



Gibbs, E. (2020) Remembering Scottish Communism. *Scottish Labour History*, 55, pp. 83-106.

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Deposited on: 8 January 2021

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Remembering Scottish Communism

Ewan Gibbs *Scottish Labour History* vol.55 (2020) pp.83-106

Introduction

The centenary of the formation of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) in 1920 provides an opportunity to assess its memory and legacy in Scotland. For seventy-one years, the CPGB's presence within the Scottish labour movement ensured the continuity of a distinctive political culture as well as an enduring connection with the Third International's world-historic project. The party was disproportionately concentrated on Clydeside and in the Fife coalfields, which were among its most significant strongholds across the whole of Britain. These were areas where the CPGB achieved some of its rare local and parliamentary electoral successes but also more importantly centres of enduring strength within trade unionism and community activism. Engineers and miners emerged as the party's key public representatives in Scotland. Their appeal rested on a form of respectable working-class militancy that radiated authenticity drawn from workplace experience and standing in local communities. Abe Moffat, the President of the Scottish miners' union between 1942 and 1961, articulated this sentiment by explaining to Paul Long in 1974 that: 'I used to smile when I heard right-wing leaders saying that the Communists were infiltrating into the trade union: we'd been there all our lives.'¹

Even within the coalfields, activists such as Moffat were part of a militant minority. Only around five thousand founding members established the CPGB but it had doubled in size by the time of the general strike in 1926. Approximately a fifth of the party's pre-strike membership were jailed in the course of the dispute. Over the next ten years, the party struggled through the Third International's policy zigzags. The ultra-left 'Class Against Class' position left the CPGB isolated and its members facing state and employer repression.² Between the mid-1930s and mid-1940s, the CPGB's membership peaked under the Popular Front. During this period, the party's primary objective was building a broad alliance of progressive forces against fascism across class lines. In wartime, the CPGB managed to typically sell approximately a quarter of a million copies of the *Daily Worker* and claimed to have in excess of fifty thousand members.³ The onset of the Cold War left the CPGB once again frozen out of the political mainstream, which deepened as a quarter of members left following the revelations of Khrushchev's secret speech and the Soviet invasion of Hungary.⁴ Yet the party recovered to reach membership levels above thirty thousand in the early 1960s and achieve the peak of its trade union influence through 'Broad Left' alliances with left-wing Labour Party supporters during the early 1970s. This strategy combined its presence in workplaces and paid officialdom.⁵

After this, the CPGB experienced prolonged decline. Scottish membership was regularly between a fifth and a quarter of the total, standing at around eight thousand in 1961. By 1990, the year before the CPGB dissolved, it claimed just over a thousand Scottish members.⁶ The only significant successor to the CPGB tradition in Scotland is the Communist Party of Britain (CPB), whereas attempts to establish Scottish organisations such as Democratic Left and the Communist Party of Scotland have been less sustained.⁷ The CPB remains the dominant political influence on daily *Morning Star* newspaper, which still enjoys a circulation of around 10,000. It has a close relationship with several Britain-wide unions but also often comments on international events from a socialist perspective.⁸

Scholarship on twentieth-century Communism has often utilised biography to reflect on distinct experiences of activists within varied contexts.⁹ This article does not follow a biographical approach, but it does rely upon oral testimonies from party members that were collected as part of a coalfield

oral history project that included interviews with former communists conducted between 2014 and 2019. Dialogue between the interviewees and the author reflected on what it meant to be a communist in a setting where the party enjoyed strengths through its presence at a community and workplace level. The testimonies also included discussions about the significance that former members attach to their former affiliation. Communist political culture rested on a symbiosis between the local circumstances of party activists rooted within industrial workplaces and communities, their links with the infrastructure of the wider British labour movement, and international inspirations. This article contributes to the historiography of Scottish communism by examining the mediating role of Scottish national identity in moulding these influences into a durable twentieth-century tradition. Although changes in international policy were important, communists were rarely simply the Kremlin's political instruments. Scottish nationhood became firmly embedded in Scottish Communist outlooks at least from the start of the Popular Front period during the mid-1930s. The CPGB had a distinctive profile within Scotland, but Scots also figured in disproportionate numbers within the leadership of the party and its recognised spokespeople at a British level. The first section explores the articulation of a distinctive Scottish outlook within the CPGB through engagement with the oral testimonies. These are supplemented by party literature, specifically copies of the CPGB's Scottish magazine, *Scottish Marxist*, and Scottish literary works produced by authors who were either influenced by communism or who depicted communists in their writing.

Both international policies and national framings were melded onto local traditions of craft and neighbourhood by communist activists. They conditioned a defensive radicalism that sought to preserve working-class collectivist traditions and national identity from the atomising effects of capitalist crises, major changes within the industrial economy and, latterly, deindustrialization. The second section develops a discussion on the Scottish communist archetype of the respectable militant. It underlines the moral character and consistency that communist political activity demanded and considers the gendered and socially conservative nature of these presentations, but also notes countervailing trends and women's engagement with communism. Party activism often came at a high personal cost to members who suffered state repression, blacklisting, divisions within the labour movement and conflicts with religious authorities. Scotland's localised communist legacies indicate the importance of understanding how activists navigate variegated political references points. Its enduring significance lies in the authority which ideological opponents of capitalism were able to exercise as workplace and community leaders and as political educators across generations.

