

## BOOK REVIEWS

Nina Fishman, *Arthur Horner: A Political Biography*, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 2010

Volume I 1894-1944, ISBN 9781907103056, 608 pp, £35; Volume II 1944-1968, ISBN 9781907103063, 608 pp, £35.00

The late Nina Fishman's magnum opus is an exhaustively researched biography of the great trade union leader and lifelong communist Arthur Horner. In many ways it represents a continuation and culmination of an argument that she first made in her PhD thesis. Horner is one of three leading figures in this book with minds of their own – the other two are Pollitt and Campbell, whose ad hoc benign interventions protect Horner from the party that they led. The Communist Party itself is something of an outside irritant – its strategic perspectives on the unions are never examined in any depth – which becomes a dead weight on Horner, and something Fishman thinks he should have cast off. Alongside this thesis there are plenty of examples in the text of incidental judgements which I would question. Among them I would list the observation that the lines between unions and management in Soviet coalmining were merely 'blurred' (p681); that the adoption of the *British Road to Socialism*, with its depiction of Britain as a near colony of the USA, 'enabled Pollitt and Campbell to steer the party back from many of the extreme anti-Labour positions of 1948 to 1949' – though the fact that it was written with Stalin's direct involvement and never involved the party membership is not even mentioned (p826); and that the Khrushchev secret speech revealed 'Stalin's excesses and miscalculations' rather than, as Khrushchev put it, his readiness to effect the 'moral and physical annihilation' of anyone and anything that got in his way – including whole peoples (p903). I also wonder why 'futility' is the only adjective used to describe 'the doctors' plot' (p948), and I have trouble recognising Palmiro Togliatti as 'a past master in finely qualifying the PCI's attitude towards the Soviet Union' – a country that, as his biographer admits, he regarded as the 'the most

complete form of democracy possible', and which he did everything to defend, even in 1956.<sup>1</sup> But then we are told that John Gollan – who could not improve on Togliatti's analysis of the Soviet Union twenty years later – 'sought to emulate the Italian communist party' – an opinion not shared by most of the CP's members who favoured the PCI in the 1970s (p912).<sup>2</sup> These examples serve to underline the fact that *Arthur Horner* is not only a detailed account of the career of its hero but also a work of controversial political interpretations relevant to communist historiography.

Horner grew up in Merthyr Tydfil in the years when socialism was in the air and it was becoming a safe Labour seat. He passed from christian to socialist evangelism, and practised both as an ILP member from boyhood. By his mid-teens he was influenced by the teachings of Noah Ablett and the Unofficial Reform Committee of the South Wales Miners' Federation. During the Great War he organised anti-war meetings, was black-listed for leading strikes, arrested for spreading disaffection and only avoided the draft by absconding to Ireland, where he joined the Irish Citizen's Army, set up by James Connolly and James Larkin. He was a revolutionary before the Communist Party was founded and paid for his convictions with imprisonment.

Eighteen months after he took up his job as checkweighman in Mardy, the post-war slump in the coal industry had begun and he was a founder member of the CPGB. Hard times ensued. Wartime controls were dismantled, export markets were lost and the coal owners determined to force down pay and working conditions. Governments pursued deflationary policies in preparation for a return to the Gold Standard. Chronic unemployment and industrial conflict characterised most of the next twenty years. According to the early perspectives of the Communist International such conditions – allegedly barren of reformist opportunities – were conducive to a rising revolutionary consciousness under the direction of the CPGB. The main battlefield was in the trade unions and by 1924 the communists had established a National Minority Movement to lead the charge. Horner's prominence in coalfield politics had secured him a seat on the CPGB's Executive by May 1924, and with Arthur Cook elected as general secretary of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain (MFGB) the Miners' Minority Movement (MMM) looked set to make a big impact. On communist reasoning the reformist trade union leaders, unequal to the times in which they lived, would be harried and exposed –

if they failed to move to the left – by a militant rank and file. Separate ‘red’ unions might be formed – one actually appeared on the Fife coalfield in January 1923 but failed to displace its rival. By 1925 a major confrontation with the employers and the government was expected, supported by the TUC. The General Strike of May 1926 lasted nine days before the General Council called it off, leaving the miners to fight on alone. Horner and the CP argued for unremitting determination to press on even though there was a return to work in Nottinghamshire and the formation of an employer-friendly break-away from the MFGB – the Nottingham Miners’ Industrial Union, which encouraged similar moves on other coalfields. By November 1926 nearly a third of all miners were back at work.

The Communist Party gained members on the coalfield, and argued, with constant prompting from the Comintern, that the movement to revolutionary politics in the working class nationally had accelerated. But the real situation in the coal industry was marked by unemployment, an employers’ offensive, an MMM in retreat and a weakened MFGB. Horner’s continued insistence on ‘total war’ in 1927 and 1928 reflected the CPGB’s and the Comintern’s logic. But even at this stage in his politics he could see that the formation of separate ‘red’ unions in Britain was a Comintern folly to be resisted, and he did so in the appropriate forums. He was elected to the ECCI in 1928 as the Comintern adopted completely unrealistic ‘revolutionary’ ambitions for all its national sections, a logic of sectarianism which was congenial for advocates of break-away ‘red’ unions even in un-revolutionary Britain. Along with J R Campbell and Harry Pollitt, Horner used his experience to obstruct such tendencies within the Politburo, but they failed to stop the formation of the United Mineworkers of Scotland in April 1929. Under pressure from Moscow, Pollitt and Campbell also came out publicly in favour of such splits in the course of the year. The best they could do – Horner included – was to ‘mitigate [the] hyperbole’ of the New Line (p186). But considering that the CP’s denunciations of ‘social fascists’, that is non-communist leftists inside the unions, were broadcast by all party publications in 1929, they were not very successful. Horner himself publicly supported the most extreme positions (p192). Then in February 1930 the ECCI itself drew back somewhat from its own destructive logic (p197).

Even in South Wales the miners’ union represented only just over half of the workforce at a time when the Comintern and the CPGB had been

planning to create a separate 'red' union. Horner could see that unofficial strike action under CP leadership was also doomed to failure, and in February 1931 the Politburo expelled him from the party – only for the ECCI to rescind the decision pending 'a wide ideological campaign' against 'Hornerism' inside and outside the organisation. Meanwhile the Comintern decided in April that the British party had to *increase* its activities within the reformist unions. In May the ECCI instructed the CPGGB leadership to desist altogether from the proposed expulsion of Horner. It was then arranged for Horner to travel to Moscow to admit his mistakes without further penalty. A better illustration of the CP's subordination to the Comintern could not be imagined. In every stage of this process – the announcement of a revolutionary wave in the British working class in 1926-7; the adoption of a sectarian position in 1928; the intensification of this sectarianism in 1929; and the retreat from aspects of its own logic in 1930; the Comintern led the way. It is hardly surprising that some experienced trade union-based communists had doubts about the direction taken – there were thousands who expressed such doubts by leaving the party or finding no good reason to join it in the first place – or that the New Line was greeted with enthusiasm by some within the organisation. But the private misgivings of leading party members were concealed from the tiny surviving membership as the party's publications trumpeted the official Moscow-approved rhetoric. Only after the ECCI itself retreated did Pollitt inform it that it was 'extremely wrong' to dismiss the reformist unions (the only effective unions in Britain) as 'played out' (p231).

It was after another spell in prison – fifteen months hard labour – that Horner, according to his own account, analysed the failings of the previous thirteen years since his first incarceration. Fishman tells us that, with the aid of Clausewitz's *On War*, Horner emerged in 1932 – though he was far from being a labour movement general and had no army to command – 'with a new systematic approach to economic conflict, which guided his conduct of union affairs until his retirement as NUM general secretary in 1959' (p239). Yet he did so, the author judges (p965), holding on to the liability of his membership of the CPGGB, a decision which is explained mostly in terms of personal friendships (p968, p407), Fishman adding that: 'No opportunity presented itself which would have enabled him to leave the party in hot blood' (p968). For many, of course, the Khrushchev revelations and the Soviet suppression of the revolt in

Hungary in 1956 provided such an occasion, though we have already seen that Fishman plays that down. Sentiment, if not sentimentality, then, seems to have been an important component of the outlook of the would-be scientific Clausewitzian, if Fishman's account is accurate.

