Reviews

Arnd Bauerkämper and Francesco Di Palma (eds), *Bruderparteien jenseits des Eisernen Vorhangs: Die Beziehungen der SED zu den kommunistischen Parteien West- und Südeuropas (1968-1989)*, Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag, 2011. ISBN 9783861536581, 253pp, €29.90, pbk

This edited volume consists of eleven chapters which explore the relationship between the Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (Socialist Unity Party of Germany or SED) and the communist parties of Britain, France, Italy, Spain and Greece in the period between the Prague Spring in 1968 and the fall of the SED regime in 1989. The subject of the book is an intriguing one, and the editors are certainly correct that their volume addresses a significant gap in the literature. They are also right to point out that their project creates all kinds of possibilities for the application of comparative and transnational methodologies. Many (though not all) of the individual chapters are well researched and interesting. When the book is read as a whole, a coherent and plausible picture emerges.

Almost all the authors note that, in the 1950s and 1960s, relations between the SED and the various communist parties of western and southern Europe were generally good. The partial exception to this rule was the relationship between the SED and the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), which for various reasons was always more distant. In the 1960s, however, the bonds of 'proletarian internationalism' came under strain as a result of the attraction of a new generation of communists to 'Eurocommunism', and their increasing willingness to criticise aspects of Soviet foreign policy and East German/Soviet domestic policy. These tensions came to a head in the wake of the crushing of the Prague Spring, which the Eurocommunists strongly condemned. Thereafter, each bilateral relationship developed on its own trajectory according to national circumstances. The Kommounistikó Kómma Elládas (KKE), for instance, had little choice but to seek

friendly relations with the SED, for it was reliant on the East German communists for financial and material support. For a time after the Prague Spring, relations between the SED and the French communists were cool. And they got worse in 1972, when the Parti Communiste Français (PCF) signed a joint programme with the French socialists. After the pact between the PCF and the socialists broke down in 1977, however, the PCF began to seek better relations with East Berlin. The relationship between the SED and the Partito Communista de España (PCE), which under Santiago Carrillo moved further than the PCF in the direction of Eurocommunism, was for a time particularly troubled. But after the ousting of Carrillo in 1983, the new leaders of the PCE sought to build bridges with the Soviet bloc. The most interesting relationship of all was between the SED and the Italian communists. On the one hand, the Partito Communista Italiano (PCI) was potentially the most useful of all West European communist parties to the SED because of its size, electoral popularity and close relationship with the West German Social Democratic Party. On the other hand, the PCI under Enrico Berlinguer went further than any other communist party in its attempts to construct a democratic, pluralist alternative to Soviet-style communism. As a result, the attitudes of the East German communists towards their Italian comrades was torn between ideological disdain and pursuing the material interests of the GDR as a state.

Bruderparteien jenseits des Eisernen Vorhangs is thus a stimulating book, and anybody interested in the SED, CPGB, PCI, PCF, PCE or KKE would benefit from reading it. But, like so many edited volumes, it is also rather less than the sum of its parts. The individual authors rarely take account of the findings of the others, and they consequently fail to develop a truly comparative analysis. As a result, the explanatory potential of their own data is not fully explored.

One interesting question, for example, is whether the bilateral relations between the various parties were shaped primarily by ideology or by pragmatism. Almost all the contributors address this question either implicitly or explicitly, but only with regard to the individual country on which they happen to be focusing. Andreas Stergiou tells us that the relationship between the SED and the KKE was governed more by cool calculations of self-interest than by the spirit of proletarian

internationalism. In Britain, by contrast, the CPGB was too small to be of much use to the SED, whilst the CPGB – unlike the KKE or PCE – was not reliant on East German logistical support. Therefore, ideological problems came to the fore. The SED regarded the idea of a 'British Road to Socialism' as right-wing opportunism. The British communists, for their part, were more willing to criticise the lack of democracy in the GDR than many members of the 'old left' of the Labour Party and trade union movement. Perhaps the most telling examples are those of the PCF and the PCI. The PCF was ideologically closer to the SED than the PCI, but, due to its political isolation, it was also less useful. When the PCF and the PCI began to fall out after 1975, the SED distanced itself somewhat from the PCF, whilst showing considerable patience with the Italian communists. The key point here is that embedded in the individual contributions is enough data to arrive at a general conclusion about the relative impact of ideology and pragmatism on relations between the SED and its 'fraternal parties', but none of the contributors joins up the dots.

An even more important question is whether the SED, in framing its policies towards the communist parties of western and southern Europe, enjoyed a degree of autonomy from Moscow. Again, the issue is raised in passing by a number of the contributors but never addressed directly in the light of all the data contained in the volume. It is particularly to be regretted, in this context, that almost all of the contributors focus on the period 1968 to ca. 1981/82, and have very little to say about how relations between the SED and its 'fraternal parties' were affected by the arrival of Gorbachev. Since the foreign policy interests of Moscow and East Berlin largely (though not entirely) corresponded until 1985, it is often difficult to gauge the degree to which the SED could act autonomously because it rarely had a reason to do so. After 1985, by contrast, the foreign policy agendas of the GDR and the USSR were starkly at odds, and it would have been instructive to explore how this impacted on relations between the SED and the various western European communist parties.

Two very striking observations are made by a number of the contributors, yet none of them comment on the analytical significance of their observations. Firstly, several of them note that the Eurocommunists,

despite their often fierce criticism of Soviet-style communism, nonetheless tried hard to be 'critical friends' and where possible to maintain good relations with the communist parties of the Soviet bloc, including the SED. Secondly, several of the authors comment on how the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 plunged all the Eurocommunist parties of western Europe, including the PCI – the most Eurocommunist of them all – into a crisis of existential proportions. Clearly, for all their protestations of political independence, and despite their criticisms of 'actual existing socialism', Eurocommunists everywhere had never really overcome their illusions in communism as it was practised in the Soviet bloc. This is surely a key reason for their political failure. A volume such as this would have been perfectly suited to exploring in depth how communists in western Europe thought and felt about Soviet-style communism, and why they were never able to step out of the shadow of Lenin, Stalin, Ulbricht and Honecker. Sadly, these and other questions remain unanswered, even though all the contributors would surely have interesting things to say about them.

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Philip Bounds, *British Communism and the Politics of Literature 1928-39*, London: Merlin Press, 2012, ISBN 9780850365948, 320pp, pb

British Communism and the Politics of Literature 1928-39 is focused on the influence of Soviet cultural policy on British literary critics associated with the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). The book is a revision of the thesis of the same title Bounds submitted for his PhD (Swansea, 2003). After an overview of cultural thinking in the class-against-class period and then of Soviet cultural theory, he concentrates on the three major communists writing on literature, with chapters on West, Fox and Caudwell, and then on cultural policy in the Popular Front period.

Central to his interpretation is the selection of speeches from the month-long Soviet Writers' Congress of 1934, published as *Problems of*

Soviet Literature by Martin Lawrence in 1935. The proceedings of the congress laid down an official line on literature, but not one that was clear enough to be much use as a guide. There was general agreement among the speakers on the need for effective literary form as well as revolutionary content, and on the need to develop and direct the talents of young writers; and'socialist realism' was established as the official model. But how the cause of socialism would actually be served by literature was given little articulation. Certainly support for the Soviet Union and revolutionaries was seen as central, but the examples of practice cited by the different speakers suggested a considerable diversity of understanding. While Bukharin gave detailed examples and recognised the complexity of people's responses to literature, Zhdanov indicated no awareness of how literature works but was nevertheless prescriptive at a general level. Gorky boasted at length of Soviet achievements in literature but offered no real direction.

Although the speeches at the congress displayed little unity about literary theory, Bounds treats them as if they were all slices of the same loaf – and this underlies problems in his analyses. He continually applies the notion of orthodoxy to the writings of the British critics, yet without a coherent doctrine, orthodoxy cannot really be a meaningful category. Thus he says, 'although Fox was ostensibly the most orthodox of British Marxist critics, there were several arguments in his work which were inconsistent not merely with Soviet theory but with the fundamental principles of Marxism itself' (p135); and 'the most surprising thing about the historical section of *The Novel and the People* was the way it departed from orthodox accounts of the cultural crisis of capitalism' (p146). Orthodoxy, it would seem, is not really a useful criterion for judging Fox. Similarly West's *Crisis and Criticism* is seen as an 'attempt to extend the insights of Soviet theory' (p92) – but also as West's expression of 'an implicit critique of the CPGB's understanding of culture' (p81). Bounds's judgements do not recognise the complexity of motives involved in critical agreement/disagreement, let alone the range of factors that shape ideas and the emotional content that may attach to them. His thinking seems to run only along a single axis.