'Men and women of our troubled century'

CPGB activism was often highly embedded in localised settings but was, nevertheless, animated by a national cultural and political orientation as well as international alignments. Scottish Communism emerged as a distinctive creed through the experience of the Popular Front, the party's embrace of constitutional reform and its engagement with arts and literature. These developments were formative to the worldview of party members and coloured the party literature that they read and sold. Communists were both defenders of community tradition and adherents to an ideology steeped in modernity. Scottish nationhood acted as a container for these competing ends by bridging appeals to the past with technologically enthused optimism for the future. Communists were formative to twentieth-century Scottish nation-building, especially through their cultural contribution that far outweighed the party's record of electoral activity – which was a failure overall. James Leslie Mitchell's (better known as Lewis Grassie Gibbon) *Scots Quair* trilogy was released in the first half of the 1930s and epitomises these trends. Grassie Gibbon, who was at least a fellow traveller if not a party member, narrates the story of the Guthrie family between their displacement from their farm in rural North East Scotland to joining the struggling proletariat in the city of

'Duncairn'. His use of vernacular Scots and mourning for the loss of local traditions is accompanied by a tempered optimism for the rising working class.¹⁰

Grassic Gibbon's sense of both past injustices and confidence in the possibilities offered by modern industry and class struggle was characteristic of Scottish Communism across the twentieth century. These motifs were apparent during 1977, when Alex Clark, a former Lanarkshire miner, full-time party organiser and Equity union activist, wrote an analysis of Scottish cultural developments in the CPGB's Scottish magazine, *Scottish Marxist*. His appraisal began from the orthodox Marxist view of material conditions as the determinant of consciousness. Clark critiqued what he saw as the relatively meagre achievements of successive Labour governments and pointed to several places where he felt investment in cultural infrastructure was required in urban and rural Scotland. Yet Clark was more optimistic in his appraisal of the value of Scottish national culture as an affirmation of a particularist identity that could carry communism's universal aims. He referred to Hugh MacDiarmid's poem, 'The Weapon', which tells a story of Irish and Scottish workers melding their differentiated traditions into a potent resource for class struggle. Clark identified with MacDiarmid's use of labour history to develop class and nationally conscious ideological resources. He saw *The Weapon* as an exemplar of both 'our roots and forces for change'.¹¹

The repertoires of localised radicalism that Scottish communist cadres sustained were intrinsically linked to the party's international alignments and mediated by a national cultural outlook. Communists both developed links to an imagined Scottish past and began to mould accounts of recent history to validate their standpoints. These impetuses were strengthened during the era of the Popular Front. In 1938, CPGB blocs at Scottish May Day parades carried banners emblazoned with images of Calgacus, the semi-mythical Caledonian chief who led resistance to the Romans, as well as William Wallace and Robert the Bruce, the Scottish heroes of the medieval Wars of Independence. As proponents of a broad anti-fascist alliance, communists styled themselves as the heirs and the modern-day guarantors of Scottish liberty.¹² These motifs were a product of alterations in Comintern policy, but also reflected the cultural milieu of Scottish communists. Gibbon's introduction to *Sunset Song* tells the story of Kinraddie, a fictional estate in Aberdeenshire, by detailing a stylised version of Scottish history which unfolds through its landscape. The farm labourers and the ancient standing stones are the ever-present features which are now threatened by industrialisation and capitalist farming methods.¹³

John Foster's account of Scotland's twentieth century underlines the interconnection between these sensibilities and constitutional and class politics. The Popular Front included the Independent Labour Party (ILP) – historic supporters of home rule – as well as the SNP. In Scotland, the Popular Front was, therefore, enunciated as a radical national democratic challenge to the increasingly centralised and technocratic politics of 1930s Britain. These sensibilities were fuelled by the context of soaring unemployment and the anger of the hunger marches, which saw unemployed miners and shipyard workers march on Edinburgh from Fife and Clydeside.¹⁴ During the June 1938, Harry McShane estimated that twenty thousand demonstrators joined the Scottish National Hunger March, primarily from depressed industrial areas. McShane's account emphasised the orderly and disciplined nature of the demonstration. Not content with marching through the centre of Edinburgh, the protesters sought a meeting with Sir Geoffrey Collins, the Unionist/Conservative Secretary of State for Scotland, and subverted authority at key national symbols. A deputation was met at the Scottish Office who accepted a telegram for Collins before protesters marched down the Royal Mile and defied police orders by occupying the grounds of Holyrood Palace.¹⁵ As Petrie persuasively argues, the National Unemployed Workers' Movement's (NUWM) activities were failures in terms of their immediate objectives. It proved much harder to change British government policies through crowd actions in the 1930s than it had been to secure improvements in local relief provision during the 1920s.¹⁶ Yet these developments reveal significant dimensions of the CPGB's

orientation, which was demonstrably national in this instance. They also invite consideration of how the visibility of mass unemployment shaped the perception that the failure of the industrial economy was a specifically Scottish national problem.¹⁷

Scottish Communism's distinctive national character developed in dialogue with its own past during the postwar period. Interwar legacies became an important source of legitimacy in a context where the swift development of the means of production were held to threaten the future of both Scottish nationhood and the industrial working class.¹⁸ The publication of Ian MacDougall's coalfield history in 1981 was a key example of the construction of a Scottish communist 'useable past'.¹⁹ *Militant Miners* contains the reflections of two East Fife Communist leaders, John McArthur, through the medium of the transcripts of an extensive life history interview, and David Proudfoot's correspondence from the fraught years of the mid-1920s. This was not merely an academic undertaking. MacDougall's dedication to oral history and the labour movement is discussed elsewhere in this edition of *Scottish Labour History*. Michael McGahey, the President of the National Union of Mineworkers Scottish Area (NUMSA) and Victor Kiernan, a history Professor at the University of Edinburgh, co-authored a foreword to the book, symbolising a coalescing of intellectual and labour movement authority. McArthur was described as part of a global generation of revolutionaries:

*One of those many men and women of our troubled century, scattered about the world, who have spent themselves in trying to change the world's face; and he has had his share in changing the face of Britain, even if not all his hopes have been fulfilled.*²⁰

Yet this universal status did not fully explain McArthur's significance to McGahey and Kiernan. A distinctive Scottish Communist tradition fused locality, Scottish nationhood, participation in the British labour movement and internationalism. McArthur was 'a Scotsman, whom his countrymen should want to know of'.²¹ Willie Gallacher's memorial cairn in Paisley is embellished with a similar motif, a quote from the CPGB's last General Secretary, Gordon McLellan who described Gallacher as 'A great Scotsman, a great patriot, a great internationalist and a great Communist.' The deliberate construction of a distinct Scottish communist tradition stretches back at least to Gallacher's publication of *Revolt on the Clyde* in 1936, the year after his election as the MP for West Fife.²² Gallacher's autobiography tells the story of growing up in Paisley and his leading role in engineering trade unionism on Clydeside during and just after the First World War. These localised experiences are tempered by participation in debates within the British left about attitudes to the war. Gallacher's memoir culminates in him meeting Lenin at the second congress of the Third International in 1920.²³

The eventual implications of these international affiliations should not be understated in terms of Scottish CPGB members' support for Stalin's murderous regime in the Soviet Union and its foreign policies. Brotherstone and Phillips' recent assessment noted that less critical readings of Gallacher's autobiography and his political activities tend to overlook the legacies of Stalinism upon CPGB policy. These cannot be reduced to Gallacher's defence of Stalin and the terror during and after Stalin's reign alone.²⁴ In the aftermath of the Second World War, Gallacher's West Fife constituency became the epicentre of a campaign against displaced Polish miners which eventually grew to encompass John Cormack's Protestant League and other far-right street politicians who had been the CPGB's enemy the previous decade. Whilst communist objections were voiced in terms of familiar anti-immigrant sentiments - preserving jobs and homes for local workers - they were also intrinsically linked to supporting Soviet policy and smearing former Allied combatants as fascist sympathisers.²⁵

No serious historical appraisal of Scottish Communism can afford to overlook these transgressions of working-class solidarity, but consideration should also be given to how Cold War alignments and

Soviet connections shaped activist lives. Scottish communists acted as CPGB representatives in Moscow during Stalin's leadership of the Soviet Union. Their number included J. R. Campbell, Robert Page Arnot, Bob Stewart, Jimmy Shields and Peter Kerrigan. In some cases, such postings ended in tragedy. Arthur McManus' brother-in-law, the Derbyshire Communist and teacher, William Wheeldon, was executed during the purges. Len Wincott, the leader of the Invergordon mutiny, was arrested in 1944 and only released twelve years later.²⁶ Other Scottish communists underlined the importance of an international perspective to their political identity. Rose Kerrigan exemplified this. Having joined the CPGB during the early 1920s, she visited the Soviet Union in 1935 and later worked for the East German trade delegation in Britain. Rose's husband, Peter, fought in the International Brigade and later reported on the Spanish Civil War for the CPGB's newspaper, the *Daily Worker*.²⁷

Peter Kerrigan's death was marked with an obituary at the 1978 NUMSA conference.²⁸ The same year, *Scottish Marxist* published an appraisal of Scottish solidarity with the Spanish Republican cause by Andy Ferns. The article dismissed 'liberal and Trotskyist accounts' which emphasised divisions between anti-fascists and questioned the motivations of some volunteers.²⁹ This attitude was also evident in the commemoration of Glasgow's contribution to the International Brigades with a statue to Dolores Ibarruri, a communist minister in the Republican government and an internal enemy of both dissenting Marxists and anarchist who fought against Franco.³⁰ In recent years, alternative readings of the International Brigades have contributed to a less partisan history.³¹ A play, *549: Scots of the Spanish Civil War*, toured Britain during 2019 and told the story of a group of friends-cum-volunteers from an East Lothian village. The young miners are commended as brave fighters for justice at home and abroad, but the play does not overlook youthful adventure, the viciousness of armed conflict or punitive experiences of military discipline.³² As the CPGB passes from human memory, its legacy remains formative to the Scottish left and increasingly liable to being claimed by a more pluralistic array of tendencies at a local and national level.