Horner's own summation of the lessons of Clausewitz adds up to the banal observation – one that Bevin or Citrine could happily subscribe to – that 'you can succeed only if you adopt the principle of inflicting the greatest degree of damage on your opponents, with the least hurt to your own forces' (p241). In practice it might have meant repudiation of the communist doxa that maximalist demands, put by a minority, could radicalise much larger numbers, even as these demands were defeated – a theory Trotsky later formulated in his 'transitional programme'. The forces at Horner's disposal in 1932 were miserably poor and the forces arraigned against him were mighty, and he had considerable experience of campaigns that had led to defeat, division and demoralisation, rather than the waves of radicalism that the Comintern had forecast. The MFGB was weak and divided, the CPGB was negligible – and also divided in this telling. The tasks before him included the need to defeat the breakaway South Wales Miners' Industrial Union, build the South Wales Miners' Federation (SWMF) and strengthen rank and file organisation, on which Horner's personal standing and promotional prospects rested, and win a national wages agreement on the road to restoring miners' wages to their pre-war level. Horner embarked on this work with members of his own party critical of his failure to heed the party line, which often contained a leninist-trotskyist logic of the sort I've referred to, as indeed it did into the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. The advent of the Popular Front tactic in 1935 made life easier for him in this regard, by eliminating the worst communist sectarianism in relation to trade union work, and by easing Horner's relations with non-communist officials. While the communist line remained firmly behind all militant action, it was equally committed to unconditional union loyalism (p310, p403) – a formula which it stuck to after the Second World War. By May 1936 Horner had risen to President of the SWMF, and from this position he worked to overcome divisions in the miners' ranks in a situation which demanded negotiation and compromise, when overwhelming force was lacking or too blunt an instrument to be effective.

With the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, Horner was able to focus

on war production, minimising industrial conflict, while winning significant wage rises for miners and the promotion of long-standing goals such as national wage bargaining and nationalisation. Corporatist arrangements brought him into close dealings with Bevin and the relevant Whitehall machinery. Success came in the form of the Porter Award in January 1944 – recommending wage increases and a national minimum, but only at the cost of strikes by miners intent on restoring differentials. This series of disputes, however, underlined the need for a thorough reform of the wage structures in mining in the minds of leading politicians. The war in the east ensured that the CPGB leadership was lined-up with Horner and against the unofficial strikes. The war also proved congenial to the creation of a National Union of Mineworkers to replace the MFGB with, it was hoped, a more united organisation. It also brought about a Labour parliamentary majority and nationalisation of the mines. Horner had the vision to champion a Miners' Charter of demands to be realised within the nationalised industry, and emerged victorious as general secretary of the NUM in July 1946, the month when nationalisation became law. When the CP turned to sharper criticism of the Labour government and renewed emphasis on wage militancy Horner had to juggle his determination to make nationalisation work with these potentially disruptive developments. Fishman thinks that Pollitt and Campbell protected Horner, as they had before, recognising the depth of his 'social democratic responsibility' (pp807-8), while they themselves 'trimmed briskly leftwards'. But she has to admit that the party as a whole stood for wage militancy and rank and file strength within the unions, and Pollitt himself advocated these positions (p875). Indeed the party's strategy was to tip the balance of power within the NUM to the left by a combination of rank and file militancy and the placement of communists in leading positions in districts such as Yorkshire. Pollitt is depicted as a restraining influence on this policy (p885), but the party's continuous espousal of it is played down and its rationale for wage militancy is not even mentioned, let alone discussed.<sup>3</sup> Even Horner, in 1955, spoke at the TUC against 'any form of wage restraint' (p892), but Fishman contents herself with the observation that he 'avoided addressing the contradiction between the NUM's support [for wage militancy] and its firm adherence to social democratic responsibility in regard to its own wage claims' (p893). But this only compounds the confusion. Horner's 'social democratic responsi-

bility' is now the NUM's. The reality, however, is that the unions – the NUM included – were not social democratic in Fishman's reading of the idea; they were not imbued by a vision of long-term strategic collaboration with social democratic governments, as in Sweden. A host of structural reasons peculiar to the UK – including the absence of majority Labour governments – worked against the success of such perspectives.

Horner's dominance within the NUM and NCB was in decline by late 1955. His alcoholism is invoked to explain this, together with his demoralisation at the endless internecine disputes at NUM head office (pp897-898). In assessing his life's work Fishman argues that 'he formulated a new, intellectually coherent strategy' (p957), vindicated by his successes in South Wales in the 1930s. This also reflected his willingness to confront the failures that preceded it. But his membership of the CP, in this account, was a personal failing by 1947, and 'an apparently insuperable obstacle' to his realising his ambition to join the General Council. This was the time of Cold War, when the party's 'dogmatic opposition to the Labour government's efforts to build socialism in Britain' (p967) and its encouragement of conflict with reformist union officials were incompatible with the 'social democratic responsibility' felt by Horner. Fishman thinks that 'Horner's decision to remain in the CPGB had profoundly negative consequences for British political history', speculating that his presence on the General Council deprived it of 'a clear strategic approach to union-employer-state relations, underpinned by Marxism, Clausewitzianism and social democratic responsibility' (p968). Horner, in alliance with Bevan in the Labour Party and Eden and Macmillan in government, might have secured the continuation of wartime corporatism in relation to arbitration, conciliation and wage determination, or so Fishman argues. I've already indicated my scepticism about this thesis and will not labour the point. What the analysis cries out for is some explanation of how other communist trade union leaders viewed their role and how they coped with the dual pressures inflicted upon Horner. Horner was not alone as a prominent communist trade union official – there were others within his own union and also within the FBU, TGWU, ETU, AEU and Foundry Workers. Communist leadership in the unions at national level grew in the 1950s and 1960s when the CP pursued a dual strategy of wage militancy and the promotion of its members into leadership positions. Prominent communist union officials also resigned from

the party in 1956 when Horner did not. We thus have the paradox that Horner – who was really a social democrat on Fishman’s reading, certainly by 1947 – remained in the party, while others – some of them self-avowed marxists – left it in disgust. He continued to speak on party platforms even into his retirement.

This demands a more systematic analysis of the nature of Horner’s communist convictions than we get here, though scattered through the text there are plenty of interesting fragments. Fishman refers to Horner’s ‘rigorous intellectual honesty’ as ‘compelling him to acknowledge that [there was] sufficient reason and evidence to reserve judgement on the Soviet state’ (p406). This was as early as 1938, though the acknowledgement Fishman refers to was private and referred to left-wing, but non-communist, trade union colleagues, rather than his own convictions. There is also some casuistry here, with plenty of ‘probables’ qualifying Fishman’s reasoning. Thus we learn that ‘Horner’s commitment to the international communist movement was probably wavering throughout 1938’ (p406). Yet two pages later we are told that ‘the USSR’s uncompromising opposition to Hitler and Franco reinforced his allegiance to the Comintern’. Horner was not present when the party leadership conformed to the new Soviet position on the Second World War in October 1939, and Fishman adds that ‘Pollitt probably ... recognised that if Horner had attended and voted “No”, he would have refused to retract his opposition’ (p419). I make that a double ‘probably’. She then speculates that ‘Dutt made no attempt to compel Horner to publicly register his support for the new line’, *probably* because of advice from Pollitt’ (p420). But Horner also desisted from describing Britain’s war as anti-fascist, saw the Soviet war against Finland in the same way as the party leadership, and enthusiastically supported the People’s Convention (p440) which, in the catastrophic circumstances following the defeat of France, was bound to be seen as subversive of the British war effort. Nevertheless, we are informed that: ‘Had Hitler delayed the invasion of the Soviet Union, Horner would probably have been compelled to choose between his union position and party allegiance’ (p452). Fishman also refers, circa 1947 – at a time when his membership of the party was seemingly *the* impediment to his desire to join the General Council – to Horner’s ‘private conscientious conviction of the USSR’s importance as a socialist country for the success of the worldwide



proletarian revolution' (p701). He accepted the communist explanation of the events denounced in the West as the 'Prague coup' after visiting Czechoslovakia in 1948, as the Cold War reached hysterical proportions (p754); he regarded the Chinese communist revolution as a vindication of his decision to remain a communist (p839); and he returned from the Soviet Union, shortly after Stalin's death, 'in a more positive frame of mind' (p869). Horner may have had misgivings about the repression in Budapest in 1956 but apparently 'knew that Pollitt's certitude and ruthlessness' in supporting the Soviet action 'were necessary' (p911), and told the *Daily Worker* that an 'American interventionist conspiracy' had sparked it all off (p913). The page numbers I've given show how scattered these statements are, and there is no sustained attempt made to weigh their aggregate significance.