His idée fixe of orthodoxy would be no more than an irritation if Bounds displayed more interest in actual literature and had greater

sensitivity as a reader. The theme of orthodoxy, he seems to feel, does not require close argument about texts, which is clearly important in his central chapters on West, Fox and Caudwell. Although close analysis may be less important for discussion of Fox, because of his attention to what he perceived to be literature's capacity for immediate revolutionary influence, it is vitally important for judging West, because he was the only one to have engaged seriously in detailed analysis of specific works and their potential effect on the social outlook of readers. West's chapter on Joyce in *Crisis and Criticism* displays without any fanfare a brilliant analytical skill, but Bounds travesties his argument, attributing to him the view that Joyce's shortcomings result from his 'ignorance of Marxism' (p112). He also totally misunderstands West's stress on the importance of the emotional content in revolutionary literature: he says West recognises that the dominance of bourgeois affective organisation in contemporary literature is a problem, and then interprets it in a footnote as 'a coded reference to fascism' (pp272-3, n73). Similarly, he reveals a limited understanding of how literature works when he mis-characterises Bukharin's view that the shaping of attitude is the crucial role of literature, reducing it to its 'ability to convey doctrine at a sub-intellectual level' (p67). Emotional and intellectual responses are different, but emotion is not 'sub' anything else, and Bukharin's speech is clear that its function is not to 'convey doctrine' but to organise an attitude to the reality presented.

Bounds places Caudwell in the Soviet scheme, but with a twist provided by another track of interpretation that interests him: 'the main assumptions of his work were all derived from the 1934 Writers' Congress, but … he significantly modified (or even subverted) these ideas by refracting them through the sort of intellectual assumptions which tend to characterise the autodidactic mind' (p161). Despite the dubious logic of subverting one's own main assumptions, Bound's appreciation of Caudwell as an autodidact might be expected to lead to a more sympathetic understanding of his idiosyncratic presentation of literary theory. On the contrary, it sidetracks him into a psychological speculation that obscures Caudwell's argument for the social basis of individual response: Caudwell's emphasis on 'instinct' is seen as evidence that he was 'probably suffering from a species of emotional turbulence

which is very common among autodidacts' (p170). Bounds is probably right in saying that Caudwell responded positively to the published speeches from the 1934 Congress (and I am grateful to him for making me reconsider some of the work in that light – the influence can be seen in *Studies in a Dying Culture* in his explicitly political criticism of Freud and D.H. Lawrence) but the theory in *Illusion and Reality*, his main work, shows no Soviet influence.

A further problem of analysis for Bounds comes from his narrow view of what was encompassed by 'crisis', a term that runs through the book. The speeches at the 1934 congress and the writings of radical critics in Britain cited many instances of decadence in western literature, and that seems to be the focus of the crisis for Bounds. But it is clear from both the Soviet speeches and British cultural criticism that it was the rise of fascism that was the crisis (although part of the argument of communist critics was that the crisis of capitalism also produced crises in ideas – as in Caudwell's *Crisis in Physics*); indeed, the British section of Writers' International was founded (February 1934) to bring together revolutionary writers to pose a socialist alternative to fascism. Bounds, by changing the focus, trivialises the engagement of the writers he is discussing.

There are also some problems of method in the book. There is much unsupported speculation; 'implicit', in its various forms, and 'presumably' frequently introduce statements that are then made to serve as fact, and although the overabundance of footnotes (fifty-six pages to 240 of main text) suggests that there is supporting evidence, too often this is not the case. On occasion this would seem more scholarly evasion than cavalier disregard: for example, when the reference cited to support the statement that West attributed Joyce's weaknesses to ignorance of marxism points to the essay as a whole rather than to any specific text within it. In a book that cites so many different texts, referring to the sources would of course be made much easier for the reader if it had a bibliography.

Bounds's question of the degree to which the cultural policy of British communists was shaped by Soviet influence is indeed interesting, and if he helps rescue the marxist critics of the period from neglect that must be a good thing. But they need to be examined

in contexts both wider and more specific if the significance of their work is to be understood. Bounds, in his limited interpretations of the writers, has done them no favours.

David Margolies

Pierre Brocheux, trans. Claire Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh: A Biography*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011 edn. ISBN 9781107622265, 288pp, £18.99, pb

Pierre Brocheux's biography of Ho Chi Minh, originally published in 2003 as *Ho Chi Minh: Du revolutionnaire a l'icone*, is informative and elegant. The framework of the book reiterates a strand of orientalist scholarship on East and South East Asian early communists, in reading them primarily as 'Confucian intellectuals' guided by ethical idealism rather than Marxism-Leninism. A brief foreword by William J. Duiker, author of the most detailed biography of Ho in English, echoes the same position: 'In Ho Chi Minh's eyes Karl Marx represented the realization of Confucian ideals in a modern historical context'.

The first chapter treats the childhood and youth of Nguyen Ai Quoc, later known worldwide as Ho Chi Minh. It touches upon his search for a 'modern' education – characteristic of the colonised intelligentsia in search of self-development in an impoverished, restrictive and repressive colonial milieu – and his eventual migration to Europe. The author shows that as a serious and self-taught young man, Ho (as he will be referred to throughout this piece, in order to avoid confusion) became interested in the plight of the oppressed through his experiences in rural Indochina (Vietnam) and the West. Living precariously on the margins of society as a sailor, a gardener and a cook during his travels through France, Britain and the United States, Ho was exposed to the impoverished realities of racialised subjecthood and working-class life. The Bolshevik revolution of 1917, with its anti-imperialist pronouncements in the midst of a World War being fought over colonies, attracted him, alongside many others in his situation. Soon afterwards he settled in Paris, where his thoughts and actions turned radical. He prepared and sent a petition

for Vietnam's political freedom before the Allied leaders assembled at Versailles. There was no response. He also joined the French Socialist Party, and was a founder of the Communist Party of France (PCF) which emerged from it. He felt the PCF should pay greater attention to the colonial question, and developed a network among a tiny anti-colonial segment of Arab, African, Chinese and Vietnamese youth through the 'Intercolonial Union', founded in 1921. Its members led a semi-starved communitarian existence and supported each other. Their mouthpiece, *Le Paria*, was started in 1922, with Nguyen Ai Quoc as one of the chief contributors. As a member of the PCF's Colonial Commission he also started writing a book on French imperialism, ultimately published in 1925 as *French Colonialism on Trial*. His activities during his stay in Paris were watched closed by the French security police, and detailed surveillance reports were maintained. In 1923 he managed to slip away from this unwelcome gaze and arrived in Moscow.

The second chapter deals with Ho's experience and work in Russia and China. In his articles and lectures of the period he highlighted the specific conditions of social exploitation and revolution in the predominantly agrarian colonial world, which was different from Europe, where a developed industrial working class already existed. In 1924 he left Moscow and made his way to Canton. There he worked closely with the Comintern representative Borodin, as well as Chinese communists and Vietnamese expatriates. Officially, he was the press correspondent of a Soviet news agency. Unofficially, as a Comintern representative, he was working with the Communist Party of China (CCP), aiming to establish a Communist Party of Indochina and using Canton as his base. In 1925, he founded the Revolutionary Youth League of Vietnam with a core group of dedicated communist cadres in Canton. He supposedly married a Chinese woman in Canton, but he returned to Moscow in 1927, when the Chinese nationalists, backed by the western powers, came down on Chinese communists. After visits to Berlin and Paris Ho made his way back to Asia, and from late 1929 to early 1933 he was based in Hong Kong, from where he travelled to Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore as a Comintern emissary. During early 1930 the Vietnamese communist splinter groups joined forces under his leadership and became known as a single entity, the Communist Party of Indochina (ICP), which led

a short-lived mass uprising in Vietnam that was brutally crushed by the French authorities.

