

John McIlroy and Alan Campbell

The historiography of British communism: An alternative reading

Surveyors of historical literature have responsibilities and these become particularly acute when they are guiding historians in other countries through their own domestic controversies. Scrupulous exposition of contrasting and conflicting approaches and positions is a *sine qua non* for subsequent endorsement or critique. The historiographer's verdicts should invariably be buttressed by clear explanations and at least brief illustration. Where such evaluation is contested in the literature, citation and quotation are indispensable. Labelling, assertion, unevidenced approbation or dismissal are the hallmarks of superficial analysis. The duties of historiographers are especially exacting when they themselves are protagonists in the debates which they are introducing and assessing. Such an approach is largely absent from Kevin Morgan's tendentious analysis of contemporary trends in the historiography of British communism published in a recent issue of this journal.¹

As if on vacation from the accepted methodological and procedural constraints of historiographical discussion, Morgan delivers a series of sweeping unsubstantiated judgments on the work of his fellow British historians. Whether he is dismissing or praising colleagues, his discourse is typically assertive rather than evidenced. He deals in closed, cryptic characterisations of the work of other historians rather than even minimally elaborated, transparent appraisals which enable readers to make up their own minds. He consistently fails to register, still less engage with, contrary verdicts. Nina Fishman's *The British Communist Party and the Trade Unions* Morgan informs us, has been "rightly acclaimed" (p. 75) for its depiction of communist activists. But he passes over the fact that some reviewers of the work have been decidedly more critical. Nonetheless he continues, "... her attempt to delineate factions within the party leadership necessarily rested on a more slender evidential basis and while in many respects insightful now seem too schematic to be wholly convincing" (p. 75). That is all he has to say of any critical substance. What German historians, many of whom, we assume, will not have read Fishman's text, are to make of this opaque pontification and how they are to discern whether it is justified remains unclear for Morgan's assessment is sustained by not a shred of evidence. Readers would certainly be well advised not to take his estimation on trust for, as we shall demonstrate, it is diplomatic and evasive. The most recent history of the *Communist Party of Great Britain* (CPGB) is more forthright and, in relation to Morgan's concerns with the relationship between the *Communist International* (Comintern) and the CPGB, perhaps more pertinent: "... [Fishman] underestimates the continued influence of the foreign policy concerns of the Soviet state, the Comintern and the British party leadership on the political culture of British activists".² Or to cite our own assessment: "Her

1 See Kevin Morgan: Labour With Knobs On? The Recent Historiography of the British Communist Party, in: *Mitteilungsblatt des Instituts für soziale Bewegungen* 27 (2002), pp. 69–83. Page numbers in our text refer to pages in this article.

2 James Eaden/David Renton: *The Communist Party of Great Britain since 1920*, London 2002, xiv.

book has been subjected to detailed criticism on the grounds of partial use of evidence, questionable interpretations and tendentious conclusions".³

In similar fashion readers are expected to take on faith Morgan's unexplained and unsubstantiated claims for the work of Andrew Thorpe (p. 76), despite James Eaden and David Renton's counterclaim which is not referred to by Morgan: "Thorpe's argument is ultimately unconvincing".⁴ Although he cites and condemns an article by one of the present authors, Morgan does not disclose to his readers that it contains a detailed critique of Thorpe's work (p. 77).⁵ Nor does he explain why, in the face of such critique, he praises Thorpe's work. Nor does he address the conclusion of a distinguished analyst of British communism, Walter Kendall, that McIlroy's paper provides "a canonical demonstration" of "the shoddy methodology" of both Thorpe and another historian, Matthew Worley, whose work Morgan also approvingly characterises, once more without a sentence of evidence to support his approbation (pp. 76–77).⁶ Of course, German historians should rely neither on Morgan's evaluation of this work or on alternative judgements. They have a right to be at least referred to the existence of the latter and to be treated to at least a taste of the evidence on which different interpretations are based.

It would, moreover, facilitate readers' understanding of recent literature if Morgan had provided even brief historical context and located himself as a historian within it. Long before feminists and postmodernists demanded authorial assertion, that distinguished chronicler of world communism, E. H. Carr, demanded that we "study the historian before we study his facts".⁷ The pioneering analysts of British communism were critical, sometimes hostile to the CPGB; they emphasised the political domination which the *Comintern* exercised over the politics and pre-occupations of British communists.⁸ From the 1980s Morgan, who

3 Alan Campbell and John McIlroy: Is CPGB History Important? A Reply to Harriet Jones, *Labour History Review* 68 (2003), pp. 385–90.

4 Andrew Thorpe: *The British Communist Party and Moscow 1920–1943*, Manchester 2000; Eaden/Renton: *Communist Party*, xix.

5 John McIlroy: *Rehabilitating Communist History*, *Revolutionary History* 8 (2001), pp. 195–226. German readers should note that *Revolutionary History* is not, as Morgan asserts, a "Trotskyist journal". A better, if still inadequate, case could be made for terming *Socialist History*, which Morgan edits and which was once the property of historians who were members of the CPGB as a 'Stalinist journal'. A mild obsession with Trotskyism is evident from his writings: see, for example, Kevin Morgan: *Against Fascism and War. Ruptures and Continuities in British Communist Politics 1935–1941*, Manchester 1989, p. 7, where he claims that the work of Trotskyist writers "deliberately misleads" its readers; and Kevin Morgan: *Parts of People and Communist Lives*, in John McIlroy/Kevin Morgan/Alan Campbell (eds): *Party People, Communist Lives*, (London 2001, p. 28, where he vicariously 'winces' at Trotskyist criticisms of Stalinists.

6 Walter Kendall: *The Communist Party of Great Britain*, in: *Revolutionary History* 8 (2002), pp. 288–289; Matthew Worley: *Class Against Class. The Communist Party in Britain between the Wars*, London 2002.

7 "Our first concern should not be with the facts which it contains but with the historian who wrote it": E. H. Carr: *What is History?* 2nd edn, London 1987, p. 22.