Horner's public declarations of faith in the communist world-view stretch back in time of course. He publicly repudiated the idea that the communists had contributed to the rise of Hitler; he came back from the Soviet Union in 1937 with his public commitment to communism undiminished, even though his visits coincided with death sentences for old Bolsheviks and old comrades (pp389-92); he thought the POUM had acted treacherously in the Spanish civil war (pp365); and he told the CP congress in 1949 that 'the British people were in need of the Communist Party' (p695). He seems, on the face of it, to have been a communist, though one who could see that the party's early aspirations to bring the unions under its direction could only damage the reputation of its members in the unions, especially those of them in leadership positions. If so he would not be the first to hold perhaps contradictory beliefs in separate compartments of his mind. Many leading politicians do this. And his perception that he had to be seen to be a trade union man first and last, while conducting trade union work, was of course right. The ETU case in the 1950s and 1960s derived most of its drama from the spectre of King Street directing union policy.

I hope readers will pay this book and its author the compliment of reading it and continuing the debate Nina started.

*John Callaghan*  
*University of Salford*

## Notes

1. Aldo Agosti, *Palmiro Togliatti: a biography*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2008, pp170, 236-37.
  2. See John Gollan, 'Socialist Democracy – Some Problems: The Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in Retrospect', *Marxism Today*, January 1976, pp4-30.
  3. See John Callaghan, *Cold War, Crisis and Conflict: The CPGB 1951-68*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2003, pp157-65, 254-64.
- 

**Bernhard H Bayerlein, *'Der Verräter, Stalin, bist Du!' Vom Ende der linken Solidarität. Komintern und kommunistische Parteien im Zweiten Weltkrieg*,<sup>1</sup> Berlin, Aufbau-Verlag, 2008, 9783351026233, 540 pp, £19.99. With Natalja S. Lebedewa, Michail Narinski und Gleb Albert, and including an eyewitness report from Wolfgang Leonard and a foreword by Hermann Weber**

One of the darkest chapters in the history of Soviet-style communism was the two years of the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, 1939-41. And here, as in many other cases, whoever wanted to know what was really happening then could have known earlier – at least in general outline.

Yet immediately after the Soviet Union – or rather Russia – finally acknowledged the existence of the secret supplementary treaty for the partitioning of east-central Europe (barely two decades ago), thereby enabling free research on the Hitler-Stalin Pact, new important work on this agreement was published. By this means the intensity of German-Soviet co-operation around 1940 – both the open and secret support of the USSR for the Nazi Reich – was more clearly established; as well as the fact that Stalin in the summer of 1939 consciously decided in favour of the option presented by Hitler's Germany, which he thought was advantageous for him. Overall, today one can no longer speak of a poor state of research in relation to the inter-state level of the pact.

This book, however, presents documents on an aspect of the topic that is relatively underexposed though not previously unknown: the specific role of the Communist International, its various member parties, and in

particular the KPD in exile. And it is a study as fascinating and gripping as it is depressing. The collection is complemented by a contribution from a contemporary witness, Wolfgang Leonhard, who experienced the policy reversal inside the Soviet Union and the communist movement as a very young man, and who remains today perturbed by the shock of these events. Bayerlein's introduction, which follows an extensive contextualising foreword by Hermann Weber, contains some impressive interpretational work, which is almost always convincing. This study is to be recommended without reservation!

The book is not an edition for purely academic use. The sources it presents are, generally, published consecutively, as a series of extracts, but also comply with academic referencing norms; and they manage to fit a large amount of rich material between the covers. The individual extracts are each preceded by a short introduction, giving the necessary historical context. Additionally, more specific explanations or notes are incorporated into the text and, together with relevant photographs, listed in the margin. An annotated register of names, an index of pseudonyms, code-names and acronyms, and a thematically ordered compilation of selected literature, round off this user-friendly volume for a broadly historically and politically interested public. The documents, translated from various languages into German, originate in the main from the Russian State Archive for Social and Political History and the Archive of the Parties and Mass Organisations of the GDR in the Federal Archives; in addition there is material from a number of other archives, plus, not least, documents from several foreign publications.

At the centre of the documented events – obviously extending beyond the summer of 1941 – is the encoded correspondence of the Moscow Centre of the Comintern, which was handled by its secret radio networks; the informal sources around Stalin and his closest collaborators; and party and government declarations, official correspondence, speeches, articles, secret reports and so forth, at various different levels. From all this there emerges into view a multifarious and dense network of a very particular mechanism, and its specific relationships to the power politics of the Soviet state and ideological legitimisation. Communist sources are frequently cross-referenced to (more or less private) statements by left-wing critics, from within the communists' own ranks, and there are also revealing quotes from Goebbels's diaries. In the course of this, the *nomenklatura* appears

above all else as a dictatorship, based on methodical lies and self-deception.

What was the bottom line? The official communist party characterisation of the war before the summer of 1941 was that it was imperialist on both sides (which according to Lenin's logic of 1914 meant opposing the respective state leaderships of all participants, especially the fascist countries, with the aim of turning the 'world war into a civil war'). But during the years of the Hitler Stalin pact world communism – following Stalinist foreign policy and its instrumentalisation by the Soviet state – in fact stood on the side of national socialist Germany, although this was cloaked in official neutrality. This was most blatantly visible in the attempts of the communist parties of northern and western Europe to enable the continued existence of their organisations and press during the course of the German occupation of their respective countries in the spring and summer of 1940. The hopes of German communists themselves for a long time focused on a semi-legal status for the KPD under the national socialist dictatorship. According to Walter Ulbricht, they would then defend the German-Soviet Pact – together with social-democratic workers and Nazi 'working people' – against the aggressive, bellicose plans of England, the alleged centre of world imperialism, and 'expose' its enemies. It was because of this perspective that world communism hushed up national socialist terror during these years, especially the persecution of the Jews.

This means that Ulbricht's infamous article in the Comintern journal *Die Welt* (9 February 1940) – which Bayerlein takes up – far from representing an extreme position or an aberration, in fact describes in its logic exactly the political line of the KPD, the Comintern and its Moscow masters. After the rapid victory of the German *Wehrmacht* over the French army and the speedy establishment of Nazi hegemony on the European continent, which was obviously not anticipated by Stalin, there was a tentative modification – though not a revision – of the communist stance on the war that had been propagated since the end of August 1939.

Bayerlein's collection does also show how profoundly the communist world movement – especially in Europe – struggled to accept the Hitler-Stalin Pact, and in the subsequent period tried to assess how to react to further changes to the situation as brought about by the Soviet-German Boundary and Friendship Treaty of 28 September 1939. They had, after all, battled for years under the banner of antifascism. But 'fascism' and

‘antifascism’ were now, according to foreign minister Molotov, ‘outdated unusable formulations’. The previous world view had virtually been turned on its head.

Initially, a number of communist parties misunderstood the German-Soviet Pact as purely an emergency measure taken by Stalin, which would still allow them to continue the policy of the ‘people’s front’ period in a modified form. This was evident in the first appeal of the KPD leadership in exile after the conclusion of the treaty, as was, of course, the demand for Hitler’s overthrow. The Moscow leadership, communicating its stance via the Comintern, had to intervene severely in this case, as well as against other communist parties, in order to ‘correct’ this.

Although the parties of the Comintern had already been ‘bolshevised’ and ‘purged’ – i.e. strictly subordinated to Moscow – in the late 1920s, in the late summer and autumn of 1939 the changes of party policy went too far for substantial numbers of party members and functionaries. Especially among their closer allies in the left and liberal political spectrum, there was a horrified distancing from this policy. Among German political exiles, the Hitler-Stalin Pact, and the way in which it was defended by communists, contributed decisively to a *rapprochement* of independent left-wing socialist groupings and the rump SPD.

One of the particular merits of the present selection of documents is the opportunity it offers of establishing continuities between the 1939-41 phases and the following phase – from the beginning of the *Wehrmacht*’s Russian crusade until the dissolution of the Comintern (1941-43). A key continuity was the complete abandonment of a world revolutionary orientation – in the original sense – in favour of the pursuit of espionage activities for the USSR, which could now scarcely be differentiated from the political activities of the International. (The heroic resistance of communists in Nazi-dominated Europe, including the Third Reich, is of course another story.) The proclaimed aim of the making of ‘patriotic alliances’ – now very widely conceived – is, upon closer examination, on a par with the empty phrases of the pact phase.