One important feature of the CPGB's heritage is its intellectualism and a commitment to combining assessments of culture and history with political economy. Andy Ferns' piece on Spain in the summer 1978 edition of *Scottish Marxist* was followed by an assessment of Scotland's economic structure, underlining the threat that Scotland's domination by 'monopoly capitalism' - specifically British and American multinationals - posed to its national political autonomy.³³ The magazine's international commentary, cultural critique and informed quotidian discussions of industry were emblematic of Scottish CPGB members' distinctive politics. A national foil held these seemingly disparate themes together and cemented the place of human agency within a materialist analysis. Michael McGahey epitomised these imperatives when he intervened in a debate on energy policy during the 1979 STUC annual conference. He carefully reminded delegates drawn from across industrial sectors that 'it is the forces behind the energies that are in competition' rather than fuels themselves. His and the STUC's solution was a 'coordinated energy policy', preferably under the oversight of a democratically elected Scottish Parliament.³⁴

The fusion of class and nationhood within communist politics was developed in the pages of *Scottish Marxist* through engagement with Scottish literature. In 1977, the magazine published Jessie Kocmanova's essay on 'A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle' to commemorate Hugh MacDiarmid's eighty-fifth birthday. Kocmanova reminisces on the poem's reception in the early 1930s, 'in its class-conscious sense' as a reflection on the defeat of the 1926 general strike. The poem's protagonist is 'a man of the people', a drunk but educated worker whose lot is to grasp the thistle which will deliver 'radical change' where 'bourgeois Scotland' has failed and given up.³⁵ Bob Starratt's accompanying cartoon is far starker, depicting MacDiarmid wielding a saltire emblazoned with a hammer and sickle to displace a stuffy academic preaching 'art for art's sake'. A second drawing, portraying MacDiarmid beneath an Ernst Fischer quote declaring art to be 'protest, criticism and revolt' mediates the poet's

nationalism through cosmopolitan lenses.³⁶ In 2014, John Kay, who worked as a full-time organiser for the CPGB between 1964 and 1990, pointed to ‘the influence of a Hugh MacDiarmid on a number of Communist Party people’, and emboldened the CPGB’s support for home rule.³⁷ Alex Clark’s earlier piece in *Scottish Marxist* discussed above demonstrates MacDiarmid’s impact on Communist cadres, as does Michael McGahey’s attendance at MacDiarmid’s funeral in 1979.³⁸

The stances McGahey came to on conflicts within the international Communist movement perhaps demonstrate another important instance of how a Scottish national lens met international influences. Michael McGahey and Jimmy Reid both voted to condemn the Soviet Union’s invasion of Czechoslovakia at a meeting of the CPGB’s Political Committee in 1968. Michael McGahey’s father, Jimmy, subsequently slammed the door of his house in his son’s face when he came to visit shortly after returning from London. Reid’s recollections of McGahey’s anxiety over his father’s likely reaction on the flight back to Scotland- ‘Old McGahey won’t like this. He won’t like it at all.’ - epitomises how the localised and familial met the national and international within the CPGB.³⁹ Willie Doolan, interviewed in 2019, recalled the Communist Party’s political culture in terms which linked occupation and class with nationhood and internationalism. During the 1970s, he would travel to Edinburgh from his home in Moodiesburn, North Lanarkshire, for ‘industrial party meetings’. One of his defining memories of Michael McGahey was when he determinedly argued against his son – a Soviet loyalist - over the Red Army’s invasion of Afghanistan. Willie rationalised that as an avid supporter of home rule, the older ‘Mick believed that a country should have its own say.’⁴⁰ Communist internationalism with working-class Scots sensibilities were conveyed in ‘Last Room in Operations’, a poetic account of McGahey by Scotland’s Makar, Jackie Kay, John Kay’s adopted daughter. Kay recounts the NUMSA President’s presence at the 1969 Scottish Miners Gala. McGahey introduced ‘Jock and Tam fray Vietnam’, visiting speakers from the North Vietnamese trade union movement who addressed the rally at Holyrood Park whilst their country was being bombed by the American air force.⁴¹ The Gala endured between the 1940s and 1990s. With parallels to the 1938 Scottish National Hunger March, the Gala was a communist innovation which repositioned a local tradition - in this case the coalfield Gala day - within a Scottish national idiom by relocating it to the Scottish capital. Its blend of occupational culture, a national framing and international speakers provide an apt summary of roots of Scottish Communism and its melding of forces for change.⁴²

‘A bit ay a communist tradition round here’

The CPGB drew its strength from its embeddedness in localised communities and workplaces. Communists acted as representatives for constituencies that were often unlikely to vote for the party but who nevertheless trusted them as principled activists. Recent major additions to the history of Scottish Communism have tended to emphasise localised factors as dominating the worldview of party members. Malcolm Petrie’s innovative analysis of inter-war Scotland positions the CPGB as on the losing side of a major reorientation in British politics. The extension of suffrage, growing strength of the Labour Party and the increasing role of the central government in welfare provision and economic management destabilised localised radical traditions and contributed towards the delegitimation of ‘the crowd’. Collective participation in rowdy street meetings, which had characterised elections in the past, was reclassified as threatening and subversive. Political relationships were redefined towards a singular contract between the citizen electorate and their parliamentary representatives. Communists’ ‘defensive, oppositional political identity’ was only able to find a footing in a small minority of single-industry localities.⁴³ Bill Knox and Alan McKinlay’s biography of Jimmy Reid presents his life as fundamentally shaped by familial and local experiences. It was impoverishment and mass unemployment in 1930s Govan, followed by his experience of engineering trade unionism between the 1950s and 1970s, that made Reid ‘the archetypal post-war Communist’.⁴⁴ In Reid’s eventual dissociation from the party in the mid-1970s, ‘the local was personal and just as important’ as disillusionment with the Soviet Union or questioning of the

'British Road to Socialism'. Repeated electoral failure in Dunbartonshire conditioned Reid's decision to abandon the party.⁴⁵

