is interesting to note that in criticising Harry Pollitt's narrow defeat in Rhondda East in the 1945 general election, Cox thought that a more positive attitude to Welsh national issues should have been shown to the electorate.[6]

In 1950, the Welsh Communist Party welcomed the inauguration of the Parliament for Wales campaign, Cox being chosen as the party representative on the national campaign committee after attending its inaugural conference in Llandudno. In October 1950 Bill Rees presented his paper — 'The Problem of Welsh Nationality and the Communist Solution' — to the Welsh Committee, advocating a federal union as a solution to Britain's national question. According to Gwyn Williams his work was subsequently shelved.[7] Following on from this, Idris Cox himself was moved to the party's International Department in June 1951, under something of a cloud and amid what Davies cites as 'accusations of "bourgeois nationalist deviation"'.[8]

Demands for the devolution of Wales were kept on the party's formal agenda throughout the 1950s and 1960s, but it was not until the publication of Welsh secretary Bert Pearce's article, 'The National Future of Scotland and Wales', in the November 1967 issue of *Marxism Today*, that the party really began to show some political comfort in publicly debating the issue and advocating national demands. This was to be followed up by the production of an irregular, bilingual magazine, *Cyffro*, in 1969 and the party's submission of evidence before the Kilbrandon Commission on the constitution in 1970.


**The Welsh National Question — The Cause of Cox's Removal?**

Brian Davies and Gwyn A Williams have both argued that it was Idris Cox's position as the Welsh party's most prominent advocate of national rights that led to his departure to London. According to Davies:

These decidedly muddy waters were never really cleared up by Cox himself. Even those who got to know him on a personal level did not get any great clarity as to what had actually happened in 1951:

... even when I knew him he was a bit reticent to go into detail ... What exactly happened in 1951 blow-by-blow I couldn't tell you to be honest ... [I] never got a clear account from Idris ...[9]

Cox's own account of events in his unpublished memoir is not very illuminating. He places his move to London in the context of the electoral setbacks of the time, in particular the South Wales party's poor performance in the 1950 general election:

Main responsibility was placed upon my political leadership in Wales, and it was proposed that I should give up my position and take on responsible

work on a national level in another sphere of the activity of the CP.[10]

On the basis of this it is probable that the CPGB's electoral performance in South Wales was the reason used by the national leadership to justify their removal of Cox. In a lengthy passage Cox questions this analysis:

> There were various views as to whether the Party situation was worse than in other parts of the country, whether all responsibility could be placed on my shoulders or the lack of collective leadership, and on the methods adopted in proposing that a change be made ... The situation in Wales was a mirror of the serious problem facing the Party as a whole ... Subsequent Communist votes in General Elections reached a record low proportion in 1970 when the vote in Rhondda East dropped to 659, I would not regard this as an argument for still another change of Party leadership in Wales.[11]

Reading between the lines, Cox is suggesting that the drop in votes could not be laid at his door, in that it reflected the problems the party was experiencing in relation to the Cold War. It is perhaps the case that Cox is alluding to the possibility that there was another reason behind his removal, in that he clearly did not regard poor electoral performance as a worthy explanation. Subsequently he hinted that he experienced problems in the Communist Party over the question of political work in the Parliament for Wales campaign:

> I don't think anyone would claim that it succeeded in creating a mass movement in favour [of a Welsh parliament]. I frankly admit that Plaid Cymru was far more active than the Communist Party in this campaign, and one needs to be self-critical of the weakness of the Communist Party in this respect.[12]

Cox's memory of these events is reinforced when one considers a Welsh district report from April 1951 which highlights the problems of the CPGB in relation to the campaign:

> The Party membership as a whole is largely indifferent to this movement. Some are even hostile, and there is a lack of conviction among even many leading members. This seems to be due to three main reasons: (a) fear that the Party will contaminate itself with middle class and religious elements, (b) the erroneous idea that a Parliament for Wales means economic and political separation and (c) that we shall neglect the class fight and our socialist aims.[13]

Caution does however need to be exercised when considering Cox's retrospective defence of his organisational capabilities. The fact that he was able to parry such criticisms with a degree of conviction, does not undermine some of the anxieties that the party leadership in London may well have been feeling at the time. A draft speech to be read by William Lauchlan at an extended meeting of the Executive Committee in February 1949 asked members to consider the communist position in 'important districts' such as Wales, Lancashire, the North-East and Scotland:

> Why is it that in these former 'depressed areas', centres of heavy industry and [a] highly organised working class with militant traditions of struggle, the Party isn't immeasurably stronger than it actually is? ...[14]

In July 1950, Harry Pollitt read out a statement to the Executive Committee regarding the question of working-class unity and the subsequent requirement of the CPGB to forge a close working relationship with the Labour Party. The executive circulated this document and asked for the various district leaderships to communicate the reception from the party rank and file. Idris Cox replied on behalf of the Welsh Committee in a letter to Peter Kerrigan.[15] This dispatch reported the results of a Welsh Committee meeting and three emergency area aggregates.

Considering the emphasis that the party leadership were placing upon Pollitt's pronouncement, Cox's missive creates a poor impression. His general view of the discussion on the Welsh Committee was that 'it revealed a tendency towards general acceptance without a full conviction'. Its author refers to 'quite a deal of doubt on the possibility of winning Labour Party members', something that was even to be seen affecting some of the 'best comrades'. Cox admitted that the West Wales aggregate was 'not well organised, and was held in a small room which could not seat more than 50, out of a membership of 400'. A better attendance was reported at the Rhondda aggregate (120) with 'no serious opposition' but 'some sectarian tendencies' and more 'serious doubts' as to the plausibility of changing the outlook of Labour Party members. All in all, Cox's account appears to represent a desire to put a positive gloss on some seemingly pessimistic insights:

> Possibly, I have drawn attention to the negative aspects of the [Welsh Committee] discussion ... But it was a healthy discussion on the whole, though I have no illusions that we shall have to wage a strong and consistent fight to get more clarity and conviction among the leading members.[16]

It is not difficult to imagine how this could reflect badly on Idris Cox's leadership in Wales. Ingrained in communist culture at this point was the necessary belief that organisational stumblings and poor results were indicative of activist failings. This was obligatory because if it were to be denied this would necessarily lead to an examination of the Cold War and the party's identity with the eastern bloc. In the immediate post-war period this was something that those directing the CPGB were highly reluctant to do.

It is difficult to prove absolutely that Cox was despatched to London on the basis of a party opposition to the fact that he symbolised a strong stand on the question of Welsh rights. However, it is highly probable that this was a significant factor in events, possibly coupled with a dissatisfaction with Cox's organisational achievements in one of the CPGB's traditional strongholds. If we accept this probability, then this opposition toward the incorporation of Welsh demands into the Communist Party's political outlook needs to be accounted for.