The third chapter examines Ho's continued involvements with the Comintern, the Chinese communist movement and the ICP. Jailed by the British in 1931 and returning to the USSR the following year, he enrolled at the Institute for the Study of National and Colonial Questions (the renamed Stalin University), and lectured and wrote extensively on the agrarian revolution. Subsequently he was protected from the purges of Comintern cadres in 1937-8, when Vera Vassileva and Dimitri Manuilsky of the Comintern disciplinary board, as well as Otto Kuusinen, head of the CI's Far Eastern Bureau, stood by him. In 1938, he was allowed to leave the USSR, and worked as a political commissioner of the Chinese Army, which was pitted against the imperial Japanese Army of occupation. In 1940 he started working with Vietnamese railway workers and other migrant labourers living in the Yunnan province. Since Vietnamese nationalists, with help from the Kuomintang, already had a political foothold among these workers, Ho organised systematic infiltration of their ranks to turn them in a left direction, and also offered revolutionary training to those inclined towards political radicalism. With the capitulation of France to Germany in 1940, and the plan of the nationalist government in China to send troops to Indochina to counter the Japanese troops being sent there, Ho's network of Vietnamese communists decided to return to their country of origin and build village-level resistance. Living in caves and other make-shift shelters in the Tonkin region, this army became the nucleus of a communist guerrilla army known as the Viet Minh. It was also around this time that Nguyen Ai Quoc finally arrived at the alias which was to make him famous as Ho Chi Minh ('The Enlightened One'). Following the fall of the Vichy regime in France, Ho guided the Viet Minh to take advantage of the Japanese uprooting of French colonial authority, and, with the weakening of the two sets of imperialist occupiers, to take control of the country's northern regions. In September 1945, a provisional revolutionary government was created in the name of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). Ho was proclaimed president of this independent country.

The book's fourth chapter analyses the crises and complexities of

decolonisation during the First Vietnam War against the French during 1945-54. In 1946, the election for a Vietnamese National Assembly was held. The Viet Minh won 97 per cent of the vote. The French, unable to bear the thought of voluntary withdrawal from what was once a colony, began negotiations. Ho visited France to prevent an all-out war immediately following the devastations caused by the Second World War. But the talks broke down, and the colonisers backed the creation of an anti-communist nationalist-collaborationist regime in the southern territories as they faced ultimate defeat in the hands of communist forces in the battle of Dien Bien Phu (1954). This was followed by Geneva accords and the partition of Vietnam. Brocheux here discusses Ho's role as a diplomatic and cautious head of state who attempted peaceful negotiation with colonisers despite their intransigence.

The fifth chapter treats the last phase of Ho's life (1954-69), as president of the DRV, when Vietnam faced internal turmoil due to land reforms and external threats posed by the Second Vietnam War which meant confronting the USA. The chapter also deals with how Ho tried to negotiate with the conflict raging within the Soviet bloc as Sino-Soviet relations spiralled downwards. His transformation from a mass leader to a mythical icon is also treated in the context of his infirmities linked with old age, and the rise of the next generation of leaders, who were responsible, according to the author, for 'sidelining' Ho entirely. This last chapter follows what Duiker and other scholars have already written, and it lacks the refreshing insights of a social historian that are present in the previous chapters.

Brocheux's rigorous empirical research and sensitive handling of the material are admirable, and the treatment of a range of primary sources through the lens of social history is truly impressive. In this sense, the biography surpasses the existing biographical literature on Ho Chi Minh, and, as it follows him through aliases, villages, cities, countries, roads, addresses, prisons, caves, rivers and mountains, the narrative resembles impressionist brush strokes, deftly depicting those aspects that could be traced and represented. However, the text also prompts certain questions that remain unanswered. An attempt to isolate Ho from the communist movement, as a Confucian figure standing apart while being involved, forms the overarching frame of the book. The author himself

has pointed out that Ho was one of many intellectuals from the colonial world who were captivated by the 'charm of October'. Can this, rather than a reworked Confucianism, explain Nguyen Ai Quoc's lifelong commitment to revolutionary communist politics? Ho Chi Minh's life encompassed dreams of a world revolution and was manifested, in concrete terms, through his work with several communist parties, including the PCF, the CCP and the ICP. While he was a founder of the first and the third organisation, he was certainly associated with at least one of the founders of the second (Chou En-Lai) in France, encouraging the latter to turn left; he also worked closely with the CCP in pre-revolutionary China during extremely difficult moments of its history. This internationalist and radical cosmopolitan vision cannot be explained on the basis of Confucian ethical idealism. Ho's (and Mao Tse Tung's) pronouncements on the need to put Confucianism on its head for socialist and communitarian purposes implied stepping beyond and questioning the boundaries set by Confucianism as an imperial-patriarchal-bureaucratic ideology.

The book also fails to fully explore the links maintained by Ho as a leader in exile with the emerging communist movement in Vietnam, even if certain tensions and activities are mentioned in detail. Also left untreated are the social conditions through which this party, led by an often invisible leader, became hegemonic within the anti-imperialist movement directed against the French, Japanese and US forces, ultimately leading to decolonisation. Certain sections on Ho's personal actions appear weak in terms of material used and sources mentioned. They resemble anecdotes and suppositions, and do not provide a convincing or comprehensive or intimate account of Ho's life. What the book does evoke is the close relationship between the Chinese and Vietnamese communist movements during the decades of their formation and growth from the 1920s to the 1950s, even if the author's interpretations of the relations between the leaders, including Chou En-Lai and Ho Chi Minh, are open to debate. The significance for Ho of Dien Bien Phu, as symbol and reality of the humiliating defeat inflicted on one of the oldest colonial powers in Asia, is virtually left out of the narrative. The book focuses on and reiterates older positions on the excesses of the land reform movement in North Vietnam as Stalinist/Maoist crimes, while

remaining silent on the conditions created by landlessness and bondage under predatory landlordism supported by colonial rule, and refusing to discuss why the famished peasants in the countryside desperately wanted and benefited from the redistribution of land – one of the crucial factors that propelled them towards communism. The author depicts Ho as a master tactician of deferral, postponing bloody confrontations with the enemy for as long as possible. He feels that the surge in warfare against the US during the 1960s was the work of a boorish troika from the north. This analysis sounds unconvincing given the political climate of the Cold War and US interventions in Asia from the 1950s. Despite these gaps and problems, the lucid writing style of the book blends elegantly with the care taken to excavate a wealth of details; they provide texture and depth to Ho Chi Minh's political and social milieu, as well as the persona of a man well-known for his enigma. The book will draw the interest of professional historians and lay readers alike.

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John Butler, *The Red Dean of Canterbury: The Public and Private Faces of Hewlett Johnson*, London: Scala Publishers Ltd, 2011, ISBN 9781857597633, 292 pp, £16.95

Hewlett Johnson is remembered as a staunchly pro-communist churchman who to the end of his days clung tenaciously to a commitment to Stalin and the Soviet experiment, despite Khrushchev's revelations and Hungary, events that caused many on the left to abandon party and cause together. This new biography draws on some 12,000 of Johnson's unpublished personal letters and papers, the recollections of his daughters and MI5 archives. With these sources John Butler seeks to cast new light onto Johnson's career and private life, and on what this material reveals not only about the man but about church-state relations in the course of some of the twentieth century's most testing times. It was during the course of the Cold War that Johnson's political beliefs became

the source of most contention and controversy, raising doubts about his Christian faith, and with it his loyalty to his country and nation, and – perhaps most tellingly – to his class.

Born in Manchester in 1874 into a prosperous Victorian household, Johnson enjoyed a privileged upbringing and an Oxford education, and married a wife of some means. His Christian socialism was no bar to his appointment to the deanship of Canterbury Cathedral; he was supported by the Archbishop of York, William Temple, who himself held socialist views, and Ramsay MacDonald, who as the first Labour prime minister had appointed Johnson to the deanery at Manchester; even King George V was said to have approved. However, within the conservative precincts of Canterbury Cathedral, mother church of the Anglican Communion and seat of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Johnson's political views were less welcome. The Cold War made them intolerable.

