COMMUNIST HISTORY NETWORK NEWSLETTER No 18 | AUTUMN 2005

Welcome to Issue 18 of the *Communist History Network Newsletter*. We are sorry to have missed our usual spring issue this year and trust readers will appreciate that for each of us the *Newsletter* is one of many commitments maintained under considerable pressure. We are however back to schedule. Like the current issue, the next one will feature reviews of a range of recent publications including a new history of the left-wing British train drivers' union ASLEF; the story of two Finnish-American radicals from the Mendocino coast and their later experiences in the USSR; and proceedings from a recent international colloquium, *Parler de soi sous Staline*. Authors and publishers of relevant works are always encouraged to send us copies for review.

In the meantime, we are pleased to announce that the job of producing the *Newsletter* is henceforth to be shared by a third co-editor, Norman La Porte, of the University of Glamorgan. Many readers will be familiar with Norry's writings on German communism, notably his book *The German Communist Party in Saxony, 1924-1933* (Lang, 2003), and his review of Reiner Tosstorff's study of the Profintern appears in the current issue. Particularly in respect of German-language materials, Norry will provide an invaluable addition to the editorial team.

In addition to the print edition, recent issues of the *CHNN* are also available for download in both Word and .pdf format on the *Newsletter* website, where the full contents of all issues can also be read online. The deadline for submissions for the Spring 2006 edition of the *Newsletter* is March 30 2006, and contributions are welcomed.

Richard Cross [richard.cross@ntlworld.com]
Norman La Porte [nlaporte@glam.ac.uk]
Kevin Morgan [kevin.morgan@man.ac.uk; tel 00-44-161-275-4907]

Politics section, School of Social Sciences, University of Manchester M13 9PL
CHNN on-line: http://les1.man.ac.uk/chnn

- **CONFERENCE ANNOUNCEMENT**: 'Mythes, réseaux, milieux, formes et cultures de l'anticommunisme en Suisse des origines à nos jours', organised by the universities of Fribourg, Geneva and Lausanne and held at UOG, Geneva 10-12 November 2005; further information from m_caillat@yahoo.fr; or mauro.cerutti@smile.ch; or Jean-francois.fayet@lettres.unige.ch

- **JAMES BARKE CONFERENCE AT THE MITCHELL LIBRARY**: On Saturday 12 November 2005, the Mitchell Library, Glasgow, hosts a one-day conference to mark the centenary of the Scottish socialist novelist and playwight, James Barke (1905-1958), whose papers the library holds. Speakers will include Margery McCulloch, Moira Burgess, Valenina Bold, David Borthwick, John Burns and John Manson, and the conference will consider Barke's major novels like *Major Operation* (1936) and *The Land of the Leal* (1939), as well as his associations with the ILP and the CPGB. Further details can be obtained from the Mitchell Library, North St, Glasgow G3 7DN (0141-287-2999).

- **THE COMINTERN AND INDIAN COMMUNISM**: Sobhanlal Datta Gupta's *Comintern and the Destiny of Indian Communism. Dialectics of the Real and the Possible*, will be published in India in 2006. 'The book is based on materials from the Comintern archives in Moscow, the CPGB archives, inner-party documents and new German and Russian materials published in recent years on Comintern in general and the colonial question in particular.' Further information and details of how to order the book can be obtained from: sobhanlal@dataone.in

- **LATIN AMERICAN BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY**: Edited by Lazar S Jeifets, Victor L Jeifets and Peter Huber, and based on materials in the Comintern archives, *La Internacional Comunista y América Latina, 1919-1943. Diccionario Biográfico* (pp445; 45 ills; ISBN 3-033-00363-X) includes entries on more than 900 Latin American communists. Further details from Peter.Huber@unibas.ch

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Reviews

Geoff Andrews, *Endgames and New Times: The Final Years of British Communism 1964-1991*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2004).

This is the sixth and final volume of Lawrence and Wishart's comprehensive history of the Communist Party of Great Britain. The title is apt: during these years, as capitalism went global and the epoch that began with the Bolshevik Revolution drew to a close, the party was wracked by internecine conflict over its purpose, strategy and self-image. Geoff Andrews succeeds admirably in charting the course and explaining the nature of this conflict. As Donald Sassoon puts it in a cover blurb, he tells 'the story of a failure, the failure to transform what was a militant working class party into a rallying point for left-wing critics of labourism.'

Though originating in a PhD thesis, the story is told in a lively, accessible style which captures something of the passion, exhilaration and intrigue with which the conflict was waged, as I can attest from my own experience as a party member in the 1970s, as a supporter of *Marxism Today* in the 1980s and as a member of Democratic Left thereafter. The plausibility of the story and the reader's pleasure in its telling are enhanced by numerous citations from interviews with former party officials and activists. Andrews builds up a strong central narrative, using oral evidence mainly to supplement archival and published sources rather than to explore the by-ways of micro-history. *En route*, however, he provides some delightful asides, as when former student leaders, asked to assess the relative merits of Althusser and Gramsci, are reported as complaining that reading Althusser 'did your head in' and 'was a bit like taking acid'. None of those interviewed hailed from the stalinist wing of the party, whether because people from this tendency were not approached or because they refused to co-operate – it is not clear which. Nevertheless, Andrews is scrupulously fair in reporting and commenting on the views, aspirations and illusions held by all the protagonists in the drama.