## A Miners' Opposition?

We saw above that it was Arthur Horner who argued against Cox's espousal of a Welsh parliament at the Party congress of 1945. Bert Pearce thought that it was the CPGB mining cohort who were Idris Cox's main opponents in 1951:

> Idris was very strongly for Welsh national rights. But he was jumped on, not only by a lot of local people who didn't agree with it. A lot of the ... miners, they were all for the workers of the world taking power ... their idea was they weren't going to mess about with any [Welsh parliament]. They were

gonna take over the pits and run them, the miners ... these were all very strong ideas and a whole lot of the most sensible miners' leaders, the best communists amongst them, were very strongly for holding onto this ... clear vision ... there was a very strong feeling that it [a Welsh parliament] was going to be a divisive thing ...[17]

If we make reference to a report of the Welsh district, sent to the CPGB's Political Committee in July 1946, we can see that Pearce's impressions are borne out. The report puts a great accent on proposing ardent party support for Welsh national rights:

This is emphasised because the general tendency in the Party is to ignore the existence of a national problem in Wales, and among *prominent members in trade unions* even to pour scorn on any efforts by the Party to formulate a policy for Wales.[18]

One also has to consider that communist mining partisans in the South Wales coalfield were, from January 1945, members of a coherent national union structure in the form of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). It is fairly unsurprising that Horner was opposed to Welsh national rights inside the Communist Party considering that he had been one of the main architects of the NUM.[19] This process was also interwoven with the syndicalist influence that Bert Pearce alludes to above.

In the post-war period syndicalism and industrial unionism continued to exercise a definite influence upon prominent communist miners in South Wales such as Horner, Will Paynter, Dai Dan Evans and Dai Francis. Such strategies place the emphasis on all-inclusive union structures in order to utilise the power of the industrial working class. Indeed it was Idris Cox himself who had in 1940 been highly critical of communist leaders in the SWMF for isolating themselves from the broader political work of the party (partly as a result of Horner's tendency to soft-pedal the CPGB's initial anti-war perspective).[20] It is therefore highly plausible that communist miners played a significant role in the departure of Idris Cox from Wales in 1951 as well as any South Walian opposition against the party's adoption of national demands in the preceding decade.

Not all communist miners leaders should be tarred with the same brush. Vic Allen characterised Welsh speaker Dai Francis as having 'a curious mixture of Communist and Welsh religious non-conformist principles'.[21] Francis, as General Secretary of the South Wales Area NUM, played a leading role in the establishment of the Welsh TUC in 1973. The party's credibility amongst Welsh speakers in the post-war era essentially fell on the shoulders of figures such as Francis, as well as T E Nicholas and his son Islwyn.


**A Cosmopolitan Coalfield**

The industrialisation of South Wales and its growth as a centre of exports in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries meant that the area was subject to large-scale immigration, from the English in particular. This had ramifications for the existence of a specifically Welsh identity. The 'Anglicisation of South Wales' posed particular problems for the use and survival of the Welsh language, as Tim Williams has shown.[22] This process meant that the identity of the inhabitants of South Wales would no longer be straightforward in essence. These are the broad social factors which would work on the Communist Party's perceptions of national needs in South Wales.

The cosmopolitan nature of the South Wales coalfield manifested itself in the working class internationalism that developed inside its boundaries from the turn of the century:

> it provides one of the comparatively rare illustrations of what classical nineteenth century socialist theory hoped for: proletarian nations where working classes resisted the attractions of nationalist agitation, preferring to organise under the banner of an international ideology based on class interest.[23]

Indeed, this internationalism could be perceived as the very antithesis of Welsh nationalism:

> The Liberal nationalism of the quarter of a century before the First World War was strongly associated with both nonconformity and the Welsh bourgeoisie of the industrial south. A resurgent working class movement understandably tended to produce an ideology which was the antithesis of this in every respect - revolutionary, atheistic, and in its own eyes firmly internationalist.[24]

The working class movement in South Wales (and in particular, the miners) developed a commitment to the *fundamental* internationalist threads of marxist thought. Francis and Smith have shown how this reverberated through the history of the South Wales Miners in the twentieth century. Communist Party members were active protagonists of this internationalism (inside and outside 'the Fed'), which they manifested through the depth of their commitment to the Republican cause in the Spanish Civil War (1936-39).

According to Davies this international consciousness led to a situation in which there was a dismissal of Welsh nationality amongst some working-class militants as a worthwhile cause which led to a failure to defeat the 'English great-nation chauvinism of the "British" ruling class'.[25]


**After Cox — Retreating on the National Question?**

A key contention of the argument advanced by Davies and Williams is that following Cox's departure to London in 1951 the party in South Wales began to neglect the issue of Welsh national demands and that this represented 'a striking change in the party's political priorities in Wales'.[26] Formally speaking, the party retained a public commitment to Welsh devolution, as is shown by a document produced in April 1954 which acknowledged that the 'Welsh people face special problems' and suggested a positive commitment to national demands:

> The Communist Party says that the Welsh people must be given their full freedom to develop their economic, social and cultural resources, and welcomes the growing determination of the people to have a greater say in running the affairs of our country. *A Parliament for Wales alone can ensure the full development of the Welsh People.*[27]

The statement goes on to make a number of immediate demands including the establishment of a Secretary of State for Wales and a National Planning Commission. The Party was thus still in effect acknowledging the influence of people such as Idris Cox and T E Nicholas. A concentration on the public face of the Communist Party is

therefore unrevealing. It was not uncommon for the party to have internal debates about the national issue. Bert Pearce remembered 'inheriting' such a discussion when he became Welsh Secretary in 1960:

> I remember this very well because one of the first papers about the nature of Wales was written by a Professor [George Thompson] in Birmingham ... Bill [Alexander - Pearce's predecessor] knew him very well and he got him to do us an opening to a discussion that they had down here and when I came down then in 1960 this was one of the things that I inherited ...[28]

There are however other pieces of evidence that suggest such examples cannot merely be taken at face value. One is a letter from the steelworker and party veteran Enoch Collins of Llanelli printed in the CPGB weekly *World News* in February 1957. Pointing to a perceived disparity between the theory and practice of the CPGB in South Wales, Collins stressed the need for the party to re-assess its attitude to Welsh national rights:

> There has for years been a lag in this aspect of our agitation and work, although there was a period when the Welsh district of the Party published the *Communist Manifesto* in Welsh and also had many pamphlets on Wales and Welsh problems. In those days they had prominence in the Welsh National Eisteddfod ... But Welsh pamphlets on Welsh problems are a thing of the past even during this period when there is a real revival in the demands for greater Welsh rights and self-government.[29]