The complex integration of local, national and international orientations within Scottish Communism is, perhaps, summarised by the way in which Harry McShane discovered the CPGB had altered its stance on war with Nazi Germany. McShane was a vociferous housing campaigner and an organiser among the unemployed as well as a member of party staff, having originally been involved in both these areas of activism before joining the CPGB in the early 1920s. He was given a six-week prison sentence over the late summer and early autumn of 1939 for organising physical resistance to an eviction. Whilst in jail, McShane was handed a copy of the *Daily Worker* by a prison warder who was amused by McShane's incomprehension at the Party's opposition to the war, which it now characterised as 'imperialist', in line with Soviet foreign policy. McShane would again shift his position, urging full support for the war effort, after Germany invaded the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941.⁴⁶ The CPGB's change of line also led other prominent Communists to caution against domestic class struggles following the start of conflict on the Eastern Front. For instance, Abe Moffat cooperated with the wartime coalition government to bring an end to strikes in the Scottish coalfields.⁴⁷ The complexities of circumstances and allegiances in these moments, specifically McShane's imprisonment for engagement in a community struggle, belie the simplistic reading that 'Stalinist Russia' was 'the source of all his politics'.⁴⁸ However, they do indicate the importance of international affiliations to shaping the worldview of CPGB members and distinguishing them from other labour movement currents.

Gregory Burke's 2001 play, *Gagarin Way*, provides a sardonic comment on the demise of localised communist traditions in Scotland within the context of economic globalization, which has displaced political internationalism. The plot unfolds in a Fife warehouse that has recently changed ownership from Japanese to American hands. Two disgruntled workers – Eddie and Gary - are inspired by the legacy of their fathers and grandfathers' trade unionism in the coalfield and Rosyth dockyard. But in the circumstances of workforce casualisation and diminished workplace solidarity, they resort to planning the kidnap and murder of a high-profile representative of the company. The plan goes awry when conversation reveals that rather than the American boss they were expecting, their hostage is in fact a Leven man called Frank who works as a consultant. In the dialogue that follows, Gary informs Frank that: 'We've got a bit ay a communist tradition round here you ken.' Frank concurs, informing his kidnapers that he is a miner's son and reminisces in collective memories of Fife's International Brigade volunteers.⁴⁹

The play is named after a street in the Fife mining village of Lumphinnans that commemorates the first person in space, the Soviet cosmonaut, Uri Gagarin. Stuart Macintyre's assessment of inter-war 'Red Strongholds' argued that the naming of the street in the 1960s was itself 'a memorial to a tradition that was already decaying'.⁵⁰ Macintyre's perception was perhaps premature, given that Willie Clarke was active as a communist councillor in the area until 2016. Clarke represented the Benarty ward for forty-three years between 1973 and 2016. He was renowned for this record of public service and fighting for local causes.⁵¹ Clarke's political standing initially grew out of his union activism. He joined the NUM at Glenraig colliery before leading the miners at Seafield. Clarke combined day-to-day workplace agitation with campaigning for tenants' rights and against nuclear weapons. Workplace politics and membership of a powerful Britain-wide union both strengthened Clarke's local position and encouraged him to use the platform this provided to advance internationalist causes. In this respect, Clarke was typical of other leading CPGB industrial trade unionists who achieved their status advancing 'bread and butter' issues in the workplace but maintained a wider political horizon.⁵²

Willie Clarke followed in the footsteps of an earlier generation within the Fife coalfields. Macintyre's book-length study of Britain's 'Little Moscows' details the development of isolated centres of radicalism during the 1920s and 1930s. These small single-industry localities included Lumphinnans and the Vale of Leven, a textile village in West Dunbartonshire. Communists built on existing traditions of radicalism that had developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The conditions of mass unemployment and experiences of class conflict which followed the First World War further instilled communist sympathies. In both cases, a relatively small number of men tended to exercise leadership and community authority through overlapping trade union, NUWM and local government roles.⁵³ Burke refers to Lumphinnans' informal title in his play.⁵⁴ It was a term which had wider purchase. Jessie Clark, the wife of Alex Clark, grew up in a mining household in Douglas Water, South Lanarkshire. During an interview in 2014, Jessie claimed the village had been 'a little Moscow', referring to its Communist Party presence and the broader collective social life. Jessie's father was a blacklisted coal miner who had been a member of the ILP before he joined the CPGB.⁵⁵ These familial links, a culture of the left that stretched across party affiliations and connections between the labour movement and social activities lend credence of Petrie's assessment of the CPGB's success in dispersed pockets of industrial Scotland. They also tend to indicate the temporality traced by Macintyre. Jessie felt that communal life dwindled after rehousing during the 1940s and pit closures in the decades which followed.⁵⁶

Memories of CPGB activism in Glasgow during the 1920s and 1930s similarly emphasise the role played by the depressed economic conditions in the interwar period as well as the immediate legacy of the First World War. *The End of the Party* documentary, which first aired in 1992, portrayed the CPGB's dissolution in 1991 from the vantage of two Glasgow Communists. Rose Kerrigan joined the party in 1921, aged eighteen. She had lost her job four years previously for criticising the First World War and saw communist activism as a logical progression from her education in Glasgow's Socialist Sunday Schools. Her comrade, Bob Horne, became a CPGB member in 1939, and explained that 'we were living in a society where there was mass unemployment and devastation all around.'⁵⁷ Kenny McLachlan's memoirs, which were written during the early 1990s, chime with Horne's reflections. McLachlan joined the party in Springburn during his teens after becoming a heating engineer. He recalled that the 1940 communist-led apprentice strike was an uplifting occasion which engendered 'the feeling that we had been party to real change in our working conditions.' McLachlan detailed a communist social world that included a flute band and reading groups. He remembered these activities as a favourable alternative to sectarian parades and gang battles.⁵⁸ Rose Kerrigan, who met her husband Peter in the CPGB, also referred to interwar rambling and cycling trips as an enjoyable part of interwar Glasgow Communism.⁵⁹

