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or Communist History with the History Left In

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The Trouble with Revisionism: or Communist History with the History Left In

Kevin Morgan

Whatever one makes of it, communism was one of the key political forces of the 20th century. At once a party, an international, a social movement and a system of government, to say nothing of a major pole of ideological and cultural attraction, the global extension of its influence helped define the "short" 20th century and was one of its characteristic expressions. The editors of the recent survey *Le siècle des communismes* characterize it in terms of diversity held together by a common project.[1] Even restricting ourselves to the period of the Comintern and Cominform (1919–56), and to oppositional communist parties in Europe and North America, striking variations in political effectiveness and social implantation are immediately apparent. Intersecting with different national cultures, which even in their purely legal aspects ranged from tolerance to terror, these can be grouped according to no single periodization or line of determination. Among the historiographical tools which this distinctively transnational phenomenon demands, those of the comparative historian promise particular insight and illumination.[2] As yet they have been only fitfully employed.

John Manley's comparison of the Canadian, British, and American communist parties is therefore especially to be welcomed.[3] Comparative studies even of two communist parties are rare. To range with assurance across three is

1. Bernard Pudal et al, "Introduction" in Michel Dreyfus *et al*., ed., *Le siècle des communismes* (Paris 2000), 9–15.

2. See Kevin Morgan, "Labour with knobs on? The recent historiography of the British Communist Party," *Mitteilungsblatt des Instituts für soziale Bewegungen*, 27 (2002), 69–84.

3. John Manley, "Moscow Rules? 'Red' Unionism and 'Class Against Class' in Britain, Canada and the United States, 1928–1935," *Labour/Le Travail*, 56 (2005), 9–49.

Kevin Morgan, "The Trouble with Revisionism: or Communist History with the History Left In," *Labour/Le Travail,* 63 (Spring 2009), 131–155.

an achievement commanding respect. Distancing himself from more polemical exchanges, Manley's measured treatment has the virtue of encouraging reflection on substantive issues. In this spirit, I want in this article to take up one of the central premises of his argument, namely the conceptualization of Comintern historiography in terms of a debate between "traditionalists" and "revisionists."[4] My argument here is that this traditionalist-revisionist dichotomy, even when sensitively presented, tends to reduce complex issues to a single historiographical cleavage defined by communist parties' relations with Moscow. Scholarship irreducible to this set of arguments may be oversimplified or misrepresented. Disproportionate attention is accorded issues that in reality are largely settled. Trivial differences are exaggerated, energies consumed that might better be channelled elsewhere, and conclusions offered adding little to what is already well established. Even sophisticated and mostly convincing narratives, like Manley's, come packaged with generalizations suggestive of the impasse in which this tradition of scholarship has become mired.

The alternative view presented here is from a British perspective, which is also a European perspective. I want to propose that the simple construction of orthodoxy and counter-orthodoxy constrains enquiry and may even mislead where the issues defining these categories are inadequately established. In rather casually employing these categories, Manley, in my view, neither accurately summarizes existing scholarship on British communism, nor sets out fruitful lines of future research. The high quality of his own research deserves better. Manley is kind enough to describe my own PhD, published in 1989, as the first important example of the revisionist approach in Britain. Other historians certainly have a better claim to such a title. Nevertheless, I want to take advantage of this characterization to show the trouble with revisionism from the standpoint of a putative revisionist, referring back to my original account as a sort of measure of what the challenge to an older scholarship actually represented.

Communist Studies and "Revisionism"

"Revisionism" as outlined by Manley is an international historiographical tendency that flourished earliest and most influentially in the USA. Its precondition was a clearly defined orthodoxy, dominant from the 1950s, emphasising the political subservience of communist parties to the Comintern. The sources of revisionism, conversely, were the "broadly radical perspectives of the 'new social history,'" and its apotheosis, apparently a book little noticed in Britain, Michael Denning's *The Cultural Front*. Manley confidently ascribes

4. On this see also the validation of historiographical "conservatism" by John McIlroy and Alan Campbell: "'Nina Ponomareva's Hats': The New Revisionism, the Communist International and the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1920–1930," *Labour/Le Travail*, 49 (Spring 2002), 186 and 147–87 *passim*.

a substantial segment of the literature on British and North American communism to one or other of these schools.[5]

The use of such categories echoes, and has sometimes been linked with, their employment with somewhat greater elaboration in the cognate field of Soviet studies. The comparison, moreover, offers insight into the context and significance of such terms. The Soviet historians' debate is usually traced to Sheila Fitzpatrick's 1986 article, "New perspectives on Stalinism," which, despite disclaimers, was widely interpreted as a "New Cohort manifesto."[6] Against an academic backdrop of "Sovietology," it announced the arrival of historians in a field reputedly dominated by political scientists, and signalled to the wider historical community that the field of Soviet history was now open to serious enquiry.[7] At the same time, Fitzpatrick's was more specifically a manifesto for the social historian, and it is this that suggested parallels with an emerging social historiography of western communist parties. In the view of Geoff Eley, commenting in similar terms on both Soviet and Comintern historiographies, it posed the danger of social history at the expense of politics: communist history, as Eley put it, with the communism left out.[8]

How far there really existed a new cohort or revisionist school was debatable. Fitzpatrick's article outlined three alternative possible claims of the social historian regarding the Stalinist political system: that its control over society was less absolute than "totalitarians" had traditionally understood; that it responded to pressures and grievances on the part of "definite social constituencies," and that its policies were actually the produce of "initiative from below" on the part of these constituencies.[9] In Comintern terms, these alternatives could be translated respectively into suggestions of the limited reach of Comintern command structures, of the responsiveness of the Comintern to pressures and grievances from national sections, and the view that Comintern policies were actually initiated "from below," or independently, by national sections. These are by no means identical claims. Not only is it possible to hold to some version of the first of them while rejecting the third of them; in practice, almost every serious historian seems to adopt some variant of this position. This may perhaps be described as "post-revisionist"; it can hardly be regarded as undifferentiated revisionism.[10] When Fitzpatrick implicitly conflated these positions, putative cohort members virtually queued up to clarify

5. Manley, "Moscow Rules?" 10–12.

6. Sheila Fitzpatrick, "New perspectives on Stalinism," *Russian Review*, 45, 4 (1986), 357–73.

7. Fitzpatrick, "New perspectives," 358.

8. Geoff Eley, "History with the politics left out – again?" *Russian Review*, 45, 4 (1986), 385–94; Eley, "International communism in the heyday of Stalin," *New Left Review*, 157 (1986).

9. Fitzpatrick, "New perspectives," 368.

10. See for example Norman LaPorte, *The German Communist Party in Saxony, 1924–1933* (Bern 2003), ch. 1 and *passim*.

their own rather different positions. Several repudiated the contraposition of social and political history. Some distinguished the centrality of state-society relations for Soviet historians from the "new" social history of other countries. Others described their work, not as the repudiation of high politics, but as a departure from top-down exclusivity to engage with both politics and society beyond the Kremlin.[11]

"Revisionism" was therefore a response to a specific historiographical context. Noting how Fitzpatrick's dispersed international cohort had come to adopt similar positions independently, Gábor Rittersporn ascribed this to the application in a field hitherto closed to such research of "commonly used methods of historical research" and "ordinary historical methodology."[12] The choice of such methods was less self-evident than this implied. Theodore Draper, for example, recalled in strikingly similar terms his own earlier ambitions in producing what have since become landmarks of American "traditionalist" historiography. So in a way did Henry Pelling in Britain.[13] Twenty years on, the application of what Rittersporn thought of as ordinary historical methodology has become relentlessly problematized. A schema of orthodoxy and counter-orthodoxy consequently seems less compelling than what one practitioner describes as "paradigmatic uncertainty," a plurality of approaches and the replacement of "simplicity and binary thinking" by complexity and nuance.[14] "Revisionism," if for the moment we borrow the term, meant the arrival in Soviet studies of historical disciplines that in the 1980s were most vigorously expressed in the new social history. To that extent the two agendas coincided, but the context and the period were specific.