Collins saw this prominent Communist role at the *eisteddfodau* being taken over by explicit Welsh nationalists such as Plaid Cymru, complaining that the 'Welsh people don't see us showing any interest in the problems of national rights and culture'.[30] It should be noted from the above quotation that Collins also draws a comparison with the Welsh party at the time it was under the leadership of Idris Cox. Collins goes on to accuse the CPGB of trailing behind the Labour Party:

> because they [the Labour Party] have repudiated the basic campaign for Welsh rights, Welsh Parliament and Welsh TUC etc., so we back-pedal on these issues. We say formally at election times and in our hand-outs that we believe in these things, but in reality we kill any semblance of real demand for them.
>
> If the Party had actively campaigned with conviction for a Parliament for Wales, the Welsh miners would have supported this.[31]

Similarly in a report to the CPGB's Political Committee in January 1954, the Welsh leadership draw attention to some of the failings in the Party's ongoing work in the Parliament for Wales campaign, hinting also at a definite suspicion toward Party members becoming infected with a 'Welsh nationalist' taint:

> On the one hand the work has been inadequate so that reactionary ideas have increasingly come to the fore in the movement and we have been unable to harness the national aspirations towards a British Road to Socialism. On the other hand some elements in the Welsh Party elevate the national question out of its place and think of solutions without a British People's Democracy.[32]

One can also pick up a subsequent acknowledgement of the Communist Party's

deficiencies in this field from certain allusions made when the party began to pay considerable attention to the British national question in the late 1960s. Bert Pearce, by that time Welsh Secretary and the person to whom the introduction of the party debate on *The National Problem in Britain* had been entrusted to in 1967, admitted in the pages of *Marxism Today* that the debate had been 'rather late and slow'.[33] Pearce made a more revealing comment in reply to Bert Ward, a party activist in London, who (according to Pearce) saw 'nationalism within Britain as baseless and therefore a reactionary diversion from the mainstream of socialist struggle':[34]

> In this rejection of the whole national issue, Bert Ward stands alone in the discussion, but I am sure not in our Party or the movement generally. Indeed his refusal to raise the very real solid factual basis on which national movements do actually exist today expresses an attitude which most of us shared too long, an attitude compounded of sectarian Marxism and the conditioning of our imperialist society. It has been the basis for the neglect of the national issues in Britain by the working class movement and, especially, by the Labour Party and the Trade Unions in the periods of their greatest growth in Wales and Scotland.[35]

Pearce also admitted that the Communist Party's practical work around Welsh national demands had, up until that time, been rather weak:

> our Party has done too little to launch serious campaigning for these national demands or, in particular, to win the Labour Movement for active support for them.[36]

This was explained by the previously referred to fear of dividing the British working class along national lines and a tendency to think of Welsh and Scottish Parliaments as 'merely a desirable extension of democracy which will be readily granted in a Socialist Britain'.[37] In a similar vein, an internal bulletin of the North Walian Communist Party in 1969 talked of the 'tragic neglect of the past years'[38] in relation to the party's work in the field of nationalist demands.

The very fact that the CPGB was willing to have its past failings in actively addressing the issue of Welsh national rights recognised in public would seem to suggest that the 1950s and early 1960s were an era in which such questions were of little day-to-day importance to key sections of the party leadership in South Wales. To a very considerable extent, the revival of an interest in the Welsh national question can be attributed to pressures from outside the party, notably the political breakthrough of Plaid Cymru, which in the Rhondda West by-election of March 1967, came a close second to Labour and pushed the CPGB into a distant third place with a mere 6.8% of the poll. In a situation where a growing disillusionment with the record of the Labour Party was becoming apparent, it was Plaid that was making headway, not the CPGB, and it was to this that the CPGB appears to have responded.

In conclusion, it is therefore highly probable that Cox's determination for the Communist Party to show a positive hand in relation to the national question in Wales, was a key reason — though not necessarily the only reason — for his removal from the South Wales district in 1951. Subsequently, there is evidence to suggest that the Welsh Communist Party retreated on its previous support for Welsh campaigns, though it must be stressed that this was an *informal* development and not necessarily part of the public face of the Communist Party. Exactly the same may of course be true of the party's later commitment to Welsh devolution, and it may be that some of the difficulties that

sections of the CPGB had in accounting for and relating to Welsh nationalism in the immediate post-war period were carried over into its subsequent development on the issue.

**Lyndon White**

*Notes*

1    See for example B. Davies, 'Heading For the Rocks?' *Arcade* 5 February 1982 and G.A. Williams, *When Was Wales?* (Penguin, 1985) pp274-5.

2    L. White, 'The Communist Party in South Wales, 1945-70' (MPhil, Cardiff, 1997).

3    In 1942 the North Wales district of the Communist Party had 200 members, compared to 2200 registered in South Wales. Cited in K. Newton, *The Sociology of British Communism* (Allen Lane, 1969) p177.  A list of delegates for the CPGB's national congress in November 1973 shows that by this time the Party only had 78 members in North Wales and only 108 in North and West Wales combined. This is opposed to 1606 registered members in South Wales.

4    *Communist Policy For The People Of Wales: Report of the First All-Wales Congress of the Communist Party* (CPGB Welsh Committee, 1945) p12.

5    Brian Davies argues that Cox edited this out of the published report of the congress. Author's interview with Brian Davies, Pontypridd. Cox did subsequently acknowledge Horner's opposition in his unpublished memoirs, referring to Horner's comments at the Congress as an 'unprecedented step'. Cox, 'From Coal Mines to Communist Ideals', unpublished manuscript, pp74-5.

6    J. Mahon, *Harry Pollitt* (Lawrence and Wishart, 1976) p309.

7    Williams, *When Was Wales?*,  p175.

8    Davies, 'Heading for the rocks', p10.

9    Author's interview with Brian Davies, Pontypridd.

10   Cox, 'From Coal Mines', p81.

11   Ibid, pp81-82.

12   Ibid, pp91-92.

13   Welsh District report to CPGB Political Committee, May 1950-April 1952: NMLH CP/Cent/Org/11/1.

14   Draft text of a speech by W. Lachlan to an extended Executive Committee meeting 26-27February 1949. CPGB Executive Committee minutes, 1949: NMLH CP/Cent/EC/01/07.

15   Idris Cox to Peter Kerrigan, 26 July 1950: CPGB Executive Committee minutes, 1950: NMLH CP/Cent/EC/02/02.

16   Ibid.

17   Author's interview with Bert Pearce, Cardiff.

18   Information Report on the Welsh District: for CPGB Political Committee, 11 July 1946: NMLH CP/CENT/ORG/11/1. My emphasis.