However, the national patriotic aspect of communist policy appears to me – unlike Bayerlein – to be already becoming distinctive in the ‘people’s front’ period. As well being influenced by opportunistic considerations, this was also very much a result of a genuine process of learning after the ultra-left period (1928-1933/34). And in my opinion a perception of the aims of

the struggle against the contemporary regimes of occupation and collaboration as being for national liberation is not to be criticised (whatever else the discussion was also undoubtedly about – in Italy, or in a certain sense even in Germany). Rather, what is to be criticised is the completely unscrupulous appeal during the later period – from mid-1941 – to downright chauvinism towards ‘the Germans’, whereas in the occupied countries in 1939/40 it had still been recommended to seek to make alliances with the ordinary German soldiers of occupation. The tactic of individual terror attacks on members of the *Wehrmacht* and their indigenous supporters – which were highly doubtful in their effect – were alien to the traditions of the workers’ movement (with its orientation towards mass action). This effectively Moscow-initiated strategy is rightly stripped of its heroic halo by Bayerlein, through the use of documents by contemporary critics.

The title of the book is a quote from the last article written by the inspired publicist and organiser Willi Münzenberg, who had been forced out of the KPD in 1938-9 because he did not follow Ulbricht’s policy towards the communists’ allies on the left – or on other forms of intolerant and ill-advised behaviour. On 22 September 1939, in response to the Nazi-Soviet Pact, Münzenberg wrote – in a reference to the typical Stalinist psychosis of betrayal: ‘Today millions wake up in all countries, they stretch out their arms, pointing to the East, and call: “The traitor, Stalin, is you!”’

Münzenberg, who was murdered in the summer of 1940 in unexplained circumstances, could not know in the autumn of 1939 how far Stalin was prepared to go. In furtherance of the pact, more than 1000 imprisoned German communists who had fallen out of favour were got rid of by simply handing them over to the National Socialist security forces at the German-Soviet demarcation line.

*Peter Brandt*

*Berlin*

*Translated by Norman LaPorte*

## Notes

1. ‘You, Stalin, are the traitor’. *The End of Left-wing Solidarity. The Comintern and Communist Parties in the Second World War.*
-

Daryl Glaser and David M Walker (eds.), *Twentieth-Century Marxism: A Global Introduction*, London, Routledge, 2007, 9780415772846, 272 pp, £24.99; Silvo Pons and Robert Service (eds.), *A Dictionary of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Communism*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 2010, 9780691135854, 944 pp, £69.95

Taken together these two volumes provide an excellent complement to each other. While *Twentieth-Century Marxism* traces the marxist tradition in the twentieth century, *A Dictionary of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Communism* provides over four hundred detailed entries on varied major topics. This does not mean that there are no problems with these books, particularly with the latter.

David Walker's introduction to *Twentieth-Century Marxism* makes a convincing case for the relevancy of the subject and soundness of this book's approach. The work, which is divided into three distinct sections – classical marxism, modern recent movements inspired by Marx, and debates about marxism today – shares the unevenness of all works with multiple authors. All the same, the general quality, particularly in the first two sections, is quite high. There are the inevitable errors, such as when the introduction refers to the 'International Workers of the World' as one of the many marxist inspired movements (p1). Now, if what was meant was 'Industrial Workers of the World', one might question whether they were influenced by Marxism. On the other hand, if there were an organisation called 'International Workers of the World', most readers, along with this reviewer, have likely not heard of it, and would benefit from further elaboration.

While space will not allow a complete recap of all the arguments made in this useful volume, a few are worth including. Alan Shandro makes a spirited defence of Lenin and leninism by stressing the reality of 'Soviet socialism under siege'. He argues that the counter-revolution pushed the 'vanguard of the revolution into more or less vicious circles of dependence upon the assistance of bourgeois experts and upon political terror and thus it wore away at popular confidence in the emancipatory dynamic of the process' (p24).

An examination of Rosa Luxemburg and Leon Trotsky by Ian D Thacher focuses on them as 'emblematic of the dominant currents of left Marxism' (p30). A masterful job is done in developing the ways in which

these historical actors both shared certain ideas and parted company on other points (for example the centrality of democracy for Luxemburg). Even for those scholars familiar with these thinkers, this essay is enlightening. One need not agree with the author's contention that there exists 'a relevance for Luxemburg and Trotsky beyond left-communism and interpretations of Stalinism ... one could use their writings to help explain the ultimate collapse of the USSR in 1991' (p41) to find this discussion stimulating.

By contrast, Jules Townshend zeros in on the classical right-wing European marxists like Bernstein, Kautsky and the Mensheviks. Typically rejected by those farther left for being too reformist, and ignored by liberals as too radical, right-wing marxism remains an intellectual current that should be evaluated. The author makes a strong case that all of the tendencies discussed in this chapter shared a belief in the parliamentary road to socialism, not merely out of fear of the repression that stronger radical actions might bring, but because they valued parliamentarianism, as did Kautsky, as 'a key process by which the working class would develop the political maturity to become a ruling class' (p49). All of the currents so far discussed stand in stark contrast to soviet Marxism, which, as Mark Sandle soundly demonstrates, reflected 'the subordination of Marxist theory to the narrow political agenda of Stalin and his programme of state-sponsored change' (p63).

With the social and economic changes in European capitalism in the 1960s and 1970s, many west European communist parties searched for a third way between the accommodation of social democracy and the rigidity of soviet communism. This search became popularly known as 'eurocommunism'. As Rick Simon points out, this phenomenon was most important in Italy, France and Spain, but had support in many smaller parties as well. For all the early hopes this movement raised in certain quarters, eurocommunism may be judged a failure, and as 'a phase in the crisis of world communism and in the transition of western European communist parties away from orthodox Marxism' (p92). Of less importance is 'western marxism', very incisively dismissed by Joseph Femia with a clear analysis and specific examples. Most often members of this tendency, such as Herbert Marcuse, have actually shown themselves to 'have little in common with the Marxist tradition' (p110).

For many reasons, it is hard to remember what promise African



marxism was once seen to hold. Daryl Glasier does a wonderful job of rescuing this 'African Marxism's moment' from our fading memories. Awash in a sea of peasants and often miseducated by their Soviet allies, African Marxists ultimately failed, while their nations are now subject to 'recolonisation' with limited real options, since much authority now 'rests with the IMF and World Bank [whose policies have] imposed great social hardship, sharpened inequality and unleashed venality' (p135). Nick Knight looks to Asia and finds that Lenin was the bridge between classical marxism and the needs of Asian revolutionaries. This was largely because Lenin 'articulated a theory of imperialism that gave to anti-colonial revolutions an important role in the world revolution' (p142).

Karl Marx had little understanding or interest in Latin America according to Ronaldo Munck. Even so, the power of the Russian revolution as an example meant the region 'was fertile territory for Bolshevism [and] the Comintern came to dominate the story of Marxism in Latin America', at least until the Cuban Revolution of 1959 (p156). Taken as a whole, the discussions in the first two sections of *Twentieth-Century Marxism* will serve as either a useful refresher course or a needed introduction to the amazing varieties of marxisms the world has witnessed in the last century. The last section, devoted to theoretical debates, is less satisfying; much like a stale dessert after a hearty dinner. That said, one essay that stands out is Daniel Little's 'Marxism and method'. The author does a service by pointing out Marx's contributions to twentieth century social science (pp240-243). Taken as a whole, this is a very useful and high quality volume.

As useful but a far more inconsistent text is *A Dictionary of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Communism*. The loathing that the editors hold for the left in general and communism in particular causes some odd, if not bizarre, contradictions to arise. To be fair, they are open about their beliefs, telling the reader that even the memory of communism 'cannot be separated from some of the worst tragedies and most infamous crimes against humanity perpetrated in contemporary history' (pxii). To the editors, their dictionary is clearly a reference book on a 'totalitarian nightmare'. Yet, the entries within are factual and dispassionately written. This often creates a tension between the editors' stated intentions and the facts presented by contributors to this project.

On the very first page of the introduction, we learn that North Korea

‘remains as the lone, irreducible custodian of the Communist past’ (pvii). Some might question this, as neither Marx nor Lenin wrote in favour of either socialism in one family or a monarchical political regime. More to the point, this line is contradicted by the submission of Andrei N Lankov on Kim il Sung, founder of the North Korean government. It is pointed out that Kim moved his country away from what most would understand as communism and created a new philosophy called *juche*. This kept some elements of leninism but combined them with ‘Korean nationalism and vestiges of the earlier Confucian tradition. Gradually, Juche replaced Marxism-Leninism as the official ideology’ (pp454-5).

Of course, when editor Robert Service is called upon to contribute, one gets 1950s cold war-style prose. In his universe, there is no nuance and no shadows of grey. The world is starkly divided between light and dark. Take his article on Lenin, for example. Anyone reading this would conclude that Lenin was pure evil who, while in his early twenties, ‘shocked even his own family with his refusal to participate in relief work’ (p471). The reader also learns that Lenin’s ideas were a ‘ragbag’, and included the centuries-old ‘intellectual (and if it dare be said, ecclesiastical) traditions that Russia had a unique and universalist destiny in the world’ (p473). As Service says in his conclusion, lest anyone have missed his point, without Lenin Russia might have avoided ‘dictatorship, terror, ideological certitude ... revolutionary optimism and amorality’ (p474).

