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# FRANZ BORKENAU: A CONTEXTUAL INTELLECTUAL BIOGRAPHY

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By Oscar Clarke

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements for award  
of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts  
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## Abstract

This contextual intellectual biography of Franz Borkenau covers the period from the early 1930s until his death in 1957, during which he was active as a sociologist, historian of communism, political scientist and journalist. The central arguments of the dissertation are: firstly, that the most important moment in Borkenau's intellectual development was the Nazi *Machtergreifung*, which occasioned a major reassessment of Marxism and led him towards a theory of totalitarianism; and, secondly, contrary to what has previously been written about him, that he did not become ever more illiberal and unhinged in his anti-communism as his career progressed from the interwar to the Cold War era. Rather, his Cold War anti-communism and Atlanticist orientation were foregrounded by the positions he took on the same issues in the contexts of the Popular Front period in interwar Britain, and the British debate over the German problem and the future of Europe during the Second World War. Which is to say that, except for a dalliance with the idea that Soviet Russia had dispensed with communism during the period of the Grand Alliance, there was a basic consistency in Borkenau's intellectual and political positions from the mid-1930s until the end of his life. The thesis also highlights Borkenau's contribution to the method of Kremlinology, which has been overlooked in previous treatments of his work.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisors, Dr James Thompson and Dr Richard Sheldon for their instructive comments on many draft chapters over the last four years. As I have been living in London during that time, I particularly appreciate James's efforts to keep up with my progress and to ensure that supervisions were arranged virtually. Many archivists have facilitated visits or sent me materials by email during the course of my research, but I would particularly like to thank Carol Bunyan, who sent me absolutely everything she had on Borkenau's internment in Australia, and Sandra Spanier, who helped me to decipher Joseph Franckenstein's challenging handwriting. I am thankful that Dr Sergei Bogatyrev gave me the opportunity to work as a PGTA at SSEES, which I enjoyed very much. Finally, I thank my wife for helping me to think about other things besides Franz Borkenau.

## Author's declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: Oscar A. Clarke | DATE: 19/09/2022

## Contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Author’s declaration</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Acronyms/Abbreviations</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>8</b>
Chapter Summaries.....	22
<b>Chapter I - The Collapse of the German Left and Borkenau’s Reappraisal of Marxism</b> .....	<b>28</b>
Introduction .....	28
Part I: Marxist Discourse and the Critique of Marxism .....	28
Part II: Defeat and the German Left.....	31
Between Leninism and anti-Marxism.....	35
The Mentalité of the Working Class in Western Europe.....	35
The Defeat of the German Left.....	37
The Problem of Resistance in Germany.....	42
Pareto vs. Marxian Prophecy.....	47
Borkenau’s Criticisms of Pareto.....	52
Rational vs. Irrational Explanations of Human Conduct.....	54
The Problem of Domination.....	56
The Circulation of Elites .....	57
Leninism vs. Marxism.....	58
<b>Chapter II – Encounters with the Popular Front Left</b> .....	<b>63</b>
Introduction.....	63
Spain .....	69
Introduction to the Spanish Cockpit.....	69
Iberian Exceptionalism .....	71
“Police Terror” in Spain .....	74
Francoism or Fascism.....	79
On Communism.....	83
Introduction to the Communist International.....	83
Historical Background of the Popular Front in Britain.....	87
From the Third Period to the Popular Front: The Comintern Line.....	89
The Popular Front movement.....	91
Looking back on the 1920s: Germany and Britain.....	95
Borkenau’s analysis of Communism – Bolshevisation and Bolshevik Morality.....	99
Communism as a Moral Problem .....	102
British Communism and the War .....	109

The Nazi-Soviet Pact and the Division of the Powers .....	112
<b>Chapter III: Vansittartism and Internationalism: 1940-1945 .....</b>	<b>118</b>
Introduction .....	118
A Labour Revisionist? .....	122
Borkenau and Patrick Gordon Walker.....	126
Coda.....	135
Vansittartism .....	136
The Socialist Response.....	141
Borkenau and Vansittartism.....	144
Socialism: National or International.....	158
<b>Chapter IV: The Cultural Cold War.....</b>	<b>169</b>
Introduction .....	169
Historiography .....	170
The Berlin Congress .....	172
The British and the German Intelligentsia.....	178
British anti-Marxism .....	184
McCarthyist?.....	188
Kremlinology .....	191
From the Comintern to the Politburo.....	194
Kreml-Astrologie .....	199
Two Schools of Kremlinology.....	202
Background of Borkenau's Kremlinology .....	204
<b>Conclusions .....</b>	<b>208</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>212</b>
Franz Borkenau (chronological) .....	212
Books and Pamphlets.....	212
Articles.....	212
Contributions.....	217
Audio .....	217
Primary literature .....	217
Secondary literature.....	226
Periodicals.....	240
Archives .....	241
Web.....	241

## Acronyms/Abbreviations

**BCCF** – Berlin Congress for Cultural Freedom (the 1950 founding Congress of the eponymous organisation)

**CCF** – Congress for Cultural Freedom (also known as the International Association for Cultural Freedom)

**CCMA** - Comitè Central de Milícies Antifeixistes de Catalunya (Unofficial Catalan government body, dominated by the anarchist organisations, established in July 1936)

**CEDA** – Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas (Right-wing Catholic political party in 1930s Spain)

**Comintern** – Communist International

**CNT** – Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (Spanish anarchist trade union federation)

**CPGB** – Communist Party of Great Britain

**CPUSA** – Communist Party of the United States of America

**DANA** – Deutsche Allgemeine Nachrichten Agentur (German news agency of OMGUS)

**ECCI** – Executive Committee of the Communist International (Comintern)

**GRU** - Glavnoye Razvedyvatelnoye Upravlenie (Soviet military intelligence organisation)

**ICD** – Information Control Division (Propaganda organisation of US military government in Germany)

**IFTU** – International Federation of Trade Unions (socialist trade union international also known as the Amsterdam International)

**ILP** – Independent Labour Party (UK)

**KPD** – Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (German Communist Party)

**LBC** – Left Book Club

**LBS** – Labour Book Service

**LSE** – London School of Economics

**NB** – Neu Beginnen

**NEC** – National Executive Committee of the Labour Party (UK)

**NEP** – New Economic Policy (Soviet Union)

**NKVD** - Naródnny komissariát vnútrennikh del (Soviet Secret Police organisation, 1934-46; previously Cheka, GPU, OGPU; subsequently MVD, KGB)

**NMT** - Nuremberg Military Tribunals

**NRA** – National Recovery Administration (United States)

**OMGUS/AMG** – Occupation Military Government of the United States in Germany (also known as American Military Government)

**OSS** – Office of Strategic Services (WWII US intelligence agency)

**PCF** – Parti communiste français (French Communist Party)



**POUM** – Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (Workers’ Party of Marxist Unification, Spain)

**Profintern** – Red International of Labour Unions (Communist international trade union federation)

**PWE** – Political Warfare Executive (British WWII propaganda organisation)

**RKP** – Routledge and Kegan Paul (Archive abbreviation)

**SCG** – Socialist Clarity Group (wartime organisation formed by Labour members with links to German socialist émigrés)

**SED** – Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (Socialist Unity Party, East Germany)

**SPD** – Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (German Social Democratic Party)

**SPSL** – Society for the Protection of Science and Learning (British relief organisation for refugee scholars from Germany and Austria)

**SSEES** – School of Slavonic and East European Studies (London)

**TUC** – Trades Union Congress (UK)

**UCL** – University College London

## Introduction

Franz Carolus Richard Albert Borkenau was born in Vienna in December 1900. Just young enough to have avoided the trenches, he was part of a generation which turned towards socialism in the aftermath of the First World War.<sup>1</sup> But Borkenau, who would later write that Hitler's racial anti-Semitism had its origins in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, embraced Communism after enrolling at university in Leipzig in 1921, partly as a response to the shock of learning of his Jewish heritage.<sup>2</sup> His youthful political extremism – Borkenau rose to the leadership of the student organisation of German communism – was also an act of rebellion against a highly bourgeois upbringing.<sup>3</sup> He had been educated at an illustrious Jesuit grammar school – alumni included Johann Strauss II and Victor Adler – while family members had held important positions in the administrative apparatus of the city.<sup>4</sup>

Borkenau was a participant in the politics of his turbulent time, whose political journey, from the eager communism of his twenties in Weimar Germany, to a Cold War anti-communism which inspired his involvement in the famous hotel-room discussion where the idea of a Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) was supposedly raised for the first time, is one which has many parallels.<sup>5</sup> Yet, one of the arguments which will be developed in this thesis is that Borkenau's intellectual development was not typical – if, indeed, there was such a thing as a typical political trajectory and terminus for ex-communists in mid-twentieth century Europe. Indeed, appropriating Hobsbawm's self-description as a “premature anti-fascist”, I have called Borkenau a “premature anti-communist”.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Borkenau's own comments on the popularity of socialism among the Viennese youth, and on the phenomenon of Austro-Marxism, in Franz Borkenau, *Austria and After*, London: Faber (1938), pp. 107 & 159-79. Borkenau's book emphasised the social and cultural disintegration of Austria in the years leading up to the First World War – including the decline of liberalism and the decline of the empire in the face of the nationalities problem – but also the paradoxical cultural flowering it inspired. For another take on that, see Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture*, New York: Vintage (1981).

<sup>2</sup> “A formula was needed which would comprise both converted and non-converted Jews... The problem for the anti-semites was: Who must be regarded as a Jew? And the answer, on the account of Jewish mass conversions to Christianity, could only be: Those who by their blood belong to the Jewish community... Hitler himself did not create anti-semitism. He simply accepted the views... [of] the large anti-semitic movement in Austria.” In Borkenau, *Austria and After*, pp. 110-1. On the shock Borkenau experienced at learning of his heritage, see the account of his friend Gerald Brenan in *Personal Record*, London: Jonathan Cape (1974), pp. 327-8.

<sup>3</sup> See his own remembrances in Franz Borkenau, “Nachwort”, in Richard Crossman (ed.), *Ein Gott der Keiner War*, Köln: Rote Weissbücher (1952), p. 258.

<sup>4</sup> See John E. Tashjian, “Borkenau: The Rediscovery of a Thinker”, *Partisan Review*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (1984), pp. 289-300.

<sup>5</sup> For a scholarly study of ex-Communism (although relating exclusively to ex-Communists in the United States, see John Patrick Diggins, *Up from Communism*, New York: Columbia University Press (1994). On the 1949 meeting of Melvin Lasky, Ruth Fischer and Borkenau, see Peter Coleman, “Out of the Ruins of Berlin”, *Quadrant*, Vol. 32, No. 1-2 (1988), pp. 6-13.

<sup>6</sup> See Eric Hobsbawm, “War of Ideas”, *Guardian online*, 17 February 2007: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/feb/17/historybooks.featuresreviews>. Richard Lowenthal – commonly

His intellectual achievements were closely linked to his political journey. Having become a renegade, in the parlance of the Communist movement, as early as 1929, over his disagreement with the turn to the Left known in the literature on the Comintern as the “Third Period”, Borkenau maintained close links with revolutionary groups in Austria and Germany in the early 1930s, while being taken on by the Marxist Institute for Social Research (Frankfurt School) to start work on a history of the transition from feudal to bourgeois philosophy.<sup>7</sup> However, the National Socialist *Machtergreifung* caused Borkenau to reassess the deterministic view of Marxism which had been *de rigueur* in both the Communist and Social Democratic movements in Germany.

This reassessment of Marxism led Borkenau towards the theory of totalitarianism – of which he has been seen as a pioneer – first essayed in his *Pareto*, published in British exile in early 1936.<sup>8</sup> Over the following years, up to the Second World War, Borkenau trod an independent intellectual

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referred to as Borkenau’s mentee, owing to their life-long association and the fact that they broke together with communism in 1929 – is arguably the most direct parallel. Yet, Borkenau’s political transformation was much more rapid. In a recent article on Lowenthal’s version of “Cold War liberalism” – centred on the concept of “Western civilisation” – Bavaj has pointed out that Lowenthal was still a believer in the historic progressive mission of the Soviet Union in 1936, and an enthusiast for the “third force” idea as late as 1947. Bavaj quotes Lowenthal on the “communist intransigence” of 1946/7 which impacted his adoption of a Western orientation. I argue that that was an orientation Borkenau assumed much earlier, and that Cold War debates had little impact on his thought. See Riccardo Bavaj, “Cold war liberalism in West Germany: Richard Löwenthal and ‘Western civilization’”, *History of European Ideas* (2022), DOI: [10.1080/01916599.2022.2095525](https://doi.org/10.1080/01916599.2022.2095525). On the post-war concept of “the West” among conservatives in Germany, and its positive (American/new world) connotations, in contrast to the negative 1920s concept of *Abendland* (the old world of declining Europe), see Martina Steber, “The West’, Tocqueville, and West German Conservatism from the 1950s to the 1970s”, in Riccardo Bavaj and Martina Steber (eds.), *Germany and the West: The History of a Modern Concept*, New York: Berghahn (2015), esp. p. 271.

<sup>7</sup> Franz Borkenau, *Der Übergang vom feudalen zum bürgerlichen Weltbild*, Paris: Felix Alcan (1934). On the Comintern, see esp. Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew, *The Comintern: A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin*, London: Macmillan (1996).

<sup>8</sup> Franz Borkenau, *Pareto*, New York: John Wiley & Sons (1936). For a commentary on the theory of totalitarianism which emerged from Pareto, see William David Jones, “Toward a Theory of Totalitarianism: Franz Borkenau’s Pareto”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 53, No. 3 (1992), pp. 455-66.

Research into the historical origins of the theory of totalitarianism has, paradoxically, emphasised both the Marxist and the Catholic contribution. It is perhaps unsurprising that Borkenau, an ex-Communist schooled by Jesuits, should have had a part to play in the formation of the theory. On the contribution of Marxist critics to the theory, see William David Jones, *The Lost Debate: German Socialist Intellectuals and Totalitarianism*, Chicago: University of Illinois Press (1999). And on the Catholic origins of totalitarianism theory, see Heinz Hurten, “Waldemar Gurian and the development of the concept of totalitarianism”, in Hans Maier, *Totalitarianism and Political Religions: Concepts for the comparison of dictatorships*, London: Routledge (2004) pp. 42-55; James Chappel, *Catholic Modern: The Challenge of Totalitarianism and the Remaking of the Church*, Harvard University Press (2018); James Chappel, “The Catholic Origins of Totalitarianism Theory in Interwar Europe,” *Modern Intellectual History* Vol. 8, No. 3 (2011), pp. 561–90.

The origins of the theory of totalitarianism have also been traced to liberal critics and dissidents of the Mussolini regime in the 1920s. See the comments about this in J. P. Arnason, “Totalitarianism and Modernity: Franz Borkenau’s Totalitarian Enemy as a Source of Sociological Theorizing on Totalitarianism”, in A. Siegel (ed.), *The Totalitarian Paradigm After the End of Communism*, Amsterdam: Rodopi (1998), pp. 151-80. There does not seem to have been a work devoted to the Italian liberals’ contribution to the theory. But, for an early comparison of Bolshevism and Italian Fascism, see Francesco Nitti (Margaret Green trans.), *Bolshevism, Fascism And Democracy*, London: George Allen & Unwin (1927). It has also been argued, however, that liberalism is a limited tool for a thoroughgoing critique of totalitarianism, as liberal theorists tend to define totalitarianism by the ways in which it opposes liberal ideology. See Andrew Zimmerman, “Foucault in Berkeley and Magnitogorsk: Totalitarianism and the Limits of Liberal Critique”, *Contemporary European History*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (2014), pp. 225-36.

For a general study of the history of the concept of totalitarianism, see Abbott Gleason, *Totalitarianism: The Inner History of the Cold War*, Oxford University Press (1995).

path. A prominent section of the Left in Britain – what I call the “Popular Front Left” – had discovered deterministic Marxism around the same time as Borkenau had become sceptical about it. In this context, the theory of totalitarianism posed a direct challenge to the widely held view that fascism was the final and most reactionary form taken by capitalism in response to the mounting threat and irresistible destiny of the workers’ movement.<sup>9</sup> Already a staunch anti-Communist, Borkenau also stood against the growing influence of the Comintern on the Western Left. In 1937, he published a highly independent eyewitness account of political developments in the Republican camp in the early months of the Spanish Civil War.<sup>10</sup> He followed that up with the first non-communist history of the Comintern, written with that “Popular Front” section of the Left, which had lately become enthusiastic about the Soviet Union and the idea of forming political alliances with communists, in mind.<sup>11</sup>

After the fall of France, Borkenau was deported to Australia and interned as an enemy alien, returning to a country which, in the context of the Blitz, had developed a decidedly anti-German atmosphere. His writings in this period are not very well remembered, but he published some unique reflections on German and Prussian history which challenged the precepts of what had come to be known as Vansittartism: the theory of eternal German infamy.<sup>12</sup> The major preoccupation of what I have called the “anti-Vansittartist Left”, which included many of the same figures who had been influential on the Popular Front Left in the 1930s, had been to advance a post-war solution to what they saw as the causes of war. Against the thesis of a “German Problem”, they held the interlinked bogeys of imperialism, nationalism and monopoly capitalism responsible, and saw socialism and European federalism as the safeguards against future wars on the continent.<sup>13</sup> By contrast with other anti-Vansittartists, Borkenau intuited the historical importance of the Atlantic alliance which had been formed as a result of the War, and believed that the problem of nationalism could be overcome by the benign application of its power.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> This was a theory which derived from the Comintern, and was given its clearest expression, perhaps, in the work of British communist R. Palme Dutt, *Fascism and Social Revolution*, New York: International Publishers (1934).

<sup>10</sup> Franz Borkenau, *The Spanish Cockpit*, London: Faber (1937). For citations, I have used the Michigan: Ann Arbor (1963) edition.

<sup>11</sup> Franz Borkenau, *The Communist International*, London: Faber (1938). For Citations, I have used Franz Borkenau, *World Communism: A History of the Communist International*, Michigan Ann Arbor (1962). I say first non-Communist history because C. L. R. James published a dissident communist (Trotskyist) history of the Communist International in 1937. C. L. R. James, *World Revolution (1917-1936)*, London: Secker & Warburg (1937).

<sup>12</sup> On Vansittartism, see esp. Isabelle Tombs, “The Victory of Socialist Vansittartism: Labour and the German Question, 1941–5”, *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (1996), pp. 287–309.

<sup>13</sup> Tombs has some commentary on some of the anti-Vansittart Left. See *Ibid.* After the War, in the context of the emerging Cold War, this would develop into the “Third Force” thesis.

<sup>14</sup> See Franz Borkenau, *Socialism: National or International*, London: Routledge (1942).

Borkenau was better as a critic and as a polemicist than as a systemiser, or as someone who could deliver detailed solutions to political problems. Nevertheless, his idiosyncratic idea that an Anglo-American “Superimperialism” could guide Western Europe to an internationalist future anticipated the responsibilities that the United States would take on in post-war Europe, even if he overestimated the British contribution to that task. It is one of the arguments of this thesis that Borkenau’s political positions in the Cold War were prefigured by this argument which he had developed in the context of the wartime debate over the “German problem”.

The question of what to call Borkenau is a difficult one. His doctoral degree had been in History, but he had worked as a political analyst for the Comintern during the 1920s. In 1934, he published an intellectual history of the transition from the feudal to the bourgeois outlook, which was Marxist inasmuch as it privileged material factors. After writing an intellectual biography of Pareto, he went to Spain in 1936 as a “sociologist”, applying the method of “participant observation” learned from Bronislaw Malinowski, under whom he had held some kind of studentship at LSE after arriving in London in 1934.<sup>15</sup> His 1938 books on the Anschluss and the Comintern were straightforward works of history, while he was styled as a “political scientist” in the jacket blurb to *New German Empire*, a book in which he attempted to explain the expansionist logic of National Socialism, and the only book in which “Dr” was appended to the author’s name.<sup>16</sup>

In truth, Borkenau was an “intellectual”, rather than an academic. While his academic career was thrown into crisis by the advent of National Socialism, the unorthodox arguments in his forthcoming Frankfurt book had already led to a straining of his relationship with the Institute, meaning that he would have been seeking new employment regardless.<sup>17</sup> If it had always been his wish to re-establish an academic career, he would not have abandoned his first opportunity, an unhappy sojourn at the University of Panama in 1935/6, after only six months.<sup>18</sup> Nor would his next career move have been to travel to Spain with only the vague hope of finding a publisher for

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<sup>15</sup> See Borkenau’s file in the Archive of the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning (SPSL). Borkenau CV, 1939, Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MS. S.P.S.L. 348/8-12.

<sup>16</sup> Franz Borkenau, *The New German Empire*, Harmondsworth: Penguin (1939).

<sup>17</sup> See Valeria E. Russo, “Henryk Grossman and Franz Borkenau: a Bio-Bibliography”, *Science in Context*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1987), pp. 181-91.

<sup>18</sup> Borkenau had good reasons for leaving his position. The national University of Panama had only recently been established and undoubtedly took advantage of the opportunity presented by the German exodus to hire high calibre scholars on exploitative contracts. He considered Panama an intellectual backwater, and was also deeply concerned about the potential fallout for refugee scholars if the opposition triumphed in the Panamanian elections, scheduled for June 1936. On the other hand, Borkenau had struggled for well over a year to obtain an academic appointment, missing out on opportunities in South Africa, India and Canada. See Borkenau’s file in the Archive of the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning (SPSL), Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MS. S.P.S.L. 348/8-12.

his observations on the Revolution.<sup>19</sup> Even after his post-war return to Germany, Borkenau dispensed with a professorship at the University of Marburg in order to work as a freelance correspondent on Soviet affairs for publications in several countries.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, as he wrote to fellow Kremlin-watcher Boris Nicolaevsky when he was asked to take over as Soviet correspondent for a major Swiss daily, the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, in 1955, the appointment was a long-held “dream” of his.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, Borkenau’s intellectual interests were probably too broad for academic life. Towards the end of the Second World War, for instance, he revived an interest in world history which went back to his doctoral dissertation, a study of a 65-volume history of the world published in Britain in the eighteenth century.<sup>22</sup> In spite of his communist faith, Borkenau had been influenced in his choice of subject by Spengler’s *Decline of the West*, which had had a short-lived but monumental impact in Germany when it was published at the end of the First World War.<sup>23</sup> His engagement with Spengler and Toynbee; with their themes of comparative civilisational history and the concept of rise and decline; and, in particular, with the examination of the origins of his own – Western – civilisation continued until his death in 1957, and many of his writings on these subjects were only collected together and published 25 years later.<sup>24</sup> But this thesis deals with Borkenau’s writings on the politics of his own time.

Previous work on Borkenau has tended to focus on his contribution to the theory of totalitarianism, and the Marxist milieu out of which his critique emerged.<sup>25</sup> In addition, it has recently been argued that this milieu – and Borkenau in particular – had a decisive influence on Hannah Arendt’s famous study of totalitarianism.<sup>26</sup> A focus, then, only on the theory of totalitarianism might be a somewhat unoriginal approach to Borkenau’s work.<sup>27</sup> Borkenau’s

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<sup>19</sup> Borkenau’s letters to Rebecca West reveal that negotiations with Faber opened only after he had returned from the first of two tours of the Spanish Republic. See Borkenau to West, 30 September 1936, Rebecca West Papers. General Collection of Rare Books and Manuscripts. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library (West Papers).

<sup>20</sup> Borkenau’s friend Harry Pross, whom he had employed as an assistant when he was editor of the US Military Government (OMGUS) journal on Soviet affairs, *Ost-Probleme*, in the late 1940s, later wrote the following about this decision (see Harry Pross, “Hoffnung im paranoischen Zeitalter”, *Merkur*, Vol. 39, No. 138, p. 697):

“A professor in Marburg for a while, [Borkenau] was not really imaginable in the tavern on the Lahn [a reference to provincial nature of the area]. His quasi-criminalistic interest in the rivalries and entanglements of daily politics demanded constant contact with the “big” political world.”

<sup>21</sup> Franz Borkenau to Boris Nicolaevsky, 28 August 1955, Boris I. Nicolaevsky collection, Box 473, Folder 31 [Reel 358], Hoover Institution Library & Archives.

<sup>22</sup> George Sale *et al.*, *An Universal history, from the earliest account of time (65 vols.)*, London: T. Osborne (1747-68).

<sup>23</sup> Oswald Spengler [trans. C. F. Atkinson], *The Decline of the West*, London: George Allen & Unwin (1971).

<sup>24</sup> Franz Borkenau & Richard Lowenthal (ed.), *End and Beginning: On the Generations of Cultures and the Origin of the West*, New York: Columbia (1981)

<sup>25</sup> In addition to his book, cited above, see William David Jones, “The Path from Weimar Communism to the Cold War: Franz Borkenau and the “totalitarian enemy””, in Alfons Söllner et al. (ed.), *Totalitarismus: Eine Ideengeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Hamburg: Akademie Verlag (1997), pp. 35-52. Also see Arnason, “Totalitarianism and Modernity”.

<sup>26</sup> Nicholas Devlin, “Hannah Arendt and Marxist Theories of Totalitarianism”, *Modern Intellectual History* (2021), pp. 1-23.

<sup>27</sup> Other works on Borkenau include: John Tashjian, *Franz Borkenau: A Study of His Social and Political Ideas* (PhD thesis), Georgetown University (1962); Árpád Szokolczai, *Reflexive Historical Sociology*, London: Routledge (2000); Árpád

contribution, as an émigré, to the anti-fascist cause in interwar Britain has also previously been examined.<sup>28</sup>

But this thesis focusses mainly on his engagement with the communist movement and with debates which took place on the Left, or rather on a multiplicity of Lefts, in the years of his intellectual activity. I take a slightly different view of Borkenau than some of the historians who have previously looked at his work, who have tended to conclude that he charted a course from dogmatic communism to dogmatic anti-communism.<sup>29</sup> But I do think that the investigation of what Ignazio Silone called “The Situation of the Ex” is the major reason why Borkenau’s work is a worthy subject for study.<sup>30</sup> In an essay on Spengler, in a variation of his protagonist’s idea of cultural Ur-symbols, Borkenau posed that each civilisation, or “high culture”, has its own “style”.<sup>31</sup> As somebody who had served the Comintern apparatus from the inside, he viewed world communism in a similar way. In one of his Kremlinological articles he adapted the French proverb that *le style c’est l’homme* into *le style c’est le parti*.<sup>32</sup> In Foucauldian language, Borkenau saw international communism as a different “regime of truth”; a world which, because it operated by different rules and norms, was not always navigable by the same methods of political and sociological analysis which could be used in the context of an open society.<sup>33</sup> He spent the best part of his intellectual life attempting to make communism comprehensible to a public which had not shared in his experience. As in the more famous case of Arthur Koestler, who wrote, for instance, of how those who had not known the communist movement from the inside had trouble grasping what he called *fraktionspolitik* – the law of intraparty struggle – Borkenau left himself open to charges of exaggeration and paranoia commonly ascribed to ex-Communists.<sup>34</sup>

Part of the appeal of Borkenau’s writings is the Marxist – or, more specifically, Hegelian – heritage, remarked upon in Tashjean’s early study of his ideas.<sup>35</sup> He had, as he reminded readers of his

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Szakolczai, “Norbert Elias and Franz Borkenau: Intertwined Life-Works”, *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (2000), pp. 45-69.

<sup>28</sup> Dan Stone, *Responses to Nazism in Britain, 1933-1939: Before War and Holocaust*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan (2003); & “Anti-Fascist Europe Comes to Britain”, in *The Holocaust, Fascism and Memory*, London: Palgrave Macmillan (2013), pp. 67-80.

<sup>29</sup> See Jones, *Lost Debate*, & Mario Kessler, “Between communism and anti-communism: Franz Borkenau”, Mario Kessler (ed.), *German Scholars in Exile: New Studies in Intellectual History*, Plymouth: Lexington (2011), pp. 93-120.

<sup>30</sup> See Ignazio Silone, “The Situation of the Ex”, in *Emergency Exit*, London: Gollancz (1969), pp. 100-10.

<sup>31</sup> Franz Borkenau, “Thinking Beyond Spengler”, in Borkenau & Lowenthal (ed.), *End and Beginning*, p. 43.

<sup>32</sup> Franz Borkenau, “Analysis of Sino-Soviet Relations”, in John Tashjean, “The Sino-Soviet Split: Borkenau’s Predictive Analysis of 1952”, *China Quarterly*, Vol. 94 (1983), p. 354.

<sup>33</sup> See Daniele Lorenzini, “What is a ‘Regime of Truth?’” *Le foucauldien*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2015), pp. 1-5.

<sup>34</sup> Arthur Koestler, *The Invisible Writing*, London: Hamish Hamilton (1954), pp. 189-90 (on ex-communists seen as paranoiacs) & 252-3 (on *fraktionspolitik*). A critical view of ex-communism which will be discussed, below, is Isaac Deutscher, “The Ex-Communist’s Conscience”, in *Heretics and Renegades and Other Essays*, London: Jonathan Cape (1969), pp. 9-22.

<sup>35</sup> Tashjean, *Borkenau: A Study*. Also see John E. Tashjean, “Borkenau on Marx: An Intellectual Biography”, *Wiseman Review*, Summer 1961, pp. 149-157.

*Communist International*, “passed through the school of dialectics”.<sup>36</sup> As George Lichtheim once opined – by way of explaining why, in his view, “the Marxists made the more interesting contributions” at the Berlin Congress for Cultural Freedom (BCCF) in 1950 – there was a “theoretical” style of political writing on the continent which owed its origins to its practitioners’ maturation in Marxism.<sup>37</sup> Borkenau never relinquished his Hegelianism, and it was through the Hegelian lens that he viewed totalitarianism as a revolutionary challenge to the *laissez-faire* system of classical liberalism. The new utopian principle (totalitarianism) had arisen, as he saw it, in answer to the old one (liberalism), and the clash, he hoped, would furnish a higher principle, shorn of the utopianism which was the bane of both.<sup>38</sup> In 1940, he appealed for an anti-totalitarian counter-revolution which would nevertheless recognise that, just like the French Revolution, the totalitarian revolution had ushered in some historical changes which were both inevitable and irreversible.<sup>39</sup>

A decade later, he developed some ideas about who was best placed to form the intellectual cadres of this counter-revolution. His Hegelian answer to the “foolish” critics who viewed ex-communists as the traders of one extremism for another was that precisely the opposite was the case. Writing about the liberalism of the American ex-communists Eugene Lyons and Max Eastman, he remarked on the difference between their outlook and that of the “*Alt-Liberalismus*”: the ideology of the big corporations, which rejected the entire development of socialism, was anti-union domestically, isolationist in foreign policy, and had never understood the new anti-liberal currents which had arisen on the old continent.<sup>40</sup> The ex-communist liberals, by contrast, were far from being opponents of unionisation and believed an active American foreign policy was essential for the maintenance of the free world. They had, he argued, “gone through these new [anti-liberal] currents” (communism) and had come to “unite the old and the new insights in themselves”.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, the ex-communist technocrats – Borkenau gave the example of James Burnham – were “immune from the danger of sympathising with an oriental despotism”, as such forerunners as the physiocrats of the eighteenth century and, he argued, Comte and the nineteenth-century positivists, had done.<sup>42</sup> There is grandeur (and perhaps exaggeration) in this view of life – and it is easy to see

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<sup>36</sup> Borkenau, *World Communism*, p. 11.

<sup>37</sup> G. L. Arnold [George Lichtheim], “The German Reviews”, *Nineteenth Century and After*, Vol. 148, November 1950, p. 296.

<sup>38</sup> See Franz Borkenau, “Return to the Old Values”, *Nineteenth Century and After*, Vol. 148, November 1950, pp. 300-5.

<sup>39</sup> See Ch. X: “Conclusions”, in Franz Borkenau, *The Totalitarian Enemy*, London: Faber (1940), pp. 239-54 & Franz Borkenau, “A Program for Counter Revolution”, *Common Sense*, Vol. 9, No. 12 (1940), pp. 12-5.

<sup>40</sup> See Borkenau, “Nachwort”, pp. 258-9.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 259.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* Comte had preached the idea of converting Islam into a positivist “cult of humanity” to the Turkish reformers of his day, believing that the Islamic and Ottoman desire to “promote uniformity of opinions and customs” could be turned to the advantage of rationalism. Comtean Positivism would later inspire the “Young Turks”. See Banu Turnaoğlu, “The Positivist Universalism and Republicanism of the Young Turks.” In *The Formation of Turkish Republicanism*, Princeton University Press (2017), pp. 90 & 92-103.



why Gerald Brenan concluded that Borkenau was a “Nietzschean romantic” – but there is also great insight into the real historical role of ideas.<sup>43</sup> It is unlikely that Eastman would have appreciated Borkenau’s dialectical interpretation of his role in history, but the outlines are not very different from what the pre-eminent historian of American ex-communism later wrote about him. “In Eastman”, as Diggins put it, “the libertarian ‘heart’ struggled privately with the Leninist ‘head’”.<sup>44</sup> Though Borkenau was sometimes pessimistic about what he saw as the disintegration of the democratic world, he often returned to the idea that totalitarianism, in spite of itself, might actually have the effect of reinvigorating its values.<sup>45</sup> It is surely no coincidence that this idea married so well with the main thesis which animated his contributions to the comparative history of civilisations: that periods of barbarism tended, paradoxically, to be essential to the emergence of new creative processes, and thus to technological and civilisational progress.<sup>46</sup>

Along with Nicolaevsky, Borkenau was instrumental in establishing the method of Kremlinology. The concept of totalitarianism had become dominant in the analysis of Soviet politics by the 1950s, and its adherents tended to emphasise its monolithic aspect. The leader – Stalin – was all powerful, and what went on beneath him was of little interest as far as Soviet policy was concerned.<sup>47</sup> The later revisionist school of Soviet historiography, of which Fitzpatrick has been the major figure, would challenge the totalitarian school, mainly by taking a “history from below” approach and looking in much greater detail at Soviet society, at everyday life, and at active and passive resistance.<sup>48</sup> But Borkenau, who had told the story of the factional struggles in the Comintern in his 1938 history of that organisation – and had also been influenced by fellow Frankfurt veteran Franz Neumann’s elucidation of power and policy struggles within the Nazi Party – challenged the standard totalitarian view in a slightly different way.<sup>49</sup> The monolithic appearance of Soviet policy, he thought, was a myth.<sup>50</sup> While Stalin had been able largely to suppress the constant struggles of policy and personalities in the Party through terror, or otherwise to turn the antagonisms to his own advantage, first the War and then his death, Borkenau thought, had brought those conflicts

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<sup>43</sup> Gerald Brenan, “Foreword”, in Franz Borkenau, *The Spanish Cockpit*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press (1963), p. viii. An historian who was an acquaintance of Borkenau in Germany after the war wrote a four-volume history of the role of anti-communism in post-war German history. Harold Hurwitz, *Demokratie und Antikommunismus in Berlin nach 1945* (4 vols.), Köln: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik (1983-90).

<sup>44</sup> Diggins, *Up from Communism*, p. 36.

<sup>45</sup> “Ex-communism, as a phenomenon that has taken on mass proportions, is so important today precisely because, in the midst of a democratic world that has lost its own values, it represents an affirmation of these very values, and this on the basis of a penetrating experience of the consequences of any departure from them.” Borkenau, “Nachtwort”, p. 255.

<sup>46</sup> See Borkenau and Lowenthal (ed.), *End and Beginning*, p. 457.

<sup>47</sup> See Carl J. Friedrich (ed.), *Totalitarianism: Proceedings of a Conference Held at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press (1954).

<sup>48</sup> See esp. Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, Oxford University Press (2000).

<sup>49</sup> See Borkenau, *World Communism*, & Franz Neumann, *Bebemoth*, London: Gollancz (1942).

<sup>50</sup> See Franz Borkenau, “Getting at the Facts Behind the Soviet Facade”, *Commentary*, April 1954, pp. 393-406.

back to the fore. The analysis of “infighting” was the key to unlocking the enigma of Soviet domestic and, more pressingly, foreign policy.<sup>51</sup> Kremlinology has still yet to receive any systematic historical treatment, and it is one of the elements in Borkenau’s biography which has been overlooked in previous assessments of his work. The only scholarly work which does give a partial historical account of the origins of the method of Kremlinology has focussed on the contributions of Nicolaevsky and the early biographer of Stalin, Boris Souvarine.<sup>52</sup> The practice of what I would call ‘vulgar Kremlinology’ in the popular press – in which Western journalists with no particular expertise would make speculations on the basis of things like where members of the Politburo were stood in photos – has received some historical attention, but it does a disservice to the more serious applications of the method, both by its earlier practitioners and by historians like Conquest and Ra’anan, when the two species are conflated.<sup>53</sup> Thus, it is one aspect of Borkenau’s intellectual biography which this thesis will be the first work to examine in detail.

I argue that Borkenau’s intellectual development has been somewhat misjudged by Jones and Kessler, who have too readily depicted him as a cliché representative of the transition from fanatical communism to paranoid anti-communism.<sup>54</sup> Perhaps, it is for this reason that his Kremlinological articles have been overlooked: they are products of a phase in Borkenau’s life which has been given short shrift in the historiography. But aside from the question whether his anti-communism impaired his judgement, I think that Jones and Kessler have put the emphasis in the wrong place, both regarding the Cold War atmosphere as the key in Borkenau’s journey to anti-communism. By contrast, I think that the crucial period in Borkenau’s intellectual development was the period of Hitler’s ascension to and consolidation of power. This was the event which triggered his most profound reassessment of formerly held views and led him to doubt the validity of Marxism as a tool by which to understand political and historical developments.<sup>55</sup> Koselleck’s observation that the experience of defeat often drives forward historical inquiry is apposite in Borkenau’s case.<sup>56</sup> He had resolved to take up the pen against communism, meanwhile,

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<sup>51</sup> See Franz Borkenau, “Ten Years of Infighting”, *New Leader*, 25 June 1956, pp. 8-9.

<sup>52</sup> Anthony D’Agostino, *Soviet Succession Struggles: Kremlinology and the Russian Question from Lenin to Gorbachev*, Boston: Allen & Unwin (1988).

<sup>53</sup> See Zachary Jonathan Jacobson, “On the ‘arcane modern science of Kremlinology’ or the case of the vanishing birthdays”, *Cold War History*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (2016), 141-58. See also Robert Conquest, *Power and Policy in the USSR*, London: Macmillan (1961); & Gavriel Ra’anan, *International Policy Formation in the USSR: Factional "debates" During the Zhdanovschchina*, Connecticut: Archon Books (1983).

<sup>54</sup> Jones, *Lost Debate*; Jones, “The Path”; Kessler, “Between Communism”.

<sup>55</sup> See Ch I.

<sup>56</sup> Paraphrased by Hayden White, “Foreword”, in Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History*, Stanford University Press (2002), pp. xii-xiii.

a full decade before 1947, the year that tends to be cited as marking the beginning of the Cold War.<sup>57</sup>

Until Jones' work on the "forgotten" 1930s theorists of totalitarianism on the German Left, which was published in the 1990s, Borkenau had been a relatively forgotten figure.<sup>58</sup> To the extent that his work had remained live into the late Cold War period, it did so among a fairly small group of Sovietologist scholars and writers who subscribed to the kremlinological method – notably Ra'anana, who, in the 1980s, revived an original thesis about the Cominform that had been advanced in Borkenau's *European Communism* – and among political comrades from post-war Germany and the publications of the CCF.<sup>59</sup> When the oldest of these comrades, Lowenthal, edited Borkenau's lost writings on the origin of the West in the early 1980s, the collection made very little impact in scholarly circles.

Perhaps the end of the Cold War was the signal for a revival of interest – in the form of an historicisation – in the work of those figures, like Borkenau, who took a prominent role in its debates.<sup>60</sup> But the period since the 1990s has been very far removed from the world Borkenau inhabited, in which the hopes and certainties of the nineteenth century were upended by the War of 1914; by economic collapse; and, as Borkenau saw it, by a totalitarian revolution which rose up in answer to the disintegration of that old world. The hopes of peace and prosperity cherished in 1945 were hardly realised in the years before Borkenau died. Out of a war in which technology had been pushed to destructive ends without precedent, the most destructive technology then conceivable had been created – and used. In 1940, Borkenau had called the Second World War an "ideological war", and, though the total defeat of Germany had been an absolute ideological defeat for National Socialism, 1945 was only the beginning of a much more protracted ideological conflict.<sup>61</sup> As Borkenau wrote, in a Hegelian register, shortly after Hitler's death:

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<sup>57</sup> See Ch. II.

<sup>58</sup> Jones, *Lost Debate*.

<sup>59</sup> Ra'anana, *International Policy Formation*. Ra'anana put forward fresh historical evidence for Borkenau's speculative thesis that the founding of the Cominform had been an act of rebellion on the part of a forward faction in international communism led by Andrei Zhdanov. See Franz Borkenau, *European Communism*, London: Faber (1953). One of Borkenau's political comrades from post-war Germany was Melvin Lasky, editor of *Der Monat* and, later, in London, of the CCF's *Encounter*. After the fall of the Berlin wall, Lasky dedicated a collection of essays on the topic to Borkenau and other friends from the "Monat years" who had not lived long enough to see the collapse of East German Communism. See Melvin Lasky, *Voices in a Revolution*, London: Transaction (1992).

<sup>60</sup> Raymond Aron is a comparable figure in this regard. See, for instance, Iain Stewart, *Raymond Aron and Liberal Thought in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge UP (2019).

<sup>61</sup> Borkenau, "An Ideological War", in *Totalitarian Enemy*, pp, 11-9.

The age of convulsions, of wars and revolutions, is patently not yet over. How could it be? The main protagonists have only now come upon the stage. The great crises of history end only when the problems are solved which brought them about.<sup>62</sup>

The task of coming to an historical judgement about figures who lived through such turbulent times can, perhaps, be obscured by the atmosphere of the present in which the historian is writing. Such has been the argument of the preeminent historian of the Cold War, John Lewis Gaddis:

History, inescapably, involves viewing distant pasts through the prism of more recent ones. The incontestable fact that the United States overreacted more than once during the subsequent history of the Cold War... [blinds] us to the equally demonstrable fact that in the immediate postwar years the behavior of the Russians alarmed... a good portion of... the world... [T]o deny that the alarm itself was sincere... is to distort the view through the prism more than is necessary.<sup>63</sup>

Similarly, the historian Walter Laqueur's response to Frances Stonor Saunders' denunciatory turn-of-the-millennium book about the CCF, which, owing to the revelations about the sources of its funding, treated those intellectuals who wrote for its publications as CIA lackeys, was simply that "you had to be there".<sup>64</sup> The anti-Soviet and anti-communist writings of a generation of intellectuals, he argued, were reflective of a time when the Soviet Union posed – or seemed to pose – a very real threat to world peace and occupied half of Europe. Another academic who was old enough to remember that time, the sociologist Dennis Wrong, wrote in 1996 that the present can be a "distorting lens" through which to view the past. He recalled that, in 1948, "fear of war and even fatalistic acceptance of its inevitability were almost universal", and argued that this aspect of the texture of that period was something which historians living in more peaceful times often struggled to appreciate.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, Nehring has questioned whether the field of 'Cold War studies' itself has "lost sight of one of the key aspects of the 'Cold War': its war-like character".<sup>66</sup>

Something should also be said about the historical reputation of anti-communists in the two distinct – interwar and post-war – periods. Regardless of the ideal of the disinterested scholar, history often passes political judgements, and biographers of figures who were closely engaged in the political debates of their times often have to, to some extent, in order to say something useful about their writings. Historians and biographers have tended to look back on the 1930s as a time when sections of the British Left exhibited a certain naivete with regard to the Soviet Union, even

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<sup>62</sup> Franz Borkenau, "The Displacement of Europe", *The Tablet*, 26 May 1945, pp. 244-5.

<sup>63</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *The Long Peace: Inquiries into the History of the Cold War*, Oxford University Press (1987), pp. 46-7.

<sup>64</sup> See Frances Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper?: The CIA and the Cultural Cold War*, London: Granta (1999); & Walter Laqueur, "You Had to be There", *The National Interest*, No. 58 (1999/2000), pp. 133-5.

<sup>65</sup> Dennis Wrong, "Truth, Misinterpretation, or Left-Wing McCarthyism?" *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (1996), p. 618.

<sup>66</sup> Holger Nehring, "What Was the Cold War?", *English Historical Review*, Vol. 127 (2012), p. 923.

if reputations have been defended on the grounds that those same sections of the Left were “premature anti-fascists”.<sup>67</sup> In that historical context, individuals who exhibited an anti-totalitarian – rather than solely anti-fascist – outlook, have often been lauded for their prescience. George Orwell is probably the standout example of a figure who has been celebrated for standing against orthodoxies in the period of the Moscow Trials and the Great Terror.<sup>68</sup> But the politics of the early Cold War period have been much more hotly contested. A resolute anti-communism in that latter period is associated not so much with intellectual courage in the face of the horrors of Stalinism, but with the injustices of McCarthyism or the perceived errors or crimes of US foreign policy.<sup>69</sup> “Cold Warriors” have been seen as providing the intellectual justifications for a Cold War which some believe could have been avoided.<sup>70</sup> While it would not be appropriate to enter into that debate, the revival of the context in which Borkenau was writing is integral to the task of coming to a judgement about his later writings.

As for Borkenau’s attitude towards communism, I cannot see any particularly profound distinction between his writings of the late 1930s and those of the 1950s. The difference, of course, between the two decades, was the *historical context*. In the 1930s, the Soviet Union was mainly concerned with self-preservation, and it was obvious to the vast majority of those on the political Left in Europe – if not, as Haslam has recently argued, to governments and the citizenry at large – that the peace and security of the continent was imperilled only by Germany.<sup>71</sup> After the Second World War, by contrast, the Soviet Union had swallowed-up the greater part of Eastern Europe, the communist parties of Italy and France had genuine mass memberships, and communists came to power in China and other parts of Asia. For much of this period, Borkenau was living in Germany, where the Cold War was part of daily life, and where the echo of the Korean War was much louder than it was in France or Britain. If his anti-communism came somewhat to the fore in his writings, it simply reflected the times rather than signalling a change of attitude.<sup>72</sup> In Borkenau’s own

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<sup>67</sup> See, for example, Neil Wood, *Communism and British Intellectuals*, Columbia University Press (1959). Also see Noel Thompson, *John Strachey: An Intellectual Biography*, London: Macmillan (1993), p. 109. For the defence of premature anti-fascism, see Hobsbawm, “War of Ideas”.

<sup>68</sup> See, for instance, John Newsinger, *Hope Lies in the Proles: George Orwell and the Left*, London: Pluto Press (2018); & Christopher Hitchens, “Orwell and the Left”, in *Why Orwell Matters*, New York: Basic Books (2002), pp. 35-78.

<sup>69</sup> See Ellen Schrecker, *Many are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America*, Princeton University Press (1999); Stephen G. Rabe, *The Killing Zone: The United States Wages Cold War in Latin America*, Oxford University Press (2016); Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid?*. Indeed, under the influence of the New Left movement in the 1960s, Mary McCarthy – who had been as staunchly anti-communist as anyone when, in 1949, she had protested a communist-front ‘peace’ conference with Sidney Hook – disapprovingly speculated that Orwell would likely have supported the Vietnam War because of his “belligerent anti-communism, which there is no use trying to discount”. Mary McCarthy, “The Writing on the Wall”, *The Writing on the Wall and other Literary Essays*, New York: Harcourt Brace (1970), pp. 168-9.

<sup>70</sup> See Christopher Lasch, “The Cultural Cold War: A Short History of the Congress for Cultural Freedom”, in *The Agony of the American Left*, New York: A.A. Knopf (1969).

<sup>71</sup> See Jonathan Haslam, *The Spectre of War: International Communism and the Origins of World War II*, Princeton University Press (2021).

<sup>72</sup> See Ch. IV.

submission, it was his experiences with the G.P.U. in Spain in early 1937 which had turned him from a mildly critical ex-Communist into an unapologetic anti-Communist.<sup>73</sup>

That Borkenau's anti-communism was perhaps tempered, in the late 1930s, by the simple fact that it was not his main preoccupation, is a judgement which implicitly suggests a method for the study of Borkenau's work. The present study will be a contextual intellectual biography, as per its title. Borkenau lived through and produced work in several historical and cultural contexts. I have tried to interpret his writings as though I were reading them as a contemporary, with the aim that this thesis will provide more historically sensitive readings of Borkenau's writings than previous studies have achieved. As Cowan has written, attention to the context in which ideas were formulated and received is "what makes intellectual history *historical* as opposed to being a subset of philosophy".<sup>74</sup> Clearly, Borkenau was not writing for posterity, but was engaging in live debates which must be understood in order to properly assess his work.

Skinner has instructed intellectual historians to look for two kinds of meanings when assessing historical texts: the *locutionary* and the *illocutionary*.<sup>75</sup> Roughly speaking, a text's "locutionary" meaning is its meaning in relation to other contemporary texts, and to the forms, standards and types of discourses and arguments occurring at a given time. I have tried to bring out the locutionary meaning of Borkenau's writings by situating them alongside representative texts produced by contemporaries, such as the Neu Beginnen (NB) group in the first chapter, the Popular Front Left in the second, Vansittartists and the anti-Vansittart Left in the third, and anti-anti-communists in the fourth. The search for the illocutionary meaning is the search for the author's – in this case, Borkenau's – intentions. In the cases of his directly polemical texts, in particular, I have tried to consider why Borkenau was writing them and what his intended audience was. In some cases – the *Communist International* and the *Totalitarian Enemy*, for instance – he quite plainly said so. This consideration, especially, has informed my judgement about how to frame the given "contexts" in which Borkenau was writing. In the case of the second chapter, for instance, I might have chosen to frame the overarching "context" in which he was writing as that of the debate over appeasement. Borkenau's *New German Empire*, which does address that issue,

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<sup>73</sup> Franz Borkenau, "Radio Lecture", *Südwestfunk*, 2 July 1956. Accessed online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t6037rL5cQ4&t=9s>.

<sup>74</sup> Brian Cowan, "Intellectual, Social and Cultural History", in Richard Whatmore and Brian Young (eds.), *Palgrave Advances in Intellectual History*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan (2006), p. 171.

<sup>75</sup> See Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas." *History and Theory*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (1969), pp. 3–53. Also see James Tully (ed.), *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and his Critics*, Princeton University Press (1988), esp. Tully's introductory essay "The pen is a mighty sword: Quentin Skinner's analysis of politics", pp. 7-28, for its discussion of locutionary and illocutionary meaning.

notwithstanding, I argue that his writings attest to the conclusion that his main labours in that period were devoted to the slaying of sacred cows on the Popular Front Left.

One criticism of the Skinnerian, or Cambridge School, approach to intellectual history has been that it takes the necessity of viewing ideas *only* in their context to extreme lengths. In his famous essay on the history of ideas, Skinner produced several examples in which historians had clumsily written of how their protagonists had *anticipated* ideas which only emerged in later periods.<sup>76</sup> While it is quite true to say that Locke could not possibly have been trying to anticipate Berkeley's metaphysics, it is also true that one idea can have an influence on another, future, idea. As Skinner's critic, Femia, has argued on the subject of Locke and Berkeley, some of their ideas bear a close resemblance, regardless of the impossibility that Locke could have anticipated the fact.<sup>77</sup> None of the authors I discuss in my third chapter, who were debating the post-war future of Europe in a Vansittartist context which would dissipate after the War, could have known what that future held, or what their responses would be to the political problems which it raised. Indeed, in their broad agreement that the nation state would be consigned to the dustbin of history, they were all wrong. Even as late as 1951, Golo Mann would write of his confusion at its persistence. "Everyone feels that it cannot remain as it is. But nobody knows where it is going".<sup>78</sup> Regardless of the impossibility of anticipating specific ideas which could only arise in the context of an unpredictable future, I hope that I have been able to show that the early Cold War debate between "Third Forcism" and "Atlanticism" was *anticipated* by positions taken during the wartime debate over the future of Europe.<sup>79</sup>

I have arranged this intellectual biography chronologically, rather than thematically, as this has allowed me to elucidate the changing contexts in which Borkenau was writing. In my judgement, there are four key periods in Borkenau's intellectual biography corresponding to four overarching contexts. The first is his estrangement from Marxism, which Borkenau underwent in the context of the crisis of the defeated German Left; the second is his first confrontation with communism, which took place in the context of the Spanish Civil War and the cultural movement for a Popular Front in mid- to late 1930s Britain; the third is Borkenau's defence of Germany, which he undertook in the context of the wartime phenomenon of Vansittartism; and the fourth is his

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<sup>76</sup> See Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding", p. 11.

<sup>77</sup> Joseph Femia, "An historicist critique of revisionist methods", in Tully (ed.), *Meaning and Context*, p. 162.

<sup>78</sup> Golo Mann, "Geschichtsschreibung als Realpolitik. Über A. J. P. Taylor und die Tragödie Mitteleuropas", *Der Monat*, Vol. 4, No. 38 (1951), p. 130.

<sup>79</sup> Similarly, Borkenau wrote of how Pareto was a "precursor of fascism", who *anticipated* Hitler in his writings on political propagandising. This is not the same thing as saying that Pareto foresaw fascism or Nazism, or was himself a fascist. It is merely drawing attention to the similarity in the style of Pareto's ideas and that of fascist ideas which came later.

activities as a “Cold Warrior” (a renewed confrontation with communism) – including the development of the Kremlinological method – which must be seen in the context of the Cultural Cold War *in Germany*. These, then, are my four chapters, and I will give a precis of each – elaborating on the contexts, Borkenau’s position within them, and my central arguments – below.

Because these four sections of Borkenau’s intellectual biography are quite historiographically distinct, dealing as they do with such divergent subjects as the response of the German Left to the Nazi *Machtergreifung*, the Popular Front movement on the British Left in the 1930s, the phenomenon of Vansittartism in wartime Britain, and the Cultural Cold War, I have saved some of the specific historiographical discussions for the introductions to each of the chapters.

### Chapter Summaries

In the years 1933-1935, the major debate Borkenau was engaged in was that of the exiles of the German Left. This is the contextual background against which his writings of this period will be viewed. He defended the position of a small factional group, Neu Beginnen (NB), which wanted to carry on underground activity in Germany, and which was inspired by Leninism. Borkenau backed NB’s analysis of the political reality in Germany – although he did not defend the group’s dictatorial political ideals – against the majority view of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) leadership.<sup>80</sup> Thus began an unconventional movement away from Marxism via a seemingly Leninist detour. That there had been something like a groupthink phenomenon on the German Left in the period of the collapse of the Weimar Republic – in which almost nobody took seriously the prospect of the National Socialists actually coming to power – was corroborated by several testimonies.<sup>81</sup> Borkenau was not immune from this and admitted later in life that events had taken him by surprise.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, the victory of ‘fascism’ in an industrialised country like Germany immediately invalidated a Marxist analysis of fascism as a modernising movement in backward countries (lacking a strong proletariat) which he had only recently written.<sup>83</sup> If he shared in the failure to pre-empt the catastrophe, though, he quickly diverged from the naïve belief common to much of the leadership of the mass socialist parties – the SPD and the Communists (KPD) – that

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<sup>80</sup> See Franz Borkenau [*pseud.* Ludwig Neureither], “Klassenbewusstsein” [Class Consciousness], *Zeitschrift für Sozialismus*, Vol. 1, No. 5 (Feb., 1934), pp. 152-159; “Staat und Revolution” [State and Revolution], *Zeitschrift für Sozialismus*, Vol. 1, No. 6 (Mar., 1934), pp. 180-185; & “Noch einmal Klassenbewusstsein” [Once More, Class Consciousness], *Zeitschrift für Sozialismus*, Vol. 1, No. 10 (Jul., 1934), pp. 325-329.

<sup>81</sup> For instance, Guenter Reimann, *Germany: World Empire or World Revolution*, London: Secker & Warburg (1938), p. ix-x.

<sup>82</sup> See Nuremberg Military Tribunals (NMT), “Transcript for NMT 1: Medical Case”, 14-15 April 1947, Harvard Law School Library. *Nuremberg Trials Project*, <http://nuremberg.law.harvard.edu/transcripts/1-transcript-for-nmt-1-medical-case?seq=6032> (Accessed 10 November 2021), p. 5889. [Hereafter, “NMT, Borkenau transcript”].

<sup>83</sup> Franz Borkenau, “Zur Soziologie des Faschismus” [The Sociology of Fascism], *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, Vol. 47, No.5 (1933), pp. 513-43.



the Nazis would not last.<sup>84</sup> In this chapter, I argue that these debates caused Borkenau to reassess the scientific value of the Marxist analysis of politics. This thesis builds on the themes of the reconsideration of Marxism and of political transformation in exile which have underscored other recent works on the German Left's response to defeat after 1933.<sup>85</sup>

As well as representing a refutation of his political ideas, Hitler's triumph bore Borkenau a great personal cost. Since 1929, he had been working on a research project on the development of the bourgeois *Weltbild* in the seventeenth century, on a stipend from Max Horkheimer's Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt.<sup>86</sup> When President Hindenburg appointed Hitler Chancellor on January 30<sup>th</sup>, it caught Borkenau by surprise while he was away from Germany, and he never attempted to return to the country which had been his home since he enrolled at the University of Leipzig in 1921. Dollfuss's Austria offered no prospects to an academic with a socialist background, especially after February 1934, when the Social Democratic Party was outlawed.<sup>87</sup> Thus, Borkenau moved to Paris in that year, where the Institute found a publisher for his study. But the unorthodox nature – from a Marxist perspective – of Borkenau's arguments displeased Horkheimer, leading to the virtual severing of ties between him and the Frankfurt School and the necessity for him to carve his own path in exile.<sup>88</sup> A brief association with the recently formed Annales School followed, its co-founder Lucien Febvre having been impressed by Borkenau's Frankfurt work. But Borkenau soon found an opportunity to go to London, where, probably aided by Harold Laski, he attained some kind of studentship at the London School of Economics, working under the social anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski. There, he came into contact with the Sociological Society at Le Play House, which led to the opportunity to author a study of Pareto's sociology, as well as contributions to the *Sociological Review*.<sup>89</sup> The intriguing feature of

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<sup>84</sup> See the criticisms of both in Walter Löwenheim [pseud. "Miles"], *Socialism's New Start: A Secret German Manifesto*, London: George Allen & Unwin (1934).

<sup>85</sup> See Terence Ray Renaud, "Restarting Socialism: The New Beginning Group and the Problem of Renewal on the German Left, 1930-1970" (Ph.D. thesis), University of California, Berkeley (2015); & Scott H. Krause, "Neue Westpolitik: The Clandestine Campaign to Westernize the SPD in Cold War Berlin, 1948-1958", *Central European History*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (2015), pp. 79-99. See esp. Krause's commentary on the *rémigrés*.

<sup>86</sup> Borkenau, *Der Übergang*.

<sup>87</sup> On the history of Austrian socialism in the 30s, see Joseph Buttinger, *In the Twilight of Socialism*, New York: Frederick A. Praeger (1953); & Anson Rabinbach, *The crisis of Austrian socialism: from Red Vienna to civil war 1927-1934*, University of Chicago Press (1983).

<sup>88</sup> See Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950*, London: Heinemann (1973), pp. 16-7.

<sup>89</sup> Franz Borkenau, "State and Revolution in the Paris Commune, The Russian Revolution, and the Spanish Civil War", *Sociological Review*, Vol. XXIX, No. I (1937), pp. 41-75.

By training, Borkenau was an historian. But, by the time he embarked on his study of the Revolutionary events in Spain, he had redefined himself as a sociologist, noting in his preface that he was applying the technique of "participant observation" learned under Malinowski. See Borkenau CV, 1939, Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MS. S.P.S.L. 348/8-12. The Frankfurt School maintained a small London office at Le Play House until 1936. See Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, p. 30.

Borkenau's Pareto study was that he applied Pareto's theories to contemporary political developments, concluding with chapters on Bolshevism and Fascism. As Jones has previously noted, this study, then, represented the beginnings of Borkenau's theory of totalitarianism.<sup>90</sup> What is also notable, though, is that Borkenau argued for the relevance of anti-humanistic Paretian theories which were anathema to his own sensibilities, and that he opposed them to what he now considered the errors of Marxism. Borkenau was a believer in the practice of psychoanalysis, and there was a definite subtext of introspection in his *Pareto*.<sup>91</sup> The ideas of this "precursor of fascism", as Borkenau called his subject, became, for him, more historically relevant in the context of its triumph than what Borkenau began to see as the discredited theories of Marx.

The context which will form the basis of my second chapter is that of the Popular Front period in Britain. This was the period in which Borkenau was most prolific as a writer, and my ideas about how to approach those writings were formed by thinking about who he was writing for (or, perhaps more accurately, against). Though, of course, the Popular Front never had any notable political success, it was the ideas and prejudices of what I call the 'Popular Front Left' which were, to a large extent, the target of Borkenau's three most important books from this period, the *Spanish Cockpit*, the *Communist International* and the *Totalitarian Enemy*.

When talking about the 'Left' or the 'Right' in any period, it is obviously a challenge not to generalise excessively. In his history of the idea of equality on the British Left, Jackson refers to a "section of the Left" which became interested in Marxism in the 1930s.<sup>92</sup> It is something roughly corresponding to this "section" which I have in mind when I use the term "Popular Front Left". I am talking about a community of prominent intellectuals who, as Jackson has emphasised, challenged "gradualism", or the parliamentary road to socialism; but who also, generally speaking, endorsed the idea of the Popular Front promoted at the time by the Comintern; and, in varying degrees, looked sympathetically upon the Soviet experiment. It goes without saying that the term 'Left' encompasses many diverse viewpoints, and there was certainly a very significant section of the Left – embodied by the parliamentary Labour Party – which was very far from the Popular

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<sup>90</sup> Jones, "Borkenau's Pareto".

<sup>91</sup> Borkenau appears to have indulged as an amateur practitioner. In internment in Australia during the Second World War, Borkenau encouraged a sceptical younger internee, Gerd Bernstein (later known as Bern Brent), to allow him to psychoanalyse him. I am indebted to archivist Carol Bunyan, who works on the history of the *HMT Dunera* (the boat which transported Borkenau to Australia), for sharing Mr Brent's recollections of his relationship with Borkenau with me. The published summary of her oral history interview with Brent does not include anything about Borkenau: <https://www.dunerastories.monash.edu/dunera-stories/112-interviewing-bern-brent.html?highlight=WyljZxJuIwiYmVybidzIwiYnJlbnQjLCJicmVudCdzIwiYmVybiBicmVudCJd>.

<sup>92</sup> Ben Jackson, "Marxists and Social Democrats", in *Equality and the British Left: A Study in Progressive Political Thought, 1900-64*, Manchester University Press (2007), p. 94.

Front Left on each of the three major points of contention that I have listed.<sup>93</sup> There were also supporters of the Popular Front – some of whom would not even have considered themselves on the Left – who were neither influenced by Marxism nor in sympathy with the Soviet Union.<sup>94</sup>

There is a contrast to be drawn between my approach and that of Stone, who has looked at Borkenau's contribution to the cause of "anti-fascism" in Britain.<sup>95</sup> For Stone, who has observed that the contemporary analyses of Nazism written in Britain to have stood the test of time tend to have been written by non-British authors, Borkenau is an exemplar of the efforts of anti-Nazi émigrés to alert Britons to the dangers of Hitlerism during the years of appeasement. I do not disagree with this, but I see Borkenau's confrontations with the Popular Front Left as a bigger part of his activity in the period under discussion. In fact, Richard Crossman made a very similar point to Stone, in 1938, when he argued, in his review of Borkenau's *Communist International*, that continental ex-communists (Borkenau and Arthur Rosenberg) had written the most insightful books about communism.<sup>96</sup> In other words, Borkenau was not only an anti-Nazi publicist who explained the dangerous logic of Nazi imperialism in his pre-war Penguin Special, the *New German Empire*; he was also a dissident voice on the Left, who attempted to educate the "fellow-travellers" of his day about the history of the movement they had lately discovered.<sup>97</sup>

Borkenau's trenchant criticisms of the role of the communists in Spain ran directly counter to the propaganda of "anti-fascist" Popular Front organisations and publications like the Left Book Club, the *New Statesman* and *Tribune*. Under the impression of his Spanish experiences – and owing to his concern about the success of the communists' Popular Front tactics – he then decided to write a history of the Comintern.<sup>98</sup> The book was the attempt of a former enthusiast to educate the new enthusiasts about the murky history that he felt they knew little about. He used the history of the Comintern to prove the folly of entering into alliances with communists, and contended that the Bolshevisation of that organisation had led West European communist parties increasingly into amoral practice, in accordance with a "theory of wickedness" developed under oppressive political conditions in Eastern climes.<sup>99</sup> Finally, the *Totalitarian Enemy*, in which Borkenau expressed the view which would become so dominant during the Cold War, that the two 'totalitarianisms' were

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<sup>93</sup> Indeed, I write about Borkenau's relationship with what I might call the 'moderate', or pre-Gaitskellite, Left in my third chapter.

<sup>94</sup> See David Blaazer, *The Popular Front and the Progressive Tradition*, Cambridge University Press (1992), 175-6. Blaazer goes as far as to suggest that liberals had a bigger role to play than those on the socialist or communist Left in the genesis of the idea of a Popular Front in Britain.

<sup>95</sup> See Stone, *Responses to Nazism*; & "Anti-Fascist Europe".

<sup>96</sup> Richard Crossman, "The Anatomy of Communism", *New Statesman & Nation*, 29 October 1938, p. 694.

<sup>97</sup> Borkenau, *New German Empire*.

<sup>98</sup> See Borkenau's preface to *World Communism*, pp. 9-13.

<sup>99</sup> See *Ibid.*, p. 173.

alike and that the conflict between them and the democracies was the essential ideological conflict of the age, was also a rebuke to the communist-inspired Popular Front understanding of fascism as the *last stage of capitalism*.<sup>100</sup>

In the Summer of 1940, Borkenau was deported as an Enemy Alien to Australia, where he lived in the Tatura internment camp for about a year. His internment coincided with the Blitz, which had affected British morale and given rise to anti-German currents to rival those of the First World War. From his return in 1941, Borkenau was involved in two separate, but closely linked, debates. The first of these was the debate over the so-called German Problem, the idea propagated by the exponents of what came to be known as Vansittartism: that Germany and Germans were inherently aggressive, and that Nazism was only the latest manifestation of the Prusso-German desire to dominate the European continent.<sup>101</sup> The second was the debate among anti-Vansittartites, predominantly on the Left, about the future of Germany and the European continent, which became livelier towards the end of the War.

In this period, I continue to see Borkenau as somebody whose political home was on the Left, even if he avoided Party allegiances. His only wartime book was published by the Labour Book Service, and he was a fairly frequent contributor (mainly as a book reviewer) to *Tribune* during the period when his friend Orwell was literary editor.<sup>102</sup> I also trace a link between Borkenau and the revisionist current in the Labour Party. As in the interwar period, however, Borkenau's ideas continued to clash with those of the Popular Front Left. While prominent representatives of the latter such as Victor Gollancz and Harold Laski opposed Vansittartism no less vigorously than Borkenau did, they tended to continue to see capitalism, rather than Germanness, as the original sin which had borne Nazism. Their ideas about the post-war future were grounded in a federalist socialist internationalism which Borkenau considered utopian. By contrast, he became an early advocate of an Atlanticist internationalism. This was a debate which, to some extent, pre-empted the Cold War debate between the advocates of US Hegemony and the "third forcers" and neutralists found mainly on the Left.

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<sup>100</sup> See the first chapter, "An Ideological War", in Borkenau, *Totalitarian Enemy*, pp, 11-19.

<sup>101</sup> Vansittartism was a neologism deriving from the name of the author of the most popular anti-German tract. Robert Vansittart, *Black Record: Germans Past and Present*, London: Hamish Hamilton (1941).

<sup>102</sup> See Franz Borkenau, "Machiavelli, Hobbes, and the Modern State", *Tribune*, 24 March 1944, p. 18; "The Revolt of the Netherlands", *Tribune*, 30 June 1944, pp. 15-6; "Terrorism and Revolution", *Tribune*, 24 November 1944, pp. 15-6; "Shorter Notices" [Reviews of *Max Weber and German Politics* (J.P. Mayer) & *Common Cause* (G. A. Borgese)], *Tribune*, 24 November 1944, pp. 20-1; "Yogi and Commissar", *Tribune*, 11 May 1945, p. 15.