He argues that the CPGB was always much more than the British outpost of Soviet communism. That it survived at all after losing a third of its members, including most of its leading intellectuals, in the aftermath of the 20th Congress of the CPSU in 1956 and the suppression of the Hungarian uprising later that year suggests as much, and subsequent events confirmed this view. From roughly 1964 to 1977, the CP underwent an unexpected renaissance. For a few turbulent years, as British capitalism foundered and the post-war settlement collapsed, the party became a minor, but significant player in the British trade union movement and, to that extent, on the wider stage of British politics. During these same years, it also became a repository for hopes and energies released by the emergence or re-emergence of social movements based on gender, sexuality, race, national identity and ecology, all of which forced the left to rethink the relationship between class and politics.[1] These developments gave rise to two political projects, which Andrews calls 'militant labourism' and 'British Gramscism', respectively. The collision and interplay between them form the crux of his account.

The CP was always a party of contradictions. A good example is *The British Road to Socialism*, adopted in 1951 – with the *imprimatur* of Stalin – to replace the previous party programme, *For a Soviet Britain*, adopted in 1935. With its commitment to parliamentary democracy and its devotion to the British labour movement, the *British Road* evidently signified the rejection of leninism. There were, to be sure, ambiguities about how an elected

'left government' would deal with attempts to destabilise it of the sort that had been a staple concern of the European left since the days of the Second International. And it was certainly anticipated that the 'transition to socialism' would be punctuated by crises. But the whole spirit of the document and its explicit acceptance of political competition and pluralism ruled out any notion of armed insurrection led by a vanguard party, which was, of course, why the programme was routinely scorned and derided by trotskyists. Despite this, the party insisted on retaining democratic centralism as its central principle of organisation, thereby preserving the outward forms of its leninist heritage.

In practice, as Andrews shows, the leadership allowed dissidents considerable latitude. It usually stopped short of invoking disciplinary sanctions against transgressors and only rarely sought to curtail the expression or dissemination of heterodox views.[2] Still, the fact that the party clung to an outmoded and discredited organisational form is indicative of its conservative culture, while the fact that dissidents were variously encouraged, tolerated or chastised, but not penalised or purged, is indicative of a leadership that was sometimes impressed, usually bemused and invariably cautious in its response to political and cultural innovation. The comparison Andrews draws with relations between a benevolent paterfamilias and his rebellious offspring is apt, provided one recalls that the sons and daughters were often supported by freethinking uncles and aunts who were equally impatient of dogma and tradition, if rather more circumspect in their political tactics. From time to time, to be sure, the leadership sought to curb the activities of rank and file members representing the 'new social forces', as distinct from the skilled, white, male manual workers whom most party members still revered as the crack troops of the class struggle. Andrews recounts three such episodes involving YCL (Young Communist League) activists, feminists and dissident intellectuals. Yet in each case, the leadership eventually backed off and the rebels got their way. In each case, moreover, what was ultimately at stake was whether social class was in some sense intrinsically more important than other social identities and whether the party's claims on its members' allegiance took precedence over those of non-party organisations and movements. Thus, these examples of how democratic centralism worked in practice serve to confirm the book's general thesis: that from the late 1960s onwards, two warring souls inhabited the same political body.

Andrews rightly insists that the party's internal conflicts cannot be explained by reference to the international communist movement. The rival camps were often described as 'Eurocommunist' and 'Stalinist' or, colloquially, as 'euros' and 'tankies'. These labels served as convenient shorthand at the time, but they fail to take account of the specifically British features of the CPGB, embedded as it was in the British labour movement and its traditions. Naturally, the various forms of dissidence and innovation that made the party such a stimulating political and intellectual milieu from the 1960s to the 1980s were influenced by developments in the wider communist movement: 1956; the Prague Spring; Eurocommunism, *glasnost* and *perestroika*. But the party's demise was intimately linked to the crisis of British labourism in the 1960s and 1970s and this, in turn, was intimately linked to the long-running crisis of British capitalism which reached a climax in this period.

From 1966 onwards, British capitalism began to show signs of deep dysfunction as economic growth faltered, real take home pay stagnated, profits were squeezed, inflation accelerated, unemployment rose and, despite the devaluation and later depreciation of the pound, the balance of payments remained in persistent deficit. This dismal performance was the result of two interacting forces: the defensive strength of organised labour and the competitive weakness and complacent insularity that were the legacy of Britain's imperial past. The most pressing economic problem was inflation. This was not so much because of its narrowly economic consequences, though these were serious enough once the rate at which prices were

rising ceased to be low, steady and tolerably predictable and became high, variable and worryingly uncertain. Rather, the recurrent distributional conflicts that drove and were continually reactivated by inflation threatened to destabilise society and provoke a right-wing backlash. In short, as the Swedish social democrats had warned in the 1940s and as subsequent events confirmed, 'inflation is the deadly enemy of socialism'. If the left and the labour movement failed to acknowledge that trade unions were involved in causing inflation and failed to take responsibility for controlling it, the only feasible alternative was for government to abandon the commitment to full employment that had formed the centrepiece of the post-war settlement, institute an old-fashioned deflationary purge and allow unemployment to rise to whatever level was necessary, as Marx once put it, to 'curb the pretensions of the working class'.[3]

The CPGB, whose Industrial Department orchestrated campaigns to defeat both 'anti-trade union' laws and successive incomes policies, maintained that these policies were an attempt to force the working class to pay for the capitalist crisis. This position was condemned as intellectually bankrupt and politically irresponsible by a small group of economists on the party's Economic Advisory Committee who advocated a 'socialist social contract' in which pay restraint would be traded off against structural reforms aimed at democratising economic decision-making: within the enterprise as well as at the macro-economic level; in private firms as well as in the public sector; and with respect to strategic issues, such as corporate investment and product development, not just the everyday management of the workplace. A democratic alternative economic strategy along these lines offered a way of combining the creative energy of the new social forces with the disciplined strength of the industrial working class in a hegemonic bid to tackle Britain's economic crisis and prefigure the socialist future.

