

# Reviews

Brigitte Studer, *Reisende der Weltrevolution. Eine Globalgeschichte der Kommunistischen Internationale*, Berlin, Suhrkamp, 2nd ed, 2021, ISBN 978-3518299296, 618pp

After 1991, research on communism in the West (at least outside the United States), although not pronounced dead, was dismissed by the public as a field whose subject matter was only of antiquarian interest. This was not changed by the fact that, with the opening of the archives in the Soviet Union and its former allied countries, one scholarly gold mine after another was uncovered, allowing an ever more precise analysis of the reasons why communism, and not least the Communist International, was able to function for decades as an alternative model to the bourgeois-capitalist organisation of society. Only with some distance to the world upheaval of 1989/91 did the realisation gain ground in academia and the public that the long-distance effects of Soviet communism, however it is judged, are also likely to shape the twenty-first century, at least in its first half.

This insight underlies Brigitte Studer's great book *Travellers of the World Revolution*, first published in 2020. Its subtitle, *A Global History of the Communist International*, refers to 'historically new practices of emancipation' that sought to shake the 'legitimation of previous power relations' (p11). In this way, the author distances herself from interpretations – which were fashionable for a long time (and revived from 1991 onwards) – that saw the Comintern merely as an internationally operating component of a Soviet totalitarianism from Lenin to Stalin.

On the one hand, the opening of Soviet archives allowed for a more precise interpretation of the sometimes paradoxical decisions of leading Comintern bodies, as for example in Pierre Broué's *Histoire de l'Internationale communiste* (1997), the most comprehensive political

history of the Comintern so far worked out from the sources (though we still know too little about the financial affairs of the 'world party of communism'). On the other hand, the temporary opening of important (but not all) personnel files of Comintern functionaries enabled an actor-centred interpretation of the history of one of the most significant political organisations of the twentieth century. The Swiss historian Brigitte Studer, who has taught as Professor at the University of Bern for a long time, has ventured such an interpretation of the Comintern.

Of the approximately thirty thousand functionaries who were in the service of the Comintern between 1919 (the year of its founding) and 1943 (the year of its official dissolution), Studer has traced the lives of over three hundred, with a focus on communists from Western Europe and from parts of the colonial world, especially India. In so doing, she 'brings into focus the elective affinities between communism, anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism in the aftermath of the October Revolution' (p24). Her efforts to shed light on the human, or, more precisely, gender-specific side of political life are notable. The book shows, however – and this can hardly come as a surprise – that despite all the proclaimed equality, the Comintern was nevertheless a strongly male-dominated organisation.

At the centre of this 'community of fate' (p25) are politically highly motivated men and women who, after the fall of tsarism in Russia and the seemingly imminent collapse of the capitalist order after the First World War, became actors in an upheaval, the result of which seemed to make the liberation of all humanity from war, exploitation and oppression immediately possible. In order to make this possibility a reality, many of them – most of them belonging to the younger generation – rejected any integration into bourgeois society. As 'travellers of the world revolution', they linked their life fate with the ups and downs of communist politics between revolution and counter-revolution. Studer follows the paths of her protagonists via Moscow, Baku, Berlin, Paris, Basel, Barcelona and other locations all the way to China. (London, as the centre of the anti-colonial struggle, is barely dealt with, and the USA, Latin America and the Middle East are also largely left out.)

A multitude of lives are sensitively reconstructed: Jakov Reich and his partner Ruth Oesterreich; the sisters Babette Gross and Margarete Buber-Neumann with their partners Willi Münzenberg and Heinz Neumann; Jules and Jenny Humbert-Droz; Charlotte Stenbock-Fermor and her companion Heinrich Kurella; Jelena Stasova; Agnes Smedley; Mentona Moser and Ruth Werner; Georgi Dimitrov; and Vittorio Vidali and Louis Gibarti. These are often tragic biographies between hope and disappointment, often involving persecution by political opponents and by their 'own' comrades. (Gibarti, actually László Dobos, as also mentioned in the book, worked for the FBI after 1945 – but whether only for the FBI, this reviewer has his doubts. His reports were so meaningless that they rather resembled secret-service play material.)