When cold war propaganda proclaimed that the Soviet Union was bent on world conquest and the destruction of western civilisation and Christianity, Johnson's insistence that Christianity and communism were not only compatible but complementary became both a challenge and an embarrassment to the church and state authorities who were proclaiming otherwise. Johnson could not be deprived of his post unless he broke civil or ecclesiastical laws, which he never did. And as a consequence he was subjected to tremendous pressure from his ecclesiastical colleagues to resign, and to unrelenting unpleasantness, obstruction and isolation within the church. Butler's sympathies are clearly with Geoffrey Fisher, the Archbishop of Canterbury, who indicted Johnson in a splenetic 1952 debate in the House of Lords as 'blind, unreasonable and stupid'. This was during the Korean War, perhaps the coldest part of the Cold War, when any dissent from the cold war consensus was guaranteed to attract the wrath of the establishment. Prior to this even the Foreign Office had conceded that, during a trip that Johnson made to Eastern Europe in 1947, it was not so much what he said that was the problem, but that it was said by someone in his position.

Butler, an Emeritus Professor of Health Services at the University of Kent, wrote his biography of Johnson at the behest of the family. The strength and originality of his research resides in the presentation of the Dean as a family man, and the exploration of his relationship with

his second wife Nowell. Nowell shared his views and supported him steadfastly whilst he was alive, and suffered along with him the scorn, derision and rejection that became his lot as the Cold War ground on. Butler poignantly records the pain and isolation inflicted on Johnson's family, which penetrated and impacted on the lives of his daughters as well.

Butler presents a well-researched biography that looks behind the public figure to the private man in a handsome volume that is complemented by a generous selection of family photos, as well as those of a more official variety showing Johnson with a host of international dignitaries from the world of communism, along with some from the world of faith. Moreover, Butler, like Johnson's previous biographer Robert Hughes, on whose book he acknowledges notable reliance, strives to present an objective analysis of a man whom both concede was inherently 'good'. Johnson, like all men, was flawed. But both biographers seem confounded as to how this peace-seeking Christian spirit could be a mouthpiece for 'murderous godless communist regimes'. Their suggestions of blind gullibility, doctrinaire obstinacy, overwhelming ego and so on reflect the same cold war indictments that were made whilst Johnson lived, and which continued to be perpetrated following his death. In this respect, Butler does not add to the conclusion Hughes reached in 1987. The book will therefore disappoint those looking for additional political analysis or new perspectives a quarter of a century on from the first biography and two decades since the end of the Cold War.

Indeed, with the last decade's proliferation of scholarship that has turned the religious dimension of the Cold War into a subgenre, and with the revived interest in marxism occasioned by the global economic crisis – and, of course, with the resurgence of religion in the international arena – the times call for a reassessment of this religio-political cleric. Butler, like Hughes before him, is not a historian, and such a re-evaluation perhaps requires a historian's skills in seeking an understanding and contextualisation of the life of a man whose autobiography acknowledged the profound historical events that impacted on his life. These included two world wars and a great slump, the rise of fascism and communism, the horror of the holocaust, the

brutalities that accompanied decolonisation, and, of course, an East-West conflict that threatened the world with nuclear annihilation. Butler's biography has, however, done a service to Johnson by revealing the treasure trove of papers waiting for a new generation of scholars; hopefully they will want to get a better understanding of the national opprobrium that was heaped upon this progressive priest, who thought that each side in the Cold War had something to give and something to learn from the other.

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Andy Croft (ed), *After the Party: Reflections on life since the CPGB*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2012, ISBN 9781907103476, 159pp, £15.99, pb

Twenty-one years after the dissolution of the Communist Party of Great Britain, the CPGB's endgame decades remain the least analysed period in the party's seventy-one year history. Despite the voluminous documentary archives, the wealth of contemporary publications by fractions and currents from across the party's political spectrum, and the accessibility of participant testimony from a wide variety of geographic and organisational perspectives, existing historical accounts of the CPGB (including the final instalment of the party's posthumous 'official history') have tended to characterise this period as one of fratricidal political conflict and unremitting structural decline; essentially a coda to the industrial, political and cultural advances with which the party wrestled in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Beyond the partisan polemics of post-CPGB splinters, academic histories of the party's twilight years have tended either to explore the trade union-based activities of the party's workplace activists (wrestling with the competing tensions of party and trade union association in the hostile context of Thatcherism) or the process of ideological reinvention by the party's renovator wing (which saw, in the continental experience of Eurocommunism, the potential for the British party to reinvent itself

as a political agent). In exploring the history of the party through these different lenses, neither approach has given particular attention to the experience of the party's embattled activists struggling through the final difficult and often debilitating years of the CPGB's life.

The 'high politics' of an ailing, fringe political party, increasingly out of synch with the historic tide, and shedding members at an alarming rate, perhaps does not merit sustained scrutiny on its own right; but there is a more convincing case to be made for interest in the experiences of left activists working outside of the political mainstream, struggling to adapt to an ever more antagonistic political environment, whilst, even in the context of seemingly irreconcilable division, continuing to share a fidelity to whatever the identity of 'being a communist' meant to them.

This collection of personal reminiscences by former members of the British communist party focuses on the contributors' engagement with the CPGB in the party's last decades. As the title suggests, this exercise in political biography encourages the authors to reflect afresh on their experience of the party's decline towards dissolution, but also to consider what the subsequent 'absence' of the party has meant to them personally. In particular, they have been asked to consider the relevance that their experience of life within a minor west European communist party in sharp decline has had on the political ambitions which have guided them in the two decades since 1991.

Through the seven contributions commissioned here, editor Andy Croft has attempted to reflect the broad, mainstream spectrum of endgame party opinion (from Broad Democratic Alliance-focused party traditionalism, to 'new times' Democratic Leftism), drawing, in particular, from the experience of the generation of party activists who came to political maturity during the final decades in the party's life, and who have remained active since. With a fair balance of gender, geographic location and party role, the result is a credible chorus (or, as might be expected, cacophony) of voices, but one which omits most of the kaleidoscope of party fractions, and also – as is so often the case in such post-mortem collections – any testimony from the thousands of party members who, repulsed by decline and division, quit the party with few agonised backwards glances.

Reading the sections of these political autobiographies that focus on the years of the party's demise, it is often hard to believe that these activists (motivated by different principles, animated by competing priorities, and dismayed by conflicting political developments) could possibly have been accommodated within so small a political organisation. In many senses, of course, they were not; the fact that temporary co-existence was possible (amidst acrimony, schism and disciplinary measures which led to numerous forced expulsions) was testament to the growing enfeeblement of the party as an organisational force.

Amongst the sharp points of difference revealed in these life stories are completely divergent views of the utility and importance of the party as a political agent. For some, even as it erodes organisationally, the CPGB serves as the central conduit and enabler for their work; for others it provides a far looser framework, at one remove from their immediate political lives. There are clear distinctions, too, in the degree to which contributors express any sense of retrospective regret or self-doubt. Some readily acknowledge weaknesses, shortcomings and inconsistencies in their own approach, or that of the party's forces they felt closest to; while others offer not one word of self-criticism.

There is plurality too in the approach that authors take to their brief; some position their life story within a wider history of the party and the political context of the time; others offer a more personal political autobiography, with a more restricted field of vision. This diversity reduces the degree of repetition in the telling, but at the same time it makes direct comparison between experiences a little more difficult.

Contemporary political agendas still frame much of the narrative. Mark Perryman is determined to exonerate the *Marxism Today* wing of the CPGB from any culpability in the distillation of New Labour thinking; while others, including Andrew Pearmain, point the finger of blame at *MT* unwaveringly. Some, including Lorna Reith, suggest that in expelling dissident party members the leadership properly defended the CPGB against internal subversion, rule-breaking and attempts at electoral fraud; others, notably Alistair Findlay, condemn what they see as the hypocrisy of the disciplinary zeal of the reformist leadership majority, who ousted committed traditionalist members from the party whilst promoting new agendas of political tolerance and inclusion.