Fortunately, most of this weighty tome is more balanced. One is tempted to say more scholarly and up to current academic standards. For example, consider the excellent essays on Karl Liebknecht (pp478-479) and Rosa Luxemburg (pp495-497), written by Ottokar Luban. They are models of precise, clear and objective writing. Likewise, there is the high quality work of Aldo Agosti and many other examples of fine scholarship within this work.

Still, problems remain, as one considers the bias of selection. That is, the question of what and who are or are not included in *A Dictionary of 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Communism*. Why is Alexei Rykov selected for a full essay but not prominent German communists such as Paul Levi, Ruth Fischer, or Ernst Meyer. Surely their walk across the stage of the political history of the Weimar Republic deserves comment? Fischer’s book *Stalin and German Communism*, written after her defection from communism, should have warranted an in-depth treatment, let alone her role as

German communist leader. The history of the German Democratic Republic would certainly have been rendered more fairly and in a more nuanced manner had this tome included detailed essays on reform communist Gregor Gysi or spy master Marcus Wolf.

Another glaring weakness is the scarcity of women communists studied. This oversight is also evident as regards communists and communism in the global south. Have Africa and Latin America really produced so few individuals of note or movements of importance? Why no treatment of communism in Ghana or Chile? Surely, there is more than enough material on both nations readily available. Of course, certain errors of omission or fact are most likely inevitable in a project so great in scope. So, if one can get beyond the ritualistic anti-communism, and treat each essay with care, this can be viewed as an important work.

Taken together, *Twentieth-Century Marxism: A Global Introduction* and *A Dictionary of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Communism* are very valuable contributions to the field. Still, particularly concerning the latter, the reader's caution is advised.

William A. Pelz,  
Chicago

---

**Guillaume Quashie-Vauclin, *L'Union de la Jeunesse Républicaine de France 1945-1956. Entre organisation de masse de jeunesse et mouvement d'avant-garde communiste*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2009, ISBN 9782296092068, 264 pp, £20.00 With preface by Michel Dreyfus**

This book, published with the support of the Gabriel-Péri Foundation, is a revised version of the masters thesis of the author, dealing with the history of the French youth organisation Union de la Jeunesse Républicaine de France (UJRF). Established in March-April 1945 in place of the Fédération Nationale des Jeunesses Communistes de France, the UJRF was *de facto* the main organisation for French young communists until 1956, when it was finally disbanded and replaced by the Union de la Jeunesse Communiste de France. Despite its relevance within the French communist movement, the UJRF has been almost ignored by historians of communism, reflecting a more general (and international)

lack of attention to the issues of communism and youth, which have been investigated systematically only in recent years. Based on extensive research – carried out mainly in the archives of the PCF and of the first leader of the UJRF Raymond Guyot; on the official magazine of the UJRF *L'Avant-Garde*; and on interviews with former leaders and militants of the UJRF – the work by Quashie-Vauclin helps fill this gap, paving the way for new questions and new research in the field. Remarkably, the author does not feign political neutrality, but clarifies already in his introduction to be himself a member of the PCF; this, however, does not imply a lack of scientific accuracy, as, to Quashie-Vauclin, 'the engagement consists of a scientific approach', as in Pierre Villar's words (p29).

The underlying question in the book regards the 'status' of the UJRF (p26): vanguard organisation for an elite of indomitable young communists or broad network geared to the 'youth masses', including non-communists? The answer changed over time, in accordance with the different views and needs of the leaders of the French communist movement. Originally, the UJRF was conceived as a 'mass organisation' for male young people (girls, in contrast, had to be included in the sister organisation Union de Femmes Françaises [UFF]). Subsequently, its main activities were mostly recreational rather than political, in an attempt to allure as many 'apolitical' young members as possible. According to the author, the reasons for this approach were twofold. On the one hand, the replacement of a young communist league with a broader, formally non-communist network was the global strategy of the communist movement after 1942-1943, when the Young Communist International (KIM) had been disbanded. The author acknowledges this, and refers to the meeting between Maurice Thorez and Josef Stalin of 19 November 1944 as a likely crucial moment for the creation of the UJRF (albeit he does not cite directly the minutes of the meeting, which have been translated and published in several forms, p65). On the other hand, Quashie-Vauclin emphasises the importance of endogenous French factors, ranging from the legacy of the Popular Front of 1936 to the efforts of the Gaullist movement to hegemonies French youth. As a result of this approach, in September 1945 the UJRF claimed to have some 250,000 members (a figure that is contentious).

In the ensuing years, however, the 'mass' character of the UJRF would have been thrown into question several times. Very soon the unitary

strategy was undermined, by the refusal of the other youth organisations (in particular Young Socialists) to take part in it, and by the reluctance of Young Communist members to join a (formally) non-communist network. As a result, after late 1945 the organisation fell under the control of André Leroy, who could be described as the henchman of one of the most important left-wingers within the PCF leadership, André Marty. Thus, in 1946-7 the agenda of the UJRF was more centred on social and political struggles than on leisure and recreational activities. In 1948, however, the UJRF line was turned again, in what Quashie-Vauclin calls 'a palace revolution' (p130), which led to the replacement of Leroy with the more moderate Léo Figuères. Although the documentary evidence does not allow to ascertain the specific reasons for this new turn, it seems likely that Leroy was ousted because the PCF secretary himself was eager to weaken the influence on the youth movement of Marty (who supported the transformation of the UJRF into a proper Young Communist League). Nevertheless, in 1950 the departure of Figuères to Vietnam and of Thorez to Moscow rendered it possible for Marty to again gain influence with the UJRF, with the remarkable exception of the Seine branch, which was controlled by the former UJRF Secretary Guyot. In the bleak atmosphere of confrontation and fierce anti-communism of the Korean War, the UJRF entered a deep crisis, so that in 1952 it had no more than 15,000 members. Despite this, the organisation was still capable of engaging in massive campaigns, such as the movement for the liberation of Henri Martin (in which even Jacques Prévert and Fernand Léger were involved), a former partisan who had been charged with sabotage because of his pacifist engagement. After 1954, the anticolonial struggles of the UJRF against the war in Algeria would have led the organisation to recover. Despite this, in 1956 the PCF leadership decided to disband the UJRF and replace it with a Young Communist League – a decision that was taken in a strictly top-down perspective, and that arrived, rather paradoxically, when the UJRF was finally gaining some consensus among young people.

One of the main merits of this well-researched book (and also well-written, particularly in its many, lively metaphors) is to be found exactly in the ability of the author to stress the deep and bidirectional linkage between the tortuous history of the UJRF, the national politics of the PCF and the wider French political environment. The overall path

followed by the UJRF between 1945 and 1956 is fruitfully described by the author as ‘an history at acute angle’, from the short-lived season of strength that was spurred on by the Liberation, through the dark hours of the Cold War, to the slow improvement in the age of the first ‘thaw’ (p233). Stressing how exogenous and endogenous factors affected the history of the UJRF in non-linear ways, the author shows how internal change and adaptations took place continuously ‘at the wrong moment’ – including the eventual decision to disband the organisation in 1956, when it was substantially recovering from its deepest crisis (p237). At the same time, the attention paid by Quashie-Vauclin to the developments of some local branches of the network (to which a number of very valuable sub-sections are devoted to at the end of every ‘national’ chapter) makes it possible to have a more nuanced view of the many ‘turns’ in the history of the UJRF. In particular, this approach illuminates the extent to which the decisions of the national leadership were actually implemented by grass-root militants. This leads Quashie-Vauclin to argue that, whereas the history of the national direction of the UJRF might be represented visually through a ‘seismographer’, because of its many turns and ups-and-downs, the local path would be visualised with ‘much smoother curves’. At the local level, the vanguard and mass approach coexisted rather than clashed against each other (p236).

Quashie-Vauclin’s work is of great value as the first major study on the history of the UJRF. The work is focussed on political-organisational aspects and thus paves the way for further investigation on the topic. Was there any international exchange (not only in financial, but also and mainly in political and cultural terms) between communist youth movements? More specifically, what role did the French delegation play in the World Festivals of Youth and Students? What were the relations between the UJRF and its female sister organisation UFF? In other words, how ‘male’ and ‘virile’ were the activities of the UJRF? Hopefully other works, following in the steps of Quashie-Vauclin’s ground-breaking research, will help answer these questions.