8 For a review of this literature, see John McIlroy/Alan Campbell: *Histories of the British Communist Party. A User's Guide*, in: *Labour History Review*, Special Issue on International Communism, 68 (2003), pp. 33–54.

acknowledged the influence of American revisionists such as Maurice Isserman, and Fishman, who explicitly styled herself a revisionist, criticised earlier approaches for their concentration on 'high politics' and over rigid conceptions of *Comintern* control. They stressed the limits of Russian direction and employed 'history from below' to develop a picture in which British activists appeared relatively unaffected in trade union and community struggles by the Russian dimension and rejected its more extreme manifestations.⁹ More recently writers such as Thorpe and Worley have returned to high politics: they have argued that the degree of *political* autonomy which the CPGB possessed and its influence on strategy was greater than earlier writers believed.¹⁰ Finally, in our own research we have developed a critique of contemporary work in the light of the opening of the Moscow archives from the early 1990s. We have criticised its Anglo-centrism, the evidence on which it seeks to deminish the influence of Moscow, the absence of any account of Stalinism and its attempt to normalise the CPGB as a variant of labourism, a minimally differentiated tendency in the labour movement.¹¹ Despite differences of historical approach, what Fishman, Morgan, Thorpe and Worley have in common is a favourable estimation of the CPGB, an emphasis on its essentially British nature and a project centred on its textual rescue from Russian domination.

Against this background, we proceed to provide readers of the *Mitteilungsblatt* with an alternative reading of recent developments in the historiography of British communism than that provided by Morgan's review. Readers may gain some insights, allowing for differences between two countries, two communisms and two sets of historical preoccupations by making comparisons, with the German literature, for example the different approaches of Herman Weber and Klaus Michael Mallmann to German communism.¹² Our original paper has had to be shortened and a section criticising in detail the methods of historians favourably reviewed by Morgan omitted. The first part deals with recent debates about the Russian dimension to British communism, the second with Morgan's suggestions for future historiography.

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As social and political historians convinced that the two are bound up together, we reject Morgan's attempts to privilege an unspecified version of social history and downplay politics as a debilitating approach to the history of a *political party*, a *political party par excellence*. The CPGB's transformative political project and its role as part of a significant international po-

9 Morgan: *Against Fascism*, p. 8, n. 27; Nina Fishman: *The British Communist Party and the Trade Unions 1933–1945*, Aldershot 1995, p. 18.

10 McIlroy/Campbell: *Histories*, pp. 47–52.

11 See, for example, John McIlroy/Alan Campbell: "Nina Ponomareva's Hats". *The New Revisionism, the Communist International and the Communist Party of Great Britain 1920–1930*, in: *Labour/Le Travail* 49 (2002), pp. 147–188; John McIlroy/Alan Campbell: "For a Revolutionary Workers' Government". *Moscow, British Communism and the Third Period 1927–1934*, in: *European History Quarterly* 32 (2002), pp. 535–569.

12 Richard Croucher: *Shifting Sands. Changing Interpretations of the History of German Communism*, in: *Labour History Review* 68 (2003), pp. 11–31.

litical movement have to be at the centre of its histories if we are to avoid a descent into obscurantism and triviality. We are therefore particularly concerned at Morgan's insistent attempt to remove discussion of the precise nature and operation of the central axis between the Kremlin and the CPGB from the agenda of communist studies. "Though politically the issue may rumble on", Morgan states, "it is not along such lines that the serious historical understanding of British communism is likely to develop" (p. 78). A preliminary issue which requires attention is Morgan's insinuating hints to the effect that some historians, presumably those he mistakenly alleges contribute to "Trotskyist journals", are pursuing political agendas while others – unsurprisingly those he favours – are refreshingly free from such "*a priori* agendas" and "ideological axe-grinding" (pp. 76–77). This is an unacceptable technique in historical debate. Where is the evidence that Morgan and Thorpe, in comparison with historians who disagree with them, are pursuing agendas a scintilla less *a priori* than their opponents? Morgan, for example, sees himself as a "socialist historian", admittedly a diffuse category, and has contributed to the press of the CPGB's successor group, the Democratic Left. We consider ourselves libertarian socialists.¹³ The only relevant issue here is whether this infects our methods as historians. Suffice it to say that no evidence of this is presented by Morgan. Perhaps he is labouring under the prejudice that everybody's political commitment is inherently and inevitably reductionist, except, of course, one's own.

More fundamentally, in the light of the availability of new archival evidence, the question of *the extent to which* the politics of the CPGB were dispensed from Moscow or forged in Britain, *the degree to which* British communists gave their political allegiance to Russia and the precise provenance of their strategic policies, remain important questions for historians. That Morgan, attempting to dismiss what remains a significant historical problem is forced to pursue it suggests its resilience. If such debates are informed, as he suggests, by "a hankering, nostalgia or sheer compulsion for political controversies that have largely petered out..." (p. 70), the question arises as why those historians to whom he accords approval such as Thorpe and Worley are still energetically involved in them.

Morgan's account of the development of this debate in Britain is confusing. By the 1980s he claims the issues were long settled, indeed by the 1990s communist political history "could seem an antiquarian and even mildly obsessive preoccupation" (p. 74). To precisely whom remains unclear. Morgan is universalising his own attitudes. Moreover, he seems to be applying a minimalist, almost trivial test. His prognostication that this was a settled issue appears dependent on the assertion that, unlike earlier CPGB apologists, all historians agreed that the *Comintern* had *some* role (p. 77). Of course, but the real, live issue by the 1990s was what that role was and how it worked, the extent, methods and the impact of *Comintern* influence. The alert reader's doubts as to Morgan's sureness of touch are exacerbated by his remarkable statement that "British communists were not in any formal sense bound by Moscow's instructions" (p. 74). The twenty-one points which formally bound its affiliates to accept the instructions of the *Comintern* executive, down to the detail of when they could hold

13 Morgan: *Parts of People*, p. 25. For the record, one of us contributed as an outsider in the 1980s to the press of both the revisionist and Stalinist wings of the disintegrating CPGB.

their congresses and who would be their leaders, are simply removed from history by this remarkable stroke of revisionism.¹⁴

Contrary to Morgan's account, the interest of at least some historians in the relations between London and Moscow was renewed following the opening of the Moscow archives in the early 1990s while abiding concerns over neglect of the Russian dimension were intensified by the publication of Nina Fishman's book in 1995. If this text did not, applying Morgan's dilute test, completely neglect the *Comintern's* role, what is more to the point is that it diminished and distorted it. We have already remarked upon the fact that in Morgan's article cryptic comments stand in for proper elucidation and critical estimation of Fishman's text. We might also remember that, writing in 2002, he claims that Fishman's work is "necessarily" handicapped by its "slender evidential basis" (p. 75). Reviewing the monograph in 1995 he was franker: "It is indeed one of the book's weaknesses that despite its publishers' claims it makes no use of the newly available CP archives".¹⁵ In 1995 there was nothing "necessary" about Fishman's eschewal of rigorous research and it meant for Morgan that her treatment of important issues was "hazy and inaccurate" and "ignorant as to detail". He insisted that her stand-ins for Stalin, those she presented as the architects and protagonists of British independence, her "book's very hero, a bicephalous mythological beast called 'Pollitt-Campbell' is really no more than an assertion"; the fragments of evidence Fishman adduced to support it, he judged, "do not in the slightest bear that construction"; and, he concluded, "These are not trivial points for they suggest a certain wilfulness as to the details of Communist Party history."¹⁶

