Reviews

Åsmund Egge and Svend Rybner (eds), *Red Star in the North. Communism in the Nordic Countries*, Stamsund: Orkana Akademisk, 2015, ISBN 8281042427, 355pp; Tauno Saarela, *Suomalainen kommunismi ja vallankumous 1923-1930*, Helsinki: SKS, 2008, ISBN 9522220515, 840pp; Tauno Saarela, *Finnish Communism Visited*, Finnish Society for Labour History, Papers on Labour History VII, 2015, ISBN 9789525976182, 233pp

Was there a Nordic communism? asks Morten Thing at the start of *Red Star in the North* – to which Åsmund Egge responds in his concluding chapter, 'overall, no'. Although there are common traits, Egge maintains, it is more interesting to look at the ways in which the individual communist parties were influenced by national traditions and the particular circumstances they had to face. This is a fair conclusion, though it does seem to fly in the face of the comparative approach adopted elsewhere in the book. This is particularly the case with the initial chapters, which examine the organisation and strategy of the parties, their support and supporters, and their relationship with the Comintern. It is in fact the release of new source material in Russian archives, mostly dealing with the Comintern, that has, to a greater or lesser degree, inspired the publication of all three books under review. Whilst this has undoubtedly added greatly to our knowledge, it has sometimes been at the cost of allowing the relations of the various communist parties with Moscow to overshadow the domestic circumstances in which they operated. Maintaining the balance between the call of Moscow and the exigencies of coping with the hurly-burly of everyday life in an unfriendly world was always a tricky business, and following the trail demands great concentration and forensic skill on the part of the historian. It is perhaps for this reason that Tauno Saarela's massive study of Finnish communism between 1923 and 1930 is a far more rewarding, if exhausting, read than the comparative overview of *Red Star in the North*.

Although the authors of this collective endeavour have conscientiously striven to cover all five countries, the absence of any contributor from Sweden is noticeable, nevertheless as all recognise, the Finnish communist party differed in very significant ways from those of the Scandinavian countries. The party was founded in Moscow in August 1918 by exiles who had fled Finland in the aftermath of civil war, and although illegal until 1944, it managed to retain the support of significant numbers of Finnish workers. In the immediate post-war years, it came close to displacing the social democrats as the dominant voice of labour, attracting a number of disaffected left-wingers into the popular-front type Finnish people's democratic league (SKDL) and winning a quarter of the seats in parliament as late as 1958. The circumstances in which the party and its front organisations had to operate during the interwar period were also very different. As Saarela notes, 'the ideals of parliamentary democracy typical of western European countries, where different opinions could be expressed freely and acted upon, did not obtain in Finland'. In this respect, he concludes, Finland resembled the states of eastern Europe, where the parties of the left also faced hostility and possible repression.

The Finnish communist party is given due prominence in *Red Star*, and the tragic fate of most of its leaders in the purges of the 1930s is vividly portrayed by Kimmo Rentola in his chapter on the stalinist terror. The difference between the Finnish and other communist parties is brought out in a number of contributions. Scandinavian students at the party schools in Moscow in the 1930s, for example, found the conspiratorial atmosphere and security regulations far more difficult to cope with than their Finnish comrades. Whereas Finnish social democracy was gradually and somewhat grudgingly accepted back into the national fold in the years after the civil war, communists were definitely considered to be outside the nation. The communists for their part saw themselves as heirs of the pre-1918 labour movement that had fought for Finnish independence in 1917, an independence that the White bourgeois state had subsequently pawned to foreign imperialist capitalism. As Ragnheiður Kristjánsdóttir notes, nationalism and independence were crucial elements in the political discourse of Iceland and Finland. In both countries, a clear left-wing alternative nationalism emerged at the end of the

second world war. As a committed opponent of the American presence on Icelandic soil, and with its own concept of the 'people' (*althyda*) leading the fight for independence, the socialist party in Iceland was able to appeal to nationalist sentiments. The SKDL also promoted a new formulation of a popular nationalism, developed in left-wing academic circles in Finland during the late 1930s, and it was able to demonstrate not only that its supporters had fought against Soviet Russia when called upon to defend the country, but also that the former upholders of 'white' nationalism were now discredited and defeated.

Unfortunately, we are given only brief glimpses of the Nordic communists after 1945: this is essentially a book about the Comintern era. Åsmund Egge's contribution on the Comintern and the Nordic parties concludes that the declining importance of the Nordic parties in the 1930s led to a diminution of the influence they had been able to bring to bear in the early years, though this was also a reflection of the increasing level of bureaucratisation of the Comintern. He maintains that the policy of the 'third period' adopted in 1928 had a drastic effect on the fortunes of communism in Scandinavia, though in the Swedish case, at least, the split in the party also reflected deep-seated divisions within the left dating back to the turn of the century. Coverage of the antecedents of leftist parties and politics in northern Europe is rather perfunctory; syndicalism, for example, and the anti-war movement in Scandinavia that aroused Lenin's scorn, are hardly mentioned.