In addition to historical actors who are still well-known today, Studer also gives a face to men and especially women of the 'second' row. Hilde Kramer, who worked in the Comintern apparatus and later in the anti-Stalinist Communist Party Opposition (KPO) under Heinrich Brandler and August Thalheimer in Germany, is probably the least known. Studer traces the personalities of Manabendra Nath Roy and his temporary partner Evelyn Trent with particular empathy. Roy, who was involved in the founding of several communist parties and organisations around the world, was also involved in the KPO in Berlin after his expulsion from the communist movement. (It should be added that Roy was for some time financially supported by Felix Weil, the silent patron of the KPO as well as of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research. Roy quickly learned German in Berlin).

In some cases, political action was combined with private relationships – and often also their failure, since the actors were not infrequently ordered to different parts of the world by Moscow, sometimes had to flee, or ended up in prison. Of the approximately 320 Comintern members mentioned in the book, almost a third met a violent death; 67 became victims of Stalinism, while others were killed by the Nazi regime or in colonial countries.

Studer shows how the initially informal, almost anarchic, relations among the communists were tightened into a hierarchical corset with the rise of Stalin, and how the human climate in the Comintern

apparatus was poisoned through deliberately scattered suspicions as a prelude to repressive measures – to such an extent that the communist movement was unable to recover even after the Second World War. This book, which is also very good in style, is thus an immensely important contribution to our understanding of the rise and fall of this world movement, beyond its congresses, decisions and resolutions. It brings us closer to the dramatis personae, beyond their functions in the apparatus, seeing them as acting, hoping, erring and fighting individuals.

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**Gianluca Fantoni, *Italy through the Red Lens. Italian Politics and Society in Communist Propaganda Films (1946-79)*, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan 2021, ISBN 978-3030691967, h-bk, 293pp**

Gianluca Fantoni's *Italy Through the Red Lens* is a valuable book, and the first of its kind. It examines diachronically the media strategy of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) – 'the first Italian political party to establish a cinema section, in 1946', as Fantoni reminds us, as well as 'the only party that had its own film production company' (p2), and a party that eventually controlled 'about twenty local television stations ... at the beginning of the 1980s' (pp256-257). Film and television production played a pivotal role in determining the PCI's political fortunes, as Fantoni convincingly demonstrates, marshalling compelling evidence compiled through careful archival research.

In the introduction, Fantoni reconsiders the PCI's attempt to use film to create 'counter-propaganda' in the run-up to the 1948 elections, an attempt he considers – along with others throughout the party's existence – as only 'partially successful' (p3). One of the merits of this book, in fact, is that it helps us to appreciate the nature – and the limits – of the PCI's success across more than thirty years of twentieth-century history. The first of the book's three parts, 'The Italian Communist Party between Socialist Realism and Neorealism (1944-

1956)', begins with a chapter that focuses on the first years after the Second World War. Fantoni makes the case that the PCI, thinking tactically but not strategically, employed film to spread a political message – namely, support for the coalition government – while failing to perceive the full potential of the medium or to anticipate the opposition that its use would engender. Because their political opponents, the Christian Democrats, maintained 'complete control of the all-pervading state apparatus', as Fantoni argues, '[t]he PCI thus lost the battle for cultural hegemony in cinema' (p35). In chapter 3, Fantoni examines the 1948 assassination attempt on PCI leader Palmiro Togliatti as it was documented in two films that borrowed from both Soviet and Catholic imagery, and worked 'at restoring the confidence of Communist militants in the party's strength' in a moment of evident and potentially destabilising vulnerability (p46).

Part II, 'Dealing with the Modern (1956-1970)', begins with an examination of PCI filmmaking in a time of political crisis for the Italian left. The films of the late 1950s and early 1960s, Fantoni demonstrates, championed Soviet foreign policy while criticising the Christian Democrats' domestic policies, which promoted increased consumerism as part of Italy's ongoing economic miracle. Chapter 5 recounts the development of a new production company, Unitelefilm, and its role in quelling rising dissension in the party ranks in the mid-1960s, after the untimely death of Togliatti, who had helmed it for more than thirty years. The results of these efforts were mixed, however, and in the years that followed Togliatti's demise many, particularly among the youth, began to leave the ranks of the PCI. The efforts to combat this flight are covered in chapter 6, where Fantoni analyses a number of films that show how '[t]he PCI's attitude towards the students' movement evolved in the course of 1968 as a reaction to the unfolding events of that memorable year', moving from disdain to cautious collaboration (p139). Yet the PCI's relationship with the student movement remained volatile, as Fantoni details in chapter 7. Following the party's lead, Unitelefilm placed its emphasis on conflicts in the country's factories, using film to make the case for an incrementalist approach to labour disputes, against the maximalism advocated by the more militant student rebels. Tellingly,