Orwell's influence with Cyril Connolly [on their relationship, see Michael Sheldon, *Friends of Promise*, New York: Harper & Row (1989)] may also explain why Borkenau began to write for *Horizon* in 1941. See Franz Borkenau, "Selected Notices" [review of Vansittart, *Black Record* and Butler, *Roots of National Socialism*], *Horizon*, March 1942, pp. 210-219.

In my final chapter, I look at Borkenau's activities in the Cultural Cold War. I argue – contra the picture of Borkenau as an increasingly hysterical and illiberal anticommunist – that the political positions he took were influenced by the context of post-war Germany, the geographical heart of the Cold War, and that the picture that British observers like Hugh Trevor-Roper and Richard Crossman presented of Borkenau were reflective of the general divergence of outlooks between Central and Western European intellectuals at the time.<sup>103</sup> In Germany and Central Europe, the Cold War was much more immediate, and intellectuals were more inclined to choose sides in the emerging conflict than in France or Britain, where the arguments of neutralism and third forcism were much stronger. I also highlight some details in Borkenau's biography which contradict the charges that he was a mandarin, a warmonger, or a McCarthyist. Though my focus is only on the intellectual biography of Borkenau, this argument builds on the more general argument about the Cultural Cold War made by Wilford: that anti-communist intellectuals in the early Cold War period were not influenced in their politics by the CIA's clandestine efforts to fund their activities, but were merely saying and writing what they would have said and written anyway.<sup>104</sup>

As I have already intimated, above, I also look at Borkenau's contribution to the method of Kremlinology, by which he tried to gain insight into internal and foreign policy developments in Soviet Russia. I believe that Borkenau's contribution to the study of communism and the Soviet Union in the last years of his life has been neglected by some of those who have previously written about him, most likely because of the belief that he had succumbed to an illiberal anti-communism which has been held to have diminished the quality of his work.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Hugh Trevor-Roper, "Ex-Communist vs. Communist", *Manchester Guardian*, July 10, 1950, p. 4; Richard Crossman, "Books in General" [review of *European Communism*], *New Statesman*, 6 June 1953, pp. 674-5.

<sup>104</sup> Hugh Wilford, *The CIA, the British Left and the Cold War: Calling the Tune?*, London: Frank Cass (2003).

<sup>105</sup> Jones, *Lost Debate*, Kessler, "Between Communism".

# Chapter I - The Collapse of the German Left and Borkenau's Reappraisal of Marxism

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*It will be necessary that all of us who witnessed or took part in the evolution of our party as participants and leaders or as observers, must now judge ourselves in the hour of defeat. This is not the time for apologies, but the time to work for the rejuvenation and improvement of our strategy. We have to learn from our defeat. – Curt Geyer<sup>1</sup>*

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## Introduction

### Part I: Marxist Discourse and the Critique of Marxism

It is as a pioneer of the theory of totalitarianism that Franz Borkenau is best remembered, and his Marxist background was undoubtedly essential to his analysis of the 'totalitarian' regimes of his time. Marxist intellectuals played a prominent role in the origins of the theory of totalitarianism, and Jones and Devlin have both shown that Borkenau's ideas about totalitarianism were, in part, products of intra-Marxist debates. In the sense implied by Pocock's idea of "sub-languages" – particular discourses relating to one or another specific intellectual group – they have claimed that Borkenau used the vocabulary and the conceptual frames of reference of these debates in his writings.<sup>2</sup> The concept of totalitarianism itself, in Jones and Devlin's retelling, largely germinated in the writings of German-speaking Marxist theorists like Rudolf Hilferding and August Thalheimer, in their efforts to build upon Marx's theories in the light of contemporary developments. The Marxist critique of totalitarianism, Devlin stressed, was eventually subsumed into non-Marxist writings on the subject, such as the famous post-war analysis of Hannah Arendt, which described the origins of totalitarianism through the same concepts of imperialism and mob-rule used by interwar Marxists.<sup>3</sup>

The origins of this critique can be traced to Hilferding, who, in the last section of his 1910 economic treatise, *Finance Capital*, had attempted to show that the buccaneering free-market capitalism of Marx's day had evolved towards a monopolistic capitalism which increasingly sought

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<sup>1</sup> In Lewis Edinger, *German Exile Politics: The Social Democratic Executive Committee in the Nazi era*, Berkeley: University of California Press (1956), p. 100.

<sup>2</sup> Jones, *Lost Debate*; Nicholas Devlin, "Marxist Theories"; J. G. A. Pocock, "The Concept of a Language and the *Métier d'historien*: Some Considerations on Practice", in Pocock, *Political Thought and History: Essays on Theory and Method*, Cambridge University Press (2009), pp. 87-105.

<sup>3</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), London: George Allen & Unwin (1958). Devlin does arguably overlook the Catholic origins of Arendt's theory of totalitarianism. She was influenced by Waldemar Gurian, for instance, and wrote his obituary. Hannah Arendt, "The Personality of Waldemar Gurian", *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (1955), pp. 33-42.

the protection of the state.<sup>4</sup> Undoubtedly, as the discussion of Borkenau's *Pareto*, below, will show, Borkenau shared this basic outlook, and emphasised the importance of the development, just as Hilferding had before him.<sup>5</sup> The fusion of the interests of capital and state, Hilferding had argued, became the basis of imperialism – the quest for foreign markets – conditioning a new development in “bourgeois ideology”, away from humanitarianism and pacifism and towards statism, nationalism, and racism:

The demand for an expansionist policy revolutionizes the whole world view of the bourgeoisie, which ceases to be peace-loving and humanitarian... The ideal of peace has lost its lustre, and... there emerges a glorification of the greatness and power of the state... The ideal now is to secure for one's own nation the domination of the world, an aspiration which is as unbounded as the capitalist lust for profit from which it springs... justified ideologically by an extraordinary perversion of the national idea, which no longer recognizes the right of every nation to political self-determination and [abandons]... the democratic creed of the equality of all members of the human race... [I]here emerges in racist ideology, cloaked in the garb of natural science, a justification for finance capital's lust for power.<sup>6</sup>

Alongside this concept of imperialism as the economic basis for an *ideology* [my italics] which would later be discussed in terms of fascism and totalitarianism, another concept which, as Devlin has pointed out, assumed especial prominence in interwar Marxist literature on fascism was Bonapartism.<sup>7</sup> Thalheimer was one of the first critics to adapt Marx's critique of Bonapartism – the movement of “the dregs, refuse and scum of all classes” – to the analysis of fascism.<sup>8</sup> This initiated the Marxist view of fascism as a kind of mob-rule, a movement, in Otto Bauer's phrase, of the “*déclassé* of all classes” which was repugnant particularly because it explicitly denied the relevance of class struggle in historical development.<sup>9</sup> For Devlin, Borkenau was an

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<sup>4</sup> Rudolf Hilferding, *Das Finanzkapital: Eine Studie über die jüngste Entwicklung des Kapitalismus*, Vienna: Wiener Volksbuchhandlung (1910).

<sup>5</sup> Borkenau, *Pareto*.

<sup>6</sup> Rudolf Hilferding, “Ch. XIV: Extracts from *Finance Capital: A Study of the Latest Phase of Capitalist Development*”, in Mark Harrison and Peter Cain (eds.), *Imperialism: Critical Concepts in Historical Studies, Vol. I*, London: Routledge (2001), pp. 249-50. Also see J. E. King, “Hilferding's *Finance Capital* in the Development of Marxist Thought”, *History of Economics Review*, Vol. 52, No. 1 (2010), pp. 52-62.

<sup>7</sup> The concept of “ideology” itself was mainly a Marxist one from its inception in the 1840s [see Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, Moscow: Progress Publishers (1976) (originally 1845)] until the 1930s. For a discussion of this, see Harold Mah, “Introduction”, in *The end of philosophy, the origin of "ideology": Karl Marx and the crisis of the young Hegelians*, Berkeley: University of California Press (1987), pp. 1-7.

<sup>8</sup> See Devlin, “Marxist Theories”, p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* Interestingly, the major early twentieth century theorist of the German Social Democratic movement, Karl Kautsky, developed a theory of the Bolshevik Revolution which corresponded to the *déclassé* theory of fascism. Kautsky argued that, owing to the backward state of Russia and the incredible trauma of the Great War in that country, it was the lowest, least educated, and most brutalised elements of the proletariat which had been the driving force of the October Revolution. This, for Kautsky, explained the retributive nature of Bolshevism, which sought to punish those judged as the oppressive classes of former times. See Karl Kautsky (trans. W. H. Kerridge), *Terrorism and Communism: A Contribution to the Natural History of Revolution*, Manchester: National Labour Press (1920).

“anticommunist Marxist” who – building on the analyses of the likes of Hilferding and Thalheimer – made use of these interwar Marxist concepts of imperialism and Bonapartism in his writings on totalitarianism.<sup>10</sup> In the Pocockian sense, in which an author utilises a discourse familiar to a particular, initiated group, but unfamiliar to the community at large, Borkenau was writing in these two “languages of interwar Marxism”.<sup>11</sup>

However, the major theme of Borkenau’s work in the early period of his exile was criticism and reappraisal of Marxism. While Borkenau’s writings on totalitarianism can be read as contributions to a Marxist discourse – his analysis of Pareto’s sociology (to be discussed, below) bearing similarity to Hilferding’s critique of bourgeois ideology in the age of imperialism; and his repeated use of the concept of the *déclassé* inviting obvious comparisons with Thalheimer and Bauer – it must also be borne in mind that the concept of totalitarianism, for Borkenau, implied a *renunciation* of Marx’s ideas about the historical development of capitalism. For totalitarianism meant – in the language of Frankfurt School theorist Friedrich Pollock – the “primacy of politics” over economics, a contention which was anathema to many of those wedded to a more orthodox understanding of Marxism.<sup>12</sup> If fascism was not a species of capitalism, subject, at bottom, to the same economic antagonisms, then it must be the inheritor of capitalism, which had resolved those economic antagonisms. This was an End of History which, as another Frankfurt Marxist, Franz Neumann, put it, “might just as easily be hell”, and could not, therefore, be accepted by any Marxist.<sup>13</sup> Though he rejected the melancholy idea that fascism/totalitarianism was the last word of History – recommending a democratic counter-revolution against it – this was precisely the ironical argument that Borkenau made in the *Totalitarian Enemy*: the totalitarian revolution was the revolution predicted by Marx; but, instead of a socialist utopia, the revolution had ushered in what Halevy called *L’Ère des tyrannies*.<sup>14</sup> Borkenau was simultaneously utilising his Marxist inheritance and critiquing Marxism.

Published four years earlier than the *Totalitarian Enemy, Pareto*, which Jones has identified as Borkenau’s first major contribution to the theory of totalitarianism, can be read as the consummation of a transition he effected away from Marxism in the context of the contemporaneous crisis of the German Left.<sup>15</sup> The germinal stages of this transition can be seen in Borkenau’s early exile writings. Firstly, his contributions to the debate on the place of Marx

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<sup>10</sup> Devlin, “Marxist Theories”, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>12</sup> See Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, pp. 154-5.

<sup>13</sup> Neumann, *Behemoth*, p. 186. See also Devlin’s useful commentary on Neumann’s response to the idea of the “primacy of the political”, “Marxist Theories”, pp. 12-14.

<sup>14</sup> Borkenau, *Totalitarian Enemy*, esp. pp. 69-70; Elie Halevy, *The Era of Tyrannies*, London: Allen Lane (1967).

<sup>15</sup> Jones, “Borkenau’s Pareto”.



within German socialism in the aftermath of the Left's defeat; and secondly, his essay on the crisis of European socialism, published in the journal of the Annales School.<sup>16</sup> The not too subtle subtext of his subsequent commentary on the sociology of Pareto was that he had begun to view the Italian anti-humanist as a more reliable prophet of the crisis of his times than Marx. By 1937, Borkenau would use Lenin's concept of a revolutionary elite to challenge the idea deriving from Marx and Engels' writings on the Paris Commune that true democracy could be realised by the "dictatorship of the proletariat".<sup>17</sup>

## Part II: Defeat and the German Left

The first great debacle of the twentieth century for German – and indeed European – Marxists had been the First World War. As Kolakowski, in the introduction to the second volume of his *Main Currents*, put it:

In the Summer of 1914, the socialist movement suffered the greatest defeat in its history, when it became clear that the international solidarity of the proletariat – its ideological foundation – was an empty phrase.<sup>18</sup>

But though this had represented a defeat for Marxist – if not necessarily, as implied by Kolakowski's invocation of "the socialist movement", all socialist – theory, it was neither a physical nor a lasting defeat. In Germany, the formally illegal or semi-legal Marxist parties actually achieved their greatest successes in the 1920s (the SPD's post-1945 record can be discounted, as it was, if we accept Edinger's argument, no longer a Marxist party).<sup>19</sup> Thus, as Kolakowski continued: "None of the Marxists posed the question whether the debacle of the socialist movement in the face of national conflicts was of any significance for Marxist doctrine itself".<sup>20</sup> It took a physical – and apparently terminal – defeat, for the German Marxists to reconsider the doctrine.<sup>21</sup>

Koselleck has argued that "historical knowledge... is driven forward by the kind of theoretical reflection to which the vanquished in a conflict of world historical significance may be driven", and there is little question that the compulsion to determine "what went wrong" led to permanent changes in the *weltanschauung* of many of the individuals who shared in the experience of the defeat

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<sup>16</sup> Franz Borkenau, "La crise des partis socialistes dans l'Europe contemporaine" [The Crisis of the Socialist Parties in Contemporary Europe], *Annales d'histoire Économique et Sociale* [Hereafter *AHES*], Vol. 7 (1935), pp. 337-352.

<sup>17</sup> Borkenau, "State and Revolution in Paris, Russia and Spain".

<sup>18</sup> Leszek Kolakowski [trans. P. S. Falla], *Main Currents of Marxism – Its Rise, Growth and Dissolution, Vol II: The Golden Age*, Oxford: Clarendon Press (1978), p. 28.

<sup>19</sup> Discussed below. See Edinger, *Exile Politics*, p. 220.

<sup>20</sup> Kolakowski, *Main Currents II*, p. 29.

<sup>21</sup> By physical defeat, I mean that German socialism was physically uprooted, its political and intellectual leaders imprisoned or exiled.

of the German Left in 1933.<sup>22</sup> As Renaud has shown, the heretical socialist group Neu Beginnen (NB) – Borkenau’s association with which will be discussed below – played an important role in “restarting” German socialism after 1945.<sup>23</sup> NB was the source of the first post-Hitler criticism, from within the German Social Democratic movement itself, of the role of Marxism in the ideology of its mass Party, the Social Democrats (SPD). The SPD had previously self-identified as a Marxist Party, and its canonical belief that socialism was foreordained – the basis of Bertrand Russell’s criticism of German socialism as early as 1896 – had been subject to little revision since the adoption of the Erfurt Programme in 1891.<sup>24</sup> Its dogmatic attachment to the Marxist catechism was, for Russell, what distinguished German Social Democracy from the Western European socialist parties.<sup>25</sup> But, as the Party’s historian Edinger documented in a study of 1956 – published three years before the Bad Godesberg programme made it official – it was in exile, in the process of coming to terms with the SPD’s destruction, that the leaders of the Party Executive (Sopade) had actually resolved to terminate its protracted identification with Marxism.<sup>26</sup> As an American political scientist observed in an article about post-war socialism in Germany, the “Socialist refugees from Hitler... important in the reestablishment of the party, came back... changed”.<sup>27</sup> Kurt Schumacher’s determination to transform the SPD from a “*Arbeiterpartei* into a *Volkepartei*” in 1946 was the consummation of this change of heart and the beginning of the road to Bad Godesberg.<sup>28</sup>

In most cases, this was not a straightforward conversion, but one which, paradoxically, as in the case of some of the NB intellectuals discussed below, as well as such SPD functionaries as Curt Geyer and Willy Brandt, began with a period of revolutionary rebellion against the Party’s reformism – oft derided as insufficiently Marxist.<sup>29</sup> Geyer, who, in 1933, counselled a revival of revolutionism, beseeching Party leaders “to think both historically and methodologically as Marxists”, had become an instrumental voice in favour of retreat from Marxism by 1939.<sup>30</sup> Borkenau weighed in on this debate, polemicising in favour of NB against the reformism of Karl

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<sup>22</sup> White, “Foreword”.

<sup>23</sup> Renaud, “Restarting Socialism”.

<sup>24</sup> Bertrand Russell, *German Social Democracy: Six Lectures*, London: Longmans (1896).

<sup>25</sup> Russell began his first lecture by quoting Engels to the effect that Marxism was a peculiarly German religion. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> Edinger, *Exile Politics*, p. 220.

<sup>27</sup> V. Stanley Vardys, “Germany’s Postwar Socialism: Nationalism and Kurt Schumacher (1945-52)”, *Review of Politics*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (1965), p. 221.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 233.

<sup>29</sup> Brandt left the SPD for the revolutionary Socialist Worker’s Party in the early 1930s, but gained, in Norway, an appreciation for the Norwegian Workers’ Party (NAP) which had put practical measures above socialist principles to tackle the economic crisis. See Willy Brandt, *My Road to Berlin*, New York: Doubleday (1960), p. 65.

<sup>30</sup> See Edinger, *Exile Politics*, pp. 106 & 221.

Kautsky and the SPD Executive in 1934.<sup>31</sup> Ironically, then, a flirtation with Leninism stood at the beginning of the reappraisal of Marxism which was to become a major theme of Borkenau's writings over the next two-to-three years. The caveat being, in Borkenau's case, that he only ever went as far as advocating a Leninist approach to the specific problem of underground activity in the anti-Nazi struggle; he was not – as some NB members were – an apologist for dictatorial socialism.<sup>32</sup> In outline, though, analogies can be drawn between Borkenau and several other political and intellectual figures on the German Left. Its collective catastrophe was the harbinger for a radical reassessment of ideas, and one particular faction of the post-war SPD would put ideas very similar to Borkenau's into political practice.

Most of the literature on the SPD in the early period after the Second World War has turned on the question of nationalism. Scholars have tended towards the view that the Party underwent a nationalist reorientation in the immediate post-war years, Schumacher in particular being seen as representative of the SPD's patriotic posturing in response to resentment about the division and foreign administration of Germany.<sup>33</sup> Imlay has recently challenged this view, arguing that German socialists were eager to maintain contacts established with British Labour during the War; that they viewed the Labour government in Britain as key to the prospects of socialism in Europe; and that they were the keenest of any European Socialists to see the reestablishment of the Labour and Socialist International, which had been disbanded in 1940.<sup>34</sup> But this is a debate which prioritises the dominant faction of the Party, to the detriment of another faction which would grow in importance, and which developed a new kind of democratic, if not necessarily socialist, internationalism – namely, Atlanticism – linked to the revaluation of Marxism undertaken in the wilderness years. This was what Krause has called the “*réémigré*” faction, predominant in the divided former capital, Berlin, where the Mayor, Ernst Reuter – Lenin's one-time appointee as Chairman of the Volga German Soviet Socialist Republic – fought tirelessly for the idea that Germany belonged in the Western, democratic tradition.<sup>35</sup> Atlanticism, or the “*Neue Westpolitik*”, was, in Krause's view, central to the political success of Reuter's protégé, Brandt, in the 1950s.<sup>36</sup> Yet, it would surely have been unthinkable – owing to the capitalist nature of the United States – before

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<sup>31</sup> Borkenau, “Klassenbewusstsein”; “Staat und Revolution”; “Noch einmal Klassenbewusstsein”.

<sup>32</sup> This distinction between Borkenau and NB leader Walter Löwenheim will be discussed below.

<sup>33</sup> See, for instance, Vardys, “Germany's Postwar Socialism”; & Dietrich Orlow, “Delayed Reaction: Democracy, Nationalism, and the SPD, 1945–1966,” *German Studies Review*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (1993), pp. 77-102.

<sup>34</sup> Talbot C. Imlay, “The policy of social democracy is self-consciously internationalist: The German Social Democratic Party's Internationalism after 1945”, *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 86, No. 1 (2014), pp. 81-123. Also, see Imlay's comments on the focus on nationalism in the German-language historiography, p. 82.

<sup>35</sup> Krause, “*Neue Westpolitik*”. Also see Scott H. Krause, *Bringing Cold War Democracy to West Berlin: A Shared German-American Project, 1940–1972*, London: Routledge (2018).

<sup>36</sup> Krause, “*Neue Westpolitik*”, p. 80.

Hitler.<sup>37</sup> As Maync has argued, the SPD's promotion of the idea of a socialist United States of Europe in the early twentieth century was prompted partly by a fear of British and American "hyper-capitalism".<sup>38</sup> The new outlook of these *rémigrés*, Reuter and Brandt, whose exile years were passed in the divergent climes of Turkey and Norway respectively, had been forged in defeat. In his memoir of those years, Brandt recalled Reuter's criticism of his Party's hierarchs during the early days of the catastrophe:

In Prague, they are writing a lot of articles, trying to prove conclusively that we have nothing to learn from the events of the recent past. But after a lost political battle nobody must think we can begin again where we have left off.<sup>39</sup>

By contrast, Brandt wrote of the elder statesman of Austrian socialism Otto Bauer, paragon of an earlier generation, that he "earnestly tried to explore the reasons for the catastrophe and yet remained a prisoner of the Marxian philosophy which always leads to the conclusion that everything happens the way it does – because it has to."<sup>40</sup>

Borkenau's friend and former NB leader Richard Lowenthal was a close ally, and, with Brandt, biographer of Reuter.<sup>41</sup> Though Borkenau himself never explicitly identified with any Party after his break with the Communist Party (KPD) in 1929, his journey away from Marxism also led him to a *Neue Westpolitik*. He would participate in some of the same post-war forums – Melvin Lasky's *Der Monat* and the Berlin Congress for Cultural Freedom – as Reuter, and was undoubtedly invested in the same central ideas: that Germany belonged to the West and that the commitment and perseverance of the United States was key to ensuring that it was not lost to the East. Like Reuter, who, during the hardships of the Blockade, drew explicit connections between the fate of Berlin and that of the whole democratic world in his rousing orations among the ruins of the burned-out Reichstag, Borkenau also saw the Soviet campaign against West Berlin as a "bluff" which called for the courage not only of Berlin's citizens but of the Western powers.<sup>42</sup> Borkenau's involvement in the Cultural Cold War will be discussed in my final chapter, but the reckoning with

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<sup>37</sup> Brandt's belief that the fates of his city and the United States were aligned - "These New Yorkers and my Berliners had the same claim on the future" (p. 13) – was signalled by his decision to begin his first memoir with a commentary on the adulation he received on a political trip to New York in 1959. "Berliners and New Yorkers speak the same language" (p.26), he suggested. See Brandt, *Road to Berlin*, pp. 11-28. In the Weimar period, this kind of enthusiasm for America was much more commonly found in liberal circles. See, for instance, Arthur Feiler, *America Seen Through German Eyes*, New York: New Republic (1928).

<sup>38</sup> Tania M. Maync, *For a socialist Europe! German social democracy and the idea of Europe: Recasting socialist internationalism, 1900–1930*, PhD thesis (2006), p. 248. Retrieved from <https://www.proquest.com/docview/304955252>.

<sup>39</sup> Brandt, *Road to Berlin*, p. 65.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>41</sup> Richard Lowenthal and Willy Brandt, *Ernst Reuter: Ein Leben für die Freiheit* [A Life for Freedom], Munich: Kindler (1957).

<sup>42</sup> Franz Borkenau, *Bange machen gilt nicht: Die Geschichte Eines Grossen Bluffs* [Have no fear: The Story of a Great Bluff], Munich: Die Neue Zeitung (1948).

Marxism, in the context of the defeat and exile of the German Left, was a necessary preliminary to it.

## Between Leninism and anti-Marxism

### The Mentalité of the Working Class in Western Europe

In 1934, Borkenau became acquainted with Lucien Febvre, editor of the journal of the Annales School, through his first wife, Lucie Varga. Varga had studied under Alphons Dopsch, the principal – perhaps sole – Austrian contact of the Annales historians in the early interwar period, and had obtained funding for a project in France, she and Borkenau having decided to leave Austria after the suppression of the socialist movement.<sup>43</sup> Both Febvre and Raymond Aron had been impressed by the *Transition from the Feudal to the Bourgeois World-Picture*, and Borkenau published three papers in the Annales journal: the first on the fate of trade unions in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany; the second, pseudonymously, on the progress of Nazism in Austria; and the third, on the crisis of European socialism.<sup>44</sup>

The German historicist Karl Lamprecht was a major influence on the Annales school. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Lamprecht had been a pioneering advocate of cultural history. He had attempted to periodise German history into ages corresponding to the development of a national psyche, or consciousness. The Annales idea of a period's *mentalité* or *sensibilité* was a partial borrowing from Lamprecht, and this emphasis on the psychological factor in history went together – for Lamprecht as for Marc Bloch and Febvre – with an emphasis on the *longue durée*, a recognition of long-term civilisational or cultural ideas, attitudes, and trends.<sup>45</sup>

In Leipzig in the early 1920s, Borkenau had studied under Lamprecht's protégé, Walter Goetz, whose endorsement of the historical method appears to have rubbed off on Borkenau.<sup>46</sup> In his third Annales paper, he argued against what he suggested were the dominant communist and the socialist interpretations of the crisis of socialism. For socialists, in Borkenau's broad generalisation of their position, the collapse of European socialism had resulted from the 1919 founding of the

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<sup>43</sup> See Peter Schottler, "Lucie Varga: A Central European Refugee in the Circle of the French "Annales", 1934-1941", *History Workshop Journal*, No. 33 (1992), pp. 100-120.

<sup>44</sup> Borkenau, *Der Übergang*; Raymond Aron, "Review: Note sur l'Histoire des idées et l'Idéologie" [Note on the History of Ideas and Ideology], *Annales Sociologiques. Série A. Sociologie Générale*, No. 2 (1936), pp. 129-38; Lucien Febvre, "Fondations Économiques, Superstructure Philosophique: Une Synthèse" [Economic Foundations and the Philosophical Superstructure: A Synthesis], *AHES*, Vol. 6, No. 28 (1934), pp. 369-74. Franz Borkenau, "Fascisme et syndicalisme" [Fascism and Syndicalism], *AHES*, Vol. 6 (1934), pp. 337-349; [pseud. "Georg Haschek"] "Partis, traditions et structures sociales en Autriche" [Parties, Traditions and Social Structures in Austria], *AHES*, Vol. 7 (1935), pp. 1-12; Borkenau, "La crise".

<sup>45</sup> See Bryce Lyon, "Marc Bloch: did he repudiate Annales history?", *Journal of Medieval History*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (1985), pp. 182-3. On the Annales, see also Peter Burke, *The French Historical Revolution: The Annales School 1929-89*, Cambridge: Polity Press (1990).

<sup>46</sup> See Kessler, "Between communism", p. 93.

Communist International and the split in the movement which was caused by it; while, for communists, the split was historically inevitable, since the socialist leaders were bound to betray the proletariat to the bourgeoisie.<sup>47</sup> For Borkenau, however, the split was only a symptom of the deep crisis of socialism, which was a crisis of history and of geography. He argued that the crisis of socialism was in part the result of the long-term political traditions and ideas in the most advanced regions of the socialist orbit. In the parts of northern and western Europe where democratic political cultures had already emerged by the nineteenth century – Borkenau listed Britain, France, the low countries, and Scandinavia – socialism had tended to develop in the direction which, in the Marxist context, would be called revisionism. In Britain and Scandinavia, socialism absorbed a parliamentary tradition, while France was the country of Jaures, whose advocacy of gradualism received much wider support than did Bernstein's on the other side of the Rhine. Borkenau also gave the example of Belgium, where the apparent revolutionary fervour of the turn-of-the-century General Strikes dissipated when political rights were granted to the workers.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, what Polasky has called the “irony of embarking on a revolution to secure suffrage” had drawn the ire of the Polish Marxist Rosa Luxemburg, for whom Belgium had been a typical example of the “reformist hesitations” of the Second International.<sup>49</sup>

To the Marxist thesis that there is a necessary relation between capitalist development and socialist class struggle, Borkenau countered “that the existence of a stable democracy [appeared to be] an obstacle to the development of a mass socialist and extremist movement”.<sup>50</sup> The history of Western Europe proved, Borkenau argued, that there was no *Bewusstsein* (consciousness) of the proletariat beyond democracy and capitalism. Thus, the crisis of socialism was precisely that the socialist movement was reliant on the continued existence of the democratic, capitalist system. “By a bitter irony,” Borkenau wrote, “the groups least prepared to take advantage of a convulsion of the capitalist system, were, in truth, the socialist groups”, which were accustomed to defending the workers' interests within the framework of capitalism.<sup>51</sup> The workers' movement was not the antithesis, he argued, but was in fact a feature, of the liberal economy. When the capitalist crisis of 1929 and the early 1930s came, it was not socialism, but Fascism, which, as Borkenau put it, succeeded in “modifying the economic and social aspects of several countries”.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Borkenau, “La crise”, p. 338.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 341-2.

<sup>49</sup> Janet L. Polasky, “A Revolution for Socialist Reforms: The Belgian General Strike for Universal Suffrage”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (1992), pp 449–50.

<sup>50</sup> Borkenau, “La crise”, p. 343 [Et ne pourrait-on, par contre, poser la thèse que l'existence d'une démocratie stable est un obstacle au développement d'un mouvement de masse socialiste et extrémiste?].

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 351 [...par un amère ironie les groupes les moins préparés à tirer parti d'un ébranlement du système capitaliste, c'étaient, en vérité, les groupes socialistes.].

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* [Le fascisme n'a-t-il pas réussi à modifier l'aspect économique et social de plusieurs pays?].

## The Defeat of the German Left

This success of fascism where socialism had failed was, of course, a lesson drawn from Germany, and it was one which invited a radical, Leninist conclusion. Lenin himself had written of how the revolutionary movement in Russia had learned the value of iron centralisation only after the “years of reaction”, when it had been “smashed” by Tsarism:

[I]t was this great defeat that taught the revolutionary parties and the revolutionary class a real and very useful lesson, a lesson in historical dialectics, a lesson in an understanding of the political struggle, and in the art and science of waging that struggle.<sup>53</sup>

The Neu Beginnen (NB) group in Germany drew the same lesson. In early 1934, Borkenau had defended Walter Löwenheim – who, under the pseudonym “Miles”, had written the NB’s founding pamphlet (the ‘Miles Broschüre’) in 1933 – after he had received a dressing-down from the paragon of German democratic Marxism, Karl Kautsky.<sup>54</sup> The main line of Kautsky’s criticism of NB had been an attack on the Leninism of its programme. Löwenheim believed that only a disciplined underground group of professional revolutionaries could function in the context of Nazi Germany.<sup>55</sup> Thus, *Socialism’s New Start* was to be led by this avant-garde, rather than by the spontaneous action of the proletariat, from which the underground group would have to sever its connections. Kautsky claimed that NB wanted to replace one dictatorship with another, which was a powerful criticism, since Löwenheim attacked the Social Democrats for failing to erect a revolutionary dictatorship after 1918 and stated his belief that, in the era of the decline of capitalism into which he felt the continent had passed, “only dictatorial centralised forms of government can last for any length of time”.<sup>56</sup>

It is doubtful that Borkenau, writing in 1934, concurred with Löwenheim’s defence of the idea of socialist dictatorship. In fact, he all but ignored the question whether the Miles pamphlet’s political conclusions were justifiable. But he did fully share Löwenheim’s belief that the victory of Nazism called for a reassessment of socialist faith in:

- (i) the class consciousness of the proletariat; and
- (ii) Marx’s theory about the development of capitalism.

These were, for Borkenau, the two sacrosanct strands of the Marxist eschatology which neither the SPD nor the KPD were prepared to reconsider. “Marx believed”, he wrote in 1935, “in a

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<sup>53</sup> Vladimir Lenin (trans. Julius Katzer), “Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder”, in Julius Katzer (ed.), *V. I. Lenin Collected Works, Vol. 31*, Moscow: Progress Publishers (1964), pp. 17-118.

<sup>54</sup> Borkenau, “Klassenbewusstsein”; “Staat und Revolution”; and “Noch einmal Klassenbewusstsein”.

<sup>55</sup> See Jones, *Lost Debate*, pp. 78-9.

<sup>56</sup> Löwenheim, *New Start*, p. 91.

preestablished harmony between the development of capitalism and the development of the class struggle”.<sup>57</sup> This was why, Borkenau claimed, Marx dismissed as utopians those of his contemporaries – like Saint-Simon and Fourier – who tried to propose concrete socialist economic programmes. Rather, by Borkenau’s reading, Marx counselled that the class struggle could only be resolved by the unravelling of the historical process; the organic growth of proletarian consciousness which was consonant with the refinement of capitalism.<sup>58</sup> Whether this was a plausible interpretation of Marx is open to dispute. The crucial point is that both Löwenheim and Borkenau were challenging what they took to be the German socialist and communist consensus up to – and even for some time after – Hitler’s appointment as Chancellor: that socialism was the fated outcome of the development of capitalism, and that the proletariat would be its historical agents.

What appeared to have happened in Germany, contrary to those expectations, was that the capitalist crisis had come and neither the socialist leaders nor the proletarian masses had been ready for it. “We must”, Löwenheim wrote in his pamphlet, “have the courage to look the facts of our age clearly in the face, even if they displease us or show our former prophesies to be erroneous”.<sup>59</sup> He asked if the supposed “revolutionary spontaneity” of the proletariat existed only in the imaginations of socialist leaders and went on to suggest that the one point on which Marx seemed to have been mistaken was in judging the socialist remodelling of society as “historically inevitable”. Perhaps, instead, it was only a “great historical opportunity”.<sup>60</sup> Löwenheim did not, however, consider himself to be abandoning Marxism. It was not, he suggested, Marxism which had failed the socialist parties (the SPD and the KPD), but the socialist parties which had not been Marxist enough. The caveat, however, was that, for Löwenheim, Marxism seemed really to mean Leninism. The Communists, he claimed, had failed to understand that the non-revolutionary outlook of the Social Democratic leaders was only representative of the reformist outlook of the masses (the “trade-union consciousness” on which Lenin had pronounced), and that by splitting from the SPD they were only isolating themselves from those masses.<sup>61</sup> The Social Democrats had failed to assume the role that the Bolsheviks had successfully played in Russia; they had failed to turn the November Revolution – which Löwenheim saw as the last phase of Germany’s bourgeois revolution – to socialist ends. The Bolsheviks were “capable of consciously utilising the impetus

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<sup>57</sup> Borkenau, “La crise”, p. 351 [Marx, lui, croyait a une harmonie préétablie entre le développement du capitalisme et le développement de la lutte des classes.].

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 349.

<sup>59</sup> Löwenheim, *New Start*, p. 18.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17 & 80-1.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97. On Lenin and *What is to be Done?*, see Paul le Blanc, *Lenin and the Revolutionary Party*, Chicago: Haymarket (2015).



of the bourgeois revolutionary forces for aims which transcend its actual aim, for the proletarian revolution".<sup>62</sup> In other words, the Social Democrats had failed to recognise that, if the proletariat were not going to be the agents of the proletarian revolution, as Marx had believed, the Party had to have the courage to turn itself into a revolutionary vanguard – *a la* Lenin and the Bolsheviks.

As has been said above, Borkenau did not endorse Löwenheim's political outlook, and it is unsurprising that his association with NB was short-lived. Indeed, he later remarked, dismissively, of the group that "that's all just Nechaev" (in the *Communist International*, Borkenau would go on to trace the Leninist form of political organisation back to the infamous Russian terrorist and associate of Bakunin who was the inspiration for Dostoyevsky's conspirators in the *Devils*).<sup>63</sup> But he was of the opinion that the Miles pamphlet was essentially sound in its criticism of what he saw as ossified Marxist theory. In 1934, still in sympathy with Marx, Borkenau recounted how Marx and Engels had grappled with the problem of class consciousness and the avant-garde, but he stopped short of blaming them for the ossification of their formulas.

Throughout their lives Marx and Engels were unable to clearly determine the relationship between the avant-garde and the mass, between socialist theory and the practical labour movement, between objective-revolutionary impulses and subjective bourgeois ideologies in the proletariat. But they felt the tension between these factors throughout their lives and struggled with it half unconsciously.<sup>64</sup>

Marx and Engels, Borkenau argued, were historically "great" thinkers who would never have tried to resolve hard problems by resorting to dogmas. Real Marxism, he wrote, "means grasping the essence of a movement from its developmental law", which meant that it was a continuous process of re-evaluation, rather than a creed.<sup>65</sup> But the "epigones", Borkenau claimed, had turned Marxism into a "system of formulas that... give it the appearance of completion".<sup>66</sup> And these formulas had already been responsible, in Germany and much of Europe, for the great disappointment of 1914, when it was found that the masses possessed a patriotic, rather than a revolutionary, consciousness.

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<sup>62</sup> Löwenheim, *New Start*, pp. 111-2.

<sup>63</sup> See Hartmut Soell, *Fritz Erler, Ein Politische Biographie* [A Political Biography], Vol. I, Berlin: Dietz (1976), p. 516. See also Borkenau, "The Russian Revolutionary Movement" in *World Communism*, pp. 22-38.

<sup>64</sup> Borkenau, "Klassenbewusstsein", p. 155 [Marx und Engels haben ihr Leben lang das verhältnis zwischen Avantgarde und Masse, zwischen socialitischer Theorie und praktischer Arbeiterbewegung, zwischen objective-revolutionären Antreibskraften und subjektiven burgerlichen Ideologien im Proletariat nicht klar zu bestimmen vermocht. Aber sie haben die Spannung zwischen diesen Faktoren ihr Leben lang empfunden und mit ihr halb unbewusst gerungen.]

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159 [Marxismus heisst, das Wesen einer Bewegung aus ihrem Entwicklungsgesetz erfassen.]

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155 [...ein system formal ueberreinstimmender Formeln bringen und ihm dadurch den Schein des Abgeschlossenen geben.]

The role of official Marxism of 1890-1914 was almost entirely exhausted in denying the tension between revolutionary theory and the inevitably cumbersome activity of the working-class party. It was precisely this concealment of reality by an apologetic theory that made August 4 appear as an incomprehensible catastrophe.<sup>67</sup>

Such was Borkenau's tone in early 1934 in the exile journal of the SPD, the *Zeitschrift für Sozialismus*. It is notable, however, that he was less careful to shield Marx from his criticism of the Marxists a year later, when writing in French in Febvre's journal. By this time, Borkenau was treating Marxism as though it did consist solely of formulas. It was, on the one hand, a theory of the development of the proletariat, and, on the other, a theory of the development of capitalism. But, dealing as it did with predictions of the future, it was actually something more than a theory; more correctly, it was a "prophesy", and one which had been disproved by events.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, it was a prophesy which owed its origins to the specific, backward, conditions of nineteenth century Germany. Marx, as editor of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, had witnessed the failure of 1848/49 and had blamed it on the betrayal of the Democratic Front by the bourgeoisie, which he had derided for compromising with the Prussian government to protect its own interests against the claims of the workers' movement. It was this disappointment, Borkenau claimed, which furnished Marx's faith in the idea that the proletariat would be the agents of the democratic revolution. Marx, Borkenau argued, shared with many of his contemporaries the nineteenth-century liberal belief in progress towards democracy, but the German bourgeoisie had let him down, so he discovered the potential of the proletariat.<sup>69</sup>

Partisans of Marx's theory of proletarian revolution would no doubt counter Borkenau's biographical speculations about how Marx arrived at it with the objection that it was a scientific theory; that, rather than the result of wish-thinking on Marx's part, the idea of the refinement of proletarian consciousness over time had its basis in a logically worked-out explanation of human conduct: materialism. Plekhanov credited Aristotle with being the first to recognise that "the development of consciousness is conditioned by the needs of being".<sup>70</sup> Borkenau, though, had become dissatisfied with the reduction of all action in history to the material factor. He cited Bergson's argument that life is a creative action, which cannot always be reduced to logical

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156 [Die Rolle des offiziellen Marxismus von 1890-1914 erschöpfte sich fast ausschliesslich darin, die Spannung zwischen der revolutionären Theorie und der unvermeidlicherweise bürgerlichen Aktivität der Arbeitermassen-partei zu leugnen. Gerade diese Verdeckung der Wirklichkeit durch eine apologetische Theorie liess dann den 4. August als eine unverständliche Katastrophe erscheinen.]

<sup>68</sup> Borkenau, "La crise", p. 349.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 347-9.

<sup>70</sup> See Plekhanov's review of Bergson's *Creative Evolution*. Georgi Plekhanov, *Selected Philosophical Works, Vol. 3*, Moscow: Progress Publishers (1976), pp. 294-98.

explanation, especially when logic becomes the basis of prophesy.<sup>71</sup> As Bergson wrote in criticism of materialism:

The essence of mechanical explanations is indeed to consider the future and the past as calculable in terms of the present, and thus to claim that everything is given.<sup>72</sup>

At university in the early 1920s, Borkenau had encountered Oswald Spengler, whose “reactionary” ideas were derided on the German Left, but whose revival of the concept of civilisational rise and decline, as against the nineteenth-century dogma of unilineal progress, would prove very influential on Borkenau later in life.<sup>73</sup> And in his citations of Bergson and Sorel (on “social myths”) – both earlier identified by Karl Mannheim as harbingers of fascism, an opinion which Borkenau himself would also express in an article of 1942 – was the first intimation of his interest in studying the works of thinkers who could explain the developments of his time (because those developments were in accord with their ideas) in a more satisfactory manner than Marx.<sup>74</sup> Ultimately, it would be Pareto to whose writings he would turn. Borkenau concluded his article with the Bergsonian contention that, contra the eschatological element in Marx, it was not the job of the historian to foretell the future: “L’histoire ne prédit pas”.<sup>75</sup>

Borkenau’s treatment of Marxism as a prophesy did invite criticism. In an otherwise positive review of Borkenau’s *Communist International* (published in 1938), the Marxist historian Arthur Rosenberg suggested that Marxism was “nothing but certain a critical method of approach to social problems”, and that Borkenau erred in treating Marx as a false prophet.<sup>76</sup> In *History and Class Consciousness*, Georg Lukács had made this same point, more clearly:

Orthodox Marxism... is not the ‘belief’ in this or that thesis, nor the exegesis of a ‘sacred’ book. On the contrary, orthodoxy refers exclusively to *method*. It is the scientific conviction that dialectical

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<sup>71</sup> Borkenau, “La crise”, p. 352.

<sup>72</sup> [L’essence des explications mécaniques est en effet de considérer l’avenir et le passé comme calculables en fonction du présent, et de prétendre ainsi que tout est donné.], Quoted in A. W. G. Randall, “The Origins and Influence of Spenglerism”, *The Contemporary Review*, 1 July 1922, p. 48.

<sup>73</sup> Borkenau was very critical of Spengler on the level of details, but was heavily influenced by Spengler’s attempts to establish “general laws of rise and decline”; and, in pursuit of that goal, by what he saw as Spengler’s unique realisation: that the “nation” was not the right unit of study, but was a specific phenomenon of Western Civilisation. General laws of history, Borkenau derived from Spengler, could only be discovered by the comparative study of historical civilisations. See esp. Franz Borkenau, “Oswald Spengler”, *Dublin Review*, No. 430, July 1944, pp. 1-11. On Spengler’s reputation as a reactionary and a charlatan, see Theodore Adorno, “Spengler after the Decline”, in Adorno (trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber), *Prisms*, MIT Press (1983), pp. 51-72.

<sup>74</sup> See Karl Mannheim [trans. Louis Wirth & Edward Shils], *Ideology and Utopia*, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co. (1936) p. 138; Franz Borkenau, “Sorel, Pareto, Spengler: Three Fascist Philosophers”, *Horizon* (June 1942), pp. 420-430.

<sup>75</sup> Borkenau, “La crise”, p. 352.

<sup>76</sup> Arthur Rosenberg, “Since October” [Review of the *Communist International*], *The Nation*, 18 November 1939, pp. 557-558.

materialism is the road to truth... [and] that all attempts to surpass or 'improve' it have led and must lead to over-simplification, triviality and eclecticism.<sup>77</sup>

Taking the historical view, meanwhile, Marx's recent biographer, Sperber, insists that the mistaken approach of both Marxists and their critics has been to "project back onto the nineteenth century controversies of [their own] times".<sup>78</sup> In other words, Marx's ideas should be historicised, and Marxism should be treated neither as a method nor as a prophesy.<sup>79</sup> In the context of the political philosophies of the German workers' parties, however, Marx had palpably been treated as a prophet; and, to restate, it is my contention that Borkenau's estrangement from Marxism was the product of his coming to terms with the defeat suffered by those Parties, and the ascendancy of the Nazis. If Borkenau can be accused of having been unfair to Marx, he was, arguably, nevertheless fair to Marxism as it was understood and preached by the Marxist parties in Germany. And, as I will address in the section of this chapter on Borkenau's *Pareto*, below, he eventually arrived at a conclusion similar to Sperber's: that Marx ought to be historicised and his ideas examined in the context of their times.

### The Problem of Resistance in Germany

Within a year, Borkenau had gone from a defender of Löwenheim's Leninist manifesto to a full-blown critic of Marxism, which he now labelled a "prophesy". Though the shift in his tone can be attributed, partially, to the difference between the journals in which he was writing – a journal of the SPD as against one with no ideological attachment to Marxism – Borkenau undoubtedly underwent a re-examination of his political ideas in the wake of Hitler's ascent to and consolidation of power, something which, before the event, he had never seriously believed would happen.

Borkenau's defence of Löwenheim's group stemmed, partly, from his interest in the problem of oppositional activity in a fascist state. NB's criticism of the major socialist parties was not only that their version of Marxism was outdated, but that they entertained wholly unrealistic hopes in a situation which was historically novel. Infamously, the German communists had promoted the slogan "After Hitler, us", cherishing the hope that Nazism would be a short-lived experiment which would lose its momentum when it faced the responsibilities of power, opening the way for the revolutionary situation which would lead to the establishment of communism.<sup>80</sup> Trotsky's prescient warning of 1931 – that, "should fascism come to power, it will ride over your skulls and

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<sup>77</sup> Georg Lukács, "What is Orthodox Marxism", in Rodney Livingstone (trans.), *History and Class Consciousness*, London: Merlin Press (1971), p. 1.

<sup>78</sup> Jonathan Sperber, *Karl Marx: A Nineteenth Century Life*, New York: Norton (2013), p. xix.

<sup>79</sup> Stedman Jones has taken the same approach in his biography of Marx. *Karl Marx, Greatness and Illusion*, London: Allen Lane (2016).

<sup>80</sup> See C. L. R. James, Ch. XII, "After Hitler, Our Turn", in *World Revolution*, pp. 305-57.

spines like a frightful tank” – was neither believed nor heeded.<sup>81</sup> Even as late as June, 1933, Löwenheim noted, the communist journal, *Die Rote Fabne*, was talking of a “revolutionary upsurge” in Germany.<sup>82</sup> But it was not only the communists who failed to grasp the fact of their own destruction. Socialist leaders had fallen for the same illusions, Löwenheim claimed. The SPD leadership had placed a veto on preparations for illegal Party work in 1932. Salter has expressed what is a common view among historians: that this was primarily because of the Party’s “obsessive constitutionalism”; a determination to stick to legality come what may.<sup>83</sup> But Löwenheim’s verdict was that the SPD vetoed preparations for illegal work because the party failed to conceive that it would be necessary. Even from its Prague exile in 1933, Löwenheim complained, the SPD leadership continued to voice increasingly absurd expectations of a spontaneous uprising of the German working class.<sup>84</sup>

The great working-class organisations... which were organised only for mass agitation under conditions of legal democracy, are proving completely incapable of adapting themselves to the new conditions of illegal struggle under fascism... They regarded the victory of German fascism only as a short episode in a society which could, fundamentally, only be democratic and which was bound... to return to democratic conditions.<sup>85</sup>

Both parties later misinterpreted the ‘Night of Long Knives’ as the first episode in the self-immolation of the Nazi Party and heralded it as the beginning of the end for Hitler.<sup>86</sup> In 1938, Evelyn Anderson, an NB member in British exile wrote an article about the German underground which occupied an entire edition of Raymond Postgate’s *Fact* and was issued as a pamphlet in the United States by the League for Industrial Democracy. She put forth some of the reasons why “the labour movement in no way comprehended what was happening” until it was far too late.<sup>87</sup> The “fundamental novelty” of the extraordinary measures by which the Nazis secured dictatorial power in the early months of 1933, she suggested, escaped the German working class organisations because – in the highly unstable political situation of 1930-2 – Brüning and von Papen, also, had relied on emergency decrees to rule.<sup>88</sup> While the communists had long been in the rhetorical habit of calling everyone who was not communist a ‘fascist’ (undermining their own ability to recognise

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<sup>81</sup> Leon Trotsky, “The Impending Danger of Fascism in Germany”, *The Militant*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 9 January 1932, pp. 1 & 4.

<sup>82</sup> Löwenheim, *New Start*, p. 15.

<sup>83</sup> Stephen Salter, “The Object Lesson: The Division of the German Left and the Triumph of National Socialism”, in Helen Graham & Paul Preston (eds.), *The Popular Front in Europe*, London: Macmillan (1989), pp. 26-7.

<sup>84</sup> Löwenheim, *New Start*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>86</sup> See Evelyn Anderson [pseud. Evelyn Lend], *The Underground Struggle in Germany*, New York: League for Industrial Democracy (1938), pp. 38-9.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.* p. 15.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.* p. 16.

the uniqueness of the real thing), the erroneous lesson which Otto Wels, chairman of the SPD, had drawn from those years – Anderson quoted his words from the last meeting the socialists were permitted to hold in Berlin’s *Lustgarten* – was that “strict masters do not rule for a long time”.<sup>89</sup>

That Hitler’s “lightning” consolidation of power came, in Löwenheim’s phrase, as a “bolt from the blue” to most of the German Left is critical to understanding the development of Borkenau’s ideas.<sup>90</sup> His oeuvre contains only fragments of autobiographical writing, and historians who have previously written about him have relied heavily on Lowenthal’s recollections for biographical details.<sup>91</sup> But Borkenau did talk about his own experience of the rise of Nazism when he gave evidence at the Nuremberg Medical Trial in April 1947.<sup>92</sup> And he admitted that he, too, was slow to appreciate Germany’s peril. Borkenau had been called as a witness for the defence of Wolfram Sievers, who was one of the six defendants who eventually received the most severe sentence of death. He had never known the accused. But Sievers defence rested on his claim that – though he had served as a director of Himmler’s Ahnenerbe, and, in that capacity, had participated in horrific medical experiments on Jewish victims – he had been, all along, a secret member of a resistance group led by the German nationalist Friedrich Hielscher, whom Borkenau had known before 1933. Borkenau was asked to testify to the credibility of Hielscher’s claim to have been the leader of the group, and to have been in clandestine control of Sievers’ affairs throughout the period of his employment by Himmler.

In the autumn of 1932, Borkenau had written an article on Italy in which he had argued that fascism was an agent of modernisation in backward countries, implying a belief that no comparable regime was likely to arise in an industrialised country like Germany.<sup>93</sup> He confirmed, in his deposition, that he “was still convinced, in September 1932, that Nazism would not win”.<sup>94</sup> He had been impressed, however, by a discussion he had had at that time with Hielscher, who, he claimed, was not only already quite certain of the opposite, but had revealed to Borkenau and Lowenthal that he was already preparing for underground activity. Borkenau remembered that, at that time, he had disagreed with Lowenthal – an earlier convert to the ideas of Löwenheim – over the potential of mass resistance under a fascist regime. Borkenau was still hopeful that, even if the German political crisis resulted in the emergence of a dictatorship of the “Italian type”, a “mass

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* p. 16-17.

<sup>90</sup> Löwenheim, *New Start*, p. 14.

<sup>91</sup> Richard Lowenthal, “Introduction”, in Borkenau & Lowenthal (ed.), *End and Beginning*; Kessler, “Between communism”.

<sup>92</sup> NMT, Borkenau Transcript, pp. 5889–908.

<sup>93</sup> Borkenau, “Zur Soziologie des Faschismus”.

<sup>94</sup> NMT, Borkenau transcript, p. 5899.

underground resistance on quasi-democratic lines” would be possible, and “the right principle”.<sup>95</sup> By 1934, Borkenau had, of course, concluded that such an idea was pure fantasy under Hitler, which was part of the reason he came to the defence of Löwenheim’s Leninist concept of an underground avant-garde. But NB’s tactics, also, proved futile. By 1935, Löwenheim had given up on the idea of continuing underground activity in Germany. As Anderson put it, the illegal organisations “merely escaped very largely the first terror waves”, which were specifically aimed at disabling the traditional mass organisations of the Communists and the Social Democrats. But “once the police set out to hunt down the illegal groups, [they] all shared the same fate.”<sup>96</sup> Lowenthal took over leadership of the group, but he was, himself, eventually forced to flee the country and NB gradually morphed into an organisation chiefly concerned with promoting the “Other Germany” narrative to a British audience after the outbreak of the Second World War. According to the author of a recent history of NB, it “transformed from a resistance cell into a lobbyist group”.<sup>97</sup> The sum of its efforts in wartime was to smuggle a handful of “Reports from Inside Germany” out of the country so that socialist emigres in Britain could refute the main charge of Vansittartism: that the German population unanimously supported Hitler.<sup>98</sup>

Hielscher, though, had outlined another approach to underground activity in his discussion with Borkenau and Lowenthal in 1932. A Right-nationalist disciple of the quasi-mystical, aristocratic political ideals of Stefan George, Hielscher and his intellectual circle had an opportunity which, as Borkenau remarked wryly at Nuremberg, was never open to the groups of the Left – the trojan horse.<sup>99</sup> Secret opponents of Nazism could work their way into senior positions – as Sievers alleged he had done – and slowly build the powerbase which would give them the opportunity to strike, suddenly and decisively, to bring down the regime. This was, essentially, what the eventual tactic of the Goerdeler group would be; the difference being that its members did not begin as a resistance group, but only gradually became one.<sup>100</sup> It was only in retrospect, Borkenau claimed, that he came to appreciate the prescience of Hielscher. Not only because he was convinced, at such an early date, of the coming Nazi succession, but because he had revealed to Borkenau his further belief that the real future core of Nazi power – and thus the organisation that he was

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<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> Anderson, *Underground*, p. 28.

<sup>97</sup> Renaud, “Restarting Socialism”, p. 54.

<sup>98</sup> The reports were used as evidence in anti-Vansittartist tracts such as Victor Gollancz, *Shall our Children Live or Die?*, London: Gollancz (1942), pp. 42-6.

<sup>99</sup> NMT, Borkenau transcript, p. 5900. The trojan horse was actually also the eventual tactic of the German Communists, who made some attempts to infiltrate the German Labour Front. Those that were successful in getting themselves elected as leaders – before the Nazis disposed of elections in the sham union – found that they were unable to do anything which might arouse suspicion and, more often than not, ended up being regarded with hatred as traitors by their own following. See Anderson, *Underground*, p. 49 & Salter, “Division”, pp. 29-30.

<sup>100</sup> See Ulrich von Hassell’s account, in Hugh Gibson (ed.), *The von Hassell Diaries*, London: Hamish Hamilton (1948).

targeting – would be the SS. It may have been partly aristocratic prejudice, or it may have been, as Hielscher told Borkenau, that he had well-informed contacts, but he had intuited that the SA and its plebian leadership – at that time the focus of considerable attention in the press because of its members’ thuggish work in the streets – would be of little importance once Hitler came to power. Himmler, he correctly gauged, would become a key personality at the heart of the regime.<sup>101</sup>

Borkenau’s estrangement from NB, and perhaps also his further doubts about political analyses of a Marxist complexion – which can be seen in his *Annales* article – stemmed from his interpretation of German events. Like the Goerdeler group, the Hielscher group had made a more successful oppositional effort than any organisations of the Left. As Borkenau recalled at Nuremberg:

Now, when in January 1933, Hitler came to power, and the mass movement went smash, and within a year it was easy to see that most of these underground movements attempting to work among the masses also went smash – well, this would of course be a long story, describing all the accumulating evidence about the impossibility of developing any type of mass resistance to a regime of the Nazi type. Then, in retrospect, that talk with Hielscher assumed quite different proportions in my mind.

It impressed me deeply, afterwards, that somebody had said with such perfect assurance what was going to come, what he was going to do, and made his measures well in advance; and I may add, that in the light of all the disasters of various underground groups, which have cost the lives of several of my close friends, I grew increasingly impressed with that feat of conspiratorial technique... [which] assumes gigantic proportions in the fight against a dictatorship and pushes somewhat back proper political considerations in the democratic sense. And when I learned that practically not a man had been killed of that organization, I thought that was really the hundred percent maximum of what an underground organization could achieve.<sup>102</sup>

It was not only that the anti-Nazi section of the Right had made a better effort of resistance – something Borkenau would only have learned after 1945 – but that this right-wing associate of Borkenau had given a much more realistic assessment of the political realities in those final weeks and months before the *Machtergreifung*. Like Löwenheim and the NB group, Borkenau came to believe that certain Marxist dogmas were at the root of the Left’s inability to conceive of the catastrophe. By the time he came to write the *Communist International*, he would criticise those who were unable “to see that the tasks which the proletariat had failed to achieve [in the revolutionary years at the end of WWI] ... could be achieved by other classes and groups”.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> NMT, Borkenau transcript, p. 5900.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5900-1.

<sup>103</sup> Borkenau, *World Communism*, p. 249.



## Pareto vs. Marxian Prophecy

In emigration, the study of contemporary political developments consumed Borkenau, to the exclusion of all other interests. His Frankfurt tome on the rise of the bourgeois outlook in the seventeenth century was published in 1934.<sup>104</sup> Yet, in spite of the impression it made on Febvre and Aron – Harold Laski also considered it an important work – he never returned to the subject.<sup>105</sup> His subsequent writings all revolved around the overriding themes – fascism, communism, totalitarianism – and events – the Spanish Civil War, the Anschluss, the Nazi-Soviet Pact – of his age. Marx’s predictions having proved, in Borkenau’s view, partly erroneous, it is unsurprising that he sought out a prophet, or “precursor” of fascism to make the object of his next study.<sup>106</sup> As Jones has put it,

Borkenau's model of social change would emerge from a bold and heretical combination of components: a Marxian theory of capitalist economic crisis and state intervention and a Paretoan notion of the emergence of new political elites.<sup>107</sup>

Though Jones emphasised the synthesis of Marx and Pareto in Borkenau’s emerging theory of totalitarianism, a reading of Borkenau’s study of the latter in the context of the debates in which he had been engaged on the German Left suggests that his *Pareto* was also an attempt at a refutation of what he saw as the eschatological element of Marxism. Moreover, Borkenau’s application of Paretian theories to the circumstances of his time amounted to an implicit historicisation of Marx. Marxism, he would later write explicitly, was a method for the study of the capitalist world in which its founder lived; it was “a perfect image of the last period of the bourgeois age”.<sup>108</sup> Though Borkenau, like many of his contemporaries on the Left, was mistaken in his supposition that the epoch of capitalism was drawing to a definitive close, it followed that Marxism was probably less appropriate as a method for the study of the emerging dictatorships than it had been for nineteenth-century capitalism.

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<sup>104</sup> Franz Borkenau, *Der Übergang*.

<sup>105</sup> Laski, who would later go very cold on Borkenau, recommended Borkenau to the Institute of Advanced Study in 1934, opining that Borkenau had written “one of the best essays in the history of ideas since the death of Troeltsch and Max Weber”, and predicting that he would go on to “do work of the very first importance”. See Harold Laski to Abraham Flexner, 26 February 1934, Archive of the Institute for Advanced Study, Records of the Office of the Director: General Files: Box 7: Bi-Bo (2), Shelby White and Leon Levy Archives Center, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, NJ, USA. Also see Harold Laski, “Mr Cole on Marx” [Review of *What Marx Really Meant*, by G. D. H. Cole], *Manchester Guardian*, 11 April 1934, p. 5.

<sup>106</sup> “Pareto can best be understood when designated as a precursor of Fascism”. Borkenau, *Pareto*, p. 20.

<sup>107</sup> Jones, “Borkenau’s Pareto”, p. 460.

<sup>108</sup> Franz Borkenau, “Marx’s Prophecy in the Light of History”, *Commentary*, Vol. VII (1949), p. 436.

Hitler's successes had led many on the German Left to doubt their previous views about the historical role of the proletariat.<sup>109</sup> Partisans of this particular tenet of Marxism, both communist and socialist, could still take comfort in the idea that 'fascism' was the "last stage of capitalism", or, in other words, a reactionary form of government instituted in a final, futile effort to rescue capitalism from the inevitable dawn of socialism.<sup>110</sup> Arguably, this view represented a continuation of the party cry – "After Hitler, us" – which had been the source of much of Neu Beginnen's criticism of the SPD as well as the KPD. But Borkenau, like the NB ideologues, came early to the realisation that the political developments he was living through had greater import. For him, the victory of Nazism in Germany amounted to confirmation that a new fascist epoch was dawning. He rebuked himself for having previously viewed fascism "as a phenomenon specific to backward countries". German events seemed to prove that the "forces driving towards" it were "of much wider reach".<sup>111</sup> Here, once again, is evidence of the singular impact of the Nazi victory on the development of Borkenau's thought. Though Devlin has emphasised the role of an interwar Marxian discourse in the development of the concept of totalitarianism, Borkenau was already, in 1935, ridiculing some of the stock-phrases of that discourse.<sup>112</sup> Neither the "famous imperialism" – "well developed already in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries" – nor monopoly capitalism – "only one aspect of a broader [historical] development" – were sufficient explanations of the fascist phenomenon.<sup>113</sup>

*Pareto* was published in January 1936 but must have been researched and written before Borkenau left London for Panama in the autumn of 1935, when the terminology of 'totalitarianism' had not yet been well developed.<sup>114</sup> Like many of his contemporaries, Borkenau therefore used the term 'fascism' quite loosely – but with a notable idiosyncrasy. While it was common for sociologists, political scientists, and journalists in the mid-1930s to imply a resemblance between Nazism and Italian Fascism, by the indiscriminate use of the Italian label, Borkenau wrote of the fascist epoch

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<sup>109</sup> Hungarian-born KPD functionary Arthur Koestler remained a communist until 1936, but he gave the example of the Saar plebiscite of January 1935 as an event which shook his illusions. He described the "catastrophic deterioration of political acumen" he underwent while in the German Communist Party, which had led him to predict a defeat for Hitler in an exile newspaper in Paris (Koestler, *Invisible Writing*, p. 273).

<sup>110</sup> This theory will be discussed in Ch. II.

<sup>111</sup> Borkenau, *Pareto*, p. 198. The article in which he had expressed the view he now repudiated was "Zur Soziologie des Faschismus".

<sup>112</sup> See Devlin, "Marxist Theories".

<sup>113</sup> Borkenau, *Pareto*, p. 198.

<sup>114</sup> A Google Ngram search for the years 1930-45 with a smoothing value of 0 reveals that usage of the terms "totalitarian" and "totalitarianism" shared the same trend: flat until 1933; rising quite gradually between 1933 and 1937; rising exponentially between 1937 and 1940; peaking in 1941; and falling gradually afterwards (possibly a reflection of the changing position of the Soviet Union in the War).

as something exemplified as much by events in Russia as in Italy and Germany.<sup>115</sup> He also described the economic regime of fascism as “state capitalism”, a label which had first been developed by Menshevik and other Marxist critics of Bolshevism in the period of the New Economic Policy (NEP). They had complained that, though the State operated the economy, it continued to abide by the capitalist principles of profit and investment – a characterisation accepted by Lenin, who saw the NEP as a temporary expedient.<sup>116</sup> In contrast to Bolshevism, Borkenau argued, Italian Fascism had intended to liberate market forces from the demands of the workers’ movement, but the State had gradually and unintentionally assumed control over the economy.<sup>117</sup> Borkenau’s application of the term State Capitalism to Italy demonstrated his belief that, despite antipodal principles, the Italian and Russian regimes had converged upon a similar economic system. Thus Bolshevism, in Borkenau’s view, was a feature of the fascist epoch, in the same way that Italian Fascism and German Nazism were. As he would clarify in 1942,

‘Fascism’, after all, is only an almost meaningless term used in self-description by a movement which preferred not to mention its real aims. The scientific term for that movement is ‘totalitarianism’, for it is the totalitarian state which has been the real goal of the movement.<sup>118</sup>

In *Pareto*, though, totalitarianism was not yet part of Borkenau’s lexicon. Hence the bold treatment of Bolshevism as a species of fascism. He was careful to emphasise that the ideological distinctions between the Russian, Italian and German movements were palpable, and that it would not be difficult to argue that each regime had a distinctive class basis.<sup>119</sup> But he downplayed the importance of those facts. What was of historical importance was their essential similarity as antitheses of liberalism, which made them archetypes of what he already considered a worldwide trend.

National-socialism at the moment of its advent was more of a victorious regime of the upper classes than Italian Fascism had been, not to mention Bolshevism. But it is now evident that the essential change of which Fascism is the political expression, namely the change from market competition to state planning, is independent of the secondary group interests implied in the revolution.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> For the indiscriminate use of “Fascism”, an example is Max Ascoli and Arthur Feiler, *Fascism: who benefits?*, New York: Norton (1938), a New School (University in Exile) joint study of the Italian and German regimes by an exile from each country.

<sup>116</sup> Borkenau, *Pareto*, p. 20; On State Capitalism, see M. C. Howard & J. E. King, “State Capitalism’ in the Soviet Union.” *History of Economics Review*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (2001), pp. 110-26. Also see Vladimir Lenin [trans. David Skvirsky & George Hanna], “The Role and Functions of the Trade Unions Under the New Economic Policy”, in *Collected Works, Vol. 33*, Moscow: Progress Publishers (1973), pp. 184-195.

<sup>117</sup> Borkenau, *Pareto*, p. 20.

<sup>118</sup> Franz Borkenau, “Sorel, Pareto, Spengler”.

<sup>119</sup> See Borkenau, *Pareto*, p. 196.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 209.

Even countries which had experienced no revolution were undergoing similar changes. In the concluding chapter of Pareto, “Fascism”, Borkenau gave what was a thoroughly economic and, in fact, straightforwardly Marxist account of the effects of the economic system of free competition *within* individual countries, but also *for* individual countries, as they entered into free competition *against* other countries on the world market. Rather than theoretical, though, Borkenau’s account was primarily historical, and can be compared to Hilferding’s argument in *Finance Capital*. In the United States, just as in Germany, the State had been compelled to intervene to protect whole classes of its citizens. For Borkenau, the establishment of Roosevelt’s National Recovery Administration (NRA) was an event comparable to Hitler’s appointment as Chancellor. Politically, there was a world of difference between the NRA and the Nazi Party, but, Borkenau insisted, they both resulted from the same economic causes.

Eastern Germany... can by no means enter into free competition in wheat with Canada or the Argentine. So it ought to be abandoned, as Eastern America was abandoned by the farmers some decades ago. But to-day, even the farmers of the Middle-West are not able to sustain competition. And now the thoroughly liberal American community has had to change its mind and intervene on their behalf.<sup>121</sup>

This was, perhaps, something of an over-simplification, since the United States did not experience any change of political system, and the NRA – like the New Deal – was the direct political response of an elected government to an economic problem. Here was an example, perhaps, of Borkenau’s tendency to write in quite broad and perhaps over-simplified terms – with the German historicists’ penchant for identifying historical “trends” – where an economist or an economic historian, for instance, might tread more carefully. Nevertheless, Borkenau was not alone among his contemporaries in making this comparison. John Strachey argued in 1941 that capitalism was exhausting its last possibilities of development by instituting a “system of central controls”, which can be “used for either a welfare or a warfare objective”; the New Deal being an example of the former, and fascism of the latter.<sup>122</sup> Borkenau’s overarching point was that “State power” was increasing everywhere as the result of economic causes.<sup>123</sup> Clearly, he continued to value Marx’s

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<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200-1.

<sup>122</sup> See John Strachey, “The Struggle for Power”, in Victor Gollancz (Ed.), *The Betrayal of the Left*, London: Gollancz (1941), pp. 232-3.

<sup>123</sup> Borkenau, *Pareto*, p. 204. Arguably, this, too, was an oversimplification. Borkenau later wrote, in reference to Russia, that “[e]very great revolution has destroyed the State apparatus which it found” (Borkenau, “State and Revolution in Paris, Russia and Spain”, p. 41). In fact, another sociologist who took a comparative approach to revolutions has emphasised the role of the prior disintegration of the State apparatus in the February and October Revolutions. See Theda Skocpol, “Old-Regime States in Crisis”, in *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China*, Cambridge University Press (1979), pp. 47-111.

insights on the effects of competition. However, he also believed that Marx's conclusions required considerable revision.