Contrary to Morgan's assurance that by the 1980s there were only "old style party loyalists insisting on a degree of strategic autonomy" (p. 73), the relative autonomy of Pollitt and Campbell was integral to Fishman's argument, as befitted a self-styled revisionist. Morgan's belief that an inability to perceive the correspondence between *Comintern* decisions and CPGB policies or diminishing the relationship was not a problem (p. 73) is belied by examination of Fishman's writings. If autonomy was far from complete, she suggests that British exceptionalism was at crucial junctures accepted in Moscow: by 1932 CPGB leaders had "successfully persuaded the *Comintern* to make Britain an exception to its general line".¹⁷ Thereafter, while German communists continued to struggle with the sectarian, ultra-left and disastrous politics of the Third Period, CPGB leaders enthusiastically pursued a calculated strategy of dissolving democratic centralism and enforcing "trade union loyalism". The CPGB's new "model of democratic centralism was highly derivative of working-class non-conformism. It relied on individual consciences to interpret the real world according to their own lights".¹⁸ Thus released from the hegemony of the *Comintern* and the party, CPGB trade unionists – and Fishman's account is heavily reliant on their partisan testimony – be-

14 On the formal subordination of the CPGB to the *Comintern*, see Theses on the Conditions of Admission to the Communist International, in Alan Adler (ed.): *Theses, Resolutions and Manifestos of the First Four Congresses of the Third International*, London 1980, pp. 92–97.

15 Kevin Morgan: *Communist Histories*, in: *Labour History Review* 60 (1995), p. 61.

16 Morgan: *Communist Histories*, p. 61–2.

17 Fishman: *Communist Party*, p. 255.

18 Fishman: *Communist Party*, p. 333.

came very like their social-democratic counterparts, only more strategic and dedicated. After 1932 the *Comintern* almost vanishes from her text: it is mentioned only in passing. The CPGB's lack of conformity to *Comintern* edicts is referred to but it is September 1939 before Moscow re-emerges to temporarily terminate this autonomous episode.

The reality was different. The vicissitudes of the CPGB, as the ultra-left *Class Against Class* line continued into 1933, its "exception" from the Third Period, together with all other national affiliates only in 1934–5, the day-to-day intervention of the *Comintern* in the CPGB and the day-to-day intervention of the CPGB leadership to control the activities of its trade unionists are all discernible from the documents in the archives. They are eliminated from this account for Fishman did not study the available documents. Nor has she done so since, simply recycling her misinterpretations.¹⁹ Reality is replaced by what she terms "revolutionary pragmatism": the leadership's positive injunction to activists to direct themselves, to work in a practical, realistic way on their own account until events produced a revolutionary situation.

Fishman is essentially and illegitimately taking the opportunistic, manipulative popular front at the face value communists gave it in public, pre-dating its origins to 1932 and providing it with a British lineage rather than a primary provenance in Russian foreign policy. The popular front strategy urged communist trade unionists to move into the mainstream, to ally themselves with workers to the right of the CPGB, to behave more "realistically". However, it was always controlled by the CPGB; traditional democratic centralism was affirmed, not, as Fishman would have it, liquidated. Individualism and economism were, as ever, inevitable tendencies; they were fought, not encouraged, by the leadership, as the documents demonstrate, in the loyal pursuit of a strategy created and steered from Moscow.²⁰ The shadowy presence of the *Comintern* embeds British autonomy in a text whose theme of 'ordinary' British trade unionists uncontaminated by Stalinism could have been contributed by CPGB spokesmen or CPGB trade unionists or gullible fellow travellers of the 1930s. If, as Morgan asserts, the existence of orders from Moscow "had always been as plain as the moustache on Stalin's face" (p. 73), why do both these orders and Stalin himself play such a minimal role in Fishman's work?²¹

Passing over all of this and commenting only on Fishman's welcome attention to activists and differentiation within the CPGB leadership, Morgan returns to the relationship between Moscow and London. He praises the work of Thorpe: "Very much a contribution to the centre-periphery debate" (p. 76). Attentive readers may be forgiven for inquiring: 'Which debate?' Fuelled by nostalgia and political compulsion, this tiresome issue had, according to Morgan, faded away long ago and several pages earlier. At least in Morgan's eyes, little new light had been shed on it by the opening of the archives (p. 74). It is bemusing to find Morgan now praising Thorpe for re-igniting it.

19 Nina Fishman: Reflections on the Historiography of the CPGB, in: Communist History Network Newsletter (Autumn 2001), pp. 7–16.

20 See McIlroy/Campbell: Histories, pp. 46–47.

21 Stalin is mentioned twice in Fishman's index. Pollitt has eighty-seven entries some covering several pages.

The work of Matthew Worley on the Third Period in Britain is likewise approved by Morgan for its "recognition of the constantly renewed tensions between centre and periphery" and its 'autonomist reading of the CPGB's history' (p. 77). This is the first time in Morgan's text that we encounter the concept of 'an autonomist reading'. Hitherto we had been assured that for historians there was a settled correspondence between the policies of Moscow and London and informed that only "old style party loyalists insisted on a degree of strategic autonomy" (p. 73). Now, although Worley has never visited the Moscow archives, "an autonomist reading", albeit one which is unspecified and unexplained, enters the story for the first time.

Readers may experience bafflement as to why Thorpe and Worley are praised for resurrecting a debate marked by nostalgia and political compulsion, of little interest to historians as distinct from politicians. Morgan fails to provide the slightest explanation. Matters are even more perplexing when we read Thorpe and discover that he stands for everything Morgan opposes in the writing of communist history. But, of course, instead of explaining and assessing what Thorpe says, Morgan treats us only to impenetrable, unexampled vagaries concerning Thorpe's "alertness to the sort of tensions and contingencies within the CPGB's mode of functioning which the practice of democratic centralism only partly succeeded in stifling" (p. 76). Yet Thorpe states clearly and emphatically that he is an advocate of the political history which Morgan disdains. His work is based on CPGB and *Comintern* minutes largely to the exclusion of the party press and rank-and-file activity. For any historian 'from below', it is based largely on "the one-sided evaluation of ideology and politics especially the limited focus on the particular 'line' and its exponents, the countless changes in tactics" which to Morgan could earlier seem "an antiquarian even mildly obsessive preoccupation" (p. 74). Thorpe explicitly rejects 'history from below' and the classic texts by Stuart Macintyre which lie at the very heart of Morgan's approach. Thorpe could be criticising Morgan's own position when he insists that this school of history writing is "profoundly unsatisfactory (...) it will simply not do to argue that we can take the politics out of political history".²² Yet Morgan explains none of this.