19   See Francis, H., 'Learning from bitter experience: the making of the NUM' in A. Campbell, N. Fishman, and D. Howell, *Miners, Unions and Politics, 1910-47* (Scolar Press, 1996) pp253-71.

20   K. Morgan, *Against Fascism and War: Ruptures and Continuities in British Communist Politics, 1934-41* (Manchester University Press, 1989) pp141-42.

21   V.L. Allen, *The Militancy of British Miners* (Moor Press, 1981) p130.

22   T. Williams, 'The Anglicisation of South Wales' in R. Samuel, (ed.) *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity. Volume II: Minorities and Outsiders* (Routledge, 1989) pp193-203.

23     E.J. Hobsbawm, cited in Hechter, M., *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic fringe in British national development, 1536-1966* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975) p264.

24     B. Davies, 'Towards a New Synthesis', *Planet* 37/38, May 1977, p58.

25     Ibid.

26     Davies (1982) p10.

27     *Communist Statement on the Future of Wales*, April 1954.

28     Author's interview with Bert Pearce, Cardiff.

29     Letter from Enoch Collins, Llanelli, *World News* Vol. 5, no. 4. 2/2/57 p77.

30     Ibid.

31     Ibid. p78.

32     Report to the Political Committee on the work of the Communist Party in Wales, 28th January 1954. Communist Party Archive CP/CENT/ORG/11/1.

33     Pearce, B, 'The National Problem in Britain: A Reply to Some Points in Discussion' in *Marxism Today*, December 1968 p360.

34     Ibid.

35     Ibid.

36     Pearce, B, 'The National Future of Scotland and Wales' in *Marxism Today*, November 1967 p346.

37     Ibid.

38     'The National Problem In Britain' in *Northern Star*, North Wales Bulletin of CPGB, January 1969.

# Hugh MacDiarmid: the Poet and the Party

Hugh MacDiarmid joined the Communist Party of Great Britain in London in the summer of 1934.[1] In the previous spring he had failed to be reinstated in the National Party of Scotland of which he had been a founder member in 1928.[2] Yet at the time MacDiarmid joined the CPGB, he was finding his way towards John MacLean's position, of an independent Scottish Workers Republic. His poem, 'John MacLean (1879-1923)', was first published in *The Free Man* on 23 September 1933. He visited Grassic Gibbon in Welwyn Garden City in the spring of 1934 and reported that 'Towards the end ... [Gibbon] ... became more and more a Scottish Communist-Nationalist *à la* John MacLean',[3] ie, he ascribed his own position to Gibbon since Gibbon never referred to MacLean. By the time MacDiarmid came to write 'Red Scotland' which was finished in April 1935, he was in full agreement with MacLean's position, and quoted MacLean's pamphlets, 'The coming war with America' (Winter 1919) and 'The Irish Tragedy: Scotland's Disgrace' (June 1920).

MacDiarmid also wrote out for the first time the quotation from Lenin's speech in November 1922 at the Fourth Congress of the Communist International which he included twice in *Lucky Poet* and which became one of his favourite quotations:

> It would be a very serious mistake to suppose that one can become a Communist without making one's own the treasures of human knowledge. It would be mistaken to imagine that it is enough to adopt the Communist formulas and conclusions of Communist science without mastering the sum-total of different branches of knowledge, the final outcome of which is

> Communism. ... Communism becomes an empty phrase, a mere facade, and the Communist a mere bluffer; if he has not worked over in his consciousness the whole inheritance of human knowledge — made his own, and worked over anew, all that was of value in the more than two thousand years of development of human thought.[4]

In parentheses MacDiarmid added: 'My Scottish Communist comrades must forgive me if I am quite unable to recognise any of them in this description of what really constitutes a Communist.'[5] His comrades were soon to become aware of this opinion. The first portion of 'Red Scotland' to appear in print formed part of a three-column letter, headlined 'Scotland, France & Working Class Interests', on the front page of the third issue of *New Scotland*, 26 October 1935.[6] The 'interests' given here form a heady mixture of a Scottish 'proletarian and Republican' secession from the Empire, and a revival of the Auld Alliance in the belief that 'the alignments in the coming war will ... probably be England, Germany, Italy, and Japan against France and America.' It should be borne in mind that, though much less radical than MacDiarmid's 'proletarian and Republican' position, the 1937 SNP Conference passed a resolution 'that the Scottish National Party is strongly opposed to the man power of Scotland being used to defend an Empire in the governing of which she has no voice.' In the summer of 1939, too, MacDiarmid still believed that a time must come when the Scottish workers would be 'actuated by a desire *not to be used as cannon fodder* in the coming war with America for which English Imperialism is planning.'[7]

The letter in *New Scotland* brought MacDiarmid into public conflict with one of the Scottish communist comrades he had implicitly slighted in 'Red Scotland', Peter Kerrigan, a near contemporary, then Secretary of the Scottish District Committee and member of the Executive Committee of the CPGB.[8] John Lochore, a veteran of the 1936 Hunger March and also of the International Brigade, has recalled that 'Kerrigan was a very, very hard man. He was very, very firm and very Party-lineish — no deviation and so forth. But as far as honesty and integrity went he was the model for that.'[9] In his reply in the *Daily Worker*, 25 November 1935, reprinted in *New Scotland* on 30 November, Kerrigan stated that 'If in spite of the joint efforts of the British workers such imperialist war took place, our task in Scotland would be, together with the rest of the British workers, to struggle for the proletarian revolution'. He also called on MacDiarmid to dissociate from the economic theories of Major C H Douglas which MacDiarmid regarded as 'the alternative to Fascism and the complement and corrective of Communism',[10] and which he continued to believe in throughout his life.

The main thrust of MacDiarmid's second letter of 14 December was that *vis-a-vis* Kerrigan he was in by far the superior intellectual position. He situated himself as belonging to 'the revolutionary section of Scottish Nationalists' and claimed that his views were in accord with the views of the leading marxist thinkers on the national question. 'What are Communists doing in Scotland at all if not working to achieve a Communist Scotland?'

In the concluding letter on 1 February 1936 Kerrigan considered that 'Scotland is not a non-sovereign nation, and therefore we cannot put forward the demand for political secession.' It was incomprehensible to him that MacDiarmid, who had slighted Georgi Dimitrov's status as a thinker, should be 'in the position to proclaim his membership of the Communist Party.'

## 1936 — Criticism and Correspondence

On 10 June 1936 the Scottish District Secretariat wrote the first of more than twenty letters to Hugh MacDiarmid over the next three years with regard to his membership and his views. He preserved and bequeathed these to the National Library of Scotland in a special collection relating to his political and other activities from 1929 to 1978.[11] 'We have raised with our Party Centre certain questions regarding yourself which involved also your membership of the Party. The Centre has instructed us to get in touch with you personally in order to take these matters up and then report to them.'[12] The Secretariat requested a meeting either in Glasgow or with its representatives in Edinburgh.