Students, feminists and others who had imbibed the politics of Gramsci welcomed this approach as a shining example of how to conduct the war of position, which should be emulated throughout the party's work. The party leadership and most 'industrial comrades', however, wanted no truck with 'capitalist' incomes policies in any shape or form, insisting that trade union militancy was the royal road to socialist consciousness – a proposition that would have outraged Lenin. Their rejection disinterred the old syndicalist idea that, sooner or later, if the workers remained united, refused to be co-opted by the state and screwed up social tensions to breaking point, the capitalist system would be brought down and a new age would dawn – a proposition that was blatantly at odds with the gradualist, democratic logic of the *British Road* and had more in common with the views of its trotskyist detractors.

Tragically, neither this specific controversy nor the wider ideological divide from which it sprang was ever resolved. The fate of incomes policy – and, indeed, of traditional social democracy – was sealed by the gradual decay of the Social Contract, the catastrophic blows suffered by the Labour government in the winter of 1978-9, the victory of the Conservatives at the subsequent general election and the neo-liberal counter-revolution for which this paved the way. The fate of the party was to remain deadlocked – or perhaps one should say stalemated – as the embattled camps waged an increasingly bitter and costly civil war which culminated in a *de facto* division of the party's remaining assets: the Gramscians took control of *Marxism Today*; the party officials, who belatedly came off the fence and sided with the Gramscians when their enemies staged an attempted palace coup, retained control of a hollowed-out party apparatus; and the proponents of class politics led by Tony Chater, editor of the *Morning Star*, and Mick Costello, who succeeded Bert Ramelson as national industrial organiser, held on to the *Star* and the party's declining industrial base. In effect, the party was over long before the formal decision to disband was taken at a special conference in 1991.

This is not quite the end of the story, however. In the final part of the book, Andrews reviews the death of militant labourism, with the defeat of the 1984-85 miners' strike, and contrasts it with the outstanding success of *Marxism Today* which Martin Jacques transformed from a rather worthy and obscure theoretical journal, little read outside the CP, into the house magazine of the British left, with a circulation of around 10,000 and a reputation for cutting-edge analysis and debate that sometimes reverberated in mainstream politics and the mass media. Apart from its fresh design and breezy style, the appeal of *Marxism Today* lay in its twin central concerns: the historic decline of the British left and the emergence of a neo-liberal new right in the form of Thatcherism, which had succeeded where the left had failed in building a broad popular alliance and was using its command over the state to push through a programme of regressive modernisation. Though the magazine operated at arms' length from the party, despite receiving a hefty subsidy, its themes and arguments prompted a final attempt to replace the *British Road to Socialism* with a programme that reflected the sweeping changes that were taking place in the world economy and in the social structure and political landscape of Britain. The result was *The Manifesto for New Times*, which performed the obsequies on militant labourism, appraised Thatcherism as a hegemonic project and outlined a Gramscian approach to the task of building a new, democratic left. Appearing in 1989, on the eve of the collapse of communism, this document became the party's swansong.

Andrews' book is, indeed, essential reading, not just for historians of British communism, but for anyone who believes, as I do, that important lessons were learned in the CP's final years which are far from having been absorbed by what remains of the British left. From this point of view, however, the book leaves something to be desired. As I have tried to suggest above, it underplays the depth and gravity of the crisis faced by British capitalism in the years from 1964 to 1975, a period which, for anyone below the age of 40, has now entered a cognitive twilight zone and which, for that reason alone, needs to be revisited and reclaimed by the left. Furthermore, a question that naturally arises when one returns to the scenes of ancient battles is whether their outcome might have been different. Granted that militant labourism was doomed to defeat, could a Gramscian alternative really have made headway at this time? What specific policies would have made a difference at critical junctures and under what assumptions about antecedent developments and the ways in which key players responded to them? Of course, counterfactual history needs to be handled with care and should not become an excuse for unbridled speculation. It is, nevertheless, important both as an aid to understanding what actually happened and as a means of ensuring that the same mistakes are not made again.

This point is linked with a second. While Andrews' summaries of the relevant literature are exemplary, he is at times insufficiently critical. For example, *Marxism Today* did a magnificent job in explaining the significance of Thatcherism and helping the left to understand what had gone wrong, but it never really engaged with the difficult task of devising and winning support for *transformatory* policies, especially in relation to the economy. By this I mean policies which deal effectively with pressing problems of the present, but at the same time are designed to initiate processes of institutional and cultural change: in short, policies that bear the seeds of a new civilisation.

A similar criticism can be levelled against the *Manifesto for New Times*. While this was written in a lively, jargon-free style and provided a much-needed set of bearings at a time when old political landmarks were disappearing, in its enthusiasm for a pluralist and non-statist version of socialism and in its loathing for the vanguard party, the new programme failed to acknowledge the limitations of non-party social movements. For one thing, there are often conflicts between different movements. Some Greens, for instance, hold views on abortion which are incompatible with feminist conceptions of reproductive rights. Likewise,

organisations representing ethnic minorities sometimes resort to moral blackmail in a bid to get white sympathisers to support policies on policing or immigration which are completely untenable. More fundamentally, the left needs to acknowledge that movements as well as parties can be sectarian. If I insist that my movement is the most important for anyone at all to support and that the oppressive features of life that give rise to the movement are the gravest and most far-reaching of all oppressions, I am guilty of a form of chauvinism. One of the reasons parties matter is that they are, or can become, the bearers of general principles and social philosophies capable resolving such conflicts and avoiding sectarian attitudes.