What Finnish communism did between 1923 and 1930 to further the revolution is the subject of Tauno Saarela's eight-hundred-page book. The first section looks at how it sought to muster the forces of revolution, the second considers the ways in which the movement attempted to weaken the prevailing order in Finland. Saarela has trawled through archives in Moscow and Helsinki and has examined the party press in minute detail in order to fulfil his allotted task. The result is a massively detailed account of the doings of Finnish communism during the seven-year period between the final dying hopes of imminent world revolution and the beginnings of the onslaught that would spell the end of communism as a political force in the public arena across much of Europe. Since the Finnish communist party was illegal in Finland, those on the left who broke away from the social democratic party in 1919-20 operated legally

as the socialist workers' party. Winning almost fifteen per cent of the vote in the 1922 elections, the twenty-seven members of parliament and the party executive were arrested and the assets of the party sequestrated in August 1923. This initial period has been covered by Saarela in an earlier volume; here, he takes up the story after the demise of the socialist workers' party. As he points out, the subsequent debate was revealing of the differences between the exiled communist leadership, heavily influenced by Leninist principles, and those in the field, who still clung to the traditions of the old united social democratic party. A mass party organised by electoral districts was dismissed in Moscow as old-fashioned and unsuited to the purpose of challenging the 'naked class dictatorship' of the White victors of the civil war. The party faithful in Finland, steeped in the culture of the workers' halls, was less inclined to abandon permanent public organisations in favour of defence or agitation committees, and the shifting of activity towards the workplace. As Ole Martin Rønning shows in *Red Star*, an unwillingness to obey the dictates of the Comintern was evident elsewhere in Scandinavia, where, to take one example, the whole notion of factory cells was alien.

Finland differed significantly from the other Nordic countries in that it had undergone a bitter civil war, the consequences of which shaped the political, cultural and social landscape of the young republic during the interwar years. Those who operated in Finland were acutely aware of the threat of suppression by the authorities, and very mindful of their obligation to press for amnesty for political prisoners. Kuusinen's call in 1924 for a workers' and peasants' government, in accordance with the line taken at the fifth congress of the Comintern, met with stiff resistance in Finland, where such a demand was seen as irrelevant to conditions in the country and liable to provoke the authorities to carry out mass arrests. The selection in 1924 of the imprisoned trade union leader Matti Väisänen as the candidate of the workers' and small farmers' electoral alliance for the forthcoming presidential elections in preference to 'the revolutionary workers' revered and beloved comrade O.V.Kuusinen', put forward by the politburo in Moscow, was not only an indication of a less than reverential attitude towards the exiled leadership, but also a clear indication of the concerns of the communist workers in Finland for their own rights. As Saarela notes, political activities in Finland were judged

differently on either side of the frontier. Whilst those on the Finnish side judged the outcome of their actions against the difficulties they encountered every day, the politburo looked to faults and deficiencies within the movement for explanation: invariably it concluded that had the movement only followed the directives of the leadership, the outcome would have been better.

In many ways, the second section of the book is the more revealing of the nature of Finnish communism. Saarela looks at seven aspects on which Finnish communism had to define its position: representative democracy; civil rights; the coercive power of the state; spiritual and educational institutions; reforms; patriotism and the fatherland; and the challenge of popular culture. Given that communists in Finland faced a particularly acute choice in the winter of 1939, when the country was invaded by the Red Army, purportedly acting in support of Kuusinen's people's government, the matter of the fatherland is of some interest. Unfortunately, the evidence displayed here does not provide any very clear answers. Finnish communists certainly felt themselves to be outside the White fatherland, which they affected to believe had been sold to the imperialist powers, and which had become a tool of those interests directed against the Soviet state. There seems however to be no indication that they regarded Soviet Karelia, which in the 1920s was effectively a fief of the exiled Finnish communists, as a possible or even suitable model for Finland. Compelled to combat the aggressive nationalism of the White victors, the communists also had to be careful not to appear to be simply acting as the mouthpiece of the perceived enemy across the eastern border. They were also the inheritors of the traditions of the old labour movement, which they claimed had earned Finland its independence in 1917, and they had to fight to uphold that tradition against the claims of the social democratic party.

Saarela entitles his second section 'weakening the prevailing order', but it is very obvious that for the most part, this was a forlorn hope. The communists were everywhere hard-pressed to resist the pressures of that order, nowhere more so than in the army, with its comprehensive programme of instruction in patriotic values for the conscripts. The claim of the party's army organiser in 1924 that twenty per cent of the infantry were communist and almost half favourably inclined towards

the proletarian revolution was an empty boast; fewer than one in a hundred recruits joined or supported the party's soldiers' organisation. On the educational front, the party did not even bother with secondary schools, regarding them as institutions for the children of the bourgeoisie. Saarela concludes that education was of less importance to the communists than it had been for the old labour movement; had he looked into the archives of the board of education, however, he might have found a somewhat different story. In choosing to focus so heavily upon the way in which the communists approached particular issues or dealt with the institutions of the newly independent republic, he neglects the broader picture, of how other members of society reacted to or engaged with communists, in local councils, school boards, the workplace or the street.