The fact that so many different perspectives are revealed in these pages is itself testament to the extent to which the heterogeneity of the CPGB had reached the point of effective disaggregation as the 1980s progressed. That sense of difference is also revealed in the nostalgia that most (though not all) of the contributors evoke when reflecting on the 'absence' created by the disappearance of the CPGB. These contributors are mourning the passing of a political agency they view in distinctively different terms.

What tempers the alternate histories and counter-factual futures proposed here is the demonstrable lack of political success which all of the CPGB's successors (and breakaway rivals) have had to endure and contend with. Possibly the only common theme in all of the contributions in this collection is a shared sense of disappointment in the more recent history of the Democratic Left and New Times Network. Some supported its creation; others were ambivalent; several were opposed outright. But all accept that the DL and NTN failed to find sufficient purchase, or to find a way to serve as the catalyst for a new political formation able to distil (albeit selectively) the 'positive' strands of the party's legacy.

For several of the authors, it is the branch life and council chamber of the Labour Party which has provided the most hospitable political home since the party's dissolution; while others have preferred to work in the context of campaigning or community groups, outside of any sort of party structure. Other parties from across the spectrum of the extra-parliamentary left have not offered compelling alternative loci for these former British communists.

After the Party provides an engaging and readable participant account of the fallout from the CPGB's final crisis, which repositions party activists at the centre of the narrative and raises a wealth of intriguing questions in the process, which will hopefully encourage further exploration of this still-neglected period in the CPGB's history.

Richard Cross

Ken Keable (ed), *London Recruits. The Secret War against Apartheid,* London: Merlin Press, 2012, ISBN 9780850366556, 348 pp, £15.95, pb

This book is a collection of short autobiographical stories written by those who were recruited by leaders of the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP) in London for underground work in South Africa in the 1960s-80s. They were mostly British, all young at the time, and white. All were either card-carrying members of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), or of the Young Communist League (YCL), or else other marxists and socialists, including anti-stalinist communists who were often called Trotskyists by others. Some, particularly in the 1960s, came from the student movement, mostly at the London School of Economics; others came from popular street campaigns and protests – against the war in Vietnam or apartheid – or from other causes supported by the left at the time. So their stories give us a unique insight into two different worlds – politically close to each other but certainly not the same – the ANC underground and the British left.

Both these worlds broadly based their thinking from amongst the pool of ideas and ideals of Karl Marx, Max Weber, Leon Trotsky, Joseph Stalin, Lenin, Mao, Castro, Nasser, Ho Chi Minh and Che Guevara. Thus, for example, differences between Trotsky and Stalin and the meaning of labour class politics were passionately discussed on university campuses in Britain (p42); and, at a lower level of sophistication, they were also taught in the training camps of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the ANC's military wing, in Angola. Both aimed at changing humanity for the better, as they thought right, and both made considerable contributions to doing so. There was one big difference, however: British communists and the majority of the others on the left operated in conditions of legality; the ANC, and particularly Umkhonto we Sizwe, did not. A move from legal protest in London to illegal and in some cases subversive activities in South Africa required a lot of courage, character and conviction. Yet those who contributed to this book made the jump.

There is no doubting their courage and their good will. They risked their comfort and even their lives in order to take an ANC message to South Africa and to assist the ANC's cause. They felt that they could not

do otherwise, as they believed that this cause was right. Of course, they understood the risks and, heading for South Africa, they were all afraid – but courage does not lie in not seeing the danger. Courage is when you know exactly what you risk, and you are afraid, but you still do what you think is right for the good of the cause.

There is also no doubting the romanticism involved. For a young Londoner of a left-wing persuasion it was an incredible adventure in the 1960s-80s to go to a far-off country to fight its oppressive regime. As John Rose wrote (p47), 'we had the time of our lives. It really had been like a laboratory of revolution'. With this baggage of courage, good will and romanticism, each travelled his or her own distance. Some ended with a couple of trips to South Africa, delivering letters and installing leaflet bombs. Others went on to be trained as full-time professional underground operatives.

Yet there was a lot of naivety in too. The naivety of the organisers of Operation J – a plan of landing of an Umkhonto detachment from a boat, *Aventura*, at a remote beach – was breathtaking. They appear to have seriously believed that it would be sufficient to infiltrate a few hundred ANC cadres into South Africa for a general mass uprising to begin. Several narratives in the book are devoted to reconnoitring a place suitable for such a landing. This day-dreaming ended with an enormous waste of funds and effort and, for some, time in jail. It could have been much worse, had the operation succeeded, and the landing taken place. But even now, after all this time, two of those who worked for this operation, thought that 'if the ship had arrived, the operation would have had a very good chance of success'. 'How might South Africa's history have been changed?', exclaimed one (p141).

A former activist in the YCL, who participated in the recruitment of cadres from his organisation for ANC missions, wrote of his 'immense resentment' about the fact that he, as well as other members, were kept in the dark about Soviet financial assistance to the CPGB and SACP. It was not these acts of solidarity that he found unjustifiable, but the secrecy that accompanied them – the fact that they were 'kept secret not only from the Soviet people … but also from the recipients, apart from the privileged few', and that they were 'unaccountable and arbitrarily distributed' (p171). To me this indicates a complete lack

of understanding of the movement and the party to which the author belonged.

Another author thought that the fact that in South Africa international phone calls could only be made from private phones, hotels and main post offices was a sign of its repressive system (p164). If, like me, he had spent most of his life in a repressive system (the USSR in my case), he would have known that one did not make international phone calls from private phones, and even entering an international hotel without a special permit could be a problem – let alone making an international call from there.

For many of these veterans, life in South Africa stopped in 1994. As one of the authors wrote, 'history happened. South Africa became the rainbow nation, a world "miracle" at a time of so few miracles' (p65). And the only nagging question that remained was whether there was not a danger of an ANC government merely managing capitalism, which would point to a disaster in future (p49).

In a way, this book is a tribute to Ronnie Kasrils, who in 1965 was a young ANC leader and underground operative at the LSE, but who went on to be come one of Umkhonto's top leaders and later a cabinet minister in several governments in post-apartheid South Africa. It was he who, either directly or through the YCL, recruited the majority of the narrators of this book, gave them their instructions, sent them for further training in the USSR, and debriefed them after their return from South Africa. He managed to find the right people and to get them to do what was needed, despite the fact that the political views of some of them were somewhat different from his own.

This is also a tribute to people who risked a lot to bring the end of apartheid closer. The book contains a lot of new and interesting details about their operations, among them some that became the most spectacular achievements or dashing acts of the anti-apartheid struggle. The operation 'Africa Hinterland' was one of them; the preparations for the landing from *Aventura* another.

This book should have been published a long time ago. Why did all these heroic deeds have to remain secret for such a long time? Why were neither the participants, nor the ANC leadership prepared to speak about them for such a long period? I suspect that the reason is simple: this was

not the type of hero of the anti-apartheid struggle that the ANC, having come to power, wanted to project. They were foreign and white, and so they had to remain in the shadows for a very long while. It is good that this long period is over – but I still think that their contribution has not been sufficiently recognised. The ANC should celebrate its heroes, as befits a non-racial internationalist organisation, irrespective of their citizenship and skin colour. In their own way these brave young people were an equivalent of the international brigades that fought in Spain in the 1930s. They should be just as celebrated. This has not happened yet.

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José Gotovitch, *Du communisme et des communistes en Belgique. Approches critiques*, Bruxelles: Aden, 2011. ISBN 9782805920240, 433 pp., 30€, pb

The Belgian communist party (Parti communiste de Belgique or PCB) doesn't rank among the aristocracy of the European communist parties. It reached the peak of its influence during the 1940s, went into sharp decline from the 1970s, and had practically outlived itself by 1989; although even in 2011 the web registered the celebration of its ninetieth anniversary in Liège, in November, while traces of a Flemish communist party could be found as late as 2009, at which point it seemed to cease to exist as an autonomous party. Despite all this, the history of the PCB is not devoid of interest, as is convincingly argued in this new book by José Gotovich. Gotovich has explored the PCB's vicissitudes more than any other historian, with both passion and a commitment to accuracy, and both these attributes are demonstrated here, in a collection that brings together more than twenty articles, written over a period of some thirty years.