If the 'orders from Moscow' approach has never constituted a problem for Morgan, this is far from Thorpe's position. In his detailed re-examination of political relations between Moscow and London, Thorpe criticises the 'orders from Moscow literature' and claims that the "*Comintern's* influence over the development of British Communist politics has been exaggerated by most observers ... the party was, to a large extent, the master of its own fate".²³ Thorpe's purpose, and one would not grasp this from Morgan's less than rudimentary rehearsal of his ideas, is specifically revisionist: his aim is to rewrite the relationship between the *Comintern* and CPGB and in doing this he exaggerates the political autonomy of the latter.

22 Thorpe: *British Communist Party*, p. 5. Thorpe continues: "Social and cultural history are important but merely to focus on what Communists did on the ground will not suffice to explain how power was negotiated and shared out in the Communist movement".

23 Andrew Thorpe: *The Communist International and the British Communist Party*, in: Tim Rees/Andrew Thorpe (eds): *International Communism and the Communist International*, Manchester 1998, pp. 68–81.

Like Worley's, Thorpe's is an explicitly 'autonomist reading'. Yet one would not glean from Morgan's account that, contrary to the estimations of the overwhelming majority of British historians, Thorpe believes that the virulent sectarianism of the CPGB during the Third Period would have been adopted "regardless of 'orders from Moscow'".²⁴ Or that, following Fishman, he claims that the CPGB leaders played a significant decision-making role in the termination of *Class Against Class* and the adoption from 1934 of the popular front in Britain.

Turning to Worley's work, Morgan, as we have shown, again substitutes evasive and, for the uninitiated, largely meaningless characterisation for even terse exposition. He fails to explain that Worley claims, against all the evidence, that *Class Against Class* was the product of "determinants both British and international".²⁵ Or that Worley moves to the brink of prioritising the former: "... much of the logic that lay behind the party's 'left turn'" was based on events unfolding in Britain itself".²⁶ In Britain, Germany and elsewhere "in the various *Comintern* sections the new line was determined in accord with prevailing socio-economic and political conditions".²⁷ Following Thorpe, Worley suggests, against all the evidence, that had Moscow not championed *Class Against Class*, the CPGB would have introduced it of its own volition: "... it is probable that the party would have been forced to consider a realignment similar to that proposed by [the *Comintern*] once existing communist access to the wider labour movement had been effectively curtailed".²⁸ Like Thorpe he glosses over innumerable inconvenient factors such as social fascism, dispensation with the united front, violence against social democrats and the CPGB's faithful echoing of Moscow's disastrous line on Germany.

On all this Morgan is silent. All he has to tell us is that Worley's account revising long-accepted analysis of the Third Period is "rational" and "evidence-based" (p. 77). This is a peculiarly minimalist test of the quality of historical endeavour, one which we hope the essays of university students let alone the published work of scholars would pass with flying colours and one which largely eliminates the role of historical criticism. Morgan thus omits to interrogate the nature and quality of the evidence and to tell us whether it sustains Worley's revisionist assertions. Reassuring readers that Worley does not argue "for some absolute value of autonomy" (P. 77), when the argument is rather about the extent and quality of autonomy, which Worley exaggerates, Morgan avoids the basic question of whether he accepts or rejects Worley's conclusions. And he fails to inform German readers that his own published work on the Third Period, like that of the overwhelming majority of British historians, takes fundamental issue with Worley's 'autonomist reading'.²⁹ The reader surely has the right to know

24 Andrew Thorpe: Stalinism and British Politics, in: *History* 83 (1998), p. 626.

25 Matthew Worley: *Class Against Class. The Communist Party of Great Britain in the Third Period 1927–1932*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Nottingham 1998, p. 94.

26 Worley: *Class Against Class*, p. 74.

27 Worley: *Class Against Class. The Communist Party in Britain between the Wars*, p. 69.

28 Matthew Worley: *Left Turn. A Reassessment of the Communist Party of Great Britain in the Third Period 1928–1933*, in: *Twentieth Century British History* 11 (2000), p. 359.

29 Kevin Morgan: *The CPGB and the Comintern Archives*, in: *Socialist History* 2 (1993), pp. 19–20.

which interpretation of these troubled years, Worley's or his own, Morgan finds most convincing and consonant with the evidence. Both cannot be correct.

Morgan is silent on much more. In several articles we have subjected the work of Thorpe and Worley to detailed examination. We have demonstrated that operating with an essentialist conception of inherent political difference between Moscow and London and employing porous definitions of dissent, Thorpe inflates London's relative autonomy through simply dispensing with any measures of significance and discrimination between strategic, tactical and organisational issues. Amplifying disagreement over relatively trivial issues divorced from consensus over fundamentals, he constructs British independence on very artificial foundations. We have confirmed by precise analysis of the fate of independence *Comintern* directives in the 1920s that the CPGB conformed to Moscow's imperative on all issues of primary and secondary significance. Through detailed assessment of archival evidence we have demonstrated that Thorpe and Worley are disabled by a cavalier use of evidence and failure to distinguish in analysing strategic change between primary and secondary explanatory factors. There were, as they document, British supporters of ultra-leftism in 1928. But the policy was introduced not by these supporters or by pressure from them but by the Russians on the basis of Russian motivations, Russian interests and Stalin's arrival in power. If the Third Period had a primary or significant national provenance, or even took account of national factors, why was it introduced simultaneously in London, Berlin, Helsinki, Tokyo, Madras and Melbourne? The move to the popular front undoubtedly reflected pressures from national parties, including the CPGB, faced with extinction as a consequence of *Class Against Class* and the German party utterly extinguished as a national force. Such pressures were secondary. What was indispensable and primary was Stalin's conception of Russian interests in the aftermath of Hitler's arrival in power.³⁰ Morgan cites some of these articles (p. 77, n. 34). But he fails to mention these criticisms, still less assess or respond to them.