The most tantalising part of this book is the penultimate section, entitled a time of revolution - with a question mark. In the winter of 1929-30, things began to move decisively against the communists in Finland. A meeting of the communist youth in Lapua, in the heartland of White Finland, at the end of November 1929 precipitated a violent counteraction. The activists of the so-called Lapua movement smashed up communist presses, kidnapped leading figures and drove them to the Soviet border, and put great pressure on the government to pass legislation banning all communist activity in the country. The party leaders in Moscow, convinced that capitalism was entering a new crisis, directed their troops to fight their deadly enemy, social fascism, i.e., the social democrats; no directions were given on how to resist the onslaught against their movement from Lapua. The communists in Finland sought to protect their meetings, but did not consider meeting violence with violence, unlike their German comrades. To the end, they remained firmly wedded to legality. The party was also riven by internal dissension between the orthodox 'flailers', who denounced their opponents, the 'staggerers' for even considering a joint front against fascism with the social democrats. The 'staggerers', many of whom were veterans of the old socialist workers' party, set up their own newspaper in opposition to the Moscow leadership, and managed to forge links with left opposition groups in Scandinavia and Germany. They were condemned by the orthodox leadership as behind the times

in wanting to create a mass legal party and in failing to understand the true nature of imperialism - in other words, they had not learnt the lessons of bolshevism.

Saarela's most recent book, *Finnish Communism Visited*, is a collection of short essays grouped into three categories. The first group looks at Finnish communism in comparative perspective, and covers much the same ground as *Red Star in the North*, with the exception of the chapter on the American impact on Finnish communism in the 1920s. Finns made up a significant proportion of the membership of the communist party of the United States (CPUSA) in its early years, and they were also active in supporting their comrades back in the homeland. A donation of around fifty-five thousand dollars not only enabled the socialist workers' party to set up the necessary infrastructure of a press and publishing company, it also allowed it to be far less reliant on the communist leadership in Russia. This was very much a one-way relationship, Saarela notes; the Finns were unwilling to take up publishing opportunities in the States, even after the suppression of their legal activities in 1930. The Finnish communist leadership on Moscow, on the other hand, came to play an increasingly important part in the relationship between American Finns and the CPUSA. Regrettably, Saarela's narrative breaks off just at the point where the story takes a radically different turn, with the emigration of thousands of American Finns to the Soviet Union in the 1930s.

The second grouping of essays looks at cultural communism. 'Class struggle in the cemetery' is rather slight, introducing the topic of the attempts of Red families and survivors to honour their dead of the civil war – a subject better dealt with in Saarela's chapter in *The Finnish Civil War 1918. History, Memory, Legacy* (ed. Tuomas Tepora and Aapo Roselius, Leiden: Brill, 2014). Saarela concludes that the way in which young Finnish communists sought to portray the worker in their short stories written during the 1920s followed the tradition of the old labour movement, which dwelt heavily upon the sufferings of the worker in an unjust society. Ludvig Kosonen's call in 1929 for stories that presented the worker as hero with an unbreakable faith in the future, was something of a cry in the wilderness as far as Finnish worker literature was concerned. The last essay in this group breaks away from

the 1920s, and looks at the way Finnish communism viewed pop music in the fifties and sixties. Steeped in a culture of self-improvement that viewed with deep suspicion anything that was instantly enjoyable, such as dancing (*especially* dancing, which in Finland was associated with restaurants and the consumption of alcohol), the postwar communist leaders, tough types who had survived Stalin's worst excesses or had lived as outcasts in White Finland, were predictably strongly opposed to 'bad, standardised music played by dance bands, 'lecherous' American pop songs and 'jingle-jangle' music played in restaurants. An early enthusiasm for jazz in the pages of the party's youth movement magazine *Terä* was swiftly stepped on in the summer of 1945, and young communists were urged to take up folk music, the 'genuine' voice of the people. Jazz featured only fleetingly on the pages of *Terä* throughout the fifties, though what was deemed 'good' and 'bad' was often confusing and contradictory. Boogie-woogie, for example, was condemned, but jive was welcomed. If jazz had been grudgingly accepted by the late fifties, rock-and-roll soon became the new enemy, 'a commercial travesty of jazz'. By the late sixties, things had begun to change, though as the author wryly remarks, rock concerts staged at the communist-owned *Kulttuuritalo* in Helsinki owed less to the appeal of communism than to the excellent acoustics of the hall. What the comrades made of glam rock unfortunately falls beyond the time frame of this chapter, though given that much of the radicalised student generation of the sixties gravitated towards the rigidly orthodox wing of the party, one cannot imagine they had much time for such outrageous frivolities.

The final section looks at leader cults, in particular, the place of O.W.Kuusinen, who is compared with the man popularly seen as the most meritorious and significant Finn in history, Marshal Mannerheim. The comparison is strictly developmental, in other words, how the leadership cult of the two men progressed over time. Kuusinen's claim to the laurels is somewhat hampered for most Finns by the fact that he ended up buried in the Kremlin wall, and even for lifelong communists, the task of making the 'tiny tailor's son', as Saarela calls him, into a wise or eminent leader is all but overwhelming.

