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# The Worlds of International Communism and Communist Internationalism: Lost but not (to be) Forgotten

(2008)

Source: 'Children of the Non-Revolution', *Voice of the Turtle*, 2002.  
[http://www.voiceoftheturtle.org/show\\_article.php?aid=280](http://www.voiceoftheturtle.org/show_article.php?aid=280).



An early Soviet banknote, carrying the internationalist slogan of the world Communist movement in multiple languages, including, apparently, Chinese and Arabic.

## **Introduction: survivors and beneficiaries**

Activists and leaders of the new global justice and solidarity movement (as I prefer to call it) know little or nothing about its pre-history. One part of this was the international Communist movement, something that the present generation is likely – if it knows or thinks about it at all – to romanticise or castigate. That internationalism, however, is too important to be simply approved or condemned. We all know the saying about those who forget history being condemned to repeat it. Whilst such repetition seems unlikely, the ambiguous history of Communist internationalism does leave traces within the new global emancipatory movements. And, indeed, one can find within and around the World Social Forum organisations, theories, ideologies and individuals with roots in that problematic past. I am one of them.

Now, it is a decade or so since I first read Phil Cohen's *Children of the Revolution: Communist Childhood in Cold War Britain* (1997) and as many since I reviewed it. I then re-read it in the light of a parallel book from the USA (Kaplan and Shapiro 1998). I found the latter both exotic and familiar. Communists in the USA surely had to be either more utopian or more fanatical in the face of the post-WW2 American consumer paradise and a know-nothing triumphalism. (When I was doing British military service, at the end of the 1950s, I had, as an upfront Communist, been treated by both men and officers with the combined respect and disinterest that might have been accorded a Jehovah's Witness). I also, however, found the US book reassuring as I discovered the extent to which the survivors of Communist childhoods had retained and reworked the commitments and hopes that had led their parents to Communism in the first place.

I discovered that I knew of a number of the contributors to the US collection. I have read the autobiography of one (Peggy Dennis 1977, both a child and a parent of the revolution). I have read the books of *parents* of others (Howard Fast, father of Rachel Fast Ben-Avi, Herbert Aptheker, father of Bettina). I *took part*, as a teenager, in the campaign to save the parents of Robert Meeropol (Rosenberg) from electrocution: my mother was Secretary of the Rosenberg Defence Committee in the UK. In 1989, I even *met* one of the contributors, Gene Dennis, son of Peggy. I asked him, in the cautious manner I considered still appropriate to the country and the case (he was then using his wife's surname), whether his father had not been a figure in the US labour?...socialist?...movement in the USA. 'Do you mean the Communist Party?' he responded. And then, in the book, I discovered someone I *must* have met, since I recall her parents as US exiles in Prague in the mid-1950s, Abe and Belle Capek (previously Chapman, previously...???). One of the authors, Ros Baxandall, I have long known of as a socialist-feminist. More recently she became a *compañera* of the woman who is my *compañera* (Gina herself being a survivor of nothing more traumatic than the Catholic childhood that affects and afflicts all Peruvians). Now Ros turns out to have been another survivor, and beneficiary, of a red diaper childhood!

For later generations on the Left, sometimes assuming that Communism and Fascism are synonyms, or at least opposed but equal, these books may provoke a re-assessment. They do to me, and I was *there*. All of which provides me with the stimulus to publish, although now as a reflection rather than a review.

## The chagrin and the pity

I may have missed it, but I think Phil Cohen fails to give the origin of the main title of his book. It comes from the French Revolution, accused by one of its children of devouring them.<sup>1</sup> Later, I seem to recall, it devoured him. The title was also used, but, I think, unexplained, in a book which briefly but seriously disturbed *my* Communist childhood in Cold War Britain. This was Wolfgang Leonhard's *Child of the Revolution* (Leonhard 1979), in which he tells of his experiences as the child of German Communists who had the terrible misfortune of leaping from the Nazi frying pan into the Soviet freezer.

There had been a considerable crowd, of three generations, of both genders and several ethnicities, assembled at the launch of the British book, in Waterstone's elegant two-storey bookshop on Islington Green, London, one evening in May 1997. Some of them looked like me: well-preserved, casually-dressed, middle-class, middle-aged, Jewish. When they spoke, from platform or floor, they neither looked nor sounded devoured. Maybe bitter, or regretful, or defensive, or self-justificatory, maybe a little nibbled, but evidently not *devoured*?

The point is - and I am not sure whether this comes out of the book either - that what we actually are is children of the *non*-revolution. It might have been Eric Hobsbawm (for whom see further below) who talked of the dilemma faced by a revolutionary party in a non-revolutionary situation. Let us leave aside the question of whether the Communist Party was revolutionary rather than militant. What I feel I need to come to terms with is not only the loss of faith (the Party as church), nor loss of warmth (the Party as family), nor loss of identity (the Party as community), but of having been so long attached to, so energetically paddling, a canoe going so furiously up what turned out to be a sidestream of British and world history. However, paddling furiously up sidestreams can give one a particular vision of mainstreams – and those floating easily down them...