From the evidence of the Secretariat's next letter, MacDiarmid replied that he would be 'down soon' in Edinburgh, and thus a pattern was established which would last until February 1939 since MacDiarmid never met the Secretariat even when he was in Glasgow for the dinner in honour of William Power on 3 December 1938 and a meeting had been arranged for 6 or 7 December. Of over a dozen letters which MacDiarmid wrote to the party justifying his position, and which are known about from the evidence of the party's replies, nothing has so far been traced.

The first explicit criticism made by the Secretariat arose from MacDiarmid's open letter to O H Whyte, 1 July 1936, which was prepared like a press handout with the headline 'PROLETARIAN-SEPARATIST LITERARY LINE IN SCOTLAND'. In the third issue of the monthly *Outlook*, June 1936, James Whyte, the literary editor, had published the first chapter of Edwin Muir's *Scott and Scotland* in which Muir stressed that Scots was no longer a homogeneous language. Whyte had declined to publish MacDiarmid's letter in reply. On this occasion the Secretariat avoided comment on Muir because they were 'not fully conversant with the controversy between you, Muir and Whyte' .They took issue with MacDiarmid over his proposals to run as a candidate in the Edinburgh University Rectorial Election in November on a 'Communist proletarian separatist-Republican line' and to organise an 'Inter-University United Front — Socialists, Communists, and Scottish Nationalists — Conference' without consultation with them as a party member.[13] The Secretariat also received a copy of MacDiarmid's four-page pamphlet, *Scotland; and the Question of a Popular Front Against Fascism and War* which was published by the Hugh MacDiarmid Book Club during the Rectorial campaign. In the pamphlet, MacDiarmid asked:

> Are the young men of Scotland once again to be sacrificed wholesale in another great Imperialist War? There would be no danger of anything of the sort if Scotland were once again an independent nation, as it ought to be. *The last War was Ireland's opportunity; the next must be Scotland's.* There is widespread discussion to-day of the need for a Popular Front in Britain. What is needed, however, is not a British National People's Front but an International People's Front in the British Isles; a very different matter; and a movement that would signalise a deathblow at the heart of the British Empire.[14]

Later in the pamphlet MacDiarmid defined this International People's Front as a Front 'of the workers of Scotland, England, Wales, and Cornwall.'[15]

The sentences which the Secretariat took exception to were quoted back to MacDiarmid. 'The betrayal of John MacLean's line by the Communist Party of Great

Britain has resulted in a loss to Scottish Socialism beyond all reckoning. Even William Gallacher, MP, who was primarily responsible for it, admits this in his autobiography, *Revolt on the Clyde*.'[16] Consequently MacDiarmid was expelled by the unanimous decision of the Scottish District Committee and informed by letter on 30 November.

In November, too, the Scottish issue of *Left Review* appeared with contributions by Edwin and Willa Muir, James Whyte, William Soutar, Catherine Carswell, Neil Gunn, James Barke and Edward Scouller, a friend of Edwin Muir, but not by MacDiarmid, who had earlier contributed a poem and a letter to the magazine. In a letter to MacDiarmid, Francis George Scott reported that the issue had been 'engineered' by Douglas Boddie, manager of Collet's Bookshop in the High Street, Glasgow, Mary Litchfield and James Whyte.[17] Boddie had claimed to Scott that he had written to MacDiarmid for a contribution but had received no reply. *Left Review* was published by the British Section of the Writers' International.


## 1937 — Appealing Against Expulsion

On 8 March 1937 MacDiarmid appealed against his expulsion from the party. The reply from the party centre in London on 7 April was conciliatory, although it appeared to conflate the correspondence in *New Scotland* with the exception taken to *Scotland; and the Question of a Popular Front against Fascism and War*, without giving an accurate account of either. 'As far as we are aware, the question of the differences between yourself and the DPC (District Party Committee) arose out of an article which you wrote in a Scots Nationalist paper on the question of the Popular Front. This article in the opinion of our Scots District Committee and in our opinion was rather anti-English people as well as anti-British imperialism.'[18]

MacDiarmid was re-admitted to the party by the Appeals Commission during the congress in May. In return for re-admission he was asked for an undertaking to 'submit the manuscript of any book dealing with Party political policy to the Party Secretariat for consideration.'[19] Clearly he gave this undertaking as the issue was raised with him on 24 June 1938 when he started *The Voice of Scotland* in that month without consultation.

The party correspondence for the rest of 1937 dealt with MacDiarmid's idea for a Scottish Section of the Writers' International and with the party's wish to draw on MacDiarmid's 'undoubtedly wide experience' of the Scottish national question.

The main difficulty in establishing a Writers' Group was seen by the party as MacDiarmid's dispute with the Muirs whom the party hoped to recruit as members. In a letter of 5 July Peter Kerrigan referred to them as 'Comrades' who were 'very close to the Party and sympathetic but not actually members'.[20]

At an afternoon meeting in Arthur Geddes' house in Edinburgh in June, Edwin Muir had delivered a paper on the future of Scottish literature. It was attended, among others, by the Edinburgh communists Fred Douglas and Brian Campbell, who were two of the five editors of *Eleventh Hour Questions*, (Edinburgh, 1937), and by the Nationalist George Elder Davie, a postgraduate student, who had been convener of MacDiarmid's Rectorial campaign the previous year. Davie clearly made a report of the meeting to MacDiarmid and this report formed the basis of his 'A Typical Little Scottish Politico-Cultural Afternoon' which he published ten years later in *The Voice of Scotland*. Donald

Gordon attended the meeting with Davie.