Instead, returning once more to his familiar technique of unevidenced assertion, he states that one of these articles is "re-asserting the cruder model of control advanced at different times by historians like Henry Pelling and Harvey Klehr" (p. 77). This is misreading or misrepresentation. The article he refers to emphasises "the central fact that British Communists freely willed the leadership of the *Comintern* and internalised its political hegemony".³¹ There is not much crude control there. On the contrary, we have stressed that Moscow achieved hegemony by means of "the legitimacy London accorded to the *Comintern* as the ultimate arbiter of Communist truth not by 'control' or coercion. That legitimacy was the preponderant and ultimate factor cementing the CPGB to the *Comintern*".³² In our view, the relationship was substantially about the projection of British communists' longings and hopes onto a Russia transformed in their imaginations into a workers' paradise, if only in embryo, and a longing for infallible leadership to secure something similar in Britain. As Morgan is well aware, such judgement, critical of Pelling, has been delivered as part of a critique,

30 McIlroy/Campbell: "Nina Ponomareva's Hats"; McIlroy/Campbell: For a Revolutionary Workers' Government; McIlroy/Campbell: Histories, pp. 47–52.

31 McIlroy: Rehabilitating Communist History, pp. 207–208.

32 McIlroy/Campbell: "Nina Ponomareva's Hats", p. 167.

not an endorsement, of the stress on 'control mechanisms' to explain the behaviour of British communists favoured by no other than Andrew Thorpe. We have repeatedly characterised such mechanisms as secondary, ancillary, reinforcing, in relation to an ideological and political domination primary in explanation. It was a domination which ensured that, on the whole, problems 'were subordinate and centred on the application of policy: the CPGB typically wanted to carry out *Comintern* decisions, not resist them'.³³

Once again Morgan's pretensions as a guide to the literature stand exposed. Yet he continues in the same vein. It is remarkable, he states, that the authors of the current article have embraced "the revisionist premise" which perceives the CPGB miners' leader Arthur Horner as "pursuing trade union objectives with sometimes 'minimal regard' for formal party policy" (p. 78). It is not quite clear why this is "a revisionist premise" or what earlier work it revises. We are unaware of any work on Horner which suggests that he relentlessly prosecuted CPGB policy through his career, although any proper account must acknowledge the extent to which this was true between 1920 and 1929, a period passed over by Morgan. But, as Morgan is well aware, in acknowledging Horner's later distance from the CPGB over mining politics, we have balanced the account by emphasising what bound him to the party until his death: Stalinism and an intense, uncritical allegiance to the Soviet Union.³⁴ Morgan does not inform his readers of our evidenced and argued characterisation of CPGB mining leaders as "Stalinist labourist" – perhaps because such elucidation would raise uncomfortable questions about his unargued, unevidenced exception of the CPGB from Studer and Unfried's verdict on the role of Stalinism in binding national parties together (p. 80).

Finally, Morgan relaxes his reticence: the only quotation from the British writers on communism he reviews in his text is a quotation from one of our articles. Its sentiments are commonplace and unexceptional: "This was a CPGB which pursued close control of its cadres, yet did not always attain it" (p. 78). Yet failing to document who has ever denied such a stance among writers on British communism from Pelling on – the only potential dissident is Fishman – Morgan sees this statement as a concession, even a covert conversion, to revisionism. Once again we must inquire: who revised what? Our statement can only be caricatured as revisionism when placed next to the parodies of monolithism which are proffered in recent revisionist writing. Thorpe, for example, constructs a quintessential straw man when he accuses writers such as Pelling of presenting a model "whereby an order was made in Moscow; was then transmitted with total clarity; and was then followed with complete obedience by the party leadership. The latter, in turn, transmitted the order to its members, again with total clarity; it was then followed, again with complete obedience, by party members".³⁵

Needless to say, Thorpe offers no citation, still less quotation to support this exaggeration. This is because no writer has ever employed this robotic model. There was nothing, at

33 McIlroy/Campbell: *Histories*, p. 48.

34 John McIlroy/Alan Campbell: *Communist Trade Union Leaders, 1947–1991*, paper to International Conference on Communist Biography, Manchester 2001; John McIlroy/Alan Campbell: *Coalfield Leaders, Trade Unionism and Communist Politics. Exploring Arthur Horner and Abe Moffat*, in: Stefan Berger/Andrew Croll/Norman LaPorte (eds.): *Comparative Coalfield Histories*, Aldershot 2004 forthcoming.

35 Thorpe: *British Communist Party*, p. 4.

least in this case, for revisionists to revise and no revisionism for us to in turn succumb to. As one of us wrote – in an article which is cited by Morgan – about the work of writers such as Pelling:

“Readers of this now extensive work would hardly be paralysed by the novelty of discovering that representatives of the British party were consulted inside or outside Comintern bodies or that Comintern decisions were not always models of clarity or that commonsensically Comintern directives required interpretation, amendment and correction in the light of experience. Earlier historians of British communism would pass over without question the fact that the united front could be applied in ways which were seen as opportunistic or too sectarian ... that different tactics might be necessary in Scotland compared with Devon or that different considerations might apply to tactics in the Transport and General Workers’ Union compared with the Tailor and Garment Workers’ Union. And to a man they would have accepted that there was dissidence ...”³⁶

If Morgan’s guidance on the literature on Moscow and London is unreliable, so are his conclusions. Having told his readers not a word about the repeated criticisms levelled at Thorpe and Worley in the literature, he pronounces, “The resulting exchanges only seem to underline the exhaustion of the debate” (p. 77). This is disingenuous: there have been no “exchanges” and no “debate”. Fundamental, elaborated, well-furnished criticism has produced no scholarly response whatsoever from Thorpe, Worley or Morgan. Yet having momentarily resurrected this controversy from rigor mortis in order to permit him to endorse the work of Thorpe and Worley, Morgan, without any justification, once more reads the last rites over an issue which remains, in reality, still very much alive.

Ways forward

Morgan’s prescriptions for the development of CPGB history are marked by compulsion to assert the homespun nature of British communism. The way forward, he insists, is “to draw upon the richer methodologies of the ‘new’ social history to explore the indigenous roots of communism in its diverse social, cultural and political milieux” (p. 78). Alert readers will note that this formulation already loads the dice in favour of one interpretation: an *a priori* imbalance, even conclusion, to research problems is embodied in the use of the term “indigenous”. Any proper research design will, of course, require exploration of the foreign as well as the indigenous roots of British communism. Moreover, it is worth observing that the “new” social history is far from “new”. A product of the work of Marxist historians, notably Edward Thompson, the French *Annales* school and the new economic history in the United States, its ambition to write total history was captured by Eric Hobsbawm thirty years ago and restated by Geoff Eley a quarter of a century ago.³⁷ While Thompson is indelibly associated with “his-

³⁶ McLroy: *Rehabilitating Communist History*, p. 205.