I have another problem with Cohen's title. 'Cold War', here, suggests, somehow, that we (party, parents, peers) were victims of McCarthyism. Or, possibly, of Zhdanovism. The problem, however, was not the Cold War, it was the *postwar* (uncapitalised). 'War Communism' is not simply a period in Soviet history, it is actually the nature of the creature as ideology and organisation. Under conditions of illegality, of war, of occupation, of imperialism, of conscious and expressed class conflict, it can grow roots. Peace disarms it, which may have been why we always spoke of 'the battle for peace'.

Amongst the expressions of anger or regret, in the book or at the launch, there was no one who asked, 'What if we *had* had a revolution?' I myself finally left the Party not simply because of the Soviet invasion of Hungary (1957), which I, with a certain amount of pain and misgiving, swallowed, nor even that of Czechoslovakia (1968), which I experienced. It was when I realised that I was in a party of which a number of members and leaders would - with a certain amount of pain and misgiving - have had me jailed, tortured or executed. How many of us sipping our wistful wine at Waterstone's would

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<sup>1</sup> Because of this revolutionary tradition and its wartime resistance experience, France, the French and French Communism were the pole to which my compass turned – for quite some time after France had turned away from revolutionary romanticism. Visiting Paris for the first time in around 10 years recently, I was, however, impressed by the shelves full of books on socialism, communism and the labour movement in Paris bookstores. In comparison, I mean, with the scarce titles on the newest social movements and internationalisms. This left traditionalism, however, also seems to imply numerous auto/biographies of traditional leftists, amongst them Communists. I picked up for my collection one by Stanislas Tomkiewicz (2003), who was drawn toward Communism as a child in pre-war Poland, and who survived it, in France, as an active internationalist.

have imprisoned, or been imprisoned, if we had achieved our ambition and 'gained power'? My closest Czech friend and colleague in Prague, a victim of purges in the 1950s, had, after my departure in 1969, helped purge his fellow dissidents from what had been our joint place of work, stating, 'it's better that I do this than some Stalinist'. This raises the question of whether a Stalinist has to think and talk like one as well as to act like one.<sup>2</sup>

I have a third comment on Cohen's title; not a criticism but a generalisation. Take this comment on Communist behaviour or psychology:

In such circumstances, then, it became possible to accept certain forms of organisation and types of behaviour as necessary for fighting the class struggle. These included:

- an authoritarian mode of validating knowledge claims...
- an aprioristically refutive approach to critical news stories or literature...
- a psychology scornful of conventional moral judgments as evidence of backsliding softness, idealism, liberalism, necessary because of the importance of proving one's wholehearted dedication to the working-class cause (a desire felt even more keenly if one was oneself from a middle-class background).

The hard, the vertical revolutionary, swaggeringly contemptuous of those too timid, too soft, to do what had to be done, to will the means as well as the end, became the model. (Mills n.d.:44)

This comes neither from the liberal-democratic West, nor from '1956', nor '1968'. It comes from '1989' and from the *Caribbean*. It reminds us not simply of the generally masculine but the specifically phallic model of the Communist activist.<sup>3</sup>

that may have been the first of its kind. Scanning it again, I find Rebecca, the daughter-wife-sister-mother (and would-be writer) expressing, in the 1950s, the kind of problems feminists recognised in the 1970s...and ex-Communists in the 1990s?

## **My own r-r-revolutionary childhood**

At this moment, in this non-review, I hear Pat Devine (son of a Stalinist Pat Devine), a contributor to the book and speaker at the British book launch, complaining that I am, like others involved, talking about the *Party*, not my childhood and family. Well, I have written two or three memoirs (see bibliography), although not under the originally-planned title, *I Was a Middle-Class Teenage Jewish Communist when Britain Had Never Had it So Good*. What's more, my mother once wrote a semi<sup>4</sup>-

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<sup>2</sup> In a nicely-balanced and perceptive review of Eric Hobsbawm's book, which I consider below, Achin Vanaik (2003) says that Hobsawm 'was never a Stalinist'. Speaking as someone who was, and later wasn't, I beg to differ. Jorge Semprun (1980) also has no problem admitting this. The matter is touched on again below.

<sup>3</sup> If this passage does not undermine a notion of the world as divided into three, or now two, opposed parts, or two historical stages, we should consider the auto/biographical work of Jung Chang (1991), born in China, to Communist parents, in 1952. Despite the distance and the culture – differentiating China also from the European Communist world of that time – I recognise social-psychological behaviour and individual psychological responses that throw light also on my own experiences a world away.

<sup>4</sup> Actually three-quarters.



'War Communism'? August 21, 1968, young people in the Old Town Square of Communist Prague carry a Czechoslovak flag stained with blood spilled by Soviet tanks. Photo: Unknown.

autobiographical novel on the family-life of Communists in postwar Britain (Adler 1983).