One problem with the idea of revisionism was thus the confusion of genre, method, and argument. Even the claim of a "new" social history, or "history from below," does not take us very far. It must at least mean recognising the intrinsic interest and significance of grassroots experiences overlooked in much traditional historiography. It does not, however, have to imply a philosophy of

11. William Chase, "Social history and revisionism of the Stalin era," *Russian Studies*, 46, 4 (1987), 382–5; Roberta Manning, "State and society in Stalinist Russia," *Russian Review*, 46, 4 (1987), 407–11.

12. Gábor Tamás Rittersporn, "History, commemoration and hectoring rhetoric," *Russian Review*, 46, 4 (1987), 418–23. This was also the case made by Michael E. Brown for the "new historians" of American communism: "the new historians see themselves primarily as attempting to bring the history of Communism in line with *history*." See Michael E. Brown, "Introduction: the history of the history of US communism" in Brown *et al*., eds., *New Studies in the Politics and Culture of US Communism* (New York 1993), 17.

13. Theodore Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia. The formative period* (New York 1986), xv; Henry Pelling, *The British Communist Party. A historical profile* (London 1975), 191.

14. Lynn Viola, "The Cold War in American Soviet historiography and the end of the Soviet Union," *Russian Studies* 61 (2002), 33–4; see also Studer, "Totalitarisme et stalinisme," in Dreyfus, *Le siècle des communismes*, 39.

history in which all lines of determination flow from the bottom up. An interest in the experience of the trenches does not mean regarding these as the "causes" of World War I. Nor need (or should) it preclude an interest in what these causes were. A bottom-up view of the Soviet terror may mean stressing the role played by tensions building up from the grassroots or the periphery. This is not, however, identical with history from below, whose interest in everyday life, conversely, must certainly include the everyday life of the terror as systematic oppression from above. The professed revisionist J. Arch Getty, in what another Soviet specialist, Stephen Kotkin, has seen as a self-criticism, actually combined a reaffirmation of method and genre with a retraction of some of the arguments which he based upon them.[15] It is little wonder that historians increasingly prefer less confusing signifiers – David Priestland, for example, proposes "intentionalists" and "structuralists" – while almost universally recognising that the debate between them has lost much of its original rationale.[16]

It is difficult to be sure how Manley's usages fit in with this. The revisionist debate provides his theoretical framework, and specifically in relation to the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) he identifies and to some extent takes issue with a group of British historians allegedly "strongly influenced by American revisionism."[17] As already indicated, my own *Against Fascism and War* figures prominently among the writings he mentions. Nevertheless, I must record with embarrassment that the only "revisionist" account of US communism with which I was familiar as I wrote it was Isserman's *Which Side Were You On?*, which I discovered at an advanced stage of writing up. The main acknowledged influence on my understanding of international communism was, rather, Fernando Claudin, whom Manley confusingly categorizes as a "traditionalist."[18] Andrew Thorpe, also classified by Manley as a revisionist, actually describes the localized perspectives of the "new" labour historians as "profoundly unsatisfactory."[19] It may be that Thorpe's work is more "revisionist" in respect of argument, and my own more revisionist in respect of method.

15. Stephen Kotkin, "The State – Is It Us? Memoirs, Archives and Kremlinologists," *Russian Review* 61 (2002), 49 n. 49; also J. Arch Getty and Oleg V. Naumov, *The Road to Terror: Stalin and the Self-destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932–1939* (New Haven 1999).

16. David Priestland, *Stalinism and the Politics of Mobilization. Ideas, Power and Terror in Inter-War Russia* (Oxford 2007), 3. As Priestland puts it: "Historians have made greater efforts to reconcile intention and structure, and seem to be converging in their views of Stalin's motivations."

17. Manley, "Moscow Rules?" 12.

18. See, for example, Kevin Morgan, *Against Fascism and War: Ruptures and Continuities in British Communist Politics 1935–1941* (Manchester 1989), 303. To this day I am unfamiliar with most of the accounts Manley cites, while recognizing the high scholarly importance of the historians with whom I am familiar, such as Mark Naison and Edward P. Johanningsmeier.

19. Andrew Thorpe, *The British Communist Party and Moscow 1920–1943* (Manchester 2000), 3–5.

If so, this merely underlines the term's inadequacy as a generic signifier.[20] Of the historians Manley mentions, only Nina Fishman has explicitly identified herself with a "revisionist" school of historians, specifically mentioning Fitzpatrick, and we shall see that even Fishman's revisionism was just as much directed at an orthodox communist narrative that Manley overlooks.[21] The relevance of revisionism to scholarship on the CPGB is altogether less straightforward than he appears to realize.

Fog Over the Channel

In part, this is an issue to do with Manley's strongly Anglo-American perspective. One of Eley's concerns with Fitzpatrick's announcement of a new historical cohort was its disregard of existing traditions of scholarship beyond the USA, in this case specifically in Britain.[22] In assimilating British scholarship to an extended Anglo-American worldview, Manley overlooks both the specificities of the British literature and the opening it provides onto a far more extensive literature on the Comintern's European heartlands.[23] This vast and wide-ranging literature includes specialist journals like *Communisme* and the *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusfirschung* and colloquia held in recent years in Moscow, Dijon, Helsinki, Brussels, Linz, Exeter, Mannheim, Paris and Manchester.[24] At these last two there was a significant North American

20. McIlroy and Campbell, in an earlier contribution, formally recognize this distinction while linking them by a catch-all "revisionist" rubric. Hence, for example, they claim of my own work that "the fundamental, if difficult question … is evaded" as to "which was *primary* in the [British] party's policies, the national or the Russian" ("'Nina Ponomareva's Hats,'" 150). But the introduction to the work they are discussing states that the "decisive influence" on the official party line was "the stated policy of the Comintern, whose decisions were binding on the British Party, even though it enjoyed a substantial degree of autonomy in running its day-to-day affairs by the late 1930s" (Morgan, *Against Fascism and War*, 13). Predating access to the archives, the statement has since been confirmed by them.

21. Nina Fishman, *The British Communist Party and the Trade Unions, 1933–45* (Aldershot 1995), 20 n. 18.

22. Eley, "History with the politics left out – again?" 390–1.

23. For the CPUSA, conversely, one imagines that a pan-American context may have been more important than a "British and North American" one. Manley's is perhaps a distinctly Canadian perspective, caught culturally, politically, demographically, and linguistically between the United States and Britain. Referring to the literature "in both Europe and North America," but citing only works in English, McIlroy and Campbell also described the American literature as the "most developed" ("'Nina Ponomareva's Hats,'" 147).

24. Published collections include Mikhail Narinsky and Jürgen Rojahn, eds., *Centre and Periphery: the history of the Comintern in the light of new documents* (Amsterdam 1996); Serge Wolikow, ed., *Une histoire en révolution? De bon usage des archives, de Moscou et d'ailleurs* (Dijon 1996); Pascal Delwit and José Gotovitch, eds., *La peur du rouge* (Brussels, 1996); Tauno Saarela and Kimmo Rentola, eds., *Communism: national and international* (Helsinki 1998); Andrew Thorpe and Tim Rees, eds., *International Communism and the Communist*

participation; proceedings on the whole, however, make little specific reference to the North American literature. Historians like Kevin McDermott and Brigitte Studer have discussed the implications for Comintern specialists of revisionist views of *Soviet* history.[25] Indeed, *Le siècle des communismes* represented a sort of coalition of francophone scholars with North American specialists on Soviet history – but not, again, on any other aspect of communism.[26] Notwithstanding the excellent qualities of the best of this work, literature on marginal anglophone parties, unsurprisingly, has not usually provided a more general point of reference.