MacDiarmid expressed concern about the content of Muir's paper and about the attitude of Douglas and Campbell towards him. The party asked Douglas and Campbell for their observations and both replies are extant.[21] They denied that there had been any attack on MacDiarmid's work as a poet by Muir or anyone else. Campbell pointed out that he had been in dispute with Davie over MacDiarmid's claim to be a communist and a 'social crediter' and reported Davie's contention that it was 'dialectical' with the wry comment, 'Since then I understand that he was not joking.' Campbell also reported that the Muirs had 'co-operated in Left Book Club work in St Andrews, and (Mrs Muir especially) in work for Spain.' He thought there was 'still a possibility that they may be brought over completely to the Party, and in any case, if tactfully treated, their future collaboration is assured.' He mentioned a Comrade Trist of Dundee, 'who has been in close touch with the Muirs and other Scottish writers'.[22] In a letter of 19 January 1938, Fred Douglas also refers to 'Montgomery of Dundee'.[23]

Muir's *Letters* confirm that in the mid-thirties he was considering the communist position. On 4 May 1935 he wrote to Stephen Spender, '1 have been coming more and more towards a socialist or communist view of things for some time'.[24] However, in another letter to Spender, on 6 October 1937, less than three months after Campbell's report, he wrote, 'I meet many communists here, chiefly Dundee ones, for Dundee is only half an hour away, and I like and respect them; but I feel I shall never join the Party, indeed I could not.[25]

In the letter of 5 July the Scottish District Committee accepted that there was 'undoubtedly a very strong sense of Scottish nationhood existent among the people' to which the party had given inadequate consideration. It also noted the existence of separate Scottish institutions and called for the establishment of 'some form of self-government' but considered that 'the raising of the issue of a Scottish Parliament and separation from England is wrong'. Aitken Ferguson's *Scotland* pamphlet (1938) advocated 'a central administrative body for Scotland' which 'should have the administration of all Scottish affairs delegated to it by Parliament.'[26] In 1938, also, the Party organised 'A Pageant of Scottish History' which was shown in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee and Aberdeen. Hugh MacDiarmid's name was missing from the 'Cultural' section of the printed programme.

**1938-39 — *The Voice of Scotland***

In June 1938 the first issue of *The Voice of Scotland* appeared. So far from submitting his political manuscripts to the party prior to publication, MacDiarmid made it clear that the contents were 'not subject to Communist Party discipline.'[27] 'The general editorial standpoint,' he wrote, 'is that laid down in "The Red Scotland Manifesto" in this issue, and our principal aim is advocacy of Independent Scottish Workers' Republicanism *à la* John MacLean.'[28] On 30 June the issue was the subject of a two-page letter from Aitken Ferguson which succinctly expressed the Scottish District Committee's viewpoints:

> If the Party in the rest of Scotland is driving at one set of issues and C M Grieve is using his literary talents and reputation on another set of issues then, you know 'a house divided against itself' — nay, more, people will wonder what is the real voice and enemies may attempt to play one off against the other. As to your 'converting the Party' — sure; there are

avenues inside our own ranks, letters and statements to the District and there is, of course, the Discussion on the Party Congress now opening in the 'Daily [Worker]'. It doesn't need to advocate militant Godlessness, which can only serve to close the ears of many people who would otherwise be disposed to listen... It does not need to alienate by advocacy (premature) of republicanism many monarchists who would be willing to struggle for Home Rule for Scotland.[29]

In fact, there were only 80 subscribers to the first volume of *The Voice of Scotland* and 31 to the second, but MacDiarmid would have argued, with justification, that it all depended on who the 80 or 31 were.[30]

In the second issue, MacDiarmid made public comment on this inner-party matter, paraphrasing one of Ferguson's sentences, and describing the inner-party statement on Scottish Nationalism as 'utterly inept'.[31] Barbara Niven's famous cartoon of the Muirs appeared in the second issue, and on 1 November Aitken Ferguson commented drily, 'I rather think that better targets could be found for the wit of the revolutionaries than people like the Muirs who, if they are not exactly with us at least are not hostile and render help in some small ways.'[32]

Inside the front cover of the third issue, under the headline, 'Spain and the Celtic Volunteers', MacDiarmid wrote:

> One of the most interesting facts in relation to the Spanish struggle is that the Celtic members — Scottish, Irish, and Welsh — of the International Brigade found it impossible to work hand in hand with their English comrades and had to break away from them and join up in a body with the Americans instead.[33]

Peter Kerrigan, who had been in Spain, received this issue on 25 January 1939, and wrote to MacDiarmid on the same day:

> I also want to object in the strongest possible fashion to the complete travesty of facts regarding the British Battalion of the International Brigade which is printed in the inside page of the cover. ... I say this because I know, personally, the statement to be untrue and obviously based on wrong information in relation to some of our Irish comrades in the Brigade.[34]

Donald Renton's recollections, which were recorded by Professor Victor Kiernan, appear to amplify Kerrigan's objection:

> There had been brought into being an Irish Company. In the light of the struggle of the Irish people for their own national independence this Company should have been, in my view, quite a separate organisation. even though attached to the British Battalion and part of the International Brigade. In practice, however, the Irish national struggle as a related factor to the Spanish fight was not in my opinion concretely enough recognised. So it brought about one or two ugly situations at Madrigueras during the training period.[35]

In 1998 William Herrick, a member of the Lincoln Battalion in Spain, seemed to confirm that an Irish company (only) had joined the Americans and not for the reason

MacDiarmid had given. Herrick wrote: 'A new group arrived one day, this one not from the States but from the British Battalion training camp — An Irish company. Though so far as we knew no bullets had been fired, the Irish troubles had broken out among the British, and the Irish company was transferred to us.'[36]

On 23 February 1939 the Central Control Commission informed MacDiarmid that the request of the Scottish District Committee for his expulsion had been upheld.[37] On this occasion he did not appeal.

On 20 February 1957 he was informed by Gordon McLennan, then Scottish Secretary, that the Scottish Committee of the Party had decided unanimously to support his re-admission.[38] He remained a member until his death.

In the course of an obituary in the final, but unpublished, edition of *The Voice of Scotland* in 1959, MacDiarmid wrote: 'As we go to press, news comes of another great loss through the death at 71 of Dr Edwin Muir. Our deepest sympathy goes out to the families and friends of all these fine men.' The 'fine men' were Dr Alan Orr Anderson, James Barke, Dr Henry W. Meikle, Prof. Denis Saurat, Dr Francis George Scott, Prof. N. Kemp Smith, Dr Harry Wilshir — and Dr Edwin Muir.[39]

**John Manson**

An earlier version of this article was published in the Scottish literary journal *Cencrastus*.

The research for this essay has been done entirely from primary sources. MSS are quoted by permission of the National Library of Scotland and of Edinburgh University Library.

*Notes*

[1] Hugh MacDiarmid was asked to attend an interview with the Secretariat of North London Sub-District of the CPGB on 20 August 1934 at 8.30 p.m. (NLS Acc. 7361/5) and was subsequently placed in the Mildmay Cell. On 12 February 1935 the London District Secretariat wrote: 'As you are going to be in the Shetlands for an indefinite period, it would be best for you to join the National group.' (NLS Acc. 7361/6) Which nation? In *The Company I've Kept*, London, 1966, MacDiarmid wrote, 'when I joined the Communist Party, I had to be "vetted", since I had a political past as a Scottish Nationalist and as a Socialist Town Councillor and magistrate. Bob Stewart was appointed to "vet" me. After asking me various questions, he said, "I don't know what to put you down as - how to describe your position ." "Oh," I replied, "just put me down as a muddled intellectual." "Right," he said, "you're in."' (152-3) This account does not indicate where and when the 'vetting' took place. In 1929 MacDiarmid (NPS) and Stewart (CPGB) had been prospective Parliamentary candidates in a Dundee constituency (though MacDiarmid withdrew).