So here goes again, at least briefly. My parents were Party members, so were most of their friends, so were most of the friends of my brother David and myself. So far, so common to Communist childhood in Cold War/postwar Britain. And, for that matter, the USA, where, I understand, at that time red diaper babies were named Lenin or Ninel. Or would the second have been - with a gesture to femininity - Ninelle? My father was the ex-East European emotional, extrovert, firebreathing, talmudic one. My mother was the English, ex-East End, reflective, reasonable one. She, with what must have been a considerable sense of relief, left the Party, together with the other 'revisionists' after 1957. He stayed in, fuming and fighting, and putting most of his considerable energy into defending East European Jewry, both outside and inside the Party - another lost cause. He died, without warning, and instantly, from a massive attack on his heart or brain, at an

age David and I have now surpassed. We put this death down to the stress he had suffered since his god had failed. My mother said, 'he was too strong for me'. But she went on to write two novels, and to have a long love affair with a very gentle man, a Northern worker, who also died some years before she did. My mother once said to me, in my own firebreathing and talmudic period, that I was more interested in ideas than people. Yes, mum, but you weren't. Ray, who died in her late-80s in 2001, nonetheless had much respect for a particular Party type, the self- or party-educated, working-class activist/intellectual.

I can trace the differing personal and political influences of my parents in my own personality, peregrinations, politics and profession. I am a cosmopolitan, I travel, I research internationalism, I am now as interested in people as ideas. (This is why I hope to do a historical study of internationalists – the human bearers of internationalism – based on auto/biographies). If I also practice what Gramsci preached, 'scepticism of the intellect, optimism of the will', it is thanks to both Ray and Alec...in this order. The male/female division of labour, in or around the Party, is quite clearly echoed in Kaplan and Shapiro. If, finally, my brother and I had our own problems growing up, within the Party and without the Party, so had our kids had with their long-ex-CP parents.

### **How we survived Communism and even quipped about it**

I had another occasion to reflect on my childhood in 1997. Raph Samuels, a founder of the New Left and *History Workshop*, a childhood, school and Young Communist League friend, and then my brilliant, neurotic, ever-forgetful social history teacher at Ruskin College in the early-1960s, had had his memorial service in London just before that book launch, and David had been the first speaker there. (David started: 'I see everyone is turning up a half-hour late out of respect for Raph'). Raph, who was only on time for his own funeral, had written, semi-autobiographically, on British Communism (Samuel 1985).<sup>5</sup> And his essay had prompted me, after 1989, to settle accounts with my Communist past and write autobiographically on my life as an internationalist (Waterman 1983).<sup>6</sup>

The reason I was able to attend the book launch was because I was in London, with my son, Danny, helping David and his Sheila move my now-aged mum into an old people's home. Sorting through my mother's (and father's) extensive book collection in her now half-empty apartment, we turned up curios from our family, my youth. My nephew, Shaun, found Raph's gift to me, of Richard Wright's *Black Boy*, thus inscribed:

In thanks for many 'quips' in the last year, and hoping you'll take your place in the YCL in the coming year, in the fight for peace and socialism.

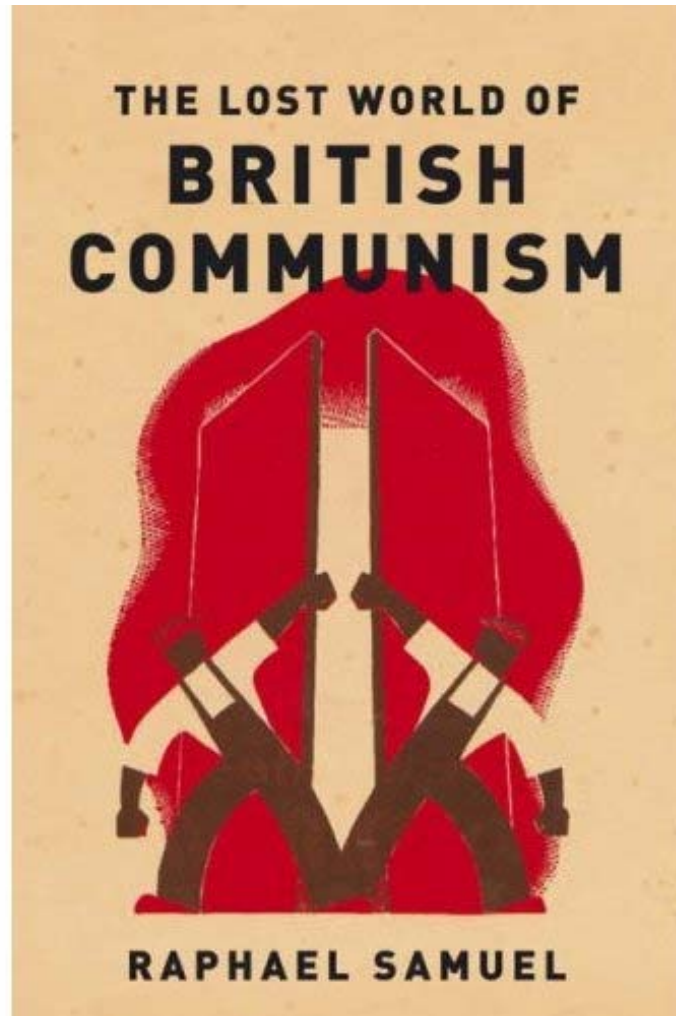
Quips in quotes, heh? And the good old fight for peace! Now, humour seemed to me largely missing from both the Phil Cohen book and the launch. Even comedian Alexi Sayle, whose CP and Jewish background I had appreciated on TV, comes over in the book more bitter than sweet. Yet irony and self-mockery, from the Jewish rather than the Communist or Marxist tradition, seem to me absolutely essential for survival, with both scepticism and optimism intact, in a heaven (cyberspace?) and earth (globe?) that seem