Marx had predicted a proletarian revolution, which would begin in the industrialised – and thus proletarianized – countries but would be of worldwide significance.<sup>124</sup> Borkenau would later explain that Marx was partly vindicated, because the totalitarian revolution had realised an integral element of the Marxian prophesy: collectivism.<sup>125</sup> Yet, it was not the proletariat which had been the instrument of the totalitarian revolution, but rather, in each instance of it, a new elite whose sentiments were better suited to the post-liberal age. Moreover, the totalitarian revolution had nowhere abolished political power or the State. It had, in fact, hugely exacerbated the problem of domination which Marx had assumed to be intrinsically linked to the economic inequalities existing under capitalism.<sup>126</sup> As a prophet of the twentieth century, Borkenau had found Marx wanting. Seen in the light of this disillusionment with Marx, Borkenau's choice of Pareto's sociology as the subject for his first study in British exile makes perfect sense. Certainly, it does not seem to have been based on a dispassionate interest in the intellectual achievements of the Italian thinker. In fact, as a sociologist, Borkenau's opinion of Pareto seems to have been rather low. Pareto's most important work, the *Trattato di Sociologia Generale*, Borkenau judged substandard as a contribution to the field.<sup>127</sup> Nevertheless, he believed that, in important respects Pareto's ideas helped to explain the political developments of the twentieth century. As a "political manifesto", the *Trattato* was of the highest significance.<sup>128</sup> Pareto was a "precursor of fascism"; a true prophet of the fascist-totalitarian epoch.<sup>129</sup> Borkenau was not the first critic to make this connection. Karl Mannheim, whose suggestions received an acknowledgement from Borkenau at the front of the book, had briefly noted Pareto's veneration of "elites" in his 1929 *Ideology and Utopia*, and had remarked on its relevance in the context of Italian politics.<sup>130</sup> But, in 1929, it had seemed that Italian Fascism was a local affair. Borkenau's view of Pareto's significance was clearly linked to his view that fascism was a phenomenon of worldwide import. It is necessary first to sketch Borkenau's main

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<sup>124</sup> "What the bourgeoisie therefore produces", Marx wrote in concluding the chapter of the *Communist Manifesto* dealing with the two classes of modern society, "are its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable." See Max Eastman (ed.), *Capital, the Communist Manifesto and other writings of Karl Marx*, New York: Carlton House (1932), p. 334.

<sup>125</sup> See Borkenau, *Totalitarian Enemy*, pp. 69-70.

<sup>126</sup> The totalitarian economy was run on the basis of "a new type of slavery". *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>127</sup> Vilfredo Pareto [trans. Andrew Bongiorno & Arthur Livingston], *The Mind and Society* (4 vols.), New York: Harcourt Brace (1935). See Borkenau, *Pareto*, p. 106.

<sup>128</sup> Borkenau, *Pareto*, p. 170.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>130</sup> See Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, p. 138.

criticisms of Pareto as a social scientist, before turning to his arguments about the relevance of Pareto's ideas.

### Borkenau's Criticisms of Pareto

Borkenau was most scathing about Pareto's theory of 'residues'. These were, according to Pareto, the sentiments, or instincts, which governed much of human conduct throughout all ages, and which were at the root of religions and ideologies, or 'derivations', in Pareto's vocabulary.<sup>131</sup> The concept of residues was central to Pareto's general theory of human conduct. There were 'logical actions', which were, exclusively, actions governed by self-interest – the major types of logical action being money-making and scientific enquiry – and 'non-logical actions', being all actions governed by residues, which were irrational.<sup>132</sup> It would not have been hard to launch a Marxist critique – *a la* Zimmerman – of Pareto's attachment to the liberal concept of the individual, in considering money-making (regardless of its effects upon society) as one of the only logical actions.<sup>133</sup> But Borkenau was most concerned by the theory of residues. He complained that Pareto failed to provide any test of his theory, but merely gave a handful of examples of conduct – usually connected with his *bête noire*, humanitarianism – which, to him, appeared non-logical, and then proceeded to deduce residues.<sup>134</sup> Borkenau was additionally unimpressed by his subject's apparent renunciation of what, for him, was the basic task of sociology: to learn how patterns of social behaviour germinate and how they spread. He noted Pareto's repeated assertions that there was no means of learning how habits, or social behaviours, originate, and that the only thing deducible from the survival of any one social behaviour is that habits spread through a "Desire for Uniformity" (for Pareto, a constituent part of 'Residue IV'). "Why", Borkenau countered, "among innumerable competing loyalties, does one [idea, system of manners, religion, style of art, etc.] obtain while others are discarded?"<sup>135</sup> Pareto's apparent lack of interest in answering this question and, in Borkenau's view, his further mystification of it by the introduction of the "metaphysical" concept of residues, disqualified him as a serious sociologist.<sup>136</sup>

Perhaps Pareto's boldest claim, according to Borkenau, was that, since residues were unchanging, there was no fundamental difference between any one tradition, religion, taboo, ideology, moral

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<sup>131</sup> As Sidney Hook put it: "residues" was "a fancy synonym for *instincts*". "Pareto's Sociological System", in James H. Meisel [ed.], *Pareto & Mosca*, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall (1965).

<sup>132</sup> Vol. I of *Mind and Society* is dedicated to the phenomenon of "Non-Logical Conduct", Pareto gives his theory of Residues in Vol. II and Derivations in Vol. III.

<sup>133</sup> Zimmerman, "Foucault".

<sup>134</sup> See Borkenau, *Pareto*, p. 164.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 47-8.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73. Pitirim Sorokin had already made the argument that residues were a metaphysical concept. See his *Contemporary Sociological Theories*, New York: Harper (1928), p. 61. It is unclear whether Borkenau had read Sorokin.

code, or accepted system of manners, and any other. These were mere ‘derivations’, “which can change without much affecting the real phenomena of social life”: unchanging residues.<sup>137</sup> Lane, who was highly critical of Borkenau’s portrayal of Pareto, nevertheless gave a similar *precis* of the Italian’s account of the relationship between residues and derivations:

Pareto argues that residues play a far more important role in society than derivations and, because of this, we cannot explain conduct in terms of the moral rationalizations [derivations] designed to account for and to justify it to others.<sup>138</sup>

Or, in Pareto’s own words, “we have to brush derivations aside and reach down to residues”. For the “social value” of a religion is contained in “the sentiments it expresses”, not in its theology.<sup>139</sup> Here was another reason for Pareto’s indifference to the study of any religions, beliefs, or ideologies. To Borkenau, an associate of the Annales School, reared in the historicist tradition of Lamprecht and others, the “unchanging” aspect of residues was merely the old Enlightenment prejudice – ironically insisted upon by an opponent of its rationalistic bent – that humans are, always and everywhere, the same, which was “in the most striking contradiction with every page of history”.<sup>140</sup> It was also contradicted by the contemporary findings of social anthropologists. Citing Malinowski, in particular, Borkenau countered that it was beyond doubt that there are traditions and beliefs which form and perpetuate because they have a clear social purpose in a given civilisational context (something Freud also maintained); or, as Borkenau put it, because societies quite simply “could not live without them”.<sup>141</sup>

This contrast with contemporary social anthropology, which hints at the influence of Malinowski over Borkenau at this time, spoke to Borkenau’s final criticism of Pareto, which was that the latter had developed a grand theory of human social behaviour, without having paid attention to any civilisation but his own, excepting occasional references to Antiquity.<sup>142</sup> The influence of Spengler, also, is palpable in this criticism.<sup>143</sup> Nevertheless, Borkenau conceded, some of Pareto’s ideas did assume pertinence in relation to *his own* civilisation.

As usual, Pareto has generalised one aspect of his own time and applied it to the history of mankind, thus taking away... all scientific value. But for certain conditions in his own time he is right...

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<sup>137</sup> Borkenau, *Pareto*, p. 41.

<sup>138</sup> James Lane, “Pareto’s English Language Critics: A Reassessment of British and American Interpretations of a Treatise on General Sociology”, *Revue européenne des sciences sociales*, Vol. 16, No. 43 (1978), p. 118.

<sup>139</sup> Pareto, *Mind and Society*, Vol. III, p. 1294.

<sup>140</sup> Borkenau, *Pareto*, p. 41.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.

<sup>143</sup> See fn.73.

[T]he theory of residues... hardly intelligible from the standpoint of objective science, become[s] full of meaning as [an element] ... of the trend towards fascism.<sup>144</sup>

## Rational vs. Irrational Explanations of Human Conduct

Pareto, it seemed, could better explain the causes of the fascist-totalitarian revolution than could Marx, who had predicted that the revolution would be made by a social class – the proletariat – as a result of the consciousness borne in upon it by its numerical growth and its suffering, and in pursuance of its own, *rational* interests. By contrast, Pareto claimed that people in general acted on the basis of non-logical, *irrational* sentiments. Borkenau qualified this, by stressing that times of acute crisis brought such sentiments to the fore. But Pareto, whose *Trattato* was completed in 1912 and published during the First World War, was observing the beginnings of just such a time. His work was “the bitter invective of a disillusioned believer in science and liberalism”, witnessing the unravelling of nineteenth-century ideals.<sup>145</sup> Liberalism satisfied the community at large, Borkenau argued, for as long as its unstated social contract lasted. To wit: that the liberty of individuals to pursue their own interests would actually guarantee the interests of the community, by increasing the prosperity of the community as a whole. But as this social contract between individual interests and the common good started to break down, the period of crisis began to emerge.<sup>146</sup> It will be noticed once again, here, that Borkenau was privileging an economic view of history very much in accord with the predictions Marx had made about the future course of capitalism. But it was at this point that he introduced Pareto. For the loss of faith in the alignment of individual and communal interests, Borkenau argued, was the trigger for an outburst of irrationalism.

In reality, the existence of the society is the primary need for each individual. But even if the ordinary man were capable of understanding the complex facts, which are fundamental for the antagonism of private and public interests, he would hardly be prepared to accept with his reason such an undesirable state of things... He tries to act and fight according to his interests. But the more he acts and fights, the more his bewilderment grows over the intellectual incomprehensibility of the social world he is living in. He is puzzled by the amazing experience that the more he fights, the worse things become. And in the moments of social catastrophe... he is exposed to the working of the most atavistic, primitive and rudimentary instincts, as all reasonable judgment has proved to be misleading.<sup>147</sup>

He proceeded to draw what might seem an odd comparison to make in a study of the work of a renowned sociologist. Borkenau compared Pareto’s ideas about political propaganda to those of

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<sup>144</sup> Borkenau, *Pareto*, pp. 173-4.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 212-3.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 213-4.



Hitler, as recorded in *Mein Kampf* and applied, with success, in the real world. The one part of Hitler's autobiography of which the objective value could not be denied, Borkenau argued, "was that dealing with mass propaganda". For Hitler was "one of the most successful propagandists of all times".<sup>148</sup> But Pareto had anticipated the principles of propaganda later employed by Hitler, specifically linking them to his theory of the central importance of residues over derivations. "Ideas", Pareto wrote, "must be transformed into passions in order to influence society, or in other words, the derivations must be transformed into residues". He argued that to refute an agitator, it was useless to offer proofs, which, working upon reason, could only, "at best, modify the derivations" without affecting the feelings. Instead, the successful propagandist "must mobilize sentiments" – whether "absurd or intelligent" – and, rather than proofs, should trust to endless repetition, which, working upon those sentiments, would always prove more fruitful.<sup>149</sup>

Borkenau questioned the validity of Pareto's principles to all periods. Conceding that political movements can never entirely renounce the appeal to emotions, he gave the example of the Corn Law League, which "utilized certainly a good deal of emotional belief in heaven on earth". Yet, he continued, "its agitators [still] felt bound... to prove their argument with figures". In fact, there seemed to be a big difference in the methods of this quintessentially nineteenth century political movement and the movement whose principles were expressed in *Mein Kampf*. "A propaganda exclusively based on uncontrolled emotionalism," Borkenau contended, "would have provoked nothing but disgust" at the time of the Corn Law agitation.<sup>150</sup> But it was uncontrolled emotionalism, rather than proletarian *bewusstsein*, which had played such a decisive role in Germany. Though he did not yet use the French term which he would employ in the *Totalitarian Enemy*, it is clear that Borkenau viewed Pareto as a herald of the *déclassé* revolution, and, in this way, a corrective to Marx, who had believed that the proletariat would be the revolution's agent. To restate what I have argued, contra Devlin, above, Borkenau spoke of the "mob", not simply as an adoption of the interwar Marxist language of "Bonapartism", but as a refutation of Marx's theory of proletarian revolution.

But for the mob of modern industrial urban agglomerations, shaken by the violent ups and downs of business and contemplating those developments with a mixture of hatred and bewilderment, the entirely emotional mode of political propaganda seems really to be well adapted.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 172-3.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

## The Problem of Domination

Pareto was an aid to explaining what, for Borkenau, was the *déclassé* nature of the totalitarian revolution, but his ideas also stood in stark contrast to Marx on the problem of domination. Borkenau raised this subject on several occasions in his study. For Marx, as Borkenau put it, domination was “a simple ‘superstructure’, or ‘reflex’, or consequence of economic differentiation”.<sup>152</sup> Borkenau considered this materialistic explanation doubtful since history, he claimed, lacked examples of societies without a dominating class. Bolshevism, moreover, had specifically set out to solve the problem of economic differentiation, and, Borkenau conceded, had palpably made considerable progress in doing so – particularly since the NEP had been abandoned, and the first Five Year Plan campaigns of industrialisation, collectivisation and dekulakisation had been embarked upon. But this had gone together, not with a lessening of the problem of domination or a withering away of the State, but, rather, had “led to an oppressive dictatorship”.<sup>153</sup> Political rule, Borkenau argued, seemed to have an existence of its own, “independent of economics”.<sup>154</sup> Here, Borkenau was positing what Pollock would call the “primacy of politics”, and was accepting what Franz Neumann was not prepared to accept: that the study of economic antagonisms was *not* the key to the study of the new dictatorships.<sup>155</sup>

Like the theory of residues, Borkenau found Pareto’s theory of elites scientifically unsatisfactory, as will be explained below. However, on the reasons for the existence of domination, he suggested, Pareto contrasted favourably against Marx. Pareto took “the necessary existence of differentiation” among humans as an axiom.<sup>156</sup> Borkenau concurred. Surely, in his polemical language, Pareto was on firmer ground than those “naïve egalitarians, who seriously believe in the abolition of all natural differences... as a consequence of the possible abolition of all institutional differentiation.”<sup>157</sup> Since Borkenau’s portrait of his subject was of a disillusioned former believer in liberalism, unaware of the ways in which his objectivity was impaired by his own prejudices, some of his polemical barbs demonstrated a slightly ironic lack of self-awareness. He had been, himself, a “naïve egalitarian” before his expulsion from the KPD in 1929. By 1935, there was a certain bitterness in his remembrances of this past. In Pareto’s favour, *pace* Marx, for instance, Borkenau wrote that: “Nobody observing the class struggle after the War throughout Europe can doubt that on an average the bourgeoisie has been far more intelligent than the proletariat in every respect.”<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>155</sup> See the introduction to this chapter.

<sup>156</sup> Borkenau, *Pareto.*, p. 106.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 106-7.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

Such generalisations do not, perhaps, show Borkenau at his best. They do, however, demonstrate that his German experiences, and the disappointments they had caused him as a Communist and a Marxist, were still at the front of his mind at the time of writing in 1935.

### The Circulation of Elites

Notwithstanding his favourable contrast of Pareto's ideas on domination against those of Marx and the Marxists, Borkenau did take issue with Pareto's apparent penchant for biological explanations of differentiation. Pareto argued that the ruling elite, or dominant class, in a society must have risen to their station by an inherent biological superiority. As biological characteristics are hereditary, this was a process which, Pareto theorised, occurred over time. Essentially, he saw the ruling class as a biological elite, which Borkenau construed as being quite close to saying a racial elite – although Pareto never wrote of race *per se*. The biological theory also created a problem for Pareto, which he freely recognised. It was a fact established by history that aristocracies tended always to decline. If it had been the case that elites formed as a result of inborn and inheritable traits, the observable fact of decline would be inexplicable. Still, it “never occurs to [Pareto]”, Borkenau wrote, that this problem “may simply prove his theory to be erroneous”.<sup>159</sup> Instead, Pareto's way out of the impasse he had created for himself was his theory of the “Circulation of Elites”, which harked back, like everything in Pareto's sociology, to residues.

Two types of elites are distinguished and identified by exhibiting quick and slow circulation, the one dominated by residue I, the other by residue II. And these two types of elites are again identified with two economic types, one being the speculator, following the lure of new combinations, the other being the “rentier,” who keeps anxiously to a fixed income. Out of these two types of elites arise two types of social order. The one is conservative, military, religious, using force as the main method of government. The circulation of elites is slow, economic stimulus weak. In the opposite case economic interests supersede military ones, the costs of government are high, but so is economic stimulus, the conservative virtues decline, and finally the leading class, degenerating into humanitarianism, proves unable to keep the political power. Revolution or defeat in war ensues and puts an end to this part of the cycle. For Pareto assumes that there is a continuous change between these two forms of government.<sup>160</sup>

In both of Pareto's types of society, the character of the elites, according to the role of their respective residues, caused the social change which kept the cycle in perpetual motion. Borkenau thought that Pareto ought simply to have dropped his attachment to a biological theory of elites

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<sup>159</sup> See *Ibid.*, pp. 115-7 for Borkenau's commentary on the problem of decline.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129-30.

and considered the alternative hypothesis that “situations form elites”.<sup>161</sup> He also raised one of the key insights of Toynbee’s contemporary work: that elites only maintained power for as long as they had a stimulus, which could be provided either by a military struggle or by a milieu of enterprise. “But aristocracies which are spared hard struggle, decline”.<sup>162</sup> In spite of his criticism of Pareto’s ahistorical attachment to biological explanations of domination, Borkenau saw the idea of a circulation of elites – corresponding to social conditions as opposed to biological predetermination – as a means of explaining political revolutions; in particular, the onset of the fascist epoch.

The necessity of putting an end to the internecine struggle [of competing interests] ... works for the ascendancy of those groups relatively independent of the existing interests, with an iron centralisation within and a crude method of violent command without, under a personal chief embodying in his person the principle of unity.<sup>163</sup>

### Leninism vs. Marxism

This passage was at once an allusion to Lenin, Mussolini and Hitler, and also an explanation why the proletariat, the interests of which, as Borkenau had argued in his article on the crisis of socialism, were paradoxically linked to the continuation of capitalist democracy, could not be the agent of the revolution which would depose that system. The workers’ movement, Borkenau had concluded, was a feature of capitalism, not its antithesis. Though he did not follow Pareto in his emphasis on biology, the Circulation of Elites appeared to him as a valuable theory because of its emphasis on the necessity of a new elite’s independence from the values of the old society. This was, in fact, what, in Borkenau’s interpretation, Lenin had insisted on as the most fundamental point in building the *déclassé* Bolshevik Party.

In the opening chapters of his *Communist International*, which followed the Russian revolutionary movement from the Decemberists to the Bolsheviks, Borkenau traced a tradition which began with the Russian nihilist Nechaev; was continued by the terrorist groups – most notably the Narodnaya Volya – of the late nineteenth century; was subsequently carried on in the propaganda of the Social Democratic organ *Iskra*, under the editorship of Lenin; and, finally, subsumed into the Bolshevik Party as its fundamental organisational principle: the tradition of the revolutionary elite, formed of professional revolutionaries.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 210.

<sup>164</sup> See Borkenau, “The Russian Revolutionary Movement” & “Bolshevism”, in *World Communism*, pp. 22-56.

The whole Russian revolutionary movement... has one element in common: the existence of organisations of professional revolutionaries, formed of young men of all classes who break every connection with their social background and live in hiding, in a close community resembling that of the early Christians, for the sole purpose of revolutionary work.<sup>165</sup>

For Nechaev, the domination of an obedient conspiratorial group appears to have been an end pursued for its own sake. He defined the duties of the revolutionary, somewhat more dramatically than Borkenau, in his infamous *Catechism of a Revolutionary*:

The revolutionary is a doomed man. He has no personal interests, no business affairs, no emotions, no attachments, no property, and no name. Everything in him is wholly absorbed in the single thought and the single passion for revolution... [I]n the very depths of his being, not only in words but also in deeds, he has broken all the bonds which tie him to the social order and the civilized world... He is their implacable enemy, and if he continues to live with them, it is only in order to destroy them more speedily.<sup>166</sup>

In order to test – and cement – the obedience and moral detachment of the cultish group he succeeded in establishing, Nechaev involved all its members in a conspiracy to kill one of their own comrades.<sup>167</sup> Yet, beyond the purely nihilistic, the idea of an organisation of professional revolutionaries – as has been discussed in the case of Neu Beginnen, above – had obvious applications in the Russian context. The argument for carrying on the political struggle via an organisation of professional revolutionaries under Tsarism was one which was specifically linked to oppressive political conditions. “Almost all the [Russian] Marxists agreed”, Borkenau wrote, “and this was the common conviction upon which the campaign of *Iskra* had been based”, that such an organisation was “a technical necessity for the fight against the Tsarist police”.<sup>168</sup> There were few avenues open for the carrying on of revolutionary propaganda, nor for any kind of legal existence as a Marxist party under Nicholas II. Conspiracy was, therefore, a necessity. The severance of revolutionaries’ commitments to the outside world was a guarantee against conflicts of loyalty, and also against Okhrana infiltration.

Borkenau suggested, though, that Lenin had a more fundamental reason for desiring to build his Party as an organisation of professional revolutionaries. The basis of Lenin’s disagreement with the Mensheviks, as Borkenau presented it, was that the latter wanted to establish themselves as a mass party of the labour movement in the Western tradition. Once legally plausible, membership

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<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>166</sup> Sergey Nechayev, *The Revolutionary Catechism* (1869). Accessed online at: <https://www.marxists.org/subject/anarchism/nechayev/catechism.htm>.

<sup>167</sup> Borkenau, *World Communism*, p. 24.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

would be open to the whole of the working class, who could then use the Party as their instrument to advance the revolutionary goals which, as sincere Marxists, the Mensheviks believed they possessed. Notoriously, in his *What is to be Done?*, Lenin had expressed misgivings about the revolutionary spontaneity of the working class, which, “exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness”.<sup>169</sup> Borkenau emphasised and re-emphasised this complaint of Lenin, which, he pointed out, was identical to what the latter meant whenever he made accusations of “opportunism”.<sup>170</sup> To wit, a retreat from revolutionism resulting from the erroneous belief in the tangible benefits of reformist practice. Borkenau’s emphasis on Lenin’s doubts about proletarian revolutionary spontaneity was perhaps partly a consequence of his own scepticism on that point. As has been explored above, Borkenau’s own estrangement from Marxism stemmed from his loss of faith in what, by 1938, he was calling the “fantastic” idea “of the proletariat opposing, victoriously, all other classes of a complex modern society”.<sup>171</sup> Borkenau’s scepticism was more thoroughgoing than Lenin’s, since the founder of Bolshevism still believed in the proletariat’s revolutionary role in history; he only doubted whether the working class could make the revolution by itself, and thus posited the need for a vanguard party. As Mayer has put it:

Lenin’s thesis is... strikingly idealistic, for it assumes that the dissemination of a doctrine can effect a change in the workers’ mentality that material conditions and class practice cannot... In effect he had returned to the utopian socialist perspective described by Engels, in which the proletariat ‘appears as an oppressed, suffering estate which, in its incapacity to help itself, must have help brought to it from without or from above’.<sup>172</sup>

Still, Borkenau looked upon Lenin as realistic by comparison with Rosa Luxemburg and other theorists of proletarian revolutionary “spontaneity”, who “enormously overestimated the revolutionary maturity of the masses” – though he clearly identified the latter more closely with Marx.<sup>173</sup> Regarding...

The issue of Lenin *v.* Rosa Luxemburg... Certainly only Rosa Luxemburg’s idea of revolution corresponded to what Marx had imagined the dictatorship of the proletariat would be; but the idea of a dictatorship based upon a class hypothetically revolutionary – the proletariat – was wholly

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<sup>169</sup> Quoted in Robert Mayer, “Lenin, Kautsky and working-class consciousness”, *History of European Ideas*, Vol. 18, No. 5 (1994), p. 673.

<sup>170</sup> Borkenau, *World Communism*, p. 44.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 421.

<sup>172</sup> Mayer, “Lenin, Kautsky”, p. 679.

<sup>173</sup> Borkenau, “Klassenbewusstsein”, p. 158 [Sie mussten dementsprechend noch immer die Verbürgerlichung der Bewegung unterschätzen, die revolutionäre Reife der Massen und ihren eigenen Einfluss ungeheuer überschätzen.]

incapable of realization in actual life. Luxemburg was a true disciple of Marx, but not a realist in this decisive matter. Lenin had to distort every line of Marx... but he had reality on his side.<sup>174</sup>

Jones has gone as far as arguing that that Borkenau “admired... Lenin’s flexibility” and partially disassociated him from Russian totalitarianism. The real blame, in Jones’ paraphrasing of Borkenau, lay with Trotsky – because he was the doctrinaire proponent of the “war communism” from which Lenin retreated – and Stalin, whose first Five Year Plan (as has often been pointed out) unleashed only the horrors (peasant collectivisation, the liquidation of the Kulak class enemy, and the conscription of industrial labour) that Trotsky had earlier advocated.<sup>175</sup> It is certainly true that Borkenau regarded Lenin as “the greatest revolutionary of all time”.<sup>176</sup> Yet, he also viewed Lenin’s formation of the Bolshevik Party as an organisation of professional revolutionaries as the key to understanding the totalitarian development of Russia.

Borkenau’s interpretation of the Russian Revolution – first developed in the debates over the Miles pamphlet held in the context of the German defeat – was elaborated, in a 1937 article taking a comparative approach to the study of revolutions, into a further criticism of Marx and his illusory “Ideal of the Commune”.<sup>177</sup> While Marx and Engels, in their idealisation of the Paris Commune, had identified the “dictatorship of the proletariat” with democracy, Borkenau argued that the Commune was an historical example only of the first stage of a revolution; and that its defeat had simply arrived before and instead of its degeneration into the dictatorship of which the establishment of the Safety Committee was an early sign.<sup>178</sup> This task, Borkenau implied, would likely have fallen to the putschist Blanquists, the similarity of whose ideas of a revolutionary avant-garde to Lenin’s had earlier been noted by Rosa Luxemburg, who accused Lenin of a “mechanical transposition of the organizational principles of Blanquism into the mass movement of the socialist working class” in a polemic of 1904.<sup>179</sup> The Bolsheviks came to power with the help and in the name of the workers, soldiers and peasants’ councils: the Soviets. But the Soviets’ demands were not for more revolutionary sacrifices or the establishment of socialism, but for bread, peace and land. The imperatives of the revolutionary moment could only be carried out progressively against the wishes of the masses and their democratic organ – the Soviets – which had gradually to be subordinated to the revolutionary elite. In the *Totalitarian Enemy*, Borkenau would argue that this led inevitably to the situation which defined the future course of the Soviet Union – the

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<sup>174</sup> Borkenau, *World Communism*, p. 89.

<sup>175</sup> Jones, *Lost Debate*, pp. 123-4.

<sup>176</sup> Borkenau, “State and Revolution in Paris, Russia and Spain”, p. 41.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>179</sup> See Rosa Luxemburg, “Part I”, *Organizational Questions of the Russian Social Democracy* (1904): <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1904/questions-rsd/ch01.htm>.

substitution of the *raison d'être* of establishing socialism with that of the maintenance of Bolshevik power.<sup>180</sup> “The fundamental idea of Marx”, Borkenau wrote in 1937, “is that the assumption of power by the people renders superfluous the existence of a special suppressive state apparatus”.<sup>181</sup> By contrast, Borkenau argued, Lenin’s revolutionary party provided the proof that the assumption of power by the people was merely the anarchistic prelude to the assumption of power by a new elite. Not only did revolutions always destroy the state apparatus which they found, but they always built it back up again to serve a new “dominating group”:

The idea of the abolition of all domination by means of the abolition of capitalism is refuted. But its rational content becomes apparent as the abolition of the political domination of the richest class. It is replaced by a dominating group of quite a new type. One of its essential features is that it is moulded by a common faith, a feature which was quite foreign to the old ruling class.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Borkenau, *Totalitarian Enemy*, p. 223.

<sup>181</sup> Borkenau, “State and Revolution in Paris, Russia and Spain”, p. 44.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.



## Chapter II – Encounters with the Popular Front Left

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*As Exes we have a painful duty to perform... Many have entered the Party because of us. Our first duty is to them; our next is to the young who are looking for a banner or a cause. – Ignazio Silone<sup>1</sup>*

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### Introduction

Stone has championed the contribution of political émigrés – and of Borkenau, in particular – to anti-fascist discourse in Britain in the years leading up to the Second World War.<sup>2</sup> Émigrés like Aurel Kolnai and Borkenau, he contended, knew more about political conditions in Germany and Central Europe than much of the British commentariat, and enriched British interwar anti-fascism with a “theoretical seriousness”.<sup>3</sup> Their first-hand knowledge of Nazi Germany, in particular, gave émigrés’ writings a certain gravity in the eyes of many of those on the British Left becoming agitated about Hitler’s intentions. Victor Gollancz hailed Kolnai’s weighty the *War Against the West*, which aimed to show that Nazism was a revolt against Western Civilisation, as the most important book that his Left Book Club (LBC) had published and called it “the bible of anti-fascism”.<sup>4</sup> In the estimation of George Orwell, Borkenau was “one of the most valuable gifts that Hitler has made to England”.<sup>5</sup> Orwell, as Hubble has observed, was clearly much influenced by a number of émigré writers and intellectuals who came to Britain in the 1930s.<sup>6</sup> The publisher Fredrick Warburg – who had himself already introduced the anti-fascist work of Edward Conze and Günter Reimann to a British audience (as well as publishing Thomas Mann’s *Coming Victory of Democracy*) – gave Orwell and T. R. Fyvel the opportunity to enlist Arthur Koestler, Arturo Barea and Sebastian Haffner into their anti-fascist wartime series, Searchlight Books.<sup>7</sup> Before he became the author of the most famous literary representation of totalitarianism, Orwell had observed that a “special class of literature... [had] arisen out of the European political struggle since the rise of Fascism”. The

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<sup>1</sup> Silone, “The Situation”, p. 102.

<sup>2</sup> See Stone, “Anti-Fascist Europe”; Stone, *Responses to Nazism*.

<sup>3</sup> Stone, “Anti-Fascist Europe”, p. 67.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>5</sup> George Orwell, “8. Review” [*Totalitarian Enemy*], in Sonia Orwell & Ian Angus (eds.), *My Country Right or Left, The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell, 1940-43*, Harmondsworth: Penguin (1984), p. 42.

<sup>6</sup> Nick Hubble, “Franz Borkenau, Sebastian Haffner and George Orwell: Depoliticisation and Cultural Exchange”, in Edward Timms & Jon Hughes (eds.), *Intellectual Migration and Cultural Transformation: Refugees from National Socialism in the English-Speaking World*, Vienna: Springer (2003), pp. 109-127.

<sup>7</sup> See David R. Costello, “Searchlight Books and the Quest for a ‘People’s War’, 1941-42”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 24, No. 2, (1989), pp. 257-76; Thomas Mann, *The Coming Victory of Democracy*, London: Secker & Warburg (1938).

dramatic experiences of continental writers (far removed from what he called the “deep, deep sleep of England”) had led them to create a new literary genre: “concentration camp literature”.<sup>8</sup>

While authority was often bestowed upon their pontifications by British admirers, political émigrés’ contribution to anti-fascist discourse was also commonly a matter of compulsion. For German-speaking refugees in London, as Felix Gilbert remembered, “it was almost impossible not to remain obsessed with the Nazi problem”.<sup>9</sup> Having suffered personally by their estrangement from their homelands, émigré intellectuals were naturally eager to take-up the pen against the regimes which had exiled them. The anguish was sometimes palpable.<sup>10</sup> Barea wrote of the Spanish Civil War as a “struggle for the Spanish soul”; Haffner used Jekyll and Hyde as a metaphor for the German character; and Hermann Rauschning reached for the symbol of the antichrist, calling Hitler “the beast from the abyss”.<sup>11</sup> In his commentary on the *New German Empire*, Stone highlighted Borkenau’s exasperation with the British political elite’s apparent failure to understand what confronted them.<sup>12</sup> Assuming a didactic style, Borkenau presented appeasement as the result of an asinine naivety on the part of those in the National Government who were prepared to take Hitler at his word. British appeasers, in Borkenau’s judgment, were

...far too greatly imbued with the soft and reasonable atmosphere of compromise prevailing in democratic countries, and instinctively expect the revolutionaries beyond the Rhine to come over, given only sufficient time and a willingness to grant concessions, to their own approach to politics.<sup>13</sup>

Certainly, Borkenau made a significant contribution to British anti-fascism in both of the above respects (émigré expertise and compulsion). In the eyes of his readers, Borkenau’s background lent extra weight to his writings, as many of the reviews demonstrate. According to Richard Crossman, it enabled him to give expression to the implicit principles of British Labourites in the *Totalitarian Enemy*: “What remains instinctive in the Englishman becomes explicit in the Austrian ex-communist”.<sup>14</sup> A preoccupation with the events which had driven him from Germany and Austria, meanwhile, is quite clear from Borkenau’s writings. Within three months of the Anschluss, his

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<sup>8</sup> George Orwell, “Wells, Hitler and the World State”, in Orwell and Angus (eds.), *My Country Right or Left*, p. 169. The “deep, deep sleep” was Orwell’s famous reflection on what he saw as British apathy towards continental affairs. *Homage to Catalonia*, Secker & Warburg (1938), p. 248.

<sup>9</sup> Felix Gilbert, *A European Past*, New York: Norton (1988) p. 174.

<sup>10</sup> In a moving passage in *Doctor Faustus* (Oxford University Press, 1959, pp. 337-8), Mann’s narrator welcomes the destruction of Germany’s cities as a divine judgement upon the country which has made itself “intolerable to the world”.

<sup>11</sup> Arturo Barea, *The Struggle for the Spanish Soul*, London: Secker & Warburg (1941); Sebastian Haffner, *Germany: Jekyll & Hyde*, Secker & Warburg (1940); Herman Rauschning, *The Beast from the Abyss*, London: Heinemann (1941).

<sup>12</sup> See Stone, “Anti-Fascist Europe”, p. 71.

<sup>13</sup> Borkenau, *New German Empire*, p. 15.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Crossman, “The Faith of British Socialism”, *New Statesman*, 6 April 1940, pp. 466-8.

post-mortem on Austria was in print.<sup>15</sup> His attempt to expose the expansionist logic of Nazism in the *New German Empire*, similarly, followed shortly upon the Czech crisis of March 1939; and the *Totalitarian Enemy*, which Borkenau concluded with a rousing appeal to England (“to save the world from Nazi barbarism”), was composed in haste after the Nazi-Soviet Pact.<sup>16</sup> Even the one not overtly political book that he wrote in exile, the biography of Pareto, turned into a treatise on Fascism.

But he was also an ex-Communist, at odds with the dominant current of the “anti-fascist” Left in Britain. He had sought not only to educate British readers about Germany, but also about the Soviet Union and the Comintern. As the editor of the *Fortnightly Review* put it, when bemoaning the internment of his contributor as an enemy alien in 1940, Borkenau had “done as much as anyone to explain to the reading public the nature of the totalitarian scourge – whether German *or Russian*” [my italics].<sup>17</sup> Indeed, in their main arguments, his three most significant books from the period 1936-1940 – the *Spanish Cockpit*, the *Communist International* and the *Totalitarian Enemy* – set out to challenge the notions of the *bien pensant* – or Popular Front – Left.<sup>18</sup> Firstly, that the Spanish Civil War was a straightforward confrontation between democracy and fascism; secondly, that the parties of the Comintern were sincere and trustworthy allies in the struggle for the former; and, thirdly, that the Soviet regime was a paragon of historical progress.

Overy has written of the British intellectual culture in the interwar period as one dominated by morbid anxieties and doom-laden forecasts.<sup>19</sup> The First World War had destroyed the sense of certainty and belief in progress of the age Stefan Zweig would call the *World of Yesterday*, and the Versailles settlement quickly began to look like an insecure foundation on which to build a new one.<sup>20</sup> After the boom of the 1920s, capitalism entered into a crisis period which seemed to threaten the survival of the democratic political system. European fascism was an ugly portent, and war with Germany was widely predicted in the years before it broke out. “War psychosis” gave rise to the Spenglerian hypothesis of the decline of Western Civilisation, which was given

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<sup>15</sup> Borkenau, *Austria and After*.

<sup>16</sup> Borkenau, *Totalitarian Enemy*, p. 254.

<sup>17</sup> William Horsfall Carter, “Letters to the Editor: Friendly Aliens, the “Technical Skill” Concession”, *Manchester Guardian*, 20 July 1940, p. 4.

<sup>18</sup> That these were his most significant books is not only my own opinion but is also informed by their reception over time. Excluding George Orwell’s memoir, Borkenau’s Spain book is cited in histories of the Civil War perhaps more frequently than any other contemporary text. Likewise, Borkenau’s interpretations in the *Communist International* still tend to be discussed in literature on the history of the Comintern. Though the *Totalitarian Enemy* was never reprinted, it confirmed Borkenau’s reputation as an early theorist of totalitarianism, which has been the dominant way in which he has been viewed by those who have previously written about him. By contrast, *Austria and After* and the *New German Empire* were books of the moment, which were closely connected to fast-moving events and therefore lack the timeless quality that the other three had in varying degrees.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain and the Crisis of Civilisation, 1919 – 1939*, London: Penguin (2010).

<sup>20</sup> Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday*, London: Pushkin Press (2011) [Originally 1943].

expression in English in the scientific works of Toynbee and the literary productions of Bernard Shaw and Wells.<sup>21</sup> Borkenau himself speculated that Western Civilisation might “progress towards its own destruction”.<sup>22</sup>

There was a current on the Left, however, which maintained immense optimism and enthusiasm through the latter years of the interwar period. While the advent of National Socialism had occasioned a reassessment of Marxist faith by Borkenau and other figures on the German Left, the opposite process was taking place in Britain. “Marxism became a mainstream intellectual phenomenon” for the first – and perhaps the last – time.<sup>23</sup> In line with Marx’s predictions, the crisis of capitalism seemed to portend the coming of socialism.<sup>24</sup> The Soviet Union – where this goal was generally considered attained – appeared like a beacon of light heralding the radiant “future of the human race”.<sup>25</sup> Fears about the decline of Western Civilisation were met by a corresponding confidence in the “new civilisation” emerging in the ruins of the old Tsarist empire.<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile, a generation of British artists and intellectuals looked upon the Spanish Civil War not only negatively – as a desperate fight against fascism – but positively, as a staging post in the struggle for a new world. Spain was, in the words of Hobsbawm, “something remembered by those who were young at the time like the heart-rending and indestructible memory of a first great and lost love”. It was where the poet Laurie Lee found a “new freedom” and a “new morality”. The young communist John Cornford, who found martyrdom, became the Che Guevara of his age, his image adorning the walls of common rooms and dormitories in Oxbridge colleges. “If I can reconstruct the feelings of that generation from personal memory”, Hobsbawm wrote,

...my generation of the left, whether we were intellectuals or not, did not see ourselves as a retreating minority. We did not think that fascism would inevitably continue to advance. We were sure that a new world would come.<sup>27</sup>

The optimism of the 1930s was also recalled by the slightly older W.H. Auden, whose famous poem upon the outbreak of war began with the regretful acknowledgement that the decade’s “clever hopes [had] expire[d]”.<sup>28</sup> Others who lived through and reflected on the 1930s –

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<sup>21</sup> See Overy, *Morbid*, Ch. I, “Decline and Fall”, esp. pp. 34-43 for decline of civilisation theme; and pp. 314-18 for prophesies of coming war from as early as 1934. Also see Ch. II, “The Death of Capitalism”.

<sup>22</sup> Borkenau, *Cockpit*, p. 300.

<sup>23</sup> Jackson, *Equality*, p. 94.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, John Strachey, *The Coming Struggle for Power*, London: Gollancz (1932). “That a collapse of capitalism in accordance with the Marxian prediction is taking place”, wrote the liberal theorist of imperialism, J. A. Hobson, “there can be no doubt”. Quoted in Jackson, *Equality*, p. 95.

<sup>25</sup> John Strachey. Quoted in Thompson, *John Strachey*, p. 109.

<sup>26</sup> See Sidney Webb and Beatrice Webb, *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation?* [2 vols.], London: Longmans (1935). For a commentary on the Webbs’ study, see Overy, *Morbid*, pp. 292-6.

<sup>27</sup> Hobsbawm, “War of Ideas”.

<sup>28</sup> W. H. Auden “September 1, 1939”, in *Another Time*, New York: Random House (1940) pp. 98-101.

Muggeridge, Orwell, Symons and Woolf, for instance – tended to place more emphasis on its crushed hopes than its morbid anxieties.<sup>29</sup> Which is not to say that Overy's portrait of the intellectual atmosphere of the interwar period is mistaken; just that it is reductive.<sup>30</sup> There was, arguably, a connection between morbid pessimism and utopian optimism; the latter being the product of the former. Müller has described the interwar period in Europe as one of "experimentation", in which the feeling that the old world had died was mixed with a certain bemusement about what was to come next.<sup>31</sup> It took until the 1930s for a solid idea to captivate a broad section of the British Left. As the Catholic philosopher Christopher Dawson, reflecting on the attraction of Bolshevism to British intellectuals, put it in 1933, their

...hopes are encouraged by the mood of fatalism and despair that is so common in Western countries. Professed Communists may be few enough, but everywhere we find intellectuals who are fascinated by the grandiose projects of Communist state planning and who feel that the social and economic system of Western Europe neither deserves nor is able to surmount its present crisis.<sup>32</sup>

The period from 1936 to 1939 was the era of Popular Front politics on the British Left. The deteriorating situation in Europe – marked by German rearmament; Italian aggression in Abyssinia; and the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War – encouraged broad swathes of the Left towards the view that a domestic alliance of "anti-fascist" forces was needed to exert pressure on the National Government to: (i) encourage it to abandon its accommodationist policies; and (ii) to enter into a collective security agreement with France and the Soviet Union, which, it was hoped, would guarantee the territorial integrity of Europe and prevent war.<sup>33</sup> Some liberals and anti-appeasement Tories also supported these foreign policy goals of the Popular Front, and joined in with its initiatives.<sup>34</sup> Meanwhile, a separate but closely related movement for a United Front aimed

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<sup>29</sup> It was the age of the "loud-speaker" (Virginia Woolf, "The Leaning Tower," in S. Gupta & D. Johnson [ed.], *A Twentieth Century Literature Reader*, New York: Routledge [2005], pp 72-81) in which "two rival heavens-on-earth whose protagonists hurl abuse at one another... are only united in despising whoever will not accept the momentousness of their rivalry" (Malcolm Muggeridge, *The Thirties in Great Britain*, London: Hamish Hamilton [1940], p. 23). Also see George Orwell, "Inside the Whale", in Sonia Orwell & Ian Angus [eds.], *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell, Vol. I: An Age Like This, 1920-1940*, Harmondsworth: Penguin (1975), pp. 540-78; Julian Symons, *The Thirties: A Dream Revolved*, London: Faber (1975).

<sup>30</sup> And, arguably, a generalisation based on a selection of authors whose works substantiate Overy's thesis.

<sup>31</sup> Jan-Werner Müller, *Contesting Democracy*, Yale University Press (2011), p. 50. I am aware that it remains somewhat reductive to talk of interwar intellectual currents as a mixture of morbid and utopian. Jackson, "Social Justice and Economic Efficiency", in *Equality*, pp. 117-48, emphasises the theorists of the Parliamentary Labour Party, like Evan Durbin and Hugh Gaitskill, who continued to believe in and advocate the "gradualism" of social democracy. But my argument is that morbidity and utopianism were much more a part of the general intellectual atmosphere of the latter interwar period (the 30s) than at any other time in the twentieth century.

<sup>32</sup> Christopher Dawson, "The Significance of Bolshevism", *The American Review*, April 1933, p. 36.

<sup>33</sup> On the Popular Front, see Blaazer, "Fascism, Unity and Loyalty: 1932-1937" & "The Popular Front", in *The Popular Front*, pp. 147-92; & Paul Corthorn, *In the Shadow of the Dictators: The British Left in the 1930s*, London: I. B. Tauris (2013).

<sup>34</sup> See Blaazer, *Popular Front*, pp. 175-6.

to bring a socialist government under Labour Party leadership to power.<sup>35</sup> The Communist Party (CPGB) and the Independent Labour Party (ILP) involved themselves in both endeavours; but the Labour Party rejected them. Owing to Labour's position, the Popular Front in Britain was never politically relevant. As Pimlott, for instance, has noted "left-wing leaders showed a disastrous insensitivity to the realities of political power and influence *within the Labour movement* [italics in original].<sup>36</sup> It was, however, culturally significant.

Left-wing Supporters of United or Popular Front ideas included the Socialist League (a grouping on the Labour Left), and the journal founded to promote its Unity Campaign, *Tribune*; the LBC; the Fabian Society; the *New Statesman*; and a cohort of prominent Left intellectuals, many of whom were associated with one or more of the above. This "Popular Front Left" has been the subject of much scholarly attention concerned with its attitudes towards communism and the Soviet Union.<sup>37</sup> These stretched from a somewhat sceptical acceptance that *the enemy of my enemy is my friend* to outright veneration of the Soviet Union as a kind of worker-run utopia, or a more advanced form of democracy where economic exploitation had been excised and the judicial system was no longer prejudiced against the working class.<sup>38</sup>

My concern in this chapter is not with the political details of the Popular Front in Britain, but with the "Popular Front" as a Comintern policy; with the attitude towards communism and the Soviet Union on a vocal and culturally significant section of the political Left in Britain which attended it; and with the relationship between this context and Borkenau's writings.<sup>39</sup> The Popular Front current captured the bulk of the Left intelligentsia, including a new generation of literary writers (the Auden set being the obvious example) and institutions, such as the University Labour Federation and the *New Statesman*.<sup>40</sup> The appreciation of this context is essential to a full understanding of Borkenau's writings. Firstly, I will discuss Borkenau's confrontation with

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<sup>35</sup> See "The Forging of a United Front", in Corthorn, *In the Shadow*, pp. 106-28.

<sup>36</sup> See Ben Pimlott, *Labour and the Left in the 1930s*, Cambridge University Press (2008), p. 6.

<sup>37</sup> In addition to Corthorn, see Bill Jones, *The Russia Complex: The British Labour Party and the Soviet Union*, Manchester University Press (1977); James Jupp, *The Radical Left in Britain: 1931-41*, London: Frank Cass (1982); & Kevin Morgan, *Bolshevism and the British Left* [3 vols.], London: Lawrence & Wishart (2006-13).

<sup>38</sup> The LBC, for instance, published a justification of the Moscow Trials, which lauded the democratic nature of Soviet justice, contrasting it with a British legal system said to be prejudicial against the working class. Dudley Collard, *Soviet Justice and the Trial of Radek and Others*, London: Gollancz (1937).

<sup>39</sup> "Popular Front" is commonly used as a descriptive term for the period in Comintern history lasting from 1934/5-9. See McDermott & Agnew, *The Comintern*.

<sup>40</sup> On the Auden set, see Samuel Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, London: Pimlico (1992). Orwell commented on the generational shift in English literature in an essay of 1940. As he saw it, the disillusioned and pessimistic writers of the 1920s, many of whom developed sympathies for reactionary politics or turned to Catholicism in the aftermath of the First World War (Pound and Eliot, for example), were superseded by the optimistic writers of the 1930s, too young to have been deeply affected by the War and full of hope and revolutionary fervour. "The typical literary man ceases to be a cultured expatriate with a leaning towards the church, and becomes an eager-minded schoolboy with a leaning towards Communism." See Orwell, "Inside the Whale", p. 559.

communism in Spain; secondly, the intent of his history of the Comintern; and thirdly, the thesis that he developed about the division between liberal democracy and totalitarianism in the context of the Nazi-Soviet Pact. A major theme in these works was criticism of the hopes entertained in progressive circles about communism and the Soviet Union. While Borkenau met the criteria of what Hobsbawm called a “premature anti-fascist”, he was also a premature anti-communist.<sup>41</sup>

## Spain

### Introduction to the Spanish Cockpit

The *Spanish Cockpit* was one of few books published about Spain during the first phase of the Civil War which were not written for propagandistic purposes. It was for this reason that it made a huge impression on much of the contemporary intellectual elite in Britain, and, subsequently, on historians of the conflict.<sup>42</sup> That it ranked among the most instructive guides to the situation in Spain was a judgement shared by Orwell, V. S. Pritchett, Gerald Brenan, G. L. Steer and Rebecca West.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, Borkenau’s book posed a challenge to what much of the Popular Front Left wanted to think about Spain. It was the text at the centre of the infamous controversy between Orwell and the editor of the *New Statesman*, Kingsley Martin, who commissioned the former to review it but then rejected the piece on the basis that it contradicted what his magazine had been saying about the government side in the Civil War.<sup>44</sup> Martin’s censoriousness has perhaps been overstated in previous accounts of the controversy with Orwell.<sup>45</sup> After all, he did subsequently print Pritchett’s highly complementary review of Borkenau, excusing himself for refusing Orwell’s by claiming that its author had used the *Spanish Cockpit* as a pretence for an airing of his own unorthodox opinions, rather than discussing its content.<sup>46</sup> Martin’s assessment was at odds with that of Borkenau, though, who thought that Orwell had picked up on an essential point which other reviewers of the book had tended to overlook – the role of the communists in Spain – as he revealed in a letter to Orwell after the eventual publication of the review in *Time and Tide*.<sup>47</sup> Pritchett’s biographer has written that Martin simply “found Pritchett a better critic than Orwell”,

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<sup>41</sup> Hobsbawm, “War of Ideas”.

<sup>42</sup> Hugh Thomas wrote the introduction to the most recent edition of the book, claiming that it was almost the only contemporary account which had “stood the test of time” [Franz Borkenau, *The Spanish Cockpit*, London: Phoenix Press (2000), p. xi].

<sup>43</sup> George Orwell, “101. Review” [*Spanish Cockpit* and *Volunteer in Spain*], *An Age Like This*, pp. 309-311 [originally published in *Time and Tide*, 31 July 1937]; V. S. Pritchett, “Spain Against Europe”, *New Statesman*, 4 September, 1937, pp. 341-342 (Pritchett also wrote a shorter review – “Character as a Factor in Spain”, *Christian Science Monitor Weekend Magazine*, 25 August, 1937, p. 10 – for an American audience); Gerald Brenan, *The Spanish Labyrinth*, Cambridge University Press (1990), p. 369. G. L. Steer, “Spanish Survey”, *Spectator*, 13 August, 1937, pp. 283-284; See also Rebecca West’s Jacket blurb on the 1963 edition of the *Spanish Cockpit*.

<sup>44</sup> Kingsley Martin to Orwell, ORWELL/H/2/32/1, Orwell Papers (UCL), 29 July, 1937.

<sup>45</sup> See John Rodden, *Becoming George Orwell*, Princeton University Press (2020), pp 40-41.

<sup>46</sup> See Raymond Mortimer to Orwell, Orwell Papers (UCL), 8 February, 1938.

<sup>47</sup> Borkenau to Orwell, Orwell Papers (UCL), 6 August, 1937.

which may be true.<sup>48</sup> But there is little doubt that Pritchett's take on Borkenau's book was less politically uncomfortable than Orwell's. An analysis of the main themes of the *Spanish Cockpit*, and a comparison of Orwell and Pritchett's respective treatment of them, will demonstrate what was disagreeable to Martin and other members of the Popular Frontist intelligentsia about Borkenau's observations in Spain.

Borkenau travelled solely in the areas held by the government side, noting the rebels' practice of only admitting sympathetic reporters.<sup>49</sup> As a result, his book was primarily an account of internal developments in government territory, and Borkenau had comparatively little to say about Franco and his allies, nor much about the progress of the conflict itself. Since Borkenau made two visits to Spain – the first in August and September 1936 and the second in January and February 1937 – the *Spanish Cockpit* was mainly a record of the progress of the social revolution as it developed between those dates. The contrast in the mental atmosphere of the two periods which Borkenau observed struck a chord with Orwell, who himself experienced life in Barcelona at two distinct moments – December 1936 and May 1937 – in between which he was fighting as a volunteer with the Marxist but anti-Stalinist Workers' Party of Marxist Unification (POUM).<sup>50</sup>

There was a major difference between Borkenau and Orwell, though. The former set out with the aim of writing a sociological study of the revolution, applying the technique of “participant observation” pioneered by Malinowski (whose work had already influenced his criticism of Pareto); the latter travelled to Spain as a volunteer fighter utterly committed to the “anti-fascist” struggle.<sup>51</sup> Orwell famously described the revolutionary situation in Barcelona – where workers were armed, factory owners had fled, and churches had been torched – as “a state of affairs worth fighting for”, an indication that he was committed not only to the fight against the rebels but to the project of social revolution.<sup>52</sup> Borkenau, on the other hand, whose first journey to Spain was recorded in the form of diary entries, expressed immediate scepticism about that state of affairs. He noted, for instance, that the anarchist union, the CNT, which – notwithstanding the fact that the anarchists refused to participate in the legal government on ideological grounds – was the real power in Barcelona in the early months of the war, was nevertheless reluctant to establish Soviets.<sup>53</sup> He posited that “the attitude of the CNT is explicable by the fact that it [already] holds the

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<sup>48</sup> Jeremy Treglown, *V.S. Pritchett: A Working Life*, London: Chatto & Windus (2004), p. 68.

<sup>49</sup> Borkenau, *Cockpit*, p. xi.

<sup>50</sup> See Orwell, *Catalonia*.

<sup>51</sup> See Borkenau CV, 1939, Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MS. S.P.S.L. 348/8-12.

<sup>52</sup> Orwell, *Catalonia*, p. 3.

<sup>53</sup> Payne agrees with Borkenau that, in Catalonia at least, the anarchist Comitè Central de Milícies Antifeixistes de Catalunya (CCMA) was the real administrative power in August 1936. See Stanley Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union and Communism*, London: Yale University Press (2004), p. 113.



factories” and the establishment of Soviets would give the other parties a chance to test its strength.<sup>54</sup> As for the anarchists’ actions in the countryside, his comments on the sanguinary work of the Durruti Column hinted at revulsion.<sup>55</sup> The POUM, meanwhile, glamourised by Orwell as representing the real revolutionary tendencies of the workers and peasants in Spain, Borkenau dismissed as unimportant and “congenitally sectarian”.<sup>56</sup> Though he was generally guarded about his personal misgivings, he occasionally failed to maintain a detached attitude. An anti-religious demonstration – the compulsory burning of Christian artifacts on the beach at Sitges – struck him as a “sad performance”.<sup>57</sup> It was a far from idealising portrait of the Spanish Revolution.

### Iberian Exceptionalism

Equally, however, Borkenau was somewhat dismissive of the right-wing British journalists who went to Spain with the bourgeois prejudices of their upbringing and returned in shock and disgust.<sup>58</sup> Spain was, by his account, the branch of Western Civilisation which had withered first; an ostensibly feudal society, refractory against Western ideas of progress. Its own progress having stalled after the War of Spanish Succession, he claimed, it subsequently became the prey of stronger European powers.<sup>59</sup> It is difficult to imagine that this portrait was not influenced by Marx and Engels. The latter had written in the 1870s that “Spain is a land so very backward in industry... that it is quite impossible to speak of [the] ... emancipation of the working classes.”<sup>60</sup> But modern historians have painted a similar picture. Economically, as Payne has put it, Spain belonged to the “agrarian and backward Southern Europe” which stretched from Portugal to the Balkans.<sup>61</sup> The Spanish *mentalité* – Borkenau referred to the Spanish “mentality” several times in his “Historical Background” on Spain, suggesting the continued influence of the *Annales* and of Febvre – was, Borkenau felt, quite divorced from that of the industrialised nations of Northern Europe.<sup>62</sup> The fact that anarchism was the doctrine of such a large part of the peasant and newly proletarian classes was sufficient evidence, for Borkenau – as for contemporary Hispanists Geoffrey Brereton

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<sup>54</sup> Borkenau, *Cockpit*, p. 79.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 240.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Quoted in Karl Kautsky, *Terrorism and Communism*, p. 60.

<sup>61</sup> Payne, *Spanish Civil War*, p. 8.

<sup>62</sup> See Borkenau, *Cockpit*, pp. 15, 19-20, 22-3. In the *Annales*, the concept of *mentalité* was given its first clear expression in Febvre’s 1928 biography of Luther (see Andre Burguiere, “The Fate of the History of Mentalities in the *Annales*.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (1982), p. 426). However, Burke has pointed out that the concept itself pre-dated the *Annales* and originated with the anthropologist Lucien Levy-Bruhl’s 1922 work on the *Primitive Mentality*. Burke also noted that Mannheim’s concept of “styles of thought” bore close relation to *mentalité* (see Peter Burke, “Strengths and Weaknesses of the History of Mentalities”, in *Varieties of Cultural History*, New York: Cornell University Press [1997], pp. 162-182). Borkenau had himself, of course, contrasted the *Weltbild* of the feudal and the bourgeois epochs in his 1934 work. Still, the repeated use of the term *mentality* is suggestive.

and Gerald Brenan – of Spain’s exceptionalism in European terms.<sup>63</sup> Marxism and the other forms of socialism common to the European Left were movements which accommodated themselves to capitalism, industrial development and the growth of the state; anarchism was something like a religious doctrine, a moralistic repudiation of these modern developments and an idealisation of poverty and simple living.<sup>64</sup> During their revolt in October 1934, the Asturian miners had ritualistically abolished money.<sup>65</sup>

In his class analysis of anarchism as a doctrine intrinsically linked to the feudal nature of Spain, Borkenau was thinking like a Marxist. There is nothing in it which disagrees with Lukács, for instance, who wrote in 1922 that:

Bourgeoisie and proletariat are the only pure classes in bourgeois society... The outlook of the other classes (petty bourgeois or peasants) is ambiguous or sterile because their existence is not based exclusively on their role in the capitalist system... but is indissolubly linked with the vestiges of feudal society. Their aim, therefore, is not to advance capitalism or to transcend it, but to reverse its action.<sup>66</sup>

Yet, as it did for E. H. Carr, who published the first English-language biography of Mikhail Bakunin in 1937, the Spanish Revolution roused Borkenau’s interest in Marx’s most stubborn contemporary antagonist.<sup>67</sup> Just as he had contrasted Pareto favourably against Marx as a prophet of fascism, Borkenau did the same with Bakunin on the germination of social revolutions. “What was and remains at issue” in debates about the Spanish Civil War, Hobsbawm wrote in 2007, was “what divided Marx and Bakunin”.<sup>68</sup> Bakunin’s idea, contra Marx, was that revolution would spring from the peoples’ moralistic repudiation of what he had considered the inhuman industrial civilisation which had started to grow in Western Europe in the nineteenth century.<sup>69</sup> This was why, Borkenau suggested, Bakunin took such an interest in the so-called backward countries, which that civilisation had not yet fully penetrated.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, in the struggle over the programme of the First International, according to Carr, Bakunin had had his greatest successes in the poorly developed regions of Southern Europe. Carr told the story of Bakunin’s “capture” of the Spanish and Italian revolutionary movements, which followed him out of the International after the Hague Conference in September 1872.<sup>71</sup> It was in Spain, specifically, Carr wrote, “where Bakunin’s

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<sup>63</sup> See Geoffrey Brereton, *Inside Spain*, London: Quality Press (1938); Brenan, *Labyrinth*.

<sup>64</sup> Borkenau, *Cockpit*, pp. 18-22.

<sup>65</sup> Payne, *Spanish Civil War*, p. 55.

<sup>66</sup> Lukács, “Class Consciousness”, in *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 59.

<sup>67</sup> E. H. Carr, *Michael Bakunin*, New York: Vintage (1961).

<sup>68</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, “War of Ideas”.

<sup>69</sup> See Carr, *Bakunin*, p. 457.

<sup>70</sup> Borkenau, *Cockpit*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>71</sup> Carr, *Bakunin*, p. 447.

influence proved more durable than in any other European country”.<sup>72</sup> And recent events in Spain, taken together with what had happened in Russia at the end of the First World War, were an endorsement, for Borkenau, of Bakunin’s simple ideas about the human impulse for liberty, and a rebuttal to Marx’s much more systematic theory of the maturation of revolutionary consciousness in industrialised societies. “It was Bakunin,” he wrote, “who predicted that revolution would come to Russia and to Spain, not, as Marx expected, to Germany and England.”<sup>73</sup>

Agrarian Spain had proved such fertile soil for Bakunian currents, Borkenau continued, because the interests of the powerful and the powerless – in typical feudal fashion – remained so utterly divorced. Power relations had not been so thoroughly complicated, as they had been in Northern Europe, by the advance of industrial capitalism. Just as the landowners were apathetic about the cruel life of the peasantry, the peasantry was devoid of moralistic qualms in dealings with those who did not share their poverty. The Robin Hood-style brigand, Borkenau pointed out, had been a common type in Spain until the *Guardia Civil* (with what Lorca called their “patent-leather souls”) were introduced in the 1840s, after which his struggle for the dispossessed was carried on by the terrorist.<sup>74</sup> The atrocities committed by both sides in Spain, he argued, were in large part the natural outcome of the fact that the antagonists had moral feeling for neither person nor property where their foes were concerned. It was, Borkenau posited, a “Spanish habit to massacre one’s enemies wholesale”.<sup>75</sup>

If this was a somewhat infantilising portrayal of hot-blooded Mediterraneans – not particularly unusual in contemporary writings about Spain – it was nevertheless true that Spain’s first post-war strongman had emerged out of a period of extreme political violence, with the promise that he would be its solvent.<sup>76</sup> As Payne has argued, the *Pronunciamiento* of Primo de Rivera in 1923 was, in large part, the consequence of several years of street fighting between anarchist *pistoleros* and hired assassins in the pay of wealthy industrialists, the so-called *años del pistolerismo*.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, the Civil War émigré Arturo Barea recorded his astonishment upon learning that a typical rural Police Constable in England lived in a cottage, rode a bicycle and generally resembled Wodehouse’s

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 456.

<sup>73</sup> Franz Borkenau, “A Study of Bakunin, the Aristocratic Founder of Anarchism” [Review of E. H. Carr], *Christian Science Monitor Magazine*, 26 January 1938, p. 11.

<sup>74</sup> Borkenau, *Cockpit*, p. 15. See also Federico García Lorca, “Romance de la Guardia Civil Española”, in Donald Allen [ed.], *The selected poems of Federico García Lorca*, New York: New Direction (2005), pp. 88-94.

<sup>75</sup> Borkenau, *Cockpit*, p. 76.

<sup>76</sup> In 1937, Vernon Bartlett’s journal summed up the violence of the War in a poem which began: “The Spaniard’s blood is fiery, the Spaniard’s head is hot”. Unsigned, “The Dress Rehearsal”, *World Review*, Vol. 3 (1937), p. 12.

<sup>77</sup> Payne, *Spanish Civil War*, p. 10.

Oates, noting that the Guardia Civil lived in barracks and never patrolled alone because of the “inveterate hatred of the whole countryside against them”.<sup>78</sup>

On the other hand, Payne has also suggested that the idea of a uniquely Spanish penchant for violence has been exaggerated by some historians – and it probably was, also, by Borkenau. In Borkenau’s first publication on Spain, an article appearing in the *Spectator* in October 1936, he illustrated the sanguinary Spanish mentality by recalling the last words of the nineteenth-century dictator General Narvaez, who, when asked if he forgave his enemies, answered, “I have no enemies, I have shot them all”. He then proceeded to estimate that, from July to the time of writing, at least 100,000 – perhaps 150,000 – executions had been carried out in the country as a whole. This was an extrapolation from figures he had recorded in towns he had personally visited, as well as those recorded by trusted sources in rebel territory, but it probably gave too little consideration to the quieter regions of Spain.<sup>79</sup> Demographic statistics, according to Payne, suggest that 100,000 is a reasonable estimate for executions carried out over the entire course of the War. Moreover, by comparing the Spanish Civil War with the earlier examples of Russia and Finland, Payne made the point that mass executions were a common feature of early twentieth century civil wars, and that (when adjusted for population size) the number of victims were quite similar in each case.<sup>80</sup>

#### “Police Terror” in Spain

It was this thesis about the uniqueness of the Spanish soil – “Spain against Europe” – which Pritchett chose to focus on in his review. Orwell, however, was more interested in Borkenau’s recording of a shift in the balance of power, such that the social revolutionary project conceived in the summer of 1936 was in the process of being interred by early 1937. While in July 1936, a significant proportion of the armed workers who had repelled the rebels had belonged to the CNT and represented the national anarchist tradition, the introduction of Soviet arms and the increasingly crucial role of the International Brigades in the War, notably in the defence of Madrid in November, led to a diminishment of anarchist and a strengthening of communist influence in the government camp. And the Communists, according to their Popular Front policy of cooperation with the forces of bourgeois democracy, wanted to act as a moderating force. This meant, first of all, that they needed to marginalise the revolutionary forces and then to undo the revolutionary project. To the anarchist policy of expropriating the factories, the communists

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<sup>78</sup> Arturo Barea, “A Spaniard in Hertfordshire”, *The Spectator*, 11 August 1939, pp. 213-4.

<sup>79</sup> A Special Correspondent [Franz Borkenau], “The Spanish Terror: An Estimate”, *The Spectator*, 2 October 1936, pp. 537-8.

<sup>80</sup> Payne, *Spanish Civil War*, p. 117.

responded with the slogan: “protect the property of the small industrialist”.<sup>81</sup> “The Communist Party is now (presumably for the sake of Russian foreign policy)”, as Orwell put it in his review of Borkenau, “an anti-revolutionary force”.<sup>82</sup> This was the point, as Borkenau informed Orwell, that most of the reviewers had overlooked. While Orwell accused certain sections of the British press – unsurprisingly the Communist *Daily Worker*, but also publications like the *News Chronicle*, whose correspondents, Arthur Koestler and John Langdon-Davies, were, in fact, at the time, clandestine Comintern functionaries – of trying to conceal the fact, Martin’s *New Statesman* had provided some coverage of the political struggle in the government camp. But socialist and liberal publications like the *New Statesman* and the *Manchester Guardian* tended to side with the communists and their right-socialist and other Republican allies over that of the anarchists, left-wing socialists and the POUM.<sup>83</sup> “The obvious reply”, as Pritchett wrote in response to Borkenau’s criticism of the Spanish Communists’ anti-revolutionary policy, “is that the Communists objected to socialisation not necessarily because Communism is a movement trying to bury its revolutionary past, but because they had to wage a defensive war with untrained men”.<sup>84</sup>

This defence of communist policy has been echoed by Hobsbawm, as well as the foremost authority on the Spanish Civil War, Paul Preston. Both have argued that the project of social revolution was a distraction from the war effort.<sup>85</sup> “Given the notorious military weaknesses of the revolutionary militias,” Preston and Graham have written, communist “policy was neither absurd nor illogical.”<sup>86</sup> While Borkenau’s contemporary, the Spanish socialist Luis Araquistain, argued the opposite – among his accusations was the claim that the communists deliberately sabotaged a military operation in Extremadura for the sake of undermining their Left-socialist rival Largo Caballero – Borkenau separated military from political developments.<sup>87</sup> While historians like Preston tend to treat the Soviet intervention in Spain as a coherent whole, Borkenau’s instincts – later the inspiration for the method of Kremlinology – were to differentiate between military advisors on the one hand, and Comintern and secret police officials on the other.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Borkenau, *Cockpit*, p. 183.

<sup>82</sup> Orwell, “101. Review”, p. 310.

<sup>83</sup> See David Deacon, *British News Media and the Spanish Civil War: Tomorrow May be Too Late*, Edinburgh University Press (2008), pp. 57-58

<sup>84</sup> Pritchett, “Spain Against Europe”, p. 342

<sup>85</sup> See Hobsbawm, “War of Ideas”; Paul Preston, “Lights and Shadows in George Orwell’s Homage to Catalonia”, *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, published online 23 October 2017: [https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/85333/1/Preston\\_Lights%20and%20shadows\\_2017.pdf](https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/85333/1/Preston_Lights%20and%20shadows_2017.pdf).