Founded in 1921, during the first ten years of its life the PCB had more or less the character of a sect, and it made itself conspicuous mainly through its fierce attacks on social democracy, from whose ranks

it drew a notable part of its membership. It enjoyed some support in the trade unions, for example among engineering workers in Liège, garment workers in Brussels and miners in the Borinage district. Nevertheless, it earned most of its prestige through the persecution to which it was subjected by bourgeois governments obsessed by *la peur du Rouge*. The PCB had a strict and sometimes difficult relationship with Moscow, one that was often mediated by its 'big brother' in neighbouring France, the PCF. Because of this, it came to play at least a secondary leading role in the developments preparatory to the turn of 1934, and the Comintern's adoption of the popular front line. And it was in this context that the PCB enjoyed its first, though short-lived, spell of popularity in the 1930s. Its influence took off in a remarkable way between 1935 and 1936, when its membership increased from 2600 to 8000, and its representation in the Belgian parliament from three to nine. A number of linked reasons account for this expansion: total identification with the struggle against fascism; militant engagement in strikes and in support of important social gains; the reflected light of the Soviet Union; and reaffirmation of a national identity in face of the danger posed by Nazi Germany.

The socialist *Parti ouvrier belge* (POB) met any suggestion of united action with an unconditional rejection, much more strongly than their fellow party in France. Nevertheless, a significant fringe of socialist activists who were disillusioned by their party's lukewarm support for the Spanish cause, and by its participation in the Belgian government, were drawn towards the PCB through solidarity with the Spanish republic. Moreover, in this period, for the first time, the wider mass organisations piloted by the PCB achieved some real consistency of support – for example International Red Aid, the *Comité de vigilance des intellectuels antifascists*, and the Friends of the USSR. Some of the most interesting articles collected here are centred on this aspect. In Belgium, the socialist and communist youth leagues even decided to unify themselves, an outcome that was fairly unusual on the European left, except in Spain.

José Gotovich is right in his assessment that in the communist collective memory the image of 1936 colours perceptions of the whole period until the German-Soviet pact of 1939, even though the political influence of the PCB had by this time considerably faded. Nevertheless, after the war began, in Belgium as everywhere in western Europe, the

communist party came to identify itself totally with the anti-German resistance. Despite the harsh repression directed against its rank-and-file activists – something of which it never ceased to be proud, characterising itself as the *parti des fusillés* – the PCB in this period steadily increased its membership, and reached its highest yet figure of 11,000 members as a clandestine party. In this same period it also achieved full political legitimacy, through the recognition it received from the national government exiled in London.

The PCB reached its peak immediately after the Second World War. With 100,000 members, it secured twelve per cent of the national vote in the 1946 elections – in Vallonie the figure was twenty-five per cent; and with twenty-four deputies and seven senators it played an important role in the Belgian government until 1947. This trend was soon interrupted, and at the beginning of the 1950s even reversed. Gotovitch explains very clearly how the PCB was unable to retain members and voters, not only because of the onset of the Cold War – after all the PCF and PCI increased their membership in that decade – but because of the loss of its influence in the trade unions, and the erosion in this way of its key social constituency. The loss was not made up for by recruitment among intellectuals and professionals. Though it remained an important factor on the Belgian political scene, sectarianism and the inexperience of its cadres doomed the PCB to a long decline, interrupted only by occasional flashes in the 1960s and 1970s.

It is impossible to reconstruct here the full detail of the impressive work of political and social history that Gotovich has accomplished, with great scholarship and on the basis of an extensive documentation. There are remarkable portraits of characters such as the socialist physician and deputy Albert Marteaux, or Marc Willems, survivor of the Stalin gulag. The general sense of the author's verdict as the PCB's historian is rehearsed in the second essay of the collection, '*Qu'est-ce que le Parti comuniste de Belgique? A quoi a t-il servi?* According to Gotovich, the PCB has been a pole of attraction only when it has been able to lead battles around objectives which did not directly correspond to its revolutionary identity and its final goals, i.e. socialism. Notably it achieved this in the period of anti-fascism, during the resistance and in the post-war reconstruction of the country. The party had its moments

of glory, but it never succeeded in consolidating its progress, because it lacked its own distinct social basis. Instead it was squeezed between social democracy and the Christian Social Party and its predecessors, the two pillars structuring Belgian society. Nevertheless, through its political discourse, and often through the activities of its members, the PCB ended up by 'protecting' the POB (later *Parti socialiste belge*) from a total distortion of its character and unlimited compromise with the bourgeoisie. In this way it even got to strengthen its socialist rival, especially in the 1960s and 1970s. We could therefore apply to Belgian history the well-known paradox introduced by Eric Hobsbawm in *The Age of Extremes*, that by the end of the twentieth century, communism had assisted the victory of its historical enemy, capitalism: it had helped it to survive first by allying with it in the war against Nazism and fascism, and then by forcing it to reform itself during the *Trente glorieuses*, in order to contain the contagion of revolution.

The book is completed by a rich bibliography of writings on the PCB, most of which are in French. This reader would also have appreciated an index, which is such an indispensable tool for a work of this kind.

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Lucio Magri, *The Tailor of Ulm: Communism in the Twentieth Century*, translated by Patrick Camiller, London, Verso, 2011, ISBN 9781844676989, 427pp, £30, hbk

This is certainly one of the most important texts to emerge from the disintegration of Italian communism and the communist universe. The title refers to a Brecht poem, quoted to Magri by the leading Italian communist Pietro Ingrao. This concerned an artisan of Ulm who in 1592 convinced himself that he had built a flying machine, and who crashed to his death as a result. Brecht's moral is that in spite of the tailor's disaster, flight was nevertheless achieved three centuries later; consequently Ingrao remained optimistic in the long term even as the party

sank. But did the tailor, Magri inquires, make any contribution to the history of aeronautics? In other words, has twentieth-century communism made any significant contribution to Marx's vision of humanity's leap from necessity to freedom?

First published in 2009, the volume was Magri's summing-up of his experiences as a communist activist and the lessons of the PCI's postwar career until its effective dissolution into the Party of Democratic Socialism in 1991. Two years after its publication he died by assisted suicide, aged seventy-nine.

Having joined the party in the mid-1950s from a left-wing Catholic youth movement, Magri had always been a controversial figure. He took up a stance on the left of the PCI, and was expelled from the party in 1969 as one of the founders of the newspaper *Il Manifesto* and the group of dissident party members which formed around it. In the early 1980s he rejoined the party, after it dropped its parliamentary understanding with the Christian Democrats. Following the PCI's dissolution he was for a time active in Rifondazione Comunista, until becoming disillusioned with that also.

The great virtue of Magri's account and analysis it that it is not written to condemn or justify, but to explain and generate understanding. Though convinced that the PCI for most of this period was on a fundamentally wrong course, he explains soberly and fairly the rationale behind the party leadership's approach, and shows awareness of the constraints with which it was faced. He is in no doubt that the initiative in promoting the Cold War came from the Western powers, specifically the USA – though he also acknowledges that the Soviet response was badly misjudged. The PCI leader Togliatti was also up against the considerable strength of the Italian bourgeoisie, not to mention the surviving elements of the fascist regime, and the militantly anti-socialist Papacy. He was also, even in the wake of the Allied victory, obliged to lead his party in a country 'more occupied by the victors than liberated' (p46) – and one which, like Greece, had been abandoned by Stalin to the Western sphere. Therefore Togliatti had no option but to accept the political and constitutional compromises that were to consign the PCI to permanent oppositional status during the decades after its eviction from government in 1947.

These impediments did not preclude adopting policies to make the

best of an adverse situation, and indeed some victories were won. The PCI multiplied its strength and credibility, gaining municipal control in many areas, and becoming a powerful intellectual as well as social and political force. In 1953 mass protests which it organised blocked the *legge truffa* or swindle law – an attempt by the establishment to rig the electoral system to communist disadvantage. In 1974 the divorce referendum, which the PCI supported rather reluctantly for fear of offending its Catholic electorate, returned a positive vote. Magri accepts that in the context of its time the 'Salerno turn' of 1944 achieved its main objectives, but also argues that the economic programme of the left remained at the level of generalities, and that a reductionist and vulgarised version of Gramsci's writings ('the Gramsci genome') weakened the PCI's theoretical grasp and ultimately its political strategy.