[2] Letter from Hon. Sec. of South Edinburgh Branch (NPS) (NLS Acc. 7361/4).

[3] *Scottish Arts and Letters* 2, Glasgow, 1946, 41.

[4] NLS MS 27035 ff. 177-8. *Lucky Poet*, London, 1943, xxi-xxii and 143.

[5] NLS MS 27035 f. 178.

[6] Robin McKelvie Black was editor/publisher of *New Scotland* which ran from 12 October 1935 to June-July 1936. Black had previously been editor/publisher of *The Free Man* in Edinburgh from 1932 to 1934 and later revived it in reduced form from 1938 to 1947.

[7] 'Notes of the Quarter', *The Voice of Scotland*, 2/1, June-August 1939.

8     Peter Kerrigan (1899-1977), a Glasgow engineer, was a member of the EC of the CPGB, 1927-9 and 1931-65, led Hunger Marches from Glasgow to London in 1934 and 1936, and was successively Scottish Secretary, National organiser and Industrial Organiser of the CPGB.

9     Ed. Ian MacDougall, *Voices from the Hunger Marches* 11, Edinburgh, 1991, 321.

10     'The Future' in *Scottish Scene*, edited by Grassic Gibbon and MacDiarmid, London, 1934, 282. MacDiarmid considered that 'Communism' operated the same financial system as capitalism.

11     NLS Acc. 7361/1-51.

12     NLS Acc. 7361/7. About half the letters were initialled or signed by Peter Kerrigan, four were signed by Aitken Ferguson and one initialled by Finlay Hart. The rest were unsigned except by terms like 'District Secretariat'.

13     Ibid.

14     2-3; also ed. Alan Riach, *Albyn: Shorter Books and Monographs*, Manchester, 1996, 353.

15     1-2; also *Albyn: Shorter Books and Monographs*, 352-3.

16     NLS Acc. 7361/7. The present writer cannot find this admission.

17     EUL MS 2959 69v. Mary Litchfield was a communist teacher who was well-known to writers like the Muirs, Gibbon and MacDiarmid in the thirties. The issue was edited by Edgell Rickword.

18     NLS Acc. 7361/8.

19     Ibid.

20     Ibid.

21     Campbell's reply, 8 July 1937, is in NLS Acc. 7361/8. Douglas' reply, undated, is EUL Gen. 2094/1/426. Campbell and Douglas had both been in correspondence with MacDiarmid before the controversy with the party. Campbell may have been one of his supporters in the plan to remove the Stone of Destiny in April 1934 (letter in NLS Acc. 7361/5).

22     NLS Acc. 7361/8.

23     NLS Acc. 7361/9. Tom Crawford has suggested that 'Montgomery' was William Montgomerie.

24     Ed. P.H. Butter, *Selected Letters of Edwin Muir*, London, 1974, 84.

25     Ibid., 98.

26     29; published by CPGB (Scottish District Committee).

27     *The Voice of Scotland*, 1/1, June-August 1938, 24

28     Ibid., 25.

29     NLS Acc. 7361/9.

30     The figures are given in a letter from the Business Manager, W.R. Aitken, to MacDiarmid, 6 November 1939, EUL MS 2942.2 f. 102.

31     *The Voice of Scotland*, 1/2, September-November 1938, 28.

32     NLS Acc. 7361/9.

33     *The Voice of Scotland*, 113, December 1938-February 1939. In his 'Foreword' to *The Scottish Insurrection of 1820* by P Berresford Ellis and S Mac A'Ghobhainn, London, 1970, MacDiarmid wrongly cited 'Spain and the Celtic Volunteers' as the cause of his first expulsion, 13.

34     NLS Acc. 7361/10.

35     Ed. Ian MacDougall, *Voices from the Spanish Civil War*, Edinburgh, 1986, 24.

36     William Herrick, *Jumping the Line*, sub-titled 'The Adventures and Misadventures of an American Radical, University of Wisconsin Press, 1998, 149.

37     NLS Acc. 7361/10.

38     NLS Acc. 7361/28.

39     Page proofs in NLS; RB.s.335.

# Postscript to 'The Poet and the Party'

MacDiarmid commented on his second expulsion from the Communist Party in a long letter to Barbara Niven, 31 March 1939, which has recently been acquired by the National Library of Scotland.[1] He acknowledged that one of the conditions upon which he had been reinstated in 1937 was that he 'would not publish political controversial matter without first submitting it and having it approved by the Scottish District Committee.' He continued, 'With regard to *The Voice of Scotland* when I started this I pointed out to the Party that it was not and could not be a Communist organ and that my relation to it would be precisely that of a journalist or comrade who was on the staff of a capitalist paper. All I could promise to do was to use my influence wherever possible in a pro-Communist direction in what I wrote myself or in my selection of other people's contributions.' However, it is quite clear that the above was a disingenuous self-justification on MacDiarmid's part and that there had been no consultation with the Party *before* the commencement of *The Voice of Scotland*.[2] So far from using his influence 'wherever possible in a pro-Communist direction', his 'Notes of the Quarter' in the first issue made it clear that 'our principal aim is advocacy of independent Scottish Workers' Republicanism' *à la* John MacLean' which was not the aim of the party of which he wished to remain a member.[3]

MacDiarmid also wrote in the letter to Barbara Niven: 'The second condition was that I should form a Scottish Section of the Writers' International. I was ready and willing to do this but as the correspondence shows the Party itself instructed me to hold my hand pending further communication which despite repeated letters from me I never received.' There is no evidence that the formation of a Scottish Section was a condition of re-admission. However, Peter Kerrigan's letters of 24 June and 5 July 1937 show that the formation of a Scottish Section was under discussion.[4] In fact, both MacDiarmid and the Scottish District Committee should have known that the Writers' International had been dissolved on 19 December 1935 and had been replaced by the International Association of Writers for the Defence of Culture.[5] In *Left Review* the attribution 'Published by T H Wintringham for the Writers' International, British Section' was dropped after November 1935 and became 'Published by T H Wintringham' in February 1936. (I should have noted this earlier.)