There are complex combinations of tradition and modernity in these memories. The self-organised social life and emphasis on working-class self-education perhaps radiates with the 'philosopher in overalls' ideal of the skilled Scottish working man. Craft traditions and workplace autonomy were secured through jealously guarding the expertise learned over an apprenticeship. This emphasis on 'refined measurement' extended to the social world of the skilled worker, including a labour movement culture of reading, discussion and teetotalism.⁶⁰ The centrality of time-served engineers to Scottish Communism tends to affirm these continuities. Arthur McManus and Willie Gallacher were prominent founding members of the CPGB who had previously played leadership roles in the shop stewards' movement during the First World War. John Gollan, Jimmy Reid, Jimmy Airlie, John Kay and Gordon McLennan were among their successors as party office bearers and high-profile representatives within Scotland and across the Britain.⁶¹ Another example is provided by the ongoing strength of the CPGB's presence at Timex's manufacturing facilities in Dundee, which centred on male toolmakers. The party had had a branch at the Milton of Craigie plant before it was shut down in 1983.⁶²

There were strong parallels within Scottish mining trade unionism. Men such as John McArthur, David Proudfoot, William Pearson and Willie Allan who politically awakened during the 1910s or early 1920s were later succeeded by men who came of age in the 1930s and 1940s. Bill McLean, Michael McGahey and Lawrence Daly became office bearers and Executive Committee members of the NUM Scottish Area (NUMSA). This generation was in turn succeeded by younger miners like George Bolton and David Hamilton whose formative years took place within the nationalised industry. Jim Phillips persuasively argues that the distinctive historical circumstances in which these cohorts matured contributed to differentiated generational outlooks.⁶³ However, there were also important continuities provided by a Communist serving as the NUMSA's President from the office's foundation in 1945 until it was abolished in 1996. These included a deepening commitment to the politics of home rule.⁶⁴ Another important contribution was the affirmation of a 'militant' identity which was passed on through oral tradition within families and preserved in the CPGB and NUMSA's institutional memory. Mick McGahey is a third-generation communist miner, and the son of the NUMSA's President, Michael McGahey. His testimony epitomised this experience. He was arrested and sacked during the 1984-85 miners' strike whilst picketing at Bilston Glen colliery in Midlothian where he was employed as a surface worker. During an interview in 2014, Mick rationalised this experience in light of his grandfather's arrest during the 1926 lockout, which led to him serving a year in prison:

*My father was born in Shotts, my family was born in Shotts, and once they moved fae pit tae pit cause miners were like gypsies. At that time the pits were owned by coal owners, were nae nationalised. So, in my grandfather's day, eh, y'know, they moved when they were victimised. My grandfather was involved in the 1926 general strike. He got sent to jail. He did six month in the jail. My grandmother got evicted. Family oot the pit owner's hoose, and they ended up in Kent, and they moved aboot the coalfields in England, and eventually came back to Scotland and settled in Cambuslang.*⁶⁵

Mick's testimony exemplifies Campbell's 'genealogies of victimisation and radicalism', which reinforced the significance of the CPGB and the miners' struggles as causes that successive members of his family had made great sacrifices for.⁶⁶ There was also a strong equation between the NUMSA and the CPGB in Mick's narrative. He claimed that during the late 1960s and early 1970s one in seven Scottish miners were Communist Party members, and related this to the political education that the union provided for its young members:

*The Communist Party ae Britain played a massive role in training and development and education. Whenever you became active in the National Union ae Mineworkers in Scotland the first thing you did whether you were the youth delegate whether you were on the committee didn't matter what role you had the first thing they did was send you on a training course. You went to the Salutation Hotel in Perth for a weekend school. And it was aboot Marx it was aboot Engels it was aboot Lenin it was aboot the ownership ae the means ae production it was aboot the politics behind why does the government behave like that. Why do we behave like that. It was a complete package ae political education.*⁶⁷

Campbell and Duncan have both observed that the CPGB was most influential within the parts of the Scottish coalfields with the best transport and communication connections and areas with the largest collieries that employed modern mining techniques.⁶⁸ Marxism's status as an ideology premised on a favourable view of scientific progress and modernity figured in the recollection of party members. John McArthur's memories of growing up in the East Fife coalfields underline that he saw himself as a member of a rising working class. He explained that during the 1900s and 1910s there was 'a conflict of ideas, background and outlook between the mining and fishing communities', with the latter tending towards religious traditions and objecting to miners and their

sons playing football on Sundays. Later, 'young miners from the fishing community' became integrated within the within an emergent trade union culture under communist leadership.⁶⁹ A sense of generational succession is also apparent within the political culture in other communist miners' memories, including early party members. Abe Moffat's autobiography contained an account of his radicalisation following his return to mining after serving as a soldier during the First World War. But it also notes that he came 'from a strong coal family' and that his father was a socialist sympathiser as well as 'a lay preacher and a staunch teetotaler'.⁷⁰ Communism's atheistic message provided a significant break, but Moffat's lineage also indicates a pre-existing connection to a radical working-class subculture.