Finally, while Andrews considers the claim that the *Marxism Today* was, in some sense and to some degree, responsible for the rise of New Labour, his treatment of this issue is somewhat perfunctory, amounting to little more than a comparison of the political trajectories of prominent intellectuals. Evidently, a more satisfactory answer requires a broader perspective on British politics than it would have been reasonable to expect in a history of the CPGB. In any case, this is a question for others to pursue. When they do so, they will benefit immensely from Andrews' groundbreaking work.

David Purdy

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[1] Note, however, that the feminists, students and intellectuals who joined the party in these years were drawn disproportionately from the white population and that despite the CP's honourable record in opposing colonialism and racism, its relationship to 'black power' was distinctly fraught. Nevertheless, as a component part of a more general upheaval in social consciousness and political behaviour affecting all the advanced capitalist countries, the black power movement helped to galvanise the realisation that these – and perhaps all – societies contain multiple, intersecting social divisions and that social identities and interests are not inscribed in the social structure.

[2] What was probably the most egregious such episode took place in 1976 when the draft of a book on political economy written by members of the party's Economic Advisory Committee in response to a request for an official party text, was withheld from publication at the behest of Bert Ramelson, the party's national Industrial Organiser. As chair of the committee, Bert never tried to suppress debate: on the contrary, he encouraged and relished disputation – the fiercer, the better. Like a Jesuit priest, however, he took good care to insulate the rest of the party from heresy – including the Executive Committee. One of the theoretical chapters of the text exposed logical flaws in Marx's theory of value and commended an alternative, neo-Ricardian account of the relationship between wages, prices and profits. But this was a somewhat esoteric issue which on its own would probably not have mattered. The main reason for cancelling the project was that the chapters dealing with the economics of 'state monopoly capitalism' expressed views on the causes of inflation and the need for an incomes policy which were at odds with the official party line.

Direct censorship of this sort was rare. For the most part, the leadership maintained control over the organisation by three methods: deploying its powers of patronage, playing off one faction against another and appealing to ingrained norms of loyalty and discipline. The principal form of patronage was the use of the 'recommended list' for elections to district and national committees to reward loyalists and keep out troublemakers, though as the careers of Martin Jacques and Dave Cook demonstrate, some of those who benefited from this system subsequently broke free from the suffocating grip of bureaucratic conformity, at the cost of temporary demotion, and became political leaders of real stature and achievement.

[3] In this and the following two paragraphs I have deliberately sharpened what Andrews has to say about incomes policy and British politics in the mid-1970s because I believe that this was the critical issue in the inner party battle and that the period from the first miners' strike at the beginning of 1972 to the start of Phase One of the Social Contract in the summer of 1975 was the turning point in the wider political struggle over the future of Britain.

Kevin Morgan, Gidon Cohen and Andrew Flinn, *Agents of the Revolution: New Biographical Approaches to the History of International Communism in the Age of Lenin and Stalin,* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), pp.320. ISBN 3-03910-075-0.

The communist movement, by its very name, seems to discourage the study of individual cases; but this very repression indicates rich territory to be urgently uncovered. After all, the theoretical and practical battles that have marked communism's violent and passionate history have hung on oppositions that imply the personal and the specific: idealism versus materialism; the subjective versus the objective; agency and determinism — all of these expressed in a movement both national and international, appealing and appalling to various social and ethnic groups. This collection of essays, based on a conference at Manchester University, is an admirable contribution to the growing prosopographical literature on communism. It also brings into dialectical relation the 'demonological' historiography promoted by Stephane Courtois and others — with its 'criminogenic', 'total' institution of communism — and a more 'pluralist' approach, typified by Wolikow et al's *Century of Communisms*, whose emphasis on diversity could be suspected of a certain indulgence towards its subject-matter.

Autobiography, biography and evaluative reports on cadres were techniques of control used by the Comintern and individual parties. In addition to this, prominent party militants used memoir to construct themselves as examples of 'people of a special mould'. The 'personal' and the 'political' were therefore inextricably, sometimes tragically, intertwined. Communism was, in the words of De Rooy, a 'jealous movement', offering both sacrifice and solace.

Some of these essays look at the functioning of communist institutions: the use of autobiography and biography in the promotion and purge of cadres, notably in the French and Finnish parties. Other essays look at the communist cultures that were created in the course of the twenties and thirties: the 'moral community' of the stridently sectarian Dutch CP; what Kevin Morgan calls 'iconoclastic consanguinity' in the CPGB. The Dutch counter-community apart, communist cultures emerge as sometimes difficult to separate from the rest of society. The families of Austrian communists in Vorarlberg before and after the war may have come across as 'red fortresses', but the desire of party members to, scandalously, seek marriages and funerals in the Catholic rite indicated that walls could be porous. The sociological make-up of the CPNZ was well in line with mainstream Kiwi society. Individual cases offer suggestive explanations of political trajectories: Rose Kerrigan's stances could be explained more by her Jewish rather than Celtic roots; while the wonderful and frightening roaming cadre, Jozsef Pogany/John Pepper is, it is argued, another example of the 'Hungarian genius', his Magyar background explaining his chameleon-like qualities.