<sup>86</sup> Helen Graham & Paul Preston, “The Popular Front and the Struggle Against Fascism”, in Graham & Preston (eds.), *The Popular Front*, p. 16.

<sup>87</sup> See Araquistain’s three-part 1939 article for the *New York Times*, “The Communists and the Spanish Civil War”, published online at <http://www.whatnextjournal.org.uk/Pages/History/Araquist.html> [accessed 1 October 2021].

<sup>88</sup> I am not trying to judge Borkenau against Preston, but to point to a difference in approach. Preston has written, in defence of Negrin’s willingness to follow communist policy, that “given that the Communists were committed to the

In his preface to the 1939 memoir of a violently anti-Caballero and anti-anarchist Spanish liberal, Jose Martin Blazquez, whom Borkenau praised for his honesty despite – in the vainglorious words of a communist reviewer – Blazquez’s “repeated tribute to the discipline, efficiency and republican patriotism of the Communist Party”, Borkenau wrote that it was the tragedy of Spain that its most revolutionary forces (the anarchists) should be the forces of indiscipline.<sup>89</sup> There is no question that he recognised the superiority of the centralised army over the militia system of the anarchists, and that he understood the terror and hatred which the latter inspired in more moderate sections of the population. Yet, as Mccannon’s historical survey has attempted to show, there was a distinction to be drawn between the military and the political aspects of Soviet intervention in Spain.<sup>90</sup> Mccannon has argued that there was barely any relationship between the GRU, which was entirely concerned with military affairs, and the NKVD, which, under the direction of Alexander Orlov, established a secret police regime and attempted to bring the Republican government under communist control. Indeed, as was the fate of the Red Army leadership in the Soviet Union, the GRU in Spain was itself eventually “razed” by the NKVD.<sup>91</sup>

The head of the GRU, Yan Berzin, who made the suicidal mistake of criticising Orlov’s activities in Spain, believed as early as March 1937 that the NKVD was compromising Soviet authority in the Republican zone, and therefore undermining the military effort.<sup>92</sup> In actual fact, Orlov was merely a pawn, many of whose orders came directly from Nikolai Yezhov in Moscow.<sup>93</sup> The intimate role played in Spanish events by Yezhov, himself notorious for his supposed orchestration of the Great Terror (*Yezhovshchina*), but also for his own unfortunate fate – which suggested that he, too, was only an instrument of Stalin – could not have been known by Borkenau in 1937. For this reason, Borkenau actually downplayed the relationship between the Moscow Terror and the imposition of a communist police regime in Spain, judging the latter to be mainly the natural result of communist psychology.<sup>94</sup> That Stalin directed this aspect of the Soviet intervention in Spain,

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defeat of fascism in Spain, that is perhaps not as heinous a crime as [the historian] Bolloten made it sound.” The important fact, for Preston, was the intent of Soviet and Communist policy towards the Civil War. He does not justify Communist terror, but sees it as a minor footnote aimed against a handful of genuine Trotskyists. Borkenau, as examined below, saw “police terror” as something quite separate from the war effort and much more pervasive than that. See Paul Preston, *The Spanish Civil War*, New York: Norton (2007), pp. 260 (for the implied criticism of Bolloten) and 261-3 (for the treatment of communist terror).

<sup>89</sup> George Garwood, “Spanish Lessons”, *The Labour Monthly* (May 1939), pp. 316-17; Franz Borkenau, “Preface”, in Jose Martin Blazquez [trans. F. Borkenau & Eric Mosbacher], *I Helped to Build an Army*, London: Secker & Warburg (1939), pp. xvii-iii.

<sup>90</sup> John Mccannon, “Soviet Intervention in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-39: A Re-examination”, *Russian History*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (1995), pp. 154-80, esp. pp. 164-66.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 174.

<sup>92</sup> See Payne, *Spanish Civil War*, p. 208.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> See Borkenau, *Cockpit*, p. 240.

ordering, for instance, the liquidation of the POUM and the murder of its leader, Andreu Nin, was only established after the opening of the Soviet archives.<sup>95</sup>

It was the ghastly proportions of the political struggle – once again, noted by Orwell, but overlooked by Pritchett – of which the *Spanish Cockpit* was one of the first contemporary accounts. On his second trip to Spain, Borkenau bore witness to the increasing totalitarianisation of life in government territory. He noted the mounting censorship of the Republican press, which “is not even allowed to mention” the political divisions between the revolutionary and the anti-revolutionary camps.<sup>96</sup> Araquistain’s journals were among the first wound-up under communist influence. Borkenau also began to find, in a way reminiscent of the conditions which had prevented him from visiting rebel-controlled areas, that ever more onerous restrictions were being placed on the movements of foreign reporters without party accreditation. Finally, he learned that his English typist was a communist spy, whose reports on his criticism of communism landed him in jail in Valencia.<sup>97</sup> These were only the beginnings of the NKVD’s work in Spain, leading only later to the notorious suppression of the POUM, which followed upon the famous “May Events”, and the ousting of Caballero, in favour of the more Moscow-friendly Negrin administrations. “Every revolution”, Borkenau observed, “seems to undergo, in its course, this transformation from mass terrorism to police terrorism”.<sup>98</sup> Like Mccannon, Borkenau believed that the totalitarianisation of the government camp, and the police terrorism of which he was himself an early victim, should be separated from the necessities imposed by the military situation. Rather, he saw it as a simple consequence of the growing dominance of the Communists over the government machinery:

Much in contrast with my first journey, I was, during the second one, continually molested and hampered in my work by being shadowed and repeatedly denounced... There was no doubt that the difference was due to the greater influence of the communists... I had not been reticent of criticism during the first journey. I had talked little with communists then, but a great deal with republicans, socialists, anarchists, and Trotskyists, and had found them all equally devoid of heresy-hunting. I had openly expressed my doubts, sometimes my disgust, about many aspects of the movement to many people... It created no difficulties, or almost none.<sup>99</sup>

Republican Spain had entered, Borkenau claimed, into a new “atmosphere of suspicion and denunciation”, marked by a peculiar “obsession” with Trotskyists – in reality “a minor element of Spanish political life”; but, to the Spanish Communists, an epithet for “anyone who disagrees with

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<sup>95</sup> See Payne, *Spanish Civil War*, p. 228.

<sup>96</sup> Borkenau, *Cockpit*, p. 235.

<sup>97</sup> See “In Jail – The Police Regime”, in *Ibid.*, pp. 236-257.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 254.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 236.

them about anything”.<sup>100</sup> In this respect, for Borkenau, Spain bore comparison with Russia, Italy and Germany. The police terror was a reflex of communist psychology, and a manifestation of the totalitarian intention “to enforce complete unity... of thought in every matter concerning the State, and to make every matter concern the State.”<sup>101</sup> There may have been a pressing need to enforce a unity of command in the army, and to abandon the militia system favoured by the anarchists, but these things were, for Borkenau, no explanation for the totalitarian internal developments behind the lines. Conversely, he questioned...

...whether the police methods employed by the Seguridad will not, in the end, prove a serious drawback for the Spanish republicans, because they strangle that popular enthusiasm which can only evolve in an atmosphere of freedom.<sup>102</sup>

For many British enthusiasts of the Republican cause, the effect of police terror upon the morale of the Spanish people imperilled the Republic less than did criticism of that terror, which might be used as propaganda by the Francoists. That was the reason Orwell’s publisher, Victor Gollancz, gave for refusing even to read let alone publish *Homage to Catalonia*.<sup>103</sup> Gollancz’s unwillingness to consider anything Orwell had written was only consistent with the decision he had already taken when he published Koestler’s *Spanish Testament* in 1936.<sup>104</sup> To wit, that the LBC’s output on the Spanish Civil War would be primarily concerned with making propaganda for the government side, and the duty to objectivity would be sacrificed if it came into conflict with this loyalty. The first part of Koestler’s book, written under the direction of the Comintern propaganda chief Willi Münzenberg, consisted of partly dubious anti-fascist atrocity stories. It was a response in kind to the “red terror” stories of the right-wing press, and later a cause of embarrassment to its author.<sup>105</sup> But Gollancz believed that the ends justified the means. “Everything should be sacrificed”, he argued, “to preserve a common front against the rise of fascism”.<sup>106</sup> Effectively, Kingsley Martin gave the same excuse for his refusal to print Orwell’s review of Borkenau, later hyperbolically claiming that it would have been akin to publishing “an article by Goebbels during the war against Germany”.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 240-1.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 256.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 257.

<sup>103</sup> See Newsinger, *Hope Lies*, p. 44.

<sup>104</sup> Arthur Koestler, *Spanish Testament*, London: Gollancz (1936).

<sup>105</sup> See Koestler, *Invisible Writing*, pp. 333-4; & David Cesarani, *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind*, New York: The Free Press (1999), p. 137.

<sup>106</sup> Quoted in Hobsbawm, “War of Ideas”.

<sup>107</sup> See Newsinger, *Hope Lies*, p. 44.



Though the liberal *News Chronicle* printed an article by the communist Langdon-Davies in which Barcelona's May Events were treated as a "frustrated putsch" by the POUM, it was not, in general, what was published, but what was omitted in Popular Front-sponsoring publications which is revelatory to the historian about the difficulties that their political loyalties caused them.<sup>108</sup> As Hobsbawm has argued, the main way individual enthusiasts of the Republican side responded to disillusion owing to sanguinary anarchism or communist intrigues was studied silence (Orwell was "the exception [that] proves the rule").<sup>109</sup> The same was true of the pro-Republic press. For all the attention it has received over the Orwell affair, Martin's *Statesman* rarely strayed beyond the sort of criticisms of the revolutionary programmes of the POUM and the Spanish anarchists which Borkenau himself made, and certainly cannot be compared to communist publications like the *Daily Worker*, which accused those groups of colluding with fascists and committing treachery against the Republic.<sup>110</sup> But inconvenient stories like those of the murder of Nin and the trial of the other POUM leaders were almost completely ignored in Popular Frontist publications.<sup>111</sup> The *New Statesman* did not actually publish any report on the outcome of the POUM trial, and the only pro-Republican British publication which appears to have raised any questions about its legality was *Controversy*, the obscure journal of the ILP (which was politically sympathetic to the POUM).<sup>112</sup>

#### Francoism or Fascism

The beginnings of the heresy hunts and the Moscow-style crackdown on political opposition which Borkenau witnessed disturbed the mythology of the Popular Front. In the preface to the *Spanish Cockpit*, Borkenau claimed that he had initially himself bought into that mythology; and that he had begun his study...

...under the common delusion that the Spanish Revolution was simply an incident in the fight between Left and Right, Socialism and Fascism in the European sense of the word; I have been convinced by observation on the spot that this is not so.<sup>113</sup>

This was probably somewhat disingenuous. Borkenau knew the country from his Comintern days and had researched the political situation during the Primo dictatorship, as he revealed in an autobiographical radio lecture in 1956.<sup>114</sup> Within the text itself, Borkenau alluded to time spent in

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<sup>108</sup> See Burnett Bolloten, *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counter Revolution*, University of North Carolina Press (2015), p. 445.

<sup>109</sup> See Hobsbawm, "War of Ideas".

<sup>110</sup> On the campaign in the Communist Press against the "Trotskyistfascist" POUM, see Bolloten, *Spanish Civil War*, p. 445; also see Deacon, *British News Media*, p. 61.

<sup>111</sup> See Deacon, *British News Media*, pp. 132-3.

<sup>112</sup> John McNair, "The POUM Trial", *Controversy*, No. 26, November 1938.

<sup>113</sup> Borkenau, *Cockpit*, p. x.

<sup>114</sup> Franz Borkenau, "Radio Lecture".

Spain in earlier years.<sup>115</sup> And it is, moreover, inconceivable that someone who gave eight years of their life to the Party – engaging, specifically, in intellectual work – would not have read Marx’s articles on Spain, which also emphasised the “peculiar features” which differentiated it from the other great European States.<sup>116</sup> Thus, it is unlikely that his judgement of the country as an arrested and un-European civilisation was formed only after the outbreak of the Civil War. Nevertheless, his overall conclusions about the War added significant nuance to the idea that it was solely an episode in the struggle between “fascism” and “anti-fascism”. Despite being unable to spend any time in rebel territory, he argued that, just as the government side was divided between the revolutionary and anti-revolutionary principle, the Franco camp was an uneasy coalition of mutually antagonistic forces. Contrary to the popular picture of Franco as a fascist leader in the image of Mussolini and Hitler, Borkenau observed that he and the other generals at the head of the movement were, ideologically speaking, much closer to the traditionalist forces behind them – the church, the landowners, and the restorationist Carlists – than they were to the truly fascist, German-imitating side of the movement, the Falange.<sup>117</sup> In his *Annales* essay on the rise of Nazism in Austria, Borkenau had made the same argument with respect to the *Heimwehren*: it was the mainstay of the *Ancien Régime*. Fascism, by contrast, was a plebian revolutionary movement which promised to destroy the old elite.<sup>118</sup>

The contention that Francoism and fascism were, from the standpoint of political science, quite distinct phenomena was, in 1937, relatively novel.<sup>119</sup> It is now quite common for historians to emphasise certain distinctions, but such ideological differences as divided the forces around

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<sup>115</sup> See Borkenau, *Cockpit*, p. 70 (“But what a contrast with the pretty shining colours of the Catalan upper-class girls of former days!”).

<sup>116</sup> See Manuel Sacristán, “Marx on Spain”, in *The Marxism of Manuel Sacristán: From Communism to the New Social Movements*, Leiden: Brill (2014), p. 145.

Marx argued that Spain had taken on an “Asiatic form of government” at the same moment that the other great States of Europe had transitioned from feudalism to early capitalism:

“It was in the sixteenth century that were formed the great monarchies which established themselves everywhere on the downfall of the conflicting feudal classes... But in the other great States of Europe absolute monarchy presents itself as a civilizing center, as the initiator of social unity. There it was the laboratory in which the various elements of society were so mixed and worked, as to allow the towns to change the local independence and sovereignty of the Middle Ages for the general rule of the middle classes, and the common sway of civil society. In Spain, on the contrary, while the aristocracy sunk into degradation without losing their worst privilege, the towns lost their medieval power without gaining modern importance.”

Karl Marx “Survey of the Revolutionary History of Spain prior to the nineteenth Century”, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works, Vol XIII*, London: Lawrence & Wishart (1980), p. 395.

<sup>117</sup> See Borkenau, *Cockpit*, p. 280.

<sup>118</sup> Borkenau [pseud. Haschek], “Partis, traditions et structures”, p. 11.

<sup>119</sup> It was not a completely unique argument, but those who tried to define Francoism or the Spanish conflict without relation to fascism generally felt compelled to acknowledge that they were arguing against the consensus. See, for instance, Hans Kohn, “The Twilight of Nationalism?”, *The American Scholar*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (1937), 259-70; & William Horsfall Carter, “Spain and the Social Revolution”, *International Affairs*, Vol. 15, No. 5 (1936), pp. 647-70.

Franco tended to be obscured by those who took an “anti-fascist” view of the struggle.<sup>120</sup> Indeed, the “one recurrent and consistent theme evident in all Republican propaganda”, as the author of a recent study of the British news media and the Civil War has put it, was “anti-fascism”.<sup>121</sup> It was the sole rallying cry behind which the otherwise schismatic Loyalist forces could unite; and it was also the best means of presenting the Spanish conflict as a zero-sum game to apprehensive foreigners.

The idea that *fascism vs. anti-fascism* was the crux of Spanish (and, indeed, world) politics predated the outbreak of the Civil War. Comintern officials had taken to calling all political opponents “fascists” from the inauguration of the “Third Period” in 1929. When, in 1930, Dmitriy Manuilsky referred to the short-lived government of Damaso Berenguer as a “fascist regime”, Trotsky responded by rhetorically – and derisively – asking: “once there is a ready epithet, why bother to think?”.<sup>122</sup> But it was not only communists who used words wantonly. As Payne has argued, the terms ‘fascism’ and ‘communism’ both began to be “paranoically” misused by contemporaries within Spain in the politically see-sawing years leading up to the Civil War as synonyms for the Right (by those on the Left) and the Left (by those on the Right) respectively.<sup>123</sup> That supporters of the Popular Front in all the countries in which such a movement emerged saw their *raison d'être* as defence against fascism is manifest.<sup>124</sup> Given this context – and the German and Italian intervention on the side of Franco – it is of no surprise that such misuse of terms extended beyond Spain. The LBC’s primer on the conflict, for instance, applied the epithet “fascist” to virtually all individuals and parties of the Right in interwar Spain, from Primo to Gil Robles.<sup>125</sup> And its broad-brush approach was replicated by the Dutchess of Atholl – derisively nicknamed the “pro-Communist Dutchess” by Orwell – who was one of the best-known supporters of the Republic in the Conservative Party, losing the whip for her sympathies.<sup>126</sup> In her Penguin Special on the

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<sup>120</sup> Like Payne, Paxton highlights Franco’s suppression of the truly fascist element in the Falange movement, essentially coming to the same view as Borkenau, that Franco’s regime was traditionalist and authoritarian. See Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, New York: Random House (2002), pp. 149-50. However, Preston and Richards tend to define Francoism as fascistic, focussing on the violence which inaugurated the regime and the fact that Spain remained a one-party state under Franco’s leadership. See Paul Preston, *The Politics of Revenge: Fascism and the Military in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Spain*, London: Routledge (1995); & Michael Richards, *A Time of Silence: Civil War and the Culture of Repression in Franco Spain*, Cambridge University Press (1998). Certainly, there were also elements of a cult of personality. Catalans remember that Barcelona’s most famous road, the Diagonal, was called Avenida del Generalísimo Francisco Franco before 1975. The important point, though, is not the extent to which Borkenau’s view can be justified, but that it demonstrably clashed with the view of the Popular Front Left.

<sup>121</sup> Deacon, *British News Media*, pp. 17-18.

<sup>122</sup> See Payne, *Spanish Civil War*, p. 29.

<sup>123</sup> See Stanley Payne, “Spanish Fascism”, *Salmagundi*, No. 76/77 (1987-88), pp. 104-5. Also see Payne, *Spanish Civil War*, pp. 35-6.

<sup>124</sup> See Graham & Preston, “The Popular Front”, p. 4.

<sup>125</sup> Harry Gannes & Theodore Repard, *Spain in Revolt*, London: Gollancz (1936). Theodore Repard was a pseudonym for Theodore Draper, who left the CPUSA in the 40s and later wrote the first major history of that Party.

<sup>126</sup> Orwell, “136. Review” [Searchlight on Spain], in Orwell & Angus [eds.], *An Age*, pp. 381-4.

conflict, she wrote in an early footnote that: “In the succeeding pages the name “Fascist” as in other books cited, will be used as covering [as well as the Falange] also Renovación Española, the C.E.D.A. and the Requetés”.<sup>127</sup> Even Orwell, who would complain in 1946 that “[t]he word Fascism has now no meaning except in so far as it signifies ‘something not desirable’”, referred to the other side as “Fascists” throughout his memoir.<sup>128</sup> When “everything which is not so-called modern democracy” is treated as “Fascistic”, the political scientist Waldemar Gurian complained in a review of a book published by the LBC in 1939, “the word Fascism loses any precise meaning”.<sup>129</sup> Yet the rebels, benefitting from Italian and German intervention, wilfully courted the label. They adopted the fascist salute at the beginning of the Civil War, and Franco embraced most of the programme – as well as the name – of the Falange.<sup>130</sup> “The propaganda on both sides,” Borkenau noted in an article published in 1939, “is agreed to describe the Franco camp as fascist. Yet, in these times, if communists and Nazis agree upon some point the chances are that it is just the contrary of the actual position.”<sup>131</sup>

The origins of Francoism were, for Borkenau, the crucial difference between it and the fascist and Nazi movements of Italy and Germany. Mussolini and Hitler had both risen to power “on the crest of a violent mass movement” against little resistance from their adversaries. Those were political conquests of power. Francoism, by contrast, started as a military rebellion which faced tremendous mass resistance.<sup>132</sup> The Battle of Guadalajara, Borkenau believed, proved definitively that only “more material help from abroad” could save the rebels’ cause.<sup>133</sup> While the British press focussed on the embarrassment of the Italian volunteers, it was Franco’s two Spanish divisions, Borkenau observed, which deserted in the largest numbers, in major contrast to the courageous efforts of the native forces defending the Republic.<sup>134</sup> While in Italy and Germany, mass support had given the respective parties the basis on which to undermine and overcome traditional social forces, the army and the church were the keystones of Francoism, which was in no way a novelty in Spain. As Payne has since put it, “all the major changes in nineteenth-century Spanish government were initiated in whole or in part by the military”.<sup>135</sup> And Borkenau predicted that a

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<sup>127</sup> Katharine Stewart-Murray, *Searchlight on Spain*, Harmondsworth: Penguin (1938), p. 58.

<sup>128</sup> George Orwell, “Politics and the English Language”, *Horizon*, April 1946, pp. 252-64.

<sup>129</sup> Waldemar Gurian, “Review, M. Rader, *No Compromise, the Conflict between Two Worlds*”, *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 1, No. 4, pp. 502–504.

<sup>130</sup> See Payne, “Spanish Fascism”, p. 105-6.

<sup>131</sup> Franz Borkenau, “The Situation in Spain”, *Nineteenth Century & After*, March 1939, p. 298.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 295.

<sup>133</sup> Borkenau, *Cockpit*, p. 271.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, “Ch. IV, The Battle of Guadalajara”, pp. 262-77.

<sup>135</sup> Payne, “Spanish Fascism”, p. 101.

Franco victory would simply amount to the latest in a long line of Spanish military dictatorships, such, indeed, as had been Trotsky's judgement of the regime of Berenguer.<sup>136</sup>

## On Communism

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*"Ever since 1931 the Communists and their fellow travellers have had a virtual monopoly of Left-wing public opinion." – Richard Crossman in a review of Borkenau.<sup>137</sup>*

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### Introduction to the Communist International

The decision to write a history of the Communist International in 1938 was one which, later in life, Borkenau suggested he had made in the wake of his Spanish experiences.

I remained silent for seven years after my expulsion [from the Party]. The reason to take up the open fight [against communism] was given to me by the Spanish Civil War, the first phase of which I experienced as an eyewitness. There, for the first time in my life, I saw the Soviet police in action. And the horror of it will never disappear from my consciousness.<sup>138</sup>

If Borkenau's own recollections are to be trusted, they undermine the view – emanating from the polemics of "anti-anti-communists" like Isaac Deutscher and Hugh Trevor Roper; affirmed, in Borkenau's case, by Richard Crossman; and maintained in some of the secondary literature on Borkenau and his work – that he journeyed gradually from one extreme to the other: from communism to an ever more unbridled anti-communism. Instead, rather as the triumph of Nazism had led him to become more critical of the eschatological, or prophetic, element of Marxism, a specific experience (what he witnessed in Spain) had caused him immediately to reconsider his former restraint and "take up the open fight".

Deutscher's early contribution to the historiography of ex-communism was an article published in the post-war US magazine *The Reporter*, which took its departure from the publication of the instantly famous collection of ex-communists' memoirs, *The God that Failed*.<sup>139</sup> This became the central piece in Deutscher's essay collection *Heretics and Renegades*.<sup>140</sup> As the title implied, Deutscher argued that ex-communists tended either to virtuous heresy – like himself – or became renegades

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<sup>136</sup> Borkenau, *Cockpit*, p. 281.

<sup>137</sup> Crossman, "Faith of British Socialism", p. 466.

<sup>138</sup> Borkenau, "Radio Lecture" [...ich nach meinem Ausschluss sieben Jahre geschwiegen. Den Anlass, den offenen Kampf aufzunehmen, gab mir der Spanische Bürgerkrieg, dessen erste Phase ich als Augenzeuge erlebte. Dort habe ich die sowjetische Polizei in Aktion gesehen zum ersten Mal in meinem Leben. Und das Grauen davor wird nie aus meinem Bewusstsein schwinden.]

<sup>139</sup> Richard Crossman [ed.], *The God that Failed*, New York: Harper (1950).

<sup>140</sup> Deutscher, "Ex-Communist's Conscience".

who supported reaction as a result of their anti-communist complex. Indulging his penchant for historical analogies, he likened the latter to “ex-Jacobin prompters of the anti-Jacobin reaction”.<sup>141</sup> There might be something in the comparison, in terms of the way apostates from the two movements have been viewed. Robert Southey’s recent biographer has argued that his intellectual evolution was far more complex than the commonly supposed transformation from a revolutionary into a reactionary.<sup>142</sup> Similarly, in a critical essay about Deutscher, Labeledz noted that such a generalisation was not reflective of the political positions taken by any of the authors anthologised in *The God that Failed*.<sup>143</sup> However, Labeledz and Deutscher had different ideas about what constituted reactionary politics. As a self-declared heretical communist who continued to write apologetics for Stalinism until Khrushchev undermined his efforts in 1956, it was natural that Deutscher should see all “renegades” as having entered the camp of the reactionaries.<sup>144</sup>

Though the historian of ex-communism, Diggins, did select four individuals who moved from communism to the American conservative right as the subjects of his study, he nevertheless pointed out on the first page of his book that many other intellectuals repudiated communism and became political moderates, or remained firmly on the socialist left.<sup>145</sup> And Borkenau himself, in his afterword to the German edition of *The God that Failed*, gave his own account of the diversity of ex-communism. “Among the ex-communists”, he wrote, “there are left-wing socialists like Ignazio Silone and Anton Ciliga no less than integral liberals like John dos Passos and Eugene Lyons.”<sup>146</sup> Besides millions of ordinary workers who must have passed through the Party in countries where communism had, at one time or another, had a mass membership, the diversity could, additionally, be studied by investigating the biographies of the political leaders of Europe:

The mayor of Berlin [Ernst Reuter] ... is a former general secretary of the KPD, but even the war minister of the last Labour government [John Strachey] was once an active communist propagandist. Important French socialists were once communists, but so were no less than three of General de Gaulle's most authoritative advisers.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>142</sup> See David M. Craig, *Robert Southey and Romantic Apostasy: Political Argument in Britain, 1780–1840*, Woodbridge: Boydell Press (2007).

<sup>143</sup> Leopold Labeledz, “Isaac Deutscher, Historian, Prophet, Biographer”, in *The Use and Abuse of Sovietology*, New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers (1989) p. 37.

<sup>144</sup> In his *Stalin: A Political Biography*, Oxford University Press (1949), Deutscher suggested that Stalin’s historically progressive achievements, such as industrialisation, would overshadow the cruelty which attended them in the historical record. In one of his last campaigns in writing, Trotsky had mounted a similar defence of the historical necessity of the Soviet invasion of Finland. It was only the ex-communists’ “utter confusion of intellect and emotion”, according to Deutscher, which led them to doubt such callous apologia. See Deutscher, “Ex-Communist’s Conscience”, p. 20.

<sup>145</sup> He named Sidney Hook and Dwight Macdonald as examples. See Diggins, *Up from Communism*, p. 1.

<sup>146</sup> Franz Borkenau, “Nachwort”, p. 255.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 254.

Trevor-Roper was a very different kind of anti-anti-communist to Deutscher. An Oxbridge historian of conservative outlook who was disdainful of Marxism, he wrote a highly critical dispatch from the founding conference of the Congress for Cultural Freedom in Berlin in 1950.<sup>148</sup> Trevor-Roper attacked the ex-communists (including Borkenau) present as perennial extremists, accusing them of sponsoring a revanchist German nationalism, which, by Trevor-Roper's account, was a greater danger to the free world than that posed by communism at the time. My fourth chapter, which deals with Borkenau's participation in the Cultural Cold War and his practice of Kremlinology, will be the appropriate place for a discussion of Trevor-Roper's article, which has often been cited in Cultural Cold War historiography.<sup>149</sup> It is relevant to note here, though, that Trevor-Roper's insinuations about Borkenau's supposedly Nazi rhetoric have been rather uncritically quoted by Jones and Kessler, and the thrust of Kessler's essay on Borkenau was that he journeyed from one extreme (communism) to the other: a "more and more illiberal" anti-communism in the Cold War period.<sup>150</sup> My discussion of the *Communist International* will aim to show that Borkenau's journey to anti-communism was already complete by 1938, while I reject the suggestion that it became more and more illiberal over time.

Several decades before Kessler tackled Borkenau's writings, Richard Crossman offered a similar narrative of the latter's intellectual development. Crossman, who wrote positive reviews of Borkenau's books in the 1930s, and was, curiously, the inspiration behind *The God that Failed* (for which Borkenau was originally slated as a contributor, eventually writing the afterword to the German translation), was nonetheless attached to the neutralist "Keep Left" wing of the Labour Party, and penned an anti-anti-communist review of *European Communism* only three years after editing that bible of anti-communism.<sup>151</sup> As Wilford notes in his history of the Cultural Cold War, such triangulations earned Crossman the nickname "double Cross-man".<sup>152</sup> Comparing Borkenau to Arthur Koestler (with whom Crossman had had a friendship which had soured), he attempted to suggest that there was a "fortunate moment in the agony of apostasy when the ex-Communist... [revolts], *in the name of Communist ideals* [my italics], against their corruption" and produces their masterpiece.<sup>153</sup> Such, Crossman argued, accounted for *Darkness at Noon* and the *Communist International*. But, once the communist ideals are overcome, the apostate becomes an embittered

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<sup>148</sup> Trevor-Roper, "Ex-Communist".

<sup>149</sup> It helped to shape the narratives of Christopher Lasch [see "Cultural Cold War", pp. 64-5] and Frances Stonor Saunders [see *Who Paid?*], whose account of the Congress also relied on an interview with Trevor-Roper conducted towards the end of his life.

<sup>150</sup> Jones, *Lost Debate*, p. 186; Kessler, "Between communism", p. 94.

<sup>151</sup> Crossman, "Books in General"; "Anatomy of Communism"; "Faith of British Socialism". Also see Richard Crossman, et. al., *Keep Left*, London: New Statesman (1947).

<sup>152</sup> Wilford, *The CIA*, p. 20.

<sup>153</sup> Crossman, "Books in General", p. 674.

and scarred personality, incapable of objectivity. Crossman's comparison was far from accurate, however. Borkenau's *Communist International* had not been written in the name of "communist ideals", but had attacked them vigorously, and, according to Borkenau's above recollections, was composed when its author had already resolved to take up the pen against communism.

Something should be said about the means by which he did this. In the introduction to the *Communist International*, Borkenau established that he had no interest in writing a book of "disclosures" about his own past as a communist, which entered his narrative only on one occasion – and somewhat vaguely – when he recalled his participation in the "Schlageter Campaign" inaugurated by Karl Radek in 1923.<sup>154</sup> Nor does he appear to have been interested in writing an anti-Soviet polemic about the Moscow Trials – which he referenced only in passing – or about other internal developments in the Soviet Union. His choice of the Comintern as a subject derived not only from the horror of his Spanish experiences, but also from the proof offered by Spain that the Communist International had "once more become" an "important" force in world politics. "As recently as 1933", he wrote in his preface, "there was not a single country outside Russia where the communists counted as a political force".<sup>155</sup> Since that time, ironically, an unrevolutionary Popular Front strategy had brought immense gains to the Communist parties of France and Spain; while, in Britain, a significant stratum of the left-wing intelligentsia had either developed overt communist sympathies or had begun to see communism as an ally in the struggle for progressive political causes. Hence, in Borkenau's view, the need for a history of the organisation of international communism, which would demonstrate that it was not a reliable ally in the defence of democracy, but had "repeatedly changed its whole policy". He sought not only to chart the history of those changes, but to explain the moral meaning of the communist movement. He also counselled that there was every reason to believe that the Comintern's "evolutions are not yet at an end".<sup>156</sup> As he restated in 1951:

...the potential readers I thought of in 1937... [were] the young communists and fellow travellers [who] were almost entirely ignorant of the history of their own movement, and I hoped to convince at least some of them by telling my tale; perhaps I was not completely mistaken in my hopes.<sup>157</sup>

From these two justifications Borkenau gave for writing a history of the Comintern, follow the virtues of my contextual approach to his intellectual biography. The book was a product of:

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<sup>154</sup> Franz Borkenau, *World Communism*, pp. 10 & 245-6. On the Schlageter Campaign, also see Mario Kessler, *A Political Biography of Arkadij Maslon, 1891-1941: Dissident Against His Will*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan (2020), pp. 59-62.

<sup>155</sup> Borkenau, *World Communism*, p. 9.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> Franz Borkenau, *European Communism*, London: Faber (1953), p. 16.



- (i) the Spanish Civil War; and
- (ii) the emergence of the Popular Front, a political phenomenon to which it offered a challenge.

I have discussed the ways in which Borkenau’s analysis of the Spanish Civil War contradicted the ideas of the Popular Front Left. I will now discuss Borkenau’s challenge to the Popular Front idea of Left unity.

#### Historical Background of the Popular Front in Britain

As Mazower has emphasised, admiration for the Bolshevik experiment – and for the revolutionary argument of communism – predated the Popular Front era. A first wave of enthusiasm for the Soviet project had emerged in the depression years of the early 1930s, when the Soviet Union appeared to be booming with the rapid industrialisation of its first Five Year Plan while the West was assailed by a “crisis of capitalism”.<sup>158</sup>

Communism was a success to set against the capitalist breakdown, an example of how to tackle the economic difficulties of modern society. It had turned the war-torn Tsarist Empire into a major industrial power within a few years: it was a system that worked.<sup>159</sup>

In 1931, the Fabian Society’s lecture series was entitled “Capitalism in Dissolution: What Next?”.<sup>160</sup> The answer was provided in a 1933 book by its stalwart Harold Laski, LSE professor of Political Science, who wrote that the “temper of Western Civilisation displays precisely those features which, in previous periods, have signalled the onset of a revolutionary epoch”.<sup>161</sup> The “impulse to equality”, Laski argued, was the “permanent passion among mankind”. Because the prevailing economic system offered no hope of meeting its demands, the efforts of “moderate-minded” politicians to maintain that system were, in the long term, guaranteed to be in vain.<sup>162</sup> Only a new social order could meet those demands, Laski argued, and “no new social order has so far come into being without a violent birth”.<sup>163</sup> It was therefore highly likely, he thought, that Britain would soon have to pass through its own 1917.<sup>164</sup>

It was not only the economic crisis, but also the collapse of the second Labour government in 1931 which contributed to the germination of this revolutionary temper among a section of the

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<sup>158</sup> See Mark Mazower, “Ch. IV, The Crisis of Capitalism”, in *Dark Continent*, New York: Vintage (2000), pp. 104-37.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>160</sup> See Richard Overy, *The Twilight Years: The Paradox of Britain Between the Wars*, London: Penguin (2009), p. 55.

<sup>161</sup> Harold Laski, *Democracy in Crisis*, London: George Allen & Unwin (1933), p. 233.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 262-3.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213.

<sup>164</sup> See *Ibid.*, p. 189.

British Left.<sup>165</sup> It created what the biographer of John Strachey – author from 1932 of “the most influential popularisations of Marxism that were ever published in English”<sup>166</sup> – described as a “political trauma” for the Left.<sup>167</sup> “In the context of the worldwide crisis of capitalism and the development of Fascism”, Newman argued, Labour’s failure “raise[d] an obvious question: was peaceful, evolutionary change possible, or were the only alternatives Fascism or Communism?”<sup>168</sup> Labour’s collapse was not the harbinger of fascism in Britain, but its leaders’ failure to introduce socialism and subsequent involvement in the National Government was viewed as a “betrayal” by prominent socialists like Laski, G.D.H. Cole and Strachey.<sup>169</sup> The latter described how it *educated* him – after a brief period of flirtation with Oswald Mosely’s New Party – towards communism.

The collapse of the second British Labour Government... was for me the decisive event. It was necessary for me to see... the mingled impotence and treachery of social democracy in action... Not until this indisputable evidence had been thrust upon me was I willing to admit that British Social Democracy was not the friend, but the deadliest enemy, of the interests of the British workers.<sup>170</sup>

A similar view animated Strachey’s polemical criticism of the German Social Democrats. Their post-war record, he argued, was one of extreme deference towards the bourgeois Weimar Republic – which did, in his retelling, drift towards fascism – at a time when they ought to have been undertaking the historical task which was the *raison d’être* of a socialist party; which would, additionally, have prevented the Nazi *Machtergreifung*: establishing socialism. Strachey described the SPD’s cooperation with German republicans and liberals as a misguided attempt to “conserve the existing *status quo*” so as not to create the revolutionary situation which might embolden reactionary or fascist forces. It was a “policy of the lesser evil” which, he contended, enabled the rise of the greater evil it had aimed to stymie.<sup>171</sup> Implicitly, his attack on the SPD amounted to a justification of the sectarian policy followed by the German Communists, who had been determined, like the Nazis, to smash the status quo.

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<sup>165</sup> Jackson, *Equality*, p. 94, cites this as a turning point for Laski, who concluded that “‘socialistic measures’ were ‘not obtainable by constitutional means.’”

<sup>166</sup> See Michael Newman, “Strachey, (Evelyn) John St Loe (1901–1963), socialist theorist and politician”, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/36337>.

<sup>167</sup> Michael Newman, *John Strachey*, Manchester University Press (1989), p 27.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>169</sup> See Donald Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism*, London: Fontana (1996), p. 63.

<sup>170</sup> John Strachey, “The Education of a Communist,” *Left Review*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (1934), pp. 63-9.

<sup>171</sup> See John Strachey “The Policy of the Lesser Evil (1)” & “The Policy of the Lesser Evil (2)”, in *The Menace of Fascism*, London: Gollancz (1933), pp. 181-217.

## From the Third Period to the Popular Front: The Comintern Line

### *“Fascism as the Last Stage of Capitalism” and “Social Fascism”*

Strachey was an early convert to the theory that fascism was the “last stage of capitalism”; the capitalists’ final, brutal effort to fend-off the historically ordained victory of the workers’ movement. This theory originated in communism and formed part of the justification for the ultra-sectarianism of the “Third Period” (1928-34) in Comintern history, when social democrats had been denounced as “social fascists”.<sup>172</sup> The relationship between the “*process of fascistisation* of the capitalist state” and the connivance in that process of the “upper stratum of the Labour organisations, led by social democracy” – the so-called “labour aristocracy” – was adumbrated in the *Theses on the International Situation and the Tasks of the Communist International*, adopted by the Sixth Congress of the Comintern in 1928.<sup>173</sup> Because they were willing to make accommodations with capitalist, bourgeois democracy – which, according to the theory, was moving steadily towards fascism – social democrats’ policies were judged *objectively* pro-fascist. Communists dedicated themselves to the destruction of the bourgeois, democratic order, both because that was the *raison d'être* of communism, but also because of this belief that the democracies were progressing towards “a new type of [fascist] State”.<sup>174</sup> Thus, the struggle against bourgeois democracy was also the struggle against fascism. As Strachey put it, “there is no such thing as democracy in the abstract”. Britain, France and America were really “dictatorships of the whole property-owning class over the whole working class”.<sup>175</sup>

Notoriously, the fight against bourgeois democracy and its “social fascist” allies sometimes led communists into collaboration with other groups – the Nazis and the French *Leagues* – which shared the communists’ destructive goal but were far more deserving of the “fascist” label than bourgeois liberals or socialists.<sup>176</sup> The “Heckert Resolution”, adopted subsequent to Hitler’s ascension to power by the Executive Committee of the Comintern (E.C.C.I.), affirmed that “Hitler’s victory was a good thing because it had ‘cured the masses from the influence of the Socialists’”.<sup>177</sup> As has been discussed in the first chapter, the German Communists were not alone

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<sup>172</sup> The theory was given its clearest expression in English in Dutt, *Fascism and Social Revolution*, which traced how fascism grew out of imperialist conflict, so that Lenin was not wrong to have called imperialism the “highest stage of capitalism” (p. 31); fascism was merely the “final phase within imperialism” (p. 25).

<sup>173</sup> See McDermott and Agnew, “Theory and Practice of Social Fascism”, in *Comintern*, pp. 98-100.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>175</sup> Strachey, *Menace*, p. 244.

<sup>176</sup> See Daniel Bell, *Marxian Socialism in the United States*, Princeton University Press (1967), p. 139. “Sometimes” should be emphasised. It is also true that street violence between the SA and communist organisations were a notorious feature of the entire period 1929-33. The conclusion of one historian of the German Communists’ anti-fascist brawling in this period was that “the KPD’s theoretical understanding... involved the whole Communist movement in a series of contradictions”. See Eve Rosenhaft, *Beating the Fascists? The German Communists and Political Violence, 1929-1933*, Cambridge University Press (1983), p. 211.

<sup>177</sup> Quoted in Koesler, *Invisible Writing*, p. 271.

in their underestimation of the real forces of fascism. But the Social Democrats at least refrained from rejoicing after Hitler came to power. By contrast, the Comintern and the KPD were convinced that the downfall of a democratic republic was an objectively progressive event. As the *last stage* of capitalism, fascism was transient, and would merely raise the crisis of capitalism to its most acute level, preparing the ground for the communist revolution, hence the KPD slogan “*nach Hitler, kommt uns*”.<sup>178</sup> As McDermott and Agnew paraphrased the Comintern’s conception: “if fascism was the last stage of a dying capitalism, then proletarian revolution would surely follow, and if that were so why should fascism be feared?”<sup>179</sup>

#### *The Comintern and the Popular Front*

In their history of the Comintern, McDermott and Agnew contend that the “Comintern line” was never a “fixed and unchanging entity”.<sup>180</sup> Here they concur with Borkenau, whose approach in *European Communism* – likely influenced by that of ex-communist Angelo Tasca’s monograph on the French Communist Party – was to make a close chronological study of Comintern publications to show how subtle week-by-week, or even day-by-day, changes tended to smooth the transition from one “line” to another.<sup>181</sup> As Borkenau had argued in 1939, “[e]very major change of Communist tactics has been preceded by... a stage of tentative experimentation”.<sup>182</sup> Of the transition from the Third Period to the Popular Front, there were several intimations between 1933 and 1935. Haslam has noted that as early as February 1933 the Communist Parties of France, Germany and Poland sent communiques to the socialist parties of their countries – the coordination, he added, was a clear sign of “Moscow’s consent” – calling for a “united front of action against fascism”.<sup>183</sup> The British Party did the same in March 1933.<sup>184</sup> When the socialist parties were lukewarm in their response – suggesting a “non-aggression pact” – the communists dropped the subject and continued their sectarianism.<sup>185</sup> It was almost a year before the next serious reconsideration. On 6<sup>th</sup> February 1934, a group of French Far-Right and fascist *Leagues* organised a coordinated demonstration which descended into a riot in Paris and forced the resignation of the Daladier cabinet. The E.C.C.I. had ordered the French Party to take part in the demonstrations, but subsequently became fearful that the riot presaged a catastrophe of German

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<sup>178</sup> See Bell, *Marxian Socialism*, p. 139.

<sup>179</sup> McDermott and Agnew, *Comintern*, pp. 110-1.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>181</sup> Angelo Tasca [*pseud.* A. Rossi], Willmoore Kendall (trans.), *A Communist Party in Action: An Account of the Organization and Operations in France*, Yale University Press (1949). Borkenau complimented Tasca’s work in his introduction.

<sup>182</sup> Franz Borkenau, “Russia’s Next Move”, *Jewish Frontier*, January 1939, p. 14.

<sup>183</sup> Jonathan Haslam, “The Comintern and the Origins of the Popular Front”, *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (1979), p. 675.

<sup>184</sup> See Jupp, *The Radical Left*, p. 45.

<sup>185</sup> Haslam, “Origins”, p. 675.

proportions in France. The French Communists declined a socialist offer to join an anti-fascist demonstration in Paris on February 8<sup>th</sup>, but accepted an offer to join an identical demonstration only four days later.<sup>186</sup> Afterwards, in France and in Austria, anti-fascist collaboration between communists and socialists started to become normalised. But the change in the Comintern line was made explicit only at the Seventh Congress of the Communist International in the Summer of 1935.

### The Popular Front movement

In Britain, the communists' Popular Front tactics had very limited political success, owing to the refusal of the Labour Party to countenance cooperation with communists.<sup>187</sup> Communism did, however, achieve a greater cultural impact than at any other period in British history.<sup>188</sup> The communists had been such a minor force in British politics during their Third Period that their re-positioning of themselves as the vanguard of the anti-fascist cause excited little controversy and much enthusiasm. After the radicalising period of the early 1930s, when the second Labour government had failed to live up to the hopes of the Left and the Soviet Union had embarked upon rapid industrialisation just as the economic crisis hit the capitalist world, came the rise of Nazism and the growing belligerence of Germany and Italy. As Stalin began to present himself as the most steadfast and determined opponent of fascism, veneration of the "Socialist Sixth of the World" reached its zenith.<sup>189</sup> A recurring idea that some left-wing writers, such as Stephen Spender in his 1937 LBC choice, *Forward from Liberalism*, began to express, was that the Soviet Union was the "only bulwark" against fascism.<sup>190</sup> This was not only because the democracies – with their policies of appeasement and non-intervention – seemed to have less energy for the fight, but because of the diffusion of the communist theory that fascism was the final and most reactionary stage of capitalism. Reviewing Borkenau in 1940, George Orwell would call this the "Strachey-Blimp thesis", in that it was shared by the anti-capitalist Left (represented by Strachey) and the pro-appeasement Right (represented by the composite figure, Colonel Blimp), some of whom thought that fascism was shielding capitalist Europe from Bolshevism.<sup>191</sup> If Hitler was a "pawn"

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<sup>186</sup> The state of "confusion" into which the communists were thrown was recorded an American journalist. See William Shirer, *The Collapse of the Third Republic: An Inquiry into the Fall of France in 1940*, New York: Pocket Books (1971), p. 205.

<sup>187</sup> Labour made its position clear as early as 1933 with a pamphlet entitled *Democracy versus Dictatorship*, which compared the Soviet Union with Nazi Germany. See Michael Newman, "Democracy versus Dictatorship: Labour's Role in the Struggle against British Fascism, 1933–1936", *History Workshop*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (1978), pp. 67–88.

<sup>188</sup> Works of social history written by contemporaries have given vivid accounts of the influence of communism upon British intellectuals in the 1930s. Muggeridge, *Thirties*; Symons, *Thirties*; Orwell, "Inside the Whale".

<sup>189</sup> This was the title of an LBC book about the Soviet Union authored by the so-called "Red Dean of Canterbury". Hewlett Johnson, *The Socialist Sixth of the World*, London: Gollancz (1939).

<sup>190</sup> Stephen Spender, *Forward from Liberalism*, London: Gollancz (1937). See Jupp, *Radical Left*, p. 62.

<sup>191</sup> George Orwell, "8. Review".

of the German industrialists, as an émigré liberal journalist argued in an LBC title, it was conceivable that *capital* might institute a similar dictatorship in Britain.<sup>192</sup>

The *People's Front*, an LBC choice penned by G.D.H. Cole in 1937, represented one of the clearest expressions of the Popular Front point of view.<sup>193</sup> While advocating a Popular Front, Cole was also responding to a recent development in the Labour Party, of which he was a long-standing member. In January 1937, the Labour National Executive Committee (NEC) had issued a warning against members who undertook activities on behalf of Popular or United Front organisations. Labour's commitment to democracy precluded cooperation with anti-democratic parties, it explained, and members who undermined this principle would be subject to expulsion.<sup>194</sup> This action was meant as a warning against the organisers of the "Unity Campaign", launched in January 1937 by the leadership of the Labour-affiliated Socialist League – a bastion of the Labour Left since 1932 – to unite Labour, the ILP and the Communists in an electoral alliance. Later the same month, Labour acted on this warning, disaffiliating the Socialist League.<sup>195</sup> Much to Cole's chagrin, Stafford Cripps, the inspiration behind the Unity Campaign, chose to disband the league rather than risk expulsion from Labour.<sup>196</sup>

Cole was a Fabian and a theorist of a liberal version of guild socialism which stressed individualism and personal freedom.<sup>197</sup> Though, as A. L. Rowse sardonically wrote, Cole "could not bear the responsible leaders of the labour movement", his major influences were Robert Owen and William Morris rather than Marx.<sup>198</sup> He had two decades of political experience behind him and was far from being naïve about communist history. In the book, he recalled having himself been the target of communist abuse during the Comintern's Third Period and resented having been called a "social fascist".<sup>199</sup> However, he conceded that the communists had not been entirely wrong to use the term. Cole had first come into conflict with the Labour leadership when he had called for the Party to use an Emergency Powers Act to hold on to power and introduce socialism by fiat in 1931.<sup>200</sup> That MacDonald and Thomas had, in that period, betrayed socialism by their conduct, Cole

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<sup>192</sup> Rudolf Olden, *Hitler the Pann*, London: Gollancz (1936).

<sup>193</sup> G.D.H. Cole, *The People's Front*, London: Gollancz (1937).

<sup>194</sup> "UNITED AND POPULAR FRONTS: LABOUR EXECUTIVE'S WARNING TO THE PARTY. A CALL FOR LOYALTY", *Manchester Guardian*, 14 January 1937, p. 9.

<sup>195</sup> See Ben Pimlott, "The Socialist League: Intellectuals and the Labour Left in the 1930s", *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (1971), pp. 12–38.

<sup>196</sup> Cole's preface was addressed to Cripps.

<sup>197</sup> See Marc Stears, "Guild Socialism and Ideological Diversity on the British Left, 1914-1926", *Journal of Political Ideologies*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (1998), pp. 289-306.

<sup>198</sup> See A. L. Rowse, *Man of the Thirties*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson (1979), p. 24. Cole credited William Morris as the source of his own discovery of socialism. See G.D.H. Cole, *World Socialism Restated*, London: New Statesman (1956), p. 5.

<sup>199</sup> Cole, *People's Front*, pp. 35-6.

<sup>200</sup> See Sassoon, *One Hundred Years*, p. 63.

argued, proved that social democracy really was deserving of communist abuse.<sup>201</sup> Their collaboration in the National Government from 1931 had, of course, been with other democratic parties – reactionary, in the view of many Labourites, but not fascist – and they had been expelled from Labour as a result. In Cole’s view, though, Macdonald and Thomas were representative of a malady in the Labour Party. Since Labour members and trade unionists had once lined up behind the policies of such renegades, they bore a share of responsibility for those “objectively wrong” policies – regardless of their subjective motivations. The communist “attack... was in reality directed against them, not as individuals, but as exponents of a policy inspired by leaders whom they readily join in denouncing today”. Objectively, therefore, Cole contended, the communists had been absolutely right about the leaders and the policies of the Labour government from 1929-31. Thus, Cole counselled, those who had supported that government ought to put their hurt feelings aside and forgive the communists for calling them names. In its new spirit of magnanimity, he argued, the Communist Party “is quite ready to think differently about them [Labour members] if they will give it half a chance”. The “great nuisance” of the moment, for Cole, was the “anti-Communist complex among many honest Labour men and women” who recalled the past too readily and personally.<sup>202</sup>

It was not only sectarian name-calling which Cole wished to show he had no illusions about. He also indicated his awareness of the communist technique of establishing front organisations – or infiltrating existing unions – in which communist influence was concealed, so as to attempt to win over the membership for the Party. During the Third Period, such organisations had been employed as part of a communist ‘United Front from Below’ tactic.<sup>203</sup> Cole called this the “solar system”, an appropriation from the definition given by Finnish communist Otto Kuusinen in 1926 and used by Herbert Morrison for an anti-communist Labour Party pamphlet, the *Communist Solar System*, in 1933.<sup>204</sup> Kuusinen had emphasised the importance of establishing mass organisations secretly controlled by the Party, which, in a clandestine manner, would attempt to influence the membership away from what communists saw as the traitorous reformism of mainstream socialist parties and out of the trade-union consciousness which prevented workers from recognising their real position under capitalism. During the Third Period, Cole conceded, Communist United Front activities had been secretive and corrosive, the real aim being to draw members away from the socialist parties to the so-called “solar system”.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Cole, *People’s Front*, p. 43.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid*, p. 37.

<sup>203</sup> For a discussion of the tactics of the ‘United Front from Below’ see McDermott and Agnew, *Comintern*, pp. 103-6.

<sup>204</sup> Herbert Morrison, *The Communist Solar System*, London: Labour Publications Dept. (1933).

<sup>205</sup> See Cole, *People’s Front*, pp. 41-2.

Despite his conviction that this had been the aim of United Front activities from 1929-34, Cole was unabashed to admit that he had nevertheless backed communist affiliation to the Labour Party during those years.<sup>206</sup> A sincere reformist, Cole was sanguine about the prospects of influencing those on the Left who were not, believing that admission into the Labour Party would have dissuaded communists from continuing with their revolutionary extremism.<sup>207</sup> As the CPGB was never admitted into Labour, Cole's theory could never be put to the test.<sup>208</sup> Regardless, Cole seemed to believe that events had exerted the desired influence over communists by themselves. With the rise of Hitler, he was persuaded that the controversies associated with the fronts and intrigues of the past no longer applied. Communists were now working "genuinely", he claimed, for "the immediate task of democratic defence"; and the United Front had "lost all character of pretence".<sup>209</sup>

Harold Laski, like Cole, had political differences with communists. Much closer than Cole to Marxism, he had nevertheless published, in 1927, a critical book on communist theory and practice.<sup>210</sup> Much like Cole, though, Laski, who was one of the founders and selectors of the LBC, was of the opinion that the Comintern had been reformed by the German catastrophe. In *Tribune* – the publication that Cripps had established in January 1937 to publicise the Unity Campaign – Laski averred that, though communists had made "grave errors" in the past, "they recognise those errors now".<sup>211</sup> The communists were determined not to make the same mistakes again, he suggested. But the same could not be said for Transport House, which was making anti-fascist unity a "crime".<sup>212</sup>

Nazism, in Cole and Laski's view, had changed the situation. Whatever their past transgressions, the communists' good faith could be assured in the anti-fascist struggle. After all, the "anti-Bolshevik crusade" was the very essence of National Socialism, and by dismissing Cripps' Unity Campaign, Kingsley Martin wrote in the *New Statesman*, it was "as if [the Labour Party] wished to rally the British people behind Hitler".<sup>213</sup> In the confrontation with such an openly and virulently anti-communist enemy as Nazism, the suggestion of communist duplicity was an absurdity. The

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<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 41-2.

<sup>208</sup> Although, the case studies presented in a recent paper on entryism in the Labour Party during the Popular Front period would suggest that very few covert communists were mellowed by this work. See Alan Campbell & John McLroy, "'The Trojan Horse': Communist Entrism in the British Labour Party, 1933-43", *Labor History*, Vol. 59, No. 5 (2018), pp. 513-54.

<sup>209</sup> Cole, *People's Front*, pp. 42-3.

<sup>210</sup> Harold Laski, *Communism*, New York: Henry Holt and Co. (1927).

<sup>211</sup> Harold Laski, "WHAT IS THIS CRIME OF UNITY?" *Tribune*, 5 Feb 1937, pp. 10-11.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>213</sup> Kingsley Martin, "THE DISUNITED FRONT", *New Statesman and Nation*, 23 January 1937, p. 108.



communists recognised, Cole wrote, that there “are only two sides in war”; and that “the whole world is on the brink of war. It was therefore “impossible to regard them as enemies – unless capitalists, and even Fascists, are therewith to be regarded as friends”. To Cole, it appeared that, in failing to come to terms with the idea that communists could be trustworthy allies, Labour moderates like “Bevin and Dalton, as well Citrine and Middleton, appear to have gone quite mad”.<sup>214</sup>

### Looking back on the 1920s: Germany and Britain

In Germany, perhaps more than in any other country, the antagonism between communists and socialists had remained virulent throughout the 1920s. After August 1914, the “renegade” Karl Kautsky had become the chief object of Lenin’s opprobrium and the embodiment of “opportunism” in communist literature.<sup>215</sup> Later, German communists blamed Noske and the SPD for sanctioning the brutal murders of the Spartacist leaders – an incident held by communists to symbolise the prostration of the “opportunist” SPD before Weimar’s bourgeois order.<sup>216</sup> German socialists, meanwhile, recoiled at the inhumanity of Bolshevism as soon as it came to power. In an exchange of polemics with Lenin in 1918 and 1919, Kautsky alleged that the major achievement of the Russian Revolution appeared to have been the vile enslavement of those arbitrarily judged to have been members of the bourgeois class under Tsarism.<sup>217</sup> Later, German socialists watched in astonishment as the KPD lent its support to a Nazi referendum which aimed to unseat the Social Democratic government of Prussia.<sup>218</sup>

These were the years in which Borkenau passed through the communist movement, and much of his book was dedicated to events in Germany which might have been unfamiliar to large sections of his British readership. Britain had an altogether milder history of internecine conflict on the Left, which perhaps offers a partial explanation why some British liberals and socialists felt able to trust in the good faith of communists well into the 1930s. The German socialist Kautsky had glanced East with undisguised horror; the British (ILP) socialist H. N. Brailsford had written the forward to the English translation of Trotsky’s rejoinder in defence of terrorism.<sup>219</sup> Indeed, even the best-known account by a British liberal critic of Bolshevism had been prefaced with the remark

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<sup>214</sup> Cole, *People’s Front*, p. 335.

<sup>215</sup> Vladimir Lenin, *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, Peking: Foreign Languages Press (1970).

<sup>216</sup> See Borkenau, *World Communism*, p. 278.

<sup>217</sup> See Kautsky’s two pamphlets, *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat* (trans. H. J. Stenning), Manchester: National Labour Press (1918) & *Terrorism and Communism*.

<sup>218</sup> One of the first accounts of this episode was provided by Leon Trotsky, “Against National Communism”, *Bulletin of the Opposition*, No. 24, September 1931: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/germany/1931/310825.htm>.

<sup>219</sup> H. N. Brailsford, “Preface”, in Leon Trotsky, *A Defence of Terrorism: A Reply to Karl Kautsky* (Trans. Anon.), London: Labour Publishing Company (1921), pp. i-iv.

that Lenin's Party deserved "the gratitude and admiration of all the progressive part of mankind".<sup>220</sup>

In the only chapter in the *Communist International* dedicated to British developments, a brief commentary on the years preceding the General Strike of 1926, Borkenau explained what he thought was a crucial distinction between British and continental communism. In the early history of the Comintern, he argued, the "'infantile disease' [Lenin's phrase] of left-wing communism" – represented by strong factions in Germany, France, Hungary and elsewhere throughout the 1920s – had barely afflicted the British Party. In fact, the "relapse into left extremism between 1929 and 1934" [the Third Period], Borkenau argued, had been forced upon the CPGB by Moscow against the will of most of its leaders.<sup>221</sup> McDermott and Agnew's work in the archives of the CPGB has confirmed this assessment. During the germinal stages of the move towards 'Class against Class' and 'Social Fascism', in late 1927, soon-to-be General Secretary of the CPGB Harry Pollitt's opposition was only broken after he was summoned to Moscow and subjected to an eight-hour harangue on the deficiencies of the British Party.<sup>222</sup> Pollitt and the CPGB Central Committee's overwhelming opposition to the Third Period was not the product of pro-reformist sentimentality. It was simply that they recognised, quite correctly, that excessively revolutionary propaganda was detrimental to their own growth, and that isolating themselves from the Labour Party was tantamount to isolating themselves from the British working class.<sup>223</sup> It should be noted that, while the German Communists had a mass membership for much of the 1920s, the CPGB never had more than a few thousand members, which probably influenced the view that its best opportunities lay the way of the United Front. As Pollitt remarked, by way of warning his fellow communists against sectarian language, in 1925:

...the English [Labour] movement is used to conducting its politics in a "gentlemanly" way and the acute personal criticisms... against MacDonald, [have] not strengthened us, but [have] certainly made it easy for MacDonald to play upon it.<sup>224</sup>

Though Labour conferences in the first half of the 1920s consistently voted overwhelmingly against communist affiliation (1922-5), Borkenau argued that "there was no such abyss between the communist workers and the ordinary members of the Labour Party as existed between communists and socialists on the Continent".<sup>225</sup> Certainly, as Morgan wrote of the later Popular

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<sup>220</sup> Bertrand Russell, *The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism*, London: Watchmaker (2010), p. 5.

<sup>221</sup> Borkenau, *World Communism*, p. 274.

<sup>222</sup> McDermott and Agnew, *Comintern*, pp. 73-4.

<sup>223</sup> As Jupp has noted, the Third Period was a disaster for the CPGB, which saw its membership shrink to 2,500 by 1931, the lowest in its history. Jupp, *Radical Left*, p. 31.

<sup>224</sup> Kevin Morgan, *Harry Pollitt*, Manchester University Press (1994), p. 48.

<sup>225</sup> Borkenau, *World Communism*, p. 275.

Front period, there was not much distance between sections of the *Labour Left* and the communists.<sup>226</sup> The relative absence of open communist sectarianism in Britain is evinced by the fact that the CPGB consistently sought affiliation to the Labour Party. The close connection between Labour and the unions also complicated matters, as “for many years individual communists [were able to remain] members of the Labour Party through their unions”.<sup>227</sup> It was only after the General Strike that Labour sought to block this avenue.

It was the situation in the trade unions, according to Borkeu, which really distinguished British communism. The Red Trade Union International (Profintern) had been established in 1921 as the trade union arm of the Comintern, and it carried the revolutionary/reformist split between the latter and the Socialist International into the unions, where independent Profintern, or “Red”, unions vied with those of the reformist Amsterdam International (IFTU).<sup>228</sup> The union question, however, was the source of bitter factional disputes in the Comintern throughout the early 1920s. Left communists backed the independent Red Trade Unions; Right communists feared that isolation from reformist unions meant isolation from the bulk of the working class.<sup>229</sup> On the continent, however, attempts to initiate a Right policy were generally complicated by the scepticism of the reformist unions. In 1924, for instance, the IFTU blocked an attempt to admit Russian unions. But the attempt had been sponsored by the British Trades Union Congress (TUC), whose President, A. A. Purcell, was a former communist and a Soviet enthusiast.<sup>230</sup> Later that year, during a period when most communist parties on the continent underwent a temporary shift to the Left amid denunciations of Brandlerism (United Front unity with socialists), the British communists continued – and expanded – their trade union unity, pioneering a policy of entryism. Encouraged by Zinoviev’s idea that the trade unions were the path to the British revolution, they founded the National Minority Movement, led by Pollitt, which operated as a “vehicle for the [communist] transformation of the Labour movement from within”.<sup>231</sup> The Soviet trade union chief Mikhail Tomsky was also successful in wooing the leaders of the TUC into an Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee, which lasted from 1925 until 1927, by which time the anti-communist Citrine had

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<sup>226</sup> Kevin Morgan, *Against Fascism and War: Ruptures and Continuities in British Communist Politics, 1935–1941*, Manchester University Press (1989), p. 36.

<sup>227</sup> Borkeu, *World Communism*, p. 275.

<sup>228</sup> For a communist explanation of the function of the Profintern, see Earl R. Browder, “The Red Trade Union International: The First World Congress of Revolutionary Unions”, *The Toiler*, Vol. 4, No. 192, 15 October 1921, pp. 9–10.

<sup>229</sup> Which was a correct assessment. The communists lost almost all of their delegates in the German unions after a shift to the Left in 1924. See Borkeu, *World Communism*, pp. 258–9.

<sup>230</sup> See *Ibid.*, p. 278. Also see Kevin Morgan, *Bolshevism and the British Left, Vol III: Bolshevism, Syndicalism and the General Strike: The Lost International World of A. A. Purcell*, London: Lawrence & Wishart (2013).

<sup>231</sup> Morgan, *Pollitt*, p. 48.

replaced Purcell.<sup>232</sup> Historians tend to agree that the Fifth World Congress of the Comintern (1924) marked the end of the last vestiges of any independence on the part of communist parties; the “bolshevisation” of the organisation.<sup>233</sup> But the British Communists seem to have been excepted from the Left extremist wave of 1924-5. When a return to the Right was effected in late 1925 it was, naturally, the British Communist and trade unionist Tom Bell who produced the pamphlet outlining trade union strategy.<sup>234</sup>

The relative absence of sectarian divisions, in the early years of the Comintern, between the British communists on the one hand, and the Labour and trade union memberships on the other, rendered the Third Period an aberration in the eyes of pro-unity socialists like Cripps, Cole, Martin and Laski. The years of open communist hostility to reformist socialists could be looked upon as an unfortunate interlude; a brief dalliance with extremism followed by a return to the normal state of things; and one which, as Cole had argued in his book, should be seen in the context of the disgrace of MacDonald and reformists of that era. Formerly “useful allies in the elaboration of a new policy for the unions”, communists were now seen by those on the Popular Front Left as loyal allies in the struggle against fascism.<sup>235</sup> In June 1937, Cripps launched a new Unity Campaign, which, to appease the Labour Executive, dropped the idea of joint work. Instead, the ILP, the Communists and the Labour Left would campaign independently of one another for the end goal of an electoral alliance. As Cripps put it in a speech in Hull to inaugurate the campaign:

Nothing will ever induce me after my experiences in the last six months to regard the Communists or the I.L.P or any Socialist working-class organisation as the political opponents of the Labour Party.<sup>236</sup>

Borkenau’s account of the history of the Comintern was motivated by the desire to challenge such sentiments. He told a story of its member parties’ gradual development into clones of the Bolshevik Party, which had adopted both its organisational structure and its ethos. A process driven by their failure to match its lofty achievements.

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<sup>232</sup> See Borkenau, *World Communism*, p. 279.

<sup>233</sup> As Eley put it: “By the Fifth Comintern Congress... the collapse of Communist support in Europe tightened the pressure for conformity. A new policy of “Bolshevization” was adopted, which dragooned the CPs toward stricter bureaucratic centralism... welding [parties] into a single approved model of Communist organization... Depressing cycles of “internal rectification” began, disgracing and expelling successive leaderships.” Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe*, Oxford University Press (2002), p. 228. Also see McDermott and Agnew, “Bolshevizing the Comintern”, in *Comintern*, pp. 41-80.

<sup>234</sup> Thomas Bell, *The Movement for World Trade Union Unity*, Chicago: Daily Worker (1925).

<sup>235</sup> Borkenau, *World Communism*, p. 275.

<sup>236</sup> “Stafford Cripps’ speech at Hull rally for new unity campaign”, *Tribune*, 11 June 1937, p. 6.

## Borkenau's analysis of Communism – Bolshevisation and Bolshevik Morality

### *The process of Bolshevisation*

One of the subtler conclusions of Borkenau's study was that the Comintern's failure to ignite the European revolution was the cause of its evolution into a vassal of Moscow. This nuanced argument has tended to be simplified in presentations of Borkenau's book in more recent Comintern historiography, where his work is said to represent the thesis that Stalin was primarily responsible for vassalizing the Comintern, as against E. H. Carr's notion that Stalin was uninterested in the organisation.<sup>237</sup> This is perhaps because contemporary historiography focusses less on the reasons why the Comintern failed in its revolutionary aims and more on the meaning of the relationship between member parties and the Moscow centre, especially in the Stalin era (considering its controversies about the flip-flopping "line" of the Communist parties). Unless a given historian happens to have a particular sympathy with communism, the question why the Bolshevik Revolution was not the harbinger of communist revolution in Europe is unlikely to be central to a study of the Comintern. It is a question which interested Hobsbawm, for instance.<sup>238</sup> But most historians would simply take as a given the conclusion that Borkenau – as a one-time communist – had to arrive at through years of experience: that there was never any prospect of a *proletarian* revolution in Europe. In 1938, however, Borkenau was arguing mainly against those who took the idea of proletarian revolution seriously. The only appreciable "school" of Comintern historiography was that of Leon Trotsky and his followers – C. L. R. James, Boris Souvarine and Victor Serge among them.<sup>239</sup> Their thesis mirrored Trotsky's theory of the "degeneration" of the Russian Revolution. Revolution in Europe had failed, in Trotsky's account, only because the Comintern had degenerated on account of Stalin's betrayal of internationalism, explicit in the slogan "socialism in one country".

Leon Trotsky fills the world with his accusations that the German, the French, the Spanish, the Belgian, and what not revolution had been possible, had only Stalin not betrayed. In reality it is the other way around. The evolution of the Comintern... [is] due to the fact that that international proletarian revolution after which the Bolsheviks originally hunted was a phantom.<sup>240</sup>

Like Carr, but contra Trotsky, Borkenau argued that Europe's revolutionary moment (which was, in any case, only a pseudo-revolutionary moment, created by the ferment of the Great War) had

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<sup>237</sup> McDermott & Agnew, *Comintern*, pp. 90-3.