The labours of Nordic historians over the past two decades have

undeniably cast lots of new light upon the doings of the communist leaderships of the northern European lands, and upon the tensions between them and party activists; but there are still questions to be asked, nonetheless. Although communists were often marginalised, especially in Finland, and isolated not only by social opprobrium but also by their own reluctance to have anything to do with 'bourgeois' society, they were nevertheless obliged to engage with the rest of society in their everyday lives. In many of these activities, politics also played a part - in the unions, the cooperative movement, even in sports organisations. How far were the ideas, opinions and judgements of rank-and-file communists shaped by these other activities, as opposed to party political directives? And how did more mundane everyday experiences affect them, especially as the years stretched out and the movement had to explain itself to a different generation which might well find other more rewarding alternatives to fill their days? The Finnish labour movement, for example, grew up at a time when political activity seemed to offer the way to resolve a whole range of pressing problems, and when the cultural aspirations set loose by Finnish nationalism were still capable of inspiring many thousands of working people to improve themselves, to write poetry and short stories, take minutes at branch meetings, and to rise up through the movement. Saarela notes the abiding strength of that tradition on several occasions, and he does offer some glimpses into alternative ways of thinking - but they are just glimpses. Above all, Finnish communism was haunted by its past, which was both its strength and ultimate nemesis. Beneath the dense text of Saarela's monumental study lies a story of the *failure* of communism and indeed of the labour movement as a whole to retain the active loyalties of the many thousands of young men and women for whom moral earnestness and the burden of the past had less and less appeal.

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Stéphane Courtois (ed.), *Communisme 2013*, Paris: Vendémiaire, 2013, ISBN 9782363580542, 539pp

The French journal *Communisme* was launched in 1982 at a time when developments in West European communist parties and the movement of dissent in Eastern Europe were foreshadowing the collapse of communist power in the Soviet Union. Presided over by the redoubtable Annie Kriegel, dynamically organised by Stéphane Courtois and quickly gathering an excellent editorial team, the journal provided a French-language alternative to Anglo-Saxon preferences, with a sociological emphasis and with West European communism as its focus. Here Marc Lazar's knowledge of Italian communism was of particular value. For the ensuing decade it served as the organisational focus of a programme of original and to an extent integrated research. It was thus well-positioned for the crisis of reorientation which struck periodicals on communism when the Soviet Union fell. With its hands freed from an emphasis on inter-bloc relations it could address the novel task of approaching communism as history.

At the same time it was faced with logistical problems that did not affect the Anglo-Saxon periodicals to the same extent. The market for a French-language publication leaning heavily towards western European concerns was circumscribed, and *Communisme* was in fact fortunate in finding, in Vladimir Dimitrievitch, a congenial publisher who assured its continued existence until 2011, when Dimitrievitch met an untimely end in a motor accident. The search for a way forward led to a change in format. The decision was taken to move to an annual publication, and the support of Vendémiaire was secured to publish it. The work under review is the first issue.

The first of the new yearbooks made for a highly promising start on the new journey. The volume is edited by Stéphane Courtis and is in two parts. The whole of the larger first part is devoted to the topic *Vietnam de l'insurrection à la dictature 1920-2012,* the second part comprising regionally-based articles on Asia, Latin America, Europe and France, with a short series of substantial reviews. The ten articles on Vietnam, presented by Christopher Goscha, in fact set the tone for the whole new publishing enterprise. Most significantly they place the

discussion within the historiography of communism, dealing with the Comintern, the Stalinist purges and the key historical role of Ho Chi Minh. Second, the selection of Vietnam for this first issue is excellent, linking historical factors to the strange post-Soviet contours of communism as a system of rule. The development of a capitalist China as an exemplar of communist social and economic organisation presents analytical problems (though the continuity of communism there as simply and only a form of political rule has not yet been fully acknowledged). Nepal and the regional government of Kerala are frankly exotic. Cuba is locked in a process of transition with no clear outcome in view, whilst North Korean statehood is of too recent an origin for that case to serve as an organising point for historical or comparative discussions of communism.

Vietnam, on the other hand, offers precisely such an organising point, particularly for any discussion of communism as history. It is with good reason that the editors have placed a portrait of Ho Chi Minh on the front cover of the book. The generation which is now passing away links the name of Ho with a war in which a movement of national self-assertion was waged within the broader framework of the cold war. Historical studies of communism are unlikely to devote much space to Giap's military strategies which led to a Vietnamese victory, but they would be well advised to give full value to the link between communism and movements of national self-assertion in the twentieth century (in Cuba, Castro has ended his speeches to congresses of the Cuban communist Party with the words, 'Long live proletarian internationalism!', followed by 'Patria o muerte!', fatherland or death). From his early years working at the hub of the Comintern's activities Ho Chi Minh was engaged in the debates over the conflicting demands of national struggles against calls for proletarian internationalism, which increasingly meant adopting policies favouring the fortunes of the Soviet Union, for long years the sole showcase of established socialist state power (on the Leninist definitions which framed those discussions). It was a circle which was only squared to the extent that the roundness of the 'proletarian internationalist' circle developed sharp nationalist angles from very soon after the Russian revolution, with the Soviet Union perforce following

increasingly national goals, but bringing within its sphere of influence movements which shared its original emancipatory mission. This book, after preliminary editorial passages and some very useful maps takes this perspective seriously, opening with two articles focussing on Ho's historical role, first in the context of Asian communism, then within the Comintern.