Contrary to Cold War psycho-babble, the cadres studied here do not display personality disorders any more shocking than those found outside the communist movement. But the 'personal' and 'political' do not always coexist smoothly. The men and women of steel can be flaky. Hence, one of the greatest figures of the CPUSA, William Z Foster, so identifies with a certain idea of the working class, imagining himself to *be* that messianic collectivity, that, at one point, he is reduced to a gibbering, autistic wreck. The demands of the institution produce a certain bolshevik melancholia: Clara Zetkin's misgivings at 'Class Against Class'; her indignation at the smashing of the KPD, her pining for the days of Luxemburg and Liebknecht; Willie Gallacher torn apart by the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.

But if these often fascinating vignettes make such products of Lenin's *What is to be Done?* 'human', that, necessarily, does not make them entirely sympathetic. Zetkin never publicly challenged Stalin's policies, and it is convincingly suggested that she is a product of her

authoritarian German background. Gallacher censures himself, both in memoir and party activity. On the face of it, the purging of Pogany/Pepper, the Comintern's answer to Bela Lugosi, is *de bonne guerre*. Maurice Thorez's *Son of the People* plays a seminal role in the creation of a new type of French communist, but this mandated personal myth-making seems to shade effortlessly into the cult of Stalin's personality as well as his own.

And (in classically marxist fashion?) there is always the cruelty of history: the external forces that make the best-laid plans of revolutionaries 'gang aglae'. However much cadres were moulded through autobiographical questionnaires and other techniques, and partly *because* of this processes of control, the French and Finnish apparatuses, as elsewhere, could not stand up to vast social, economic and political changes. The events of 1989-1991 were a death in the family, in more ways than one. The 'jealous movement' had a love that hurt.

Gavin Bowd

Jean-François Fayet, *Karl Radek (1885-1939): Biographie politique*, (Bern: Peter Lang), pp.xv & 813, ISBN 3-906770-31-1, pbk.

Of all those whose lives became enmeshed in the drama and tragedy of bolshevism, Radek must rank as one of the most fascinating. This is not on grounds of any great strength of personality, and in some respects this remains a little elusive even after one has read this meticulous new biography. Rather, Radek fascinates because of the range and complexity of the networks, the connections, the social and political milieux through which his biography takes us. One of the outstanding figures of the early Comintern, Radek personified its internationalism, and this not only in his critiques of war and imperialism and his expectations — admittedly more cautious than many — of the spread of the revolution. More than that, as Fayet stresses, Radek himself was like an archetype of Deutscher's 'non-Jewish Jew', whose ideas, career and identity alike seemed to transcend the limitations of the merely national. Born in Galicia and passing through a romantic Polish nationalist phase before embracing socialism, Radek, like his native Poland, came to stand at the fulcrum of the Soviet-German relationship that held the key to the emerging European post-war order. His tragi-comedy, according to Heinrich Brandler, was to pass in Germany for a Russian, and in Russia for a German. However, as what Fayet calls the 'great communicator' of the revolution, this was also his great political asset. Through his German 'passion' combined with the Russian enthusiasms of the first workers' revolution, he emerged first as figurehead, then as scapegoat, and never recaptured his early pre-eminence after the failed German October of 1923. No doubt it was precisely as communicator and internationalist that he fell foul of the new bureaucratic order. At the same time, the tortuous development of Radek's politics until his arrest in 1937 provides anything but a clean-cut break between the first four congresses of the Comintern and what came after. As always, one of the great advantages of biography is in adding to standard periodisations a more complex layer of narrative, often corroborative but also adding its own complications.

The great strength of Fayet's biography is precisely this provision of a nuanced and multi-layered narrative that is particularly strong in respect of the cultural and political context and the wider associations through which Radek moved. In his introduction, he tells of how his curiosity about Radek was aroused by reading references to him in E H Carr's *The Bolshevik Revolution* and wanting to retrieve him from the footnotes of such accounts. Of course, Fayet is not the first to set himself this goal and he makes proper acknowledgement of the contribution already made by Warren Lerner in his biography of 1969. Nevertheless, given the opening of archives and the development of scholarship based upon them, it is not

surprising that there is a good deal more to add, though more perhaps in the detail than in the general outline. In this respect, Fayet's is a impressive work of scholarship that combines the painstaking use of original sources with careful attention to these historiographical debates.

A particular asset is the much fuller account he now provides of Radek's background and early years, including his involvement in the pre-1914 German and Polish social-democratic parties. Skilfully Fayet steers his way through a series of political and historioraphical minefields such as the 'Radek affair' just before the First World War, the alleged German funding of the bolsheviks prior to 1917, and Radek's avoidance of the fate of those like Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht who were murdered by the German reaction of 1919. (Here Fayet records the allegation that his life was spared in return for details of the whereabouts of Luxemburg and Liebknecht, but argues that, in the absence of any firm evidence of this, Radek's role and mandate as an interlocutor with the Soviet government offers a more likely explanation.) Similarly with regard to the Stalin period, Fayet offers judicious assessments of episodes like Radek's awful 'The architect of socialist society' (1934), a hagiography of such gross and misplaced superlatives that historians have speculated as to whether it represents a hidden satire on the regime and its absurdities. Regarding Radek's arrest in the purges, again Fayet presents a range of possible interpetations of Stalin's motives that have been advanced, before offering his own view that it is unnecessary and perhaps inappropriate to seek such personalised forms of explanation.