In the same letter MacDiarmid exculpated himself from his failure to meet the Secretariat by putting the blame on James Barke (1905-58), who was antagonistic towards MacDiarmid in the thirties.[6] 'The District Committee summoned me to meet them to discuss the matter when I was in Glasgow in December. I intended to do so, but as the result of an assault upon me in the Glasgow Press Club by James Barke, the novelist, whom I understood to be a member of the CP and a personal friend of some of the District Committee and of my particular enemies in or near to the Party, I finally decided not to do so, and didn't.' Whether the assault was physical or verbal is not known. MacDiarmid had obviously written in similar terms on 6 February 1939 to Peter Kerrigan who replied on 9 February, 'James Barke is not and never has been a member of the Communist Party.'[7] Barke, however, was certainly a fellow-traveller at this time.

In their letter of expulsion of 23 February 1939 for 'failure to comply with the conditions of [his] re-instatement', the Central Control Commission noted to MacDiarmid: 'The completely arrogant and undisciplined tone of [his] postscript to [his] letter of 6 February 1939'.[8]

In a chapter excluded from his autobiography *Lucky Poet* (1943) MacDiarmid appears to refer to James Barke's 'assault'. The chapter 'My Reply to Roy Campbell' was clearly written after the publication of Campbell's *Flowering Rifle* on 6 February 1939. Here MacDiarmid makes a comparison between the murder of Lorca and the 'assault' upon himself. 'I am aware of course, that there is no doubt as to who murdered Lorca and that there is nothing to choose in this respect between Fascists and the great body of so-called Communists. Even I in Scotland have been subjected to unprovoked physical assault at the hands of Left Wing supporters — unprovoked except for the provocation automatically given to these creatures by my intellectual and spiritual superiority.'[9] Perhaps he had written to Peter Kerrigan in similar vein.

Earlier in the same chapter MacDiarmid was able to give support both to the International Brigade and to Catalan anarchism in successive pages. He wrote:

> 'I would have given anything I had to give to have been a member of the International Brigade in Spain, but my domestic responsibilities, my physical condition (incompletely recovered from my very serious illness in 1935) made this impossible.'[10]

Then he went on to make a deadly criticism of a workers' government:

> 'I had for many reasons a deeper idea than most of the other writers on the Spanish War have succeeded in giving of the springs of Catalan Anarchism. I knew that to these Anarchists theirs was the last outpost of liberty in Europe; liberty, to them, was something tangible, something that included practical comradeship. They had fared no better under the republic than under the monarchy since machine-gun bullets remained in the one case what they had been in the other, and it was plain to them that every government, even a government of the workers, is ruled by hatred and fear of the workers.'[11]

While striving to maintain his membership in the CPGB MacDiarmid adhered to beliefs in an independent 'Scottish Workers' Republic', in 'social credit' and in anarchism which were incompatible with membership. In a footnote in *Lucky Poet* he tried to justify his contradictions as 'interdependencies'. 'As a Socialist, of course, I am, it should be obvious, interested only in a very subordinate way in the politics of Socialism as a political theory; my real concern with Socialism is as an artist's organized approach to the interdependencies of life.'[12] Here he was responding to Eric Linklater's characterisation of him as Hugh Skene in *Magnus Merriman* (1934); 'Whether the revolution he advocated was Communist or Nationalist he was not very clear'.[13] In 1962 MacDiarmid quoted the footnote in full in a letter to Barbara Niven in which he claimed to be 'completely covered' by it against criticisms which David Craig had made of his Marxism in 'MacDiarmid the Marxist Poet'.[14]

As a poet MacDiarmid justified his inconsistencies by reference to John Keats' definition of 'negative capability' in 1817. Keats wrote:

> 'I had not a dispute but a disquisition, with Dilke, on various subjects; several things dovetailed in my mind, & at once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in Literature & which Shakespeare possessed so enormously — I mean *Negative Capability*, that

is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts without any irritable reaching after fact & reason'.[15]

In a MS verse MacDiarmid wrote:

> …
> I am full of Keats's negative capability
> …
> The power of holding in my mind all manner of doubts and contradictions
> With no impatience to find solutions to me,
> To find a key, a panacea, an open sesame, a single
> Solution to all problems, or to follow
> One single philosophic or religious line,
> Accepting it as the right and only one for me.[16]

In 'The Glass of Pure Water' which was written by September 1937 MacDiarmid called for 'the ending of all Government/Since all Government is a monopoly of violence'.[17] In a passage written in 1938 and first published in 'The Kind of Poetry I Want' chapter in *Lucky Poet* MacDiarmid wrote 'But I have found in Marxism all that I need'.[18] Therein lies one of the contradictions.

In a letter to Guy Aldred on 28 August 1939 MacDiarmid claimed that he had been 'expelled in ludicrous lying pretexts as, indeed, anyone with a scintilla of genuine socialist integrity is always sure to be.'[19] The party's grounds for expulsion were given as 'political irresponsibility and failure to conform to the discipline of the Party'[20] in 1936, and his failure 'not only to submit controversial material to the DPC before publication, but also to keep the appointment with the Scottish DPC which had been asked for in [his] letter of 7.11.38'[21] in 1939. In general the party showed a good deal of patience and restraint in correspondence with MacDiarmid and, on one occasion, the London Secretariat suggested that if he felt he couldn't accept party discipline it would be better for them to part and co-operate on questions where they were in agreement.[22] It should be added that years of literary neglect, poverty and isolation (and one serious illness) in the Shetland Islands from 1933 onwards had led, at least in part, to the extreme ways in which he advanced his views.

**John Manson**

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*Notes*

1    NLS Acc. 12074-2.

2    Letters from Aitken Ferguson to MacDiarmid, 24 and 30 June 1938. NLS Acc. 7361-9.

3    *The Voice of Scotland* 1/1, June-August 1938, 25.

4    NLS Acc. 7361-8.

5    Information from David Pike, *German Writers in Soviet Exile*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1982.

6    This antagonism is revealed in his letters in the Barke Papers in the Mitchell Library, Glasgow.

7    NLS Acc. 7361-10.

8    Ibid.

[9]    NLS MS27037 f.75.

[10]   Ibid. f.50.

[11]   Ibid. f.51.

[12]   Hugh MacDiarmid, *Lucky Poet*, London, 1943, 241.

[13]   Ibid.

[14]   Ed. Grieve, Edwards, Riach, *New Selected Letters*, Manchester, 2001, 374. Craig's essay was first published in ed. Duval, *MACDIARMID a festschrift*, Edinburgh, 1962, 87-99.

[15]   Keats's letter is quoted in *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Vol. X.

[16]   NLS Acc. 12074-1.

[17]   Ed. Grieve, Aitken, *Complete Poems*, London, 1978, 11, 1043.

[18]   *Lucky Poet*, 152.

[19]   *New Selected Letters*, 166-7.

[20]   NLS Acc. 7361-7.

[21]   NLS Acc. 7361-10.

[22]   Letter of 7 April 1937 in NLS Acc. 7361-8.