Within this transnational discourse, and helping to constitute it, differing political and intellectual traditions continue to shape the literature in formative ways. In France, strong prosopographical and anthropological traditions within the sociological and political science communities link with particular interests in memory and identity, and a recent culturalist turn can be detected in both Soviet and Comintern historiographies.[27] In Germany, a decisive influence has been the political science literature on the party as institution, and specifically on the totalitarian party. The North American literature, in this wider perspective, bears the distinctive hallmarks of a particularly fertile labour history tradition combined with the persistence of Cold War *mentalités* in sometimes extremely conservative variants.

The British historiography shares the first of these characteristics but not the second, suggesting interesting comparisons with a British-based Soviet historiography, also said to have steered clear of Cold War paradigms.[28]

International 1918–1943 (Manchester 1998); Serge Wolikow and Annie Bleton-Ruget, eds., *Antifascisme et nation. Les gauches européennes au temps du Front populaire* (Dijon 1998); Brigitte Studer, Berthold Unfried and Irène Hermann, eds., *Parler de Soi sous Staline. La construction identitaire dans le communisme des années trente* (Paris 2000); Jean Vigreux and Serge Wolikow, eds., *Cultures communistes au xxe siècle. Entre guerre et modernité* (Paris 2003); Kevin Morgan, Gidon Cohen, and Andrew Flinn, eds., *Agents of the Revolution* (Berne 2005). Mention should also be made of the new English-language journal *Twentieth Century Communism*, to be launched in May 2009.

25. For example, McDermott warns that, whatever arguments might be presented for a bottom-up dynamic in the Soviet terror, its application to the decimation of the Comintern apparatus lacks plausibility; see McDermott, "Recent literature on the Comintern: problems of interpretation" in Narinsky and Rojahn, *Centre and Periphery*, 28–9; also Brigitte Studer, *Un parti sous influence. Le parti communiste suisse, une section du Komintern 1931 à 1939* (Lausanne 1994), 10.

26. Contributors based in North America are Donald Filtzer, Wendy Goldman, Peter Holquist, Lewis Sigelbaum and Lynne Viola. One may equally note that in *Parler de soi sous Staline*, Sheila Fitzpatrick is among the contributors on Soviet themes, while chapters on the Comintern are the work of European historians.

27. In addition to earlier references, see Brigitte Studer and Heiko Haumann, eds., *Stalinistische Subjekte. Individuum und System in der Sowjetunion und der Komintern 1929–1953* (Zurich 2006).

28. Viola, "Cold War," 25 n. 1, notes that "the very rich UK historiography fell outside (or

Instead of the simple North American influence assumed by Manley, it may make more sense to think of the common historiographical influences shaping both literatures. Isserman, for example, has specifically cited the inspiration of E.P. Thompson's *Making of the English Working Class*.[29] For better or for worse, it is in the application to communism of broader insights and conventions deriving from labour history that the roots of much "revisionism" lie. As an undergraduate in the early 1980s, knowing nothing of revisionism or any other communist literature, I thus took issue with Pelling almost spontaneously on the basis of labour history programmes in which communism hardly figured.[30] For a young person simultaneously discovering historians like Thompson, Pelling's whole explanatory framework seemed impoverished, unconvincing and, be it frankly admitted, "conservative."

If anything, he was too easy a target. As Draper rightly observed, "in order for there to be a new history, there must be an old history to be fought and vanquished."[31] Though Pelling's less guarded observations provided this in almost too conveniently straw-like a form, there was little that was halfway challenging worth vanquishing, doubtless because of the relative weakness of British anti-communism. In America as national anathema, in Germany as state cleavage, in France as the majority party of the left, communism elsewhere gave rise to "traditionalist" classics, often of ex-communist authorship. Among them were Draper's work in the USA, Hermann Weber's in Germany and Annie Kriegel's in France. In the USA, and latterly in Germany, these accounts provided a foil for revisionism, exactly as Draper suggested.[32] Each of them has had their critics, though none, as far as I am aware, on grounds of inadequate scholarship. It would be difficult, however, to identify a British equivalent: unless it were Walter Kendall's account, concluding with the CPGB's

leaped outside or ignored) Cold War paradigms, partly for reasons of thematic emphasis."

29. Maurice Isserman, "Open Archives and Open Minds: 'Traditionalists' versus 'Revisionists' after Venona", *American Communist History*, 4, 2 (2005), 217.

30. I am amused to observe that in contesting Pelling's explanation of communist recruitment during the Second World War, I took issue with his "monocausal" emphasis on Soviet factors, while acknowledging their "crucial importance," and stressed the significance of both local factors in recruitment and the general wartime shift to the left.

31. Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 447.

32. The French case was rather different due to the existence of an influential communist party with a strong sense of its own history. Even in Germany, it is interesting that a full-blown revisionist-style debate emerged only after the collapse of the GDR; for details, see Norman LaPorte, Kevin Morgan, and Matthew Worley, "Introduction" in *Bolshevism, Stalinism and the Comintern: Perspectives on Stalinization* (Basingstoke 2008).

foundation.[33] Bryan Palmer is right in this respect, that the British context is specific.[34]

What, therefore, was revisionism meant to revise? In 1989 I identified three British communist histories. The most prolific, though hardly registering with Manley, was an orthodox communist narrative that evidently proved more durable than in the USA. Also prolific was a Trotskyist literature targeting the labour history "industry" and challenging the CPGB's *histoire sainte* with an *histoire sainte hérétique*.[35] The third history, equating to Manley's orthodoxy, was more or less confined to Pelling. Indeed, the fragility of Manley's construction is evident in his linking of Pelling's name with those of Eric Hobsbawm, Willie Thompson, and Roderick Martin. Hobsbawm and Thompson, of course, were critical Marxists within the CPGB, Thompson playing a leading role in the party's history group. Martin was author of a history of the National Minority Movement (NMM) whose recognition of tensions within the communist movement was recognized as prefiguring the more nuanced approach of "revisionism."[36] Unmentioned by Manley, Leslie Macfarlane's was the main "traditional" monograph in the field, covering the CPGB's early years and dissociating itself from Pelling, exactly as it has received high praise from "revisionists" like Fishman and Matthew Worley.[37] Whether by cohort formation or intellectual positioning, the literature simply will not fit into Manley's bipolar model.

There was consequently *no* considerable academic treatment of the post-Stalinization of the CPGB from an "orthodox" perspective: the only detailed studies were of Trotskyist or official communist provenance. For "new cohort" historians of the USSR, one rationale was a rebalancing one.[38] In the CPGB's case, such rebalancing as was required was of a very different character. The conservative traditionalists John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr have identified studies of specific localities or areas of communist activity as a hallmark

33. Walter Kendall, *The Revolutionary Movement in Britain 1900–21* (London 1969). Raymond Challinor, *The Origins of British Bolshevism* (London 1977) can be linked with Kendall in its focus on the CPGB's pre-history.

34. Bryan Palmer, "Who are these guys? Politics, passions, peculiarities and polemics in the historiography of British communism," *American Communist History*, 4, 2 (1995), 188.

35. See, for example, Sam Bornstein and Al Richardson, *Two Steps Back: Communists and the Wider Labour Movement 1935–1945* (Ilford 2007); also Claude Pennetier and Bernard Pudal, "Du parti bolchevik au parti stalinien" in Dreyfus *et al.*, *Le siècle des communismes*, 333–5.

36. Morgan, *Against Fascism and War*, 9–10.

37. L.J. Macfarlane, *The British Communist Party. Its origin and development until 1929* (London 1966), 11 and *passim*; see also Matthew Worley, *Class Against Class: the Communist Party in Britain Between the Wars* (London 2002), 14; Fishman, *British Communist Party*, 2.