Whilst a lay preacher's son may have found much that they recognised in the CPGB, Communism threatened to open a spiritual and political chasm for Catholics who joined the party. In William McIlvanney's *Docherty*, socialism is presented as a break with family tradition for Tam Docherty, an Ayrshire miner and the son of an Irish immigrant. The novel features a scene in which Tam confronts a priest in the years leading up to the First World War. They clash over the principles of faith and rationality, each viewing the other as an obstacle to social justice. But before the novel concludes, Tam has become appalled by the extremism of his son Mick, who became a Communist after being injured on the Western Front.⁷¹ Whilst the Catholic Church made peace with the Labour Party during the early 1920s, its conflict with Communism never abated.⁷²

McIlvanney's realist novel alluded to traumas suffered by Scottish Communists and their families. These became more pronounced in the context of ideological conflict with fascism during the 1930s and international divisions between the Church and the Third International over the Spanish Civil War. Jennifer McCarey's grandfather was a Lanarkshire steelworker and a CPGB member who numbered International Brigade volunteers among his closest friends. Jennifer recalled learning from her grandfather that he had been 'victimised by the Catholic church' for his political activism. During an oral history interview in 2014, Jennifer further recounted that among her neighbours in Mossend there were several men and women who had had similar experiences: 'they hid it because they had been victimised by the Catholic church in the community. Some of them, their fathers had been thrown out the parish. The whole of the family.'⁷³ Willie Doolan's memories of maturing in Moodiesburn, around nine miles to the north of Mossend, indicate that these divisions remained strong during the 1950s and 1960s. His father became a 'sleeping member' of the CPGB after marrying his mother, who was 'a devout Catholic'. Willie's decision to follow his father into employment at Cardowan colliery, and the party, left her 'kinda heartbroken when ah tended to go wi ma father's inclinations and ideology.'⁷⁴ The talk John Foster delivered at the 2017 Scottish Labour History society conference on the CPGB's early years underlined the importance of the 'Catholic left' and its eventual separation from supporters of the Russia Revolution in the years before 1920.⁷⁵ These developments and their long-term influence require further research as important and lasting dimensions of the Scottish labour movement which were highly connected to the development of international politics.

Communist leadership's persistence within mining trade unionism, which inspired Willie Doolan, was elaborated upon by Raphael Samuel in his reflections on the 1984-85 miners' strike. Samuel identified Scottish and Welsh miners' leaders as embodying their 'own distinctive version of militancy – more 'educated', more Communist, more statesman-like' than their English counterparts.⁷⁶ Michael McGahey was the central exponent of this dignified leadership, which he had developed under the tutorage of the Moffats.⁷⁷ The form of respectability that these men radiated was highly gendered and came to resemble a conservative defence of working-class status in the context of intensifying deindustrialization. In a similar vein, McGahey's comrade, Jimmy Reid, explained to a meeting of shop stewards from across Britain in 1971 that the work-in at Upper Clyde Shipbuilders had 'reasserted the dignity of working men.' It was a struggle to 'establish that they've

got rights, and they've got commitments and privileges and principles.'⁷⁸ Both the work-in and the great strike for jobs were innovative forms of industrial action outwith the usual bounds of British trade unionism's preoccupation with negotiating pay and conditions. Like McGahey, Reid had also been inspired by older communists in his industry. Jock Sheriff was a 'grassroots Communist' and shop steward at Weirs when he was an apprentice. When he worked full-time for the party in London during the 1960s, Reid was then taken under the wing of Harry Pollitt and John Gollan, other former engineers turned professional revolutionaries.⁷⁹

Both Reid and McGahey's capacity for humour and theatrics was learned from earlier generations who prized the 'the rough and tumble' of street meetings as a central component of authentic working-class politics.⁸⁰ However, each of them also had to face a much-changed political context. They came of age in a labour movement that was no longer characterised by a subcultural environment marked by legacies of religious observance and teetotalism. Both men also had to contend with new forms of media to spread their message. Reid's fame grew through a prime-time television clash with the actor, Kenneth Williams, a prominent Conservative supporter whose received English pronunciation and a mock-camp voice effected disdain for the manual working class. This exchange of words and conflicting perspectives consolidated Reid's image as a representative of respectable Scottish working-class masculinity and its collectivist ethos.⁸¹ McGahey became recognised as a leading miners' representative at a British level during the coal wage disputes of the early 1970s. Paul Routledge recalled that as an industrial correspondent he felt: 'The Communists always seemed more sure of themselves, better equipped with facts and arguments, more ready to take on the media' than 'moderate' union leaders were.⁸² Willie Doolan, who was a young striking miner at Cardowan colliery during the 1972 miners' strike, remembered that his workmates revelled in a story of McGahey subverting class and status relations during Downing Street negotiations. McGahey refused an offer of Prime Ministerial cigars for himself but took several for picketers which were sent to Danderhall Miners' Club in Midlothian.⁸³