*Leo Goretti*  
*University of Reading*

---

---

Norman LaPorte, Kevin Morgan and Matthew Worley (eds.), *Bolshevism, Stalinism and the Comintern: Perspectives on Stalinization, 1917-53*, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2008, ISBN 9780230006713, x + 319 pp, £55.10

This substantial volume is a timely and important contribution to the field of international communist studies. The editors have identified a significant gap in the existing literature – the lack of an archive-based comparative approach to the history of the Comintern and its member parties. It should be stressed that this is not a general history of the Comintern; rather the stated aim is to expand the boundaries of our understanding by means of a new ‘transnational’ framework inspired by the potentialities of Hermann Weber’s seminal ‘Stalinization’ thesis, first expounded in the late 1960s. In his work Weber clearly prioritised exogenous over indigenous factors in the transformation of the German Communist Party from a relatively democratic organisation into a highly centralised instrument of stalinist policy, and one of the key goals of the book is to raise awareness of Weber’s thesis by testing its applicability for other national sections of the Comintern. Hence, unlike many edited volumes, this one is highly coherent and brings together a distinguished collection of both internationally renowned scholars and younger experts, who adopt a plurality of methodologies, including those associated with the recent ‘cultural turn’. Inevitably, some pieces engage more directly with Weber’s concept than others; some are essentially empirical, others analytical and interpretive, some fully incorporate new archival material, others rely more on secondary sources, several are overtly comparative, a few are more narrowly focused. Overall, this combination of approaches, content and source material is a definite strength, especially in terms of its appeal to a broader audience.

The fifteen chapters, all of which are accessibly and fluently written, explore in fascinating detail arguably the key dilemma of Comintern history – the complex interactions between the local, national and international contexts of communist activity. Chronologically, the focus is on the 1920s and 1930s, but some authors carry the story through to the 1940s and Stalin’s death. The editors’ introduction is lucid and balanced, and admirably sets the tone for subsequent essays, as does Professor Weber’s forceful re-substantiation of his original ‘Stalinization’ thesis, and

Brigitte Studer's very careful critical evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses. These opening chapters are followed by several national case studies assessing the impact of Stalinization on various communist parties, three of which are strictly comparative in approach: Andreas Wirsching on the PCF and KPD, Ben Fowkes on the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav parties, and Kerry Taylor and Matthew Worley on the CPNZ and CPGB. Three other authors focus on individual communist parties: Aldo Agosti on the PCI, Tauno Saarela on the Finnish party, and Emmet O'Connor on the Irish party. These essays are interspersed with more thematic contributions: Peter Huber analyses the changing social composition of the Comintern's central bodies; Jean-François Fayet examines the important case of Paul Levi; Norman LaPorte and Kevin Morgan discuss the Ernst Thälmann and Harry Pollitt leadership cults; Gina Hermann provides a historiographical account of Comintern and PCE policies during the Spanish Civil War; and finally Edward P. Johanningsmeier examines the Profintern and syndicalism in the USA.

Particularly noteworthy are those innovative contributions that deal with the 'everyday life' of communists, which by their very nature complicate the powerful notion of external Muscovite control. Here we might pick out Randi Storch's exploration of the experiences of Chicago's communist foreign language speaking ethnics for whom the Soviet Union mattered a great deal, but who also acted in ways that 'made sense in their local union, community or club meetings' (p278). Indeed, Storch's admonition, that the best way to comprehend American communism is to move beyond the commonplace binary of communists 'as either Moscow's puppets or independent radicals' (p263), basically forms the leitmotif of the volume.

There are, however, one or two lacunae. First is the lack of a chapter specifically devoted to the central authorities in Moscow, what could be called the 'Russian perspective'. What did the Soviet bosses of the Comintern (Lenin, Zinoviev, Trotsky, Bukharin, Stalin and others) mean by the concept of the 'bolshevisation' of the international communist movement? What motivated the 'Stalinists' in their attempts to 'Stalinise' the communist parties (the term 'Stalinization' was, of course, never used at the time)? How did the nature, content and forms of 'Stalinization' change over time, and why? Was it the same beast in 1928-29 as in 1938-39? Second, there is nothing on Asian communism, especially the Chinese and Indian communist parties. In this sense the book is rather anglo-



saxon and eurocentric. It would be enlightening to know how Stalinization was adapted in China and other parts of the non-western world. Finally, a concluding chapter pulling all the evidence together would have been welcome. But it would be churlish to end this review on a negative note. This book will prove invaluable to Comintern specialists and to all those interested in the varied experiences of the international communist movement.

Kevin McDermott  
Sheffield Hallam University

---

**Marc Junge, *Die Gesellschaft ehemaliger politischer Zwangsarbeiter und Verbannter in der Sowjetunion. Gründung, Entwicklung und Liquidierung (1921-1935)*, Akademie Verlag, Berlin, 2009, 9783050045597, 513 pp, €59.80, hbk**

The Society of Former Political Convicts and Exiles (OPK), founded in Moscow in March 1921, encapsulated many of the contradictions and ambiguities of the early Soviet state. It was formed, on the initiative of veterans of the revolutionary struggle from various parties, to represent and commemorate all those who had suffered exile and imprisonment for their parts in the struggle against tsarism, irrespective of past or present party affiliation. Former anarchists, such as P Maslov and D Novomirsky were prominent among its founders, along with Mensheviks, Socialist Revolutionaries, Bolsheviks and others who had been sentenced by the tsarist state for political activity. The OPK sought to preserve the memory of the common struggle of the revolutionary movement at a time when the victorious faction of that movement, the ruling Bolshevik Party, was eliminating the last remnants of its rivals' organisations within Soviet Russia. It was an organisation of intensely political people which had to try to be above parties and outside of present-day politics. At first its members could – and occasionally did – include both the currently jailed and their jailers. By the time it was finally dissolved, in 1935, it had changed beyond recognition, having long lost its political and organisational independence.

Marc Junge's work, based on his post-doctoral thesis, is the first full-length study of the society, and traces its story from its creation to its eventual dissolution. It is a very thorough factual account, which sets the OPK firmly in the wider context of Soviet political life in the first decade of Stalin's rule. In this way, Junge gives an insight not only into the evolution of a particular body with certain peculiarities (not least, a number of members with a reputation beyond the borders of the USSR), but also into the way institutional politics as a whole developed in the Soviet Union.

At the time of its foundation, the OPK was in some respects not such an exceptional organisation. It was still possible for societies – even some with a political focus – to be established on initiatives from below. The Soviet authorities at this stage were keen to integrate non-Bolsheviks prepared to accept the Bolsheviks' political monopoly into public life. Bodies like the Socialist (from 1924, Communist) Academy, founded in 1918, which brought together Bolshevik and non-Bolshevik specialists in the humanities and social sciences, and even the trade unions, provided a space where former members of other parties and groups could be active alongside the ruling communists. Indeed, in the initial phase it was the Soviet trade unions, in the person of their leader M I Tomsky, which acted as the OPK's major patron.

Junge describes the process whereby the OPK tried to find its niche. In its very first years it took on a bewildering variety of functions. It organised commemorative meetings in Moscow, and it provided accommodation and sheltered employment to veterans of the revolution (especially the non-Bolsheviks, who found it harder to get work for the state). At a time of acute material shortage in Soviet Russia, it provided pensions and social benefits for its members and their families, largely financed by the state. It published a journal, *Katorga i sylka* (*Hard Labour and Exile*), containing memoirs and reminiscences. For a brief period it even worked alongside the Political Red Cross and attempted to defend human rights in Soviet Russia. The impossibility of this last stance became apparent in the summer of 1922, when the Soviet state organised a criminal show trial against many of the leaders of the Socialist Revolutionary party, several of whom were OPK members. Some of the non-Bolsheviks in the OPK tried to draw parallels between the pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary treatment of dissent. The OPK

Presidium even voted a food ration for the mother of S V Morozov, one of the defendants in the trial – a decision which had to be hastily rescinded (p124). At the end of August 1922 Tomsky, whose role as the OPK's patron meant that the SR case had put him in a difficult position, suggested that the organisation be dissolved. But this proved unnecessary. The OPK shifted its stance from independent activism, firstly to one that Junge calls 'active neutrality', and then to an abandonment of any attempt to use its members' moral authority to influence current Soviet politics.