38. Roberta T. Manning, "State and society in Stalinist Russia," *Russian Review*, 46, 4 (1987), 410.

of revisionism.[39] If this indeed was revisionism, then such a literature did already exist in Britain, stimulated by the same Thompsonian labour history tradition. However, none of these earlier works, including those of Martin, Croucher and Stuart Macintyre, took as its central focus the communist party itself.[40] The stated object of my own perceived revisionism was to incorporate this perspective into a narrative adopting this communist party focus, hence combining the missing "traditionalist" party narrative with case studies and methodological insights deriving from the "new" social history. Rather than leave the communism out, this meant putting the communism back into this history, through what I called "the Party 'line' in the narrow sense and … its relationship to the fundamental and strategic objectives of the Communist Party."[41] The resulting account was not without its flaws, not least, of course, because communist archives in both London and Moscow were not then generally accessible. Nevertheless, as Alan Campbell argued at the time, it did add "significantly to our knowledge of the influences of international politics" on the CPGB.[42]

Unknown to me, "new cohort" historians of Soviet Russia were at that time dismissing Fitzpatrick's counterposition of the "revolution from above" with an "imaginary hypothesis of a 'revolution from below.'"[43] Stuart Macintyre, whose pioneering "revisionist" writings on British communism long predated my own, was in a different context characterising both "high politics" and "history from below" as "treacherous" spatial metaphors.[44] In my own attempted synthesis of these approaches, I was therefore crudely expressing ideas that were then very much in the air.[45] Nevertheless, if this approach can now be described as post-revisionist, then the delayed development of a serious British communist historiography meant that it entered its post-revisionist phase without really having passed through a revisionist one. Its "revisionism," if that is the word, was principally directed at the competing *histoires saintes*, which were all that were then being produced.

This is why Manley's conclusions read somewhat wearily. In 2005 he argues, apparently as a counter to revisionism, that "what really mattered was the power to make and break policy in the interests of Socialism in One Country … as clear-sighted Communists had recognized since 1929, the leaders of

39. John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr, "The historiography of American communism: an unsettled field," *Labour History Review*, 68, 1 (2003), 66.

40. Morgan, *Against Fascism and War*, 9–10.

41. Morgan, *Against Fascism and War*, 10.

42. Campbell in *Scottish Labour History Society Journal* (1990), 93–7.

43. Rittersporn, **"History, commemoration and hectoring rhetoric," 420.**

44. Stuart Macintyre, *The Oxford History of Australia. Volume 4: 1901–1942. The Succeeding Age* (Melbourne 1986), x.

45. Morgan, *Against Fascism and War*, 10.

that country held all meaningful power."[46] In 1989 I wrote, apparently as an exponent of this revisionism, that "the broad lines of Communist policy were determined not by a rational appraisal of what was possible in British conditions but by the erratic directives of the distant heads of world Communism who could not have cared less about the fate of the British working class, nor of the British Communist Party …"[47] Revisionism, if it meant anything, meant that this was not the end of the story. Even so, Manley's findings seem a poor return on twenty years of scholarship, the opening up of archives, and his own skilful adoption of a comparative framework.

Manley also invokes a revisionist literature on the Third Period "emphasis[ing] the 'indigenous' sources of the sectarian 'New Line', and question[ing] whether its impact was disastrous."[48] He does acknowledge that "many revisionist historians accept the traditional view" of the period's Soviet origins, which again betrays the tortuousness and fragility of these categories. Excluded from such qualifications, my biography of CPGB general secretary Harry Pollitt is nevertheless cited with those challenging the "traditionalist" view that this was "when Stalinism triumphed in the International and Moscow's intrusions politically disabled the working-class movement."[49] Here is the relevant section of my text:

> It was only at the end of the 1920s that the Comintern was reduced by Stalin to its final state of undifferentiated subservience … [as] Stalin … pursued his vendetta against the right through every one of its national sections. If superficially this marked a shift to the left, the real significance of this last wave of exclusions and preferments was to annul all such factions and distinctions within Communist politics. Instead, there was installed at the head of each purified Central Committee some pliant figure for whom neither left nor right existed except in so far as Stalin defined them. … Britain was no exception, and Pollitt's elevation to the Party leadership in the summer of 1929 should thus be seen as but the native expression of a much broader phenomenon: the emergence of what we might call the Stalin generation of Communist Party leaders.[50]

Traditional histories need radical alternatives to caricature and anathematize, or risk expiring out of sheer banality. Manley's elastic definition of revisionism, if one understands it correctly, seems to lump together *any* recognition in *any* area of *any* degree of autonomy, contestedness, or non-dependency, in *any* period, at least from the late 1920s. Palmer, indeed, has criticized precisely such

46. Manley, "Moscow Rules?" 49.

47. I also wrote that the CPGB's "most unequivocal commitment" was to "an immaculate conception of the Soviet Union;' that the defence of the USSR was the "basic determinant of Communist policy;" that it retained the "unshakeable belief that loyalty to the interests of the Soviet Union, as defined by the Soviet leadership, remained the first duty of the class-conscious worker;" Morgan, *Against Fascism and War*, 51, 65–6, 101, 309.

48. Manley, "Moscow Rules?" 11.

49. Manley, "Moscow Rules?" 10.

50. Morgan, *Harry Pollitt*, 60–1.

a notion of "relative autonomy," though without much precision, for neither he nor anybody else now seriously defends the notion of absolute control that must logically be exposed to it.[51]

If simple models of autonomy and control are redundant, then no simple spectrum of opinion exists between them, depending on the weakness or intensity of historians' revisionism. John Newsinger has proposed precisely this more nuanced treatment of "maximalists" and "minimalists"; Manley's description of some of his own work as "mildly revisionist" appears to rest on the same idea.[52] Even so, it is inadequate. Many questions, such as gender relations, cannot possibly be reduced to such a schema. Even confining ourselves to centre-periphery relations, any serious account will include differentiated and even incongruous elements, rather than a facile blend, or worse still, essentialism. Distinctions of context, period, personality, nationality, are all likely to figure. Revisionists will be found accepting traditionalist views, and vice versa. Indeed the superficiality of the whole presentation can been seen in the way in which Manley himself has presented strikingly similar versions of his paper but with introduction and conclusion in each case of a different character.[53] If there was anything resembling a "new cohort" production in Britain, it was the *Opening the Books* collection that appeared in 1995 as an alternative to "constricting definitions of the political" and "simply plotting the vagaries of the party line." Held together, if at all, by method and genre, the idea of a collective programme was nevertheless specifically disavowed, along with any shared depreciation of the CPGB's Soviet connections.[54]

Precisely in view of the importance of Manley's triple narrative, I therefore want to propose a number of modifications and extensions to the agenda framing his research. I want to suggest that his conclusions are overstated even in respect of the evidence he himself presents; I want to question the naïve view of structuring power relations to which, albeit inconsistently, he seems to subscribe; and I want to highlight the inadequacy of using the Third Period alone to demonstrate any generalized model either of autonomy or control, particularly given the oxymoronic notion of revisionists holding traditionalist views. Manley's work opens up important lines of enquiry only to return to exhausted seams. As Lynne Viola has noted in a wider context, obsessions with competing paradigms are not only exclusionary in their effects but constrain original thinking.[55]

51. Palmer, "Who are these guys?" 187–8.

52. John Newsinger, "Recent controversies in the history of British communism," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 41 (2006), 557–572.

53. See Manley, "Moscow Rules? Red Unionism in Britain and North America, 1927–1936." Paper presented to the Social Science History Association, Pittsburgh, October 2000.

54. Kevin Morgan, "Introduction" in Geoff Andrews et al, eds., *Opening the Books. Essays on the social and cultural history of British communism* (London 1995), 1–3.