³⁷ Eric Hobsbawm: *From Social History to a History of Society*, in: *Daedalus* 100 (1971), pp. 20–45; Geoff Eley: *Some Recent Tendencies in Social History*, in: George Igger/Harold Parker (eds.): *International Handbook of Historical Studies*, London 1980, pp. 55–70.

tory from below”, he also paid extensive attention to “history from above”. Moreover, as social history developed, what Eley termed its initial “totalising commitment to understand all facets of human existence” flaked.³⁸ Depoliticised celebrations of working-class life sometimes verged on antiquarianism and fragmentation set in. By the 1990s ‘the totalising ambition’ of social history had subsided into different schools with different emphases from demography and ethnohistory to urban history.³⁹

Thus Morgan’s advocacy of “new” social history is far from transparent or unproblematic: nowhere does he specify what kind of social history he is advocating. The most extensive application of social history to communism has been in the United States; but it entailed a debilitating, one-sided stress on the grass roots. Morgan himself registers some reservations about history from below. Positively, he asserts, without specific reference to any texts, that it has subverted the idea that “all key lines of determination flowed from ‘above’” (p. 78). As we have demonstrated above, a careful reading of, for example, Fishman’s work or Morgan’s own work, casts doubt on this statement – at least if we take the somewhat evasive phrase “key lines of determination” half seriously. But Morgan also concedes that much of the social history written in America is communist history with the communism left out. He agrees with those critics who have charged many American historians with adopting a two-party model with a Stalinized national leadership subordinate to the Kremlin rarely encroaching on quasi-autonomous rank-and-file idealists in the localities. As two recent critics affirm:

“... the Communist *party* remained in the background. Revisionist literature offered a Communist movement where local autonomy, spontaneity and initiative ruled and orders from the centre were ignored ... [it dealt] with a limited geographic area, a short time span, a single incident, a specific ethnic or racial group, a particular union or some other partial aspect of Communist history.”⁴⁰

If the British literature is less developed and less extreme, it is, despite Morgan’s protestations, cut from similar cloth, as a reading of Fishman demonstrates. Surely there is a need to return to totalising ambition and the integration of social and political history, history from above and history from below. Morgan appears to consider this. He pleads guilty to the “two party” approach identified above by Haynes and Klehr and the downplaying of Stalinism in his own work on activists to present a healthy communist rank and file. In the international trend to reject “such dichotomies” he detects “the most promising signs in the historiography of the 1990s” (p. 79). However, it is a false dawn. Such integrative approaches as suggested by Studer and Unfried he declares “somewhat problematic in the British context” (p. 80). Once again, an unjustified British exceptionalism is asserted. He demands exemption – by once again loading the dice – “for small, struggling and *pragmatic* communist parties” (our empha-

38 Eley: *Some Recent Tendencies*, p. 62; Edward P. Thompson: *History from Below*, in: *Times Literary Supplement*, 7 April 1966.

39 Jon Lawrence/Miles Taylor: *The Poverty of Protest. Gareth Stedman Jones and the Politics of Language – A Reply*, in: *Social History* 18 (1993).

40 John Earl Haynes/Harvey Klehr: *The Historiography of American Communism. An Unsettled Field*, in: *Labour History Review* 68 (2003), pp. 65–66.

sis). Evidence that the CPGB, standing near the head of the conformist line of national parties when it came to *Comintern* directives, was “pragmatic”, at least on the significant and essential issues, is sparse. But Morgan follows this uncorroborated assertion with a specious appeal to existing trends in the literature. Recent writing on the CPGB, he states, has moved away from any “unitary conception of Soviet derivation” towards “trying to accommodate the sheer diversity and multiplicity of the relationships in which British communists were involved” (p. 80).

This is special pleading: communists in many other countries were involved in diverse and multiple relationships; we do not need to embrace a “unitary conception of Soviet derivation” to inquire how the Russian dimension influenced these diverse and multiple relationships; the literature from which Morgan identifies a trend in Britain has been relatively sparse; and just because a trend exists does not mean we should not question it. The literature which he cites to indicate the correct approach undoubtedly requires such questioning. The collection which he co-edited with Geoff Andrews and Fishman, which he claims exemplifies this approach, is mis-titled. As Eric Hobsbawm noted in his afterword, the contributions “do not make much use” of the archives, indeed only four of the thirteen contributions utilised the newly opened CPGB archives and only one referred to leadership minutes repatriated from Moscow.⁴¹ Nor did the collection demonstrate any consistent application of social history, “new” or otherwise. Some contributions, such as those of John Callaghan on colonial policy, Richard Croucher on the unemployed workers’ movement and Andrews on factionalism in the 1970s are primarily institutional, though to varying degrees valuable, accounts. Contributions which did adopt a social history approach, such as those from Sue Bruley and Alan Campbell, suffered from failure to deploy new evidence from Moscow. In consequence, Campbell’s account of the Communist union, the *United Mineworkers of Scotland*, balanced indigenous factors with *Comintern* pressure in a fashion which Morgan finds congenial (p. 80). Yet Morgan ignores Campbell’s subsequent work utilising *Comintern* files which re-specified the predominant influence of the *Comintern* and provided a more nuanced interpretation of local factors.⁴² The generally inward-looking, somewhat one-sided nature of the volume is suggested by Morgan’s comment on the need for another book on “the CPGB and Moscow”.⁴³

Morgan also applauds a collection on the cultural history of the CPGB. He characterises this as offering “generally more nuanced and critical perspectives” (p. 81), than precisely which other works is left unspecified.⁴⁴ If the collection does not exemplify G. M. Trevelyan’s aspiration to write “history with the politics left out”, it reflects the social historian J. R. Green’s belief that politics should be passed over lightly and briefly. Presented as a

41 Eric Hobsbawm: Afterword, in: Geoff Andrews/Nina Fishman/Kevin Morgan (eds.): *Opening the Books. Essays on the Social and Cultural History of the British Communist Party*, London 1995, p. 251.

42 Alan Campbell/John McIlroy: *Reflections of the Communist Party’s Third Period in Scotland. The Case of Willie Allan*, in: *Scottish Labour History* 35 (2000), pp. 42–45.