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<sup>5</sup> Later, the various pieces written by Raph for *New Left Review* at this time were brought together as a book, with an introduction, by his widow, social-historian, Alison Little (Samuel 2006). My references are, however, to the NLR original.

<sup>6</sup> This chapter is now being expanded into a book-length work, provisionally entitled 'The Autobiography of a Long-Distance Internationalist'. Draft chapters can be found on the web. Putative publishers, print or digital, should feel free to approach me about this.

to have so many more things in them than were dreamed of in our branch meetings. I would, as I have written, never have survived as a Communist without the anti-Communist joke (Waterman 1993).



Cover of the book by ex-Communist, Raphael Samuel, who argues the significance of British Communist internationalism.

[http://www.versobooks.com/books/nopqrs/s-titles/samuel\\_r\\_british\\_communism.shtml](http://www.versobooks.com/books/nopqrs/s-titles/samuel_r_british_communism.shtml)

These were traded privately amongst the more-sceptical Communist youth in postwar Britain, though I don't recall this occurring much inter-generationally, nor up and down the Party hierarchy.

There was such a hierarchy, and I think this is not fully revealed in the Cohen book, though it is in Raph's sometimes sentimental account (he was only actually in the YCL/Party for about 6-7 years). My relationship with King Street, the CP HQ in those days, was much like that with my headmaster, later with my sergeant and then my employers. I expected them to respect me and treat me fairly, but they did not always do so, and I was often intimidated, resentful or angry. I was once summoned into his office and bawled out by a YCL General Secretary, with seriously negative charisma, for daring to criticise, on a bus, some Tactic (it was certainly not as big as a Strategy). His

immediate subordinates, including one who later became a historian of Communism,<sup>7</sup> were impressed by my bravado. This was actually, I suppose, a stubborn individualism, which also led me to pick up and smuggle back to the UK the forbidden West German leaflets that fluttered down on my Communist adolescence in Cold War East Berlin, during the World Youth Festival in 1951.

There was also gross and petty manipulation within the Party, which identifies it with the party as a general political form (now looked on by the public almost everywhere with suspicion or disdain). I only recall three recurring dreams/nightmares during my 72 years, two of which had to do with my life as a Communist (sub-species: dissident). One followed August 20, 1968, and had me denouncing Brezhnev, with righteous and effective anger (but in which language?), in front of a Soviet TV audience of one zillion. An earlier one was about the devious way in which the British Communist Party, in the early-1960s, brought about the change in name from *Daily Worker* to *Morning Star*.

### **The loss of Communist nerve and verve**

This repackaging of an unchanged product was itself clear indication of a loss of Communist nerve and verve. George Matthews was either Editor of the paper or General Secretary of the Party at that time. And...was this, several rows before me, the same George Matthews, somewhat frail, but with almost as much pale lanky hair, at the book launch, 30-something years later?<sup>8</sup> I had twice applied for and twice turned down low-level jobs with the *Worker/Star*. I was then, obviously, moving away from notions of both financial and professional self-sacrifice. But why, after an initial urge to greet George at the launch, did I finally hold back? Was it because he had just told us that on his first-ever journey to the Soviet Union in 1956 he had been, as a visiting Communist leader, isolated from real life there? Do us a favour! On my first trip, from Prague, one year later, aged 21, and as a carefully chaperoned 'tourist of the revolution' (Enzensberger 1976), I had seen, said there and reported back plenty (though only to comrades who were also friends).<sup>9</sup> It was not a matter of time, opportunity or status but of attitude and determination. In any case, 'real life' - including anti-semitism - was more than adequately represented at *official* events back in the USSR. Another leading British Communist told me, in Prague, in the mid-60s, of gross anti-semitic and anti-democratic attitudes expressed to him by a general at a Moscow reception.