<sup>238</sup> See Eric Hobsbawm, "Cadres", *The London Review of Books*, Vol. 29, No. 8 (2007): <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v29/n08/eric-hobsbawm/cadres>.

<sup>239</sup> See, Leon Trotsky (trans. Max Eastman), *The Revolution Betrayed*, London: Faber (1937); Boris Souvarine (trans. C. L. R. James), *Stalin*, New York: Longmans (1939); Victor Serge (trans. Ralph Manheim), *From Lenin to Stalin*, New York: Monad Press (1973); James, *World Revolution*.

<sup>240</sup> Borkenau, *World Communism*, p. 419.

already passed by the time the Communist International became a relevant influence in the affairs of its member parties.<sup>241</sup> During the revolutionary wave at the end of the First World War, he noted, neither Bela Kun in Soviet Hungary nor Rosa Luxemburg in Germany were prepared to take instruction from Lenin.<sup>242</sup> Bolshevism, still fighting for survival, was looked upon as an ally by the revolutionary Left in Europe, but not yet as a model to be imitated. Paul Levi, the “true disciple of Luxemburg” who took over the leadership of the German communists after the institution of the Comintern, sustained her reserve on the all-important organisational question of the vanguard.<sup>243</sup> A younger group of “Left Communists” in Germany, meanwhile, who were disdainful of Levi’s moderation, were also the bane of Lenin, who polemicised against them for their “infantile disorder”: their failure to recognise the value of compromise as a purely tactical manoeuvre.<sup>244</sup> By presenting these facts, Borkenau attempted to show his readers that the Comintern was not always what it would later become. Which is to say that Borkenau’s analysis of the Comintern was very close to what is today the standard historical interpretation of it: that it was gradually “Bolshevised”. Except that the Bolshevisation, for Borkenau, followed from the failure of revolution in Europe, and would have occurred regardless of Stalin’s victory in the Russian power struggle. “The obvious degeneration of the Comintern,” he wrote, “is not primarily due to Russian influence”.<sup>245</sup>

In his book, Borkenau gave a long account of the so-called “March Action” of 1921, and of the trenchant pamphlet against it which earned Levi expulsion from the Party.<sup>246</sup> Levi accused an extremist faction in the E.C.C.I. led by Bela Kun – and acting independently of Zinoviev and Lenin – of pushing Left elements in the German Party into a terroristic conspiracy in the Mansfeld region of Saxony, in the hope that it would foment a general revolution in Germany. In actuality, the action was a disaster for the Party, which lost almost its entire membership.<sup>247</sup> As well as demonstrating, in his own person, the strength of independence from the Comintern in European parties in the organisation’s early period, Borkenau argued that Levi was one of the first examples of a dissident communist whose expulsion was the prelude to the adoption of their own policies.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> Carr suggested that the Autumn of 1920 was the “high-water mark” of the Comintern’s “hopes of promoting revolution throughout the world”. See E. H. Carr, *A History of Soviet Russia, The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-1923, Vol. 3: Soviet Russia and the World*, London: Macmillan (1953), p. 165.

<sup>242</sup> See Borkenau, *World Communism*, p. 181.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>244</sup> See Lenin, “Left-Wing Communism”.

<sup>245</sup> Franz Borkenau, “Mr Wintringham Interprets, too”, *Controversy*, No. 26, November 1938, p. 278.

<sup>246</sup> See Borkenau, *World Communism*, pp. 213-20; Paul Levi (trans. David Fernbach), “Our Path: Against Putschism”, in *Historical Materialism*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (2009), pp. 111-45.

<sup>247</sup> See “Notes to the English Edition”, in Lukács, *History and Class*, p. 346.

<sup>248</sup> A theme in Soviet history, from Stalin turning to the Left after defeating the Leftist Trotsky to the policy of De-Stalinisation, first essayed by Beria, who was then, ironically, the major scapegoat in Khrushchev’s “Secret Speech”.

The Comintern underwent its first rightward shift shortly after Levi's expulsion in 1921, which was coincident with the introduction of the NEP in Russia. Borkenau, though, somewhat downplayed this connection, arguing that the rightward shift owed at least as much to the disastrous failure of the putschist tactics in Germany denounced by Levi. The extremists in the German Party (the Brandler-Thalheimer group) against whom Levi had polemicised, had recognised the foolishness of their revolutionary adventurism as soon as they were faced with its unhappy consequences and were converted overnight into "Right-wing" communists. Thus, the shift to the Right in the Comintern had been effected partly under the influence of the all-important German Party, Borkenau argued, and was not merely a reflex of the retreat from War Communism in Russia.<sup>249</sup> Further evidence of the relative independence of those European parties affiliated to the Comintern at that time, Borkenau added, was the fact that the shift to the Right was met with consternation in France and Norway, where communist leaders openly accused Moscow of treason.<sup>250</sup> In Germany, meanwhile, a new left-wing of the Party emerged (the Maslow-Fischer group), and a bitter period of factionalism developed between it and the formerly Left Brandler-Thalheimer faction.<sup>251</sup>

Much of the process of the Bolshevisation of the Comintern has been seen to have been driven from the centre.<sup>252</sup> The leaders of the E.C.C.I. were appointees first of Lenin and subsequently of Stalin.<sup>253</sup> The E.C.C.I was based in Moscow, where the Comintern's Congresses were also held. Member parties – often operating in conditions of illegality or semi-legality – were increasingly reliant on Russia for finance. However, Borkenau tended towards the view that Bolshevisation was a process gradually undertaken by the communist parties themselves. As revolutionary hopes diminished and the first wave of independent minded leaders like Levi were pushed out of communist parties, not only did the prestige of Russia grow in the minds of the remaining membership, he argued, but the desire to learn from and even ape the methods and tactics of the Bolshevik Party became irresistible. The "star of Moscow" rose as the hopes of revolution in Europe diminished.<sup>254</sup> Gradually, it became the "basic conviction of communism [everywhere]... that it needs only a truly Bolshevik party, applying the appropriate tactics in order to win".<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Borkenau, *World Communism*, pp. 222-3.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 227.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 236.

<sup>252</sup> See McDermott and Agnew, "Bolshevising the Comintern", in *Comintern*, pp. 41-80.

<sup>253</sup> In an aside, Borkenau suggested that, by his choice of mostly Russian appointees, Lenin unknowingly demonstrated the priority he gave to Russian affairs over the international matters. "Socialism in one country", Borkenau argued, was implicit in Lenin (Borkenau, *World Communism*, p. 268), who, to quote Lukács, did not cherish such "exaggeratedly sanguine hopes" as Trotsky about "the pace and tempo of the revolution". *History and Class*, p. xli.

<sup>254</sup> Borkenau, *World Communism*, p. 416.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 413.

Parties actually sought direction from Moscow, as in 1923, when Karl Radek gave the lead to the German Party's first foray into nationalist propaganda (discussed below).<sup>256</sup> In order not to lose their connection with the Russian centre, meanwhile, the leaders of the German Left, previously sympathetic with Trotsky over Stalin, declared against the former the moment they intuited his political eclipse.<sup>257</sup>

### Communism as a Moral Problem

Implicit in Borkenau's narrative – noteworthy in the context of his efforts to educate contemporary fellow-travellers about the history and sociology of communism – was the contention that Bolshevisation had ethical consequences. This was a message he would deliver much more explicitly in *European Communism* in the 1950s.

It was mainly the experience of those years [the 1920s] – the years when I myself had seen the Comintern operating from within – which made me conclude, in my first publication on this subject, that communism outside Russia was 'simply a failure'. Actually, the interest of Comintern history during those years... [consists] in the internal transformation of communism.<sup>258</sup>

A subtext can be garnered from a number of his remarks and anecdotes in the *Communist International*. The process of the subordination of Communist parties to the Russian centre, his narrative repeatedly implied, went together with the importation of Leninist principles into the European communist movement; principles sharply divorced not only from those of socialists and liberals enticed by the Popular Front, but of Western Civilisation. In his own case, as he would years later recall, the appeal of communism had stemmed from a violent resentment against a highly bourgeois upbringing; the "highest ideals" merging with the "greyest instincts".<sup>259</sup> Borkenau believed that Nechaev had provided Lenin with the organisational model for the Bolshevik Party, as discussed in the last chapter. But he also saw Lenin's communism as the heir of the Russian revolutionary movement in the ethical sense. It had the same "streak of moral indifference"; the same conviction that "in the service of the revolution, everything, absolutely everything, is permitted".<sup>260</sup>

In 1920, Lenin had adumbrated the moral precepts of communism in his polemic against the left-wing communists in Europe, in a work which Borkenau compared to *The Prince*.<sup>261</sup> Lenin had

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<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 245-8.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 256.

<sup>258</sup> Borkenau, *European Communism*, p. 50-1.

<sup>259</sup> Borkenau, "Nachwort", p. 258.

<sup>260</sup> Borkenau, *World Communism*, p. 24.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191.



begun by emphasising what the world communist movement must learn from the experience gained by Russian revolutionaries between 1905 and 1917:

As for teaching the fundamentals of political science to masses and leaders, to classes and parties alike, each month of this period was equivalent to an entire year of “peaceful” and “constitutional” development.<sup>262</sup>

He had also expounded on the knowingly deceitful methods to which communists must adhere. Against the ideologically pure left-wing communists in Germany, Holland and Britain, who, as a matter of principle, proposed a boycott of parliamentary and union activity, Lenin spoke of the utility of tactical compromises with “bourgeois” and “social chauvinist” enemies. The Left communists’ slogan, “no compromise”, Lenin argued, was obstinate and self-defeating “childishness”, and represented a deviation from revolutionary communism almost as serious as that of the “opportunism” of the “social chauvinist” leaders.<sup>263</sup> Naturally, Lenin despised parliamentarism and unionisation –stating that “hatred [of the bourgeoisie and “socialist traitors”] is truly the beginning of all wisdom” – but he recognised both as aspects of the bourgeois order which, palpably, still stood in Europe, and which he did not believe could be defeated from without.<sup>264</sup> He outlined the method of entryism (later put into practice in Britain by Harry Pollitt, as explored above), which had been tried and tested by the Bolsheviks in Russia, and defended Bolshevik revolutionary scheming from the counter charge of the Left radicals: that any tactical compromise amounted to “opportunism”.<sup>265</sup>

Naïve and quite inexperienced people imagine that the permissibility of compromise in general is sufficient to obliterate any distinction between opportunism, against which we are waging, and must wage, an unremitting struggle, and revolutionary Marxism, or communism.<sup>266</sup>

The Bolsheviks, he pointed out, had signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk – against the opposition of their own subsequently repentant Left wing – only to secure the respite from German imperialism which would allow them to continue to plot its demise; they had participated in the elections to the Constituent Assembly only to make the subsequent task of dissolving it more straightforward; and they had maintained their alliance with the Mensheviks only as a means to the end of destroying them. This was not capitulation or opportunism, but tactical shrewdness.

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<sup>262</sup> Lenin, “Left-Wing Communism”, p. 27.

<sup>263</sup> See Ch. VIII, “No Compromise”, in *Ibid.*, pp. 66-76.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>265</sup> On the proposal for the transference of entryist methods from Russia to the West, see *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

...there were periods of several years in which we were formally united with the Mensheviks in a single Social-Democratic Party, but we never stopped our ideological and political struggle against them as opportunists and vehicles of bourgeois influence on the proletariat.<sup>267</sup>

As Lenin put it in the conclusion of his polemic, it was “necessary to link the strictest devotion to the ideas of communism with the ability to effect all the necessary practical compromises, tacks, conciliatory manoeuvres, zigzags [and] retreats”.<sup>268</sup> And this was certainly approaching the doctrine of Nechaev. Borkenau made the point, hardly decisive, that Lenin never said a word against the author of the *Catechism of the Revolutionary* in any of his writings.<sup>269</sup> But he also emphasised the execution of Lenin’s brother – a convert, as a member of the Narodnaya Volya, to Nechaev’s ideas, and to terrorism in the service of the revolution – as the singular event which decided Lenin on his revolutionary path (Bertram Woolf later concurred).<sup>270</sup> The evidence of Nechaev’s influence on Lenin – and, thus, on the theory and practice of Bolshevism – has never been more than circumstantial. But Borkenau’s inferences agree with the assessment of Vladimir Bonch-Bruyevich, Lenin’s personal secretary, as quoted in a biography of Lenin published decades later:

Vladimir Ilyich often mentioned the cunning trick the reactionaries play with Nechayev, through the light-fingered hands of Dostoyevsky. He thought *The Possessed* a work of genius, but sickening, for as a consequence people in revolutionary circles have started to treat Nechayev negatively... All of Nechayev should be published. It is necessary to learn and seek out everything he wrote... and collect and print everything. And Vladimir Ilyich said these words many times.<sup>271</sup>

Borkenau recalled the Dutch communist Gorter’s remark that Lenin “saw all things only from the Russian point of view”, which was to say that East was East and West was West, and, for Lenin, the latter was “a book with seven seals”.<sup>272</sup> There was a connection between Lenin’s Russianness, Borkenau wanted to suggest, and his ethical outlook: the belief that what was expedient was what was moral. The Russian revolutionary movement had grown up in a *milieu* of illegality and brutal suppression. Nihilism was almost the major theme of Russian literature in the second half of the nineteenth century; while, in the West, Dostoyevsky was barely read before 1914.<sup>273</sup> In *European*

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<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>269</sup> Borkenau, *World Communism*, p. 25.

<sup>270</sup> Borkenau, *World Communism*, pp. 25-6. Bertram Woolf, *Three who Made a Revolution*, New York: Dial Press (1948), p. 42.

<sup>271</sup> In Robert Payne, *The Life and Death of Lenin*, New York: Simon and Schuster (1964), p. 34.

<sup>272</sup> Borkenau, *World Communism*, pp. 191 & 51.

<sup>273</sup> See Garth M. Terry, “Dostoyevsky Studies in Great Britain: A Bibliographical Survey”, in Garth M. Terry & Malcolm V. Jones (ed.), *New Essays on Dostoyevsky*, Cambridge University Press (1983), p. 216.

*Communism*, Borkenau would be a little more explicit about the civilisational chasm which separated Leninism and Western socialism.

Like many a Greek and Russian churchman before him, Lenin combined a dogmatic, hide-bound, and sterile approach to basic problems of human existence with immense energy... [and] with a ruthless, totally amoral, shrewdness in tactics... [His talent] operated only in his familiar Russian milieu... Although he lived for many years in England, France, Switzerland, and Austria... he did not understand the first thing about the labour movement in any of these countries.<sup>274</sup>

In the *Communist International*, Borkenau illustrated this by quoting Lenin's infamous injunction to the nascent British Communist Party: to make the same use of the Labour Party as the Bolsheviki had made of the Mensheviki.<sup>275</sup> They must...

...support Henderson in the same way as the rope supports a hanged man... [T]he impending establishment of a government of the Hendersons will... hasten the political death of the Hendersons and the Snowdens just as was the case with their kindred spirits in Russia and Germany.<sup>276</sup>

The Comintern, Borkenau argued, was the attempt to impose values forged in an alien civilisation upon the Western labour movement. Bolshevisation did not only mean political subordination to the E.C.C.I., Borkenau's argument ran, but spiritual capitulation to Lenin's amorality. This played out in Germany in the form of the 'Schlageter Campaign'. In 1923, Karl Radek delivered a eulogistic speech about a National Socialist terrorist, Albert Schlageter, who had been executed by the French for carrying out sabotage operations during the Ruhr Crisis. Radek's speech inaugurated the KPD's first foray into nationalist propaganda and unity with National Socialism, based on the belief that the Party could win the revolutionary forces of German nationalism to its own cause. Borkenau's purport, in recalling this episode, was to illustrate where the Machiavellian scheming of the German communists led them. First, to defeat. For "the weaker side never exerts attraction over the stronger one" and the Schlageter Campaign only buttressed the nationalist assault on the Republic which culminated in Hitler's Munich *putsch*.<sup>277</sup> But second, and of greater consequence, to disgrace. The "contrast between words and deeds", the heritage of Nechaev and Lenin, became the day-to-day practice of communism in Europe.<sup>278</sup> In a passage which would have

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<sup>274</sup> Borkenau, *European Communism*, p. 27.

<sup>275</sup> See Borkenau, *World Communism*, p. 234.

<sup>276</sup> Lenin, "Left-Wing Communism", p. 88.

<sup>277</sup> Borkenau, *World Communism*, p. 248.

<sup>278</sup> This was a phrase Borkenau used in response to a communist review of the book. See Borkenau, "Wintringham Interprets", p. 279.

seemed paradoxical to those readers in 1938 impressed by communist anti-fascism and the Popular Front, Borkenau wrote that,

Whether Stalin wants an alliance with the democratic countries or not is immaterial... The effect of communist ideals is to menace liberty and democracy; and in the end, in all likelihood, the effect of communist propaganda will have been to strengthen Fascism.<sup>279</sup>

Lenin was not the only expositor of the communist ideals with which Borkenau attempted to make his point to the Popular Front socialists – the Laskis and the Coles – who were willing to believe that a democratic transformation had occurred among the communists. To this end he quoted the Hungarian thinker whom he took to be Lenin’s most brilliant interpreter among the Central European intelligentsia – notwithstanding that his Hegelian idealism was considered heretical in the Soviet Union – Georg Lukács.<sup>280</sup> Lukács was recognised as a sociologist of renown in Germany, where, in Heidelberg before the Great War, he had already fastened on the saving “power of the Russian idea” as an alternative to Western civilisation.<sup>281</sup> He was, however, virtually unknown in the English-speaking world in 1938.<sup>282</sup> Indeed, what is now his most famous work, *History and Class-Consciousness*, was not published in English translation until 1971. It was, therefore, one of the ironic features of Borkenau’s study that it was among the first works written in English to pay tribute to Lukács’ intellectual gifts.<sup>283</sup> Borkenau credited Lukács, in the aforementioned essay collection, for being one of the first authors to recognise the import of Lenin’s theory of the vanguard, but also for bringing it to its “logical conclusion”, which was the identification of truth and morality with the Party. If the proletariat were burdened by a bourgeois *Weltbild*, “the Party must carry [it] along a course which it would not follow by itself”. In order to do this – owing to the bourgeois prejudices permeating them – “it is only natural that it should be necessary to mislead both the masses and the less initiated members of the party itself”.<sup>284</sup> As Lukács put it himself:

...because the party aspires to the highest point that is objectively and revolutionarily attainable... it is sometimes forced to adopt a stance opposed to that of the masses; it must show them the way

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<sup>279</sup> Borkenau, *World Communism*, p. 427.

<sup>280</sup> Zinoviev denounced Lukács’ deviationism in 1924. See Norman Levine, “Lukács on Lenin”, *Studies in Soviet Thought*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (1978), p. 19.

<sup>281</sup> See Müller, *Contesting Democracy*, p. 70.

<sup>282</sup> Proving Borkenau’s point that the young communist recruits of the 1930s had no knowledge of the history of their own movement, the International Brigade veteran, Tom Wintringham, in attempting to compare Borkenau’s exposition of Lukács’ “doctrine of wickedness” to the notorious conspiracy theory, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, pretended to “remember Lukács’ as an aesthete, critic, Marxist theoretician” while mistaking him for the “commander in battle worthy of the troops he led”, Béla Frankl, “killed leading the XII International Brigade”. Frankl had used the pseudonym Pál Lukács in Spain. Tom Wintringham, “Interpretative’ is a Polite Word”, *Controversy*, No. 25 (1938), p. 260.

<sup>283</sup> Perhaps as a subtle acknowledgment of this, George Lichtheim dedicated his 1970 biography of Lukács to Borkenau. George Lichtheim, *George Lukács*, New York: Viking Press (1970).

<sup>284</sup> Borkenau, *World Communism*, p. 173.

by rejecting their immediate wishes... only *post festum*, only after many bitter experiences will the masses understand the correctness of the party's view.<sup>285</sup>

As for the role of the professional revolutionary, Lukács emphasised the subordination of the “whole personality” to the Party, arguing that discipline corresponded dialectically to the Party's struggle for the “realm of freedom”.<sup>286</sup> While he sought vainly to synthesise Luxemburg and Lenin – overestimating the role of the Soviets in informing the decision making of the Russian Party – he followed Lenin, ultimately, in a quasi-mystical belief in the principle of leadership. The “selection of personnel” was, in the final assessment, the guarantee that the Party would always represent the highest level of class consciousness.<sup>287</sup>

Not only did Lukács arrive at the conclusion, which, Borkenau suggested, was latent in Lenin – that the vanguard, not the proletariat, was decisive in enacting the revolution prophesied by Marx – but he also imbibed and expanded on Lenin's Machiavellian approach to law and morality. Lenin's *Left-Wing Communism* had appeared in June 1920, and, in an essay dated July 1920, Lukács dialectically synthesised Lenin's two basic arguments – that left-wing communism and opportunism were two sides of the same coin; and that the combination of legal and illegal struggle was the correct course for a communist Party.<sup>288</sup> In their approach to legality, Lukács argued, infantile Leftism and opportunism appeared “diametrically opposed”, the former attached to the “romanticism of illegality” and the latter to the “cretinism of legality”.<sup>289</sup> But illegality as a fetish – encapsulated by the “grand gesture” of the terrorist – merely demonstrated an inverted attachment to law. “For to rebel against the law *qua* law, to prefer certain actions *because* they are illegal, implies for anyone who so acts that the law has retained its binding validity.”<sup>290</sup> The correct position of a communist with respect to the law was “complete indifference”. Communist practice was a “*mere question of tactics*” and the legality of a course of action should be simply disregarded as a consideration.<sup>291</sup>

For the Central European socialist movement as much as the Russian, legality had never been a possibility, which helps to explain why Lukács shared Lenin's lack of interest in it. But the failure of the Comintern, in Borkenau's view, derived from the Leninist tendency to underestimate the crucial differences between East and West. “The history of the Communist International is, largely,

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<sup>285</sup> Lukács, *History and Class*, p. 329.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 315-6 & 320.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 336.

<sup>288</sup> See “Legality and Illegality”, in *Ibid.*, pp. 256-71.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 265 & 270.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 263.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 264.

an instance of a clash of cultures,” he wrote.<sup>292</sup> The Heidelberg-trained Lukács, as Lichtheim showed in his biography, was a representative *par excellence* of the dialectical and metaphysical currents of German thought which met with such incomprehension in the Anglo-American world.<sup>293</sup> He was also, for Borkenau, a representative of the communist approach to morality, forged in the oppressive political contexts of Russia and of Central and Eastern Europe, which was similarly foreign to Borkenau’s British readers. The Hungarian Party returned to illegality after the downfall of Kun’s short-lived Soviet Republic – in which Lukács had served as Commissar of Education – in August 1919, and existed underground in Viennese exile during Hungary’s White Terror. It was during this period, Borkenau claimed, that Lukács gave the most vivid expression to the Nechaevian nihilism which Lenin’s writings only hinted at.

In an article written by Ilona Duzcinska, one of Lukács’ close collaborators in the Viennese circle, published after Duzcinska had been expelled as an associate of Levi in 1921, she credited him with outlining the “secret doctrine” which was the “quintessence of true communism”: the “dialectical theory of wickedness”.<sup>294</sup> According to her article, which Borkenau gave a precis of in English, Lukács had explained that it was “the highest duty [of communist ethics] to accept the necessity of acting wickedly”, explaining that the “conviction of the true communist is that evil transforms itself into bliss through the dialectics of historical evolution.”<sup>295</sup> Lukács had in fact committed this doctrine to print as early as 1918, when it was meant as a rebuke, because he had yet to join the Party. He considered Bolshevism a “moral problem”, as it “rests on the metaphysical notion that good can come from evil, that it is possible... to lie ourselves through to the truth [and that] liberty can be attained through oppression”.<sup>296</sup> In 1919, when he had come to terms with the moral problem, he would explain it – aptly, through an example from Russian revolutionary history – as a tragical conflict between two rights. Taking the memoirs of the Russian terrorist Boris Savinkov as his inspiration, Lukács argued that “ethical self-awareness makes it quite clear that there are situations — tragic situations — in which it is impossible to act without burdening oneself with guilt”.<sup>297</sup> Savinkov had to choose between the ethical imperative not to commit murder and the

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<sup>292</sup> Borkenau, *World Communism*, p. 26.

<sup>293</sup> Lichtheim, *Lukács*, p. 25.

<sup>294</sup> In Borkenau, *World Communism*, p. 173.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.* Duzcinska was not the only one of Lukács associates to have credited him with this theory. In *The Magic Mountain*, Thomas Mann based the demonic Naphta, for whom the proletariat’s “task is to strike terror into the world for the healing of the world”, on Lukács. See Müller, *Contesting Democracy*, p. 69.

<sup>296</sup> Quoted in Paul Le Blanc, “Spider and Fly: The Leninist Philosophy of Georg Lukács”, *Historical Materialism*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (2013), p. 50.

<sup>297</sup> George Lukács, “Tactics and Ethics”, in Rodney Livingstone (ed.), *Lukács: Political Writings 1919-1929*, London: New Left Books (1972), p. 10.

“higher ideal” which was an “imperative of the world historical situation”.<sup>298</sup> Lukács gave a startlingly precise justification for the divorcing of words and deeds. The ethical dialectician...

...sacrifices his inferior self on the altar of the higher idea... [For] only he who acknowledges unflinchingly and without any reservations that murder is under no circumstances to be sanctioned can commit the murderous deed that is truly — and tragically — moral.<sup>299</sup>

The Bolshevisation of the Communist Parties, Borkenau argued, went together with their gradual moral debasement. Beneath the welter of shifts from Left to Right, from social fascism to Popular Front, the real moral content of communism was reduced to Lukács’ injunction that *all was permissible* in the service of the Party and the cause. Only the most disciplined, or, by another measure, the least scrupulous elements could remain in the Party for any significant length of time, which partially explained the tremendous failure of the Comintern up to 1934. By an analysis of the organisation’s own published figures, Borkenau was able to demonstrate that the mass membership of the communist parties shifted continuously with the changing lines and tactics.<sup>300</sup> By the commencement of the Popular Front period, though, he argued, the leadership – the small central committees tasked with carrying through Moscow’s demands – had been utterly hardened on the Leninist model:

...the communist parties... transformed themselves into quasi-military organizations ready to obey anything... [A]t the top... every single man likely to oppose orders had been weeded out. They had become an obedient army of crusaders, listening to the orders of their Fuhrer only.<sup>301</sup>

### British Communism and the War

That the CPGB had been successfully moulded into a Leninist Party was suggested by its conduct in the years 1939-41, when it followed a policy of revolutionary defeatism on the model of Lenin’s demand to “turn the imperialist war into a civil war”.<sup>302</sup> But it was symptomatic of the tendency of Popular Front intellectuals to look upon communism as a progressive force which occasionally lapsed or fell into error, that this episode tended to be viewed by them as a betrayal of shared principles, rather than, as Angelo Tasca’s study of the French CP during that period phrased it, merely the ordinary practice of *A Communist Party in Action*.<sup>303</sup> In May 1940, Victor Gollancz published a pamphlet addressed to the Communist Party which asked: *Where are you Going?*<sup>304</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>300</sup> See Borkenau, *World Communism*, Ch. XXI, “The Structure of the Communist Parties”, pp. 357-75.

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 375.

<sup>302</sup> See Borkenau, *European Communism*, p. 244. Also see Francis King (ed.), *About Turn: The British Communist Party and the Second World War*, London: Lawrence & Wishart (1990).

<sup>303</sup> Rossi, *Communist Party*.

<sup>304</sup> Gollancz’s pamphlet was reprinted as the first essay in Gollancz (ed.), *Betrayal*, pp. 3-47.

Quoting Comintern denunciations of fascism from before the Nazi-Soviet Pact, he recalled that, during the Popular Front days, “so many of our immediate practical objectives (and not only these) were, or seemed to be, identical”.<sup>305</sup> While he denounced the policy of revolutionary defeatism being followed by the Communist Party, he was not prepared to believe that communists had really reneged on the humanitarian principles to which they had claimed to adhere only shortly before. Gollancz asked them to “pause... and think yourself back into those” halcyon days, and appealed to them to consider whether they were prepared to risk “the destruction of the Western Labour Movement, and of the great civilisation of which it is a part” in the name of the Party line.<sup>306</sup>

The pamphlet was reprinted in *The Betrayal of the Left*, in which the founders of the LBC each offered their assessment of the “betrayal” of the British communists. Laski began his preface by paying communism a complement for its past. The “Communist Parties of the world”, he wrote, “had rendered a supreme service to the working-classes by their [former] insistence that there could be no compromise with fascism”. As if to suggest that *that* was the real communism, he wrote that it was “tragic indeed” that such a book should have become necessary.<sup>307</sup> Like Gollancz, Laski was regretful, not for his naivety, but for the breakdown of what he had supposed to have been a sincere anti-fascist alliance. Gollancz, meanwhile, remained almost sycophantic towards the former allies whose policy he nevertheless pilloried brilliantly. Their policy, he stressed on several occasions, employing a qualification familiar to communists, was “objectively” pro-Nazi, in that its consequences could only be injurious to the British cause and beneficial to Germany. Subjectively, however, he remained convinced that communists were sincere (but misguided) humanitarians.<sup>308</sup> George Orwell, whose relationship with Gollancz had been strained since the latter’s rejection of *Homage to Catalonia*, had been invited to contribute two essays to the book. But when he wrote that the “Communists [aim] to spread disaffection in the Nazi interest”, Gollancz appended a censorious footnote “to dissociate [him]self from the words ‘in the Nazi interest’, unless the word ‘objectively’ is understood, as no doubt the author intends”.<sup>309</sup>

What Borkenau had attempted to demonstrate in his book was that communists were animated, subjectively, neither by the principles they espoused during the Popular Front period, nor by the opposite principles with which they made Germany’s case against “British imperialism” from 1939 to 1941. All communist practice was subterfuge, such that it made little sense for those who

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<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3 & 45.

<sup>307</sup> “Preface”, in *Ibid.*, p. xi.

<sup>308</sup> See, for example, “Editor’s Forward”, in *Ibid.*, p. ix.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238.



accepted their alliances to subsequently accuse them of “betrayal”. Rather, as Hobsbawm, himself a communist during those periods, later put it:

The Party... had the first, or more precisely the only real claim on our lives. Its demands had absolute priority. We accepted its discipline and hierarchy. We accepted the absolute obligation to follow ‘the lines’ it proposed to us... Whatever it had ordered, we would have obeyed... If the Party ordered you to abandon your lover or spouse, you did so.<sup>310</sup>

It is unsurprising that Borkenau would later be so impressed by Tasca’s study, which used the literature produced by the French Communist Party to demonstrate the fluidity of its “Party line” through the War period.<sup>311</sup> The Popular Front allies of communism became critics when the communists changed their line, but were reluctant to consider the possibility that communists were not actually animated by a set of shared socialist principles which remained constant regardless of the political context. Hence the bemusement implicit in the question, *Where are you Going?*

Borkenau would criticise the same tendency among conservative and Catholic anti-communists who saw the Comintern as “the shape of the devil in our present time” and focussed their critique on what they saw as the original sin of Marxism.<sup>312</sup> Rather, Borkenau argued, the communism of the Bolsheviks and the Comintern was a totalitarian political movement, and the critique of it had to begin with the acknowledgement that it was inherently unstable, rather than ideologically consistent. By his presentation of it, communism was animated by an absolute “opportunism” (in the ordinary, non-Leninist, sense of the word), just as Kautsky had argued in 1920, which judged any means acceptable in pursuit of an ill-defined but unobtainable end – utopia.<sup>313</sup> Since the goal was unobtainable, policies would always fail, and the movement would be compelled to try opposite ones. “The movements of communism proceed with an increasing momentum... every turn to the left or right exceeds the previous one in vehemence.”<sup>314</sup> Lenin’s principle of the elite – a vanguard uncorrupted by the bourgeois consciousness of society – was supposed to be the secret of success. Thus, the failure of each policy implied the failure of leadership, through deviation, wrecking, sabotage and betrayal. In cyclical motion, scapegoats were purged, and policies were overturned.<sup>315</sup> Such was Borkenau’s explanation of the logic of the Great Terror, which was proceeding through its most orgiastic stage just as he was finishing the book. Communism’s “only

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<sup>310</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times: A Twentieth Century Life*, New York: Pantheon Books (2003), pp. 134-5.

<sup>311</sup> Tasca (pseud. A. Rossi) actually wrote two studies on the French CP during the War. In English translation, Tasca’s studies were condensed into one book, *A Communist Party in Action* (cited above). Borkenau cited Tasca repeatedly on France in *European Communism*, and also wrote of “Angelo Rossi’s two masterpieces on the history of French communism” on the first page of his Preface to that book. See Borkenau, *European Communism*, p. 13.

<sup>312</sup> Borkenau, *World Communism*, p. 11.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 176-8; Kautsky, *Terrorism and Communism*, p. 199.

<sup>314</sup> Borkenau, *World Communism*, p. 414-5.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 176-8.

constant”, he would write after the War, was “its boundless dynamism”. Far from being a fixed and unchanging entity, it was a “wild storm-tide”.<sup>316</sup>

### The Nazi-Soviet Pact and the Division of the Powers

Shortly after the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, Borkenau started work on the *Totalitarian Enemy*, a book which, it has been pointed out, pre-empted the notion of totalitarianism dominant in the Cold War period, which linked Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union as collectivist states ruled by oligarchical elites.<sup>317</sup> Looked at in the context of the time, the book allowed Borkenau to expand his criticism of the now waning Popular Front outlook. In the *Communist International*, he had used the history of the Comintern to critique the trust placed in communists by the Popular Front Left. Now he returned to criticism of the Right vs. Left, fascism vs. democracy worldview which he had earlier challenged by his distinction between Francoism and fascism in the *Spanish Cockpit*. The *Totalitarian Enemy* countered the ideas on which the hope of collective security had been built: that the Soviet Union was an inheritor of the Western progressive tradition with which a meaningful alliance could be sustained; and that the conflict of the age was that waged by fascism (otherwise known as “German monopoly finance capitalism”) against the democratic and socialist (the U.S.S.R) states.<sup>318</sup> Instead, he argued, the Soviet Union was a totalitarian power which had found an international alliance suited to its internal political regime. The division of the powers crystallised the character of the War. It was an ideological war; “a conflict between the democratic and totalitarian types of regime”.<sup>319</sup>

This called for a reassessment of the popular theory which originated as the communist interpretation of fascism. Namely, that fascism was the last stage of capitalism. The theory, as explained by John Strachey in a post-war essay about Koestler’s *Darkness at Noon*, suggested:

that Fascism was no accidental catastrophe but the logical and inevitable consequence of ‘capitalism-in-decay’. Nazi Germany, with its psychopathic propensity for both internal violence and external aggression, was seen as the exemplar which each and every capitalist society must soon imitate if such societies were left in existence.<sup>320</sup>

The corollary to this view, Strachey continued, was the idea that Soviet communism represented the only “way out for mankind”.<sup>321</sup> If all capitalist societies were following the same course of

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<sup>316</sup> Franz Borkenau, “Von Marx bis Stalin”, *Der Monat*, Vol. 1, No. 5 (1949), p. 100.

<sup>317</sup> See Jones, *Lost Debate*, pp. 118-9.

<sup>318</sup> This was how Strachey continued to characterise Nazism. See “The People’s Convention”, in *The Betrayal of the Left*, p. 157.

<sup>319</sup> Borkenau, *Totalitarian Enemy*, p. 7.

<sup>320</sup> John Strachey, *The Strangled Cry: and other Unparliamentary Papers*, London: Bodley Head (1962), p. 17.

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

development, the export of communism to Europe was the sole defence against fascism. There was “no conclusive answer”, as Strachey put it, to Koestler’s Stalinist interrogator, Gletkin, when he explained that the only moral duty of the “Bastion” [the Soviet Union] was “not to perish”.<sup>322</sup> On account of this view, neither the Nazi-Soviet Pact nor the subsequent invasions of Poland and Finland completely undermined the pro-Soviet outlook of Left intellectuals in Britain. In the *Betrayal of the Left*, Gollancz, Strachey and Laski each offered charitable interpretations of Stalin’s decision making. The Pact, in their view, was motivated by the same central consideration as Collective Security had been: to prevent (or delay) Hitler’s offensive against the Soviet Union.<sup>323</sup> Similarly, the invasions of Poland and Finland were viewed as a means of fortifying the borders of the socialist sixth of the world.<sup>324</sup> The Pact and the invasions were defended not only on the grounds of *realpolitik*, but also on the basis that the survival of the “bastion” would prevent the future fascisation of the world. Though he considered the following hypothetical justification for the Pact to be utterly misguided, Gollancz allowed for the possibility that:

The Soviet Union may have pursued this policy from the conviction that to keep out of a major war at all costs, and so to be able to defend the Socialist fatherland when the test came, must ultimately be for the greatest good of the working classes of all countries, whatever the cost to them now.<sup>325</sup>

By contrast, Borkenau argued that the Pact cleared up a “great many misconceptions [which] had arisen out of the view commonly held that Fascism and Communism were deadly enemies, and their hostility was the crux of world politics to-day”.<sup>326</sup> Firstly, it “brought out the essential similarity between the German and the Russian systems”; and secondly, it breathed new life into the idea that liberty was the essential ingredient, deep in the foundations of Western Civilisation, which held that civilisation together in spite of the great antagonisms which divided its political forces.<sup>327</sup> Borkenau framed the war as a struggle against the totalitarianisation of the world, offering a novel interpretation of history which set the concept of ‘totalitarianism’ against the commonly understood meaning of the term ‘fascism’. Rather than the most aggressive means by which capital defends itself against socialism and the working-class movement, Borkenau used ‘fascism’ virtually as a synonym for ‘totalitarianism’, which had nothing to do with capitalism, but was the designation

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<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 16 & 18.

<sup>323</sup> “I can well understand why the politics of the appeasement era led Stalin to the conclusions he then formed”, wrote Laski. *Betrayal*, p. 18.

<sup>324</sup> “The same basic aim – to keep out of major war – explains the invasions of Poland and Finland: for Russia was... making an attack on her by a great power less probable,” Gollancz reasoned. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>326</sup> Borkenau, *Totalitarian Enemy*, p. 7.

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13-4.

for states which had established “collectivism” through “tyranny”.<sup>328</sup> Bolshevism was “Red Fascism” as Nazism was “Brown Bolshevism”, which was to say that both were species of totalitarianism.<sup>329</sup> These latter had been fringe terms in Britain, previously associated with “anti-Bolshevik communists” like Otto Rühle, and Christian commentators like William Henry Chamberlin in the United States.<sup>330</sup> But Borkenau suggested that there should no longer be any cause for embarrassment in using them.<sup>331</sup>

Instead of the forces of capitalism instituting fascism as a last and most extreme form of defence against socialism, totalitarianism, Borkenau argued, arose as a revolution against the liberal world which had been engulfed in crisis since 1914. “It is in the first place not as a conquering empire, but as a force of world revolution, that Nazism and Communist Russia confront Western Civilization.”<sup>332</sup>

Neither the Russian nor the German revolution originated primarily in specific national conditions. Both were results... of one and the same crisis... which has held the world in its grip since 1914... It is quite immaterial, when we take a wide view, that the Russian revolution occurred in an earlier, and the German revolution in a later stage of it. For the basic reasons are in both cases the same: the collapse of the liberal, free-trade society of the nineteenth century... The World War was an international fact, and there would not have been a Bolshevik revolution without it. The economic crisis was an international fact, and there would not have been any German revolution without it.<sup>333</sup>

In both the Russian and the German cases, the Revolutions were carried through, not by an existing class (though Borkenau noted wryly that “Colonel Blimp and the University Labour Federation” continued to believe in the proletarian character of the Bolshevik Revolution), but by a new elite.<sup>334</sup> In the Russian case, this was the Bolshevik Party which had been specifically imagined and constructed by Lenin as a classless cohort of professional revolutionaries. The core of the Nazi Party, meanwhile, were a motley group of down-and-outs, *déclassé* in the mobbish sense

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<sup>328</sup> See the chapters “Towards Collectivism” and “The New Tyranny” in *Ibid.*, pp. 69-104 & 146-69. This was a reversal of the early usage of the term ‘totalitarianism’ in the 1930s, which, as Jones notes, was mainly used as a substitute term for ‘fascism’, and thus linked to the idea of reactionary capitalism. See Jones, *Lost Debate*, p. 89.

<sup>329</sup> Borkenau, *Totalitarian Enemy*, p. 20.

<sup>330</sup> See Paul Mattick, *Anti-Bolshevik Communism*, London: Merlin Press (1978); Jones, *Lost Debate*, pp. 110-1; & Thomas R. Maddux, “Red Fascism, Brown Bolshevism: The American Image of Totalitarianism in the 1930s”, *The Historian*, Vol 40, No. 1 (1977), pp. 85-103.

<sup>331</sup> Borkenau, *Totalitarian Enemy*, p. 13.

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 211-2.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 218.

in which Marx had used the word.<sup>335</sup> Nor did either of the two revolutions limit themselves to oppressing or eradicating one particular class (although, in focussing on class, Borkenau certainly exhibited a blind-spot with regard to the Nazi commitment to anti-Semitism).<sup>336</sup>

In Borkenau's presentation, the Russian Revolution began as a social revolution – with Terror and the expropriation and forced exile of the wealthier classes – but the Bolsheviks later came into conflict, also, with the working class, hence the slogan of the Kronstadt rebels: “Soviets without Communists”.<sup>337</sup> From 1929 – the year in which, with the commencement of collectivisation in the countryside, Russia's totalitarian revolution was finally completed, according to Borkenau – the elite successfully opposed its own interests to that of each section of the most numerous population group in Russia: the peasantry.<sup>338</sup> Nazism arose with the “spurious claim to fight Bolshevism”, but gradually undertook the *gleichschaltung* of all sections of society.<sup>339</sup> It collectivised the working class, instituting a form of state sponsored semi-slavery in which industrial workers lived in barracks, subsisted on starvation wages and lost the liberty to change jobs, so that their condition began to resemble that of forced labourers in concentration camps, and, indeed, that of the industrial workers of Russia. With the Four-Year Plan, meanwhile, the Nazis turned private enterprise to the demands of rearmament and state planning, so that the individual capitalist became a state employee in a managerial capacity.<sup>340</sup>

In both cases, then, Borkenau's argument ran, the new ruling elite opposed its own interests to those of all classes, in the same way in which religion and all non-Nazi or non-Bolshevik cultural expression was suppressed in both countries.

The general rule... is that totalitarian governments can have two forms: in more highly developed countries they emerge from deadlocks in the political struggle, and they superimpose a new ruling political gang over the old ruling classes, which they only gradually permeate and destroy. That is the Nazi type of development... In backward countries brand-new ruling classes are likely to emerge... from the beginning.<sup>341</sup>

While the theory that capital would institute fascism to ward off the threat posed by proletarian revolution implied the need to defend the land where the workers held power, Borkenau argued

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<sup>335</sup> The Nazi leading group is analysed for traces of psychopathy, “insanity”, drug addiction and (perhaps reflective of the homophobic context of the times) sexual perversion. *Ibid.* See esp. pp. 168 & 213. On drug addiction, see Norman Ohler, *Blitzed: Drugs in Nazi Germany*, London: Penguin (2017).

<sup>336</sup> Elsewhere, however, he had predicted that the Nazis' scapegoating of the Jews would lead to a massacre comparable to the Armenian genocide. Borkenau, *New German Empire*, p. 132.

<sup>337</sup> Borkenau, *Totalitarian Enemy*, p. 216.

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 224-5.

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>340</sup> See the chapter “Nazi Economics” in *Ibid.*, pp. 32-68.

<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 236.

that the Pact between Russia and Nazi Germany should disabuse all observers of the notion that such was actually an accurate characterisation of the Soviet Union. Indeed, the pact exploded the “campaign of lies” in which German and Russian propaganda had equally engaged, that either regime was a bulwark against the class-forces represented by the other one.<sup>342</sup> To the Blimpish argument that communism might win in Germany if the Nazis were ousted, Borkenau countered that it was the Nazis themselves who were introducing communism.<sup>343</sup>

Borkenau’s central theory of communism and of fascism, which is to say of totalitarianism – as it emerged from *Pareto*, from the *Communist International* and finally from the *Totalitarian Enemy* – was that it was the regime of a new elite, a group which grows up in the bosom of the old society, outside of all classes.<sup>344</sup> The idea that the totalitarianism was classless had the implication, for Borkenau, that the fight against it necessitated the *unity* of all classes.

The counter revolution [against totalitarianism is] ... not the revolution of one class or group... it is a reassertion of the independence and the liberty of action of all of them, against a common foe.<sup>345</sup>

Jones has argued that the book consummated Borkenau’s break from socialism.<sup>346</sup> Certainly, he had given explicit support to class cooperation over class struggle. But he also called for the healing of the crisis of liberal society on the basis of a fairer and more egalitarian settlement, which amounted to a dialectical incorporation of the aspects of totalitarianism he judged to be inevitable developments of modern civilisation. Influenced by Karl Mannheim’s contemporaneous writings, Borkenau shared in the widespread belief that economic planning, for instance, was a necessary development towards which all societies were driving.<sup>347</sup>

It has been noted that Borkenau’s book was overtaken by events when, in June 1941, Hitler launched his invasion of the Soviet Union and Churchill welcomed the latter into the Grand Alliance.<sup>348</sup> But, in his analysis of the historical forces which brought the Nazi and Soviet regimes to power, Borkenau had exploded the twin myths that Bolshevism was the revolution of the proletariat and Nazism was the counter-revolution of the forces of capital. He had also opened

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<sup>342</sup> Borkenau, *Totalitarian Enemy*, p. 249.

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238

<sup>344</sup> This was an argument advanced also by James Burnham, in a book published in the United States at around the same time. *The Managerial Revolution*, New York: John Day (1941).

<sup>345</sup> Borkenau, *Totalitarian Enemy*, p. 250.

<sup>346</sup> Jones, *Lost Debate*, p. 119.

<sup>347</sup> “The breakdown of liberalism,” Borkenau wrote in his review of Mannheim’s *Diagnosis of Our Time*, “is too complete for any doubt to remain about the need for planning”. See Franz Borkenau, “Some Recent Books”, *Dublin Review*, July 1943, p. 87.

<sup>348</sup> See Lowenthal, “Introduction”, p. 6.

the door to the idea that the relevant ideological division of the age was that between the totalitarian powers and the liberal democracies, something even Strachey was prepared, tentatively, to consider.<sup>349</sup> In emphasising “the difference between capitalism and socialism”, Strachey conceded in a 1941 essay entitled “totalitarianism” (the first time Strachey had used the term in print), one must not neglect the “difference between democracy and dictatorship”.<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>349</sup> I am not arguing that Borkenau was alone in this contention. Plenty of political books in the 1930s had defined democracy vs. dictatorship as the major issue of the time (Halevy, *Era of Tyrannies*, for example). But this was not the case on the Popular Front Left which Borkenau addressed in the introduction to the book. On the Popular Front Left, the problem of dictatorship in the Soviet Union had been minimised or overlooked before the Nazi-Soviet Pact, and was once again after 22 June 1941. See, for instance, Harold Laski, “The End and the Means”, in *Faith, Reason and Civilisation*, London: Gollancz (1944), pp. 167-82. “The attempt... to identify the Bolshevik variant of Marxism with the doctrine of Mussolini or of Hitler seems to me monstrous error”. The latter were “erected in the name, and with the assistance, of the forces of privilege”, while Bolshevism “denied the claim of those who by the ownership of property... dominate the habits of society” (pp. 168-9). While F. A. Voigt had denounced Leninism and Hitlerism as twin variants of Caesarism in 1938 [F. A. Voigt, *Unto Caesar*, New York: Putnam & Sons (1938)], Laski complained that “historians of Rome praise Julius Caesar... for ending the ugly anarchy of the Republic... But when Lenin achieved the same result, his creation of order becomes at once ‘tyranny’” (p. 170).

<sup>350</sup> Strachey, “Totalitarianism”, in *Betrayal*, p. 204.

## Chapter III: Vansittartism and Internationalism: 1940-1945

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*We gain nothing... by thinking of the post-war international problem in terms of a fixed German "national character" the traits in which are excessive aggressiveness, excessive arrogance, and an excessive obedience to the orders which are imposed upon it. These are no more inherent in the German than snobbishness is inherent in the Englishman, or pioneering in the American, or clarity in the Frenchman. – Harold Laski (1943).<sup>1</sup>*

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### Introduction

Borkenau published five books in the space of less than three years from 1937-40. By contrast with this prolific haul, supplemented by several journalistic articles and book reviews, some uncredited assistance to Arnold Toynbee in the production of his “Annual Surveys of International Affairs”, and, with Eric Mosbacher, the translation of Jose Blázquez’s Spanish Civil War memoirs, his output for the entire decade from 1940-50 was rather meagre.<sup>2</sup> For this reason, previous treatments of Borkenau’s work have largely overlooked the war years, tending to jump from the theory of totalitarianism established in the *Totalitarian Enemy* to Borkenau’s post-war involvement in the Cultural Cold War.<sup>3</sup>

By paying some attention to the war years, I hope to be able to show that some of the major intellectual disputes of the Cold War period can be seen in their germinal stages during the World War. Indeed, Borkenau had already attracted controversy – his 1942 Labour Book Service (LBS) tract, *Socialism: National or International?*, upsetting the General Secretary of the Labour Party so much that he only agreed, reluctantly, to its publication after a critical introductory note by Leonard Woolf had been added.<sup>4</sup> The book also provoked a review laden with *ad hominem* attacks by Harold Laski in the *New Statesman*.<sup>5</sup> Borkenau’s 1941 book is a useful representative text by which to show that Cold War controversies over foreign policy on the British Left began as contrary wartime visions about what the post-war world would look like. Some of these visions issued, in part, out of the opposition of socialist intellectuals to the phenomenon of ‘Vansittartism’ – the wartime conflation of Nazism and Germany. In particular, Borkenau’s response to Vansittartism is revelatory about the shaping of his post-war political positions.

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<sup>1</sup> Harold Laski, *Reflections on the Revolution of our Time*, London: George Allen & Unwin (1943), p. 226.

<sup>2</sup> Blázquez, *I Helped Build an Army*. On Borkenau’s assistance to Toynbee, see Arnold Toynbee to Esther Simpson, 23 August 1940, Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MS. S.P.S.L. 348/8-12.

<sup>3</sup> Jones, *Lost Debate*; Jones, “The Path”; Kessler, “Between communism”.

<sup>4</sup> Borkenau, *Socialism*. See James Middleton to T. M. Ragg, 9 February 1942, Routledge & Kegan Paul (RKP) Archive, University of Reading Special Collections, RKP 169-4.

<sup>5</sup> Harold J. Laski “A Convert”, *New Statesman and Nation*, 25 Apr 1942, p. 277.



As in the interwar period, it remains correct to view Borkenau within the Left/socialist milieu in the war years. He was writing mainly for left-leaning publications like *Tribune* and *Horizon*, as well as Leonard Woolf's *Political Quarterly* and the *Dublin Review* and *Tablet* (these latter two – the former under Christopher Dawson's wartime editorship – were the major organs of Catholic anti-fascism). He was also lecturing for the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) and, as already mentioned, his only (post-internment) wartime book was published by the LBS. Nevertheless, Borkenau clearly aspired to the Weberian ideal of the detached, scientific observer, unencumbered by ideological commitments. "The sociologist is not concerned with wishes", he wrote, but "with facts, and with trends past and present".<sup>6</sup> Whether such an ideal was possible of attainment – especially for somebody whose subject matter was contemporary politics – had been doubted, some years earlier, by Karl Mannheim.<sup>7</sup> In any case, during the Popular Front years, Borkenau had had significant differences with the schools of socialism which had identified their cause with the Soviet Union. Though these tended to be the same groups and individuals who most vigorously opposed Vansittartism (an anti-Vansittartist Left) – and therefore shared Borkenau's aversion to the idea of 'punishing Germany' – he continued to disagree with them about the international post-war alternative. Borkenau's outlook was, however, somewhat closer to that of some of the moderates and up-and-coming revisionists in the Labour Party. In an attempt to show where Borkenau belonged, politically speaking, at this time, I have outlined some of the links between Borkenau and the revisionist movement in the first part of this chapter. I have attempted to show the similarities, for instance, between texts by Borkenau and Evan Durbin, pointed out at the time by Richard Crossman, and have also traced Borkenau's influence on Patrick Gordon Walker.

In contrast to scholarship on the political Left in the 1930s, which has tended to focus more on the interlinked categories of the Left intelligentsia, the Popular Front, anti-fascism, Communism and the far-Left than on the Labour Party itself, scholarship on the political Left in the 1940s has been heavily weighted towards the Labour Party in power, especially the domestic policies of the government.<sup>8</sup> Areas of interest have included debates over planning and public ownership; the

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<sup>6</sup> Borkenau, *Socialism*, p. 157.

<sup>7</sup> Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*.

<sup>8</sup> As Ward lamented in 2002, the historiography of the Labour moderates of the 1930s was still built on biographies, their importance having been overlooked in favour of various facets of the "red decade". See Paul Ward, "Preparing for People's War: Labour and Patriotism in the 1930s", *Labour History Review*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2002), pp. 171-185 (Biographical portraits include: Ben Pimlott, *Hugh Dalton: A Life*, London: J. Cape (1985); Stephen Brooke, "Problems of 'Socialist Planning': Evan Durbin and the Labour Government of 1945", *Historical Journal*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (1991), pp. 687-702). The reason for this is, perhaps, fairly obvious. Labour went into political eclipse in 1931, and, as Rowse disapprovingly recalled, the "left intellectuals... [moved] much to the fore where publicity was concerned" (*Man of the Thirties*, pp. 2-3). The situation was reversed when Labour came to power in 1945. Churchill and the Tory press had attempted to run against the relatively insignificant Labour Left and made much of the revolutionary rhetoric of Party chair Harold Laski. Owing to the image problem Laski was causing the Party, Attlee famously asked him to commit to "a period of silence" shortly after becoming Prime Minister. See Isaac Kramnick and Barry Sheerman, "Labour's

establishment of ‘consensus politics’; the role of the public in shaping the socialist policies of the Attlee government; and the implications of the growth of sociological interest in the British working class.<sup>9</sup> The domestic focus is unsurprising, since the Party was quite open in its view – adumbrated by Francis – that “foreign affairs were an area of policy... at the mercy of outside developments” to which it would be “impossible to sustain or indeed define a distinctly socialist approach”, and the Labour government was challenged by contemporary detractors on the Left for its parochialism.<sup>10</sup> It is remembered for its transformational domestic impact, and for its role in turning the Empire into the Commonwealth, but not so much for its influence in Europe, from which, arguably, it retreated. Such was, for instance, the estimation of McKibbin, who argued that Labour all but abandoned internationalism when it came to power in 1945.<sup>11</sup>

However, with the emergence of the Cold War, foreign policy became a major source of conflict among socialist intellectuals and parliamentarians. Scholarship on the Cultural Cold War has shown that debates and divisions which became more pronounced after 1947 had begun in the crucible of the anti-Nazi struggle. As Wilford, for instance, has demonstrated, foreign policy was an important source of the revisionism of the ‘Gaitskellites’, many of whom were just setting out on their political careers during the War.<sup>12</sup> The origins of ‘Bevanism’, also, can be traced to debates about foreign policy, its leading lights Richard Crossman and Michael Foot having announced their discontent with the Atlantic Alliance in their influential 1947 pamphlet, “Keep Left”.<sup>13</sup> Intriguingly, Borkenau’s writings – which did not have much to say about domestic issues – had considerable influence upon the revisionist Patrick Gordon Walker and the more chameleon-like Crossman. In 1940, Crossman heralded Borkenau’s conclusions in the *Totalitarian Enemy* as the basis of a potential new “political faith” for the Labour Party, comparing its tone to that of contemporaneous books by Labour parliamentarian Hugh Dalton and up-and-coming revisionist Evan Durbin – demonstrating, perhaps, that Crossman was more closely aligned with the

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Triumph and a Period of Silence”, in *Harold Laski: A Life on the Left*, Harmondsworth: Penguin (1993), pp. 479-515. On the 1930s, see Corthorn, *In the Shadow*; Jupp, *Radical Left*.

<sup>9</sup> See Steven Brooke, *Labour's War: The Labour Party During the Second World War*, Oxford: Clarendon (1992); Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945*, London: Cape (1975); Steven Fielding, Peter Thompson & Nick Tiratsoo, *'England Arise!'*, *The Labour Party and Popular Politics in 1940s Britain*, Manchester University Press (1995); the articles on the Labour Party in Harriet Jones and Michael Kandiah (eds.), *The Myth of Consensus. Contemporary History in Context Series*, London: Palgrave Macmillan (1996); Alexandre Campsie, “Mass-Observation, Left Intellectuals and the Politics of Everyday Life”, *English Historical Review*, Vol. 131, No. 548 (2016), pp. 92–121.

<sup>10</sup> Martin Francis, *Ideas and Policies under Labour, 1945-51: Building a New Britain*, Manchester University Press (1997), pp. 9-10. Francis was summarising the argument of an official Party publication: Denis Healey, *Cards on the Table*, London: Labour Party (1948). On Labour’s “parochialism”, see Arthur Koestler’s criticism at the Berlin CCF in 1950: “An Outgrown Dilemma”, in *Trail of the Dinosaur*, London: Hutchinson (1970), p. 122.

<sup>11</sup> Ross McKibbin, *Parties and People: England 1914–1951*, OUP (2010), pp. 146-8.

<sup>12</sup> Wilford, *The CIA*.

<sup>13</sup> Crossman et. al., *Keep Left*.

revisionists during the War than he was after it.<sup>14</sup> Crossman's judgement probably influenced the decision of the LBS selectors in approaching Borkenau. He had been a long-time admirer of Borkenau, and had posed the question, in a review of the *Communist International*, whether it was a coincidence that its author and Arthur Rosenberg, the two "outstanding historians" of communism, were both renegades. By contrast, when Crossman came to review *European Communism* in 1953, he argued that Borkenau's status as an ex-communist inhibited his ability to maintain objectivity on the subject – a strange conclusion, given that Crossman had been the guiding spirit behind the *cris de coeur* of ex-communism, the *God that Failed*.<sup>15</sup>

Early scholarship on Vansittartism emphasised that its advocates were mainly to be found among conservatives, and that its most vocal opponents tended to be socialists or, in some notable cases, prominent Christians.<sup>16</sup> Tombs, however, subsequently showed that Vansittartism also made significant headway among socialists.<sup>17</sup> Recent scholarship on socialist internationalism has provided more detail about the conflict over the German question within the Labour Party and among socialist exiles in Britain.<sup>18</sup> To a large extent, the wartime debate over Vansittartism was an intra-Left one. An exclusively international issue, it was also an important avenue for some of the earliest intra-Left clashes over post-war foreign policy and ideas about the German and European future. Though the socialist and Christian response to Vansittartism has now received plenty of historical attention, Borkenau's essays on German historicism, Prussianism and Lutheranism have not previously been consulted as sources.<sup>19</sup> His response to Vansittartism has also been neglected by scholars who have previously written about his work. His was a less moralistic response than those inspired by religious or socialist ideology. He took the idea of German history as a factor in the emergence of National Socialism seriously, in much the same way as later historians like George Mosse and Hans Kohn – and, indeed, Gordon Walker – did.<sup>20</sup> An analysis of his writings adds

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<sup>14</sup> Richard Crossman, "Faith of British Socialism".

<sup>15</sup> Crossman, "Books in General"; Crossman (ed.), *God that Failed*.

<sup>16</sup> See Aaron Goldman, "Germans and Nazis: The Controversy Over "Vansittartism" in Britain during the Second World War", *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (1979), pp. 155-191; Hedva Ben-Israel, "Cross Purposes: British Reactions to the German Anti-Nazi Opposition." *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (1985), pp. 423-438.

<sup>17</sup> Tombs, "Socialist Vansittartism".

<sup>18</sup> Talbot Imlay, "Reconstituting the International, 1940-1951", in *The Practice of Socialist Internationalism: European Socialists and International Politics, 1914-1960*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2017), pp. 263-308; Ettore Costa, "From the Old International to the New Internationalism (1940-45)", in *The Labour Party, Denis Healey and the International Socialist Movement: Rebuilding the Socialist International during the Cold War, 1945-1951*, London: Palgrave (2018).

<sup>19</sup> See Rainer A. Blasius, "Waiting for Action: The Debate on the 'Other Germany' in Great Britain and the Reaction of the Foreign Office to German 'Peace-Feelers', 1942", in Francis R. Nicosia and Lawrence D. Stokes (eds.), *Germans Against Nazism: Nonconformity, Opposition and Resistance in the Third Reich: Essays in Honour of Peter Hoffmann*, Oxford: Berghahn (2015), pp. 279-304.

<sup>20</sup> G. L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology*, New York: Grosset & Dunlop (1964); Hans Kohn, "Is the Free West in Decline?" in *Political Ideologies of the Twentieth Century*, New York: Harper & Row (1966), pp. 249-64. Gordon Walker will be discussed below.

something important to the picture of Vansittartism, demonstrating that it was not simply a black and white conflict between those who held the Germans *in toto* in contempt and those whose moral sensibilities were, for good reason, repulsed by that attitude. Borkenau's writings on the subject show that it was possible to reflect, seriously, on German history without succumbing to crude theories of eternal German infamy. Vansittartism should also be seen as a major aspect of the context in which Borkenau's only book from this period, *Socialism: National or International*, was composed. It was in that book that he argued for a benign post-war Anglo-American Empire, while treating as illusions the ideas of a federated and socialist Europe which were common among other left-wing opponents of Vansittartism.

### A Labour Revisionist?

Borkenau was much less prolific in the 1940s than he had been in the latter years of the previous decade. War work, monitoring German propaganda for the BBC, and post-war work with DANA, the US occupation government's news agency in Germany, occupied time that might have been spent on personal projects. But before any of that, he was kept idle for fourteen months on account of the British government. In June 1940, Borkenau was arrested in the round-up of 'Enemy Aliens' which followed the French collapse. Had he been interned in Britain, he would have been free by October, when the order for his release was given.<sup>21</sup> Instead, he was deported on the *HMT Dunera* to Australia, where he lived in an internment camp for almost a year, the first transport back to Britain not departing until June 1941, arriving in August. This protracted absence from London caused the cancellation of the contract for a book Borkenau had discussed with R. H. Tawney and agreed to write for the LBS on the topic of "democratic socialism in action", a provisional title which offers a clue as to Borkenau's political sympathies at that time.<sup>22</sup>

There does not appear to have been any historical treatment of the LBS, which is, perhaps, the measure of its failure to play any noticeable role in winning converts to the Party. Given that the ineffective LBS appears to have been conceived as a direct challenge to what its founders considered the irresponsible revolutionism of the Left Book Club (LBC), it is ironic that historians of the latter have backed-up John Strachey's claim that it had inculcated a public enthusiasm for socialism which cannot be discounted as a factor in the outcome of the 1945 general election.<sup>23</sup> A

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<sup>21</sup> See Esther Simpson to Borkenau, 18 August 1941, Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MS. S.P.S.L. 348/8-12.

<sup>22</sup> See T. M. Ragg to J. S. Middleton, 3 September 1941, RKP Archive, RKP 169-4.

<sup>23</sup> See Stuart Samuels, "The Left Book Club", *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1966), p. 78; Gordon Barrick Neavill, "Victor Gollancz and the Left Book Club", *Library Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (1971), p. 214. As Kingsley Martin commented in the *New Statesman*, the first announcement of the founding of the LBS coincided with a letter from Labour's NEC to constituency parties regarding "the embarrassing activities of the Left Book Club" whose local groups were reported to be being used for the purposes of communist infiltration. This was April 1939, before the relationship between the Left Book Club's three primary selectors – Gollancz, Laski and Strachey – and the Communist Party was damaged by the Nazi-Soviet Pact. Martin unequivocally backed the LBC, noting that "Transport

further layer of irony is that a big part of the reason for the LBC's relative success vis-à-vis the LBS, is that the former was founded in 1936, and achieved its highest levels of subscriptions in the pre-war years, when it was operating in the conditions of a free market. Wartime paper rationing imposed limits on all publishers, but it has been shown that the newly formed Ministry of Information (MI) was able to give a boost to books or pamphlets it considered of particular propaganda value, by such means as making available additional allocations from reserve stocks of paper.<sup>24</sup> The LBS, through its publisher, Routledge, tried unsuccessfully to gain the MI's favour by appealing to Graham Greene, who was in charge of its Books department.<sup>25</sup> Though Beers has argued that 1945 was a consummation of the success of Labour's propaganda efforts before and during the War years, the LBS was not one of the Party's more successful ventures.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, books were not one of the facets of Labour's propaganda strategy considered by Beers, who judged the Party's courting of the popular press and the shrewd way in which it associated its policies with the recommendations of the Beveridge Report as its major accomplishments.<sup>27</sup> And the LBS was not the only socialist publishing effort to fail to live-up to a grand wartime mission. Frederick Warburg's Searchlight Books, inaugurated by George Orwell's the *Lion and the Unicorn*, succeeded in producing only a handful of titles printed in small quantities before it folded.<sup>28</sup> The kinds of materials the MI preferred for domestic propaganda were patriotic but predominantly trivial, unpolitical texts which emphasised British national identity, usually with pictorial accompaniments. The MI-inspired series "Britain in Pictures", which included such titles as *British Dogs* and *British Herbs and Vegetables*, is a monument to its saccharine – if not necessarily misconceived – notion of the "best kind of propaganda".<sup>29</sup> What the LBS does represent, however, is a political fightback by Transport House and its moderate version of democratic socialism against the Popular Front Left of the 1930s, which suggests it as an intriguing topic of inquiry for future studies of the British Left in wartime.<sup>30</sup>

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House smells communism everywhere and prefers stagnation to having any truck with socialists". See "A London Diary", *New Statesman*, 1 April 1939, p. 487. Wilson Harris also regarded the founding of the LBS as the announcement of a "Battle of the Book Clubs". See Janus, "A Spectator's Notebook", *Spectator*, 24 March 1939, p. 474.

<sup>24</sup> See Valerie Holman, "Carefully Concealed Connections: The Ministry of Information and British Publishing, 1939-1946", *Book History*, Vol. 8 (2005), p. 212.

<sup>25</sup> See T. M. Ragg to Graham Greene, 24 July 1940, RKP Archive, RKP 153/11 (1-3).

<sup>26</sup> See Laura Beers, "Labour's Britain, Fight for It Now!", *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 52, No. 3 (2009), pp. 667–95.

<sup>27</sup> Thorpe also notes the success of Labour's political myth-making. The influential *Guilty Men* instilled the idea that the appeasing Conservatives were entirely responsible for the War into the popular imaginary. See Andrew Thorpe, *Parties at War: Political Organization in the Second World War*, Oxford University Press (2009), p. 5.

<sup>28</sup> See Costello, "Searchlight Books".

<sup>29</sup> See Michael Carney, *Britain in Pictures: A History and Bibliography*, London: Werner Shaw (1995), p. 28.

<sup>30</sup> Thorpe, *Parties at War*, looks at political organisation and how the party struggle was conducted in the context of the wartime electoral truce. But Labour was also conducting an internal political struggle against its own left-wing, as it had in the 1930s.

The provisional title for Borkenau's abandoned project is intriguing, given that it was being discussed around April 1940, shortly after Evan Durbin's *Politics of Democratic Socialism*, had been published as the inaugural offering of the second incarnation of the LBS.<sup>31</sup> The similarity of the titles suggests that Tawney saw Borkenau's projected book as something like an addendum to Durbin's. Indeed, Crossman had remarked, in his review of the *Totalitarian Enemy*, on the similarity between Borkenau and Durbin's tone. The *Totalitarian Enemy*, however, was quite a different text to the *Politics of Democratic Socialism*, Durbin having been concerned with sketching a programme for the Labour Party, while Borkenau was analysing the totalitarian regimes. However, Durbin's book included a chapter (citing Borkenau's *Communist International*) attempting to debunk the communist approach to socialism, in which he connected communism and fascism by highlighting the pivotal role of hatred in both ideologies.<sup>32</sup> This chimed with Borkenau's claim that Nazi and Bolshevik psychology both boiled down to "simple concentrated hate".<sup>33</sup> Durbin, like Borkenau, was also careful to judge Marx's ideas as products of their nineteenth century context. He noted that, while it might have appeared to Marx that society was growing increasingly proletarian and that more and more people would be pushed into wage slavery, it was obvious in 1940 that such had not been the case for some time. Conversely, he argued, society had been growing "increasingly bourgeois" for several decades.<sup>34</sup> The recognition of this, Durbin felt, was the recognition that theories of class conflict were outdated, and its advocates would be compelled to reject democratic means because they would have no hope of commanding a majority.<sup>35</sup> Both books, finally, had attempted to deal with the problem of how 'socialistic' ends, which had been reached more completely in Russia and Germany – the socialisation of industry, economic planning, etc. – could be achieved democratically.<sup>36</sup> Given its programmatic purpose, Durbin's text was much more detailed on these points, but Borkenau – who, it is fair to say, was not a programmatic writer, and who was perhaps incapable of getting down to the finer points – was far livelier.

