

# Editorial

This issue of *Twentieth Century Communism* marks a change from earlier ones: it is the first not to be based around specific themes. Instead, the journal's pages were opened to a diversity of topics and approaches to the history of communism throughout the 'short' twentieth century – or 'Age of Catastrophe' as Eric Hobsbawm called it.<sup>1</sup> This format will continue in every other issue of the journal as it continues as a biannual publication.

What the contributions published in this issue demonstrate, is just how global the field of communist studies has become, as is reflected in the journal's subtitle – *a journal of international history*. Although communist studies has never attracted researchers' interest on the scale of, for example, fascism, we now have a burgeoning historiography and ever diversifying approaches to the subject. The challenge is the truly world scale of the field, not least because of the diversity of languages needed to read the relevant materials. One way of surmounting these obstacles is a collective undertaking informed by common themes. In this respect, an admirable recent overview addressing communist history as global history can now be read in Stephen A. Smith's introduction to *The History of Communism*. In common with other recent studies of international communism, Smith – whose focus in a wide ranging volume is communism in power – notes that the Bolsheviks understood the October Revolution of 1917 as 'inaugurating a new stage in human history, the beginning of the transition from capitalism, a system they believed was based on exploitation, inequality, and war, to communism'.<sup>2</sup> Other studies have evaluated how this aspiration shaped the worldview and identity of the staff of professional revolutionaries who aimed to realise the Comintern's proclamations. As the Hannover-based biographical project on the Comintern under Michael Buckmiller and Klaus Meschkat noted, these agents and emissaries of revolution saw October 1917 as the first rays of the new rising sun which would spread commu-

nism from East to West around the globe.<sup>3</sup> These beliefs also infused the art which depicted the spread of revolution worldwide, as the cover image of this issue by Ivan Ivanovich Golikov illustrates.<sup>4</sup>

Yet, despite these new biographically informed insights in the culture of communism and the states it ruled over, we still know more about the political history of the Comintern and its 'national sections'. This is exemplified in John Riddell's new monumental edition, which finally brings the Fourth World Congress of the Communist International (1922) into English translation with a wide ranging introduction.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the most significant gap in the literature has been how the early Comintern and its internationalism was received in Soviet society. It is this *terra incognita* which Gleb J. Albert's contribution sheds new light on.

Albert's work demonstrates the importance of internationalism in early Soviet Russia and shows how constant reference to its centrality at the beginning of the communist project was used against the rise of Stalinism – the reorientation away from spreading revolution abroad to building 'socialism in one country' – not only by the left opposition, but crucially by the wider sections of Soviet society. Albert also re-conceptualises our understanding of early Soviet internationalism and the Comintern. To do so, the author develops Max Weber's concept of 'institutional charisma' in an innovative and convincing contribution above and beyond the current revival of interest in 'political religion' as a conceptual framework to explaining political belief and active engagement.<sup>6</sup>

From the 'centre' of world communism, the next two contributions move westwards – to extend our travelling analogy – to the so-called 'peripheries' of local communisms, with case studies of communist networks in rural France and then an exploration of changing attitudes to sexual and family norms in the Allende generation of communist youth in Chile.<sup>7</sup> Prigent's contribution focuses on rural Brittany, a conservative stronghold in France until the early 1970s. The author compares and contrasts socialist and communist networks that were active in the region, particularly those linked with the French Section of the Workers' International (SFIO) and the Communist Party of France (PCF). Integrating an analysis of the internal workings of the PCF and SFIO at the municipal and regional level, with an exploration of the

various trade union and social networks of their respective activist cores, Prigent sheds light on the plurality of identities in ‘red Brittany’ across its urban, maritime and rural communities.

Alfonso Salgado’s contribution takes us from the theme of identities to that of social attitudes in Chile in the early 1970s. He examines the long-held view that the communist left upheld ‘traditional’ ideas of the family and sexual mores. By analysing *Ramona* – a youth-orientated magazine controlled by the Communist Youth of Chile – he explores how its writers and readers engaged with particularly contentious issues such as premarital sex, contraception, family arrangements, marital breakups, abortion and homosexuality. Stressing the importance of generational cleavages and emphasising how the local context shaped the way ‘international’ ideas were perceived (such as responses to the sexual revolution in Europe), Salgado provides a nuanced account of how the ‘younger’ generations may have retained some of the conservative elements of the ‘old’ generation’s thinking, but that they also strove to re-define several core ideas of the family and sexual norms to fit with their own expectations and to push the boundaries of what was deemed ‘acceptable’.

The following two articles engage respectively with the writing of communist history and Soviet historiography. Tauno Saarela’s review of literature on Scandinavian communism not only helps us break through the language barrier, but also shows how a relatively under-researched region – usually associated with social democracy – fits into the wider historiography. Ian Thatcher then makes an interesting case about the historiography of the Russian ‘Provisional Government’ (RPG), which took power in February 1917, challenging western scholars who have dismissed all Soviet historians’ accounts of the history of the Provisional Government as unreliable and ideologically skewed. Thatcher argues that while there was a clear Marxist framework to the varied tomes he discusses, they were nevertheless nuanced, contextualised accounts whose authors were no less committed to professional historical method and research than their western counterparts.

The final article in this issue introduces us – that is, readers in English – to a topic that is perhaps best known in the Anglophone world from the perspective of anti-communist literature by ‘renegades’. Jan Valtin’s *Out of the Night* is presented in John Fleming’s recent study *The Anti-*

*Communist Manifestos* – as one of four books that shaped the Cold War in our imaginations.<sup>8</sup> Constance Margain, by contrast, takes us back to the historical world of Valtin’s ‘International Union of Seamen and Harbour Workers’, showing its importance to Soviet policy internationally, as well as the role of the union’s interclubs, in disseminating propaganda as well as acting as a conduit for espionage.

We leave you, the reader, with an issue which, we believe, reflects the diversity of communist studies in the second decade of the twenty-first century. If most of these contributions challenge received views, then we are doing our job: working toward historicising a global movement – once seen as unable to take a step forward without monolithic Stalinism pulling it two steps back – at all times, in all countries and on all ‘fronts’.

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## Notes

1. Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991*, London: Michael Joseph, 1994.
2. Stephen A. Smith, ‘Introduction: Towards a Global History of Communism’, in Stephen A Smith (ed), *The Oxford Handbook of Communism*, Oxford: OUP, 2014, p.1.
3. Michael Buckmiller, ‘Bilanz eines russisch-deutschen Forschungsprojekt’, in Michael Buckmiller and Klaus Meschkat (eds.), *Biographisches Handbuch zur Geschichte der Kommunistischen*, Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2007, pp.19-20.
4. For details of the life and artistic career of Ivan I. Golikov (1886-1937), see <http://www.russianlacquerart.com/cnt/Palekh>.
5. John Riddell (ed and trans), *Toward the United Front. Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, 1922*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012. A review of Riddell’s volume is carried in this issue.

6. For an overview of recent literature, see Norman LaPorte, 'Introduction', *Moving the Social: Journal of Social History and the History of Social Movements*, Issue 5, 2014, pp. 5-30.
7. For a further discussion about the theme of local communisms, see Norman LaPorte, 'Introduction: local communisms within a global movement', *Twentieth Century Communism: a journal of international history*, 5, 2013, pp.5-18.
8. See John V. Fleming, *The Anti-Communist Manifestos. Four Books that Shaped the Cold War*, London & New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009.