Whilst the choice of Vietnam as a focus is good from a historiographical point of view it is not quite so useful from a comparative perspective. In the heyday of institutional studies of communism, when the Soviet Union was there to measure other communist systems against, Vietnam was given scant attention. Now, however, it emerges as the foremost of all the surviving ruling communist parties in retaining the chief characteristic features of the Soviet model, in terms of the 'leading role of the party' and more importantly (given the path followed by the Chinese Communist Party) in terms also of the economic system. True, the book can be hardly be faulted for ignoring this aspect of today's Vietnam, since it has invested heavily in an historical perspective. But within the remit of that aim the book does remarkable service to those whose interests are comparative and institutional. Above all it offers a bridge between the historical and institutional approaches. Here the article by Stephan Blancke on North Korea's relatively short communist history, linking past to present, could usefully be taken as a model for future contributions. After the extravagant posturing of the North Korean leadership in recent years it is refreshing to be reminded of the more sensitive attempt of the regime's founder Kim Il Sung to explain his strategy of *Ju'che* in terms that did at least fit into the matrix of meanings of the communism of his day.

Overall, the book is valuable in presenting aspects of the history of communism that the rivalry of the cold war and its dramatic end have obscured.

Michael Waller

Phillip Deery, *Red Apple: Communism and McCarthyism in Cold War*, New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2014, ISBN 978-0-8232-5368-5, xi + 252pp

New York not only had a strong tradition of dissent and was the only American city to elect communists to office, it was also the epicentre of the Communist Party of the United States of American (CPUSA). However, in vividly detailing the trials and tribulations to which some New Yorkers were subjected during the McCarthy era, Phillip Deery is reminding us all of a period of Cold War political repression that most certainly still has resonance, especially since 9/11. As Deery states in the final sentence of the book: 'Their collective stories illuminate the personal costs of holding dissident political beliefs in the face of intolerance and moral panic, and this is as relevant today as it was seventy years ago' (p163) The sense of McCarthyism as an aberration in American History remains pervasive. It was an anomalous era when excessive fear of Soviet intentions overwhelmed the nation's time- honoured traditions, particularly for due process and civil liberties. In the popular mind it remains an exception to what came before and after. Deery clearly suggests this is not the case. Moreover, what came after, as he points out, followed the victory of the persecutors: 'their actions crippled the left and stifled the forces of change' (p162).

The book is extremely well researched and highly readable and is very obviously a valuable addition to the wide-ranging and extensive literature documenting the outrages and infamy of that period in time. The format of the book is the presentation of six case studies, with each chapter self-contained. Whilst each study illuminates the impact of McCarthyism on the individual, taken as a whole, the book provides compelling insights into the phenomenon of McCarthyism. A photograph of the protagonists accompanies each chapter so the reader knows what they look like from the beginning. At the end of each chapter the reader certainly feels they know each as a person. Deery, however, doesn't simply delve into the archives to bring to the forefront lesser- known victims whose experiences might otherwise have been lost to history, albeit certainly of itself a commendable endeavour. What makes the book so special is the way he brings the six case studies

to life. Deery clearly cares about these people and wants the reader to understand their motivations and how their attitudes changed and evolved as the Cold War progressed. His approach is non-judgemental and even-handed and compassionate. Deery's powers of exposition, underpinned by a deep understanding of the period and meticulous research, bring much needed fresh perspectives to the responses of progressive people confronted with the ubiquitous challenges inherent throughout the McCarthy era.

Deery examines the human costs to key individuals brought before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) hearings on the Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee, which resulted in the incarceration of its chairman, Dr Edward Barsky, and its executive board. He also explores the academic freedom cases of two New York professors, Lyman Bradley and Edwin Burgum. Both lost their jobs. He reveals the fascinating circumstances that led to the blacklisting of the communist writer Howard Fast, author of Spartacus, and how his subsequent defection from American communism, albeit not the left, led to his eventual rehabilitation. Equally intriguing is the visit to New York of the world-renowned Russian composer Dimitri Shostakovich. Forced by Stalin to attend the 1949 Waldorf conference, he was humiliated by Cold War liberals following a plan devised by 'Americans for Intellectual Freedom', despite their offering asylum to Shostakovich should he not wish to return to Russia. The final case study is O. John Rogge, one of the country's most prominent radical lawyers. Deery laments Rogge's neglect by biographers and Cold War scholars. Deery recounts Rogge's search for a 'Third Way', which made him despised and distrusted by left and right, clearly highlighting the extent to which Rogge's neglect, and that of others like him, represents a serious historiographical gap. Without doubt a more detailed study of Rogge will help understanding of the profound inner struggles caused those on the left during this momentous Cold War period, most particularly, with regard to the revelations about Stalin made by Khrushchev in his 1956 cataclysmic 'secret speech'.