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<sup>7</sup> This was Monty Johnstone, who shared with us in Prague, 1968, the trauma of the Soviet invasion. Monty, who was travelling with his family and some volumes of Lenin in Russian, was then able to exercise his linguistic and ideological talents on the poor Soviet conscripts. Monty and I drifted apart because of his continued attachment to Communism whilst I moved on to other things. He died, 2007, remembered in a warm and accurate obit by Eric Hobsbawm <http://politics.guardian.co.uk/politicsobituaries/story/0,,2154211,00.html>.

<sup>8</sup> George Matthews died, 2005, receiving a friendly obit from a (former) Communist, Mike Power. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/obituaries/story/0,,1454585,00.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Hereby hangs another tale - with a very long tail. On return to Prague after my first visit to Moscow, early-1957, I typed out a long and detailed diary. This was reproduced in six carbon copies, one of which I gave to my Moscow friend, Renita Grigorieva, at the World Youth Festival that summer. All copies were lost to me until 2007, when a young English-speaking friend of Renita, Alexandra Osminina, found me on the web. Renita's copy of the diary had, she said, narrowly survived a fire in the family *dasha* (weekend cottage). The text was pretty-well intact, so, aged 70+, I could revisit, with both embarrassment and amusement, my 21-year-old internationalist Communist self.



Left: Ricardo Ramirez, later Guatemalan guerilla leader Rolando Moran. Right: myself, then English and Chief Sub-Editor of World Student News, magazine of the Communist-front organization, the International Union of Students in Prague. We were in Moscow reporting on preparations for the (also Communist) World Festival of Youth and Students, 1957. In front of us a couple of foreign students. Behind us one of a zillion Lenin icons.

It was shabby of me not to let the bygones be: the mind was willing but the spirit mean. I was shocked to find the nostalgia and 'youth sentiment' bitter as well as sweet. The fact is that I did not feel quite at home amongst the unfamiliar faces at Waterstones, or even the more-familiar names in the book. If the contributions of Pat Devine and Brian Pollitt awakened a sense of identity, this is because - variously - of East-European experience, military service, late-development, Party hostility to our university ambitions, Third-World involvement, the impact of feminism (Waterman 1994), divorce, lectureships in social science. But why *should* I feel at home on Islington Green? When I lived in London it was Islington Grey. I have only lived in the UK about 10 years since I was 19. My less, or more, 'interesting times' (see Hobsbawm below again) were in Prague in the

1950s<sup>10</sup> and again in the 1960s, not to speak of Nigeria in the early-1970s, and the Netherlands (plus South Africa, Peru and everywhere) since then. But I missed the successive or overlapping British moments of Eurocommunism, *Marxism Today*, and the Democratic Left. These were, in any case, indications of further decline, in which the CP was losing the virtues of its earlier vices, to the point at which, with *New Times*, it seemed to be in favour of everybody, including capitalists, and everything, including New Age-ism.

### **The greatest social historian of his time**

This is the moment to roll on Eric Hobsbawm. He has crowned an impressively long career as an outstanding social historian, of truly international repute, with his almost-century-long and wide-ranging memoirs (Hobsbawm 2002). Born in Year One of the Russian Revolution, growing up in Germany in the 1920s and early 1930s, Eric really has more reason to consider himself a child of the revolution than all the rest of us combined. Reading him has been an unsettling experience since I cannot help feeling that his life foreshadows my less illustrious one. He came from a secular Jewish family, became a Communist, then an academic specialist on labour history and social protest, traveled widely. One generation older than me, the guy could have practically been my father! I certainly read and was inspired by Eric's writings, even whilst still at school. Beginning my own career as an international Communist bureaucrat, later an academic specialist on labour and social movements, I sat quietly at the back of meetings of the Communist Historians Group, in the early-1960s, listening to Eric and a whole generation of brilliant British social historians. Or, at least to those of them who had stayed in the CPGB after 1956-7.

Eric Hobsbawm did not really leave the Communist world and movement until this movement left him and that world self-destructed. Conveniently for readers, Eric has a chapter on Communism and his life as a Communist (127-51). This begins unpromisingly, I think, since he declares that:

The question why I stayed so long [1936 to c.1986?] obviously belongs in an autobiography, but it is not of general historical interest. (127)

That, surely, depends on what kind of history one is generally interested in. Hobsbawm continues along his Communist half-century, providing us with historical cases, anecdotes and explanations, but never quite giving us his own coming-to-terms with a faith, with a party, with states, which were having an ever-decreasing attraction to, respectively, the believers, the members and their citizens.

Although, moreover, Hobsbawm denies that Communist Parties were for romantics (133), both his account and his own prolonged attachment to Communism suggest, rather, the contrary:

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<sup>10</sup> Of both Prague in the mid-1950s, and British Communism both before and after, I have been reminded by discovery of the extraordinary memoirs and reflections of a Brighton working-class Communist, Denis Hill (1989). Denis, who had been a very young Communist rather than a child of Communists, worked with me on *World Student News* in Prague at this time. I figure in his book simply as 'Peter'. One of the tasks Denis was given by the British CP, I now discover – or do I also vaguely remember? – was to 'keep an eye' on someone considered 'volatile and brash', who failed to act as part of the 'British team', and who then 'went native' with Czech students from the national film school! I also 'went native' with Zuzana, an attractive, intelligent and definitely non-Communist student of English, in whom Denis appears uninterested. In Perrugia, Italy, November 2002, I met up with another of these, Carlo, still a Green politician, who has also written of his youthful experiences in Prague (Ripa di Meana 2000).