There would be little point in multiplying such examples, and for an account of this singularly complex and controversial life Fayet's will surely prove definitive. I have only one real caveat, and that is regarding the treatment of Radek's public and private persona. The book is described as a political biography, and Radek's, as Fayet points out, was a political life, mitigated only by the passions identified here for women, tobacco and literature. Nevertheless, while fully appreciating the opaqueness of the sorts of sources on which such accounts are so often dependent, perhaps there might have been more of a discussion as to *why* Radek should have aroused such powerful antipathies, even among those who might have been closest to him, such as Luxemburg, and in a movement which contained no shortage of objectionable individuals. Evidence of Radek's duplicity and double-dealing, or what was perceived as such, is certainly provided. But perhaps there was more scope too for the sort of approach adopted in the current Références/Facettes series (Presses de Sciences PO). In these volumes, figures like Thorez and Mussolini are reconstructed through their diverse depictions and self-depictions, posthumous as well as contemporaneous, and 'political' lives thus provided in the double sense of their contested construction as well as their content. Radek would surely be an ideal candidate for such a treatment, and even within Fayet's more narrative account there might have been ways of doing more to incorporate such a perspective. Nevertheless, given the comprehensiveness of Fayet's account, it would be quite misleading to end on such a note. It really is an exemplary treatment in the best tradition of the biographies of leading bolsheviks.

Kevin Morgan

Neil Redfern, *Class or Nation: Communists, Imperialism and Two World Wars*, (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2005), pp.1-257. ISBN: 1 85043 723 8. £47.50.

Neil Redfern's book raises some interesting questions about the role of partisanship in historical enquiry. At one level the book is yet another leftist critique of the CPGB's history. The author's aim is to explain why the party 'enthusiastically supported the British war effort in the Second World War, given that most of its leaders had been militant opponents of the

First World War' (p1). In pursuit of this aim, Redfern traces the history of the party from its origins and foundation through to the 1940s, highlighting the party's policy on imperialism, nation and war, its analysis of the nature of the state and its view of social democracy.

Redfern approaches the party's history from the point of view of a committed 'Bolshevik'. He believes in the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and imperialism, the smashing of the bourgeois state, and the transformation of the relations of production to create the material basis of communism. He thinks that a party of dedicated revolutionary cadres is the appropriate organisational form of leninist bolshevism. He argues that both world wars were 'imperialist wars' and that the bolshevik policy during the First World War of 'revolutionary defeatism' and turning the imperialist war into a civil war should have been pursued in the Second World War as well. He frankly admits that such a policy might well have had some negative consequences, including that '[Nazi] Germany might have invaded and defeated a revolutionary Soviet Union unable to gain assistance from imperialist states more concerned with the extirpation of Bolshevism than with the balance of power in Europe', but, says Redfern, 'that is a risk that the Communist Movement would have had to take if it had pursued an internationalist strategy' (p208). At the same time, Redfern is a critic of the 'Euro-centrism' of the bolshevik tradition. In his view the Comintern grossly exaggerated the prospects for revolution in the advanced capitalist countries and underestimated those in the colonial world. What the Comintern failed to grasp, says Redfern, is that the great majority of people in the imperialist countries benefited from imperialism, which is why reformism rather than revolutionary politics flourished in Britain and other capitalist states.

As might be imagined a lot of the book is devoted to pointing out how the party failed to measure up to the author's preferred brand of bolshevism. Redfern's narrative structure takes the form of the 'Rise, Decline and Fall of British Bolshevism'. According to the author, the party was from the outset infected by the political corruption of imperialism's 'superprofits' and began to abandon revolutionary bolshevism not long after its foundation and embraced a politics that was not only 'reformist' — the least of its sins — but 'revisionist', 'opportunist', 'class collaborationist', 'nationalist' and 'social-chauvinist'.

Redfern is particularly scathing of the party's performance in relation to the colonial question, arguing that while it often spouted anti-imperialist slogans it did not do a lot about them in practice. Yet it is clear from Redfern's own treatment that while the party did not give the colonial question the absolute priority he would have liked, it did devote quite a lot of attention to the anti-imperialist struggle and was fully committed to the liberation of the colonies and the dismantlement of empire, although it had its own ideas about how this might be best achieved.

Somewhat surprisingly, Redfern manages to transcend his own polemic and makes a considerable effort to convey the party's point of view as well as his own. Among the best chapters of the book in this respect are those devoted to the party during the Second World War. Redfern makes plain his own disapproval of the party's politics during the war, arguing that leaders and members alike embraced nationalism and social patriotism, much like the majority of socialists during the First World War. But he goes to considerable lengths to explain the logic of the party's line, often in sympathetic terms. He is particularly successful in reconstructing the reasons for the party's absolute dedication to the British war effort, which led it to quell strikes, support Churchill's coalition government, witch-hunt opponents of the war, oppose Indian independence, and dampen down discussion of the postwar world.

In the book Redfern wears two hats — that of historian as well as of bolshevik. The chapters on the Second World War formed the basis of his PhD thesis and it is evident here and

elsewhere in the book that — willingly or not — he embraced the narrativist norm of telling the story from the participants' point of view as well as your own. The result is a book that is remarkably unbiased, given the extent of the author's hostility to the party's politics. Three cheers for historicism! Speaking as someone whose general attitude towards the party's history is the more right-wing the better, I found a great deal of interest in the book.

But more interesting than the point that the discipline of history affords us some protection from bias and polemical excess, is that Redfern's partisanship has positive value as well. His political standpoint leads him to investigate aspects of the party's history that might otherwise be neglected, minimised or glossed over. For example, Redfern's belief that the working class were bought off by imperialism means that he is resistant to the 'revolution betrayed' school of thought and generally eschews the search for an unrealised militancy in the party or the labour movement. Instead, he emphasises that the party only became popular when it embraced a radical patriotism which chimed with the 'social-chauvinist' politics of the general population — not least during the Second World War — a position that commanded the overwhelming consent of its members and supporters. There were leftist dissidents and revolutionary purists in the party but these were few and far between after the mid-1930s.