those students wished for the party to become more radical in organising not only the factories but also film production, leading them to protest against the PCI contingent at the Pesaro Film Festival, because of what they saw, in Fantoni's words, as 'the impossibility for cinema to be revolutionary, or even just progressive, within the existing cinema industry' (p164).

Part III, 'A Decade of Living Dangerously: The Turbulent Peak (and the Seeds of Decline) of the Italian Communist Party (1970-1979)', begins with an examination of the PCI's promotion of films aimed at political moderates, to build support for collective resistance to the rise of neo-fascism. Chapter 9 shows how cinematic celebrations of the Resistance coalition during the Second World War served as strategic supports for the PCI's Historical Compromise with the Christian Democrats in the 1970s. Chapter 10 reconsiders the party's response to the women's movement, which was seen – and was portrayed on screen – as subsumed by and subsidiary to the worker's struggle, a framing that alienated many women, who left the PCI in large numbers by the end of the decade.

Feminists were not the only ones to abandon the PCI at this time, as Fantoni details in chapter 11. Increasingly angered by what they saw as the PCI's intransigence, and unmotivated by its turn to Eurocommunism, many younger voters broke with the party, too, precipitating an outflow of activists and voters that the PCI leadership, let alone PCI-aligned filmmakers, were unable to stanch. If film production ultimately proved unable to reverse the party's declining fortunes at the close of the 1970s, however, it is nevertheless true, as Fantoni argues in his conclusion, that 'the films produced by the PCI provide a particular record of the party's history and development' over the pivotal post-war period that is this book's focus (p269). The significance of Fantoni's study, which carefully analyses that record, is therefore undeniable.

Indeed, I may be more convinced of the significance of *Italy through the Red Lens* than is its author. Throughout the book, Fantoni repeatedly – and to my mind unnecessarily – disavows his subject's contemporary relevance. He worries, for instance, that reports of celebrities aggrieved by student criticism 'may be difficult to believe today' (p164), and

that ‘modern-day viewers ... might find it difficult to understand’ the public’s impassioned emotional investment in charismatic political leaders (p120). Suffice it to say that I am not nearly so worried, or rather, my worries tend to emerge from the opposite direction. I wish I could share Fantoni’s apparent confidence that these phenomena can be consigned to the past. Then again, it is probably unsurprising that the writer, immersed in his subject, insists on an incomparable historical specificity, while the reader is inspired to pursue historical connections, comparisons, and analogies. I am so inspired, however.

Let me therefore suggest a connection by way of conclusion. It seems to me that *Italy through the Red Lens* might profitably be read alongside recent studies by Daniela Treveri Gennari, Gianluca Della Maggiore, Tomaso Subini, Dario Edoardo Viganò, and others on the films and media strategies of the Christian Democrats. Much of what Fantoni reveals in his study finds its counterpart or opposite in theirs, with the result that both Italian film and Italian politics – and more importantly the intersection between these two – will become clearer and better understood the more that the media histories of these rival parties are analysed together. Having prepared this analysis by writing, for the first time, the history of PCI films, Gianluca Fantoni has provided a distinctive service to the field.

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Łukasz Stanek, *Architecture in Global Socialism. Eastern Europe, West Africa, and the Middle East in the Cold War*, Princeton & Oxford, Princeton University Press 2020, ISBN 9780691168708, x+358pp

Katherine Zubovich, *Moscow Monumental. Soviet skyscrapers and Urban Life in Stalin’s Capital*, Princeton & Oxford, Princeton University Press 2021, ISBN 9780691178905, xii+274pp