55. Viola, "Cold War in American Soviet Historiography," 34.

Red Unions in Britain

Manley cites James Barrett in describing "red" or breakaway unions as an acid test of third-period Stalinism.[56] Of the two such unions formed in Britain, he concentrates on the United Mineworkers of Scotland (UMS), which functioned for some six years in one of the few areas in which communists had a credible industrial presence. Here revisionist counter-argument dwelt on the strength of local feeling that also lay behind the union's formation.[57] This in turn was acknowledged by anti-revisionists, who argued only that the Comintern should not have "licensed and amplified" ultra-leftism, not that it created it.[58] This is the perfect illustration of a supposed polarization of views where nobody seriously contests the significance of either bottom-up and top-down factors. If the revolutionary union appeared in Scotland, not in Wales, not even the most determined "traditionalist" explains this by primary reference to Moscow. If it survived for half a decade, not even the most determined "revisionist" denies that Moscow's support was a necessary precondition.[59]

But as Manley points out, there was a third possible revolutionary union: not just as a counter-factual so impracticable that it did not even get to be formulated; nor even as a strategic objective, like a national red miners' union; but as an express directive and instruction of the Comintern itself. This was the revolutionary seamen's union. Following the decision to launch such a union at the Sixth Comintern Congress in 1928, George Hardy, who was then working for the Profintern, returned to Britain with a Comintern mandate and the evident belief that "the Party had no other choice than to form a new Union in which I thought I was going to hold an importance [sic] position."[60] On his arrival he discovered that letters of his embodying Profintern directives had been binned by Pollitt without their contents being relayed to the Minority Movement executive. "I was told," he went on, "that 'any suggested organizational changes or instructions emanating from that end [the Profintern EC] will be resisted from here'…" He also described the refusal to form the new union as inseparable from the CPGB's "wrong policy" of union legalism. To his manifest disgust, Hardy was not restored to a position of authority within the NMM, and within two months returned to Moscow and the Profintern General Council.[61] Immediately on his departure, Pollitt secured the CPGB's

56. Manley, "Moscow Rules?" 13.

57. For example, Worley, *Class Against Class*, 161–7.

58. Alan Campbell and John McIlroy, "Miner heroes: three communist trade union leaders" in John McIlroy, Kevin Morgan, and Alan Campbell, eds., *Party People, Communist Lives. Explorations in biography* (London 2001), 163.

59. Worley, *Class Against Class*, pp. 162–7.

60. Hardy to CPGB Political Bureau 5 October 1928; Worley, *Class Against Class*, p. 123.

61. Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (Moscow) (hereafter RGASPI) f. 495 op. 100 d. 514 Hardy to CPGB Politburo 5 October 1928; f. 495 op. 100 d. 498 CPGB Politburo minutes 6

endorsement of recruitment to the new seamen's section of Bevin's Transport and General Workers' Union.[62]

Manley's account is fair if sparse; Pollitt's leadership, he says, "mattered."[63] This carefully weighted narrative, however, jars with a conclusion postulating "compliant leaderships prepared to accept every twist and turn of the line as the last word in Marxist theory."[64] How are such statements to be reconciled? Pressure for the seamen's union, after all, was not the affair of a moment. Towards the end of 1930, Hardy again returned to Britain "to finally create and ensure the development of a new fighting seamen's union." Complaining again of the CPGB's "deep reformism," he remained there barely three weeks.[65] Though the CPGB rejected an Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) proposal that he become NMM joint secretary, Hardy later functioned as head of the Seamen's Minority Movement (SMM) and chair of the Hamburg-based International of Seamen and Harbour Workers. By his own account he was a "convinced supporter of such a revolutionary seamen's union … ready to do everything necessary to accomplish this … in full conformity with the directions of the Red International of Labour/Labour Unions (RILU)."[66] When, finally, in 1932 he was levered out of the SMM, his catalogue of grievances once more targeted Pollitt's "entirely negative attitude" to new unions and the prevailing "right-opportunism … that reduces our Party trade union work to the narrow basis of trade union politics."[67]

What weight should these differences be given? A recurring problem in Comintern historiography is the failure to employ evaluative criteria consistently from one case to another. Doubtless a sort of ahistoricism is inherent in the denial of relative autonomy, where what are really explanatory variables must lead unerringly to the same unvarying result of unremitting domination by Moscow. Subventions from Moscow are ascribed a determining significance without any consideration of the possible impact of their absence, diminution

November 1928; f. 495 op. 100 d. 481 CPGB delegation, 6th Comintern congress, executive members' minutes, 1 August 1928.

62. Hardy to CPGB Politburo 5 October 1928; RGASPI f. 495 op. 100 d. 498 CPGB Politburo minutes, 6 and 13 November 1928; Worley, *Class Against Class*, pp.129–30; also Andrew Flinn and Kevin Morgan, entry on Hardy in Keith Gildart, David Howell, and Neville Kirk, eds., *Dictionary of Labour Biography. Volume XI* (Basingstoke 2003), 98–109.

63. Manley, "Moscow Rules?" 31.

64. Manley, "Moscow Rules?" 49.

65. RGASPI f. 495 op. 100 d. 68, "Statement of the impressions of Comrade [George] Hardy regarding the situation within the CPGB", 25 November 1930.

66. RILU *Magazine*, February 1932, 68–71.

67. RGASPI f. 495 op.100 d. 836 Hardy to CPGB Political Bureau 8 July 1932; f. 5347 op. 52 d. 98–109 Hardy, statement on his removal as SMM secretary, 25 September 1932.

or withdrawal.[68] Great heat is generated by examining how Moscow-trained cadres were not only systematically advanced to leadership positions, but also in most cases prematurely removed from them.[69] Manley identifies the formation and disbandment of red unions as a significant sign of subordination to Moscow and hence of "Stalinism." In Pelling's account, the proposed seamen's union is even described as an immediate vehicle of Soviet strategic interests.[70] If successful resistance to its formation did not represent "significant autonomy or initiative from below," then what does Manley think might have done?[71] Even if one includes the localized United Clothing Workers Union, formed while Pollitt was out of Britain, and excludes all the possible unions that did not even reach the stage of a practicable proposition, we are still left with a failure rate of one in three according to the specific measure which Manley himself proposes.

There is another detail in his account worth taking up. Manley describes "the most prominent disbeliever" at the CPGB's rancorous Eleventh Congress in November 1929 as the South Wales miner Arthur Horner. In fact, a more outspoken contribution was made by Wal Hannington, national organizer of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement (NUWM). Operating from outside the trade unions, Hannington made a robust case for independent leadership and mounting political struggle, while at the same time offering a platform for "courageous working-class fighters" against the growing bureaucratization which was one feature of Stalinization. He was certainly regarded as a threat. A Stalinist panels commission, established at this congress for the first time, held a session of "very great length" in which central committee nominees were subjected to minute scrutiny "under the direct assistance and leadership of the representatives of the ECCI." This was the purge to which Manley refers, and both Horner's and Hannington's names were excluded. One delegate described it as "absolute political victimization." There was, however, a last reflex of party democracy when both names were moved individually from the floor of the congress. Horner obtained 25 votes to 56. Hannington, by contrast, obtained 52 votes to 30, and functioned thereafter as the one central committee member with a personal mandate.[72]

More important was his continuing leadership of the NUWM. This may not have been a union, red or otherwise, but it fell within the remit of the

68. See Kevin Morgan, *Labour Legends and Russian Gold. Bolshevism and the British Left part 1* (London, 2006), ch. 1 and *passim*.

69. See Manley's reference to this debate, "Moscow Rules?" 12. However, the issues raised in it are not especially relevant to the third-period context in which Manley cites them.

70. Pelling, *British Communist Party*, 69–71.

71. Manley, "Moscow Rules?" 49.

72. RGASPI f. 495 op. 100 d. 593, including contributions of William Rust (reporting for panels commission) and Dai Lloyd Davies; see also my entry on Hannington in Joyce M. Bellamy and John Saville, eds., *Dictionary of Labour Biography, Volume X* (Basingstoke 2000), 73–8.