Another example of Redfern's partisanship working in his favour is his treatment of the party's changing stance on the war question, in many ways the central theme of the book. As an advocate of the revolutionary defeatist position Redfern wants to expose in detail how the party came to abandon its anti-war position and commit itself to wholeheartedly prosecuting the anti-fascist war, notwithstanding the fact that it meant supporting one side of an inter-imperialist conflict. Redfern fulfils his task very well and his account deftly captures the transitions, tensions and elisions of the party's path to a pro-war position. Central to the party's changing attitude was, of course, the Soviet connection and Redfern very effectively demonstrates that current debates about the contradictions between national and international interests and influences in the communist movement had little meaning in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. Nothing was more important to the communists of that era than the defence of the Soviet Union and the suggestion that the party would do anything to undermine the world's first socialist state — whatever the costs to its own position — was complete anathema. No more so was this case than during the Second World War when all doctrinal disputes paled into insignificance when set beside the millions of Soviet citizens dying on the Eastern Front.

Geoffrey Roberts

Reiner Tosstorff, *Profintern: Die Rote Gewerkschaftsinternationale 1920–1937*, (Paderborn: Schoeningh, 2004), pp.791, ISBN 3-506-71793-6.

The history of communism was the history of a global movement. At least during the 1920s and early 1930s — to paraphrase both Marx and Lenin — the clarion call was for workers of the world to unite under communist leadership against dying imperialism and its social democratic 'lackeys'. To join the Communist International (Comintern) was to accept the Bolsheviks' '21 Conditions' of entry, in which centralisation and uniform ideology was understood as an antidote to the dissolution of proletarian internationalism on the eve of the First World War. Yet, since scholars have seen the files previously for party-historians only, research has focussed on communism in its various national contexts. There are good reasons for this. Important studies have convincingly demonstrated how specific domestic environments informed the politics and political culture of the Comintern's national sections. However, another obstacle stood in the way of a comprehensive study of world communism: few historians are also linguists with the skills necessary to access world communism's

polyglot proceedings. For this reason, the best available studies have been eruditely edited collected volumes that have drawn together the finding of experts on one or more of the Third International's national sections.[1]

As Tosstorff's impressive study demonstrates, historians have failed to notice an elephant inhabiting the headquarters of world communism. The history of communism was also a (highly ideologically constructed) cult of the international proletariat, which had to be won over for communism in the factories to pave the path for revolution. His monograph provides the first documentary-based study of the 'Red International of Labour Unions' (RILU) (or Profintern, according to its Russian acronym) from its foundation in 1921 to its dissolution in 1937. In addition to the author's native German, the monograph is impressively researched in Russian, English, French and Spanish, enabling him to digest a vast amount of documentation held in Moscow, (East) Berlin, Bonn, Britain and the US. The book's most important contribution is to look beyond the relationship between bolshevism and the leftwing of social democracy, demonstrating how the foundation of the RILU required a meeting of communism and syndicalism — not just in southern Europe but in North and Latin American. At least in the early years, Tosstorff argues that there was a cross-fertilisation between syndicalism and communism, which centred on a common desire to revolutionise the factories 'from below'.[2] However, with the consolidation of Bolshevik rule in Russia and Stalin's rise to power, the risks of revolution gave way, in all but rhetoric, to placing the defence of the state at the centre of foreign relations.

After setting the scene with a sketch of international trade unionism before 1914 (pp21–50) the following five chapters offer a highly detailed analysis of the developments leading to the foundation of the RILU in 1921 and its activities until the end of 1923. The foundation of the RILU was, in essence, a Soviet reaction to the post-war re-foundation of the 'reformist' International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU). Famously, the slogan dominating the interwar years was 'Moscow or Amsterdam', where the IFTU had its headquarters. The first organisational step taken towards setting up a 'revolutionary' trade union international was the formation of the 'International Trade Union Council' in 1920 (esp. pp165–73), which had the main objective of convening a world congress of revolutionary trade unions in Moscow. During these developments, Tosstorff pays close attention to the role of the future head of the RILU, Alexandre Losowsky. It was not only Losowsky's mastery of foreign languages that suited him for the job. An aptitude for anticipating changes in Moscow's political tactics and promptly adapting to their new demands ensured that he, unlike his counterparts leading the Comintern, headed the RILU throughout his existence.

From its foundation, the RILU was and, despite some tactical shifts in political strategy, ultimately remained a narrow, sectarian organisation. It proved impossible to win mass influence in the social-democratic unions in Germany and Britain, which were the IFTU's main national pillars. Assorted sections of the syndicalist movement around Alfred Rosmer in France and Andrés Nin in Spain joined Moscow's 'revolutionary' trade union international — at least in the short term. But significant communist influence in the socialist-dominated trade-union movement in Czechoslovakia remained something of an exception.[3] Tosstorff also brings out the structural dilemmas produced by the formation of an independent 'revolutionary' international while, between 1921 and 1928 and after 1934, communist trade unionists were expected to conquer the social democratic-dominated trade unions from within.

