

Editorial

One might suppose that historians of communism have less to learn than most from the current vogue for transnational history. Whatever criticisms might be made of the great traditional landmarks of communist historiography, restriction of the subject to an exclusively national terrain is not one of them. On the contrary, the main objection to these party-focused histories was that national contexts and determinants were so often relegated to a purely secondary level, and it was precisely this preoccupation with external agencies and motive forces that a later generation of historians sought to bring into question. In the resulting 'centre-periphery' debate, the transnational dimension of communist history was, for the most part, argued out as if more or less confined to the relationship between Moscow and otherwise self-sufficient communist parties.

That, however, is only part of the picture. It was not until after Stalin's death that the first suggestions of a sort of polycentrism could be entertained. Nevertheless, communist conceptions of the international, even at their most centralised, had always amounted to something more than the relationship between a centre and its outer parts. Proletarian internationalism, even if we view it as a Kriegelian 'graft' onto existing transnational relations, was confronted with lines of communication, forms of exchange and patterns of formal and informal political domination that could not be simply spirited away by a chorus of the *Internationale*. Nor, indeed, must one assume that the communists necessarily sought to circumvent these other connections, for it was here that both the promise and the challenge of a wider solidarity lay. Shared commemorations, personalities and images of struggle were fundamental to the communists' political ethos and identity. At no point were these projected from Russia alone, though the balance between the centre and these other peripheries fluctuated considerably. From 'Hands Off Russia' to Stalingrad and the campaigns against Trotskyism and Titoism, Soviet

concerns were never simply pushed to the margins. Nevertheless, as the focal point of political conflict and expectation shifted, so too did communists' campaigning priorities and solidarity actions. Successively Germany, China, France, Spain, Vietnam and even Britain were each among the countries which for longer or shorter periods occupied some protagonist's role in the communists' world-view. More persistently, there was the brute fact of empire, and therefore of the forms of transnational mobilisation – between colony and colony, or colony and metropolis – by which the communists' somewhat unevenly maintained commitments to colonial emancipation were to be made effective.

There were also the practicalities of international organisation. Though formal authority in the communist movement derived from the centre, volatility of programme and personnel meant that relations within the Comintern were unstable and often contested. Regional secretariats and inter-party liaison tended to follow the easiest line of communication, whether through geographical proximity or cultural and linguistic ties. There were also significant movements of activists and functionaries across national boundaries. With the suppression of communist activities that very few countries did not experience at some point, directing centres and populations of activists were shifted to those places of refuge in which these activities could still be carried out, though rarely, as these pages show, without exposure to new risks. One of the many tragic ironies of communist history was that for thousands of communists and sympathisers – economic migrants as well as political ones – an idealised USSR naturally appeared as the one such centre in which their personal well-being was guaranteed. Following the defeat of fascism and the dissolution of the Comintern, matters were further complicated by the establishment of new communist states standing ambiguously between centre and periphery, and representing possibilities of transition or mediation between them. Some might be dismissed as satellite states; but as subsequently polycentrism and the Sino-Soviet split became a reality, there were now openly competing centres for communist allegiances, from the Italy that was beloved of Eurocommunists to the Albania of Enver Hoxha that was not. The tensions that resulted eventually played their part in undermining the system as a whole.

This is a vast field of study and in a journal issue like this we can only

give a sample of current research and a sense of some of the possibilities that might be developed in the future. The experience of exile is one that has already been touched upon in this journal, notably in Stephen Hopkin's essay on Jorge Semprún.¹ José Neves's article on the Portuguese communist composer Fernando Lopes-Graça offers an interesting point of comparison, for whereas Semprún essentially rejected nationalism as identity, while stubbornly retaining a sense of his own Spanishness, Neves describes Graça's turn to the national precisely in the context of the time he spent in Paris in the late 1930s. In both cases, it is the national stance of the PCF that stands out, though as a point of attraction for Graça and of revulsion for the Semprún who turned against communism.