Profintern and unemployed activities received much attention at the fifth RILU congress in 1930. As Pollitt conceded, the NUWM was also the CPGB's one "mass organization with a real paying membership."[73] It was also one substantially comprising industrial workers like Hannington himself, a toolmaker and member of the Amalgamated Engineering Union. Hannington's successes nevertheless earned him a barrage of criticism because of the "legalistic," trade-union type methods on which they were allegedly based. In June 1931 he was described as "a *real danger*" for the party and the following year removed from the central committee because of his "most stubborn and solid resistance" to Comintern policy.[74] His leadership of the NUWM was nevertheless seemingly unassailable, and in 1933 Pollitt was still complaining of inadequate leadership and fraction work at every level of the organization.[75]

A traditionalist reading surely requires that Hardy and the seamen's union prevail, and Hannington and Horner go under. Manley is forthright: "they could not actually commit any [deviations] and hope to remain active leading Communists."[76] A more historicized reading suggests not that the reverse must have been true, but that other forces than the Comintern's transmission belt were also at work. The depiction of compliant leaderships following Moscow's "every twist and turn" turns figures like Hannington into unpersons. On the issue of red unions, it disregards the evidence even of Manley's own, in other respects so informative, text.

The Easiness of Saying Things

Citing a London seamen's activist to illustrate eagerness to implement party directives, Manley nevertheless stresses the impossibility of generalising from such a case.[77] He is right: the peculiar futility of not a few centre-periphery exchanges owes much to the trading off of equally well-substantiated examples of direction and "mediation," without any real possibility of resolution. The real issue concerns the significance to be attributed to these mediations. Draper, for example, is cited by Manley as acknowledging such adaptations, while stressing that these were "no more than might be expected" of activists

73. RGASPI f. 495 op. 100 d. 754, Pollitt to Arnot, 23 January 1931.

74. RGASPI f. 495 op. 100 d. 739, Arnot to Pollitt, 19 June 1931; Labour History and Study Centre, Manchester (hereafter LHASC) microfilm, CPGB central committee minutes, 9 November 1932.

75. RGASPI f. 495 op. 100 d. 898, Pollitt, "Situation in the CPGB," 31 May 1933; see also Kevin Morgan, Gidon Cohen, and Andrew Flinn, *Communists in British Society 1920–1991* (London 2007), 137–9.

76. Manley, "Moscow Rules?" 38. The observation is a general one.

77. Manley, "Moscow Rules?" 36.

facing widely differing practical circumstances.[78] Similar arguments have also been advanced in Britain; they gloss over the fact that recognition of this "no more than might be expected" social dimension was precisely the point of "revisionism" and wholly attributable to it.[79] One may or may not be a post-revisionist; there is certainly no going back to pre-revisionism. Pelling's insistence on the CPGB's "all but complete" transformation into a "military apparatus of the USSR," or Kendall's description of communists as "mere puppets," are positions no serious historian now defends.[80]

These differences have often been conceptualized as the distinction between "social" and "political" approaches to communist history. Such an approach was implicit in the designation of the *Opening the Books* collection as providing "social and cultural approaches" to British history. On consideration, the distinction is too simplistic, and the majority of the collection's essays offer political approaches too. Given the politicising imperatives of the Comintern, the very notion of a social sphere beyond party discipline was at once immensely problematic and inherently political; the passive voice, "no more than might be expected," obscures the point that this was precisely what the Comintern did *not* expect and existed to overcome. "Hornerism" was not a political platform; it was the political construction by the apparatus of Horner's "no more than might be expected" attitude to futile strike action. Setting aside the social-political dichotomy, both formal and informal aspects of political authority and subordination need to be registered with scrupulous care.

The seamen's union again provides an example. In *Labour/Le Travail*, John McIlroy and Alan Campbell earlier took issue with the argument that no real effort was made to establish a new union: "in the face of insistent, if supple, demands the CPGB adopted precisely such a perspective."[81] The space between adopting perspectives and actually doing things, due to the Comintern's more circumscribed oversight of the latter, was sometimes considerable. It was also a space which effective communist work both exploited and depended upon. McIlroy and Campbell see the Comintern's role as servicing Soviet foreign policy. Pelling, in the specific instance of the seamen's union, invoked the Russians' strategic interest in blocking munitions shipments to Japan.[82] What conceivable use is a "perspective" in blocking munitions? McIlroy and

78. Manley, "Moscow Rules?" 38.

79. On this point see Kevin Morgan, "The historiography of the British communist party: further considerations and a reply to John McIlroy and Alan Campbell," *Mitteilungsblatt des Instituts für soziale Bewegungen*, 31 (2004), 243–55.

80. Pelling, *British Communist Party*, 104, 107; Kendall, *Revolutionary Movement*, 301.

81. McIlroy and Campbell, "'Nina Ponomareva's Hats'" 181.

82. Pelling, *British Communist Party*, 70.

Campbell date the adoption of this perspective from 1928 or 1929.[83] Here is Pollitt reaffirming it three years later:

> There are 2,000 members of the seamen's section of the Minority Movement in the whole of England. There are 146,000 seamen employed on British ships. … Now, we have these 2,000 members, 64 per cent of which are unemployed, and most of them have been unemployed over a long period. We have not got in one dock in England a single ships committee. We have not got in England a single section of the seamen where we have a basis for a new union at this stage. Our fight is not a fight against the perspective of a new union, but our fight is against instructions being sent by comrades who have carefully avoided facing the fact and who propose to organize a new union for the 1st of January [1932].

Pollitt adopted precisely the required perspective; but acting upon it would be "a crime against the whole of our work in England."[84]

Need historians register such distinctions? Recent public policy literature challenges simplistic distinctions between policy "formulation" and "implementation."[85] Manley, following Draper, upholds them: the international line, he says, was "invulnerable," though he does not really demonstrate who it is that ascribes it instead to "indigenous tactical initiatives." The real issue, until he does so, is the extent of its invulnerability in those arenas where communists actually exercised some influence. That this was sometimes problematic even at a national level is sometimes conclusively attested. Pollitt's binning of Profintern communications, and of a key Comintern telegram at the beginning of the war, is one example. Emmet O'Connor has similarly shown how Pollitt used his privileged access to communications in relation to the Irish communist party.[86] Such documented examples, however, are merely the surface traces of a hidden world of informal prerogatives that by their very nature were rarely minuted or embodied in resolutions – except where rooted out by the apparatus.[87] Not infrequently they are mentioned in oral sources, which traditionalist historians, of this as of other varieties, have consequently disparaged. It is not hard, however, to find corroborative references in internal party documents. Here are three from South Wales, beginning with a letter of the party functionary Idris Cox in January 1932:

> It is easy to say I must convince the comrades. The fact is that I get them to agree what to do, work it out concretely, and they accept it as the line to be put forward. But once they are in the Lodge meeting they either say not a word or do something different.[88]

83. McIlroy and Campbell, "'Nina Ponomareva's Hats'" 181.

84. RILU *Magazine*, February 1932, 69–70.

85. See for example Heather Hill, "Understanding implementation: street level bureaucrats' resources for reform," *Journal of Public Administration and Theory*, 13, 3 (2003).

86. Emmet O'Connor, *Reds and the Green. Ireland, Russia and the Communist Internationals 1919–43* (Dublin 2004), 201.

87. Hence, for example, it is only thanks to Hardy that we know what Pollitt did with Profintern communications, which one would not expect to find formally recorded.

88. RGASPI f. 495 op. 100 d. 836/1–2, extract from letter of Idris Cox, 28 January 1932.

Here is the same writer the following month, on the issue of workers' enquiries into pit accidents:

> In fact, it can be said that the biggest obstacle we have to getting a real workers' enquiry are the group members … [who] do not believe in this line. Out of loyalty they accept in words but try to find all the difficulties in applying it. … they are frightened of the opposition put up by the Lodge officials and Executive officials …[89]

Two years later, a report on South Wales refers to its "alarming weakness" in carrying through party campaigns against the "terrorist methods" of the British state:

> On all the important issues it is the absence of Party consciousness and clear understanding of the Party line which hampers the membership from seeing clearly the need for mobilising the workers.[90]

Doubtless there was a hierarchy of issues, or rather different hierarchies; and if effective activism remained compatible with Comintern discipline, it was because the hierarchies of Comintern officials and activists concerned with pit accidents could reflect different orders of priority. There were other ways of adopting perspectives than in the shape of formal resolutions.