So began the decades-long drift towards the eventual demise of the PCI and what Magri sees as the assimilation of its remnants into the bourgeois universe. All the party's many virtues and merits, the resolve and vision of its militants, its immense cultural weight and relative freedom from Stalinist dogma, the integrity and honesty of its local administrations, its huge electoral support, did not prevent the process from working out its inherent logic – resistance was futile. A large revolutionary party confronting immovable conservative structures is irresistibly tempted towards an unacknowledged social democratic accommodation which it dissembles with revolutionary phrasemongering, and from that it slides towards a basically liberal project. In Italy Togliatti's untimely death, as well as the illness-related retirement his successor Luigi Longo, were no doubt significant, but they were subordinate to the logic of events.

From Magri's point of view such an outcome was not wholly inevitable, and history presented several opportunities to which the PCI failed to make an adequate response. The upsurge of student activism in 1968 was followed in Italy by the 'hot autumn' of industrial strikes and protest in 1969. Magri contends that in the former events the PCI essentially played a spectator's role, with its own student organisation participating only ineffectively, while the industrial struggle was largely left to the trade unions, so that the party failed to gain the insertion into the labour movement which it might have done. Magri is not suggesting that this constituted a missed revolutionary opportunity, but

that it might have been used to broaden the party's base and extend its challenge to bourgeois hegemony, as well as to consolidate the party internally. The unexpected success of *Il Manifesto* was evidence of this, but it was also of course the occasion of Magri's own exclusion, along with Rosanna Rossanda and others.

In a political framework that was haunted by the memory of how fascism had seized power in the 1920s, the PCI leadership was understandably wary of anything that might be construed as adventurism, and insisted that it would only enter government as part of a coalition with the Christian Democrats (DC). Such fears were by no means unreasonable, given the known attitudes of the military and secret services, and they were powerfully reinforced by the Pinochet coup of 11 September 1973 in Chile. The aim of the party's electoral strategy was to win such a strong parliamentary leverage that the DC would be obliged to accept its presence on equal terms, so that the DC's collaboration in government would inhibit a right-wing putsch. But this was an objective the consummately corrupt DC was determined to block, and even if it had been willing to take the risk it was most unlikely that the US would ever have permitted such an outcome.

In Magri's opinion, major advances could nevertheless have been attained. The PCI secured a significant electoral advance in 1976 (though so did the DC), at a time when the US was embroiled in its Vietnam defeat, the aftermath of the Nixon scandal and a dollar crisis – which rendered it unusually unable to exercise a veto. German social democracy, in the meantime, had its hands full coping with the Portuguese revolution and the collapse of the Franco regime, in both cases actively and successfully striving to prevent a communist-dominated outcome. In Magri's view the party then made the cardinal mistake of agreeing to give parliamentary support to a DC government without being part of the administration, thus having to share responsibility for the DC's incompetence and corruption, even criminality, without being in a position to advance its own agenda. It was not the Red Brigades and the kidnapping and murder of Aldo Moro – though they made a sensational public impact – that fundamentally determine the course of events. The PCI was neutralised, and by the time its leaders appreciated their error in the early 1980s it was too late.

It was at this time that Magri rejoined the party and remained with it until its dissolution, which he strongly, and rightly, opposed. No Western communist party was better equipped than the Italian to continue in face of the disintegration of the world movement – and without, as was the case with its French or Portuguese counterparts, retreating into a sectarian redoubt. But what was left of it, after its change of name and nature in 1991, could not meaningfully survive the ditching of its communist identity, even though its successor retained an initially numerous paper membership and continued as a political actor in several different manifestations during the subsequent two decades.

It was probably of little consequence whether or not most of the minor West European communist parties survived. However that certainly did not apply to the PCI. What was abandoned was a major social force with deep penetration in the population, particularly its industrial classes; one which had largely escaped from the trammels of Comintern and Stalinist dogma, and which, with its unique heritage, would have been capable of advancing an alternative agenda to that of encroaching neoliberalism. Had the PCI, 'which joined together millions of members and voters in a complex society, and walked a tightrope between social struggles and parliamentary institutions' (p183), still continued as an oppositional presence at the time of the Italian political system's implosion in the 1990s, subsequent Italian history might well have turned out very differently. But this debacle was efficiently exploited by Berlusconi, and not by the fragmented left.

The volume concludes with an 'Envoi' entitled a 'New Communist Identity', which Magri wrote in 1987 and prints here as his closing chapter – as relevant, in his view, as it had been over twenty years earlier.

Humanity, he writes, has advanced technologically and organisationally to the stage where 'the discourse of communism, in its original, emancipatory meaning has come of age for the first time in history' (p389); but now, 'things are less evident and much more complex'. Nevertheless, in spite of oversimplified interpretations, Marx's basic concepts remain 'the key to a communist identity that involves recovery and profound innovation' (ibid). He goes on to discuss a variety of contradictions and dilemmas defining the post-communist era – environmental degradation, the nature of work, gender relations, the

hollowing out of state sovereignty and effective democracy, abundance sitting alongside poverty. Finally, he addresses the question of whether the historic form of the political party can any longer function as an agent of democratic emancipation, rather than as an electoral machine servicing a corrupted parody of democracy. He concludes that it can, but only through transformation and renewal, to become 'the fusion of values, analysis and transformative project that bestows on politics its profound significance and which, day in, day out, serves as an instrument for the criticism and transformation of personal life. An ethical, not only intellectual, foundation' (p427). This was very far from the case with current styles of politics: 'More than ever we can see how democracy without genuine parties degenerates and lays itself open to manipulation and how what call themselves parties have degenerated into professional apparatuses competing with money and spectacle'(p183).

A few minor criticisms can be offered. Magri is perhaps too inclined to give Mao and Maoism the benefit of any available doubt. The reader is frustrated by the fact that only a name index is provided, and by the quality of proof-reading. But *The Tailor of Ulm* is a remarkably stimulating and thought-provoking text, which anyone involved in any sort of emancipatory political project would benefit from studying.

Willie Thompson

Josie McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism: Intimacy and Sexuality in the GDR*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, ISBN 9780521727617, x + 239pp, £18.99 pbk

This book investigates a wide range of issues pertaining to sex and love in the GDR between 1949 and 1989, including nudism, pornography, pre-marital sex, prostitution, divorce, homosexuality, monogamy, infidelity and divorce. McLellan's primary conclusion is that, between the stuffy 1950s and the more permissive 1980s, a 'sexual revolution' took place in communist East Germany. In particular, McLellan examines how this revolution was driven by complex interactions between state

policy on the one hand and popular attitudes and behaviour on the other.

When the state and the population clashed, it was in many cases the regime that was forced to give way. In the 1950s, for example, the communists failed to stem the increasing enthusiasm of East Germans for nudism. Similarly, the liberation of the abortion laws in the 1960s and 1970s came about largely as a result of pressure from both the population and the medical profession. The state tried hard to mould sexual behaviour but often failed. Throughout the whole lifetime of the GDR, sex education and sex advice books presented heterosexual, loving monogamous relationships as the ideal to which citizens should aspire. Yet even official surveys showed that 'infidelity and casual sex were rife, and sexually transmitted diseases a significant problem' (p84). In other instances, however, the communist regime was able to successfully influence people's opinions and sexual behaviour. McLellan claims, for example, that the state's pro-natalist policies helped to prevent birth rates from sagging to the extent that they did elsewhere in the industrial world. GDR sex manuals emphasised the importance of women's pleasure and gave precise instructions to men 'on how to find the clitoris and what to do when they got there' (p86). According to McLellan, this helpful advice appears to have borne fruit in the rising orgasm rate amongst women.

One point that emerges with particular clarity is how numerous were the uses to which sex was put by the communist authorities. The claim of the GDR to be the 'champion of love and intimacy' was a part of its assertion of moral superiority over the capitalist West, where sex had been reduced to a meaningless distraction or commercial exchange. But at the same time as the communists trumpeted the 'healthy' approach of the GDR to human sexuality, the Stasi was making prolific use of sex as a tool both of espionage abroad and of blackmail at home. In the 1950s and 1960s, the efforts of the regime in the field of sex education were related to their attempt to fashion a new socialist personality. In the 1970s and the 1980s, by contrast, the liberalisation of sexual policies under Honecker was an important component of the 'social pact' by which the state sought to pacify its citizens.