The Leninist 'vanguard' party was a combination of discipline, business efficiency, utter emotional identification and a sense of *total* dedication. (ibid. Original stress)

If this does not itself include romanticism, membership surely requires it.<sup>11</sup> (So, indeed, does the internationalism of the new global justice movements, hopefully under the slogan, 'Another Emancipatory Romanticism is Possible!'). It also, however, requires a certain denial of, or blindness toward, other realities or other people's (and peoples') experiences and perceptions of such realities. Eric Hobsbawm certainly describes the rise and fall of this ultra-secular and ultra-modernist faith. But he does not note the extent to which it also incorporated religious and other pre-modern elements. Jorge Semprun (1980:258) reports a Spanish Party article of faith: 'It is better to be wrong with the party, inside the party, than to be right out of it or against it'. He compares it to the Catholic belief that 'outside the Church there is no salvation'. Hobsbawm does not, furthermore, I think, admit *responsibility* for continuing to endorse through his party membership (alright, as a dissident) something that in 1953 (Berlin), 1956 (Poznan and Budapest), and 1968 (Prague) was crushing the labour and popular protest which he as a historian was both a student of and publicly identified with! Even after the *collapse* of Communism, he evidently had no problem appearing on TV in prolonged and affable conversation with Markus Wolf (150, Figure 30), an equally urbane and cosmopolitan Communist, who nonetheless served the German (Un-)Democratic Republic, as the Allen Dulles of its CIA, until two years before this concrete dystopia collapsed.<sup>12</sup>

Edward Thompson, another of those brilliant British Communist labour and social historians, but of a more culturalist and humanist bent, left the Communist Party after 1956, and then started a whole new political life, championing the social movements that only later came to be called 'new' – citizen rights, peace, and solidarity across the Cold War divide. Although I left the Party one disaster after Thompson and one final crisis before Eric, I followed the path of the former rather than that of the latter.

This brings us back to *Marxism Today*, and Eric's influential 'The Forward March of Labour Halted' (263-81). This period actually marks Hobsbawm's most dramatic intervention into the politics of labour in the UK. Originally intending to record the progressive differentiation of the working class and consequent marginalisation of the Labour Party and union movement, Eric came to be the leading Marxist voice for the *rightward* march of labour. His analysis, in this memoir, of the various failed attempts of

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<sup>11</sup> A point recognised in a masterly review of the autobiography by Perry Anderson (2002), who also identifies a series of political and personal contradictions, or changing tones, in the work. Anderson's looks likely to be the review-of-reference for the Hobsbawm memoirs.

<sup>12</sup> Here matters get murkier - and dirtier. In his role, Markus Wolf was either directly or indirectly responsible for the major East German solidarity activity in the world, this being the training of Third World nationalist movements in matters of internal security (spying, imprisonment, torture and death). One of these organisations was the African National Congress, and such people as Ronnie Kasrils, something of a Communist Pimpernel, then head of security for the ANC's military arm, Umkonto we Sizwe (Kasrils 1993, Trehwela 1992). Ronnie Kasrils, along with numerous other leading South African Communists, nationalists and – it must be said – unionists, have now converted themselves into the ideologues and bearers of neo-liberalism in South Africa! I am not at all sure that we can blame all this on the ironies of history. There is in Communist party tradition, and not only in Communist state practice, something that puts loyalty (subservience to institutions, leaders and ideology) above personal autonomy and responsibility (the critical/self-critical personality). These were, of course, not only characteristics of Communism. But given Communism's pretensions to represent human emancipation, the contradictions are sharper here. The new internationalisms really need to surpass any notion that human emancipation can be embodied in a state or party.

various socialist lefts, to capture the Labour Party, carries considerable conviction. But the political impact of Hobsbawm's argument was to nudge the Labour Party in the direction of Tony Blair, a 'Thatcher in trousers' (276), who leaves Hobsbawm appalled.<sup>13</sup>

A lifelong cosmopolitan and an internationalist (not the same thing), Eric, it seems to me, here lost the plot – or failed to see the emergence of a new one. I have elsewhere recorded the contrasting positions – at a low point of labour and socialist internationalism - of Edward Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm (Waterman 2001:40-42). Whilst both saw this flag in tatters, Thompson referred to the necessary preservation of an 'internationalism of the imagination', Hobsbawm saw the hope for its future as lying with the African National Congress of South Africa (for which see again Footnote 12)! The ANC, though heavily influenced by Communism, was, of course, less a labour or a socialist than a radical-nationalist movement. And it has to be said that its internationalism implied, for example, identification with the Soviet Union's fatal reproduction in Afghanistan of the disastrous US strategy in Vietnam. Hobsbawm, the labour historian, here revealed ignorance of the 'new labour internationalism' associated at that very time with a South African trade union movement that had escaped from both the traditional Communist and the Radical-Nationalist shackles (Southall 1995).