One travels a long way through these beautifully designed and illustrated books. Katherine Zubovich’s *Moscow Monumental* takes us

into the Stalin years and Stalin's grandiose notion of the 'capital of all capitals' that culminated in its famous wedding-cake skyscrapers. As Zubovich reminds us, these distinctive profiles in the sky were also deposited as 'brotherly gifts' in various East European capitals, notably Warsaw. It is nevertheless from the Khrushchev years that one can trace a much wider and more sustained exportation of building prototypes, expertise and materials that included but went far beyond the phenomenon of 'gift diplomacy'. This is the focus of Łukasz Stanek's book. Stanek describes it as a process of socialist (or sometimes East European) 'worlding' that took predominantly modernist architectural forms and did not emanate solely from the USSR, but also from the diverse components of a non-homogenised Eastern Bloc. Chronologically, Stanek picks up where Zubovich leaves off; read alongside each other the books leave an impression of decentring and animation of new peripheries, suggesting a sharper divide between the Stalin and post-Stalin periods than some accounts of Soviet politics indicate. But between Stalin's capital of capitals and post-Stalin 'socialist worldmaking' there is also significant common ground. In their different ways, both these accounts are shaped by currently strong impulses towards a global and transnational history of communism. Through the processes and structures of the built environment, both texts invite reflection on the relations of power and ideology in patterns of transnational rivalry and exchange.

At least in her earlier chapters, it is Zubovich who covers the more familiar ground. Though filled out with material from her archival research, these follow a relatively well-trodden path from the modernism of the 1920s to the Moscow General Plan of 1935 and the impracticalities of the never-to-be-realised Palace of the Soviets. Zubovich's third chapter describes the USSR's temporary opening up to Western influences of the war and immediate post-war years. This combined with pressures of wartime necessity to accommodate those currents and trends to standardisation and prefabrication that briefly transcended both national and ideological borders. The story of the Moscow skyscrapers is in part that of the refusal of this logic. As an archetype of socialist construction, Moscow monumental was hugely wasteful of human and material resources in times of the most



pressing social need. As Zubovich shows, the skyscrapers were never conceived of as meeting post-war housing needs. By monopolising resources they generated chaos and stood out amidst the squalor of workers' barracks, resembling the building huts we might imagine around the pyramids. Zubovich describes it as 'a public celebration of luxury at a moment of widespread deprivation'. A school is newly built at Cheremushki, but children wait their turn as it serves as a furniture store for university buildings of unsurpassed pomposity. The book's final chapter describes the repudiation of architectural 'excess' as one of the battlefronts of Khrushchev's de-stalinisation. At last the Palace of the Soviets was abandoned for the civilising presence of a public swimming pool. But the skyscrapers remain as public symbols of a legacy that was not so easily left behind.

Stanek's account begins with this reaction against excess coinciding with Khrushchev's simultaneous turn towards the wider world. Zubovich's work draws deeply on her researches in the Russian archives. Stanek's rather different conception of his topic is encapsulated by his use of private and public archives in several different countries, along with contemporary printed sources and interviews with architects and building professionals. Using these materials he presents four detailed case studies exploring the role of architects and planners from communist Eastern Europe in post-colonial West Africa and the Middle East. The case studies are Accra, Lagos, Baghdad and the paired examples of Abu Dhabi and Kuwait City. Three at least of them hang together as a broadly sequential narrative running across the chapters. The case of Nkrumah's Accra (1957-1966) demonstrates clear political and ideological congruence between Ghana's adoption of a socialist path of development and the turn to the developing world that was headed by Khrushchev's USSR. The case of Lagos (1966-1979) brings to the fore the distinctiveness of design traditions and architectural culture in different East European countries, but appears rather disconnected from any real notion of socialist development. The UAE and Kuwait (1979-1990) are examples of 'socialism within globalisation' that do not depend on any meaningful sense of political affinity and will certainly strike some readers as having little to do with the longer history of socialist solidarity.

The interplay of rupture and continuity is arguably best captured in the chapter on Baghdad (1958-1990). This nominally spans the entire period of the other three. It also involves the widest range of East European actors and takes in regime and other political changes in Iraq itself. Though hinging on the Polish-drafted Baghdad master plans of 1967 and 1973, the chapter offers a case study in the political economy of Khrushchev's 'world socialist system' and in doing so brings together many of the key themes in the book. The Baghdad plans are among the dozens of realised and unrealised projects whose illustration in this volume will be a revelation to the reader with interests in architectural and planning history. These are perhaps the primary intended readership and the images are among the core sources of a lavishly illustrated production. For historians of communism, it is also a fascinating contribution that opens up an unexplored dimension of its post-Stalin global history.