While these two articles focus on a single actor, Alix Heiniger adopts a prosopographical approach to the German communist exiles who – also in the 1930s – settled in neighbouring European countries in the expectation of soon being able to return to a Germany freed of Hitler. Again, the significance of relations with the PCF is underlined, and Paris's importance is confirmed as what Willi Münzenberg described as the 'capital of the emigration'.²

Josep Puigsech tells a rather different story, of the Spanish communist exiles in Moscow, much distrusted by Semprún, who continued to fight out the internal battles of the civil war period, but now under the immediate oversight of the Comintern. The outcome, remarkably, was the recognition of a separate Catalan section of the International, which Puigsech describes as unique in its history, and which he documents here for the first time in English. Spain itself, of course, was not so much a place of exile, as one in which those already exiled, many of them communists, sealed the connection between the Spanish people's struggle and their own diasporic condition by taking up arms against fascism. There has never been a shortage of literature on this conflict. Nevertheless, David Featherstone in his contribution here takes us beyond the better-known European examples to consider the diasporic politics of African American communists who, in fighting in Spain, established connections between anti-fascism and anti-colonial politics that sat uneasily with the left patriotism of the popular front.

The last of our contributions to this theme returns to the experience of settlement in the USSR itself. In the case of the American Finnish

emigration to Soviet Karelia, this was not so much a case of political exiles or of resistance fighters, but of politicised economic migrants who saw the prospect of linking their own betterment with the construction of a new socialist society. Many were to return bitterly disillusioned, and in reconstructing their story Markku Kangaspuro picks his way through a minefield of political controversy that lasted for decades afterwards.

Also included in this issue are articles by Dianne Kirby and Stéphanie Roulin which, from their different perspectives, approach the theme of Christian anti-communism, and complete the discussion of the varieties of anti-communism initiated in our last issue. While both journal issues for 2014 are therefore taken up by research articles, our eighth issue, which will appear early in 2015, will catch up with the backlog of reviews and review essays.

For the 2014 issues, special thanks are due to Adrià Llacuna, who not only assisted with the earlier Manchester seminar 'A century of anti-communisms' but was the main organiser of a second seminar, 'Towards a transnational communist history', from which a number of the papers in this issue are drawn. Adrià also provided the translation of the contribution here by Josep Puigsech, while the translation of Stéphanie Roulin's article is by Duncan Brown. Further editorial assistance was provided by Penny Crosson, while the Manchester seminars received financial support from the Political Studies Association (Communism Specialist Group), the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence and the Politics Department at Manchester.

Over a much longer period our thanks are due to Richard Cross, who with this issue leaves the team of editors to concentrate on other commitments and enthusiasms, notably his interests in the punk movement. Richard has played a key role since the very earliest issues of this journal's predecessor, the *Communist History Network Newsletter*. Without his energy, technical know-how and shrewd editorial judgement, what was initially a somewhat ad hoc production could never have been sustained over more than twenty issues and would certainly not have developed to the point of launching a journal of the present scope. When, as CHNN editors, we met in 2007 to decide whether to call it a day or move to a different level, Richard's preference for the latter was decisive, and without his commitment this project would probably not have seemed feasible.

His moving on leaves a big gap, especially as we move to two issues a year. We are therefore very pleased to have had the chance to expand the team of editors, and with this issue welcome Gavin Bowd, whose several contributions to the journal include his article on De Gaulle and Ceausescu in our third issue; Gidon Cohen, whose essay on political religion and British communism appeared in issue two; Ben Harker, biographer of Ewan MacColl, who is currently co-editing our coming issue on 'Communism and the cultural turn'; and Dianne Kirby, whose article on Christian anti-communism appears below, and who also contributed to our earlier roundtable on anti-communism. Contact details of all editors are provided on the reverse title-page, and readers are encouraged to contact any of us with ideas for themes, articles or any other initiatives to which TCC can usefully contribute.

Notes

1. 'Still a "Spanish Red"? The communist past and national identity in the writing of Jorge Semprún', *TCC*, 3, 2011, pp70-91. Articles in the same issue that explore transnational relations between different communist parties are Andreas Stergiou, 'The Socialist Unity Party of Germany's bizarre relationship with the Greek Communist Party in the period 1968-1989' and Gavin Bowd, 'De Gaulle, Ceausescu and May 1968'.
2. On this see Jean-Michel Palmier, trans. David Fernbach, *Weimar in Exile. The antifascist emigration in Europe and America*, London: Verso, 2006, pp184-218.