Eric Hobsbawm remains for me a great social historian of his time, but then in both senses: the time he writes about and his imprisonment within it. Where Thompson's internationalism of the imagination helps us imagine a new kind internationalism, Hobsbawm's remains an *internationalism*.

### **The excesses of Communism? Or of socialist modernism?**

The limitations of Communism did not begin with Communism, nor were they confined to it, nor did they end with it. Before Communism, or at least Bolshevised Communism, there is the tragic figure of Rosa Luxemburg:

Capable of effecting change in the consciousness of the workers, she believed she could also change an unhappy man into a happy one. The difference between the amorphous crowds she so easily swayed and the individual escaped her. So did the distinctions inherent in divergent cultures and social conditions; she saw humanity but not the individual human being. 'Contact with the masses gives me inner courage and tranquillity', she said, but [her lovers] Jogiches or Zetkin seldom evoked these sensations. With them she felt unloved, unappreciated, and unneeded, or at best was constantly afraid of not being loved, appreciated, or needed. Lonely and sick at heart, she increasingly sought in humanity the wholeness and security that her parental home and her lovers had failed to give her. (Ettinger 1987:160)

Communism was also, it should be remembered, only one of many left modernisms, if of an extreme variety. This is argued in Alexi Sayle's contribution to the British book. His father was a Labour Party candidate and a secret member of the CP, who had proposed getting rid of the (early-modern?) Liverpool trams:

I saw that that kind of modernism was completely flawed in their paternalistic welfare state...[H]igh-rise culture seemed to spring from their paternalistic, socialist-communist view of doing things for people

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<sup>13</sup> A leader of the UK Socialist Workers Party, characteristically, understands Hobsbawm's autobiography in terms of a Tale of Two Erics (Harman 2002), one Virtuous, one Vicious. Evil Eric is, of course, the one whose critique of the British left of the 1980s still scores against the SWP of the 2000s.

and knowing what was good for people. They were wholeheartedly in favour of slum clearance; but they had a real disdain for working-class culture and couldn't see what was good in it. (46)

This is not fair for the party that started the folk revival in the postwar UK, transported traditional Liverpool songs to London, and even produced *new* industrial folk ballads. But I know what he means.

After British Communism there is, of course, the Socialist Workers Party (Footnote 13), which may have actually traded-in the *vanguard* for the *placard*, jiggled energetically at the edge of TV coverage of protest in Britain. One awaits, but with breath unbaited, for the memoirs of *their* children. The parents of such putative offspring seem reluctant to share with the world *their* experience even after they have left their Trotskyist parties (for a Peruvian exception, see Martínez 1997). Those I know in the UK have often felt so badly burned that they can't even talk about it. And then there are, of course, the *new* political families, even in the alternative international social movements, as indicated in the British book by Black lesbian poet, Jackie Kane:

Every lobby, whether feminist or anti-racist, has been snookered by that one thing, not being able to criticise enough your own concepts. There is a fear of becoming the enemy within and going over to the other side and betraying your love, which is very deep. The party was like a family, and when there were splinters going off that was like parts of your family getting lost and going missing, like a child gone missing. (38)

I have seen this happening within the feminist family in Latin America, and heard from my *compañera* how she experienced both the splintering (theirs) and the criticism (mine).