In a Soviet context, Jean-Paul Depretto has rejected the arguments of both revisionists and counter-revisionists as to whether workers were "for" or "against" Stalin's turn of the late 1920s. While reaffirming the absence or suppression of alternatives to the existing order, Depretto invokes Alf Ludtke's notion of *Eigensinn* to indicate a sort of recalcitrance that always stopped short of resistance.[91] David Priestland, on the other hand, notes that in a culture of party unity, Stalin's interest was to delegitimize institutional conflicts by ascribing them an ideological significance, while those who sought to limit or sidestep his authority had an interest in avoiding their politicization.[92] It is difficult to see how the tired old dichotomies do justice to such complexities. My own resistance to a concept like Fishman's "revolutionary pragmatism" is that it risks reducing these complexities to something like a platform.[93] There is no doubt, on the other hand, that something is also missing from Manley's model of relentless compliance. Pointing out that Horner was prepared to press a red union line on the Canadian party while resisting it in South Wales, Manley speaks of "surgical" excisions of independence and the exercise of self-

89. RGASPI f. 495 op. 100 d. 836/1–2, extract from letter of Idris Cox, 1 February 1932.

90. CPGB archives, Dutt papers, "South Wales report," May 1934.

91. Jean-Paul Depretto, "Opinion ouvrière et protestation sociale à Nijni-Novgorod (1928–1932)," in Studer and Heiko Haumann, eds., *Stalinistische Subjekte*, 129–30.

92. David Priestland, *Stalinism and the Politics of Mobilization. Ideas, power, and terror in inter-war Russia* (Oxford 2007), 296.

93. See Fishman, *British Communist Party*, ch. 2 and *passim*.

discipline.[94] That is hardly convincing. Acknowledgement of different political roles and functions would bring out much more clearly the existence both of compliance (from "above" or in "conception") and independence of judgement (from "below" or in "implementation") even in the same individual.

The Third Period and Beyond

Surgical metaphors, like surgical instruments, need handling with care. No serious observer contends that Horner was permanently damaged by Hornerism or that he learnt by these experiences to become "more prolix and more conformist."[95] The "third period" of Class Against Class saw the intensification of the Comintern's practices of top-down intrusion and direction. The period is for this reason far more abundantly documented in central archives than periods of vastly greater membership and influence. Of course, we want to use this material. Archives, however, are not a given, but constructed historically; they reflect particular relations of authority, the unequal resources by which the archival voice is produced, the fuller documentation – to make a very obvious point – of prolixity and not taciturnity. In Britain, at least, anti-revisionism has nevertheless been fixated by the disproportionate documentation of the periods, issues, rituals, and populations most closely bound up with Moscow. Even anti-revisionists have complained of the neglect of communism's formative years.[96] Palmer has also noted the relative neglect by these same anti-revisionists of the later "popular front" period on which "revisionist" historians often focused, and which do after all have the drawing power of a five, ten or twentyfold increase in communist membership and influence.[97] I have already shown that revisionists (so-called) do not assume that what holds good for one period holds good for another. Between "traditionalist" accounts focusing on the Third Period and "revisionist" ones invoking the popular front, to say nothing of sanitized accounts of these parties' origins, the rigorous articulation of both ruptures and continuities is more than usually necessary.

Here one confronts another paradox. Draper's objection to revisionists was that they failed to address communist history in its entirety, so that the party appeared like the elephant "that seems to be a different animal depending on where it is touched."[98] To posit an elephantine oneness across six and a half decades and several political generations encapsulates history with the history

94. Manley, "Moscow Rules?" 33.

95. Manley, "Moscow Rules?" 33.

96. Palmer, "Who are these guys?" 193–4; McIlroy, review of Laybourn & Murphy's *Under the Red Flag*, *Socialist History* 21 (2002), 111–15.

97. Manley, "Moscow Rules?" 11; Draper, *American Communism*, 452; Geoff Eley, "From cultures of militancy to the politics of culture: writing the history of British communism," *Science & Society*, 61, 1 (1996), 119–30.

98. Theodore Draper, *American Communism,* 481.

left out. But at the same time, indeed in the same breath, Draper also accused revisionists of deriving "dubious general rules" from "single cases."[99] This is not untypical of the levels of coherence achieved in such polemics. Doubtless there did exist revisionist tendencies to a static or unilinear model extending evenly across the Comintern period, inverting and yet corresponding to the old orthodoxy. On the other hand, it was "revisionism" as historicization that not only admitted the possibility of differentiation between different periods, but through neglected forms such as biography engaged with periods and allegiances extending both through and beyond the history of the communist party itself.[100] Manley peers at the part of the elephant that was the Third Period, but the conclusions he draws are framed in general terms. This bypasses substantive issues posed by even a modest extension of perspective, not least by some of Manley's own work. It also obscures the obvious point that Draper's alleged "new orthodoxy" actually represented the displacement of orthodoxy by heterodox and conflicting readings.

One can do worse than return to Horner. In "traditional" historiography, Horner has figured almost exclusively in the Third Period guise as the victim of Stalinist zealotry.[101] Manley himself, constrained by similar chronological parameters, evokes Horner's summoning to Moscow for "political re-education" and to Berlin, where the story ends, "to complete his penance."[102] Unlike the revisionist of Draper's imagination, drawing general rules from this single episode, I would be curious to know how far this "political re-education" was effective, and whether or not Horner's penitence proved long-lasting. Without discounting Moscow and Berlin, I should be interested in Horner's return to his own territory of the Rhondda and the psychological effects of his obtaining, in the immediate aftermath of victimhood, the CPGB's highest vote in the same year's general election. I would be interested in how Horner from the mid-1930s pursued his career as the CPGB's most effective trade union leader despite persistent criticisms of failings analogous to those surgically excised during the Hornerism episode. I should have wondered at his restoration to the central committee in 1937, and of the evidence thereafter, not of his prolixity, but of his repeated failure to turn up at all.[103] I should have noted how

99. *Loc. Cit.*

100. For notable examples, see Edward P. Johanningsmeier, *Forging American Communism: The life of William Z. Foster* (Princeton, N.J. 1994); Tânia Ünlüdag-Puschnerat, "A German communist: Clara Zetkin (1857–1933)" in Morgan *et al.*, *Agents of the Revolution*, 93–110.

101. For the most recent example, see John McIlroy and Alan Campbell, "The heresy of Arthur Horner," *Llafur*, 8, 2, 2001, 105–18, which focuses specifically on 1931.

102. Manley, "Moscow Rules?" pp. 22–3.

103. When Pollitt invited a discussion of central committee procedures in July 1938, Horner's observations were especially revealing: "I feel I am doing more service if I have a point to raise in seeing Pollitt, etc. than spending a whole day in this executive. I think we are intimidating many people here. I am not afraid to speak anywhere – but I am full of nervousness speak-

a leading associate of his at a pre-war party congress challenged Pollitt for his omission to any reference to Horner or the exercising "without parallel in the rest of the country … [of] the decisive leadership of a very powerful trade union."[104] I should have wondered whether these specific localities and industries were not, *pace* Haynes and Klehr, the places in which alone these marginal communist parties exercised significant power.