Recent commemorations have perhaps consolidated the status of the articulate male industrial worker as the domineering figure within memories of Scottish Communism. The huge attendance at Jimmy Reid's funeral in 2010 and a Scottish Parliamentary ceremony to mark the twentieth anniversary of Michael McGahey's death in 2019 cemented the place of both men in accounts of the making of devolution. In 2019, it was revealed that McGahey's ashes were buried in the Scottish Parliament building.⁸⁴ Nine years earlier, both the recently departed Labour Prime Minister, Gordon Brown and the then SNP First Minister, Alex Salmond, attended Reid's funeral and laid claim to his legacy for their respective political traditions.⁸⁵ More recently, the blacking of Chilean jet engines by workers at the Rolls Royce factory in East Kilbride during the 1970s was celebrated in the documentary film *Nae Pasaran*. One of the four shop stewards who were integral to this action was a Communist Party member, Robert Somerville. Somerville epitomises the Scottish Communist archetype as a skilled male engineer and an internationalist whose politics and principles were practiced in the workplace.⁸⁶

However, public memory is not solely preoccupied with male Scottish Communists. Two literary works exemplify more pluralist representations in gender terms. James Robertson's historical novel, *And the Land Lay Still*, features a communist couple in the mining village of Borlanslogie. He portrays the collective endeavour that communism meant for the Clarks and the Kerrigans, emphasising that 1956 was a fateful year for party members who remained as well as those who left.⁸⁷ Robertson underlines the family togetherness and the emotional costs of activism that are important to an empathetic understanding of Scottish communists.⁸⁸ John McGrath's 1980 play, *Blood Red Roses*, shares *Nae Pasaran's* setting in an East Kilbride engineering factory. Its plotline probes the limitations of communist radicalism. The main character, Bessie McGuigan, is a CPGB activist and a shop steward who struggles against a combination of class and patriarchal oppression within her

workplace. Yet she is ultimately undermined by her own husband, another CPGB trade unionist who leaves her and the family for a less politically committed woman.⁸⁹

The year after McGrath's play was released, Bob Horne remembered Willie Gallacher as a traditionally minded man whose advocacy of teetotalism was combined with unease at women wearing trousers.⁹⁰ Knox and McKinlay concluded that Reid was also uncomfortable with the advance of feminism and the questioning of gender relations during the 1970s.⁹¹ These developments were significant in shaping a chasm between the CPGB and the emergent post-1968 radical left which then became a source of growing division within the party during the bitter debate between traditionalists and Eurocommunists.⁹² However, the CPGB was also a source of empowerment for Scottish activists. Bessie McGuigan may well have been inspired by Helen Warren, the East Kilbride mother of two who acted as a 'shadow shop steward' at Birmingham Sound Reproducers and played a leading role in a drawn-out strike for union recognition during 1969.⁹³

Recent research has questioned the extent of women liberation politics within solidarity actions during the 1984-85 miners' strike but it has also affirmed that communist activists and experienced Scottish trade unionists were central to establishing the National Women Against Pit Closures campaign.⁹⁴ Rafeek's oral histories uncovered a longer history of Scottish communist women's commitment to activism over housing and amenities. He also recorded women's role in 'challenging subservience' within their own party over the division of activist tasks and during battles over policies such as abortion on demand. This caused unease among both men and women in the party during the 1960s and 1970s.⁹⁵ Women were able to participate in the CPGB, but within the demarcations of contemporary gender relations. These were not static. Trade union activism among women factory workers who benefited from the post-war expansion of employment in assembly goods factories demonstrates how socio-economic shifts contributed to cultural and political changes that were felt within the party. The changed atmosphere legitimated the demands of birth control campaigners even if it made some party members uncomfortable. Michael McGahey's view, that the working class had two wings and needed both to fly, came to fruition in the NUMSA's proposal for the union to offer affiliate membership to wives in the aftermath of the 1984-85 strike. Just as that conflict had exposed divisions within the British coalfields, so this proposal was, ultimately, voted down by delegates at a British conference.⁹⁶ During the CPGB's twilight years, advances made in the sphere of gender politics could not be consolidated as the party's strategy of achieving societal change via the industrial working class atrophied.

Conclusion

The CPGB developed a distinctive Scottish communist tradition over a period roughly approximate to a human lifetime. It has left a history that crosses geographical scales, between local activism, Scottish nationhood, the British labour movement and communist internationalism. Communist activists were inheritors of a radical working-class subculture. Early party members were often steeped in a tradition of teetotalism and in some cases lay preaching. But being a communist also came with the heavy costs of family conflicts and struggles with religious authorities as well as employer and state repression. Activists drew their strength from international inspirations, including the Soviet Union and the Spanish Republic's struggle against fascism, but they were also firmly embedded in their local circumstances. Scottish communists were most effective as pragmatic workplace and community leaders who gained respect for their principles and commitment to class struggle. However, they were also recognised as political authorities and popularised campaigns for peace, solidarity with international struggles and home rule. As the CPGB steadily departs from human memory,⁹⁷ its legacy is a contested one, aspects of which are open to broader currents of the left as older controversies become less potent. It is important that the memory of Scottish Communism which emerges in the coming decades does not airbrush out the most slavish

dimensions of adherence to Stalinist dictate. Yet, it must also remember the worry that Michael McGahey felt on his flight home from London over to face his father after voting to condemn the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia at a meeting of the CPGB's Political Committee. Communism deserves an empathetic reception which is sensitive to the highly emotional experiences of intense political activism and the victimisation CPGB members often experienced. A meaningful heritage for the contemporary labour movement also requires an appraisal of communists as workplace and community activists engaged in deliberations over political action that took inspiration from a national perspective and international alignments. These prerogatives are very much alive in our own moment of far-right advance and in the urgency of the movement to stop climate change.

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