Each of the books has its own particular strengths and limitations. One of Zubovich's strongest chapters, 'Moscow of the shadows', makes brilliant use of contemporary archives in providing a bottom-up perspective on the world of the skyscraper. In particular, she uses the residents' letters, in which such views may be found best documented in the absence of any opportunities for collective action unlicensed by the state. There is also a chapter on the *Vysotniki* or hero-builders of the high buildings, and focusing on the role of building labour in such aspects as the status and contribution of women workers. Such a perspective is missing from Stanek's account. He is interested in both individual and collective actors as 'vessels of architectural mobilities' and indicates the categories of 'architects, planners, contractors, administrators, managers, educators, foremen, and workers'. Nevertheless, this in practice is a descending hierarchy. The earlier groups are vividly evoked and there is a helpful discussion of architectural labour in the Cold War (pp85-94). But building labour does not get the same consideration, while, if any were marginalised, displaced or at least de-prioritised by the projects discussed, these are not documented here as those in Moscow are.

Another challenge emerging from these readings is that of unpicking the relationship between values of socialism and inter-

nationalism on the one hand, and both transnational practices and national cultures and traditions on the other. Tapping a rich vein in the current scholarship, Zubovich cites accounts like Clark's *Fourth Rome* in outlining what she calls a 'tripartite argument about international engagement, urban restructuring, and historical ties'. Implying more than just external engagement, she repeatedly invokes the internationalism (or 'Soviet internationalism') which she maintains was not negated by stalinist monumentalism but actually fostered by it.

Internationalism is such a heavily freighted concept in the communist lexicon that one would have appreciated a fuller elucidation of these claims. Excepting a very few cases like pre-Meiji Japan, both inward and outward transnational exchange has shaped the cultural histories of numerous modern states that one would not usually characterise as internationalist. Few called on foreign expertise for major monuments as often as tsarist Russia. With its Italian, Greek and German craftsmen, art historian G.H. Hamilton described Moscow even in the sixteenth century as yielding to no other in its cosmopolitan character, and yet one hesitates to characterise this as autocratic internationalism. Zubovich clearly delineates the distinction between what she calls 'earlier patterns of Soviet internationalism' and the 'new, postwar internationalism that positioned Moscow at the center of world-historical development'. The latter, however, sounds uncomfortably like the internationalism on which the sun never sets and there seems to be a hollowing out of a concept for which rather strong claims are nevertheless made.

One issue is that of how far internationalism implies some negation of unequal transnational power relations. Another is that of how far it implies a universalist ethos as opposed to the deployment by national actors of transnational resources of diplomacy or cultural exchange. One of the key themes emerging from Zubovich's narrative is that of the persistence of the Bolsheviks' love-hate relationship with America. In documenting this she draws on both Russian and American archives in further enriching insights already so well developed by Jean-Louis Cohen. Once more, however, transnational relations on their own did not equate to internationalism. They fluctuated, as Zubovich shows, with the volatility of Soviet policy

towards the outside world. But the fascination with the skyscraper also had specifically American connotations, and this was not as yet a merely 'Western' building type associated with capitalism in general (pp80-82). Like the tractor or conveyor belt of an earlier phase of *Amerikanizm*, this was also a fascination with technique which could be appropriated for ideological ends that could never be realised in capitalist America itself. To architects of the time, the American skyscraper appeared as 'wildly disorganised' (Erich Mendelsohn), and as the antithesis of any notion of the ordered state or public good. It is fascinating to learn that Stalin himself also regarded low-rise Paris as an exemplar of the well-built capital. If New York lacked monumentalism and Paris the skyscraper's modernity, Moscow, the capital of capitals, would combine the two while avoiding the machine aesthetic of the Corbusian *ville radiieuse*.