None of these questions will trouble anyone, like Draper, who thinks of the communist party as an elephant. Manley writes of what might have been had the communists' positive qualities been harnessed to "realistic political projects and not to tactics and slogans that widened divisions in the labour movement."[105] Similar reflections appear to have been the end result of Horner's "re-education"; tensions were not simply resolved, but were continually reproduced, in different forms. Unfortunately there is little sense in Manley's account of what wider significance we should ascribe to third-period evidence; and if his conclusions tend to the general, not the specific, the assumptions on which this is based are not spelt out.[106]

Alternative Questions

The combination of vital research and inadequate conclusions underlines the exhaustion of the centre-periphery dichotomy as Manley describes it. Already in 1987, Lynn Viola distanced herself from Fitzpatrick's creation of "somewhat artificial schools of historiography," and argued instead for revisionism as the general working practice alone conducive to the development of serious scholarship.[107] Such revisionism means continually re-evaluating, not simply discarding, older lines of research. Probably it is the mindset of our times to see complexity where our predecessors often saw things more simply. Perhaps, as the Cold War recedes, there are also more historians about who never really internalized its dichotomies. Perhaps too, as Fitzpatrick implied, it is the recognition of agency, contingency, flux, mutability – in a word, of complexity – that distinguishes historians' contribution to the human sciences and provides the rationale for the historicization of communism. Pelling himself was drawn to the subject by what he called the "complexity of human motivation

ing here. I have never rid myself of a sense of such superior knowledge as 8 or 9 men on this executive have. I have fallen in the habit that I can come and sit here and don't feel the slightest responsibility to do anything positive."

104. LHASC CP/Cent/Cong/4/5, CPGB fifteenth congress, September 1938.

105. Manley, "Moscow Rules?" 49.

106. It is noticeable in this respect that in writings addressing different or more extended periods, Manley has not felt the need to locate himself along a traditionalist-revisionist axis; see, for example, his excellent "'Audacity, audacity, still more audacity': Tim Buck, the Party and the People, 1932–1939," *Labour/Le Travail*, 49 (2002), 9–41.

107. Viola, "In search of young revisionists," *Russian Review*, 46, 4 (1987), 428–31.

and political behaviour." His confusion was in combining this insight with the notion, that could not be reconciled with it, of complete and relentless sacrifice to a foreign dictatorship.[108]

Manley hardly goes to those excesses. Nevertheless, his research suggests a number of alternative lines of enquiry that would better repay comparative examination than the more familiar agenda he is seemingly constrained by. For example, he mentions the absence in the Britain of the late 1930s of the sort of militant upsurge of semi-skilled and unskilled workers that swept across North America; and wonders how far this was due to the absence of a comparable commitment to industrial unionism and the unorganized.[109] This would certainly provide a more fruitful line of enquiry, going beyond the confines of the Third Period and of communism itself. He also observes in passing that the Canadian CP, as proportionately the largest of his three parties, was the one which had least geo-political significance and hence enjoyed and suffered the least attention from Moscow.[110] That is certainly an issue for comparative historians. Was the CPC's greater relative strength partly a matter of political space? Was its membership higher proportionate to other Canadian parties, or was party membership in Canada at generally higher levels – as for example in Weimar Germany or post-war Italy? Again, membership was a two-way process, both of adhesion and admission; the CPGB, for example, was seen as keeping out "very many good active workers (who in other lands as 100% communists are regarded)."[111] Was Canada one of these other lands? Were different attitudes to the unorganized reflected in different conceptions of the party itself and its membership requirements? If migration helps explain the uneven spread of party membership within Britain itself, can similar patterns be traced across national boundaries?[112] Given the importance of regional distinctions, transnational movements, and the salience in the USA and Canada of ethnic and linguistic identities, might other lines of comparison be as significant as those he draws at country level? Specifically in respect of the Moscow connection, might the inverse correlation noted by Manley itself have some explanatory value? It is a simple historical fact that when Moscow's interest in and resourcing of British communism was at its peak, the party's domestic influence and membership was at its nadir. The recovery of Chinese communism from Comintern emissaries and uprooted "internationalists" seems to

108. Pelling, *British Communist Party*, 191.

109. Manley, "Moscow Rules?" 48.

110. Manley, "Moscow Rules?" 15.

111. RGASPI f. 495 op. 25 d. 312, Baumatten report c. 1927; on this see Morgan *et al.*, *Communists in British Society*, ch. 2.

112. On this also see Morgan *et al.*, *Communists in British Society*, ch. 2.

point a similar moral.[113] Here, one might have thought, is an issue going to the heart of the Comintern's mode of functioning and political effectiveness.

Manley's "Anglo-Saxon" frame of reference would also merit further exploration. He posits close inter-relationships between the parties, which surely would repay more serious consideration. What was the role of the regional secretariats, and what were the effects of their transformation? What sort of authority did a figure like the Hungarian Pogány command?[114] How, if at all, did the roles of key figures alter in these transnational contexts? What, if any, were the differences in political culture between the three parties? Manley provides a tantalising suggestion that Stalinist self-criticism may have been less developed in Britain.[115] The Scottish communist Harry McShane reported, on the other hand, that the Stalin cult was developed earlier in Canada than in Britain, and it was probably also more intense.[116] For those preoccupied with communism's secret world(s), there is also the issue of why levels of communist involvement in espionage, at least on currently available evidence, appear to have varied so widely across the three countries. Perhaps one could also trace some of these issues through a figure like Hardy, whose career took in revolutionary activities in all three countries, and whose conflicts with the CPGB were ascribed precisely to his not having "grown up with the British movement."[117]

Manley has made important contributions to communist history, displaying consistently high standards of scholarship. It is precisely this that allows consideration of substantive issues without distraction or innuendo. But one is left in conclusion with a sense of unease regarding the cavalier use that he makes of the notion of revisionism. Discussing the work of Christopher Hill, Geoff Eley, in a somewhat broader context, has questioned the validity of revisionism as a "retreat from … grand interpretative schemes" in favour of the "irreducible complexity of historical process and events."[118] Mary Fulbrook makes a similar point in the same context: if Hill did not present the "whole

113. See for example Roland Lew, "Le communisme chinois" in Dreyfus, *Le siècle des communismes*, esp. 237–43.

114. For some initial thoughts, see Thomas Sakmyster, "A Hungarian in the Comintern: Jozsef Pogány/John Pepper" in Morgan *et al.*, *Agents of the Revolution*, 57–72.

115. Manley, "Moscow Rules?" 33–4.

116. See Harry McShane, *No Mean Fighter* (London 1978), 160–1. Manley's "'Audacity, audacity, still more audacity'" is instructive in this context, and it would be interesting to compare the cult of Tim Buck with those of Pollitt and Browder.

117. RGASPI f. 495 op. 100 d. 836, Hardy, statement of 25 August 1932.

118. Eley, "Introduction" in Geoff Eley and William Hunt, eds., *Reviving the English Revolution: Reflections and Elaborations on the Work of Christopher Hill* (London 1988), 2–3.

picture" on 17th century England, he did at least understand that there was a whole picture and that "no aspect can be reified as a 'topic' on its own."[119]

Superficially this seems akin to Draper's preference for the whole elephant over its constituent parts. In reality, though, it is the elephant itself that in traditional communist historiography is reified as a topic. One simply cannot imagine what Eley calls a "totalising history" of organizations with a membership density of one in five or ten thousand; certainly not by analogy with Hill's work.[120] To the extent that there can be such a history, it means precisely the tracing of its multiple interconnections, and not just the pursuit along the transmission belt of an "invulnerable" line and progamme. For just as there is no reification of isolated points, Fulbrook writes, "there is also no reification of a functioning 'system' as a whole;"[121] and certainly no such system as simply overrides ties, which were also systems, of locality, nationality, workplace, gender, generation, and political formation. One may think of this as a totalising history. I prefer to think of a plurality of perspectives from which alone one can make sense of so volatile and contradictory a phenomenon. The distinction in this context is immaterial. Manley's adoption of a binary approach does justice neither to these future challenges, nor to the achievements of existing scholarship – including, certainly not least, his own.

119. Fulbrook, "Chrisopher Hill and Historical Sociology" in Eley and Hunt, *Reviving the Englsh Revolution*, 48–9.

120. Eley, "Introduction," 1.

121. Fulbrook, *loc. cit.*