Crucial to understanding the thinking of the American left in the 1940s was the common conviction that domestic fascism was rising and another war was imminent. Certainly the US in this period was not

Stalin's Russia and McCarthyism was not Stalinism. American dissenters in the thousands faced marginalisation, discrimination, unemployment and even prison, but not death. Albeit, as Deery illustrates, some deaths can be attributed to the impact of McCarthyism, they were not, with the sole exception of the Rosenbergs, state executions. Nonetheless, the result was still the death of an innocent person. Deery recounts how the wife of one of the case studies committed suicide following an incognito call from the FBI. As a family member explained: 'the pressure and public disgrace proved too much' (p109). Interestingly the need to qualify discussions of American political repression with reminders that it was not as bad as the Soviet variety increasingly appear to be pre-requisite for western authors dealing with the more reprehensible behaviour of America during the Cold War. Hence it is worth drawing another distinction: that American History and Russian History are very different and generated contrasting contexts against which their respective levels of oppression against their own and other peoples ought to be measured.

Deery does more than rescue personal stories that deserve to be heard. His case studies remind us that large swathes of the left, if not consigned to the historical dustbin in mainstream history, have been dismissed simply as 'dupes' and fellow-travellers, if not subversives and potential traitors. Deery demonstrates that during the McCarthy era the left was besieged, but it was never silenced. More than that, he shows that many on the left were people of courage and integrity looking to help make a better world, struggling amidst political confusion and propaganda campaigns to remain true to their own values. The personal costs, and in some cases tragedy, could be high.

Certainly a book for students and scholars, this is also a book that, at a time when the forces of progress seem to be once more on the rise, ought to be read widely.

Dianne Kirby

Fedor Il'ich Dan, translated and edited by Francis King, *Two Years of Wandering: A Menshevik Leader in Lenin's Russia*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2016, ISBN 9781910448724, 236pp

This is the first translation into any language of Fedor Dan's memoir of his last two years in Russia, between 1919 and 1921 (the Russian version keeps these temporal parameters in the title, the translation does not). Written and published in Berlin in 1922 immediately after Dan, a prominent menshevik leader, had been exiled from soviet Russia, it describes in vivid terms Dan's personal experiences under conditions of war communism, civil war, and the beginnings of the New Economic Policy (NEP). The memoir quickly acquired classic status, thanks to its immediacy and to the stature of its author. At a time when information about Soviet Russia vacillated between dithyrambic eulogies and the most alarmist denunciations – fake news is nothing new – Dan's partisan but sober account made this memoir stand out. The Russian text was republished in 2006 by Moscow's Centropolitgraf.

Francis King's translation is fluid and readable. He has included a forty-five-page introduction and a number of notes explaining some of Dan's references and correcting a few of his statements. He has also attaches five appendices: the speech given by socialist-revolutionary leader, Victor Chernov, to the mass meeting in Moscow in honour of the British Labour delegation of 1920; a letter from the Russian Social-Democratic Worker's Party central committee to members of the same delegation; menshevik leaflets and appeals from the time of the Kronstadt revolt, February-March 1921; Cheka documents on Dan's case; a hostile soviet review of Dan's book, the only inkling the soviet reader had of the book 's existence and of its contents. There is also an index and a bibliography of 'further reading'.

King's introduction is more satisfactory than the much shorter anonymous introductory note from the publisher of the 2006 Russian edition which insists, more than is warranted, on Dan's 'unwavering struggle against Bolshevik power'. In fact, Dan's position, summarised in the 'Martov Line' that was the linchpin of menshevik politics in exile for the seventeen years after 1923 that Dan stood at the head of the exiled party, was far more ambivalent. To be sure, it denounced soviet power, as Dan

does abundantly in the book under review, but it considered the overthrow of the soviet order to be an even greater evil. This explains why, during the civil war, the menshevik party called upon its members to enlist in the red army and punished those who deviated from this line. A victory of the 'whites' would, according to Dan, usher in a counter-revolutionary, bonapartist dictatorship that would set back for a long time the gains of the revolution. Dan and the menshevik party counted on a gradual democratisation of the bolshevik regime, to be obtained by steady pressure from below in favour of free elections, freedom of assembly and freedom of the press – at least for the 'democratic', i.e., socialist forces in Russia. The introduction to the 2006 Russian edition is simply wrong in stating that 'Dan considered the Russian bourgeoisie sufficiently revolutionary to guarantee the development of the country'. His wager was, undeviatingly, on the working class. Nor is it true that 'permanent divergences' remained with Martov; their temporary divergence in 1917 and, to some extent, in 1905 gave way to an identity of views which Dan cultivated for many years after Martov's death. Indeed, Dan, who happened to be Martov's brother-in-law through his marriage to Martov's favourite sister, Lidia, made fidelity to Martov's memory and political testament the leitmotiv of his being. The Russian edition is also factually incorrect in stating that Dan was deprived of soviet citizenship in 1923. This did not occur until 1932 when a Soviet decree on deprivation of citizenship aimed at Trotsky included socialist emigrés, such as Dan, with the purpose of blackening Trotsky's reputation. It is true though, as the Russian introduction writes, that until the end of his life, in New York in 1947, Dan believed in the possibility of a democratisation of Soviet politics.