After detailing the discussions between Moscow and syndicalists throughout Europe, North and Latin America (pp220–60) prior to 1921, a case study assesses the impact of the trade-union question on the consolidation of the largest communist party outside Soviet Russia, the

German Communist Party (KPD) (pp260–70). Tosstorff sketches how the German Revolution set in motion a process of political ferment on the far-left, in which the 'official' KPD was only one of a diversity of communistic and syndicalist-type organisations. What they all had in common was an attraction to the successful revolution in Russia, and the Bolsheviks used their kudos in order to negotiate with all sides. Yet, rather than serving as the glue holding together a broad revolutionary church, Moscow's machinations ultimately alienated the workers deemed necessary for revolution. The ill-fated March Action of 1921, a putsch in the central German mining district, estranged the revolutionary trade unionists who had come over to the 'United KPD' from the leftwing of the Independent Social Democratic Party in December 1920. Similarly, Moscow's efforts to rein in the ultra-radicals in the western German mining industry, who advocated 'industrial unionism', led to their departure from the RILU in the spring of 1921. Thereafter, the KPD was never able to win significant influence in the social-democrat-dominated 'Free Trade Unions' outside of a number of local strongholds. For the remainder of the Weimar Republic, the KPD never resolved the tactical conundrum of whether to work inside the 'reformist' trade unions, or to leave them and set up independent 'revolutionary' unions.

Structural factors also came into play. By 1921 the post-war 'revolutionary wave' had already ebbed. Thus, at least in this reviewer's opinion, from the outset the RILU was all-but destined to be part of the flotsam of revolution. In 1923, the 'revolutionary tide' lapped over Germany again during the crisis initiated by the Franco-Belgian occupation of the Ruhr in 1923. But, the 'united front' strategy failed to detonate the German revolution (pp580–89). What Tosstorff could have spelt out, is that the Bolsheviks now saw the Red Army rather than workers in the factories as the vanguard of any European revolution. More generally, in line with many recent studies, he does, however, indicate that bolshevism's drive for strict organisational centralism and ideological conformity and uniformity preceded Stalin, who made a bad situation worse. In 1921, for example, Zinoviev informed the KPD's representative at the Comintern's Third Congress, Curt Geyer, that, 'If admitting Unionists [to the International] were contingent on the KPD's approval […] that would mean "national federalism", but not an international' (p265).

Some three-quarters of Tosstorff's study addresses these early years in the history of the RILU. After 1923-24, when syndicalism had either abandoned the movement or joined the party, the Profintern became merely the trade union-arm of the Comintern. During the ensuing years, the RILU struggled to survive as an independent organisation. Apprehensive of the formation of the 'Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee' amid calls for 'international trade union unity', the RILU's looked to the colonial world as a new forum for world revolution during the mid-1920s (pp639–48). In 1927, a 'Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat' was set up to co-ordinate policy. The failure of Moscow's interventions in China, however, turned this new avenue of activity into another dead-end. The Comintern's ultra-sectarian 'Third Period' (1928–34) seemed to offer the Profintern a new lease of life (pp649–83). But the ill-fated attempts to set up 'red trade unions' at the national level and specialist 'sub-internationals' for black workers, stevedores and Latin America, proved to be a paper tiger. With the arrival of the Comintern's 'Popular Front' policy in 1934-35, the Profintern and its member unions were regarded as an obstacle to 'united' actions with social democrats – and, indeed, bourgeois organisations – to halt the rise of European fascism. In 1937, it was unceremoniously dissolved, almost as if its existence had become a dark secret.

Some readers may regret that Tosstorff's methodology remains 'traditional': a sort of latterday E H Carr plus Soviet documentation. At times the view 'from above' could usefully have been supplemented by attention to the social history of the revolutionary left. For example, providing an examination of why syndicalism could take root in the western

German mining industry, but not in the pits of South Wales or in the old-industrial regions of Saxony and Thuringia.[4] This could also have been used to demonstrate why Moscow's 'general lines' could not be simultaneously valid in, for example, Germany and Latin America at the same time. A more explicitly comparative approach would also have helped illuminate national differences in the response to Moscow's uniform 'general lines' and the process of 'stalinisation'. Equally, despite the painstaking attention to the period 1917 until 1923, the study fails to convince that syndicalism's early flirtation with bolshevism was based on more than a 'misunderstanding' (p713). It is a conclusion the majority of the book appears to contradict. Tosstorff begins his monograph by refuting Geoffrey Swain's conclusion that the organisation was 'never more than a footnote in the history of the international workers' movement' (p13). Both of them are right: the RILU was a 'spectre' haunting global capitalism, but it never took on the substance it founders initially hoped for.

Of course, any study of this length is bound to raises questions as well as providing important research conclusions. It should be stressed that Tosstorff did not set himself the task of offering a social as well as political history of the RILU. Crucially, however, he has paved the way for future scholars working on world communism, giving a much needed global dimension to existing literature focusing on relations between individual countries and the Profintern. It can only be hoped that this book will be translated in order to reach the majority of scholars are not themselves polyglots.

Norman La Porte, University of Glamorgan

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1 M Worley (ed), *In Search of Revolution. International Communist Parties in the Third Period*, (London, 2004); T Rees and A Thorpe (eds), *International Communism and the Communist International*, (Manchester, 1998).

2 For an English-language study of communist trade-union policy in Germany, see L Peterson, *German Communism, Workers' Protest, and the Labour Unions: The Politics of the Rhineland-Westphalia, 1920–24*, (London / Dordrecht, 1993).

3 For an English-language study, see K McDermott, *The Czech Red Unions, 1918–1929: A Study of their Relations with the Communist Party and the Moscow Internationals*, (Boulder, 1988).

4 S Berger, 'Working-Class Culture in the Ruhr and South Wales: a Comparison', in *Llafur. Journal of Welsh Labour History*, Vol 8, No 2, 2001, pp5-40.