McLellan's claims are credible because they are based on a thorough

evaluation of an impressive range of primary sources, including archival documents, films, books and magazines, photographs and paintings, supported by a large number of interviews with East Germans. It is particularly pleasing that McLellan's approach to her sources is empirical. Unlike many historians of sexuality she does not succumb to the temptation of focusing on representations and 'discourse'. Instead, she keeps her attention firmly on the lives and experiences, the joys and the suffering, of real people. She is also to be commended for the clarity and unpretentiousness of her prose, and the sensitivity – and occasional humour – with which she addresses her topic.

The book, however, suffers from two main problems. Firstly, McLellan does not go far enough in using her material to engage with deeper questions in the historiography of the GDR. Particularly within the German-language literature, there are major debates about how best to characterise the nature of the relationship between state and society in communist East Germany. McLellan's study has the potential to bring new evidence and insights to these debates, but she does not make the most of this opportunity. Only in the conclusion does she stand back to ponder the wider significance of her findings, and her observations here are astute yet frustratingly brief.

A second, more serious weakness is McLellan's failure to place the East German sexual revolution in comparative context. As McLellan herself admits on several occasions, the GDR 'was far from hermetically sealed' (p209) – it was influenced in all kinds of ways by global trends. Moreover, many of the changes that were taking place in East Germany were related to the same underlying socio-economic developments that were occurring elsewhere, for example the growth of the welfare state, increased standards of living, improved housing and reduced working hours. Only occasionally does McLellan deploy evidence from other countries to help us appreciate the full significance of her East German data. For the most part her focus is narrowly on the GDR. As a result, it is impossible to evaluate the degree to which the phenomena she describes were representative of wider patterns.

Again, McLellan here fails to exploit the explanatory potential of her material, for the GDR could be used as a very interesting case study. As part of the communist bloc, it was subject to the same ideological and

political imperatives as countries such as Czechoslovakia, Hungary and the USSR. But culturally it was also part of Protestant northern Europe, along with countries such as the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden, where the sexual revolution went much further than in the Catholic south. Looking at the East German 'sexual revolution' in comparative context would therefore not just tell us more about what was happening in the GDR itself, but allow us to explore the relative impact of the wider forces that were driving (or impeding) the sexual revolution in Europe.

These criticisms notwithstanding, McLellan's monograph is a major contribution. It is innovative, thought-provoking and humane. There is nothing like it in the English-language literature of the GDR, and its findings will be of interest to scholars well beyond the field of East German studies.

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Serge Wolikow, *L'Internationale communiste (1919-1943). Le Komintern ou le rêve déchu du parti mondial de la révolution*, Paris, Les Editions de l'Atelier, 2010, ISBN 9782708241312, 287 pp & CD-ROM, €26, pbk

Since the opening up of relevant archives in the early 1990s there has been a constant stream of publications on the history of international communism. Serge Wolikow has been associated with much of the best work published in French, including three important collections of conference papers, the larger overview *Le siècle des communismes* (2000) and the authoritative biographical dictionary *Komintern* (2001). Despite the abundance of new research, or maybe because of its multi-faceted character, what is nevertheless lacking is any attempted overview on the basis of this material. Wide-ranging histories of communism appearing in English include the recent volumes of Archie Brown and David Priestland, as well as the Service/Pons *Dictionary of 20th Century Communism*, originally published in Italian, whose uncertain qualities were noted in an earlier issue of this journal by William A. Pelz. Nevertheless, there has been no real attempt at a new Comintern history

since the Pierre Broué and McDermott/Agnew volumes appeared amidst the first wave of archival disclosures in the 1990s. While Broué's continued a longstanding engagement with the Comintern from a Trotskyist perspective, and McDermott's work registered the renewed impetus the archives had given the centre-periphery debate, Wolikow introduces his own account both as a distillation of recent researches and as a recognition of the neglected history of the Comintern 'as such'.

Though much wider in scope, the book may be regarded as an updating and extension of the introductory essay Wolikow contributed to the *Komintern* volume. Indeed, an updated version of the project's nearly eight hundred biographical entries is provided as a CD-ROM, and for those without access to the print version this in itself is reason enough to get hold of a copy. Wolikow's treatment is not, however, simply a commentary on the biographies. Only one of his chapters, 'Formation and destiny of Kominterniens', directly fulfils this function, including a discussion of the Comintern schools and the repression to which those working in its apparatus were subjected by the late 1930s. This chapter is grouped in a final, slightly miscellaneous section with a discussion of Comintern historiography as shaped by changing political and intellectual environments and the collapse of a culture of archival secrecy. Nevertheless, the volume's two longer sections focus less on the Kominterniens than on the world in which they moved, as reconstructed here both institutionally and ideologically.

The first and longest section, 'Organisation and strategy', outlines the structures of the new world party, before providing a broadly chronological account of the several phases of Comintern policy before its dissolution in 1943. The second section, on 'Culture and doctrine', complements this with a discussion of the Comintern press apparatus, but mainly comprises detailed studies of Comintern doctrine on the state, the nation and the crisis of capitalism. This is consistent with the claim in Wolikow's introduction that the Comintern's distinctiveness lay as much in its ideological productions as in its forms of political mobilisation. This is not a feature always recognised in recent discussions, and it is noticeable that in these chapters Wolikow for the most part presents original research. While this is also amply evident in his discussions of the Comintern's political strategy, these also draw

on a wider recent literature, in Spanish, Italian and English as well as French.

Naturally, Wolikow's treatment reflects the parameters of the project in which it originates. As he notes in his chapter on the Kominterniens, the criterion of participation in some Comintern structure or event excludes the great majority of communist activists. Wolikow's own primary interest is thus in the history, including the social history, of the Comintern itself as an institution. In particular, it is approached from the perspective of the European francophone countries covered by the biographical dictionary. Wolikow makes an eloquent case for revisiting the Comintern in the context of a global labour history. As well as drawing on literatures relating to communist parties across Europe, he thus acknowledges the limitations of the eurocentric perspective within which much of this history has been written. Nevertheless, it is the francophone parties, and particularly the PCF, that provide his point de départ. His chronological chapters deal most fully with the period from the mid-1930s, in which the PCF displaced its German counterpart as focal point and examplar of Comintern politics. Original material is presented on episodes like the gestation of the popular front, the impact of the Nazi-Soviet pact and, in particular, reactions to the collapse of the Third Republic in 1940.

Even in a wider perspective, this emphasis on France has the sort of rationale and justification that could be made for E.H. Carr's focus on the German party in an earlier period. From the more marginal British perspective, certain oversights may nevertheless be noted. One is the Anglo-Russian trade union committee of the mid-1920s, which not only throws a rather different light on the politics of the united front but also underlines the fact that the Comintern was not the only possible agency for the dissemination of Bolshevik influence, even if it was undeniably the most important. From the same perspective, the Profintern might certainly have merited precedence over the Sportintern and Krestintern, which feature here as examples of Comintern front organisations.

As Wolikow nevertheless notes in his introduction, the politics of the Comintern can in no period be represented in purely monolithic and unilinear terms. To capture its disparate manifestations one might perhaps imagine a volume of the scope and expertise of the Service/

Pons Encylopedia, but, like the Comintern itself, aspiring to some level of synthesis and co-ordination. Pending any such collaboration, Wolikow has provided an invaluable point of reference for the further development of Comintern historiography. Reading his introduction, in which he sets out his general rationale for a Comintern history, my first thought was how good it would be to have a translation in *Twentieth Century Communism*. In the style of the French academy, Wolikow upholds what are there referred to as scientific principles of research. He eschews a narrow partisanship, and in his discussions of stalinisation and the terror he certainly does not romanticise the Comintern. He does, on the other hand, strongly affirm the continuing relevance of Comintern history 'in a globalised world in which the international co-ordination of social movements remains an issue of current concern'. There is no reason why a twenty-first century historiography of this twentieth-century phenomenon should not continue to flourish.

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