King's introductory essay is divided into two parts: a biography of Fedor Dan as well as a history of the menshevik movement in 1917 and thereafter; the latter part also includes a historiographical section. All in all, the essay is sensible and scholarly. What it lacks, however, is a flesh-and-blood portrait of the author of *Two Years of Wandering*. For that one should turn to Boris Sapir's introduction to his edition of Dan's Letters (1899-1946) published by the Amsterdam International Institute of Social History (IISH) in 1985. Boris Sapir was the youngest member of the menshevik foreign delegation, the party's governing body that Dan

ruled with an iron hand until 1939 and from which he resigned in 1942. Sapir, born in 1902, had been a member of the menshevik youth movement in soviet Russia (the party in exile only admitted into its ranks those who had been party members in Russia), he had experienced the notorious Solovki prison camp before escaping to the west, and he spent many years as the curator of Russian materials at the IISH, working there until his death in 1989. In his funeral announcement his widow included a phrase about her late husband having been pleased to live long enough to see the disintegration of communism. He was the last surviving member of the menshevik leadership.

Sapir and Dan did not see eye-to-eye on most matters. When Dan published *The Origins of Bolshevism* shortly before his death, Sapir attacked it mercilessly from the right-wing, anti-Soviet perspective that he had adopted. Sapir dismissed as nonsense Dan's hypothesis that Russia would attain freedom through socialism and that bolshevism was an inevitable stage in the liberation struggle. At the same time, Sapir was personally close to Lidia Osipovna, Fedor Dan's wife and, later, widow, who tried to reconcile the warring Menshevik factions until her own death in 1963. In the introduction to his edition of Dan's letters, Sapir betrays none of the partisanship that marked his relations with the menshevik leader. The portrait he draws is persuasive and even sympathetic.

Sapir describes Dan as business-like, an unparalleled organiser – for some years before the revolution Dan acted as a sort of chief-of-staff of the menshevik party – a person born to be a minister. This is something that could not be said of Martov or, say, Rosa Luxemburg. In Russian terms, Dan was a *gosudarstvennik*, someone imbued with a strong sense of the state and ready to serve it. By training, Dan was a medical doctor but, as has been said, he much preferred trying to heal humanity rather than individuals. In fact, Dan could – should? – have been a soviet commissar. Working closely with Lenin-led 'iskrites' before the bolshevik-menshevik split in 1903, it was Dan who distributed Lenin's *What Is to Be Done*? in Russia. Dan missed the fateful second congress of the Russian Social Democratic Party being in internal exile in Russia at the time. To Lenin's surprise, Dan, 'with his strong constitution', chose menshevism and never deviated from this choice. Sapir is at a loss to

explain Dan's choice; one may surmise that it may have been related to his almost dog-like affection and admiration for Martov. In any case, Dan displayed tough authoritarian instincts that only became stronger over the years; his party comrades who, according to Sapir, respected Dan more than they loved him, spoke wryly of Fedor Ill'ich Dan as 'our Ill'ich' evoking that other Ill'ich: Lenin. During the period of the provisional government in 1917 Dan belonged to the 'revolutionary defensist' wing of the menshevik party and occupied a high position in the central executive committee of soviets. Immediately after the October revolution he joined Martov's internationalists and never departed from this position, referred to scornfully as 'half bolshevik' by its opponents.

Two Years of Wandering describe Dan's peregrinations and travails in Soviet Russia. At times, he was in state employment as a medical doctor. At others, he sat in prison, once narrowly avoiding being shot by order of the bloodthirsty St Petersburg bolshevik chief, Grigorii Zinoviev. Prison was no picnic, mostly characterised by appallingly primitive conditions though it occasionally allowed socialist prisoners to enjoy themselves, for instance, in organising a theatrical production (to which Dan was not admitted in the Peter and Paul fortress, though he did later attend a similar event in the Butyrki prison). The ambiguity of bolshevik attitudes to the mensheviks comes through in the soviet leadership's self-contradictory antics. The menshevik party was re-legalised in mid-1919. At the height of the civil war in late 1919, Dan participated in the seventh congress of soviets, as did Martov. *Izvestiya* reported that Lenin and Trotsky even joined in the applause following Dan's speech. To Dan's surprise, the menshevik party and Dan himself as a delegate were invited to the eighth congress of soviets in late 1920. At the same time, the menshevik press and menshevik meetings were savagely repressed. At the top of the bolshevik pyramid Lenin appears to have been unwilling to execute mensheviks whereas Trotsky argued for the most severe measure against them.

Lenin's position was shared by many subalterns in Soviet service who recalled that mensheviks and bolsheviks had once been members of the same party. Dan does not boast but he clearly enjoyed privileges thanks to people who held him in high regard. In fact, Dan's bugbear, as that of many loyal soviet functionaries, was the Cheka, the secret police that operated

almost like a state within the state. At one point, Dan even reports praise of Moisei Uritsky, the head of the Petersburg Cheka who had been assassinated in 1918. Since then the Cheka had become a law unto itself.