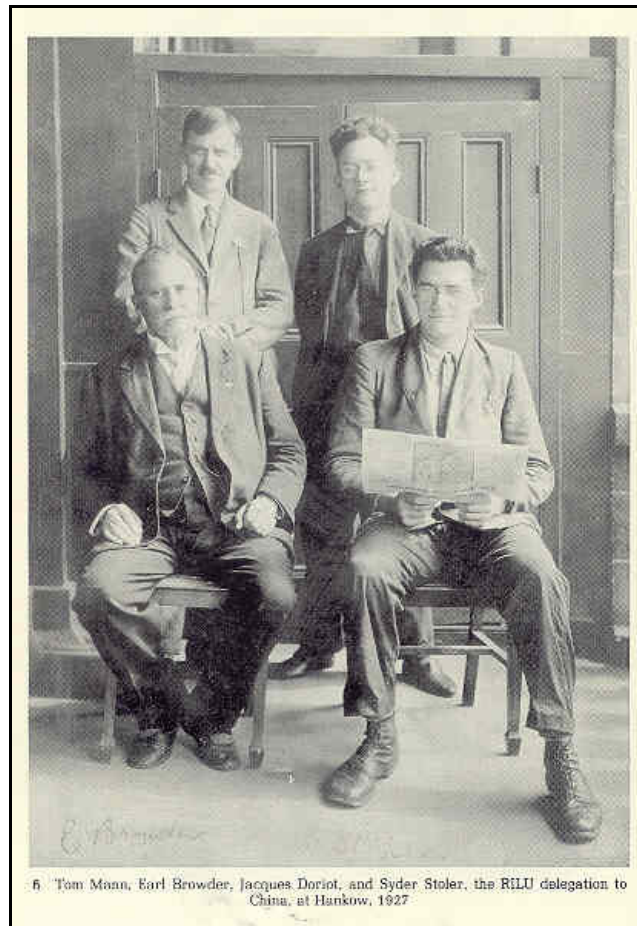
Was *Children of the Revolution* really necessary? Part of it was *I believe* already in Richard Crossland's, *The God that Failed* (Crossland 1947). I never read this one since it was on our psychological equivalent of the Vatican index and we could anyway dismiss it unread: 'If it was a God for them, no wonder it failed!'. Part is in the novel of E.L. Doktorow which, though a fictional account of one of the Rosenberg children growing up in the Cold War USA (Doktorow 1972:238ff.) reminded me also of Cold War Britain - and of gothic American horrors that justified our blind eye toward Soviet ones. My grandfather said at this time something we Communists did not dare to say even to ourselves: 'If the Rosenbergs did give the secret of the atom bomb to the Russians, they ought to be given the Nobel Peace Prize'.<sup>14</sup> Wouldn't the Cohen book have been more appropriate *before* the study of Raph Samuel, which knits together personal recollection and reflection with the historical and sociological insight these interviews lack - as does Kaplan and Shapiro? Probably. But this book does add new notes to the Communist experience, at least for me. One is the difference between the politically-isolated but sexually liberal middle-class families and the communally-integrated but sexually conservative working-class ones. How many parties were there in this monolithic Party?

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<sup>14</sup> Here one can take recourse to the latest book of *red diaper* contributor, Robert Meeropol (2003), survivor of not so much his Communist infancy as of the anti-Communist inquisition in the US of the 1950s - an inquisition threatening the US again as I write. Robbie, who I recall from photos as the round-faced, doe-eyed, younger son of 'atom spies', Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, now runs a foundation for the children of politically persecuted parents.

## Universalism-internationalism-emancipation as tradition and imperative

One combination, complex, syndrome, Raph Samuel treats as quite central is mentioned only in passing in *Children of the Revolution*. It is universalism-internationalism-emancipation (Samuel 1985:39-40). Such big words and hopes seem to be alien to the children of British Communists, writing in the disoriented 1990s, frightened off by what had happened to the Communist world, or by Thatcher's Cultural Revolution, or by the relativism of a post-modernism which replaced Grand Theory with Grandiose Methodology. I met my first Negroes (that word dates the experience: it must have been



Among the international representatives of the Communist International's Red International of Labour Unions, in China, late-1920s, are the veteran British labour leader, Tom Mann (front left), the American, Earl Browder (front right), the French former worker, Jacques Doriot, and a Soviet (?) representative, Sydor Stoler. Source: George Hardy (1956).<sup>15</sup>

around 1947) in Raph's Communist household: they were Sudanese student Communists, and one of them was, 'having an affair' with the British Communist lodger

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<sup>15</sup> Hardy's is the heroic Communist internationalist account. It does not confront the problematic political fates of at least Doriot and Browder. Further problems for the heroic vision of this particular exercise, and for Communist internationalism more generally, are raised by Krebs (2004), McKnight (2001) and Isaacs (1961). Hardy's worker son, George Hardy Jr, died as a member of the International Brigade in Spain. The intertwining in Spain, as in China, of Communist internationalism, Soviet espionage and *realpolitik* is difficult, if not impossible, to separate.

upstairs. The Party was also a refuge from anti-semitism, which for us Jewish kids in postwar Britain was a permanent imagined threat and an occasional terrifying presence. It was only with the slackening of Communism in the 1960s that I met British party members insensitive to something that had been a lodestone for an earlier generation.

But universalism-internationalism-emancipation are not, for me, a past memory. They are a growing imperative and an attractive future. Which is actually why, being two hours away in Florence, at the European Social Forum, in the new century, I was motivated to search out Carlo of the last century. This secular trinity was not, for the Good Old Cause, simply a luxury of cosmopolitan, middle-class, Party members like us. As Raph also points out, the Communist leaders of the Unemployed Workers Movement, in the 1930s, were inspired by the 'belief that they were members of a worldwide revolutionary comradeship' (33). That Communism, here, was reproducing the universalism of earlier monotheistic and apocalyptical religions, or that Communists thought they, alone, held the keys to this kingdom, is less important than the aspiration, the insight and the ethic. If and when this trinity are rediscovered, reinvented, to fit the experience of ordinary people in an increasingly globalised world, we may have to reassess the parents of the revolution, even where – fortunately - it never took place.

And now, aged 72, I really have to wrap up this compilation and get back to my own autobiography. Before someone else does. Or worse, for me at least, doesn't.

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