There are similar crosscurrents at play in Stanek's idea of 'socialist worldmaking'. This he identifies with 'the claim to the worldwide applicability of the socialist path of development; the worlding of Eastern Europe, or the sharing with the developing countries of the East European experience of overcoming underdevelopment, colonialism, and peripherality; and collaboration within the world socialist system' (p305). This seems clear and unambiguous, and yet his richly documented case studies do not entirely square with such a summary. One of their greatest strengths is to remind us of the specificities of location and inheritance of socialist Poland, Bulgaria and the GDR. He questions the received notion of Soviet satellites, albeit sometimes unconsciously falling into the same language. He also insists that this was not just the homogeneous 'Soviet bloc' perceived by the West, but revealed 'distinct political ambitions and constraints, economic interests, technological profiles, industrial capacities, and architectural traditions' (p4). His studies demonstrate the point so convincingly that one is left uncertain as to the homogenising construct of socialist worldmaking itself. Among the individuals documented here are the Hungarian Károly Polónyi and the Pole Zbigniew Dmochowski. Nevertheless, if their longer career histories suggest some notion of an 'East European planning tradition' (Polónyi), it was one that might be accommodated within a conception of 'global' (or national-

level) socialism but was far less clearly driven by it. Dmochowski did not at first return to socialist Poland but carried on teaching in cold-war Britain. Polónyi did not leave Hungary after 1956, but did seize on the opportunity to forge connections with architects across the cold-war divide, and signalled his cosmopolitanism by using the Anglo-French version of his name. The architect and designer Nick Hollo figures briefly here as Hungarian-born, but left Hungary for Australia at the age of eight. The notion of ‘worlding from below’ again tells part of the story, but the idea that these vessels of mobility simply ‘found themselves’ in the global South needs also to factor in the state, commercial and career interests on which some other accounts lay rather greater emphasis.

An alternative reading of Stanek’s case studies might therefore be to welcome his challenge to established moulds of analysis while wondering whether this is best served by proposing new ones which in some respects are not so new at all. Each of these books in some respects raises as many questions as it answers. Nevertheless, they are meticulously researched, beautifully produced and, in Stanek’s case in particular, break much new ground. Both can be strongly recommended.

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**Ewan Gibbs, *Coal Country. The Meaning and Memory of Deindustrialization in Postwar Scotland*, London, University of London Press 2021, ISBN 9781912702541, 306pp**

In recent decades, deindustrialisation, and its wider social and political implications, has become an important area of focus for historians, political scientists and sociologists working in a variety of national contexts.<sup>1</sup> *Coal Country*, the first monograph by Ewan Gibbs, a lecturer at the University of Glasgow, explores these processes within the setting of post-war Scotland, concentrating in particular on the declining levels of employment within the nationalised coal industry

in the period between the late 1940s and the 1980s. Throughout Gibbs is careful to ensure that his comprehensive treatment of the management of the coal industry during these years is complemented by an appreciation of, and empathy for, the experience of those who lived and worked within coalfield communities. Central to this effort is the focus of the study on Lanarkshire, a region that Gibbs suggests 'reveals the long-term consequences of deindustrialization' (p18). This desire to balance the national and the local is apparent in the sources that underpin the book. Alongside the archives of the National Coal Board (NCB) in both its Scottish and UK guises, the Ministry of Fuel and Power, and the Scottish Area of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUMSA), Gibbs employs testimonies collected during more than thirty individual interviews as well as two 'focus groups' (p15).

The result is a profoundly humane study of economic, social and political change, which displays a sustained concern with the local impact of shifts in national economic policy. Important in this regard is the explanatory weight that Gibbs accords to two concepts. The first is the idea of a widely held 'moral economy' understanding of the coal industry that emphasised the interests of the communities that relied upon the jobs that mining provided; here Gibbs draws on the influential work of E.P. Thompson as well as the research of other contemporary historians of the Scottish coal industry.<sup>2</sup> The second is the proposition that any moves to prioritise narrow financial concerns within coal mining generated contending responses from workers and the broader labour movement; referencing Karl Polanyi, Gibbs describes this dynamic as a 'double movement' (p8). Taken together, Gibbs argues, these concepts allow us to better understand popular responses to changes in UK government policy towards coal in the post-war decades.