The portrait that Dan paints of soviet Russia under war communism is bleak. In the provinces where Dan was sent on state service, the atmosphere was insufferable. He complains of enforced idleness, the ever-worsening arbitrariness of local petty dictators, the tendency for once normal people to degenerate into stupid bureaucrats. 'It is clearly something running in the veins of people of Russia', he allows himself to add. Dan describes one of the commissars who supervised his prison guards as displaying 'a strange mixture of unusually attractive geniality, endearingly childlike cheerfulness, Asiatic cunning and bestial cruelty'. Conditions under NEP, introduced after the Kronstadt revolt for which mensheviks were blamed, were different but just as horrible. Corruption and speculation had been always present but now they were practiced openly. The freedom of trade permitted by NEP quickly turned into criminality. Direct food allocations, against which the mensheviks had inveighed, were replaced by insufficient monetary wages. Whereas formerly one of the sources of Bolshevik strength has been its categorical refusal to accept any 'lords', now Dan heard the obsequious ancien régime term 'barin' (master) on people's lips.

Fedor Dan does not have much of a sense of humour. He tells one potentially funny story: a family travelling by train with a sick child took a goat along for the sake of goat's milk. Whenever the train stopped, the goat would bleat at the window driving onlookers to fury as wounded soldiers were travelling on the train's roof whereas a goat was in a first class cabin. Dan manages to make even this account fall flat. At one point, he accepts arrest because the alternative would be to desert from his assigned job, something which Dan would not countenance, just as in 1917 he had refused to leave the Siberian exile to which he had been condemned by the no longer existing tsarist government until he was properly discharged. Evidence of Dan's personal fastidiousness also comes through in his confession that he refused to lie down in one prison for fear of catching lice. Elsewhere, Dan reflects on his own condition and that of many like him. Not entirely convincingly but rather banally, he writes that 'the better the external conditions of one's confinement the

more sharply one feels the purely psychological oppression of being in prison'. Somewhat stoically, he reflects that 'being in a soviet prison is like a lottery, you can be released or you can be shot'.

Regardless of Dan's personality and personal quirks that one may try to discount , this book is a priceless description of a key moment in Soviet Russia's development, a period marked by the horrors of an embattled and debased society as well as by the hopes of a better future. At the end of his two years of wandering, Dan chose exile abroad. One wonders whether he regretted his choice.

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Eric Aunoble, *La Révolution russe, une histoire française. Lectures et représentations depuis 1917*, Paris: La Fabrique, 2016, ISBN 9782358720793, 255 pp

On 22 April 1945, in the 14th arrondissement of Paris, the French Communist Party (PCF) inaugurated with great pomp and ceremony a plaque commemorating Lenin's exile there. At this time, the 'high Stalinist' version of the October Revolution was at its apogee, stifling dissident voices, beginning with Trotskyists and anarchists, and even airbrushing out the role of a young Charles de Gaulle in the expeditionary force sent to quell the Bolsheviks. After all, the General owed his supremacy over the French Resistance to the support of the Soviet Union.

Such a triumphant consensus had not always been the case, and would not remain so. In this fascinating and immensely readable study, Eric Aunoble shows, in an erudite but also refreshingly militant way, how French readings and representations of the Russian Revolution have evolved with the changing political context. The book holds some surprises: if, before the Great War, Jean Jaurès had seen Russia's future in the hands of an indomitable factory proletariat, by 1917, *L'Humanité*, the newspaper he had founded, was denouncing the Bolsheviks for betraying France's alliance with that country. Also less well-known is the long struggle by Albert Camus to find a publisher for Alfred Rosmer's memoirs,

Moscow Under Lenin. Indeed, it was difficult for such an alternative voice, like those of Victor Serge, Boris Souvarine and even George Orwell, to be heard at a time of both PCF hegemony on the left and of Gaullist France's brief love affair with the USSR of Khruschev and Gagarin.

However, despite the huge efforts by the PCF to convey a certain representation of 1917 and all that, through Soviet histories, novels and films, there always was a hostile current, from Serge de Chassis to Joseph Kessel to *Tintin*, that played on the 'barbarous', even 'cannibalistic' nature of leather-coated Bolshevik commissars clutching knives figuratively, and sometimes literally, between their teeth. With the waning popularity of the PCF and the USSR, especially after May-August 1968, a radically anti-communist historiography seized power in the French universities and media, imposing a 'totalitarian' interpretation of 1917 which echoed similar re-writes of 1789, as illustrated by the work of former Stalinist zealot François Furet. Such an increasingly anti-communist and anti-Soviet climate was inimical to a historian like Marc Ferro, who drew upon newly available Russian sources to provide innovative approaches to October, but who refused to participate in the new Cold War crusade.

It was a sign of the times that the eightieth anniversary of the Russian Revolution saw the publication of the *Black Book of Communism*. Eric Aunoble recognises the value of Nicolas Werth's contribution to that volume, especially given that Werth contradicts some of the assertions by the editor, ex-Maoist Stéphane Courtois, but he deplores the re-writing of history as that of 'victims' rather than being something that 'men and women make'. The idea or possibility of mass popular revolt is eclipsed by a bourgeois liberal view of revolution as involving a mere change of constitution. Aunoble also points out the virtual silence of those who, not so very long ago, looked hopefully to 'the light in the East'. It is perhaps an irony of history that, in today's France, the keenest interest in the Russian Revolution can be found in libertarian circles, beginning with the rediscovery of the anarchist Nestor Makhno. This is a timely and troubling assessment of how a period of history can become intensely contested then strangely forgotten.

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