43 Kevin Morgan: Introduction, in Andrews, *Opening the Books*, p. 3.

44 Andy Croft (ed.): *A Weapon in the Struggle. The Cultural History of the Communist Party*, London 1998.

work about *communists*, the political party to which the writers and artists whose biographies are traced here is a shadowy, elusive presence. Thus Morgan's contribution on jazz tells us more about the world of the musicians and their music than about the impact of communists on that world, still less about their political activities.⁴⁵

We would enter here a plea for breadth, and tolerance of different approaches and methods within that breadth. We have urged elsewhere that if labour history is to avoid fragmentation and de-politicisation, there is a necessity for an analytical framework which recognises the continued centrality of politics at all levels and embraces "a multi-layered concern with social and economic as well as political factors ... for a totalised approach".⁴⁶ Despite its graceless and unevincenced dismissal by Morgan on grounds which are irrelevant to the historian (p. 78, n. 34), we would endorse a similarly inclusive methodology for the study of communism. Prescription is easier than its realisation but we have sought to practise what we preach. Campbell's recent thick-textured reconstruction of the Scottish coalfields embedded communists in their communities and studied both those communities and communist politics within one of the few sites of deep-rooted if unevenly distributed CPGB influence in Britain. Going beyond accounts of Little Moscows, it addressed countervailing political strategies and anchored coalfield communities in their regional, national and international settings.⁴⁷ On a smaller scale we have explored the role of communists in the Scottish coalfields and the miners' union during the Second World War. Our account is unusual in that as well as comparing formal communist politics with a practice which closely reflected them, we also bring on stage the state and the CPGB's antagonists, the *Independent Labour Party* and the Trotskyists, in a contextualised, peopled narrative. Our analysis of the tension between a CPGB leadership committed to the state and productionism and an opposition intent on mobilising industrial action, subverts existing work by Fishman and Morgan and sheds new light on a range of issues from attitudes to the war, the use of legal coercion in industrial relations, strike rates, employer strategies and mobilisation theory.⁴⁸ We would proffer this work as a more fruitful exemplar of ways forward than the partial accounts acclaimed by Morgan.

45 Kevin Morgan: *King Street Blues. Jazz and the Left in Britain in the 1930s–1940s*, in Croft: *Weapon in the Struggle*, pp. 123–141.

46 John McIlroy/Alan Campbell: *Still Setting the Pace? Labour History, Industrial Relations and the History of Post-War Trade Unionism*, in: *Labour History Review* 64 (1999), p. 190. Morgan's ageist pre-occupations and his allegation that we "set out our stall" against younger historians in this essay are puzzling and incoherent. We commended the work of some historians younger than ourselves and some who are older. We criticised historians who are younger and older. Like most historians we base our criticisms on what people have written not their age. We also note Morgan's application of Eley's criticisms to "younger American historians" (p. 79).

47 Alan Campbell: *The Scottish Miners, 1874–1939*, vol. 1. *Industry, Work and Community*, Aldershot 2000; Alan Campbell: *The Scottish Miners, 1874–1939*, vol. 2. *Trade Unions and Politics*, Aldershot 2000.

48 John McIlroy/Alan Campbell: *Beyond Betteshanger: Order 1305 in the Scottish Coalfields during the Second World War, Part 1: Politics, Prosecutions and Protest*, in: *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations* 15 (2003), pp. 27–72; John McIlroy/Alan Campbell: *Beyond Betteshanger: Order 1305 in the Scottish Coalfields during the Second World War, Part 2: The Cardowan Story*, in: *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations* 16 (2003), pp. 31–80.

His second suggestion is for more comparative history. He is again inexplicit on what specific approach should be adopted, although “comparative historians are as varied as any other type of historian”.⁴⁹ He does tell us that we need “a rigorous comparative methodology” and that in this context his own work merits attention (p. 82, n. 57). His contribution co-authored with Marco Santana reflects on the independence of communist trade union activists in Britain and Brazil from their parties.⁵⁰ The comparisons are largely decontextualised, ahistorical and unfruitful. The authors emphasise that the two countries could not be more different. But the key additional point that the two parties and their members and their trade unions could not be more different and that this makes fertile comparison even more difficult, is not stressed. Far from throwing into perspective distinctions and similarities of politics and mores and institutions, we hear nothing, for example, about the decisive differences between the two working classes and their organisations, the vain search for a “plantation proletariat” and a Brazilian Kuomintang, the persistent search for alliances with the army, the disastrous putsch orchestrated from Moscow in 1935 or anything much else about a Brazilian communism which unlike its British counterpart was an underground movement for most of its existence. Initial scepticism about the authors’ promise to reveal “common patterns in disparate environments” and expose the “determinants of resistances to the logic of Leninist centralism” crystallizes when we peruse the text.⁵¹

The first section centres on a paragraph rehearsing the independence of British trade unionists and their defence of an inclusive trade unionism across the CPGB’s history and seventeen lines claiming that Brazilian activists rejected their leaders’ leftism on industrial issues in the 1950s. The text asserts general, abstract similarities; it does not constitute a historically situated comparison. The second section focusses on an undifferentiated and undefined syndicalism allegedly affecting both parties. In the CPGB its protagonists are Arthur Horner and Will Paynter whose privileging of trade unionism might more specifically, if still imperfectly, be termed ‘economism’. They were labelled ‘syndicalist’ only in imprecise abuse, not in relation to any half-way rigorous definition of the term. There is no evidence that Horner or Paynter sustained the ideas of the *Miners’ Next Step* against ‘Leninism’. Yet their ‘trade unionism pure and simple’ is conflated here with the strong, developed Latin syndicalist tradition in the Brazilian movement: the vast majority of the delegates at the party’s foundation conference shared an anarchist background. And once more there is no context: apart from a reference to ‘official corporatist structures’, the reader would be unaware that this comparison is being conducted against the very different setting of independent British unions and Brazilian *sindicatos* operating within a framework of state control. The third section contains a paragraph on the CPGB’s search for respectability in 1945 and four paragraphs on post-war developments in Brazil. By this stage it will be clear that this paper consists of the juxtaposition of fragments of contrasting national experience rather than the working through of

49 David Englander: Introduction, in: David Englander (ed.): Britain and America. Studies in Comparative History 1960–1970, New Haven/London 1997, p. x.

50 Morgan/Santana: A Limit to Everything.

51 Morgan/Santana: A Limit to Everything, pp. 52–3, 55.

Morgan's "rigorous comparative methodology" (p. 82). Comparative history is important and should be pursued. This is not the way to pursue it.