The Soviet regime, on the other hand, certainly wanted to use the standing of the revolutionary veterans to bolster its own moral authority as the legitimate inheritor of a great revolutionary tradition. Despite its ostensibly non-party status, the OPK's material dependence on the Soviet state gave the communists the whip hand in the organisation, once they chose to use it. Its subsequent evolution reflected the development of Soviet politics as a whole, both organisationally and ideologically. It was reorganised after 1922, on a basis which expressly excluded former prisoners of the tsars who had been actively hostile to the Soviet state after 1917. Then, in 1924, in a move which the CPSU was to use in many Soviet organisations where communists and non-communists worked together, it organised a distinct communist fraction within the OPK, through which the party could exercise control. Although individual OPK members could, and did, dissent from the official party line, the loyalty of the organisation as a whole was secured. This was not achieved without opposition: for example, Junge reproduces the resignation statement of the former anarchist A N Andreev, who publicly left the organisation in March 1924 in protest against the growing use of political repression in the Soviet Union (pp460-62).

However, those who left were greatly outnumbered by those who joined the society – its membership passed the 500 mark around 1924, and continued to grow throughout the 1920s, reaching almost 3000 by the early 1930s. The OPK retained its welfare functions, and was able to develop a small constellation of enterprises, sanatoria and so on which helped finance its activities. The main focus of its work in the mid-1920s was directed towards history – preserving the memory of the revolutionary struggle against tsarism, collecting documents and artefacts for museums, and researching the history of the revolutionary movement. For the most part, during the NEP period there was no official line on much

of this history, which meant that the OPK could publish materials and memoirs from a range of organisations and standpoints. It also began work on a series of biographical encyclopaedias of the Russian revolution. For much of this time, the leading figure in the organisation was the communist V D Vilensky-Sibiryakov, who did much to ensure that the published output of the OPK was of high quality. One way this was achieved was by establishing working research groups, consisting of former inmates of different penal institutions and historians. Under Vilensky-Sibiryakov, a teleological Bolshevick narrative of the history of the revolutionary movement was developed, in which all the preceding development led up to, and culminated in, the emergence of Lenin's party and its seizure of power.

The dominant role of Vilensky-Sibiryakov was short-lived, however. In the mid-1920s he was identified with the Trotskyist opposition, and the communist fraction in the OPK – previously his power base – was mobilised to depose him. This represented a further encroachment on the society's supposedly non-party nature, but Vilensky-Sibiryakov, having previously used the communist organisation to ensure party control of the OPK, was unable to rally the society's non-communists in his defence. The leading positions from then on were taken by two old Bolsheviks: I A Teodorovich and E M Yaroslavsky. Teodorovich was an independent-minded communist of a relatively liberal temperament: at the end of 1917 he had resigned from Lenin's first government in protest at its failure to involve representatives of other socialist parties. Yaroslavsky held very much to the Stalin line. By 1928, the OPK was again getting entangled in the factional battles within the CPSU, as Teodorovich, whose government responsibility was in the agriculture commissariat, became identified with the 'right deviation' and became the target of a campaign of hostility.

The issue here was how to interpret the role of *Narodnaya volya* in the history of the revolutionary movement, as 1929 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of that organisation. Lenin's brother had belonged to, and sacrificed his life for, *Narodnaya volya*, and Teodorovich was keen to celebrate it and present it as a kind of forerunner of Bolshevism for its emphasis on active struggle and organisation. However, Russian marxism had developed precisely as a rejection of *Narodnaya volya*, and it was the Bolsheviks' agrarian-oriented opponents, the Socialist Revolutionaries, who had always been keenest to claim descent from that group. Junge does a fine

job in unpicking and presenting the complex and increasingly bitter political struggle which ensued, in which Teodorovich came under fire both from party hardliners keen to root out the 'right deviation' and M N Pokrovsky's school of historians for his inadequate marxism.

Other political developments from 1929 onwards finally undermined the OPK's entire *raison d'être*. A series of show trials of former members of other parties, and the CPSU's increasingly shrill campaign for 'vigilance', tended to make redundant the entire OPK project of co-operating with and co-opting revolutionary veterans from other traditions. As Junge shows, around this time there was a wave of arrests of OPK members with non-Bolshevik pasts, which caused indignation among the OPK's remaining non-party members, and particular problems for Yaroslavsky, who had to try to defend the official line. Most notably, the veteran revolutionary and former *Narodnaya volya* member Vera Figner publicly rebuffed an attempt by Yaroslavsky to present her with OPK membership to mark her eightieth birthday in 1932, referring to the society's refusal to oppose the use of the death penalty in the USSR (p368).

The historiographical mission of the society was also cut away by Stalin's letter to the journal *Proletarskaya revolyutsiya* in 1931, in which he made it clear that henceforth only one interpretation of the history of Bolshevism was permissible. Economic difficulties and a shortage of paper obliged the society to cut back its publishing plans. Nonetheless, the OPK carried on for another four years, until in the wake of the Kirov assassination the number of quasi-independent societies in the USSR was pared back to the barest minimum. In 1935, the state took on direct responsibility for the OPK's remaining welfare functions, and the organisation was liquidated. Within a few years, the same fate awaited many of its most prominent members, including Teodorovich (shot in 1937) and Vilensky-Sibiriyakov (arrested in 1936, died in prison in 1942).

Junge's book is an impressive achievement – well-researched, clearly written and well-organised. It will be the standard work on the Society of Former Political Convicts and Exiles for many years to come.

Francis King  
Norwich

---

Gina Herrmann, *Written in Red: The Communist Memoir in Spain, Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois, 2010, xix + 246 pp, ISBN 9780252034695, \$45.00*

*Written in Red* is an interesting and perceptive analysis of some key Spanish communist autobiographies. Herrmann begins by noting that, following the Spanish Civil War, Spain seems to occupy a special place in communist historiography: while in other countries the romance of communism has faded, with reference to Spain the themes of anti-fascism and heroic struggle seem to have survived remarkably well. Rather than exploring this issue by considering the political cultures of the conflict, Herrmann turns instead to forms of memory. A succinct, well-focused and genuinely sparkling introduction analyses the structures of communist memory, setting the specific features of the communist autobiography into the wider context of modern autobiographical writing, and referring to recent scholarship on the nature of autobiography. Rather than discouraging autobiography as an individualist act, the communist milieu actually encouraged it, but set it along a certain path, almost giving would-be autobiographers certain tropes that they were to follow, in which 'the emotional' was to be 'embedded in the political' (p7). Such forms of writing were popularised through the various communist-inspired movements that encouraged sympathy for the Soviet Union and artistic creativity. During the period of stalinism, these rituals of accusation and self-criticism made such practices still more rigid, resulting in some highly formulaic representations of identity (p9). These formalities could become extremely politically important: Herrmann pointedly reminds us that two of her autobiographers, Semprún and Ibárruri, actually sat on committees which expelled party members. Party autobiographies therefore grew less distinctive, less individual, and tended to stress the subject's willingness to adjure failings and to stay loyal to the party.

Following this promising start, the following five chapters are something of an anti-climax. Here, one must note a permanent chasm between literacy scholars (of which Herrmann is one) and social scientists: put simply, literary scholars would prefer to read one text ten times, while social scientists would prefer to consult ten texts, even if they only read them once. The succeeding five chapters of *Written in Red* are an intense,

detailed reading of five works, one of which is a fascinating example of co-authorship in which a dissident daughter (Teresa Pàmies) has edited her loyalist father's posthumous diary. The chapters are themed around issues arising from the autobiographies and the evolution of the communist party in Spain. The analysis that Herrmann develops is certainly cogent and perceptive – but at the end of two hundred pages I could not help thinking that she was relying on a very thin documentary base. Literary scholars will probably wish to disagree with my judgement: no doubt, *Written in Red* is the work for them.

A second, minor, criticism is Herrmann's steadfast refusal to consider broader political or social themes in detail. Sometimes there are slight inaccuracies in her passing references to political issues: thus hundreds of thousands of Spanish Republicans did not flee over the border to France on 1 April 1939, at the war's end (p28), but in the last days of January 1939 and the first days of February 1939. There is no attempt to compare Spanish communist autobiography with similar works produced by Catalanists, republicans, socialists or anarchists – and the last group would have provided a fascinating point of comparison. One can even question the heavy centrality that Herrmann gives to the communist party: given the criss-crossing nature of Spanish politics, was it really as distinct from other political groups as Herrmann argues?

These points do not detract from the substantial strengths of *Written in Red*. It is an original, coherent and well-argued analysis of some key autobiographical texts, and Herrmann is to be congratulated on this success.