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<sup>31</sup> Adverts taken out in various magazines in February 1940 announced the launching of the LBS, with Durbin's book as the first title. The service had published several books in 1939, but had suspended its activities with the outbreak of the war. See "Their Recruits Will be Armed with Books", *Daily Herald*, 14 March 1940, p. 7; "Advertisement", *Spectator*, 16 February 1940, p. 223.

<sup>32</sup> See E. F. M. Durbin, "Introduction: The Dictatorship of the Proletariat", *Politics of Democratic Socialism*, London: Routledge (1940), p. 151.

<sup>33</sup> Borkenau, *Totalitarian Enemy*, p. 137.

<sup>34</sup> Durbin, *Democratic Socialism*, p. 112. Also see Borkenau, *Totalitarian Enemy*, p. 199: "Society did not break up into two opposite camps, one small camp of capitalists and one enormous camp of exploited proletarians."

<sup>35</sup> Durbin, *Democratic Socialism*, pp. 204-5.

<sup>36</sup> See Durbin, "Part V: The Strategy of Democratic Socialism", in *Democratic Socialism*, pp. 283-324; also see Borkenau, "Conclusions", *Totalitarian Enemy*, pp. 239-254.

Durbin was an LSE economist who had written several papers on the technical aspects of planning, but he was less suited to popular writing than Borkenau. Brooke has noted that one of the earliest judgements of Durbin, in a university journal reviewing his efforts in debates at Oxford, where he read PPE, was that he was “very good and very dull by turns”.<sup>37</sup> Borkenau, as an ex-revolutionary with a penchant for paradox and a dialectical turn of mind, did not suffer from this deficit. Indeed, it was his style as much as his arguments that earned him the admiration of literary writers like Orwell and V. S. Pritchett.<sup>38</sup> In the conclusion of the *Totalitarian Enemy*, Borkenau had introduced the idea of an anti-totalitarian “counter-revolution”, which, in an Hegelian rather than a restorative (reactionary) sense, would incorporate the “inevitable” historical trends – namely, economic planning and the extension of the power of the state – which had received their clearest expression in the totalitarian regimes.<sup>39</sup> Britain, with its traditions of compromise and piecemeal reform, and its expanding civil service, would take a leading role in effecting this synthesis of the necessary aspects of the new world with what remained valuable of the old one – the traditions of personal liberty and spiritual freedom which had been thrown to the wind in the messianic “fever” of the “totalitarian revolution”.<sup>40</sup> In what could be considered a tradition of Marxist writers, Borkenau supported his argument by invoking the parallel of the French revolution, which had irreversibly altered the political and, especially, the economic landscape of Europe, even while the messianic and extreme anti-religious ideas of the Jacobins had failed to take permanent hold.<sup>41</sup>

Clement Attlee was keen for LBS books to be distributed among the armed forces, where he hoped that they would help to inculcate Labour values.<sup>42</sup> But to achieve any kind of popular readership, the LBS would need authors with popular appeal. Its selectors seem to have shared Crossman’s view that Borkenau was the kind of imaginative writer who could help to enunciate the “political faith” of the Party in a way that the likes of Durbin, Walter Citrine and Hugh Dalton were incapable of doing:

Though it may be impolitic for Labour leaders to say so publicly, I fancy that here for the first time their philosophy is expressed, with all the hard brilliance which we have come to associate with the

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<sup>37</sup> Stephen Brooke, “Evan Durbin: Reassessing a Labour ‘Revisionist’”, *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (1996), p. 33.

<sup>38</sup> See Pritchett’s description of the “elegant” style of the *Spanish Cockpit* (V. S. Pritchett, “Spain Against Europe”, p. 341). Also see Orwell’s praise of Borkenau’s style in his review of the *Communist International*: “It is a most encouraging thing to hear a human voice when fifty thousand gramophones are playing the same tune”. In Orwell & Angus (ed.), *An Age Like This*, p. 388.

<sup>39</sup> Borkenau, *Totalitarian Enemy*, pp. 239–40.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 241–3.

<sup>42</sup> See, “The Post-War World”, *Manchester Guardian*, 16 January 1941, p. 4.

critics of Transport House... What they distrust in practice, he exposes as theoretical clap-trap, what they pursue as *ad hoc* policy, he expounds into a philosophy of British counter-revolution.<sup>43</sup>

Ellis has recently argued that more attention should be paid to continental influence on the revisionist movement within the Labour Party. Challenging what she called the “insularity” paradigm of British socialism assumed by authors of standard works like Jackson and Morgan, she focussed on Anthony Crosland’s wartime infatuation with Lucien Laurat’s *Marxism and Democracy*.<sup>44</sup> Unlike Borkenau, Laurat tended to appeal to the authority of Marx to justify his arguments.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, his central thesis, that it was “democratic Socialism which has the right to claim the authority of Marx and Engels, not Bolshevism”, reflected the feelings of the likes of Crosland and Durbin, that Labour moderates ought to have greater confidence in their position, and should put it across in a more forthright manner.<sup>46</sup> Borkenau was undoubtedly another notable continental influence on the Labour revisionists. Reviewing Borkenau’s Anschluss book, *Austria and After*, Hugh Gaitskell noted that Borkenau “act[ed] as a guide” for English readers on contemporary continental dramas: “After Spain, Austria”.<sup>47</sup> In the Labour newspaper, the *Daily Herald*, meanwhile, Borkenau’s *bona fides* as “an Austrian and a democrat” were credited for helping him write the “best epitaph of the Austrian State”.<sup>48</sup>

#### Borkenau and Patrick Gordon Walker

One future Labour revisionist upon whom Borkenau made a big impression was Patrick Gordon Walker, who had been a history tutor at Christ Church throughout the 1930s, had taught himself German when he spent a year in the country in 1930/31, and had been much impressed by Borkenau’s book on the rise of the bourgeois world view. Surprisingly, there has been no biography of Gordon Walker (barring short entries in encyclopaedias and dictionaries of national biography), despite a long political career in Labour Cabinets and Shadow Cabinets, including a brief spell as Foreign Secretary in the first Wilson government. His political diary is a useful source on his activities, and also contains a biographical introduction.<sup>49</sup> His neglected historical writings, meanwhile, are demonstrative of the extent to which he was influenced by the writings of emigres.

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<sup>43</sup> Crossman, “Faith of British Socialism”, p. 466.

<sup>44</sup> Catherine Ellis “‘The new Messiah of my life’: Anthony Crosland’s reading of Lucien Laurat’s *Marxism and Democracy*”, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (2012), pp. 189-205. See also Kenneth O. Morgan, *Labour People: Leaders and Lieutenants*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (1987); Jackson, *Equality*. Jackson did give significant attention to the influence of Marxism on the British Left, but Ellis’s overall point was that historians have neglected to study the real-time influence of continental thought on the British Left in the 30s and 40s.

<sup>45</sup> See Ellis, “The new Messiah”, p. 195.

<sup>46</sup> Lucien Laurat, *Marxism and Democracy*, London: Gollancz (1940), p. 141.

<sup>47</sup> Hugh Gaitskell, “Post Mortem on Austria”, *New Statesman and Nation*, 25 June 1938, p. 1084.

<sup>48</sup> W. N. Ewer, “Austrian Epitaph”, *Daily Herald*, 13 July 1938, p. 17.

<sup>49</sup> Robert Pearce, “Introduction”, in R. Pearce (ed.), *Patrick Gordon Walker: Political Diaries 1932-1971*, London: Historians’ Press (1991), pp. 1-53.



Borkenau's influence can be seen both in Gordon Walker's approach to history and to contemporary politics. It will be useful to look briefly at Gordon Walker's historical outlook, even if it represents a slight digression, as Borkenau's writings can be seen to have influenced him away from an orthodox Marxist materialism. I will then return to the apparent impact on Gordon Walker of Borkenau's thesis about totalitarianism: that it was a parody of Marxian revolution.

In a 1937 paper, Gordon Walker had cited Borkenau's critique of the "*isolierend-kausal*" method by which Max Weber had arrived at the conclusion that the capitalist spirit had grown out of the protestant ethic. Weber believed that he had shown that the material structure of society had grown out of the religious ideals of Protestantism, thereby disproving the material conception of history. As Borkenau wrote in criticism:

Ideologies are certainly important in history, otherwise they would not arise. [But] if one looks for their effects without seeking their causes – that is the essence of the isolating method – this will inevitably result in positive refutations of the materialist concept of history.<sup>50</sup>

Following Borkenau, Gordon Walker pointed out that Weber's inquiry had proceeded *from* the protestant ethic – the outlook Weber had seen as essential to the rise of capitalism – but had overlooked the factors that led to the growth of the ethic itself. Gordon Walker argued that a major cause of the Reformation had been economic imperatives associated with the Price Revolution, and that Weber would therefore have been less able to throw out historical materialism if he had examined the historical origins of Protestantism.<sup>51</sup>

But Gordon Walker took a more nuanced position on historical materialism in 1951, when he published his only major theoretical work. It was a heavy-going treatise on the dilemma of liberty, which, for Gordon Walker, was an entirely modern one, inextricably linked to the bourgeois view of the world which had been given its first systematic expression by Descartes.<sup>52</sup> Many historians of the "scientific revolution" had concluded that the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries marked a consciousness shift in Western Europe; that the outlook of the philosophers and the natural scientists amounted to a novel picture of the world, diverging dramatically from the religiously conditioned outlook of the Middle Ages.<sup>53</sup> In the new picture, God is gradually superseded by mathematical and mechanistic explanations of motion. While Copernicus posited the mechanistic operation of the universe, Descartes brought all matter into the mechanistic picture, including the

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<sup>50</sup> F. Borkenau, "The New Morality and the New Theology", in N. Birnbaum & G. Lenzer (ed.), *Sociology and Religion: A Book of Readings*, Englewood, N. J.: Prentice-Hall (1959), p. 285.

<sup>51</sup> Patrick Gordon Walker, "Capitalism and the Reformation", *Economic History Review*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (1937), pp. 5-6.

<sup>52</sup> Patrick Gordon Walker, *Restatement of Liberty*, London: Hutchinson (1951).

<sup>53</sup> Herbert Butterfield, *The Origins of Modern Science*, London: G. Bell & Sons (1949) is the classic statement of this view.

human body. But he separated mind, which he considered the only substance not subject to mechanistic determinism. For Gordon Walker, Descartes' dualism was the root of the idea of "man the measurer". *Res extensa* (matter) can be measured; *res cogitans* (mind) measures.<sup>54</sup>

Gordon Walker saw the mechanistic, deterministic picture of Descartes as the grounding for all subsequent Western political thought. The heirs of the Cartesian age, he argued, were unable to think outside of its categories; Cartesianism was the "second nature" of Western man.<sup>55</sup> Dualism, however, had created a problem for the political philosophers, Gordon Walker argued. If mind stood outside of mechanistic nature, then it could not itself be measured. Neither human beings nor society could, therefore, be studied; there could be no psychology, nor sociology. If, on the other hand, there was no distinction between mind and matter, mind, also, would be subject to strict determinism.<sup>56</sup> For Descartes, the will could only be exercised through the mind, which was the only substance not subject to the laws of nature; for Marx, not even the mind was free from the mechanical laws of nature. By discarding dualism, then, Gordon Walker argued, materialists like Marx extended Cartesian determinism.<sup>57</sup> In other words, Gordon Walker saw Materialism as the consummation of the mechanical world picture. He now viewed the materialist conception of history itself as a method with a specific historical provenance. Materialism could only have arisen in the Cartesian universe in which everything in nature is held subject to mechanical laws. He had become an advocate of the historical method – the only one which permitted the historian to see beyond the mental picture of their own age.<sup>58</sup>

Gordon Walker's choice of Descartes as the representative figure of the modern mental revolution seems to have been a conscious siding with Borkenau in the continental Marxist debate over the origins of the modern *Weltbild* which had taken place in the early 1930s. With a 1931 study on the socio-economic roots of Newton's "mechanistic" thought, the Soviet historian of science Boris Hessen had inaugurated a new direction in the history of science, one which emphasised the interplay between societal and scientific development.<sup>59</sup> Borkenau concurred with Hessen's approach, but he put special emphasis on Descartes, whose philosophy, in Borkenau's reading, was an unconscious reflection of the position of the alienated individual in what Marx and Kautsky had called the *Manufaktur*, the period in which the division of labour had first been introduced in Europe and the artisan of the Middle Ages had begun to be displaced by the unskilled worker.

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<sup>54</sup> Gordon Walker, *Restatement*, p. 80.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, p. 120.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 74-5.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 90-91.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 97-98.

<sup>59</sup> Boris Hessen, "Social and Economic Roots of Newton's Principia", in *Science at the Cross Roads*, London: Kniga (1931), pp. 149-212.

This was the moment when quantity drove out quality; when, in Marxist terms, Labour became subject to “reification”, defined by Petrovic as the “transformation of human beings into thing-like beings which do not behave in a human way but according to the laws of the thing-world”.<sup>60</sup> Following Marx, Borkenau believed that the modern age began at the period of the reification of all human existence.<sup>61</sup>

Borkenau cited Descartes’ four rules in the *Discourses* – in which the French philosopher had insisted on breaking problems down to their simplest parts and proceeding from those simple parts to complex solutions (rules 2 and 3) – as a direct analogy to the division of labour.<sup>62</sup> Borkenau also saw the growing practice of calculation in early capitalism as crucial to Descartes’ division of the primary from secondary (sensory) qualities of objects. He saw Descartes as a representative of a growing tendency to reduce all quality to quantity. For Descartes, only quantifiable qualities like shape, size and weight were real (primary); by contrast, such qualities as colour, smell and taste derived not from the object itself but from our sense perception.<sup>63</sup> This “reduction of everything to quantity”, in Segev’s paraphrasing of Borkenau, “is the realization of the main principle of capitalism”.<sup>64</sup> For Borkenau, Descartes’ philosophy corresponded to the “undeniable mechanistic fatality of bourgeois fate”.<sup>65</sup> “Nothing,” Descartes had written, “lies entirely within our power except our thoughts”.<sup>66</sup>

Shortly after the publication of Borkenau’s *Transition* in 1934, Henryk Grossman had savaged Borkenau’s ideas about the influence of the *Manufaktur* period on the new vision of reality.<sup>67</sup> Borkenau had deliberately discounted the influence of machines on the mathematical-mechanistic *Weltbild*, arguing that complex machines (and the systematic use of machines in the production process) only came later. In other words, for Borkenau, machines were the outcome, rather than the cause, of the new outlook. Grossman, by contrast, claimed that the use of machines could be traced back at least to the early sixteenth century, and they could be shown to have influenced the way of thinking about the world of representatives of that period like da Vinci. Even in Descartes’s

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<sup>60</sup> See Gajo Petrovic, “Reification”, in Tom Bottomore *et al.* (eds.), *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, Harvard University Press (1983): Accessed online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/petrovic/1983/reification.htm>.

<sup>61</sup> See Tashjean, “Borkenau on Marx”, p. 151. Tashjean notes that while Marx borrowed the labour theory of value from the “bourgeois” economist, Ricardo, the difference was that Ricardo saw it as a timeless economic law, while Marx saw it as an economic law *only* under the historical situation of capitalism.

<sup>62</sup> See Alon Segev, “Franz Borkenau: Cartesianism and the exploitation of man and nature”, in *Political Readings of Descartes in Continental Thought*, London: Bloomsbury (2019), p. 127.

<sup>63</sup> See *Ibid.*, p. 126.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>65</sup> Franz Borkenau (*trans.* Richard Hadden), “The Sociology of the Mechanistic World-Picture”, *Science in Context*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1987), p. 120.

<sup>66</sup> Rene Descartes, “Discourse on Method” in *Discourse on Method and Meditations*, New York: Dover (2003), p. 19.

<sup>67</sup> Henryk Grossman (*trans.* Gabriella Shalit), “The Social Foundations of Mechanistic Philosophy and Manufacture”, *Science in Context*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1987), pp 129-180 [1935].

writings, Grossman countered, the camera obscura and the clock were given explicit reference, while there was nothing overt about the division of labour.<sup>68</sup> There were two major aspects of the Grossman-Borkenau divergence, then. The first was the question of periodisation. As Freudenthal has put it, the “differences... are already conspicuous in the identification of the decisive historical turning point to be studied: it is Leonardo da Vinci in Grossmann, Descartes in Borkenau, and Newton in Hessen.”<sup>69</sup> Here, Gordon Walker clearly followed Borkenau. The second aspect was the division of opinion over the nature of the causal relationship between machines and mechanistic thinking. Again, Gordon Walker adopted Borkenau’s position, citing the latter’s observation that the seventeenth century was peculiarly lacking in inventions.

Because the seventeenth century was the great age of mechanistic thinking it is commonly assumed that it was also the age of mechanistic invention, as would be natural had the machine produced mechanistic thinking. In fact, of all modern centuries, it was the poorest in invention.<sup>70</sup>

Gordon Walker’s footnotes show that he based his ideas on the rise of the mechanistic *Weltbild* on two main sources, Borkenau and Lewis Mumford. Mumford had made a similar argument to Borkenau in his much more famous *Technics and Civilization*, published, like Borkenau’s book, in 1934:

[M]en had become mechanical before they perfected complicated machines to express their new bent... Behind all the great material inventions of the last century and a half was not merely a long internal development of technics; there was also a change of mind. Before the new industrial processes could take hold on a great scale, a reorientation of wishes, habits, ideas, goals was necessary.<sup>71</sup>

Mumford had also appropriated Marx on the *Manufaktur* to show how the use of the machine in the production process had grown out of the division of labour:

Manufacture, that is, organized and partitioned handwork carried on in large establishments with or without power-machines, broke down the process of production into a series of specialized operations. Each one of these was carried on by a specialized worker whose facility was increased to the extent that his function was limited. This division was, in fact, a sort of empirical analysis of the working process, analyzing it out into a series of simplified human motions which could then

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<sup>68</sup> See Segev’s commentary, “Cartesianism”, pp. 129-31.

<sup>69</sup> Gideon Freudenthal, “Introductory Note”, *Science in Context*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1987), p. 105.

<sup>70</sup> Gordon Walker, *Restatement*, p. 237.

<sup>71</sup> Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* (7<sup>th</sup> ed.), London: Routledge (1955), p. 3.

he translated into mechanical operations. Once this analysis was performed, the rebuilding of the sequence of operations into a machine became more feasible.<sup>72</sup>

But, unlike Borkeu, Mumford did not discuss the thought of the philosophers of the seventeenth century as something linked to this process. It can only, therefore, have been Borkeu from whom Gordon Walker took the idea of Descartes as the indispensable philosopher of what, in a 1966 article for *History Today*, he called “the machine age”.<sup>73</sup> George Lichtheim, perhaps because he was the only reviewer familiar with Borkeu’s book, was the only one who noticed its influence on *Restatement of Liberty. Transition*, he wrote, “seems to have made a profound impression on Mr Gordon Walker, for he adopts its central argument”.<sup>74</sup>

There had been a political aspect in Grossman’s rebuttal of Borkeu. His letters to Max Horkheimer have only recently been published, and have not formed part of previous discussions on the subject. Grossman described Borkeu as an “insufferable renegade”, “dangerous” and “capable of anything”.<sup>75</sup> His critique of Borkeu was considerably longer than Horkheimer had requested, but he fought hard to ensure it was published in full, lest Borkeu “squirm out” of facing the criticism by being able to claim that the Institute had considered any part of it unfair. He hoped that his criticism of Borkeu would have the same effect as a polemic he had written against an Austrian economist in 1916:

You do not know my past and do not know that I have fought through in many discussions with success... My book... directed against Professor Gürtler of Graz... was devastating for Gürtler. He could not prove a single sentence wrong and for this reason he was finished as a scholar [and] turned to politics.<sup>76</sup>

Confirmation, for Grossman, of Borkeu’s dangerous tendencies was a lecture he gave to the Institute of Sociology at Le Play House upon his return from his first trip to Spain in September 1936. For his criticism of the government side, Borkeu was an “outspoken fascist”.<sup>77</sup> A hint as to why Grossman held such a strong personal antipathy is contained in the use Gordon Walker made of Borkeu’s thesis about the role of the manufacture process in the development of the bourgeois worldview. Though, as has been shown in a recent commentary on Borkeu’s

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 145-6.

<sup>73</sup> Patrick Gordon Walker, “Origins of the Machine Age”, *History Today*, 1 September 1966, pp. 591-600. As is, hopefully, obvious from the above, what Gordon Walker meant by “the machine age” diverges from what historians of late nineteenth century industrialism mean by the term.

<sup>74</sup> George Lichtheim (*pseud.* G. L. Arnold), “The New Commonwealth”, *Twentieth Century*, Vol. 151, January 1952, p. 59.

<sup>75</sup> Henryk Grossman, “Letters to Max Horkheimer”, in Rick Kuhn (ed.), *Henryk Grossman Works, Volume 1*, Leiden: Brill (2019), pp. 411 & 413.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 413-14.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, p. 423.

treatment of Descartes, his whole argument about the impact of the *Manufaktur* on seventeenth century thought can be traced back to a number of Marx's suggestions on the subject, it nevertheless conflicted with another view, suggested, arguably, by a more orthodox reading of Marx.<sup>78</sup> As Hadden, who attempted to revive Borkenau's ideas in the 1990s, put it:

Borkenau's position opposes both the liberal self-understanding of science as the application of freed-up human reason to nature, and the orthodox Marxist conception of science as the appropriation of the properties of nature in response to the economic, productive needs of the dominant class.<sup>79</sup>

Gordon Walker and Grossman seem to have concurred that Borkenau's was the more subversive of the two readings of Marx – suggesting, as it did, the interplay of material and intellectual factors in the process of historical change. For Grossman, this was a reason for censure. He developed a visceral hatred of Borkenau because he saw his book as an insidious attempt to smuggle Weberian idealism into a publication funded by Horkheimer's Marxist Institute.<sup>80</sup> Gordon Walker, though, approved of what he saw as Borkenau's corrections of the Marxist view, just as he had, earlier, approved of Borkenau's critique of Weber's isolating method. In his *History Today* article, he began by contrasting what he clearly took to be Marx's view with what he saw as the corrective. In his book, he had cited Borkenau as the source for the “proof” offered below:

Because we see the machine reshaping society and changing men's habits and ways of life, we are apt to conclude that the machine is, so to speak, an autonomous force that determines the social superstructure. This was the Great hypothesis of Karl Marx.

In fact, things happened the other way round. One proof of this is that the factory came into existence before the machine.<sup>81</sup>

While Borkenau's book was undoubtedly a major influence on Gordon Walker's approach to history – and to Marxism – the future Labour Foreign Secretary's émigré connections of the 1930s and 40s unquestionably influenced the development of his future political outlook. The work on which Gordon Walker had drawn most heavily in *Restatement* was the *Civilizing Process*, the treatise written by Borkenau's friend Norbert Elias, who had been a student of Mannheim in Frankfurt.<sup>82</sup> Elias's work, originally published in German by a Swiss publisher in two volumes in 1938/39, was

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<sup>78</sup> Segev, “Cartesianism”.

<sup>79</sup> Richard Hadden, *On the Shoulders of Merchants*, Albany: State University of New York Press (1994), p. xii.

<sup>80</sup> Grossman, “Letters to Max Horkheimer”, in Kuhn (ed.), *Henryk Grossman Works, Vol. 1*, p. 402.

<sup>81</sup> Gordon Walker, “Origins”, p. 591. Also see Gordon Walker, *Restatement*, p. 236, where Borkenau is credited as the source of this “proof”.

<sup>82</sup> See especially Ch. XV: “The Process of Civilization”, in Gordon Walker, *Restatement*, pp. 197-213.

reviewed in Britain exclusively by Borkenau.<sup>83</sup> It subsequently went into almost total eclipse, and, but for the odd reference to it in sociology journals, Gordon Walker was virtually the only author to cite it – which he did heavily (whole sections of his book are essentially summaries of Elias’ ideas about the development of bourgeois manners) – in the two decades following its publication. In the mid-1950s, by which time Elias had belatedly been appointed to a lectureship in sociology at the University of Leicester, his magnum opus gained some attention among Dutch cultural historians, but it was not published in Germany until 1968, translated into French until the 1970s, or English until the 1980s.<sup>84</sup> A significant Elias revival followed, and he is now the subject of several biographies and critical commentaries.<sup>85</sup> Like Borkenau, Gordon Walker was aware of Elias’ book because he knew the author personally, having met him at the house of the psychologist S. H. Foulkes.<sup>86</sup> That Gordon Walker read the obscure work when it was published, describing it as “seminal” in his diary in February 1939, would suggest that, like Borkenau, he received a gifted copy from Elias.<sup>87</sup> Borkenau was also part of Foulkes’s circle in exile, and Foulkes would later acknowledge the influence of his two “sociological friends” – Elias and Borkenau – on his work.<sup>88</sup> It is not, therefore, unreasonable to assume that Gordon Walker became personally acquainted with Borkenau through Foulkes.

During the war, Gordon Walker and Crossman were both involved with radio propaganda to Germany; Gordon Walker was working on the BBC’s German service, while Crossman was employed by the Political Warfare Executive (PWE) and helped to establish the “Station of the European Revolution”.<sup>89</sup> The station was in large part staffed by German exiles from the *Neu Beginnen* (NB) group, including Paul and Evelyn Anderson and Lowenthal. Borkenau, as noted in the first chapter, was associated with NB in its early days, but drifted away from the group in exile. Neither Francis Carsten nor Lowenthal mentioned Borkenau in their respective reminiscences of NB, but he remained a close friend of both throughout his life, while he cited “Paul Sering” (Lowenthal’s NB *nom de plume*) as the major influence on his analysis of the German

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<sup>83</sup> See Franz Borkenau [Review], “Ueber den Prozess der Zivilisation, Vol. I”, *Sociological Review*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (1938), pp. 308-11; and [Review] “Ueber den Prozess der Zivilisation, Vol. II”, *Sociological Review*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (1939), pp. 450-2.

<sup>84</sup> See Johan Goudsblom “The Sociology of Norbert Elias: Its Resonance and Significance”, *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 4, No. 2-3 (1987), pp. 323-337.

<sup>85</sup> See, for example, Eric Dunning & Jason Hughes (eds.), *Norbert Elias and Modern Sociology: Knowledge, Interdependence, Power, Process*, London: Bloomsbury (2013).

<sup>86</sup> See Marc Joly, “Norbert Elias's Networks in the British Intellectual Field before His Appointment in Leicester 1945-54”, *Cambio*, Vol. 3, No. 5 (2013), p. 126.

<sup>87</sup> R. Pearce (ed.), *Patrick Gordon Walker*, p. 95.

<sup>88</sup> See Dieter Nitzgen, “Lost in Translation? Reading Foulkes Today”, *Group Analysis*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (2014), p. 220.

<sup>89</sup> See Francis Carsten, “German Refugees in Great Britain, 1933-1945”, in Gerhard Hirschfeld (ed.), *Exile in Great Britain: Refugees from Hitler's Germany*, Leamington Spa: Berg (1984), p. 23.

economy in the *Totalitarian Enemy*.<sup>90</sup> Like Crossman, Gordon Walker had NB connections. He had actually become involved with the group as early as 1933, when he had gone to Germany on behalf of the Labour Party to establish clandestine links with the German underground.<sup>91</sup> He subsequently helped Carsten – whom he had met at that time in Berlin – to obtain a fellowship at Wadham College.<sup>92</sup> Carsten was, incidentally, a close friend of Elias, whose influence had pushed him towards a career in historical research after his legal career had been curtailed by the Nazis.<sup>93</sup> Lowenthal had become the effective leader of NB in 1935, when his position in favour of the continuation of the underground struggle in Germany had won out over Löwenheim’s pessimistic, but undoubtedly correct, assessment of its fruitlessness.<sup>94</sup> Lowenthal was in too much danger, however, to stay in Germany himself, and had to leave for Prague. Later, in British exile, Lowenthal became one of Gordon Walker and Austen Albu’s closest collaborators in the Socialist Clarity Group (SCG), founded in 1937.<sup>95</sup> Albu, like Gordon Walker a future Gaitskellite, had also got to know some of the NB group in Berlin and Prague, where NB’s foreign office had been based until the invasion of Czechoslovakia, when it was hastily transferred to London.<sup>96</sup> The SCG considered the future of socialism and, in particular, socialist internationalism in its journal *Labour Discussion Notes*. Gordon Walker’s diary is fragmentary and somewhat allusive about exactly what he was doing after war broke out, but he seems to have been instrumental in protecting some NB members in Britain from internment, while he also made officially sanctioned trips to Belgium and France, where he may have been helping to form connections with underground cells.<sup>97</sup> This would explain why his diary entries describe Lowenthal (whom he knew as Rix) as “useful”.<sup>98</sup> Knowles, who has recently written about NB’s influence on Albu, has noted that the SCG had a plan to go underground if Britain were invaded.<sup>99</sup> Once that danger had passed, though, Lowenthal remained a key figure in the SCG, authoring a pamphlet against Vansittartism.<sup>100</sup> Given Gordon Walker’s

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<sup>90</sup> See Richard Löwenenthal, *Die Widerstandsgruppe “Neu Beginnen”*, Berlin: Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand (1982); F. L. Carsten, “From Berlin to London”, *The Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (1998), pp. 339–49; Borkenau, *Totalitarian Enemy*, p. 8.

<sup>91</sup> R. Pearce (ed.), *Patrick Gordon Walker*, p. 5.

<sup>92</sup> See Peter Alter, “Francis Ludwig Carsten: 1911-1998”, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, Vol. 115, p. 124.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> See Jones, *Lost Debate*, p. 77.

<sup>95</sup> See Christopher Knowles, *Winning the Peace: The British in Occupied Germany 1945-1948*, London: Bloomsbury (2017), p. 85.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> Gordon Walker appealed to Alexander Maxwell at the Home Office on behalf of NB members (see Pearce [ed.], *Patrick Gordon Walker*, p. 97). On Gordon Walker’s movements, see *Ibid.*, pp. 99, 106.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 101, 103, 105, 107. The editor of Gordon Walker’s diary seems to have been unaware of Neu Beginnen, noting in a footnote that NB probably meant “national bureaux”, and failing to identify several of Gordon Walker’s German contacts, including Rix. *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>99</sup> Christopher Knowles, “Winning the peace: the British in occupied Germany, 1945-1948”, PhD Thesis, Kings College London (2014), p.131.

<sup>100</sup> Richard Lowenthal (*pseud.* Paul Sering), *Why is Germany Aggressive?*, Tillicoultry: NCLC (1941).



interest in Borkenau's writings and association with Lowenthal, as well as Crossman's endorsement of the *Totalitarian Enemy* (Gordon Walker and Crossman were associates in the Oxford Labour Party; they had a prickly relationship, but met and dined together often), it is highly likely he would have read the book.<sup>101</sup> And one of the SCG's earliest publications, published by the Fabian Society in May 1940 (two months after the *Totalitarian Enemy*), seems to bear the marks of Borkenau's influence. One of Borkenau's conclusions, characteristically a grimly ironic one, had been that "the totalitarian revolution" was:

...the Socialist revolution which Marx had foretold; though the agent of this revolution has not been the proletariat. It has led, contrary to Marx's expectation, not to wider liberty but to tyranny of gangs of *déclassés* over the masses.<sup>102</sup>

The authors of the SCG pamphlet wrote that:

Fascism has shown... that the next step towards an integrated economy... need not automatically occur as a consequence of the efforts of the Labour Movement, but can be forced on society by brutal and reactionary means in the course of which the industrial and political instruments of working class struggle are smashed to pieces.<sup>103</sup>

In *Restatement*, Gordon Walker included a chapter on "Totalitarian Revolution". He did not cite Borkenau, but he restated the same argument in a passage which resembled the *Totalitarian Enemy* even more closely than the SCG pamphlet. "What happened in Marx's homeland was a surprisingly accurate picture of a Marxian revolution in the conditions in which Marx long beforehand foretold." Only it was a "topsy-turvy parody of a Marxian revolution".<sup>104</sup>

Hitler's great tactical success lay in uniting the declassed middle sections with the mass unemployed against the body of organised workers. These, according to Marx, should have led and inspired the revolution: they were in fact the sole stable and conservative force in society.<sup>105</sup>

## Coda

Borkenau might have come to be regarded, like Durbin, as a prominent theorist in the history of wartime Labour reformism. His internment, however, meant that his democratic socialism book was never written. After his return from Australia, it was agreed that he would instead write something "shorter" – probably a reflection of paper scarcity (the LBS was releasing books only

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<sup>101</sup> Gordon Walker mentions meetings and lunches with Crossman in his diary. See, for instance, R. Pearce (ed.), *Patrick Gordon Walker*, pp. 76, 100, 118.

<sup>102</sup> Borkenau, *Totalitarian Enemy*, p. 239.

<sup>103</sup> Austen Albu et al. [Socialist Clarity Group], *Labour's Next Step: A Wartime Strategy*, London: Fabian Society (1940), p. 4.

<sup>104</sup> Gordon Walker, *Restatement*, p. 294-295.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid*, p. 294.

every other month by this point, and they were mostly thin volumes) – and timelier.<sup>106</sup> In the context of the phenomenon of ‘Vansittartism’ which had grown up in Borkenau’s absence, this was to be a study of the ideal of internationalism in the socialist movement, *Socialism: National or International?*. The book, which will be analysed below, probably had a greater influence on E. H. Carr’s *Nationalism and After* than the author acknowledged, and has recently been hailed as an unjustly forgotten study by Samuel Moyn.<sup>107</sup> It was, however, the opposite kind of book to the one Tawney had initially discussed with Borkenau. Rather than the kind of inspirational enunciation of Labour’s ideals which the slated *Democratic Socialism in Action* might have been, the central argument of the book was one which Borkenau had to acknowledge readers would find purely “negative and destructive of ideals”: “that labour internationalism has so far proved to be one of the most futile ideologies ever cherished”.<sup>108</sup> Even if it had not been the case that most of the works of the LBS passed hastily into obscurity, there would be little reason for surprise that Borkenau’s book was not an exception.

### Vansittartism

As an exile from Nazi Germany with a very public record of opposition to the regime, the “period of misery”, as he described his internment, might have occasioned a certain amount of resentment.<sup>109</sup> Certainly, the irony was not lost on him that the majority of apparently suspect German and Austrian ‘enemy aliens’ in his camp were Jewish refugees “benumbed by their incapacity to understand, first why Hitler had robbed and ejected them, and now why the British had put them behind barbed wire in Australia”.<sup>110</sup> It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that, besides the book, Borkenau’s major preoccupation in the months after his return was with what he and others christened ‘Vansittartism’, after its most famous exponent, Lord Robert Vansittart; the “literature of hate”, as Borkenau also called it, being put out by the “destroy Germany school”.<sup>111</sup> Vansittart had been Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs throughout the 1930s, but was replaced in that role for political reasons during the Munich crisis; the capstone of the government’s appeasement policy, which Vansittart had always vehemently opposed. He was, therefore, as bitter as the left-wing authors of *Guilty Men* about the Munich set. His status as a shunted Cassandra, who could claim that he had been right all along about the government’s

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<sup>106</sup> T. M. Ragg to J. S. Middleton, 3 September 1941.

<sup>107</sup> For the claim that Carr was indebted to Borkenau, see F. Hayek, “The End of Nationalism?”, *Spectator*, 16 March 1945, p. 248. Also see Samuel Moyn, *Not Enough: Human Rights in an Unequal World*, Harvard University Press (2018), p. 237.

<sup>108</sup> Borkenau, *Socialism*, pp. ix, 157.

<sup>109</sup> Franz Borkenau, “I was Interned by the British”, *Christian Science Monitor*, 24 November 1941, p. 22.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> Borkenau, “Selected Notices”, *Horizon*; & Franz Borkenau, “The Myth of Prussia”, *Political Quarterly*, Vol. XIII, No. 2 (1942), pp. 193-205.

disastrous policy, lent a degree of gravitas to his indictments of Germany. In his most famous pamphlet, he encouraged the association between his foresight about appeasement and his warnings about the nature of the Germans. “The characteristic of the butcher-bird [Germany]”, he wrote, “is to pounce upon his neighbours when they are living peaceably beside him; and it is their characteristic never to suspect him till it is too late”.<sup>112</sup> Subsequently, he would label his detractors – those who were not prepared to hold “well over 75%” of the German people responsible for the war – “neo-appeasers”.<sup>113</sup>

The debate over whether the Nazi leadership or the German people were responsible for the war was conducted not only in newspapers and books, but in Parliament, the War Cabinet and the offices of the BBC.<sup>114</sup> It was, therefore, loaded with implications for wartime policy as well as the post-war fate of Germany and Europe.<sup>115</sup> Goldman’s early historical account of Vansittartism claimed that conservatives and conservative publications were naturally drawn to more severe indictments of Germany, with socialists and German-speaking exiles (who were, also, mostly socialists) constituting the main forces of opposition to those currents.<sup>116</sup> However, Tombs and, more recently, Costa, Thunecke and Imlay, have documented the phenomenon of “socialist Vansittartism”.<sup>117</sup> They have shown that the socialist opponents of the anti-German outlook were not solely polemicising against conservatives but were also involved in passionate disputes over what they saw as a shocking betrayal of internationalism by many of their political allies. It is not incidental that Borkenau’s *Socialism: National or International* was written when these debates were at their height; and when national loyalties experienced a renaissance among socialists.<sup>118</sup>

The question of the roots, nature and future of Nazism had, of course, exercised exiles, more than anybody else, since 1933. For the anti-Nazi refugees in London, as Felix Gilbert remembered, “it was almost impossible not to remain obsessed with the Nazi problem”.<sup>119</sup> Émigré investigations

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<sup>112</sup> Vansittart, *Black Record*, p. 4.

<sup>113</sup> Vansittart, “Foreword”, in W. W. Coole & M. F. Potter, *Thus Spake Germany*, London: Routledge (1941), p. xi.

<sup>114</sup> See Patrick Gordon Walker’s comments about the BBC at a conference held at the German Historical Institute in London in 1977. Lothar Kettenacker (ed.), *The “Other Germany” in the Second World War*, Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag (1977), pp. 138-9.

<sup>115</sup> Joachim Fest argued that the belief that “Germans were innately evil” contributed to the failure of the conservative opposition to Hitler to make any headway with the British government – which they hoped would support them in their efforts to depose Hitler – even before the War. *Plotting Hitler’s Death: the German Resistance to Hitler*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson (1996), pp. 78-9.

<sup>116</sup> Goldman, “Germans and Nazis”.

<sup>117</sup> See Tombs, “Socialist Vansittartism”; Costa, “From the Old International”; Imlay, “Reconstituting the International” (all cited above); & Jorge Thunecke, “Fight for Freedom: A Vansittartist Network of Right-wing German Socialists in Great Britain (1941-1945)”, in Helga Schreckenberger (ed.), *Networks of Refugees from Nazi Germany*, Leiden: Brill (2016), p. 82.

<sup>118</sup> The editors of George Orwell’s collected works summed up the unexpected turn he and many socialists took upon the outbreak of war in the title they chose for his writings from that period. Peter Davison et al. (ed.), *A Patriot After All, 1940-1941: George Orwell*, London: Secker & Warburg (2000).

<sup>119</sup> Gilbert, *A European Past*, p. 174.

and speculations about the ‘other Germany’ – publications by, for instance, Sebastian Haffner, Heinrich Fraenkel and Rudolf Olden – outweighed the output of the anti-German school in the early months of the War.<sup>120</sup> This continued the trend, which Dan Stone has previously highlighted – established by the likes of Konrad Heiden, Herman Rauschnig, Aurel Kolnai and Borkenau himself – of exiles being viewed as authorities whose writings were the best sources to furnish Britons with an understanding of Hitlerism.<sup>121</sup> In the main, serious newspapers continued to discuss the ‘Nazi problem’, and not yet the ‘German problem’ – but there were exceptions. In a review of the *Totalitarian Enemy*, A. L. Rowse, who subsequently earned a reputation for trenchant Vansittartism, deduced, by means of selective quotation from Borkenau’s chapter on “the Nazi mentality and its background”, a vindication of his own belief that the Germans were hard-wired to follow neurotic and hysterical leaders.<sup>122</sup> Rowse also managed to extract a root and branch condemnation of the German outlook from Haffner’s book, which most other contemporary readers deemed one of the finest illustrations of the potentialities of the ‘other Germany’.<sup>123</sup> Skinner’s remarks about the contrast between the way texts are received in – and according to the current debates and prevailing values of – their time and the way they are received by posterity, are particularly apposite in relation to the Vansittartist period.<sup>124</sup> Books about Germany had the potential to inspire utterly contradictory readings according to the sympathies of the reader. One notable example is Franz Neumann’s *Behemoth*. To the extent that modern scholars have considered the context of *Behemoth*, they tend to have focussed on the purely theoretical-intellectual influences on the author, and have debated whether Neumann’s book should be read as an economic (Marxist) or a legal (Weberian) critique of National Socialism. For Devlin, Neumann’s Marxism prevents him from looking beyond “monopoly capitalism” as a characterisation of the German regime.<sup>125</sup> By contrast, Kelly and Tribe argue that “[l]egal analysis is the centrepiece of *Behemoth*”, and “the lasting thematic core of the book”.<sup>126</sup> But modern commentary on the book tends to overlook a subsidiary theme which Neumann clearly felt the need to address. “We have

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<sup>120</sup> Haffner, *Jekyll and Hyde*; Heinrich Fraenkel, *The German People Versus Hitler*, London (1940); Rudolf Olden, *Is Germany a Hopeless Case?*, London (1940).

<sup>121</sup> See Dan Stone, “Anti-Fascist Europe”. Rauschnig’s *Revolution of Destruction*, in particular, was hailed as the most informative book on Nazism by reviewers across the political spectrum, such as Dorothy Thompson (“The Revolution of Nihilism”, *Washington Post*, 8 May 1939, p. 7), Kingsley Martin (“A London Diary”, *New Statesman and Nation*, 6 July 1940, pp. 6-7) and F. A. Voigt (“A German on Hitler”, *Manchester Guardian*, 22 August 1939, p. 5).

<sup>122</sup> A. L. Rowse, “Totalitarian Aggression”.

<sup>123</sup> A. L. Rowse, “The Problem of the Germans”, *Spectator*, 26 July 1940, p. 96.

<sup>124</sup> In the *Prince*, Machiavelli was not inaugurating the doctrine of duplicity that has come to acquire his name, but was “attack[ing]... the prevailing moral assumptions of his age”. See Quentin Skinner, *Machiavelli*, Oxford University Press (2019), p. 2.

<sup>125</sup> Devlin, “Marxist Theories”, p. 13.

<sup>126</sup> Duncan Kelly, “Rethinking Franz Neumann’s Route to Behemoth”, *History of Political Thought*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (2002), p. 459; Keith Tribe, “Capitalism, Totalitarianism and National Socialism”, in *Strategies of Economic Order*, Cambridge University Press (1995), p. 170.

tried to show,” Neumann wrote in his conclusion, “that there is no specific German trait responsible for aggression and imperialism”.<sup>127</sup> Though Neumann’s conclusion was clear, he nevertheless conceded in the book that it was “difficult to substantiate the... view that the German people do *not* stand behind National Socialism”, and contemporaries attempted to rest their case both for and against Vansittart by appeals to his analysis.<sup>128</sup>

It was the fall of France which elicited the first wave of national panic about Germans and Austrians, leading to the infamous regulation 18B, which authorised the internment of all ‘Enemy Aliens’ over the Summer of 1940. ‘Aliens’ had already been subjected to onerous restrictions on their freedom of movement, and Borkenau mentioned being unable to visit Cambridge – “a prohibited area” – in a letter of May 1940.<sup>129</sup> The speed with which the round-up proceeded and the general chaos in government meant that appeals to the Home Office on behalf of individuals were of no use. Both the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning (SPSL) and Borkenau’s publisher, Geoffrey Faber, wrote letters on his behalf, but no replies were forthcoming.<sup>130</sup> As Francis Carsten, himself an émigré and subsequently an historian of the German-speaking emigration in Britain, later pointed out, the decision to deport some 4,200 of the internees was a rushed and panicked response to the fear of an imminent German invasion.<sup>131</sup> The internments did, however, inaugurate the predominantly socialist practice of defending innocent Germans. In the Commons, Labour MPs questioned the efficacy of imprisoning confirmed anti-Nazis.<sup>132</sup> Editorials in the liberal *Manchester Guardian* and by Kingsley Martin in the *New Statesman* took a similar line, Martin citing Haffner and Borkenau, who, he argued, had demonstrated their value as anti-Nazi propagandists.<sup>133</sup> In the *Evening Standard*, Michael Foot ironically asked, “Why not lock up General de Gaulle?”.<sup>134</sup> François Lafitte – communist author of a Penguin Special which highlighted the inhuman conditions in domestic internment camps – was somewhat critical of this focus on “useful” refugees, comparing such appeals (perhaps a little hyperbolically) to the Nazi practice of preserving “economically valuable Jews”. He argued that, in order not to sink to the

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<sup>127</sup> Neumann, *Behemoth*, p. 388.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.* p, 158. For contemporary responses to *Behemoth*, see (against Vansittartism) Paul M. Sweezy, “Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism”, by Franz Neumann (Book Review)” *Science and Society*, Vol. 6 (1942), pp. 281-286; (for Vansittartism) Dosio Koffler, *Vansittartitis: A Polemic*, London: Hutchinson (1943).

<sup>129</sup> Borkenau to Simpson, 28 May 1940, Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MS. S.P.S.L. 348/8-12.

<sup>130</sup> Simpson to Home Office, 21 May 1940, Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MS. S.P.S.L. 348/8-12; Geoffrey Faber to Simpson, 16 August 1940, Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MS. S.P.S.L. 348/8-12.

<sup>131</sup> Francis Carsten, “German Refugees in Great Britain, 1933-1945”, in Hirschfeld (ed.), *Exile in Great Britain*, p. 21.

<sup>132</sup> HC Deb, Vol. 362, Col. 1209-1306, Available at: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1940-07-10/debates/513c14f4-f07b-48c8-bf14-f863b62ffa58/Refugees> (accessed 17 Feb. 21).

<sup>133</sup> “A London Diary”, *New Statesman and Nation*, Jul 20, 1940, p. 58.

<sup>134</sup> *Evening Standard*, 17 July 1940, p. 5.

Nazis' level, appeals should focus on the elementary principle that nobody who is not suspected of a crime should be locked-up.<sup>135</sup>

Borkenau was not present during the Blitz and, in an article about his Australian experiences for the *Christian Science Monitor*, wrote that he had “returned to an England... much surer of victory than we had ever imagined her”.<sup>136</sup> But it had been in the context of the widespread fear of invasion and relentless aerial bombing that Vansittart and others' ever more vituperative denunciations of Germany had begun to gain ground in the conservative press.<sup>137</sup> Gallup polls, taken in September 1939 and November 1940, demonstrated how the public mood had begun to change. At the outbreak of war, 90% of respondents had answered that the war was against ‘the Nazis’, as opposed to ‘the Germans’; in the subsequent poll, only 50% stuck to the distinction.<sup>138</sup> After the particularly destructive bombing of Coventry, the *Daily Express*, published an article claiming that the citizens of the city longed for revenge against German civilians.<sup>139</sup> In fact, as a moral philosopher has pointed out, Mass Observation data suggested that the inhabitants of bombed cities were less keen to advocate a response in kind than the general population.<sup>140</sup> Such sentiments were sometimes echoed in liberal newspapers and even in academic journals. Harold Picton, a writer who had warned against hysteria during the First World War, felt compelled to revive his efforts. Having lived in Germany throughout the Weimar years, he defended the cultural achievements of the Republic, arguing that Germans were the first victims of the Nazis.<sup>141</sup> But his portrait of a Germany suffering under the iron heel was given short shrift in Chatham House's *International Affairs*, the reviewer bluntly stating that “the distinction between the German people and the Nazis no longer exists”.<sup>142</sup> In November and December 1940, at the invitation of Minister of Information, Duff Cooper, the most senior avowed Germanophobe in government, Vansittart delivered six broadcasts on the topic of the Germans' ‘Black Record’ on the BBC overseas service.<sup>143</sup> As an editorial in the *New York Times* recognised, the use of the BBC for such propaganda and the fact that Vansittart – though he had lost much of his real influence – remained a diplomatic adviser to the government, made this a notable development:

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<sup>135</sup> François Lafitte, “Behind Barbed Wire”, *New Statesman*, 30 November 1940, p. 540.

<sup>136</sup> Franz Borkenau, “I was Interned”.

<sup>137</sup> Vansittart's literary career began with a series of anti-German poems in the *Sunday Times*. See, for instance, “Desolation”, 31 July 1940, *Sunday Times*, p. 5, where he used the ahistorical term “Hun”, which he cautiously avoided in his later pamphlets.

<sup>138</sup> In Ferdinand A. Hermens, *Tyrants' War and Peoples' Peace*, University of Chicago Press (1944), p. 17.

<sup>139</sup> See “Correspondence: Reprisals”, *New Statesman*, 30 November 1940, p. 541.

<sup>140</sup> A. C. Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, New York: Walker & Co. (2006), p. 196.

<sup>141</sup> Harold Picton, *Nazis and Germans*, London: Allen & Unwin (1940).

<sup>142</sup> G. A. R., “Nazis and Germans”, *International Affairs Review Supplement*, Vol. 19, No. 2, October 1940, pp. 134–135.

<sup>143</sup> See Angus Calder, *The People's War*, London: Pimlico (1992), pp. 489–90.

The present war has been comparatively free from the unlovely kind of propaganda that marked the former one... This is the indictment of a race – specifically the German race. Sir Robert Vansittart... fell into this error when he said this week... that Herr Hitler gave the great majority exactly what it wanted and liked.<sup>144</sup>

### The Socialist Response

The debate over the ‘German problem’ exploded in the press after January 1941, when Vansittart’s broadcasts were published as a pamphlet of the same title. The most vocal opposition to Vansittartism came from the socialist Left. Kingsley Martin often condemned it in the *New Statesman*, and it was for many months the major topic of the magazine’s correspondence pages; the Fabian Society released the pamphlet *Vansittart’s Gift to Goebbels*, authored by the émigré Heinrich Fraenkel; while Victor Gollancz also confronted Vansittart in *Shall Our Children Live or Die?*, and published another Fraenkel appeal in his own, “Victory Books”, series of pamphlets.<sup>145</sup> Gollancz and Harold Laski’s Left Book Club (LBC) published two further books in refutation of the thesis of German guilt, and it remained a subsidiary theme in several subsequent LBC titles of the late war period.<sup>146</sup>

The neologism ‘Vansittartism’ came into usage from around January 1942,<sup>147</sup> and Vansittart was usually cited as the main target of the left-wing polemics because he was by far the best known and most indefatigable advocate of the anti-German doctrine. By the time Gollancz went to print with his refutation in late 1941, *Black Record* had sold 500,000 copies and Vansittart had already followed it up with an even more extreme pamphlet in which he claimed that “all the miseries of the world’s last three generations have issued from the German land and the German soul”.<sup>148</sup> However, it was other members of the labour movement who were the more immediate target of the left-wing polemics against Vansittart. Though the most prominent anti-Germans were conservative politicians and historians like Vansittart, Cooper and Rowse, the debate over German guilt became an intriguing subplot to the Labour Party’s attempts to frame its wartime foreign policy, as well as its ideas about a post-war settlement. The future Labour Prime Minister, Clement

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<sup>144</sup> “Indicting a ‘Race’”, *New York Times*, 1 December 1940, p. E6.

<sup>145</sup> On Kingsley Martin and Vansittartism, see the chapter “War and Truth” in C. H. Rolph, *Kingsley*, London: Gollancz (1973), pp. 223-252; Heinrich Fraenkel, *Vansittart’s Gift to Goebbels*, London: Fabian Society (1941); Gollancz, *Shall Our Children Live?*; Heinrich Fraenkel, *Help us Germans to Beat the Nazis*, London: Gollancz (1941).

<sup>146</sup> Julius Braunthal, *Need Germany Survive*, London: Gollancz (1943); Aubrey Douglas Smith, *Guilty Germans?*, London: Gollancz (1942). Further opposition to Vansittartism in Paul Hagen, *Will Germany Crack*, London: Gollancz (1942); Evelyn Anderson, *Hammer or Anvil*, London: Gollancz (1945); Leonard Mosely, *Report from Germany*, London: Gollancz (1945); Friedrich Schlotterbeck, *The Darker the Night, the Brighter the Stars*, London: Gollancz (1947).

<sup>147</sup> The coinage may well have been Kingsley Martin’s, the earliest use of the ‘ism’ I could find being its use as a title for a letter to the editor of the *New Statesman* in January 1942. Leopold Loewenstein-Wertheim, “Correspondence: Vansittartism”, *New Statesman*, 17 January 1942, p. 42.

<sup>148</sup> Vansittart, *Roots of the Trouble*, London: Hutchinson (1941), p. 11.

Attlee, was, like Churchill, given to making acerbic remarks about Germany.<sup>149</sup> The Chairman of the Labour Party, James Walker, was in another league altogether, once claiming that it made him “smile when people say that it is a bad thing to talk about exterminating the Germans”.<sup>150</sup> At the Labour Conference in June 1943, two factions of the Party clashed over the wording of a resolution, one side calling for “peoples” not to be identified “with vicious governments”; the other side – with strong union support – comfortably carrying their amendment that Labour “welcomes any steps that may be taken for the re-education of the German people”, who, it was claimed, had succumbed to “the spirit of aggressive nationalism”.<sup>151</sup> If, as an editorial in the *Manchester Guardian* pointed out, it was only being realistic to acknowledge the necessity of post-war re-education, some delegates nevertheless felt that the wording was uneasily close to implying general German complicity in the crimes of Nazism.<sup>152</sup> The *Manchester Guardian* itself had already begun to take a harder line by this time, carrying an almost gushing review of Vansittart’s memoir in April 1943.<sup>153</sup> Its editorial on the Labour conference invoked George Lansbury, suggesting that the opposition to the aggressive amendment derived from the appeasement-supporting, “pacifist” wing of the Party that had lost influence in the 1930s.<sup>154</sup> While this may have been true of a handful of Labour MPs, it was a charge that could be aimed at very few of the most vocal anti-Vansittartists, who, as Labour MP Sydney Silverman pointed out in a letter of response, had, in that decade, become accustomed to being labelled ‘warmongers’ for their stances on issues like Spain, and for their warnings about Hitler.<sup>155</sup>

Some émigré socialists from countries like Belgium, Poland and Czechoslovakia, accusing their British counterparts of an ignorance of the true scale of the atrocities committed by the Germans, took on even more extreme postures than Vansittart.<sup>156</sup> A Polish author went so far as to self-publish a pamphlet dedicated to proving that Martin’s defence of the ‘other Germany’ was both pro-Nazi and motivated by anti-Polish prejudice.<sup>157</sup> As Thunecke has documented, a small number of German émigré socialists, led by Walter Loeb, joined the ‘destroy Germany’ chorus, taking leading positions in Walker’s Fight for Freedom group.<sup>158</sup> The Loeb faction gradually ingratiated itself with the Labour Party, and this had particularly deleterious effects for the German Social

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<sup>149</sup> See Goldman, “Germans and Nazis”, p. 164.

<sup>150</sup> See Jorge Thunecke, “Fight for Freedom”, p. 82.

<sup>151</sup> See “Labour and Peace Problems”, *Manchester Guardian*, 18 June 1943, p. 6.

<sup>152</sup> “Vansittartism”, *Manchester Guardian*, 18 June 1943, p. 4.

<sup>153</sup> “Lord Vansittart’s Opinions”, *Manchester Guardian*, 22 April 1943, p. 4.

<sup>154</sup> “Vansittartism”, *Manchester Guardian*.

<sup>155</sup> Sidney Silverman, “Letters to the Editor: Vansittartism”, *Manchester Guardian*, 26 June 1943, p. 6.

<sup>156</sup> In a letter to the *Sunday Times*, Camille Huysmans, the Belgian president of the Socialist International, wrote that all Germans were Nazis. See Braunthal, *Need Germany*, p. 26.

<sup>157</sup> F. B. Czarnomski [pseud. Polonius], *“The Editor Regrets”: The Case Against the New Statesman*, London (1944).

<sup>158</sup> Thunecke, “Fight for Freedom”.



Democratic (SPD) organisation in the UK, Sopade – which lost its financial support from Labour – as well as the socialists associated with Neu Beginnen (NB).<sup>159</sup> In a 1942 letter to Karl Frank, an NB representative in the United States, Lowenthal regretted that Britain had become a lonely place for German socialists.<sup>160</sup> From 1940, through his role on the Political Warfare Executive (PWE), Crossman had helped some of the NB group to propagandise to Germany over the airwaves from the “Station of the European Revolution”.<sup>161</sup> But this became ever more controversial. As Ben-Israel has noted, the records of the PWE and the BBC reveal sustained conflict over the question whether a Vansittartist tone would drive Germans to Hitler or whether, conversely, a too lenient tone would increase German confidence in British weakness.<sup>162</sup> In any case, propaganda seems to have followed military policy. In February 1942, the Area Bombing Directive was given to Bomber Command, authorising the bombing of non-military targets with the express aim being to “focus attacks on the morale of the enemy civil population and in particular the industrial workers”.<sup>163</sup> The idea of appealing to any kind of German underground opposition could not very well go hand-in-hand with the policy of blitzing Germany into submission. The Station of the European Revolution was dissolved in June 1942.<sup>164</sup>

The Vansittartist idea that the Germans caused the war by an inherent lust for world domination was a theory of history, and it clashed with the theory of history the Left Book Club, the Labour Left, the *New Statesman* and various other left organisations and individuals had been propounding throughout the 1930s. This was the theory that fascism and war resulted from capitalism and imperialism, which was treated in the last chapter. As LBC author Aubrey Douglas Smith wrote, “in all countries the capitalist interests threaten war”. “If capitalism continues unchecked” after Germany’s defeat, he predicted, “rivalry between America and Europe may be the basis of a Third World War”.<sup>165</sup> For all Gollanz’s apparent humanitarianism, his book contained a long excursus on the theme of the punishment that must be exacted against Germany’s Junkers and capitalists in which he seemed to forget about his Christian ideals, leading one reviewer to point out that he had merely substituted one hatred for another. He was “using Satan to drive out Satan”.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> See Anthony Glee, *Exile politics during the Second World War: the German Social Democrats in Britain*, Oxford: Clarendon Press (1982), p. 131

<sup>160</sup> Paul Sering [Richard Lowenthal] to Karl Frank, 28 October 1942, Karl B. Frank Papers, Box 5, Folder 5, “Neu Beginnen,” Hoover Institute.

<sup>161</sup> Carsten, “Exile”, p. 23.

<sup>162</sup> Ben-Israel, “Cross Purposes”, p. 428.

<sup>163</sup> Grayling, *Dead Cities*, p. 50.

<sup>164</sup> See, Conrad Putter, “German Refugees and British Propaganda”, in Hirschfeld (ed.), *Exile in Great Britain*, pp. 129-161, esp. pp. 141-2.

<sup>165</sup> Douglas Smith, *Guilty Germans?*, p. 211.

<sup>166</sup> See R. A. Scott James, “Studies in Hate Politics”, *Spectator*, 3 April 1942, p. 332.

### Borkenau and Vansittartism

It has been noted above that Rowse derived justification for the Vansittartist outlook from Borkenau's *Totalitarian Enemy*. It would be well to begin a discussion of Borkenau's ideas about the 'German Problem' with the chapter to which Rowse referred. While Borkenau, like the anti-Vansittartists of the Popular Front Left, opposed outright the idea of condemning a nation – and compared it to the idea of condemning a race – he was not reflexively opposed to the idea that an investigation of German intellectual history could contribute to an understanding of the rise of Nazism.<sup>167</sup> This was something the Popular Front intellectuals were generally reluctant to concede, as they tended to highlight only the economic causes – the inflation of the 1920s, the world economic crisis, and, of course, the machinations of capitalists and moneyed interests – in bringing Hitler to power.<sup>168</sup> Borkenau did not deny the importance of economic factors, but, as an Austrian émigré with a particular interest in intellectual history going back to his work on the rise of the bourgeois worldview, he was perhaps better placed to consider the role of ideas.

In the chapter in the *Totalitarian Enemy* from which Rowse extracted a justification for the outright condemnation of Germany, Borkenau had begun by pointing to the ways in which Germany's political and spiritual traditions differed from those of the West. He noted that German unification had been carried out by Prussia, and thus under Eastern influence. The disintegration of feudalism had occurred to a far greater degree in the West, he argued. Not having undergone the same changes, Prussia, like Russia, had not seen the severance between the aristocracy and the State which had occurred in the West. Even in 1871, the Prussian aristocracy tended still to see themselves as servants of the state; the English aristocracy, by contrast, had established a proud independence – they began to live *off*, instead of *for*, the State, hastening their decline into Wodehousian absurdity.<sup>169</sup> As noted above, Borkenau had been the only reviewer in Britain of Elias's history of the development of Western mores and morals, the *Civilizing Process*, which was not published in English for several decades. The influence of Elias's work can clearly be felt in the way Borkenau's argument proceeded. He suggested that the development which had followed from the fact of aristocratic independence in Britain, the assimilation of aristocratic and bourgeois manners and morals, had not occurred to nearly the same extent in Germany. All over Western Europe, Borkenau argued, whether through the Court of the Medicis in Italy, or the Parisian or southern English gentry, such a process had taken place, and a national standard of speech, morals and manners had been clearly defined. Not so in Germany.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> See Franz Borkenau, "The German Problem", *Dublin Review*, Vol. 209 (1941), pp. 189-197.

<sup>168</sup> See Gollancz, *Shall our Children Live?*

<sup>169</sup> Borkenau, *Totalitarian Enemy*, p. 107-8.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid*, 112.

The importance Elias had ascribed to this contrast is clear from the fact that he had begun the first volume of his major work with a chapter on the distinction between the concepts of French ‘civilisation’ and German ‘Kultur’.<sup>171</sup> ‘Kultur’, Elias argued, was a concept which took root among the bourgeois intelligentsia in the eighteenth century. This emerging economic class had its way to political power barred by the rigidity of courtly society in the German states.<sup>172</sup> It was only an apparent paradox, Elias argued, that France should have appeared to have been marked by greater social divisions than Germany in the late eighteenth century; that a political revolution of the bourgeoisie should have occurred in France. The French Revolution, as Elias saw it, was actually the culmination of a long process of assimilation through which the bourgeoisie had grown powerful enough to stake greater political claims. Importantly, the French bourgeoisie had already adopted many of the habits and manners of its aristocracy – and did not dispense with them after the revolution.<sup>173</sup> In Germany, by contrast, the middle-class intelligentsia was restricted to a purely spiritual and intellectual – as opposed to political – rebellion. Courtly society in the German states had hitherto taken no interest in the German nation. The cultivated spoke in French, wrote in Latin and considered the German language plebian, as Frederick the Great’s dismissive remarks about the German dialects made plain.<sup>174</sup> It was, therefore, the politically redundant bourgeoisie which took up the task of creating a German grammar.<sup>175</sup> The emerging class was also required to set new moral standards in literature, owing to the courtly prejudices against the literary representation of anything which, by its own standards of cultivation, it considered vulgar. This explained, Elias claimed, the famous Sturm und Drang literary movement, which emphasised emotion and can be seen as the beginning of German romanticism, as well as the introduction of Shakespeare – whose utilisation of characters from lower social classes and employment of bawdy euphemisms had marked his plays as barbarous in the eyes of the cultivated, courtly society – in German translation.<sup>176</sup>

It was natural, Elias argued, since German courtly society had modelled itself on France, adopted French aristocratic mores and manners, and even the French language, that the bourgeois rebellion against its own aristocracy should also take the form of a rebellion against things French. The new German intelligentsia had simply learned to associate France with its own aristocracy. The very first exponents of a *Sonderweg* (special path), then, in Elias’s retelling, were the middle-class intellectuals of the second half of the eighteenth century – Goethe’s generation. They were

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<sup>171</sup> Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process, Vol. I: Manners*, New York: Urizen (1978), pp. 3-50.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid*, p. 18.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 36-7, 49.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid*, p. 12.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid*, p. 18.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 13-15.

romantic, nationalistic and anti-French. Despite their romantic and nationalistic outlook, however, they were opposed to the authoritarian and elitist political reality which barred them from social advancement.<sup>177</sup>

One striking attempt to establish a German moral code was the youth movement. Noting that industrialisation had arrived in Germany only in the second half of the nineteenth century – and had therefore been truncated into a much shorter period – Borkenau believed that the youth movement, which had been borne as a spiritual rebellion against it, had never been understood in all its significance abroad.<sup>178</sup> Indeed, it was not until the 1960s that the first historical account of it appeared in English – and it was written by a German-born historian.<sup>179</sup> But the feature of the youth movement to which Borkenau drew attention was its participants' almost messianic desire to affect a violent rupture with the traditions of their elders, not in the usual way that generational revolts sometimes occur, but in a crazed and ultra-nationalistic fashion. It was not an organic nationalism, Borkenau suggested, but an artificial construction, as it had to be in a young nation marked by religious division and lacking clearly defined national traditions. The youth movement, like the Nazis, sought for a basis of national culture in the far distant, Teutonic past; “a desperate attempt”, Borkenau wrote, “to find a common denominator of German civilisation.”<sup>180</sup> Of course, Borkenau's treatment of the youth movement was somewhat reductive. Laqueur's book emphasises, above all, that it was far from being a monolithic movement, but that, from its inception in the late nineteenth century – and especially after the First World War – there were, at all times, factional groups representing a plethora of ideological tendencies and political outlooks.<sup>181</sup>

Contra Vansittartist readers, however, Borkenau maintained that, for all that reasons could be found in recent German history to explain the “German tragedy”, the Messianic aspect common to both the youth movement and National Socialism was not really German at all, but that “the pages of European history are filled with accounts of outbursts similar to the Nazi revolution”. In the West, he continued,

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<sup>177</sup> *Ibid*, p. 30.

<sup>178</sup> Borkenau, *Totalitarian Enemy*, p. 113.

<sup>179</sup> Walter Laqueur, *Young Germany: A History of the German Youth Movement*, London: Routledge (1962). The lack of attention paid to the youth movement in English-language scholarship was, indeed, remarked upon by Richard Crossman in his introduction to Laqueur's book.

<sup>180</sup> Borkenau, *Totalitarian Enemy*, p. 113.

<sup>181</sup> Laqueur, *Young Germany*.

...they have not only appeared at every really important turning point in history, but... have always gone together with the idea that some complete salvation could be worked on this earth through an accumulation of atrocities.<sup>182</sup>

Like Norman Cohn in his famous book of 1957, Borkenau drew an analogy between the Nazi outburst and those of the revolutionary sects of the Middle Ages.<sup>183</sup>

The essence of these revolutionary creeds is that the final day of salvation has come, that the millennium on this earth is near; that God's chosen instruments must make an end of all the hierarchies and refinements of civilisation... and that complete virtue, happiness and simplicity can be brought about by violence.<sup>184</sup>

Messianism was almost peculiar to the West, Borkenau argued, because the idea of salvation has a Judeo-Christian provenance. In Antiquity, he suggested, there were no movements to compare with the Hussites, the Anabaptists, the Jacobins and the Nazis. He borrowed the term "secular Messianism" from F. A. Voigt to describe how modern political movements drew on the Judeo-Christian heritage.<sup>185</sup> "We pay", he wrote "for the higher morals and deeper hopes of Christianity in the periodical fearful outbursts of Messianism, which attempt to achieve, in our own times, what is meant to belong to a time beyond."<sup>186</sup>

While Borkenau, then, had borrowed some of Elias' observations about the peculiarity of German history, and also viewed the revolutionary nature of the youth movement as a precedent for the Nazis, he reached the conclusion that there was something undeniably Western about National Socialism. He had noted that movements like National Socialism tended to appear at turning points in history, as the most extreme, messianic manifestations of historic change. Thus, he developed the Hegelian argument that, in Hegel's words, a "figure of life [had] grown old".<sup>187</sup> Though Britain was called upon to "save the world from Nazi barbarism" it was not immune to the overarching historical developments that were most pronounced in Germany.<sup>188</sup> The centralisation of power in the state, the movement towards collectivism and economic planning were, Borkenau thought, international developments. Certain historic factors had played a role in the German catastrophe, but Nazism could not be explained as something emanating from an intrinsic German evil. It would be "paying the Nazis back in kind" to form a "picture of the Germans as the outcasts of

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<sup>182</sup> *Ibid*, p. 121.