Morgan also urges comparisons within Britain, "the need to know what distinguished British communists from other types of activist and what they had in common ..." (p. 82). He suggests that a recent prosopographical project permits the utilisation of "unrivalled biographical sources for communists to explore, rigorously and systematically, the values, affiliations, social characteristics and recruitment patterns of the CPGB's membership over the whole period of its existence" (p. 83). It is an ambitious claim unjustified by the database on which his assertions rest. This dataset contains 837 entries involving a tiny proportion of the thousands of CPGB members over its seventy years of existence; it has no claim to be a representative sample facilitating generalisations. For this reason, the historian who seeks to use it to study and compare sub-groupings of members will find it unsatisfactory.⁵²

We can illustrate the point with different examples. First, given Morgan's interest in social and cultural history, communist literati: there are entries on Graham Greene, Harold Heslop, Lewis Jones and Hugh McDiarmid, although several are skeletal; there is nothing on Christopher Caudwell, Patrick Hamilton, Cecil Day Lewis, Doris Lessing, John Sommerfield, Stephen Spender, Randall Swingler or Edward Upward. Second, Welsh miners were a significant constituency: their leaders are thinly represented here with entries on A. J. Cooke, Horner, Dai Dan Evans and Dai Lloyd Davies but not Paynter, Evan Evans or Alf Davies. Third, Jack Dash and Ted Dickens are the only leading Communist dockers present, while Bert Aylward, Dickie Barratt, Ted Saunders and Fred Thompson all fail to make an appearance. Fourth, and somewhat ironically in view of Morgan's interest in diversity, the database is biased against dissidents: it contains no record of Arthur Reade, the first British Trotskyist, or Reg Groves, Henry Sara, Stuart Kirby, Denzil Harber, Stuart Purkiss or Harry Wicks, founders of the Trotskyist movement in Britain and former members of the CPGB; Michael McCreery and Reg Birch, leading Maoists expelled in the 1960s, are also absent. Finally, only thirty-one Communists are identified as Jewish, a small fraction of this important constituency. Such manifest limitations undermine Morgan's aspiration to "rigorous and systematic" exploration of communist lives. His hopes of comparison with non-communist labour movement activists are profoundly disabled not only by the absence of any similar dataset for the latter population but by an approach to entries which emphasises the British and downplays the Russian influences on the politics and lives of communists.⁵³

These concerns are reinforced by consideration of Morgan's article on the *International Lenin School* (ILS), the only published work based on this dataset.⁵⁴ Only thirty-nine students are mentioned although our own research on the ILS has identified 159 British students who studied there. Of the 154 we have identified, only forty-two can be found on Morgan's database; moreover, eighteen of these forty-two entries contain no indication of ILS at-

52 The database is available at <http://les1.man.ac.uk.CPGB>, accessed October 2003.

53 Alan Campbell/John McLroy/Barry McLoughlin/John Halstead: *The International Lenin School. A Response to Cohen and Morgan*, in: *Twentieth Century British History* 15 (2004), pp. 51–76.

54 Gidon Cohen/Kevin Morgan: *Stalin's Sausage Machine. British Students at the International Lenin School 1926–1937*, in: *Twentieth Century British History* 13 (2002), pp. 327–355.

tendance. Given the importance of the Welsh and Scottish districts and their distinctive identities, regional analysis is important. Here too the database fails the test of rigour. We have identified twenty-seven Welsh students yet only seven can be found on the database. Of the twenty-four sent from Scotland only eight appear on the database.⁵⁵ And despite assertions of “rigorous quantitative analysis”, the “remarkable finding” that ILS students were “distinctly less likely” to attain leadership positions in the CPGB, is, it transpires, a conclusion supported by consideration of four individuals.⁵⁶ Morgan’s claim to have utilised “unrivalled biographical sources” (p. 83) must therefore be taken largely on trust. Our own fuller data suggest the greater longevity of a more substantial participation by ILS graduates in leadership positions than Morgan allows.⁵⁷ If collective biography does promise one fruitful line of advance, it can only be on the basis of a sounder qualitative and quantitative evidential base and a more rigorous methodology.

Conclusion

It will come as little surprise to students of the left in Germany to discover that the historiography of British communism is keenly contested and that recent interpretations emphasising the ‘indigenous’ roots of its politics and its British ethos have been fundamentally challenged by historians. There is little sense of this in Morgan’s essay. Any historiographical survey should give its readers a balanced impression of the literature. It should carefully outline the basis and extent of the differences within that literature. And it should provide a rigorous estimation of the quality of the evidence adduced to sustain conflicting interpretations. Within such an argued, transparent framework, an emphasis on the author’s own position and predictions is acceptable. This approach is lacking in Morgan’s contribution. Exposition and evidence-based argument are replaced with uncorroborated assertion and clipped characterisation, the basis of which is rarely revealed to readers. When probed it is invariably exposed as evasive or inaccurate. The article is more a manifesto for a particular approach than a rigorous investigation. In responding we have, perforce, provided readers with the other side of the argument rather than, as we would have wished had the starting point been different, a rounded account of the field.

Morgan’s position is signalled in his title. He conceives the CPGB as “Labour with knobs on”. On this account British communism was ultimately a domestic politics. It was distinguished from the mainstream of proletarian politics only by a few shibboleths and eccentricities. Yet the Labour Party never adopted democratic centralism or revolution. Whatever con-

55 John McIlroy/Barry McLoughlin/Alan Campbell/John Halstead: Forging the Faithful. The British at the International Lenin School, in: *Labour History Review* 68 (2003), pp. 99–128; John McIlroy/Alan Campbell: The Scots at the Lenin School. An Essay in Collective Biography, in: *Scottish Labour History* 37 (2002), pp. 50–71; John McIlroy: *Glowyr Cymru ym Mosgo*. Welsh Communists at the Lenin School between the Wars, in: *Llafur* 8 (2003), forthcoming.

56 Cohen/Morgan: Stalin’s Sausage Machine, pp. 329, 346–354; Campbell et al.: A Response to Cohen and Morgan, p. 64.

57 Campbell et al.: A Response to Cohen and Morgan, pp. 70–75.

cessions it made after 1945 to America, its own policies were determined in London, not in Moscow or New York. It never supported revolution, a one party state, the Moscow trials or the Hitler-Stalin pact. It would not have collapsed into impotence without a subsidy from a foreign power. Whatever the overlaps, the lines of demarcation are clear and decisive. For much of its life the CPGB would be more aptly characterised as 'Stalinism, warts and all'. While we have only been able to give readers a taste of it, the weight of historical evidence stands strongly against the verdict that the CPGB was essentially Labour's left wing. It affirms, rather, the central fact that British communism was a distinct radicalism with roots outside Britain. National communist parties were influenced by their national environments. The national terrain required accommodation and tactical adaptation. Yet what is remarkable and primary is the fact that at the heart of the British empire men and women placed the cause and the policies of the USSR at the heart of their own lives and their own politics. How this happened, its causes and its consequences, remains a central issue for historians of the British labour movement.