Sharif Gemie  
University of Glamorgan

---

**Daniel Rosenberg, *Underground Communists in the McCarthy Period: A Family Memoir*, Lewiston, New York, The Edwin Mellon Press, 2008, 9780773448421, 232 pp, \$109.00**

‘An American said to me,’ wrote Sartre in 1947, ‘that we are all eaten by the fear of being less American than our neighbour.’<sup>1</sup> Fear became a

singular component of Americanness in the 1950s, with its practice embedded in pervasive anti-communism. The State of Indiana required loyalty oaths for professional wrestlers, while New York City sacked public bathroom attendants deemed security risks. A stirring and handsomely-funded Advertising Council campaign defended 'American-Style Capitalism'. Class conflict became officially equated with racial and religious intolerance. The demonisation of communism was broad, deep, and popular, and though repression did not prohibit Communist Party members and sympathisers from activism, it did prompt their retreat. It is retreat that is the dominant theme of historian Daniel Rosenberg's rich study. The book combines a memoir of his parents' clandestine experience in the CP in the 1950s with an examination of the party's underground policy of these years. Rosenberg draws on an extensive range of published and archival primary sources to depict the matrix of fear and persecution that typified the early cold war party experience.

Anti-communism fulfilled two domestic requirements in particular – to combat the strike waves that began in 1941 and lasted through the mid-1950s, and to diminish support for labour by eliminating the influence of Popular Front politics and culture. Myra and Murray Rosenberg (no relation to Julius and Ethel) came of age in New York City's anti-fascist and Popular Front milieu, and shared its goals. They joined the CP in the late 1940s. Both came from working-class secular Jewish communities in Brooklyn, where nearly half of *Daily Worker* subscribers lived. Myra was a 'red-diaper' child, surrounded by textile and teacher union activists, an aunt who studied with Martha Graham, and a famous communist uncle, Moisey Rosen. Some relatives had served in semi- or fully-clandestine circumstances in the 1920s and early 1930s. The experience was intertwined with familial heritage, and the book briefly surveys this piece of the party's interwar experience. Myra joined the Party in 1947 at the age of 17.

Murray's liberal background made him open to marxism in high-school (James Baldwin was a classmate), but it was after his World War Two service that he joined the American Labor Party and was radicalised by a city social work job that took him to the Bowery. He entered a party industrial club of social workers, and joined the CP in 1949 at age 24. The couple was a generation younger than many of their leftist peers, but the book does not explore generational differences among members. They



---

married in 1950, after the Smith Act indictments of party leaders and at the time of the McCarran Act. Murray's public workers union was red-baited, and its president incarcerated.

Myra and Murray were ordered underground in 1954. The book emphasises that the party was reacting to frightening external pressures, but Rosenberg argues that it was unprepared for the ramifications of its clandestine turn. The threats were many: leaders viewed fascism and war as imminent; members suffered daily harassment from the FBI and some had already been indicted and jailed; the level of internal spying was unclear; and public hyperbole made anti-communist legislation popular. Fearful sympathisers cancelled *Daily Worker* subscriptions. The CP narrowed its public presence, but continued to run candidates, and to appear in the media and in the New York City phone book. Some member groups were made into small cells, membership and dues declined, and the book argues that 'cliquism beset the organization'. An underground developed, requiring name changes, relocations, and sometimes bail-jumping, tactics that often proved unsuccessful. Two party leaders hiding in California were apprehended after sending out for lox and bagels. Myra and Murray Rosenberg benefited from supportive families, unlike others whose whereabouts were revealed as a result of familial vendettas, or the indiscretion of children, or whose marriages could not withstand the strains of surrendering the 'party-family-friendship network'. Myra and Murray became 'Judy' and 'Bert', and in the tradition of Myra's elders, 'extended the pseudonymous branch of the family tree'.

The book interweaves party developments and member experiences to draw out this history, and concludes that for many underground living served as refuge from unemployment and prosecution. But this life proved tense and uncertain, as FBI men conspicuously followed family and friends (and had infiltrated much of the underground). Further, members were required to maintain party discipline, which deepened their isolation. For example, comrades had to report unauthorised contact with one another, as Murray did at least once. Perhaps most difficult to endure was a secret life devoid of politics (including literature) and activism. Rosenberg diverges from historians' claims that the underground wound down in 1955. He shows that many lower-level cadre fell through the cracks of a weakened CP structure – and remained under until 1956 –

when Myra and Murray were allowed to resurface, or later. Returnees continued to live with wariness. The couple re-started their party-family network, but returned home in the midst of informal debates among members regarding the efficacy of membership. Myra and Murray did not waver, and in retrospect saw their resistance to doubting the Soviet Union as an example of 'standing as partisans to socialism'. But they were exceptions, as the book notes; the revelations of 1956 and a barely diminished anti-communist environment reduced the size of the CP by two-thirds.

Rosenberg conducts a thorough and useful survey of internal and external considerations of the party's underground policy, though his approach lacks a clear conceptual framework or analytic structure. He notes that historians both sympathetic and hostile to the CP are critical of the party's underground policy. Most concur that the decision separated experienced organisers from their work, hindered the campaign to restore the party to full legality, and inhibited the CP from connecting to popular movements, notably those around civil rights and labour. However, Rosenberg finds merit in historian Peter L Steinberg's observation that the degree of legal prosecution left leaders little choice but to seek isolation.<sup>2</sup> The book also underlines contentions that secrecy compounded existing internal leadership problems, made worse by a mechanistic application of ideology, and agrees that the organisation's ability to function was impeded. Rosenberg dismisses Irving Howe's conclusion that radical romanticism was causal, arguing instead that from the CP's perspective, conditions proved more than dire.<sup>3</sup> The Korean War, book-banning, civil defence drills, incarcerations of prominent members, the Rosenberg executions, and preparations for mass detentions – the latter publicly opposed by Eleanor Roosevelt, Albert Einstein, and high-profile anti-communist Walter Winchell – understandably caused the party to panic. Rosenberg thinks that going underground likely kept several hundred members out of jail, and notes that some leaders later regretted not ordering still more cadres into hiding.

Myra and Murray Rosenberg subsequently came to criticise their leaders, but believe that the decision to send them underground to preserve the party was appropriate at the time. What would happen, they worried, if 'all the leadership ... was in jail'. Here the author argues that 'fascism ... rationalized the underground', and appearances hid broader underlying social forces. Indeed, prosperity made anti-capitalism a hard

sell. But the book also notes that, under intense pressure, 'U.S. Communists did not distinguish themselves for depth of interpretation'. Rosenberg assesses the party's 'serious conceptual misconstruction' of the imminence of fascism and war, and the ideological inconsistencies this analysis engendered. Such conditions of organisational weakness and rigidity, he believes, made self-assessment during the anti-communist years impossible. The book is equally effective in arguing that judicial persecution and FBI subterfuge 'dwarfed' the CP's errors.

The study fails to consider some important aspects. Party attitudes towards race are external to the book's purview. One member, James E Jackson Jr., a founder of the Southern Negro Youth Congress, went underground for five years, leaving his wife, the editor Esther Cooper Jackson, alone to care for their two daughters and fend off the FBI.<sup>4</sup> Further, the book makes no attempt to explicate or assess party practice towards female members, changes in gender relations among members coping with underground circumstances, or demands women made on their party and families after resurfacing. Finally, the book conveys little sense of the initiatives the CP pursued in these years, beyond defence against the witch hunt, or how public initiatives and the underground policy intersected.

Rosenberg thinks that hiding out was a logical solution for members, who justifiably felt alone and prosecuted, but could only rely on a leadership that was unable to make sense of their environment or provide clear direction. The party retained its public presence and press, a fact the book emphasises. Here the author gestures towards the CP's inability to ally with its wide range of anti-McCarthy allies and fight more forcefully for legality, as well as to miscalculations made by leadership. Despite America's right turn, the civil rights and labour movements maintained momentum and legitimacy, a consequence of a socially conscious rank and file. Rosenberg's study shows that a similar idealism characterised Myra and Murray Rosenberg, an idealism on which the party relied but used unwisely.

*Eric A. Schuster*  
*Chicago City College and Loyola University Chicago*

## Notes

1. Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Americans and Their Myths' (18 October 1947), in Katrina vanden Heuvel (ed), *The Nation 1865-1990*, New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1990, pp176-8.
2. Peter L Steinberg, *The Great Red Menace: United States Prosecution of American Communists, 1947-1952*, Westport: Greenwood Press, 1984.
3. Irving Howe and Lewis Coser, *The American Communist Party: A Critical History (1919-1957)*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1957.
4. Erik S McDuffie, "'No Small Amount of Change Could Do': Esther Cooper Jackson and the Making of a Black Left Feminist", in Jeanne Theoharis, Komozi Woodard, Dayo Gore (eds), *Want to Start a Revolution? Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle*, New York: New York University Press, 2009, pp25-4.