<sup>183</sup> Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millenium*, London: Secker & Warburg (1957).

<sup>184</sup> Borkenau, *Totalitarian Enemy*, p. 122.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid*, p. 125 (Voigt, *Unto Caesar*, p. 14).

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid*, p. 123.

<sup>187</sup> G. W. F. Hegel (trans. S. W. Dyde), "Preface", *Philosophy of Right*, London: George Bell (1896), p. xxx.

<sup>188</sup> Borkenau, *Totalitarian Enemy*, p. 254.

mankind". Such a view would only stand, he argued, "if Hitler's theory of inborn racial characteristics were true".<sup>189</sup> At the time of writing, Borkenau felt, only winning the war mattered and it was therefore "beside the point to discuss what will become of Germany after the war".<sup>190</sup> But the outlook was rosier by the time Borkenau had returned from Australia, and the future of Germany had become a more immediate talking point.

#### *The German Problem*

Between October 1941 and March 1942, Borkenau entered this debate with what were ostensibly three reviews of the same book, Rohan Butler's *Roots of National Socialism*, but were really disquisitions on the 'German problem'.<sup>191</sup> While Vansittart's *Black Record* had denigrated all Germans – "the brazen hordes" – in the coarse language of tabloid journalism, Butler's book advanced the same thesis of incurable German perfidy at, in Borkenau's assessment, "the highest possible standard of argument".<sup>192</sup> Butler's book was a chronicle of German philosophy since the time of the French Revolution. He endeavoured to unmask what he saw as the unending stream of romantic, reactionary and nationalistic impulses which had naturally culminated in Nazism. Borkenau was dismissive of Vansittart, whose writings, he felt, were unworthy of much comment. But he was obviously troubled by the potential of the more sophisticated style of argument adopted by historians like Butler to influence the conduct of the war and any future peace. Indeed, the German political scientist Sigmund Neumann, like Borkenau, an anti-Nazi émigré, wrote of Butler's book that it "stands out as a reliable guide through the labyrinth of German thought", which, because of its dispassionate tone was "doubly effective in its indictment".<sup>193</sup>

Butler attempted to demonstrate that there was a distinctive strain of modern German thought which was essentially alien to the intellectual traditions of the West, and that there was, therefore, a sharp line of demarcation between German and Western civilisation. Primarily culpable for Germany's estrangement, Butler contended, was its 'historical school'. The 'historical school', he charged, was a reactionary intellectual movement which had grown up in opposition to the Western tradition of Natural Law, which Butler saw as the red thread connecting Classical, Thomist and Enlightenment philosophy. Specifically, Butler dated the origins of the 'historical

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<sup>189</sup> *Ibid*, p. 144.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid*, p. 145.

<sup>191</sup> Rohan Butler, *The Roots of National Socialism*, London: Faber (1941). Borkenau, "German Problem"; Franz Borkenau, "The Roots of Modern German Thought: The Historical School", *The Tablet*, 10 January 1942; "The Roots of Modern German Thought: The Idea of Progress", *The Tablet*, 17 January 1942; "The Roots of Modern German Thought: The Approach to History", *The Tablet*, 24 January 1942; "Selected notices", *Horizon*.

<sup>192</sup> Borkenau, "German Problem", p. 189.

<sup>193</sup> Sigmund Neumann, "Roots of Totalitarianism", *Virginia Quarterly Review*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (1942), pp. 610-615.

school' to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as a revolt against Enlightenment universalism.<sup>194</sup>

It was the current of thought best represented by Voltaire and the French *philosophes* of the eighteenth century – who, inspired by the Newtonian 'laws of nature', posited the universality of human nature – against which, Butler alleged, the 'historical school' most violently rebelled.<sup>195</sup> If human nature were universal, it followed that regional and historical peculiarities were aberrations caused by local and temporal superstitions. These would be swept away by the advance of reason – as, indeed, was literally attempted in a sanguinary manner by the Jacobins. The 'historical school', by contrast, emphasised History as the essential unit in the study of human affairs. Instead of 'Natural Law', there were different laws, moral codes and rules of conduct for different ages and civilisations.<sup>196</sup> Borkenau agreed with Butler that the 'historical school' represented a challenge to the universalism of the Enlightenment. But the juxtaposition of virtuous Western European Enlightenment on one side and wicked German reaction on the other, was, he averred, a travesty of history.<sup>197</sup>

As Borkenau countered, the origins of the 'historical school' could actually be traced a long way farther back than the aftermath of the French Revolution, and its most notable early exponents were not German, but Italian and French – namely, Vico and, much more famously, Montesquieu, who suggested, in his *Spirit of the Laws*, that political regimes ought to reflect local custom and tradition.<sup>198</sup> Indeed, Beiser has argued that Hegel borrowed the idea of the "spirit" of a nation from his Gallic predecessor.<sup>199</sup> Thus, in Borkenau's submission, there was nothing specifically German, nor reactionary (as in coinciding with the counter-revolutionary currents after 1789), about the 'historical' outlook. Nevertheless, the political context of the rise of the 'historical school' in Germany was the period marked by the Revolution and the Napoleonic wars, which was, naturally, also an era of anti-French feeling in Prussia and nascent Germany.

Butler ably demonstrated that Herder and Ranke, whose contemporaneous works established the historical theme in German thought, had also been susceptible to the violent anti-French passions of their time.<sup>200</sup> For Borkenau, though, these indictments of the opinions of individuals were hardly

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<sup>194</sup> Butler, *Roots*, esp. pp. 10, 16, 21.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid*, p. 53.

<sup>196</sup> See John Toews, "Historicism from Ranke to Nietzsche", in W. Breckman & P. Gordon (Eds.), *The Cambridge History of Modern European Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2019), pp. 301-329.

<sup>197</sup> See Borkenau "Selected Notices", *Horizon*.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid*, p. 216.

<sup>199</sup> F. C. Beiser, "Hegel's Historicism", in F. C. Beiser (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, Cambridge University Press (1993), p. 274.

<sup>200</sup> Butler, *Roots*, pp. 24 & 86.

proof that the historical school itself was at the root of a cosmic German evil. Borkenau conceded that the book amounted to an impressive litany of nationalistic, Statist, anti-Christian and, finally, racist quotations by nineteenth and early twentieth-century German thinkers. He charged, however, that, while Butler had in some cases misinterpreted or misquoted his targets, he had also become confused about which of them fitted into the historical school tradition out of which Nazi ideology supposedly grew.<sup>201</sup> A long passage on Nietzsche, champion of amorality and the will-to-power, for instance, culminated in a comparison with Kant, Hegel and “a long line of German and germanized thinkers” who had abjured the pursuit of happiness.<sup>202</sup> But, while, in Butler’s own account, Nietzsche repudiated happiness because he saw it as part of a “slave morality”, Kant merely believed that Reason – rather than “promoting happiness” – should be the only guide to human conduct.<sup>203</sup> Hegel simply had a tragical view of historical progress which rendered the pursuit of happiness absurd. “World history,” he wrote, “is not the soil of happiness”.<sup>204</sup> Of the three, only Hegel fell into the tradition of the historical school, leading Borkenau to suggest that historicism had only really been a device through which Butler had attempted a sophisticated form of Vansittartism. He pointed out that Nietzsche, author of “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life”, had been an outspoken antagonist of the historical school and what he had considered its unheroic hankering after the past.<sup>205</sup>

Emphasis on the idea that peoples or nations have their own peculiar histories and traditions can easily be turned into an argument for an anti-cosmopolitan world view, and Butler made the connection between the historical outlook and nationalism. But Borkenau’s insistence that historicism was not German in origin meant that, for him, such a connection hardly amounted to an indictment of Germany, and could be made in the cases of de Maistre and Chateaubriand in France; or Burke in England.<sup>206</sup> Then again, Borkenau distinguished conservative or reactionary historicism – represented by those who appealed to national tradition as the basis of law and morality, and therefore resisted change and foreign influence – from the version of historicism which placed emphasis on the idea that the study of history revealed change. The adherents of this view – Borkenau once again advertised the international nature of the current by citing Tocqueville

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<sup>201</sup> In particular, Borkenau questioned Butler’s understanding of Hegel’s use of the term ‘Germanic’ (germanisch). For Butler, Hegel’s invocations of the ‘Germanic’ stage of history were pure German supremacism. Borkenau, though, pointed out that Germanic was a collective noun for those North and Central European nations with common linguistic roots. Borkenau, “Selected Notices”, *Horizon*, pp. 212-13.

<sup>202</sup> Butler, *Roots*, p. 161.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 157 & 26.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid*, p. 76.

<sup>205</sup> Borkenau, “The German Problem”, p. 190.

<sup>206</sup> Borkenau, “The Historical School”, pp. 16-17.



and Spencer along with Hegel and Marx – were much less likely to view national tradition as the keystone of law and ethics.<sup>207</sup>

In Borkenau's submission, Butler had chosen the wrong target. It was not the historical view, he argued, which started in motion the currents which led to Nazism, but precisely the opposite was the case. It was the denial of the historical view. It was in the works of racialists like Gobineau and Houston Stewart Chamberlain (neither of whom, Borkenau commented, were German) that a new and thoroughly unhistorical, pseudo-biological worldview had emerged. Butler had not overlooked Chamberlain's influence on Nazi ideology, something which had already been established by Hitler's first biographer, Konrad Heiden.<sup>208</sup> Indeed, as he had with Nietzsche, Butler had devoted several pages to Chamberlain's writings.<sup>209</sup> But, once again, Borkenau questioned the appropriateness of such a figure's inclusion as a representative of the historical school. The racist ideas that Hitler had inherited from Chamberlain and from Wagner's operas, and that Himmler's Ahnenerbe was supposed to prove, were, for Borkenau, a negation of the historical outlook. "What Hitler proclaims," Borkenau wrote, "is the absolute opposite of historicism: that racial characteristics are unchanging and that race is the basis of all history".<sup>210</sup>

#### *The Myth of Prussia*

If the Vansittartist notion that all Germans were beyond redemption had only limited influence on those charged with conducting the war, more persuasive was the notion that the Prussian mentality was the key to the rise of Hitler. Indeed, Churchill himself, during the war, regularly referred to Prussianism as "the root of the evil" in Germany.<sup>211</sup> And even the socialist opponents of Vansittartism were prone to working "Prussian characteristics" into their class analysis of National Socialism.<sup>212</sup> While Churchill was blaming Prussia for German militarism, socialists like Braunthal saw Prussia's landowning Junker class as the real vested interests behind Hitler. "The complex of ideas commonly denounced as German thought", he wrote, "should rather be termed Prussian tradition", and among the most vigorous champions of the "ideology of Prussian traditionalism" he listed the upper classes, the Prussian aristocracy, the Junkers, the owners of heavy industry and business interests.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Borkenau, "Philosophy of History".

<sup>208</sup> Konrad Heiden, *Der Fuehrer: Book One*, London: Gollancz (1944), pp. 198-99.

<sup>209</sup> Butler, *Roots*, esp. pp. 167-174.

<sup>210</sup> Borkenau, "Selected Notices", *Horizon*, p. 217.

<sup>211</sup> See Robert Cooper, "The Myth of Prussia", in Cyril Buffet & Beatrice Heuser (eds.), *Haunted by History: Myths in International Relations*, Oxford: Berghahn Books (1998), p. 226.

<sup>212</sup> Gollancz, *Shall our Children Live?*, p. 54.

<sup>213</sup> Braunthal, *Need Germany Survive?*, p. 66.

In an article for Leonard Woolf's *Political Quarterly*, Borkenau labelled the Prussia-Nazi equation the "Myth of Prussia", arguing that Prussian militarism had only ever been a plagiarism of larger European land powers.<sup>214</sup> France and Spain, he pointed out, were the first countries to introduce a standing army, while the Swedish allotment system (*indelningsverket*) was the basis of the canton system by which Prussia was commonly supposed to have introduced conscription into modern Europe.<sup>215</sup> Prussia plagiarised both, Borkenau argued, not as a means of satisfying the inborn militaristic traits of its population, but, rather, owing to the real dangers it faced as a new and relatively small state surrounded by larger and more powerful ones. Prussia "had had the choice between being a play-thing in the hands of the mighty or of becoming one of the mighties herself".<sup>216</sup> Thus the much-maligned "Prussian spirit", Borkenau argued, was something wholly artificial, generated and maintained because militarism was seen as a necessity of Prussian survival.<sup>217</sup>

While Borkenau saw nothing unique about Prussian militarism, then, he also challenged the view that Prussian interests were pulling the strings of the Nazi party. Conversely, he argued, Hitler and the Nazis were the liquidators of Prussia, which Borkenau correctly predicted would never rise again. Drawing an analogy with the Roman Empire – "Rome conquered the world, but immediately it had finished conquering it, the conquered provinces conquered Rome" – he argued that the decline of Prussia had set-in at the moment at which Bismarck united Germany under Prussian domination.<sup>218</sup> The privileges Bismarck had vested upon the Prussian squirearchy – which monopolised the senior positions in the army and the civil service – became increasingly anachronistic, Borkenau argued, in the context of the newly achieved German unity. Despite the failure of the 1918 Revolution, a "process of de-Prussianisation" had been set in motion, he continued, by some of the more modern-minded generals in response to the German defeat. And the advent of Hitler, he concluded, only accelerated this process. "The most obvious relation between Nazism and Prussianism", he wrote, was "that Hitler destroyed Prussia, completely and without leaving a trace of it".<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Borkenau, "Myth of Prussia" (cited above).

<sup>215</sup> See Daniel Riches, "Early Modern Military Reform and the Connection Between Sweden and Brandenburg-Prussia." *Scandinavian Studies*, Vol. 77, No. 3 (2005), p. 355. Riches writes that: "the Prussian canton system was preceded in almost all of its essential elements by the two main systems of early modern Swedish domestic recruitment, utskrivniny [conscription] and the indelningsverket [military allotment system]".

<sup>216</sup> Borkenau, "Myth of Prussia", p. 196.

<sup>217</sup> A contemporary historian of Prussia has made the same point about Prussia's geographical misfortune. See Christopher Clark, *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia*, London: Penguin (2007), p. 27.

<sup>218</sup> Borkenau, "Myth of Prussia", p. 203.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 204.

In *Black Record*, Vansittart had included personal anecdotes from his negative experiences as a student in Germany. He had made an example of the Prussian university fraternities – Hohenzollern era breeding grounds, similar to Eton and Harrow, for the higher civil service – in which members were schooled in the art of duelling, as an example of the inborn violence of the German nature.<sup>220</sup> A common refrain of the socialist criticism of Vansittart was that those fraternities did not represent the common German people. Though that was undoubtedly true, the critics tended to concede Vansittart’s point that the small, privileged representatives of what Braunthal called the “Prussian tradition” in the duelling fraternities were the future Nazis. The “other Germany”, for Braunthal, was represented by those who opposed the Prussian tradition – and, therefore, Nazism.<sup>221</sup> Though Clement Attlee used stronger language – referring to Prussia as a “virus” – there was not that much distance between the anti-German Labour leader and defenders of Germany like Gollancz and Braunthal on the Prussian question.<sup>222</sup> All agreed that the Prussian Junker class were the root of the German problem.

Borkenau, by contrast, judged it as absurd to talk of the students’ fraternities as if they were the germs of future Nazism. The National Socialists’ suppression of the Prussian fraternities was, he averred, a window into the déclassé nature of Nazism and a microcosm for the crushing of Prussian power and destruction of Prussian values undertaken after 1933.

[The] fraternities were dissolved by the Nazis without an exception, their members forced to join the plebian Hitler youth and the S. A., where they were systematically subjected to bad treatment and constantly, in Soviet fashion, put up to derision for their upper-class manners and descent. Attempts were made, but unsuccessfully, to continue these fraternities underground, and the leaders were put into concentration camps. The machinery through which the old Prussian ruling caste controlled appointments to the civil service no longer exists.<sup>223</sup>

Borkenau’s verdict that Prussia was a “ghost of the past” has been borne out.<sup>224</sup> As Clarke has argued, “Germany was not Prussia’s fulfilment... but its undoing”.<sup>225</sup> National Socialism helped to dig its grave, dissolving the autonomous government in Prussia in 1933.<sup>226</sup> The Nazis also ended the Prussian aristocracy’s domination of the German army, as well as the army’s domination of the German state.<sup>227</sup> But it is revelatory of the *zeitgeist* at the time that Borkenau was writing that

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<sup>220</sup> Vansittart, *Black Record*, p. 38.

<sup>221</sup> See Braunthal, *Need Germany Survive?*, p. 67.

<sup>222</sup> See Cooper, “Myth of Prussia”, p. 225.

<sup>223</sup> Borkenau, “Myth of Prussia”, p. 204.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>225</sup> Clark, *Iron Kingdom*, p. xxiii.

<sup>226</sup> See Cooper, “Myth of Prussia”, p. 224.

<sup>227</sup> Victor Rothwell, *Britain and the Cold War, 1941-1947*, London: Cape (1982), p. 34.

the Four Powers felt it necessary to formally abolish the Prussian state, which had already withered away, in February 1947 (Allied Directive No. 46). It was, as Golo Mann put it, merely the “posthumous execution of a dead Kingdom”.<sup>228</sup>

### *Lutheranism*

Despite his argument that Prussia was only a fragment of the past, Borkenau did give some credence to the idea of an east-west dichotomy in Germany, pointing to “the profound effect religion has had in shaping national character”.<sup>229</sup> In a 1944 article subsequently translated as one of his three treatises on German History – his first book published in Germany, in 1947 – he suggested that an understanding of Lutheranism was of paramount importance to an understanding of the German problem.<sup>230</sup> Borkenau viewed the Reformation as, geographically, a revolt of Northern against Southern Europe, and Lutheranism as its specifically Eastern movement. While the Western German provinces were shaped as much by Calvinism as were Holland, England and Scotland, the dominance of Lutheranism in the German East, he suggested, had an integral influence on the development of the German character. In fact, the doctrinal distinctions between Lutheranism and Calvinism – much like the differences between Catholicism and the Eastern Orthodox Church – were reflective of a deep-seated cleavage between Western and Eastern civilisation. And “German history”, he wrote, “ever since Luther’s days, has been a constant tug-of-war between the Eastern and the Western currents in her makeup”.<sup>231</sup>

Congruent with what he had written in the *Totalitarian Enemy* about the significance of the Eastern influence under which German unification had been carried out, Borkenau argued that, in the era of Luther and Calvin, dissimilar social conditions in Eastern and Western Europe had a decisive effect on the respective doctrines they enunciated. In the West, with the growth of town life and the emergence of a bourgeoisie, the Reformation had a social revolutionary aspect. But, Borkenau contended, “[n]one of the factors disrupting feudal society farther west was yet operative in eastern Germany”.<sup>232</sup> In fact, the lack of social revolutionary doctrines – and the static nature of Eastern civilisation – had, Borkenau submitted, deep roots going back far beyond the Great Schism. One of the most palpable divergences between Eastern and Western civilisation, he felt, were their utterly antithetical monastical ideals.

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<sup>228</sup> Golo Mann, *The History of Germany Since 1789*, New York: Praeger (1968), p. 500.

<sup>229</sup> Franz Borkenau, “On Lutheranism”, *Horizon*, September 1944, p. 162.

<sup>230</sup> Franz Borkenau: “Luther: Ost oder West?“, in *Drei Abhandlungen zur deutschen Geschichte*, Frankfurt: V. Klostermann (1947), pp. 45–75.

<sup>231</sup> Borkenau, “On Lutheranism”, p. 173.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid*, p. 164.

While Eastern monasticism, in all its forms, had always amounted to a turning away from the secular world – a life of “self-torturing asceticism”, or isolation and contemplation – he held that there was no parallel Western tradition.<sup>233</sup> Rather, Western monasticism had been associated with strict moral demands, and an “identity of living” enforced upon all clergy.<sup>234</sup> In the West, Borkenau argued, the Reformation brought monastic ideals closer to the laity, so that a kind of practical morality developed, in relation to which monastical morality (with its particular prohibitions unsuitable for the laity, such as celibacy) was merely a “more accomplished form”.<sup>235</sup> In the East, however, the assumed divorce between secular and monastic existence meant that such a development was barely conceivable. The great saints of the East, Borkenau claimed, were symbols of mystical adoration, but there was no moral relationship between them and the secular world.<sup>236</sup> This was closer to what, in another essay, Borkenau would suggest was the original meaning of monasticism in the early Christian era. The word ‘monk’, he pointed out, derived from the Greek *monachos*, meaning a person living an eremitical life, while those living in communal religious orders were distinguished as *coenobites*. But after, in the West, the solitary monastic ideal died out, ‘monk’ came to take on the opposite of its original meaning.<sup>237</sup>

The danger of the Western conception, he suggested, highly attuned to an ideal of moral rectitude, was the practical impossibility of the sinless life.<sup>238</sup> In line with Western tradition, Calvin was acutely aware of the conflict between the sinful reality and the moral ideal – the hypocrisy of the world. He could not, therefore, believe in the saving power of faith, but put in its place divine election.<sup>239</sup> Luther’s teachings, however, Borkenau felt, only began to make sense if seen as products of an Eastern context. Luther abjured the secular world, teaching that the prince of the world is the Devil.<sup>240</sup> But the greatest affinity between Luther and the Eastern church, in Borkenau’s reckoning, was the Antinomian approach taken towards sin. Both operated by the formula – for which, he argued, ample justification can be found in the Gospels – that the “greatest grace is given to the greatest sinners”.<sup>241</sup> Luther, in fact, took this formula even further, teaching in his commentary on Paul that sin, through contrition, was “the chief avenue to faith and grace”.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> *Ibid*, p. 166.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid*, p. 167.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>237</sup> Franz Borkenau, “Monastic Revival Coming”, *World Review*, July 1945, p. 29.

<sup>238</sup> Borkenau “On Lutheranism”, p. 168.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid*, p. 172.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid*, p. 174.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid*, p. 170.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid*, p. 172.

Though Borkenau began his article on Lutheranism by promising that it would be enlightening about the German problem, he actually made little connection between the Eastern monastic tradition in which he attempted to place Luther and the Nazi present. In fact, there was only one tentative reference to contemporary Germany, and it was couched in the terms of a rhetorical question.

The profound popularity, the almost divine worship offered to more than one tyrant in the East, also finds its explanation in this attitude which appreciates inspiration quite irrespective of its moral content. Is it part of the explanation of... the Hitler cult?<sup>243</sup>

Luther, as the church scholar Tiefel has pointed out, did introduce the concept of the “*Wundermann*”, a miracle worker sent by God to rule without regard to the written laws when the historical conditions demand it.<sup>244</sup> However, most of Borkenau’s illustrative examples of the Eastern monastic ideal in practice were Russian. He remarked on the incredible position of the most famous representative of the amoral Khlysty sect, Rasputin – virtually inconceivable from a Western perspective – in the Court of Nicholas II and among St Petersburg high society. He also drew attention to the novels of Dostoyevsky, which were, he contended, actually theological parables, where the highest grace was afforded to two types: firstly, those saintlike figures “who are not of this world” (Alyosha and Myshkin); and secondly, “those who are wading completely in its mud” (Mitya and Raskolnikov).<sup>245</sup> While he remarked on the popularity of Dostoyevsky in Germany as opposed to France and Britain, he also suggested that, in the eternal tug-of-war between East and West in Germany, Lutheranism had moved somewhat away from its original Eastern inspiration. Lutherans, in fact, had come to adopt many puritanical values – such as hard work, economy and practices of cleanliness – which distinguished contemporary Lutheranism from Orthodox Christianity.<sup>246</sup>

Nevertheless, he saw the Western aspects of modern Lutheranism only as a veneer under which Eastern trends remained dominant.<sup>247</sup> Though, elsewhere, Borkenau had written that anti-Semitism and the ‘Jewish problem’ had been Austrian obsessions, rather than German ones; though Nazism had its origins in the non-Lutheran Bavarian south; and though none of the higher leadership of the Party had Lutheran backgrounds, he still considered the Lutheran Church an

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<sup>243</sup> *Ibid*, p. 169.

<sup>244</sup> Hans Tiefel, “The German Lutheran Church and the Rise of National Socialism”, *Church History*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (1972), p. 336.

<sup>245</sup> Borkenau, “On Lutheranism”, p. 170.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid*, p. 173.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid*, p. 174.

integral aspect of the German problem.<sup>248</sup> In a review of a Catholic anti-Nazi pamphlet, Borkenau contrasted the widespread spiritual rejection of Nazism by Catholics with the feeble Protestant record. He was somewhat dismissive of Pastor Niemöller and the Confessing Church, whose opposition was held to relate mainly to “matters of... church life”.<sup>249</sup> Karl Barth had made a similar criticism of his coreligionists in 1936, and Tiefel later argued that such Lutheran opposition to Nazism as there was only really began when the Church realised that it would not be exempted from *Gleichschaltung*.<sup>250</sup> The renunciation of the secular world which Borkenau saw as being at the heart of Eastern Christianity was one explanation why Orthodox Russia and Lutheran Germany had both offered such pitiful spiritual resistance to political tyranny.

Both the living part of the eastern Church – its monasteries and their worshippers – and the living part of the Lutheran Church – the conventicles of pietists – have always scrupulously abstained from politics. In the practical world this means that they have always been abjectly subservient to political rulers, however cruel, tyrannical and criminal.<sup>251</sup>

The Lutheran theologian Hans Asmussen had made the same critical comparison as early as 1934, when he wrote that the silence of the Church would lead Christian life to assume a “Byzantine form”.<sup>252</sup>

Borkenau nowhere attempted explicitly to connect Lutheran beliefs with any of the most obvious aspects of the Nazi *Weltanschauung* – such as its race theories – nor did he attempt to provide any account of religious enthusiasm for the regime (straightforward as such a task may have been).<sup>253</sup> Enlightening as it was as a unique perspective on the Reformation, then, his essay only really uncovered one small dimension of the Nazi problem: the political apathy of German

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<sup>248</sup> “...much which, to the world at large, seems difficult to understand in Nazidom becomes quite intelligible if one remembers that the founder... passed his youth in Vienna”. Borkenau, *Austria and After*, p. 94.

<sup>249</sup> For praise of Catholic resistance, see Franz Borkenau, “Men of Faith”, *Observer*, 18 October 1942, p. 3. Indeed, Niemöller’s famous poem is really a confessional in which he recognises this himself.

<sup>250</sup> See Tiefel, “Lutheran Church”, pp. 326 & 333.

<sup>251</sup> Borkenau, “On Lutheranism”, p. 174.

<sup>252</sup> See Tiefel, “Lutheran Church”, p. 335.

<sup>253</sup> Another refugee in Britain, Peter Wiener (*Martin Luther: Hitler’s Spiritual Ancestor*, London: Hutchinson [1945]), did attempt to write a ‘from Luther to Hitler’ pamphlet (dedicated to Vansittart), but tried to turn Luther into a political theorist whose ideas about such subjects as the State (the subject of one chapter) were held to anticipate Hitler’s. Borkenau’s Luther, far from being a political theorist, was responsible for dissociating religion from politics. Though it would have been especially easy to have made an example of Luther’s anti-Semitism (see Heinrich August Winkler, *Germany: The Long Road West, 1789-1933*, Oxford: OUP [2006], p. 15), the topic of another of Wiener’s chapters, such a task could have been performed in relation to almost any Medieval or early modern theologian, so would have proved nothing more than that Luther and Hitler were both anti-Semites. Austin’s recent book has shown the ways in which the Jews and Judaism was instrumentalised in confessional warfare during the Reformation. See Kenneth Austin, *The Jews and the Reformation*, Yale University Press (2020). Nirenberg, meanwhile, has seen Anti-Judaism as a “Western tradition”, arguing that Jews and Judaism have been instrumentalised in polemics in Western culture going back to St Jerome and St Augustine’s mutual use of the accusation of ‘Judaizing’ tendencies against one another. See David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition*, New York: Norton (2013).

Protestantism. This Lutheran heritage, Borkenau wrote regretfully, in a soul-searching passage which only appeared in the German version of the text, “is partly responsible for making us into a people that always failed politically”.<sup>254</sup> The article did, however, anticipate the positions Borkenau took in the Cold War. He concluded it by stressing the millennia-long chasm between Eastern and Western thought and prophesied that the East would “make history in conjunction with and in opposition to the west for a very long time to come”.<sup>255</sup>

### Socialism: National or International

Borkenau’s only post-internment wartime book should be seen, in part, as a product of the Vansittartist context. A history of the nationalist trends in Socialist parties and the Labour Movement from the era of the first British trade unions up to the time of writing, Borkenau summarised how labour had come to rely on the state to ameliorate its exploitation in the era of Manchester liberalism; and how, in the unequal world created by the uneven pace of industrial development, where the interests of labour in wealthy countries had come into conflict with those of labour in less wealthy ones, the former had tended to support exclusionist policies against the movement of people and goods.<sup>256</sup> He also suggested that the nominally internationalist socialist parties of Europe were, in spite of their ideologies, nevertheless often moved by patriotic impulses (which, he held, was only true, also, of the masses) – the most obvious example being when several of them voted for war credits in August, 1914.<sup>257</sup>

August 4<sup>th</sup>, 1914 marked an incisive turning-point. It led to various splits, culminating in the foundation of the communist international in March, 1919. Communism’s claim to existence was rooted in its claim to true internationalism... [which], the communists said, the majority of socialists had betrayed.<sup>258</sup>

But this most significant exception to the patriotic rule, Lenin’s Bolsheviks, had subsequently adopted “socialism in one country”, and had, Borkenau argued, undergone a complete transformation. “The most violently internationalist section of the socialist world movement” became “the most nationalist of them all”.<sup>259</sup> He might have noticed, however, that there was, lately, another exception to the rule: the German-speaking socialist exiles like himself, who neither supported the Reich’s cause as the Social Democratic Executive had done in 1914, nor retreated into pacifism in the manner of the anti-war Zimmerwald movement of 1915, but were unanimous

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<sup>254</sup> Borkenau, “Luther: Ost oder West?”, p. 74.

<sup>255</sup> Borkenau, “On Lutheranism”, p. 176.

<sup>256</sup> Borkenau, *Socialism*, pp. 26-7.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.



in hoping for a German defeat. His interpretation of Stalinist nationalism, meanwhile, was perhaps demonstrative of a willingness to take Moscow's wartime propaganda at face value.<sup>260</sup> With the advent of the Cold War, Borkenau would move away from the view that Bolshevism had simply been impregnated by nationalism.<sup>261</sup>

Though Borkenau kept the Vansittartist debate out of his book, he was, concurrently (in the texts which have been examined above), writing articles against the "literature of hate", and it is not a stretch to see the phenomenon of socialist Vansittartism as a subtext in a book which aimed to document the failure of socialists to live up to their supposed ideal of internationalism. Indeed, Braunthal borrowed the title of Borkenau's book for a section of his anti-Vansittart tract, which began: "It cannot honestly be contested that discrimination against any nation is incompatible with the very idea of socialism".<sup>262</sup> Braunthal conceded that Borkenau's analysis was, on the whole, accurate, but implored his readers to take solace in the existence – and persistence – of the internationalist ideal. Despite the "depth of [the] conflict" between the ideal and the real world, socialists had, rightly, refused to relinquish the ideal; and this fact, Braunthal believed, portended its ultimate victory.<sup>263</sup> A less optimistic German refugee scholar implied that Borkenau's conclusions were clinched by the negation of internationalism he had witnessed among anti-German representatives of British socialism.<sup>264</sup> Ironically, the anti-German elements in the Labour Party returned the accusation. German socialists should be excluded from the discussion about Labour's war aims, Labour's International Secretary, William Gillies, argued in a 1941 memorandum, because the SPD was a nationalist party.<sup>265</sup> Like Borkenau, Gillies noted the Party's support of its own government in the First World War, but, unlike Borkenau, he overlooked the attitude of several other European socialist parties which acted with the same instinct, as Leonard Woolf pointed out in an admonishing letter to him.<sup>266</sup> Woolf may well have been writing to Gillies with Borkenau's book in mind, as he had shortly before been called upon to write the critical introductory note inserted in it to placate the Labour General Secretary, James Middleton, who was unhappy that it was being published as part of the Party's book service. In fact, Woolf had offered little by way of criticism. Congratulating Borkenau for clearing some of the "dead wood"

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<sup>260</sup> Also in 1942, Borkenau reviewed the pamphlet *Stalin und das ewige Russland* [later expanded and translated into English – Walter Kolarz, *Stalin and Eternal Russia*, London: Drummond (1944)] and concurred with the author's conclusion that "Russia becomes more and more patriotic and less and less marxist-communist... and the climax of this development is already very near". See Franz Borkenau, "Some Recent Books", *Dublin Review*, October 1942, pp. 175-7.

<sup>261</sup> See Borkenau, *European Communism*.

<sup>262</sup> Braunthal, *Need Germany*, p. 238

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid*, p. 240.

<sup>264</sup> Wolfgang Friedmann, *The Crisis of the National State*, London: Macmillan (1943), p. 70.

<sup>265</sup> See Talbot Imlay, *Practice of Socialist Internationalism*, p. 267.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid*, p. 269.

in his cherished beliefs, he merely stated that “there is a good deal to say on the other side which he [Borkenau] ignores,” without elaborating on what that was.<sup>267</sup> Woolf subsequently recruited Borkenau to contribute his “Myth of Prussia” to the *Quarterly Review*.

The criticism of Borkenau tended to challenge his tone rather than his arguments. Woolf reminded readers to be sceptical of an author who labelled his own solution “realistic” and his opponents’ “utopian”.<sup>268</sup> Harold Laski, meanwhile, indulged in some speculative psychologising. Noting that “Dr Borkenau continues his rapid pilgrimage from the eager communism of his youth to the comfortable haven of mild social reform”, he suggested that Borkenau’s “power to see the emerging shape of a new society” was “conditioned by a determination never to experience again the deceptions of his youth”.<sup>269</sup> Both Laski and Middleton made claims to a foresight which they diagnosed as lacking in Borkenau’s writings. They could see beyond the world of capitalism and the nation state – of which labour nationalism was merely a symptom. “Under a socialist economy,” Middleton wrote, “every additional pair of hands can produce more than it consumes”.<sup>270</sup> Laski, in a similar vein, complained that “nowhere does he [Borkenau] analyse the implications of the economy of abundance that comes into view with the idea of a planned society”.<sup>271</sup>

In fact, Borkenau believed that socialism had already gone a long way towards displacing capitalism, but that it did not appear to have removed the problems of economic conflict or scarcity. “We are living in a society which is becoming more socialist every day,” he wrote. “The differences existing between the Russian, the German and the English regime” may have been great enough “to justify a life-and-death struggle... yet compared with liberalism of the *laissez-faire* type they are only differences of degree”.<sup>272</sup> He took the emergence of the planned society for granted. As a biographer of Hayek’s *Road to Serfdom* has pointed out, almost everyone did during the war, which is part of the reason Hayek became an outcast among mainstream economists after publishing it.<sup>273</sup> Borkenau was, however, marginally less sanguine about planning than Laski,

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<sup>267</sup> Leonard Woolf, “Introductory Note”, in Borkenau, *Socialism*, pp. v-vi.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.* Readers familiar with Woolf’s journal, the *Political Quarterly*, would have been aware that these terms were a subtle means of equating Borkenau with E.H Carr. Woolf had recently criticised Carr for arguing that the League of Nations had been “utopian” because it failed. In Woolf’s view, the failure of any policy was insufficient as proof that it was unattainable, and Carr had merely cherry-picked ideals and policies he disagreed with and labelled them “utopian”. Woolf pointed out that Carr had viewed appeasement, for instance, as a “realist” policy, but that it, too, had failed. See Leonard Woolf, “Utopia and Reality”, *Political Quarterly*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (1940).

<sup>269</sup> Laski, “A Convert”.

<sup>270</sup> James Middleton to T. M. Ragg, 9 February 1942, RKP Archive, RKP 169-4.

<sup>271</sup> Laski, “A Convert”.

<sup>272</sup> Borkenau, *Socialism*, p. 158.

<sup>273</sup> Neil McInnes, “The Road Not Taken: Hayek’s Slippery Slope to Serfdom”, *National Interest*, No. 51 (1998), pp. 56-66.

believing, like Karl Mannheim, that “planning for freedom” was an intensely difficult problem.<sup>274</sup> Planning had gone farthest in the totalitarian states, and this, in Borkenau’s view, was because the totalitarian regimes had less cause to take account of the competing economic interests that constituted society. Nevertheless, Borkenau did not believe that planning entailed totalitarianism, but attempted to distinguish between democratic and totalitarian planning:

It has been proved by experience that planning is only possible where there is a central authority able to plan. This is... a problem of power. The central authority must have the power to override vested interests... One hears it said that such an authority should overrule all individual interests and plan in the interests of “the community”. This is loose thinking. Every step of planning affects many interests... [and it is] utopian to plan so that in the balance all interests would be affected favourably as much as unfavourably... The balance in favour of the one and to the detriment of the other can, however, be big or small. Big balances are the result of totalitarian, small balances of democratic planning.<sup>275</sup>

Like Braunthal, Laski accepted the general soundness of Borkenau’s historical observations, nevertheless upbraiding him for merely rediscovering “a good deal that has been obvious for many years” – and doing so with an “air of patronising and aloof superiority”.<sup>276</sup> Samuel Moyn’s recent judgement that *Socialism: National or International* was a “brilliant and neglected” study rather contradicts Laski’s insinuation that it was unoriginal, while Borkenau’s main argument has certainly been recapitulated by several more recent historians of socialism, who do not appear to have been aware of his book.<sup>277</sup> In a lecture delivered in 1948, Laski adopted it himself, conceding that for most socialists, “loyalty to the nation state” always came before “loyalty to international socialism”.<sup>278</sup> But, as Imlay points out in a recent history of twentieth century socialist internationalism, a “major war... shakes the international system to its very roots, creating unparalleled opportunities for revising the status quo”.<sup>279</sup> Laski undoubtedly sensed these opportunities – as did Borkenau. Their ideas about what they were, however, diverged. In a Fabian lecture of 1941, published as part of a pamphlet on War aims by the LBS, Laski declared “that the independent sovereign state is an anachronism that has exhausted its historic utility”.<sup>280</sup> He went

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<sup>274</sup> See Karl Mannheim, *Diagnosis of Our Time*, London: Routledge (1943); also see Borkenau, “Some Recent Books” (1943).

<sup>275</sup> Borkenau, *Socialism*, p. 161.

<sup>276</sup> Laski, “A Convert”.

<sup>277</sup> Moyn, *Not Enough*, p. 237. See the historiographical commentary of Imlay, who seeks to show that the consensus of historians of socialism – such as Wilfred Loth, Rolf Steininger, Donald Sassoon and James Joll – has been that internationalism has been a very minor aspect of the conduct of socialist parties. Imlay, *Practice of Socialist Internationalism*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid*, p. 295.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid*, p. 9.

<sup>280</sup> See Harold Laski, “The Need for a European Revolution”, in Laski *et al.*, *Programme for Victory*, London: Routledge (1941), p. 5.

on to argue that “enduring peace” – an end which everyone bar Hitler could get behind – was “incompatible with the power of any nation-state to threaten by aggression the security of its neighbours”.

This must mean an international order the members of which abandon their claim to sovereignty, and agree that all matters of common concern shall be matters, also, of common decision. It is, I think, clear that the executive organ of that international order must control all armaments, especially aviation. It is clear, further, that tariffs, currency, migration, the standards of labour, the right of access to raw materials, and the use of colonial possessions are matters of common concern in which no state can exercise sovereign powers.<sup>281</sup>

It was this kind of talk that Borkenau was most dismissive of in his book. While Harold Nicholson and H.G. Wells were among those who talked explicitly of a post-war world government, the idea of a federal solution to Europe’s problems invited widespread support from an array of political viewpoints. In his book, Borkenau referenced both neo-liberal and socialist federal unionists.<sup>282</sup> The group Federal Union had been founded in 1938, and, as Rosenboim has recently documented, incorporated diverse representatives, from the socialist Barbara Wootton to the anti-collectivist Hayek.<sup>283</sup> As Pinder has written, given the quantity of federalist literature produced in Britain between 1939 and 1941, it is “doubtful... whether such an impressive amount has appeared in any one country since”.<sup>284</sup> The broad idea of a European federal union along the sort of lines laid out in Laski’s lecture is the almost unanimous vision which emerges from the texts of the socialist opponents of Vansittartism. Rather than a German problem, they argued, there were a series of related problems – capitalism, imperialism, fascism and war – which were undoubtedly international. The solution, therefore, must be international, too. If a defeated Germany, as Braunthal put it,

...were left an isolated power, surrounded and encircled by blocs of states... then aggressive nationalism would again receive a new and powerful impulse... But at the same time [there is] a great opportunity [for] an entirely new way of life within an international Commonwealth.<sup>285</sup>

Borkenau was in complete agreement with the view that fascism was an international rather than only a German problem, and also saw the necessity for what he called a “new internationalism”.<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>281</sup> *Ibid*, p. 20.

<sup>282</sup> Borkenau, *Socialism*, pp. ix & 162.

<sup>283</sup> Or Rosenboim, “Barbara Wootton, Friedrich Hayek and the debate on democratic federalism in the 1940s”, *International History Review*, Vol. 36, No. 5 (2014), pp. 894-918.

<sup>284</sup> John Pinder, “Federal Union 1939-41”, in W. Lipgens (ed.), *Documents on the History of European Integration, Vol. 2*, New York: De Gruyter (1986).

<sup>285</sup> Braunthal, *Need Germany*, p. 227.

<sup>286</sup> Borkenau, *Socialism*, pp. 157-172.

But he was sceptical about the ease with which states would cooperate with one another over the matters listed above by Laski. Laski complained that Borkenau wrote with an “acrid contempt” for his antagonists and with “acids... at the end of his pen”.<sup>287</sup> In fact, the bulk of the book – dealing as it did with history – was relatively free of the kind of aloof superiority Laski claimed to detect. The few remarks which are likely to have inspired this reading were concentrated in Borkenau’s concluding chapter, and related to what he called the “cloud-cuckoo internationalism of Federal Union”: “the paper plans for international unions so cherished by our dear utopians”, “eternal unteachables” who had failed to learn the lessons implicit in the failure of the League of Nations.<sup>288</sup>

Borkenau considered it more than doubtful that states would voluntarily abandon their sovereignty in the aftermath of the war and subsequently commit to solving all future disagreements – “with the equality of all participants” – by common decision.<sup>289</sup> He was not alone in doubting that. East and Central European émigré intellectuals were almost entirely preoccupied with the same questions of European and world reconstruction in the latter part of the War – pressing as they were for the future of the countries they had fled. In a Czech and Polish exile journal published in the US, which was devoted to these questions, Stanislaw Strzetelski, a member of the Polish government-in-exile, addressed the idea of a federation of the nations of the Danube basin, writing that “no one entertains any illusions that the sentiment of national interest would give way before the patriotism of a wider federal homeland”.<sup>290</sup> This was, perhaps, an allusion to recent history: the collapse of the Habsburg monarchy at the end of the First World War. In fact, the less ambitious idea of a Danubian Confederation had been raised at that time, and, as Borkenau had argued in *Austria and After*, would have been the ideal solution for the future of the formerly Austro-Hungarian states. But the ideal had been unobtainable owing to the national divisions which had been a marked feature of the late Habsburg era.<sup>291</sup> It was, in fact, Anschluss – denied by the terms

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<sup>287</sup> Laski, “A Convert”.

<sup>288</sup> Borkenau, *Socialism*, pp. 162 & 169.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid*, p. 162.

<sup>290</sup> Stanislaw Strzetelski, “Federation in its Place”, *New Europe and World Reconstruction*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (1942), p. 46.

<sup>291</sup> Borkenau’s was very much the consensus view for a long time. As Cohen writes, historians have:

...conventionally depicted the Habsburg Monarchy as... [unable] to accommodate the national aspirations of its peoples. It is the locus classicus for the failure of an old-fashioned dynastic empire to develop among its subjects a broader civic identity and loyalty to the state to counter the rise of nationalist demands for self-government.

But Cohen’s purpose in stating that view was to challenge it; primarily, by pointing to the evidence that few of the national political movements of the pre-1914 era actually sought the result that they got after 1918, but had tended to call for various reforms. See Gary B. Cohen, “Nationalist Politics and the Dynamics of State and Civil Society in the Habsburg Monarchy, 1867-1914.” *Central European History*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (2007), p. 241. Still, it is easy to see how Central and Eastern Europeans could be sceptical about the federal solution in the 1940s.

of the Treaty of Versailles – which had widespread popular support in Austria in the early 1920s.<sup>292</sup> Before the advent of Nazism, when its meaning changed for them, Austrian socialists had been partisans of Anschluss.<sup>293</sup>

As with the conflict between the Italian or Chinese worker with aspirations to migrate to America for a better standard of living, and the American worker whose work and pay was threatened by such migrants, Borkenau held it as axiomatic that all social groups in all nations would be subject to similarly irresolvable conflicts of interests *if such a system were suddenly established* [my italics]. In his preface, Borkenau used the trite formula that “the road to hell is paved with good intentions”, but it is clear that what he really had in mind was the tragic conception of history Hegel took over from the Greek dramatists: the never-ending cycle of conflicts between equally just demands.<sup>294</sup>

It is a great mistake to imagine that, once you understand the other man’s point of view, you will somehow come to an arrangement with him. More often than not the better you understand the roots of conflicts, the more surely you feel they are inevitable.<sup>295</sup>

This was diametrically opposed to what Borkenau’s fellow *Neu Beginnen* veteran Paul Hagen thought. “If there is really an insuperable conflict of interests between nations”, he wrote,

then an argument can be made for fascism... However, what seem to be insuperable conflicts between the interests of nations usually turn out to be only conflicts of interests between privileged groups in those nations.<sup>296</sup>

Borkenau, though, had sought to emphasise that all groups within a nation had interests which they expected that nation, or State, to defend. These conflicts could only be soothed in a gradual, piecemeal fashion by an arbiter with ultimate power over all interests – such as the State. As quoted above, Borkenau had contrasted the big balances of totalitarian states with the small balances of democratic ones. Small balances when negotiating the conflicting interests of various states meant that the pursuit of a more internationalist world would have to be a slow and gradual task. Much like the revisionist continental Marxists who had opposed the revolutionary ideology with the idea of the gradual introduction of socialism in the early twentieth century, Borkenau sought to challenge the idea that a new internationalist world could suddenly be brought into being at the end of the war.

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<sup>292</sup> See Borkenau, “Danube Confederation and Anschluss”, in *Austria and After*, pp. 180-212. Also see, Erin R. Hochman, *Imagining a Greater Germany: Republican Nationalism and the Idea of Anschluss*, Cornell University Press (2016).

<sup>293</sup> See G. E. R. Gedye, *Fallen Bastions*, London: Gollancz (1939), p. 40.

<sup>294</sup> Borkenau, *Socialism*, p. ix.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid*, p. 68.

<sup>296</sup> Hagen, *Will Germany Crack?*, p. 213.

Borkenau's ideas about the future of internationalism were based, in large part, on analogy to the functioning of the nation state. "National unity," he wrote, "is a model for international unity."<sup>297</sup> As in the above quotation on the problem of national planning, Borkenau emphasised the central importance of power. Democratic states, he pointed out, are run on the basis of compromise and bargaining, with the threat of less conciliatory methods like strikes. But violence is impermissible, and it is tacitly accepted by almost everyone that the state must have a monopoly on it. If it lost that monopoly – if the instruments of violence were to enter any fight with their weapons – then compromise would be at an end and there would be a severe crisis of power; an "abeyance of the state"; civil war. Laski proposed the "international control of all armaments" while G.D.H. Cole called for the "abolition of national armies, navies and air forces, and perhaps of national police forces", in favour of "supra-national forces" loyal to the "supra-national state".<sup>298</sup> Borkenau, however, wondered how an international police force could be made to work in practice. "If major issues were at stake (and they must be at stake all the time) the national elements of this international force would inevitably act in loyalty to their national units". Such a state of affairs would "correspond exactly to what a democratic country would be like" during a Civil War.<sup>299</sup>

Power, Borkenau held, was the key to the functioning of the nation state, and would, similarly, have to be the key to any supranational government. Bluntly, he concluded that "federal union... will obviously work only when all the elements opposed to it are crushed and held down. In other words, it will work as hitherto all political rule has worked – through power".<sup>300</sup> The aforementioned Strzetelski made exactly the same point:

Hence, the conclusion is clear: a federation of Central European nations – especially in the present epoch of total warfare – could become an effective and independent instrument only if it turned into a uniformly directed empire.<sup>301</sup>

For Strzetelski, this simply told against the federative idea; but, for Borkenau, it was an argument for "superimperialism". For Borkenau had much the same vision of a peaceful, cooperative Europe as Laski, Braunthal and the other Federal Unionists. He simply believed that its failure of realisation was assured if an attempt was made to bring it to fruition by nothing other than a multilateral commitment by national governments to abolish their national interests. Instead, the project would have to be led by actually existing world powers with the will: firstly, to carry it through regardless of the objections of smaller nations; but secondly, to do so in such a gradual

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<sup>297</sup> Borkenau, *Socialism*, p. 162.

<sup>298</sup> From articles in the *International Socialist Forum*, both cited in Braunthal, *Need Germany*, pp. 205-6.

<sup>299</sup> Borkenau, *Socialism*, pp. 162-3.

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid*, p. 163.

<sup>301</sup> Strzetelski, "Federation", p. 46.

and “mild” manner so as to preclude major national rebellions arising. Rather than a project of simple cooperation, it was one of “superimperialism”.<sup>302</sup> Clearly, there was some justice in Gerald Brenan’s portrait of his friend as someone who “always thought, like a Prussian professor, in terms of force and power”.<sup>303</sup>

This super- or ultra-imperialism was almost certainly a conscious borrowing from Karl Kautsky, who had argued before the First World War that, in an effort to avoid the war which he held to be the inevitable result of imperialist competition, imperialist powers might form cartels so that they could continue their exploitation of agrarian countries, but no longer in competition with one another.<sup>304</sup> Once again, Borkenau was using the Marxist lexicon, but in a somewhat subversive way. His version of superimperialism was something much more like the pax-Romana, where one hegemon (in 1942 he still considered this the Anglo-American alliance, rather than simply the United States), would use soft power to shape the destinies of smaller countries. This is closer to how the term would come to be used after the Second World War, although it has tended to be used only in the context of economic control.<sup>305</sup> Borkenau gave very little detail about how superimperialism would work, but was concerned solely with making the proposition that nationalism and the nation state could only be overcome by the influence of a stronger power over weaker ones.

Here was the crucial divergence between Borkenau and the general tenor of the left-wing opposition to Vansittart. Socialists like Gollancz were highly wary of the Atlantic Alliance and the idea of the capitalist powers reshaping Europe. Indeed, he wrote that the Atlantic Charter:

...looks to a Europe and a world benevolently dominated by an Anglo-American capitalism... [which has failed to learn the lessons] of the slump of 1929 and the fascist offensive which followed it, and which culminated... in a whole world at war.<sup>306</sup>

If the lesson of Nazism was that capital had driven the world to fascism and war, then the Charter, which, as Gollancz saw it, euphemistically promised a return to free trade and the competition for markets and raw materials (he highlighted clauses IV and VI), “must make another world war all but inevitable”.<sup>307</sup> Douglas Smith was encouraged that the “moderate tone of the Atlantic Charter... has disappointed the Vansittartites”, but following the logic that *capitalism means war* he

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<sup>302</sup> Borkenau, *Socialism*, p. 172.

<sup>303</sup> Brenan, *Personal Record*, pp. 327-8.

<sup>304</sup> See Karl Kautsky (trans. William E. Bohn), “Imperialism and the War”, *International Socialist Review*, November 1914. Accessed online at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1914/09/war.htm>.

<sup>305</sup> The Bretton Woods system, for instance, has been seen as an example of US superimperialism: see Michael Hudson, *Super Imperialism: The Economic Strategy of American Empire*, Chicago: Holt, Rinehart and Winston (1972).

<sup>306</sup> Gollancz, *Shall our Children Live?*, p. 126.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid*, p. 129.



nevertheless conjectured that the United States and Britain were likely to be the major antagonists in a Third World War, as the competition between them for markets would commence with Germany's defeat.<sup>308</sup>

Not being tied to the view that capitalism had been the ultimate cause of the war, Borkenau had no reason to be so gloomy about the strengthening Anglo-American relationship. In fact, he took the view that only two possibilities were being opened up by the War.

I believe that the war is anyway bringing about an international order and that the only problem is whether it will be a Nazi or an Anglo-American order. I believe that for everybody, except the Nazi scum of the earth, the Anglo-American order is infinitely preferable... Hitler or Roosevelt; there is no third option.<sup>309</sup>

The socialist anti-Vansittartists, however, did believe in a third option. They hoped that Germany could liberate itself, and thus tended to make wildly exaggerated assessments of the strength of oppositional forces within Germany. Their idea of a new internationalist Europe was intrinsically linked to the illusion that Germany was on the cusp of a socialist revolution. Gollancz quoted Soviet sources, also given attention in the *New Statesman*, which claimed that German prisoners of war in Russia were holding conferences at which they were plotting Hitler's overthrow.<sup>310</sup> Meanwhile, on the strength of the "Reports from Inside Germany" produced by *Neu Beginnen*, Gollancz concluded that mental opposition to the regime was so widespread that revolution was bound to break as soon as the machinery of oppression had begun to disintegrate.<sup>311</sup> Both Gollancz and Braunthal suggested that the British press was deliberately ignoring revolutionary currents in Germany, in order to deter the British people from being inspired by them.<sup>312</sup> Tombs, however, has pointed out that the Vansittartist German émigré authors of *Gollancz in German Wonderland* were quite justified in ridiculing this idea that Germany would kickstart a series of European revolutions as a Leninist illusion from 1918.<sup>313</sup>

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<sup>308</sup> Douglas Smith, *Guilty Germans*, pp. 238 & 211.

<sup>309</sup> Borkenau, *Socialism*, p. 171.

<sup>310</sup> Gollancz, *Shall our Children Live?*, p. 38. Stalin, also, was quoted suggesting that the German army conscripts would be Hitler's gravediggers, which, Gollancz noted, was the "antithesis of Vansittart's analysis". But the Soviet line on German guilt was in the process of one of its wild metamorphoses. By 1943, Soviet propagandist Ilya Ehrenburg was publishing much more extreme tirades – one pamphlet entitled with the injunction "kill" – than anything Vansittart ever wrote. (See Steven Merritt Miner, *Stalin's Holy War: Religion, Nationalism, and Alliance Politics, 1941-1945*, University of North Carolina Press [2003], p. 67.) In concert with the new line, it was actually a Soviet spy in the US State Department, Harry Dexter White, who most likely drafted the Morgenthau Plan. See Norbert Muhlen, *The Return of Germany: A Tale of Two Countries*, Chicago: Henry Regnery (1953), p. 10.

<sup>311</sup> Gollancz, *Shall our Children Live?*, pp. 42-6.

<sup>312</sup> See Braunthal, *Need Germany*, pp. 241-2; Gollancz, *Shall our Children Live?*, p. 38.

<sup>313</sup> Tombs, "Socialist Vansittartism", p. 307.

Borkenau was more realistic about the ability of a defeated Germany to play an immediate part in shaping its own destiny. He saw the Atlantic Alliance as much more than a matter of wartime cooperation, believing that the United States and Britain would have to take on the responsibility of shaping post-war Europe, as well as the African continent. Borkenau's idea of the historical unity of the West precluded any Anglo-American responsibility for other parts of the world; "the land between the Baltic and the Pacific must be left to work out its own salvation".<sup>314</sup> Europe, though – and Africa, given that its countries' interests had been tied to Europe by the legacy of colonialism – could only be unified under the influence of a hegemonic power, he argued. Rather than a peoples' revolution, it was the exercise of power which could lead the continent away from nationalism. Borkenau made the same analogy to the Roman Empire as he had when he described the waning Prussian influence over unified Germany, suggesting that the Anglo-American hegemony would be subject to a "withering away" in the same fashion.

From the very moment the struggle had ended, the temple of Janus had been closed, and Roman supremacy had been achieved, that supremacy lost its content... Two generations after Augustus little difference was left between a Roman and a provincial. Two centuries after Augustus all difference was legally abolished, long after it had become completely obsolete.<sup>315</sup>

Superimperialism, Borkenau was convinced, was bound to become exactly the same thing as the internationalism preached by contemporary Federal Unionists. But believing neither in the idea that States would sacrifice their sovereignty without some form of compulsion, nor in the socialist idea that they would do so because the War would lead to a European-wide revolution beginning in Germany – and that the coming to power of the working classes would dissolve the problem of national conflicts of interests – superimperialism was, he felt, the only means of achieving it. In retrospect, Borkenau was perhaps just as utopian as the Federal Unionists. Neither voluntary renunciations of sovereignty nor the exercise of imperial power ended the era of the national state. But Borkenau's Cold War commitment to Atlanticism had been established already in 1942.

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<sup>314</sup> Borkenau, *Socialism*, p. 169.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 171-2.

## Chapter IV: The Cultural Cold War

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*'I am not a warmonger, still less a McCarthyist; I am not a partisan of preventive war, massive retaliation or anything of that kind... But I do deny that anything anybody in the West did prevented Mao from doing anything he wished to do.'* – From an article Borkenau wrote on the Formosa Crisis of 1955.<sup>1</sup>

*'Nobody likes people who run about the streets yelling 'Get ready, get ready, the day of wrath is at hand'. Least of all when they yell in a foreign accent... They are quite obviously fanatics, or hysterics, or persecution maniacs... Anti-Nazi refugees who talked about the German concentration camps and Hitler's plans for world-conquest were regarded as fanatics and fomenters of hatred, as their successors, the East European refugees and ex-Communists, are regarded today. If only the Cassandras and Jeremiahs would shut up, we could have peace for our lifetime!'* – Arthur Koestler<sup>2</sup>

*'Talking of Germans, I don't like them. The world I admire owes nothing to them – nothing whatever.'* – from the wartime diaries of Hugh Trevor-Roper<sup>3</sup>

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### Introduction

In this chapter, I investigate the claim, which has appeared in previous biographical treatments of Borkenau, that his later work was tarnished by an overly zealous anti-communism which overwhelmed his analytical abilities.<sup>4</sup> This is an assessment which has been heavily influenced by Hugh Trevor-Roper's account of Borkenau's participation at the Berlin Congress for Cultural Freedom (BCCF), the event which launched the organisation of the same name.<sup>5</sup> I have therefore investigated this event, and located other accounts of Borkenau's participation, to try to determine whether Trevor-Roper can be treated as a reliable source.<sup>6</sup> In looking at contemporaneous accounts of the BCCF, I have tried to set them in their context. The event began just days after the outbreak of hostilities in Korea, and took place in a partitioned city which had recently been blockaded, and was in many ways the epicentre of the Cold War. The BCCF was an international event, and Trevor-Roper was attending as a delegate from Britain and a reporter for a British liberal newspaper. Though he had written a universally lauded book about the last days of the Nazi

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<sup>1</sup> Franz Borkenau, "How Mao Bluffed Dulles", *New Leader*, 30 January 1956, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Koestler, *Invisible Writing*, pp. 189-90.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Davenport-Hines (ed.), *Hugh Trevor-Roper, The Wartime Journals*, London: I. B. Tauris (2012), p. 53.

<sup>4</sup> See Jones, *Lost Debate*, p. 185; Kessler, "Between Communism" p. 109.

<sup>5</sup> Trevor-Roper, "Ex-Communist". I have used BCCF for references to the June 1950 event, so as to distinguish it from the organisation founded at that event, The Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF).

<sup>6</sup> Sidney Hook, *Out of Step: An Unquiet Life in the Twentieth Century*, New York: Harper & Row (1987); Celia Goodman (ed.), *Living with Koestler: Mamaine Koestler's Letters*, New York: St. Martin's Press (1985); Francois Bondy, "Berlin Congress for Freedom", *Commentary* (Sept., 1950), pp. 245-51; Lichtheim, "The German Reviews"; A. J. Ayer, *More of my Life*, Oxford University Press (1985).

regime, he was nevertheless an outsider in West Berlin; somebody who was unfamiliar with aspects of the political context. I have tried to assess how the British and German contexts influenced different ways of viewing the issues under discussion at the BCCF. I believe that it is important to think not only about how Borkenau was viewed by a British observer, but how he was viewed by Germans and central Europeans in Berlin; and to ask: how did Borkenau's political commitments correspond to the contexts of West Germany and West Berlin in the early Cold War period? To a British intellectual, Borkenau appeared as a zealot, but was that the way he was viewed by the majority of attendees at the Congress?

After looking at Borkenau's participation at the BCCF, I will move on to the method of Kremlinology. It is undeniable that Borkenau's *European Communism* (1953) was a highly speculative book, much less meticulously documented than his earlier history of the Communist International. But was this because Borkenau was overwhelmed by "anti-communist passions", as Jones and Kessler have suggested, or was it in fact because he was pioneering a speculative method for the study of communism and Soviet politics which relied on supposition because of the paucity of reliable documentary evidence available to researchers at the time?

## Historiography

Cold Warriors – those who "Waged the Literary Cold War", to borrow the subtitle of a recent history of their activities – have been subject to sustained criticism in the historiography of what is more commonly called the "Cultural Cold War".<sup>7</sup> The criticism is consistent with the general trend of scholarship about anti-communism, which has been concentrated heavily on the United States.<sup>8</sup> It has been observed that the late 1960s and early 1970s marked a hostile turn in the treatment of anti-communism as an intellectual phenomenon in the US.<sup>9</sup> For many historians writing in that period, anti-communism was problematically bound-up with unpopular US Cold War policies and foreign entanglements.<sup>10</sup> Scholars also began to look upon the period from the

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<sup>7</sup> Duncan White, *Cold Warriors, Writers who Waged the Literary Cold War*, London: Little, Brown (2019). The term derives from Lasch, "Cultural Cold War".

<sup>8</sup> Judith Joël & Gerald M. Erickson, *Anti-Communism: the Politics of Manipulation*, University of Minnesota Press (1987); Peter H. Buckingham, *America sees Red: anticommunism in America, 1870s to 1980s*, Claremont: Regina Books (1988); John E. Haynes, *Red Scare or Red Menace?: American Communism and Anti-Communism in the Cold War Era*, Chicago: Ivan R. Dee (1995); Schrecker, *Many are the Crimes*; Robbie Lieberman, *The Strangest Dream: Communism, Anti-Communism and the US Peace Movement 1945-1963*, New York: Syracuse University Press (2000); Michael Kimmage, *The Conservative Turn: Lionel Trilling, Whittaker Chambers, and the Lessons of Anti-communism*, Harvard UP (2009); Larry Ceplair, *Anti-communism in Twentieth-century America: A Critical History*, Santa Barbara: Praeger (2011); Robert J. Goldstein, *Little 'Red Scares': Anti-Communism and Political Repression in the United States, 1921-1946*, New York: Routledge (2016).

<sup>9</sup> Richard Powers, *Not without Honor: The History of American Anticommunism*, Yale UP (1998); Harvey Klehr & John Earl Haynes, *In Denial: Historians, Communism and Espionage*, San Francisco: Encounter Books (2003).

<sup>10</sup> See Sidney Lens, *The Futile Crusade: Anti-Communism as American Credo*, Chicago: Quadrangle (1964); Robert Griffith and Athan G. Theoharis (ed.), *The Spectre, Original Essays on the Cold War and the Origins of McCarthyism*, New York: New Viewpoints (1974); Mary S. McAuliffe, *Crisis on the Left: Cold War Politics and American Liberals*, University of Massachusetts Press (1978); David Caute, *The Great Fear*, New York: Simon & Schuster (1979).

late 1940s to the mid-1950s as one marked by hysteria; anti-communism was commonly perceived as synonymous with McCarthyist persecution and Hollywood censorship; and the suggestion was made that socialist and liberal anti-communist intellectuals (like Sidney Hook or Arthur Schlesinger) had created a propitious intellectual atmosphere for the ‘Second Red Scare’.<sup>11</sup>

I am not concerned with the history of anti-communism in the US, except insofar as it has been seen as the progenitor of an intellectual current in Europe to which Borkenau contributed. To the extent that anti-communism has been studied as an intellectual phenomenon in Europe, it has generally been treated as a by-product of a “Cultural Cold War” cynically launched and perpetuated by the State Department and the CIA through the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF).<sup>12</sup> Wilford has challenged this view.<sup>13</sup> While the CIA did secretly bankroll many Western European literary journals of an anti-Soviet and anti-communist orientation (*Der Monat*, *Preuves* and *Encounter* being the most famous examples), Wilford’s argument was that they were only tapping into an organic current among a large network of prominent intellectuals whose writings were not in any way manipulated. This, indeed, was the argument Schlesinger made in 1967 (when the funding story broke): that the money the CIA pumped into the CCF only helped anti-communist intellectuals in Europe “do better what they were doing anyway”.<sup>14</sup>

One of the problems with the ‘follow the money’ approach, the purport of which has been to suggest that anti-communist intellectuals were hired lackeys, is that the political biographies of those intellectuals – Raymond Aron, Koestler, Melvin Lasky or Borkenau himself, for example – almost always reveal that their political commitments predated their involvement in the CCF.<sup>15</sup> If Stonor Saunders, who pioneered this approach, had been familiar with Borkenau’s work, she would not have mistaken him as the one-time “official historian of the Comintern”.<sup>16</sup> Instead, the book to which she referred proved that Borkenau was firmly anti-communist as early as 1938, when it was not necessarily advantageous to his career.<sup>17</sup> There is no question, then, of Borkenau

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<sup>11</sup> Lens, *Futile Crusade*, p. 73; Lasch, “Cultural Cold War”, p. 68.

<sup>12</sup> See Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid?*. Since the publication of Stonor Saunders’ book, Lasch’s formulation (“Cultural Cold War”) has become standard in academic historiography. Also see Giles Scott-Smith, *Western Anti-Communism and the Interdoc Network: Cold War Internationale*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan (2012).

<sup>13</sup> Wilford, *The CIA*. See also, Hugh Wilford, “The Information Research Department: Britain’s secret Cold War weapon revealed”, *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (Jul., 1998), pp. 353-369.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in In Tity de Vries, “The 1967 Central Intelligence Agency Scandal”, *Journal of American History*, Vol. 98, No. 4 (2012), pp. 1089.

<sup>15</sup> On Melvin Lasky, see Giles Scott-Smith, “‘A Radical Democratic Political Offensive’: Melvin J. Lasky, *Der Monat*, and the Congress for Cultural Freedom”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (2000), pp. 263-80; & S. A. Longstaff, “Missionary in a Dark Continent’: *Der Monat* and Germany’s Intellectual Regeneration”, *History of European Ideas*, Vol. 19, Nos. 1-3 (1994), pp. 93-99.

<sup>16</sup> Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid*, p. 71.

<sup>17</sup> Borkenau, *World Communism*.

becoming a “mandarin”.<sup>18</sup> It has, however, been argued that Borkenau’s anti-communism became increasingly unhinged, until it “overwhelmed [his] true gift for unorthodox yet insightful analysis”.<sup>19</sup> One of the key pieces of evidence has been his participation at the BCCF in 1950.