This framework is most apparent in the first two chapters of the book, which offer an exemplary narrative account of the coal industry in post-war Scotland before an examination of responses to colliery closures, with a particular emphasis on the waning Lanarkshire coalfield. As Gibbs makes clear, deindustrialisation – and the job losses it entailed – was a feature of the nationalised coal industry

almost from its inception in 1947: employment in Scottish collieries fell from 82,000 in 1957 to 32,000 in 1967, before collapsing to just 6,000 twenty years later (p25). The question was always how such reductions in the workforce were to be managed, and how the concerns of the workers and their communities would be taken into consideration. There was, as Gibbs shows, a consistent 'hostility towards organised labour' and an 'opposition to coal on economic and political grounds' within key government departments throughout the post-war era, and especially when the Conservatives were in office (p29). Nevertheless, between the 1950s and the 1970s successive governments and the NCB felt some obligation to guarantee that any pit closures would be accompanied by a combination of transfers to other collieries within commuting distance, early retirement for older workers, and, where appropriate, the creation of alternative – and comparably paid – sources of employment. This was matched by an acceptance on the part of the NUM that pit closures were an inevitable feature of the modernisation and reorganisation of the industry. It was the abandonment of this 'moral economy' understanding of the coal industry by the Conservative government that came to office in 1979 that generated the far more confrontational industrial relations of the 1980s.

Gibbs then shifts his attention to a range of individual experiences, collected in three chapters that concentrate respectively on understandings of community, differing gendered perspectives on deindustrialisation and questions of generational identity, and which foreground the oral interviews. The analysis here is subtle and the individual testimonies are handled with care. Despite his evident sympathy and admiration for those engaged in political and labour activism, Gibbs never slips into an uncritical nostalgia, and he is alive to the tensions that existed within families and communities as patterns of male and female employment shifted, and the expectations of different generations came into conflict. The discussion of generational changes is especially useful, as Gibbs delineates the different outlooks that prevailed between those whose induction into mining had taken place during the economic depression of the 1920s and 1930s, when the industry remained under private control, as opposed

to subsequent generations who had known only nationalisation and then decline. This Gibbs characterises succinctly as the difference between ‘inter-war veterans’ and their successors, the ‘industrial citizens’ and ‘flexible workers’ (p158).

Of greatest interest to readers of this journal will likely be the space that Gibbs grants in chapters six and seven to coalfield politics, and especially to the influential role played by members of the Communist Party of Great Britain within the NUMSA. In doing so, Gibbs revises the traditional historiography of British Communism, which has tended to accentuate the party’s marginal political position. By concentrating on the experience of Scottish mining communities, Gibbs reveals the role of individual Communists, most notably Abe Moffat, Alex Moffat and Michael McGahey, in guiding the direction of the NUMSA for much of the post-war period. The result was, in Gibbs’s words, ‘a social democratic approach on industry matters’, coupled with ‘a communist perspective on international affairs’ (p188): the NUMSA cooperated with the NCB on restructuring and closures but adopted a firm left-wing stance on foreign policy questions (p192-3). Finally, Gibbs highlights the part played by Communists during the 1960s and 1970s in shaping the pro-devolution stance of not just the NUMSA, but also the wider Scottish labour movement. As he maintains, this was a vital, but often overlooked, element in constructing a coalition in support of constitutional reform within Scotland that rested upon economic concerns. Indeed, Gibbs sees the post-war period as one that saw ‘elements of Scottish national identity and class interest merge’, forging ‘a countermovement framed around a protective role for Scottish nationhood against the threats of market forces and remote administration’ (p237). The contemporary significance of this development should be clear.

*Coal Country* is, then, an impressive study. While it will be of interest primarily to historians of post-war Scotland and of deindustrialisation, it reaches important conclusions about the relationship between national and class identities, and the response of the political left to constitutional questions. As such, it deserves to be widely read.

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## Notes

1. See, for example, the Deindustrialization and the Politics of Our Time (DePOT) project based in Canada: <https://deindustrialization.org/>.
2. See in particular: Andrew Perchard and Jim Phillips, 'Transgressing the Moral Economy: Wheelerism and Management of the Nationalised Coal Industry in Scotland', *Contemporary British History* Vol 25 No 3, 2011, pp387-405; Jim Phillips, 'Deindustrialization and the Moral Economy of the Scottish Coalfields, 1947 to 1991', *International Labor and Working-Class History* Vol 84, 2013, pp99-115.

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