### The Berlin Congress

The accounts of Borkenau’s participation at the Congress – from Stonor Saunders to Scott-Smith to Jones to Kessler – have all relied on one arguably dubious contemporaneous source, the report on the Congress published in the *Manchester Guardian* by Hugh Trevor-Roper.<sup>20</sup> Trevor-Roper’s account was challenged at the time by other observers, like Francois Bondy and George Lichtheim, and the weight of evidence from diarists and memoirists contradicts some of the factual details as he presented them.<sup>21</sup> While I believe that there are very good grounds for suspecting that Trevor-Roper’s article was not an accurate rendering of what actually occurred in Berlin, the important thing to recognise is that his presentation of the Congress and of Borkenau’s participation is itself a crucial piece of contextual evidence; a demonstration of the divisions in the European intelligentsia in the early Cold War period. Rather than an authoritative source about Borkenau, Trevor-Roper must be treated as a participant in those debates. It is not so necessary to establish which of Trevor-Roper or Lichtheim or Bondy’s accounts was the most objective as it is to ask what these contradictory primary sources tell us about the political disagreements among European intellectuals in 1950. Taken together, they amount to a documentation of the fierce disagreements which existed about the approach to take to the challenge of Soviet Communism.

To the British historian, Borkenau appeared “hysterical” and West Berlin was pervaded by a “Cimmerian darkness”.<sup>22</sup> To the Swiss journalist, Bondy, the troubled state of the city as a threatened outpost of democracy in the East meant that its citizens were uniquely positioned to see through what he deemed the “third force” mythology of peaceful coexistence which he associated with Britain, France and Italy.<sup>23</sup> As Bondy put it, “the two main ideological tendencies

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<sup>18</sup> Noam Chomsky appropriated the Chinese concept to suggest that a generation of intellectuals had become professional publicists for US foreign policy. *American Power and the New Mandarins*, New York: Pantheon (1969).

<sup>19</sup> Jones, *Lost Debate*, p. 185; Kessler, “Between Communism” p. 109.

<sup>20</sup> Trevor-Roper, “Ex-Communist”.

<sup>21</sup> Hook, *Out of Step*; Goodman (ed.), *Living with Koestler*; Bondy, “Berlin Congress”; Lichtheim, “The German Reviews”; Ayer, *More of my Life*.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Davenport-Hines (ed.), *Hugh Trevor Roper: Letters from Oxford*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson (2006), p. 48.

<sup>23</sup> In a recent paper, Eisenhuth and Krause treat the “outpost of freedom” metaphor as an invented “narrative” based partly on a “mythical past” which overlooked that Berlin had been the Nazi capital. But it was also literally true that West Berlin was an “outpost”, in that it was physically separated from the Bonn Republic, and that, by any meaningful measure, its citizens were freer than those of the GDR. Stefanie Eisenhuth and Scott H. Krause, “Inventing the ‘Outpost of Freedom’. Transatlantic Narratives and the Historical Actors Crafting West Berlin’s Postwar Political Culture”, *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (2014), URL: <https://zeithistorische-forschungen.de/2-2014/5093>.

of the Congress followed... geographical lines”.<sup>24</sup> West European delegates complained “that America is dragging Western Europe into its imperial quarrels”. But in Berlin, he contended, “everybody knows that it is Russia, not America, that aims to conquer Europe, and that without the American will to risk war Russia would have achieved this aim long ago”.<sup>25</sup> Bondy was clearly sympathetic to the side of the argument promoted by the Berliners and the “refugees from Russia and Eastern Europe”, but his article showed that context mattered.<sup>26</sup> The notion that Borkenau’s intervention was hysterical was tied to the West European approach to the question of how best to “work for peace”.<sup>27</sup>

The Berlin Congress was held in the last week of June 1950, and its first session was conducted the day after Communist North Korea launched its invasion of the South. It was, therefore, a moment of acute tension, when the polemical debates over peace and the possibility of the coexistence of the Western democracies and the Soviet Union which had dominated the post-war years assumed especial urgency. As Stueck has put it, Korea “greatly escalated the military dimensions of the Cold War”.<sup>28</sup> The government of the United States, for the first time since the defeat of Hitler, faced the decision whether to go to war in defence of an ally or to preserve peace at that ally’s expense. Most reports on the Congress noted that the Korean events intensified the atmosphere of the meeting, and it was pointed out by the *Manchester Guardian’s* official correspondent that the newspaper of the (communist) Socialist Unity Party (SED) had taken the opportunity to draw threatening comparisons between Korea and Germany, warning that “American aggressors” were scheming to foment a similar conflagration in the latter as they apparently had in the former.<sup>29</sup> For Germans in Berlin and the Federal Republic, Korea was a portent; after the Communist victory in China and the Soviet nuclear test, there was widespread concern that it would be a dress rehearsal – like the Spanish Civil War – for another world-wide conflict of ideologies, in which divided Germany would be the epicentre.<sup>30</sup>

Trevor-Roper’s criticism of Borkenau ought to be read in the context of the Korean conflict, which exacerbated the geographically influenced ideological divisions at the Congress. For – though he failed to acknowledge it – Korea was the subject of the speech which disturbed him and coloured his image of the Congress. In Trevor-Roper’s rendering, Borkenau had argued that

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<sup>24</sup> Bondy, “Berlin Congress”, p. 248.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 247.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 248.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 249.

<sup>28</sup> William Stueck (ed.), *The Korean War in World History*, Kentucky UP (2004), p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> “Berlin Congress Comes Adrift”, *Manchester Guardian* (28 Jun., 1950), p. 10.

<sup>30</sup> See P. West & S. Ji-moon (ed.), *Remembering the Forgotten War: The Korean War Through Literature and Art*, London: East Gate (2001), p. 191. Contemporary communist propaganda made much of the Spain analogy. See A Winnington, *I Saw the Truth in Korea*, London: People’s Press (1950).

“communism... must be destroyed at once by uncompromising frontal attack”, and had been met by an “hysterical German applause” – from an audience composed mainly of nationalists and ex-Nazis “hysterical with a frontier hysteria” – which amounted to an “echo from Hitler’s Nuremberg”.<sup>31</sup> But in Lichtheim’s dispatch from the Congress, the episode was reported quite differently. Borkenau had merely “allowed Berliners to cheer him for praising President Truman’s stand on Korea”.<sup>32</sup> The comments in question were made during a debate which occurred on the final day of the Congress, by which time Truman had committed US air and naval forces to defend South Korea. Bondy conceded that Borkenau’s was an “overexcited contribution” to the debate, which would be consistent with Gerald Brenan’s impressions of his friend as an “uncouth” and erratic speaker, whose intelligence only came out “when he sat down to write”.<sup>33</sup> But Bondy refuted Trevor-Roper’s insinuations about what Borkenau actually said. Noting, like Lichtheim, that the speech was specifically about Korea, he wrote that it:

...shocked some of his hearers perhaps not so much by its lack of tact as by its essential truth. The greater part of the Western European liberal and socialist intellectuals who were present... did not relish being confronted with a situation in which the issues of freedom and of peace are in conflict. Not only aggression, but also resistance, is an act of war, and there is—and has always been—a point at which the choice between freedom and peace has to be made.<sup>34</sup>

It is, unfortunately, not possible to know verbatim what Borkenau said during this speech, as the minutes of the Berlin Congress are not present in the International Association for Cultural Freedom Records.<sup>35</sup> Peter Coleman, who wrote the first history of the CCF – though, very much an official history (he was a long-time editor of the Congress’s Australian journal, *Quadrant*) – quoted Borkenau asking: “Is not everyone thrilled that President Truman has ordered arms for South Korea?”, and the French delegate David Rousset responding to the subsequent applause with the rebuke that “this is no way to debate a question”.<sup>36</sup> Coleman, however, did not provide a source for these quotations and, given the book’s unacademic style, it is possible that they were semi-inventions.

Whether these were his exact words, though, it was not the rabid anti-communism of an ex-communist which conditioned Borkenau’s support for US military intervention in Korea. Rather,

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<sup>31</sup> Trevor-Roper, “Ex-Communist”.

<sup>32</sup> Lichtheim, “German Reviews”, p. 295.

<sup>33</sup> F. Bondy, “Berlin Congress”; Brenan, *Personal Record*, p. 327.

<sup>34</sup> F. Bondy, “Berlin Congress”, p. 248.

<sup>35</sup> International Association for Cultural Freedom Records, Series III: Seminars, 1950-1977, Subseries I: Berlin 1950, June 26-30, Founding Conference, Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>36</sup> Peter Coleman, *The Liberal Conspiracy*, New York: Free Press (1989), p. 30.



his support was consistent with the general stance towards the Cold War which he had developed through the experience of living in Germany since 1945. This was that the only weapon the Soviet Union wielded in the struggle was a potential lack of commitment to that struggle from the Western powers. Sidney Hook would argue that the Cultural Cold War was launched by the Cominform via its “peace offensive” (the Popular Front-style campaign by which communists in the West attempted to attract pacifists and progressive intellectuals into “peace fronts”).<sup>37</sup> Similarly, in Germany, Borkenau was among a community of intellectuals who argued that a Soviet political and cultural offensive significantly predated the establishment of the CCF – and had begun long before the Western powers were even aware of it.<sup>38</sup>

The Russians had taken control of the airwaves in the divided German capital in 1945, and used Radio Berlin as a propaganda tool, often in violation of the clause in the Potsdam Agreement by which the four powers in Germany agreed to refrain from criticism of one another.<sup>39</sup> As in Eastern Europe, the Communists in the Russian sector in Germany sought to use phony political alliances as a method by which to subvert political rivals, most famously by the creation of the Socialist Unity Party (SED).<sup>40</sup> The SED was held up as an alliance between the KPD and the SPD, but was seen by those SPD detractors who refused to participate as a means by which the Communists could liquidate the Social Democrats – a “shotgun marriage”, as Lichtheim called it.<sup>41</sup> In 1946, when the SPD’s Ernst Reuter was elected Mayor of Berlin, the Allied powers allowed the Russians to use their veto to block his appointment.<sup>42</sup> At that time, the Americans were more concerned with maintaining good relations with the Russians than with establishing democracy in Germany, the prospects of which were still seen as doubtful. The text outlining the job of the Information Control Division (ICD), the body concerned with propaganda in the American zone, shows that, before 1947, the US Military Government (OMGUS) saw denazification as its sole task. It stated that “information will impress upon the Germans the totality of their military defeat, the

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<sup>37</sup> Hook, “The Communist Peace Offensive”, in *Out of Step*, pp. 382-396.

<sup>38</sup> On this, also see Melvin Lasky,

- “Adventure in Berlin”, *New Leader* (25 Oct., 1947), pp. 8-9 & 15;

- “Berlin Letter”, *Partisan Review*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Jan., 1948), pp. 60-68; and

Peter Blake, “AMG in Germany”, *Politics*, Vol 5 (Summer, 1948), pp. 194-202.

<sup>39</sup> Hjalmar Schacht’s acquittal at Nuremberg in 1946 was used by Radio Berlin as evidence that the Soviet’s “capitalist” allies were really fascist powers, according to the 1930s theory that capitalism equalled fascism. See Nicholas J. Schlosser, *The Cold War on the Airwaves*, University of Illinois Press (2015), p. 16. By early 1947, Russian-controlled newspapers in Germany were referring to President Truman as a “little Hitler”. See “Lasky Applauded by German Writers”, *New Leader*, 11 October 1947, p. 3.

<sup>40</sup> For a description of the same methods in Czechoslovakia from a dissident democratic socialist, see Jan Stransky, *East Wind over Prague*, Westport: Greenwood Press (1979). On the Russians in Germany, see Norman Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949*, Harvard UP (1995).

<sup>41</sup> See G. L. Arnold, “Sliding Downhill”, *Tribune*, 13 June 1947, p. 16.

<sup>42</sup> See Melvin Lasky, “Appeasement is a Lively Corpse”, *New Leader*, 2 August 1947, pp. 30-1.

impossibility of rearmament, [and] the responsibility of the individual German for war and atrocities”.<sup>43</sup>

In one of Borkenau’s few writings from this period, an article of 1947, he suggested that the German Communists were using denazification to intimidate the population.<sup>44</sup> Accusing the Communists of infiltrating key parts of the German bureaucracy, such as the departments concerned with “the distribution of food and housing”, he claimed that the German population was “terrorized”.

The average German does not want to fall foul of the housing office or to have his denazification dossier scrutinized closely by a Communist... But most of all he does not want to complain about this Communist infiltration because, exactly as in Nazi times the man to whom he opened his heart might be a Gestapo agent, so now the recipient of his complaint might himself be a Communist. All Germans have seen the rise of one totalitarian dictatorship. Now they ask: Is the international peace so safe that we need not fear to be overrun by Soviet armies in, let us say, ten or fifteen years from today? Will not then every outspoken word we said about the Communists now mean certain death?<sup>45</sup>

If this was the sort of account that Trevor-Roper would write off as paranoid anti-communism, it was nevertheless supported by a British observer who published a book about the situation in Berlin in 1947. According to W. Byford Jones:

The real political battle in Berlin was at first underground. One could live there as a foreigner and not be aware that a classical struggle between an international communism and the forces which will ever oppose it was in progress.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> In Robert Shandley, *Rubble Films: German Cinema in the Shadow of the Third Reich*, Temple University Press (2010), p. 11.

<sup>44</sup> The political scientist John Herz would later write that, “in the Soviet sphere, the purge of Nazis and Fascists soon became the tool for indicting any opponent of Communist-totalitarian rule and for eliminating him as a ‘fascist collaborator’, whether or not he had been one under the Axis rule”. On the other hand, Herz also claimed that the emerging Cold War led to an unfortunate response from the Western powers: “Was it necessary, then, for the Western countries to welcome as ‘allies’ in their anti-Communist stand not only those democratic non-Communists, on whom Communists undeservedly place the stigma of ‘collaborators’, but also the real former collaborators and Fascists?” See John H. Herz, “The Fiasco of Denazification in Germany”, *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 63, No. 4 (1948), p. 594. A fairly common theme in the historiography of denazification has been that, for this and other – more practical – reasons, there was a general failure to punish Nazi criminals sufficiently or in sufficient numbers. See Robert Hutchinson, *After Nuremberg: American Clemency for Nazi War Criminals*, Yale University Press (2022). However, the specific claim made by Borkenau – who was certainly not opposing the principle of denazification – has been backed up, for instance, by the story of the communist Heinrich Schmitt given in Taylor’s book. Employed in Bavaria as a denazification expert, Schmitt was found to be “stuffing [his department] with fellow communists”, See Frederick Taylor, *Exorcising Hitler: the occupation and denazification of Germany*, New York: Bloomsbury (2011), p. 284.

<sup>45</sup> Franz Borkenau, “The Structure of Germany: A Reconsideration”, *Tablet*, 3 May 1947, pp. 216-7.

<sup>46</sup> Wilfred Byford-Jones, *Berlin Twilight*, London: Hutchinson (1947), p. 156.

It was also the conclusion drawn by the socialist novelist Upton Sinclair, who revived his wartime “Lanny Budd” series of historical novels, and placed his hero in Germany in the period 1946-49. An unashamedly propagandistic novel, Sinclair charted Budd’s transition from a dovish peace campaigner in New Jersey, who introduces a radio address by Bertrand Russell at the beginning of the novel, into a hawkish defender of US military presence in Europe – a conversion which takes place against the backdrop of communist intrigues in Germany.<sup>47</sup>

After the BCCF, Trevor-Roper would refer to Berlin and Washington as the “natural haunts” of McCarthyism, from which Oxford was a refuge.<sup>48</sup> But this showed little apparent appreciation of the divergent political contexts. In the United States, McCarthyism meant, above all, the intimidation of the political Left by the political Right by means of the usually false accusation of subversive communist activities. By contrast, the anti-communists Trevor-Roper had encountered in Berlin had been resisting real communist subversion since well before the Berlin blockade and the politicisation of that City’s struggle in the East-West conflict of the Cold War. Communists had taken advantage of the wartime alliance and the employment opportunities which came with the need to establish a new, denazified, Germany. A prominent example was the British Soviet spy Cedric Belfrage, who, from 1945 until early 1947, was employed by the ICD to oversee the formation of the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, the “most important newspaper to be licensed by ICD in the American zone”.<sup>49</sup>

Strong evidence that Borkenau’s support for the US President did not amount to advocacy of “uncompromising frontal attack” against communism can be drawn from an unpublished article written for *Partisan Review* in 1952, from which it can be inferred that he shared the fears of many on the European Left who worried that the United States might unnecessarily escalate the Cold War on account of panic.<sup>50</sup> Borkenau cited the recently published diaries of James Forrestal, in which it was revealed that the US Secretary of Defence at the time of the Berlin blockade had believed, throughout that crisis, that world war was imminent.<sup>51</sup> He held this as an example of the general wrongheadedness of the US approach to the Cold War. American apprehension, he argued, tended to grow even as the threat of war receded. The Berlin Blockade, he wrote, “demonstrated

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<sup>47</sup> Upton Sinclair, *The Return of Lanny Budd*, London: Werner Laurie (1953).

<sup>48</sup> Davenport-Hines (ed.), *Letters from Oxford*, p. 51.

<sup>49</sup> Belfrage appointed several communists to the editorial board prompting complaints that the newspaper became an American-sponsored communist publication. See Blake, “AMG”, p. 194. Blake was not aware that Belfrage was a spy, which was established in the 1990s by the release of the Venona files. See John Earl Haynes & Harvey Klehr, *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America*, Yale UP (1999), pp 109-11.

<sup>50</sup> Franz Borkenau to William Phillips, Box 14, Folder 4, h, 11 November 1952; and “MS on American Policy in Europe” (Hereafter: “Partisan Review MS”), Box 14, Folder 5, o, 12 January 1953, Partisan Review Collection, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Centre, Boston University.

<sup>51</sup> Walter Mills (ed.), *The Forrestal Diaries*, New York: Viking (1951).

conclusively that Russia did not want war”; the Soviets did not disrupt the airlift and eventually ended the Blockade.<sup>52</sup> David Dallin later cited the episode as an example of Stalin’s brinkmanship, or “brink-of-war” tactics: to take initial risks that would sow fear in the West and might lead to political or territorial concessions; to advance to the brink; but to retreat if the threat of war became too serious.<sup>53</sup> Clearly, Borkenau felt that Berlin was the brink from which Stalin had elected to retreat.<sup>54</sup> “The Russian plan”, he wrote, “from 1949 onwards, was, visibly, to give priority to political over military action”; the threat to Europe, in Borkenau’s opinion, was communist subversion – not war.<sup>55</sup> He had made the same argument at the time of the blockade, when he called Russian threats a “great bluff” in a propaganda pamphlet he produced for OMGUS.<sup>56</sup>

Borkenau also regretted that, in response to the outbreak of war in Korea, the US had initiated rearmament propaganda in Germany. As US media hyped the threat of war in Europe, US policy in Germany swiftly switched from the post-war demilitarisation campaign to one of remilitarisation. This, Borkenau wrote, contributed to a “war scare” atmosphere in Europe, where, in most countries, he suggested, the most effective propaganda of the political opposition was pacifism. He contended that over-hasty rearmament agreements “not underwritten by the [main] opposition” parties were useless, since they would only exacerbate popular antipathy towards the Atlantic alliance. Essentially, his argument was that the United States needed to stop frightening European publics about the dangers of war, which was the opposite of the crusading attitude he was accused of holding by Trevor-Roper. Indeed, he recalled a conversation he had had with an American State Department official in 1951, in which he had questioned the rapidity of the rearmament effort. It was having an unsettling effect on European politics, he had argued, and, in turn, damaging the prospects of economic recovery. The official had responded by accusing him of “Bevanism”.<sup>57</sup>

### The British and the German Intelligentsia

Borkenau was neither a Bevanite nor a warmongering ally of the German nationalists and ex-Nazis who, despite Trevor-Roper’s insinuations, were almost certainly not present at the Berlin Congress. The fact was not lost on the British historian – who referred to them as “rootless” – that Koestler and Borkenau had Jewish backgrounds; and it is unlikely that it would have been lost on any

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<sup>52</sup> Borkenau, Partisan Review MS, p. 6.

<sup>53</sup> David Dallin, *Soviet Foreign Policy After Stalin*, Philadelphia: Lippincott (1961), pp. 13-14.

<sup>54</sup> In *European Communism*, p. 551, Borkenau put forward a ‘kremlinological’ argument which linked the failure of the Berlin Blockade to the political eclipse of the “forward” faction in the Kremlin led, he believed, by Andrei Zhdanov.

<sup>55</sup> Borkenau, Partisan Review MS, p. 4.

<sup>56</sup> Borkenau, *Bange Machen gilt nicht*.

<sup>57</sup> Partisan Review MS, p. 11. On Bevanism, see Geoffrey Foote, “The Bevanite Left”, in Foote (ed.), *The Labour Party’s Political Thought*, London: Palgrave Macmillan (1997), pp. 260–78.

remorseless followers of the Fuehrer.<sup>58</sup> Nor would Nazis have welcomed the fact that the Congress was being hosted by the Social Democratic Mayor, Reuter, who had been an inmate of Lichtenburg Concentration Camp. Reuter's politics were anything but nationalist. He was perhaps the most prominent oppositionist within the SPD to what was widely perceived as the nationalist policy of the Party's leader, Kurt Schumacher.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, the internationalist wing of the SPD was predominant among the German delegation at the Congress, with Carlo Schmid and Lowenthal also in attendance. Alfred Weber, meanwhile, who had joined the SPD in 1945, used the Congress to issue a *nostra culpa* on behalf of Germany for the crimes of the Nazi era.<sup>60</sup> Weber's contribution went unmentioned by Trevor-Roper. Lichtheim, who regularly reviewed the German political scene for the British periodical *The Nineteenth Century and After*, gave the following summary of the reaction to the Congress in the German press: "On the whole, the Social Democrats were pleased, the Catholics displayed a certain reserve, and the Right was silent".<sup>61</sup>

Borkenau was, in fact, alive to the danger of a resurgence of nationalism in Germany, and had addressed the issue in a 1949 article for Melvin Lasky's *Der Monat*. He started by developing the argument he had begun to make several years earlier in *Socialism: National or International*. To wit, in the age of superpowers, nationalism – implying, as it did, sovereignty and the ability of a State to pursue completely independent economic and foreign policies – was an illusion.<sup>62</sup> It was a political reality, he argued, that the fate of Germany, like the other "small" nations of continental Europe, was not, and could no longer be, entirely in its own hands.<sup>63</sup> But it was this political reality – stark in a country which had been physically decimated by the powers now occupying its territory – which disturbed the German population and opened the door to a revivification of "the Wilhelmine and Hitlerian tradition".<sup>64</sup> "Since 1945, there has not been a month or a week," Borkenau wrote, without "the rumour that the war between East and West was imminent".<sup>65</sup> The

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<sup>58</sup> Trevor-Roper, "Ex-Communist"

<sup>59</sup> Schumacher consistently opposed the Federal Republic's inclusion in any European integration, believing that it was a capitalist manoeuvre which would damage the prospects of establishing socialism, and that it would render the partition of the country permanent. For Reuter and Schumacher's contrasting outlooks, see: R. Hrbek, "The German Social Democratic Party I" and J. Bellers, "The German Social Democratic Party II", in R. T. Griffiths (ed.), *Socialist Parties and the Question of Europe in The 1950's*, New York: Brill (1993), pp. 63-89.

<sup>60</sup> Weber's speech was printed in Lasky's journal: "Alfred Weber", *Der Monat*, Vol. 3, No. 22-23 (1950), pp. 352-354. On Weber's support for the SPD, see Sean A. Forner, *German Intellectuals and the Challenge of Democratic Renewal*, Cambridge University Press (2014), p. 157.

<sup>61</sup> Lichtheim, "German Reviews", p. 297.

<sup>62</sup> See Franz Borkenau, "Mut am rechten Ort" [Courage at the Right Place], *Der Monat*, No. 8/9 (1949), p. 61. Also in *Der Monat*, in a polemic against A. J. P. Taylor, Borkenau quoted a famous passage from Hegel in arguing the apparent revival of nationalism in Germany was only an absurd hangover from an age which had long been superseded: "When philosophy begins to paint its grey in grey," says Hegel, 'then a figure of life has grown old.'". Franz Borkenau, "Der Utopist wider Willen" [The Reluctant Utopian], *Der Monat*, No. 44 (1952), p. 211.

<sup>63</sup> Borkenau, "Courage", p. 61.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

fear engendered by such rumours, Borkenau argued, brought out two apparently contradictory reactions in West Germany. The first was an “embittered nationalism” which came to the surface at moments of high tension.<sup>66</sup> He cited the Ruhr Statute (IAR) – by which the Western powers would indefinitely control the industrial heartland, and which, incidentally, prefigured the European Coal and Steel Community and the European Union – and the nationalist resentment it inspired, which was a frightening reminder of the 1920s.<sup>67</sup> Against Adenauer’s efforts to cooperate with the Western powers, nationalism became one of the major *motifs* of the political opposition. Schumacher’s Social Democrats were far from immune to this current, complaining bitterly about the IAR, as well as the Occupation Statute of the same year, which brought the Federal Republic into existence, but which included restrictions on German sovereignty which they regarded as “reasons for sorrow”.<sup>68</sup>

The second reaction to the fear of war, according to Borkenau, was a “spirit of surrender to Soviet pressure”.<sup>69</sup> There was a current of thought, Borkenau argued, which proposed capitulation as the remedy which would “somehow keep [Germany] out of the international catastrophe that was considered inevitable”.<sup>70</sup>

The coexistence of these two attitudes, which are incompatible for rational thought, can be explained first and foremost by the profound decay of all rational thought, which is so characteristic of post-Hitlerian Germany and represents the most terrible legacy of National Socialism.<sup>71</sup>

But the “‘ideological’ attitude in which the two irreconcilable reactions merge” was carefully nursed by the Soviets. In the East, Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen were re-opened, and the SED instituted a purge against the naïve Social Democrats who had dissolved their own Party for unity and were now branded “spies and saboteurs”.<sup>72</sup> But in the West, it was the SED which dissolved

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>68</sup> See Editorial, “THE NATIONS: Agreement on Germany”, *Time*, 18 April 1949. Accessed online at <https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,856141-1,00.html>. Whether it is accurate to characterise Schumacher as a nationalist is open to debate. He opposed the Schuman Plan partly from the same socialist direction as some elements of the European Left have consistently opposed the EU, denouncing “technocratic totalitarianism” and international capitalism. He claimed he wanted to “make Europe strong”, but also talked of the repression of “national democracy” and “basic German principles” represented by European integration, which he compared to “Charlemagne’s empire”. He argued that “disillusionment... with the European idea” – which he nonetheless appeared to encourage – would provoke “dyed-in-the-wool nationalist extremism”. See Kurt Schumacher, “Macht Europa stark”, Hanover (1951). Accessed online at: [https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/2002/11/25/b36cebda-e613-4bff-a263-aacfd84c410/publishable\\_en.pdf](https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/2002/11/25/b36cebda-e613-4bff-a263-aacfd84c410/publishable_en.pdf).

<sup>69</sup> Borkenau, “Courage”, p. 63.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> See Ted Grant, “The Ruhr Statute”, *Socialist Appeal* (February 1949). Accessed online at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/grant/1949/02/ruhr.htm>.

itself.<sup>73</sup> This allowed the West German communists to feign independence from the Soviet Union and East German events as they stoked nationalist propaganda. During the deliberations over the Occupation Statute, the West German communist Max Reimann was quoted in *The Times*:

He branded the occupation Statute as a new colonial law imposed on Germany. ‘We shall fight until our beloved German people have been liberated from foreign imperialists and those in Germany who work with them.’<sup>74</sup>

While Trevor-Roper accused the “rootless” anti-Communist Borkenau of whipping up nationalist hysteria in Berlin, it was in fact the Communists who were committed to nurturing German nationalism in 1950. Indeed, Orlow has argued that Schumacher’s SPD seized on nationalism partly because they feared that, if they did not do so, nationalist sentiment would be “exploited by the enemies of democracy” – i.e., by “communist pseudo-nationalism”.<sup>75</sup>

Borkeu was deeply troubled by the potential of an “intellectual betrayal of the West” carried by what he saw as the strange admixture of nationalism and capitulationism in the Federal Republic.

In the nationalist denigration of the Western democracies and in the readiness to surrender to Soviet terrorism, the same lack of understanding of the real power and inner strength of democracies is evident, the same overestimation of the hollow power-mongering of an Oriental despotism.<sup>76</sup>

But it was in Berlin where he found a contrasting spirit. It was Reuter who, dissenting from the Schumacher wing of the SPD, hailed the Occupation Statute as “unbelievably better than anything we had expected”. And it was the opposite of German nationalism which Borkeu found – and found refreshing – in the beleaguered metropolis. Far from being the friend to a recrudescing German nationalism (as Trevor-Roper had implied), Borkeu, like Reuter, was a keen early advocate of *Westintegration*, or “Neue Westpolitik”, to use Krause’s term for the Social Democratic version of it.<sup>77</sup>

Alongside that West Germany, which seems to be morally disintegrating only the more it rebuilds economically, there is also a struggling Berlin and an oppressed, tormented East Zone, which have learned what really matters in the hard school of terrible suffering... It was not without reason that Berlin was “the sewer of the Reich” for the National Socialists. Today, people there think not of

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> On SPD and KPD/SED nationalism in post-war Germany, see Orlow, “Delayed Reaction”, esp. pp. 84-5.

<sup>76</sup> Borkeu, “Courage”, p. 63.

<sup>77</sup> Krause, “Neue Westpolitik”.

rotten peace, not of the alleged cultural superiority [of Germany over] ... the West, but of the necessity to preserve freedom even in the toughest of battles.<sup>78</sup>

As Wilford has noted, nobody associated with the Labour Party or the mainstream of the left-wing intelligentsia in Britain attended the Berlin Congress – despite the strong SPD representation – because most on the British Left were wary of being associated with a gathering which they knew would be perceived as anti-Soviet and pro-Atlanticist.<sup>79</sup> George Orwell had already observed that such was the case when he and Arthur Koestler had failed to enlist support for their idea of a “League for the Rights of Man” in 1946.<sup>80</sup> At the Congress, Koestler regretted the absence of “many of those who,” owing to an “attitude of contemplative detachment”, “are not here with us today”.<sup>81</sup> This was a dig aimed, not at overt Soviet sympathisers like Konni Zilliacus, who were fringe figures on the Labour Left, but at the much more powerful contingent of West European socialists who advocated ‘neutralism’ or subscribed to the idea of Europe as a ‘third-force’.<sup>82</sup> Julius Braunthal, the naturalised British first Secretary General of the post-war Socialist International, in process of formation at the time, had explained the nascent organisation’s support of the ‘third-force’ idea in a 1949 article in *Foreign Affairs*.<sup>83</sup> There was very little sympathy, he had argued, for the idea of dictatorship embodied by Russia. There was also widespread recognition – based on the vassalisation of the East European republics – that Soviet Russia represented an imperial power which threatened Western Europe; and, moreover, that communist parties were, effectively, agents of that power, rendering any cooperation with them unthinkable. Most socialists, therefore, were supportive of the protective presence of the United States in Europe. However, even if they had few illusions about the system of government in the Soviet Union, they considered the long-term prospects of socialism non-existent under the influence of the capitalist US. In the long run, then, as Braunthal put it, the only hope for socialism in Europe lay in first building it up under US protection, but then, once a balance of power had been achieved, in “agreement between the Socialist Western Europe and the Communist east”.<sup>84</sup> Aron saw this kind of reasoning as the major superstition of the European Left. Ultimately, the Soviet Union was an ally – even if, currently, it was a palpable threat – because, “after all, the Soviet Union is on the left”.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Borkenau, “Courage”, pp. 63-4. Another contemporary observer noted these differences between West Germany and West Berlin. See Muhlen, *Return of Germany*, pp. 231-4.

<sup>79</sup> Wilford, *The CIA*, p. 194.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

<sup>81</sup> Arthur Koestler, “Two Methods of Action”, in Koestler, *The Trail*, pp. 116-118.

<sup>82</sup> An idea first enunciated in 1947 by Leon Blum in France (See Wilfried Loth, “The French Socialist Party, 1947-1954”, in R. T. Griffiths (ed.), *Socialist Parties*, pp. 25-26) and the ‘Keep Left’ group in Britain (Crossman et al., *Keep Left*).

<sup>83</sup> J. Braunthal, “The Rebirth of Social Democracy,” *Foreign Affairs* (Jul., 1949), pp 586-600.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 599-600.

<sup>85</sup> See Raymond Aron, “France’s Intellectuals and Stalinism”, *New Leader*, 25 February 1952, pp. 10-1.



With the exception of the idiosyncratic Herbert Read, none of the British delegates who did attend the Berlin Congress – Trevor-Roper, A. J. Ayer, Barbara Ward or Julian Amery – were associated with the political Left. Nevertheless, these members of Britain’s intellectual elite had other reasons to be concerned about the increasing post-war influence of the US in Europe. In France, anti-Americanism led to the adoption of neutralism by Gaullists and other non-socialists.<sup>86</sup> Similarly, there were many in Britain, like the foreign secretary, Ernst Bevin, for whom an appetite for ‘third-forcism’ had less to do with the future of socialism than it did the maintenance of Britain’s diminishing imperial power.<sup>87</sup> Wilford has pointed to an anti-American sensibility among the largely aristocratic intelligentsia in Britain, and it is noteworthy that the months leading up to the Berlin Congress witnessed the advent and rise of the demagogic Joe McCarthy, the vulgar embodiment of all that was detestable about the US: incivility, anti-intellectualism, dishonesty, and even alcoholism. McCarthy seemed to grow in stature as his blatant lies became more outrageous, leading Bertrand Russell to place a bet that he would become president.<sup>88</sup> Arguably, he did more than anyone in enabling anti-anti-communism to become a potent species of anti-Americanism.<sup>89</sup> When Trevor-Roper encountered the anti-communism of the SPD stalwarts in Berlin, he was not thinking, as they were, about the KPD’s role in the disintegration of the Weimar Republic; of the Nazi-Soviet Pact; nor of the recent attempt to annul their party by the creation of the SED. Britain, where communism had never been a serious political force, had none of that history, nor the recent memory of blockade, which was unique to West Berliners. Rather, Trevor-Roper’s mind went to the American demagogue. Oxford was a sanctuary, he claimed, from the McCarthyism of the German capital.<sup>90</sup>

Like Bertrand Russell, who was not in attendance in Berlin but consented to being named one of the Congress’s honorary chairpersons before temporarily withdrawing his support for the organisation, the British delegates shared a distaste for the forthright tone adopted by some of the speakers.<sup>91</sup> While Arthur Koestler talked in the language of dialectical oppositions, the subject of Ayer’s paper – John Stuart Mill’s arguments for tolerance – sidestepped the political issues of the hour. In his memoir, Ayer conceded that it was a “namby-pamby” offering.<sup>92</sup> Reuter, who had assumed worldwide notoriety two years previously with a powerful statement of resistance to the

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<sup>86</sup> See John T. Marcus, “Neutralism in France”, *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (1955).

<sup>87</sup> Wilford, *The CIA*, p. 53. Also see John Kent, “British Policy and the Origins of the Cold War”, in Melvin P. Leffler & David S. Painter (ed.), *Origins of the Cold War: An International History*, Routledge: London (1994), p. 150.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, p. 10 & p. 211.

<sup>89</sup> See Jean-François Revel, *Anti-Americanism*, San Francisco: Encounter (2003), p. 3.

<sup>90</sup> Richard Davenport-Hines (ed.), *Letters from Oxford*, p. 51.

<sup>91</sup> Ayer and Trevor-Roper’s take on the Congress convinced Russell to temporarily resign as an honorary chair of the CCF, but Sidney Hook convinced him to rethink the decision. Hook, *Out of Step*, p. 442-3.

<sup>92</sup> Ayer, *More of my Life*, p. 64.

blockade, used the Congress to deliver a message of solidarity to Eastern Europeans.<sup>93</sup> But Barbara Ward replied that Eastern liberty was not a Western concern. Anti-Soviet advocate of ‘containment’ though she undoubtedly was, she thought of herself as a realist and was discomfited by suggestions that – once established as a permanent organisation – the Congress might provoke a diplomatic incident by following through on its promise to offer scholarships to dissident students from the East Bloc.<sup>94</sup> The aristocratic anarchist Herbert Read, meanwhile, gave a paper on the decline of culture under capitalism, which seems to have been an attempt to bring some balance to what he perceived to be excessive anti-communist polemicizing – and was certainly viewed as an act of British rebellion by the correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian*.<sup>95</sup>

In his report on the Congress, Trevor-Roper affected the superior attitude of the Oxford don, who looked down upon the unseemly political squabbles of Central Europeans. He complained that Berlin was an inappropriate venue, since its inhabitants “had never really believed in” cultural freedom, suggesting that he believed Germans were unsuited to liberty.<sup>96</sup> The author of *The Last Days of Hitler* does not seem to have been unaffected by the anti-German polemics which had proliferated during the war, as evidenced by the contemptuous reference in that book to the “Nordic nonsense and gaseous metaphysics in which the *true German* [my italics] felt at home.”<sup>97</sup> (His distrust of the metaphysical frame of mind had, in fact, been inculcated in him by reading Ayer’s treatise, *Language, Truth and Logic*).<sup>98</sup> Trevor-Roper’s invocation of Hitler’s Nuremberg, in connection with the “hysterical German applause” received by Borkebau could be excused as the kind of exaggeration characteristic of the journalistic form, were it not that his considered reflections upon his trip to Germany, set down in a letter to Bernard Berenson, were much the same: “Give me the Latin world... but beyond the Limes a Cimmerian darkness seems to me still to prevail”.<sup>99</sup>

### British anti-Marxism

Ironically, given that the villains of Trevor-Roper’s piece were the “ex-communists”, the preeminent aspect of his anti-German temper was a scorn for Marxism, undoubtedly a major source of distinction between British and German intellectuals, and also, as Berger’s comparative history has shown, the socialist parties in the two countries.<sup>100</sup> Trevor-Roper did not cavil against

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<sup>93</sup> Wolf von Eckardt, “Congress for Cultural Freedom”, *Information bulletin, OMGUS* (Sept., 1950), pp. 19-23.

<sup>94</sup> See Hook, *Out of Step*, p. 441; see also, Barbara Ward, *Policy for the West*, New York: W. W. Norton (1951).

<sup>95</sup> “Berlin Congress Comes Adrift”, *Manchester Guardian* (28 Jun., 1950), p. 10.

<sup>96</sup> Trevor-Roper (1950), “Ex-Communist”.

<sup>97</sup> Hugh Trevor-Roper, *The Last Days of Hitler*, London: Macmillan (1947), p. 95.

<sup>98</sup> Davenport-Hines (ed.), *Letters from Oxford*, p. 47.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>100</sup> Stefan Berger, *The British Labour Party and the German Social Democrats, 1900-1931*, OUP (1994).

the ex-communists – in the style of Isaac Deutscher – as renegades who had betrayed their faith. Rather, he complained that Marxism was their original sin; that only those who had “never swallowed... that obscurantist doctrinal rubbish whose residue can never be fully discharged” were fit to discuss the defence of cultural freedom.<sup>101</sup> In his *Last Days of Hitler*, he had diagnosed Marxism as a philosophy nurtured by the German “despair of reason” and the need to elevate politics to the realm of “mystery”.<sup>102</sup> Ayer, the anti-metaphysician, failed to see anything philosophically valuable in Marxism, while Russell believed that it was a product of Germany’s authoritarian historical development.<sup>103</sup> The latter had given a series of lectures debunking the Marxian ideology of German Social Democracy as early as 1896, and had concluded with the warning that:

...if Social Democrats acquire the government with all their ideals intact, and without a previous and gradual training in affairs, then they may, no doubt, like the Jacobins in France, make all manner of foolish and disastrous experiments.<sup>104</sup>

The Marxist inheritance – with the idealism of Hegel restored – was palpable in Koestler’s contributions to the Congress, as well in the paper Borkenau prepared, but was not actually allotted time to deliver. Koestler talked of the alternative between capitalism and socialism as one which was being gradually emptied of meaning, as many countries in the post-war period were grappling with the problem of finding the right balance between the nationalisation of industry, planning and free enterprise. In Hegelian words, the old opposites were being absorbed into a higher unity. Yet as this “nineteenth century” dilemma was losing relevance, a new conflict had grown up, which, Koestler claimed, “cuts across the old lines of division”. This was “total tyranny against relative freedom”.<sup>105</sup> Koestler interpreted this as no alternative at all, beseeching his listeners to make the obvious choice, which irked Ayer and Trevor-Roper, who averred that the Congress should be conducted on an “intellectual level”, which, to them, meant free from politics.<sup>106</sup> It was not only that Koestler expressed his political views in too strident a manner, but that he expressed them at all, which disturbed the British delegates. Lichtheim most likely had them in mind when he wrote, in his book on Hegelian Marxism, that:

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<sup>101</sup> Trevor-Roper, “Ex-Communist”.

<sup>102</sup> Trevor-Roper, *Last Days*, p. 239.

<sup>103</sup> Ayer argued that there had only been a single Marxist thinker, Plekhanov, who had produced a work of philosophical value, though did not elaborate on that comment. A. J. Ayer, *Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, New York: Vintage (1984), p. 19.

<sup>104</sup> Russell, *German Social Democracy*, p. 170.

<sup>105</sup> Koestler, “Outgrown Dilemma”.

<sup>106</sup> Trevor-Roper, “Ex-Communist”. Though Trevor-Roper complained about the “intellectual level” of the speakers, he and Ayer were reduced to “thumping the table whenever a delegate expressed support for American intervention in Korea.” See Ben Rogers, *A. J. Ayer: A Life*, New York: Grove Press (1999), p. 236.

...anyone who has attended a gathering of Continental European philosophers will have noticed that whereas Marxists and Thomists make no bones about their respective political orientations, it is remarkably difficult to get their empiricist critics to take a stand on political issues.<sup>107</sup>

Nevertheless, if Koestler's arguments were excessively forthright "dialectical over-simplifications" as the *New Statesman's* correspondent complained, Borkenau's undelivered paper was, in Lichtheim's view, "one of the calmest and weightiest contributions" submitted to the Congress.<sup>108</sup> Contra Koestler, Borkenau acknowledged that there might, in fact, be some justifiable aspects of the totalitarian challenge, which, he argued, arose as a reaction to the age of ruthless liberalism. It was, in part, a response to the "misery and loneliness" occasioned by the ideal of absolute liberty, and a reassertion of the individual's longing for the protection of the state. Indeed, totalitarianism might have taken the form of a healthy reaction to the cruel excesses of Manchester liberalism, had not its followers inherited liberalism's most tragic trait: utopianism. Totalitarianism was a revolution, and "what we are living through... is the last phase of an ebbing revolutionary epoch".<sup>109</sup> But, as Borkenau had argued repeatedly elsewhere, revolutions rarely deliver their stated – or even implicit – aims.<sup>110</sup> Anti-totalitarianism was the counter-revolution which would help to bring about "an amalgam of revolutionary and pre-revolutionary ideas and institutions". It must not, however, take the form of a restoration of the old liberalism, but must learn from the dialectical challenge presented by totalitarianism.<sup>111</sup>

This was significantly subtler than Koestler's Manichaeic demand for an unequivocal taking of sides, and, despite its Hegelian register, bore similarities to what, on the instigation of Ayer and Trevor-Roper, was added to the final manifesto of the Congress. Where Borkenau had invoked a higher synthesis, the British delegates carried their case for the inclusion of clause 13: "the defence of intellectual liberty today imposes a positive obligation: to offer new and constructive answers to the problems of our time".<sup>112</sup> Borkenau's contribution arguably undermined Trevor-Roper's accusation that an ex-communist clique attempted to direct the Congress's proceedings and resolutions. As Lichtheim opined:

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<sup>107</sup> George Lichtheim, *From Marx to Hegel*, London: Orbach & Chambers (1971), p. 206.

<sup>108</sup> Peter de Mendelssohn, "Berlin Congress", *New Statesman and Nation*, 15 July 1950; Lichtheim, "German Reviews".

<sup>109</sup> Borkenau, "Return to the Old Values".

<sup>110</sup> Franz Borkenau, "State and Revolution in Paris, Russia and Spain".

<sup>111</sup> Borkenau, "Return to the Old Values".

<sup>112</sup> "The Right to Say 'No'" [Manifesto of the CCF], in Koestler, *Trail*, pp. 112-115.

This was scarcely the sort of thing which the naiver sort of anti-communist had come to hear... [and] cannot have been to the liking of that eminent neo-liberal, Mr James Burnham, who was present to lend his weight to whatever looked like the germ of an anti-Soviet crusade.<sup>113</sup>

Additionally, Lichtheim observed, the French and Italian ex-communists David Rousset and Ignazio Silone had largely sided with the British delegates on most issues at the Congress, and was minded to conclude that the emphasis Trevor-Roper placed on Borkenau's short speech could only be explained by the fact that "he happened to be one of the more prominent ex-communists present".<sup>114</sup> It is notable that the *Manchester Guardian's* official correspondent at the Congress published a total of seven reports on its proceedings, none of which mentioned Borkenau at all. Moreover, Mamaine Koestler's correspondence and Hook's memoir combine to give a fairly comprehensive record of the activities of Koestler, who, undoubtedly, dominated the proceedings in Berlin. It appears that Borkenau was not present at any of Koestler's meetings or receptions; nor was he involved in drafting the manifesto (Ayer and Trevor-Roper, however, were).<sup>115</sup> Trevor-Roper complained that the Congress was "dominated by professional ex-communist *boulevardiers* like Arthur Koestler & Franz Borkenau, confident in the support of German ex-Nazis in the audience".<sup>116</sup> But the latter's role in the proceedings – like the presence of the Nazis – seems to have been a figment of the historian's imagination. Indeed, Borkenau was not even allotted time to deliver his paper.

When A. J. Ayer came to write his memoirs, he wrote somewhat regretfully of how "Hugh and I, with one or two followers, raised what were mainly mischievous objections" during the Congress.<sup>117</sup> Yet Trevor-Roper's account has informed most of the scholarly treatments of the Berlin Congress. Stonor Saunders interviewed the historian for her book about the CCF, and he repeated his claim that Borkenau's "violent" speech crystallised the meaning of the Congress: which was a resurrection of National Socialism.<sup>118</sup> She did not challenge this interpretation. However, given that she referred to Borkenau as having formerly been "the official historian of the Comintern", it is evident that she had little familiarity with his oeuvre.<sup>119</sup> Scott-Smith, arguably the foremost authority on the Cultural Cold War, also relied upon Trevor-Roper's retelling. But he mistook the British historian's invocation of Borkenau's "speech" to be a reference to the written submission which the latter never delivered, and made a confused attempt to square the arguments

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<sup>113</sup> Lichtheim, "German Reviews".

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> Goodman (ed.), *Living with Koestler*, pp. 140-5.

<sup>116</sup> Davenport-Hines (ed.), *Letters from Oxford*, p. 47.

<sup>117</sup> Ayer, *More of my Life*, p. 63.

<sup>118</sup> Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid?*, pp. 78-79.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

made in that paper with Trevor-Roper's apparent diagnosis of "the affinity between anti-communism and nationalism-fascism".<sup>120</sup> Equally, Kessler and Jones have cited Trevor-Roper as evidence that Borkenau's anti-communism became increasingly unhinged. "Anti-communist passions", Jones wrote, describing his deterioration in the post-war period, "overwhelmed Borkenau's true gift for unorthodox yet insightful analysis".<sup>121</sup>

In reality, Borkenau's undelivered paper was only a more refined version of the argument for an anti-totalitarian counter revolution he had made in the *Totalitarian Enemy*, the argument that Richard Crossman had hailed as an expression of the philosophy of the Labour Party in 1940. Indeed, Borkenau had restated the argument in wartime essays in left-wing magazines on both sides of the Atlantic, *Common Sense* and *Tribune*.<sup>122</sup> Which is to say that Borkenau's political thinking had not undergone any significant development. But the context had changed. 1940 was a propitious time to draw the comparison between Soviet communism and Nazism through the totalitarian concept, and to explore the opposition between totalitarianism and liberal democracy. As Lowenthal later pointed out, the *Totalitarian Enemy* did not age well because the Nazi-Soviet Pact proved to be temporary, and the Red Army made a decisive contribution to the victory of the Grand Alliance in the War.<sup>123</sup> In 1950, the concept of totalitarianism had become a highly polemical one, associated by its detractors with anti-communist crusading at home and abroad. As has been shown, above, however, Borkenau cautioned against overestimating the military threat of the Soviet Union and criticised the United States for alienating public opinion in Europe by panicky and over-hasty rearmament.

### McCarthyist?

Borkenau's criticism of nineteenth-century economic liberalism was retrospectively misunderstood by Lasch, who suggested in the 1960s that Borkenau had been criticising the "softness and sentimentality of bourgeois [political] liberals."<sup>124</sup> Though the sociologist Denis

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<sup>120</sup> Giles Scott-Smith, *The Politics of Apolitical Culture: The Congress for Cultural Freedom and the Political Economy of American Hegemony 1945-1955*, Florence: Taylor & Francis (2001), p. 200. Borkenau had actually sketched out a very similar thesis to that which he submitted in Berlin in his 1944 article, "Machiavelli, Hobbes and the Modern State", which was published in the left-wing *Tribune*. *Tribune's* editors clearly failed to locate any justification of "nationalism-fascism".

<sup>121</sup> Jones, *Lost Debate*, p. 185. Kessler also quoted Jones' verdict: "Between Communism", p. 109.

<sup>122</sup> In economics, Borkenau argued, "the 'liberal' idea of the Manchester School" was Hobbes' doctrine of "the struggle of man against man". But...

...with the decline of free competition, the ideology of the struggle of every man against every man must also decline... [and] its totalitarian excrescences are only the last convulsion before the end. Materials for a different social doctrine are ready on all sides.

In Borkenau, "Machiavelli, Hobbes and the Modern State". Also see Borkenau, "A Program for Counter Revolution".

<sup>123</sup> Lowenthal, "Introduction", p. 6.

<sup>124</sup> Lasch, "Cultural Cold War", p. 68. Lasch seems to have been confused by Borkenau's use of the term "classical liberalism", by which Borkenau meant what he characterised as the all-against-all economic doctrine of the nineteenth century. By Lasch's reading, Borkenau was attacking the values of political liberalism, and, as such, was demonstrating that he maintained a "Bolshevik habit of mind" (p. 68). Lasch's misunderstanding perhaps derives from the fact that

Wrong challenged what he saw as Lasch's misrepresentation, the "high-level McCarthyism" of which Borkenau stood accused seems to have influenced academic treatments of his work.<sup>125</sup> It has been claimed that Borkenau "testified" against the writer Kay Boyle's husband, Joseph Franckenstein, when the couple were investigated by Truman's Loyalty Security Board.<sup>126</sup> Borkenau had worked under Franckenstein for DANA in Marburg, where they had been tasked with setting up a newspaper in 1948. The two men disliked each other, and Franckenstein, who disapproved of a trip Borkenau made to Berlin to undertake anti-communist propaganda activities during the blockade (likely the period in which Borkenau published *Have no Fear*), fired him.<sup>127</sup> It would appear that Borkenau was merely interviewed by the FBI in 1951 in New York, as a known contact of Franckenstein, and did not, in fact, inform on him or testify against him in court.<sup>128</sup> He gave his opinion that Franckenstein was "pro-Soviet" and Boyle "a pink", which was the more common American word at the time for what was known in Britain as a fellow traveller.<sup>129</sup> In the inquisitorial context, it was perhaps cruel of Borkenau to use the term "pro-Soviet" of Franckenstein, but what he said about Boyle was hardly revelatory. As Boyle's biographer has conceded, she was not at all circumspect about offering her signature or her money to whichever "anti-fascist" or "anti-war" cause or group her friend, the editor of *The Nation* Freda Kirchwey, asked her to support. As a result, she unknowingly put her name, and tied her reputation, to an endless series of Communist front groups.<sup>130</sup> Borkenau's interview seems to have been of little overall importance to the case against Boyle and Franckenstein.

Among the collected correspondence of Boyle and Franckenstein, there is, in fact, a fascinating undated and unaddressed letter written by Borkenau.<sup>131</sup> While it is impossible to know to whom the letter was addressed, it appears to have been composed in 1948. In it, Borkenau denies a charge

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Mises, Hayek and the Austrian School had revived "classical liberalism" by the time at which he was writing, so that it was known as "neoliberalism", while plain "liberalism" was more commonly used as a term for the progressive philosophy of political "liberals".

<sup>125</sup> Lasch actually went as far as inferring that Borkenau was a fascist sympathiser, on the basis that he had delivered a paper on totalitarianism which hardly mentioned Nazism. *Ibid.*, pp. 68-9. Though this suggests that Lasch was ignorant about who Borkenau was, it probably influenced Scott-Smith's suggestion that Borkenau's paper was evidence of an "affinity between anti-communism and nationalism-fascism". Scott-Smith, *Apolitical Culture*, p. 200. Borkenau himself may have answered Lasch by pointing out that it was 1950, and Nazism was no longer of any relevance. As he wrote against A. J. P. Taylor's hope for an Anglo-Soviet alliance to contain Germany: "Why face the dangers of 'socialist' Russia in all its dimensions when one can talk so well about Metternich, Bismarck and Hitler?" Borkenau, "Reluctant Utopian", p. 213. For a clearing-up of the difficulties Lasch encountered grasping which kind of liberals Borkenau was opposing, see Dennis Wrong, "Radical Agonies", *Commentary*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (July 1969), pp. 59-63.

<sup>126</sup> See Kessler, "Between Communism", p. 110.

<sup>127</sup> Borkenau, *Bange Machen gilt nicht*, Joan Mellon, *Kay Boyle*, New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux (1994), p. 309.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 337.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 334.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 315.

<sup>131</sup> Joseph Franckenstein to Kay Boyle, "ALS February 10 1948, Marburg 2 pp. & 2 pp. statement of anti-communism Franz Borkenau", Kay Boyle and Joseph Franckenstein correspondence, 1940-1963, Morris Library Special Collections, Southern Illinois University, Box 24, Folder 2.

of communism aimed at himself, apparently with the intent of ending his employment by OMGUS. While it would be useless to speculate how this letter came to reside in the collected correspondence of Boyle and Franckenstein, it is clear that Borkenau himself had to face down accusations of communist sympathies while serving the US occupation government in Germany. This may have coloured his view on the Loyalty Security Hearings and McCarthyism. In *European Communism*, he expressed his opposition to them in the same terms as Sidney Hook had done in his famous article “Heresy, Yes – But Conspiracy, No”.<sup>132</sup> Hook’s argument was that the suppression of heretical belief – communist or otherwise – was unjustified and un-American, but that conspiratorial, or underground, political activity should be illegal. Borkenau went further, arguing that outlawing communism actually served the purposes of the movement, since its essence was to “hide first its aims and then also its personnel”.

It is clear that a prohibition of the communist parties will not only constitute a serious problem in terms of the democratic freedom of opinion, but will also operate along lines which the communist *élite* itself is following. It is possible to visualise an ‘ideal’ final stage of communism, where no overt communist movement would exist at all, and where the mass movements directed by [communists] would be devoid of all tangible communist affiliation.<sup>133</sup>

Incidentally, this ‘ideal’ stage effectively corresponded to what the US Communist Party (CPUSA) had achieved during the latter stages of the World War, when it disbanded itself, and when, as revealed by Elisabeth Bentley and underscored by Venona, spying on behalf of the Soviet Union was at its height in the US.<sup>134</sup> Borkenau believed that “Communism as a democratic mass movement is entirely harmless” because if communists were forced to use “ordinary democratic methods... communism would be finished” on account of its palpable unpopularity.<sup>135</sup> As it was, the front groups clandestinely directed by the CPUSA were a major part of the reason that innocents like Boyle got caught up in the arguably misguided and persecutory attempts to tackle communism in the late 1940s and 50s.

Borkenau stated his opposition to McCarthyism most clearly in his afterword to the German edition of the *God that Failed*:

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<sup>132</sup> Sidney Hook, “Heresy, Yes – But Conspiracy, No”, *New York Times Supplementary Magazine*, 9 July 1950, p. 12.

<sup>133</sup> Borkenau, *European Communism*, p. 549.

<sup>134</sup> See Haynes and Klehr, *Venona*, p. 12.

<sup>135</sup> Borkenau, *European Communism*, p. 549.



As the current events in the American Congress show, the struggle against communism serves only as a pretence in the party dispute, as a means of discrediting opponents who are somewhat further to the Left.<sup>136</sup>

While clearly, then, not an advocate of McCarthyism, Borkenau also expressed his opposition to the more sensationalist forms of anti-communist commentary in the 1950s. In 1956, when Isaac Don Levine and Soviet defector Alexander Orlov were preparing to publish the accusation that Stalin had been an Okhrana agent from 1906-12 – on the basis of the so-called Eremin letter – Borkenau decided to make public that he and others had presented evidence to Levine, prior to publication, that the letter was a forgery. After Levine chose to publish it anyway, Borkenau accused him of showing “disregard for the rules of careful checking which are the essence of responsible journalism”.<sup>137</sup>

Above all, Borkenau believed that obtaining a clear understanding of Soviet and Communist politics was of the essence for the Western powers in shaping their foreign policies. For this reason, he edited the journal *Ost-Probleme* – which was devoted largely to studying the Soviet and Communist Press – from 1949-51. He was dismissive of purely anti-Communist polemics which failed to enlighten their readership. A book on Soviet Romania by Reuben Markham, for instance, Borkenau judged “a not at all exaggerated account of the horror of communist rule”, but one which “leaves the reader completely untaught about the structure and problems of this rule”.<sup>138</sup> Borkenau’s determination to illuminate the Cimmerian lands behind the Iron Curtain inspired his adoption of the method of Kremlinology.

### Kremlinology

It is a matter of judgement whether Borkenau’s writings of the 1950s were as sagacious as those of the 30s, but it is a matter of fact that those mainly journalistic writings had a significant influence on many students of Soviet affairs even years after his death. In 1983, for instance, John Tashjean published a commentary on a neglected memorandum by Borkenau, which, based on a simple notion about the nature of totalitarian regimes, had enabled him to intuit the ideological causes of the Sino-Soviet Split, years ahead of its actual realisation.<sup>139</sup> Borkenau’s speculations, in *European Communism*, that Soviet foreign policy in the late Stalin years ought to be viewed through the prism of a rivalry between a ‘forward’ and a cautious faction – of which Zhdanov and Malenkov were

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<sup>136</sup> Borkenau, “Nachwort”, p. 259.

<sup>137</sup> See Franz Borkenau, “Stalin”, *New Leader*, 5 November 1956, p. 22. For a forensic study of the Eremin Letter, see Eric Lee, “The Eremin letter: Documentary proof that Stalin was an Okhrana spy?”, *Revolutionary Russia*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (1993), pp. 55-96.

<sup>138</sup> Franz Borkenau, “Nagy, Markham und Mindszenty”, *Ost-Probleme*, Vol. 1, No. 7, 26 October 1949, pp. 176-7.

<sup>139</sup> Tashjean, “Sino-Soviet Split”.

the major representative figures – was revived by historians of that period in the 1980s.<sup>140</sup> And the idea that the study of what Arthur Koestler called “*fraktionspolitik*” – unrelenting intra-party struggle – was integral to understanding Soviet affairs, led Borkenau to the method of which he and Boris Nicolaevsky are generally held to be the pioneers: Kremlinology.<sup>141</sup> This approach, though its obvious shortcoming was that it sometimes substituted deduction for the often unobtainable hard evidence, influenced a diverse range of commentators and scholars, including Lowenthal, Laqueur, Robert Conquest, Donald Zagoria and Barukh Hāzan.

Just as the differences in the political contexts of Britain/Western Europe and Germany/Central Europe influenced the way in which Borkenau’s political outlook – and, indeed, the whole project of the Congress for Cultural Freedom – was viewed by contemporaries, the practice of Kremlinology was one which Borkenau himself contrasted against the “British” approach to the study of communism. As has been shown above, Borkenau’s ex-Communism was held against him by British observers like Laski, Crossman and Trevor-Roper. But since communism had never been a mass movement in Britain or the US – notwithstanding its successes among the intelligentsia in the Popular Front period – Borkenau felt that English-speaking political scientists, sociologists and historians tended towards an approach to its study which neglected the importance of the intra-party conflicts which he, as an ex-Communist, understood instinctively.

In a 1954 review of a study of communism by Hugh Seton-Watson, son of the founder of London’s School of Slavonic and Eastern European Studies (SSEES), Borkenau was complimentary about the author’s marshalling of the historical facts, but took issue with Seton-Watson’s explanations of them.<sup>142</sup> In his book, Seton-Watson had interpreted the communist insurrection in Germany in the summer of 1923 as a response by the Comintern to the advent of the Stresemann cabinet, which, he had argued, Moscow regarded as too pro-Western.<sup>143</sup> Borkenau provided this as one of several illustrative examples of what, he suggested, not only Seton-Watson, but British academics in general overlooked in their studies of communism.

The... British background of the author is probably responsible for [a] ... line of thought which seems incessantly to bedevil British policy towards Communism: the over-rating of “imperialist” and “foreign policy” aims in Communism as against the role of intra-party conflicts. This is a very natural error, since the English, like other peoples, tend to interpret foreign events in the light of their own historical background, which is certainly not devoid of “imperialism”, but is happily free

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<sup>140</sup> Ra’anan, *International Policy Formation*.

<sup>141</sup> Koestler, *Invisible Writing*, pp. 252-3. On Nicolaevsky’s Kremlinology, see D’Agostino, *Soviet Succession Struggles*, esp. pp. 159-200.

<sup>142</sup> Franz Borkenau, “The Secret History of Communism”, *Encounter*, February 1954, pp. 71-6.

<sup>143</sup> Hugh Seton-Watson, *The Pattern of Communist Revolution*, London: Methuen (1953), p. 102.

of mutual throat-cutting as a method of settling political differences. The result is that such sober interpreters as Professor Seton-Watson, opposed to nothing as much as “speculation”, indulge in the wildest speculations when it is a matter of substituting imaginary “imperialist” or foreign policy motives for the real origins of important decisions.<sup>144</sup>

In Germany in 1923, Borkenau had argued in the *Communist International*, a major contributory factor to the insurrectionary violence had been the Stalin-Trotsky power struggle which had begun to develop as Lenin’s health declined.<sup>145</sup> As evidence, he noted that the Soviet Army’s exports of military supplies to Germany had continued as the uprising commenced (hence the grounds for the supposition that the Comintern was acting independently of the Soviet Politburo and the Narkomindel). More compelling still, Borkenau added, Stalin had published a denunciation of the action (which Trotsky had encouraged) at the time.<sup>146</sup> In contrast to what Borkenau characterised as the British approach, he considered his own approach to be that of the ex-Communist. “It is not easy, with a British background, to accept, as real modes of behaviour, things which, to a Communist, are so axiomatic as to be beyond all discussion.”<sup>147</sup> Between the two approaches, he sought to emphasise:

... the gap between a grudging acceptance... of the importance in principle of the intra-party struggle in Communism, and the systematic application of that point of view, step by step. If I speak of these things incessantly, it is not a personal obsession or an “ex-Communist prejudice”; it is simply due to the knowledge, common to all those who were ever near the Communist “apparat”, that the “real” history of Communism must largely be sought in the struggles for power within the Communist bureaucracy.<sup>148</sup>

Thus, Borkenau’s own take on the importance of his ex-Communism was not that it had left him embittered and resentful, but that his knowledge of communist practice was a boon to interpreting communism’s “secret history”. In the case of the German insurrection, it helped, of course, that Borkenau had been inside the communist movement at the time, and had borne witness to the factional struggles within the German Party as well as the relationships between the major German factions and those in Moscow. Borkenau’s view became more difficult to substantiate when he tried to interpret current events, of which, as an ex-Communist, he had no more inside knowledge than anyone else. Moreover, the 1940s and early 50s were not 1923; not the era of the struggle for

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<sup>144</sup> Borkenau, “Secret History”, p. 72.

<sup>145</sup> See Borkenau, “Germany in 1923”, in *World Communism*, pp. 243-56.

<sup>146</sup> Borkenau, “Secret History”, p. 73.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 75-6.

succession, but the era of “High Stalinism”.<sup>149</sup> The view was widely held that Stalin had utterly suppressed the factional struggles of the early period in Communist history and established a power that was absolute. This was, in fact, the view associated with the totalitarian school.<sup>150</sup> Kremlinology appeared to pose a challenge to the notion of the all-powerful totalitarian leader.

#### From the Comintern to the Politburo

As has been intimated, above, Borkenau’s emphasis on intra-party conflict went back to the *Communist International*, where he had relayed the struggle between the Left and Right factions which had defined the development of the Comintern throughout the decade in which he was, himself, a member: the 1920s.<sup>151</sup> These Comintern struggles, of course, closely mirrored those going on within the Soviet hierarchy, where the arch-intriguer, Stalin, rose to power by opposing a moderate, ‘Right’ course to the ‘Leftist’ fanaticism of the Trotskyists, before adopting many of his opponents’ policies and ‘exposing’ the ‘Right deviationism’ of one-time allies like Bukharin.<sup>152</sup> In the *Communist International*, however, Borkenau had arrived at the conclusion that intra-party conflict was a thing of the past; the concentration of power in the hands of Stalin – in the Soviet Union and in the Comintern – was the major fact of the 1930s. The “Comintern was completely purged of all those who could possibly have an opinion of their own”.<sup>153</sup> As a contemporary reviewer of Boris Souvarine’s *Stalin* wrote, Borkenau’s book corresponded to that biography by showing “the application to the foreign Communist parties” of the “technique of domination which Stalin worked out in Russia”.<sup>154</sup>

The most recent major history of the Comintern, produced after the opening of the Soviet archives, contrasted two major ‘lines’ in the historiography of the organisation.<sup>155</sup> The first, the authors argued, was introduced by Borkenau’s contemporaneous book; the second, by E. H. Carr in the 1980s. The “Borkeu line” was that, by the commencement of the Third Period (roughly 1928/1929), Stalin had established total control over the Comintern and its affairs, directing all of the ideological twists and turns of the member parties which represented the world communist movement. The “Carr line”, by contrast, was that Stalin despised the institution, and remained aloof from what he considered its petty disputes. The Communist parties took inspiration from

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<sup>149</sup> For a commentary on the concept of “High Stalinism” (the idea that the last years of Stalin’s regime were the apogee of his power), see Juliane Furst, “Introduction: Late Stalinist Society”, in Furst (ed.), *Late Stalinist Russia: Society Between Reconstruction and Reinvention*, Abingdon: Routledge (2006), pp. 1-2.

<sup>150</sup> See *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>151</sup> See esp. Ch. XV “Waverings”, in Borkenau, *World Communism*, pp. 257-73.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 222, 256 & 339.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 270.

<sup>154</sup> F. C. Hutley, “Bolshevism. Some Thoughts Suggested by Souvarine’s ‘Stalin.’” *The Australian Quarterly*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (1940), p. 87.

<sup>155</sup> McDermott & Agnew, *Comintern*, pp. 90-1.

Moscow but were in no way servants of Stalin. McDermott and Agnew's archival researches inclined them towards Borkenau's interpretation. However, they added a note of caution. Stalin had absolute control over the world communist movement, they argued, but he did not always exercise it. In fact, he deliberately allowed rival ideological factions to develop, so that he could play them against one another at his convenience.<sup>156</sup> In other words, the *fraktionspolitik* of the 1920s never completely disappeared.

This was, in fact, precisely the position that Borkenau himself had arrived at by the time he came to write *European Communism*, which he started work on in 1949.<sup>157</sup> He had come to it by a fairly circuitous route. For, though Raymond Aron, in an introduction to a 1962 reprint of Borkenau's *Communist International*, suggested that Borkenau had never had any illusions about the dissolution of the Comintern in 1943, this was not quite true.<sup>158</sup> At the time, Borkenau had declared the end of communism as a world revolutionary movement. In concord with the position later adopted by Carr, Borkenau concluded that the Comintern had become a nuisance to Stalin, who was in the process of abandoning communist ideology altogether in favour of Great Russian nationalism.<sup>159</sup> It was, of course, the era of the Great Patriotic War, when Eisenstein was working on *Ivan the Terrible*, and the prognostications that Hans Kohn had made in the early 1930s – that Bolshevism was gradually being subsumed by nationalism – seemed to have confirmation.<sup>160</sup> It was also, as Aurel Kolnai recalled, a moment of “extreme obsequiousness toward Soviet Russia”, owing to the Grand Alliance.<sup>161</sup>

Around the same time that he sounded the death knell for world communism, Borkenau wrote a favourable review of a monograph by Walter Kolarz, the title of which, *Stalin and Eternal Russia*, encapsulated its argument. Borkenau expressed agreement with Kolarz's conclusion that Russia was becoming “less and less marxist-communist” and that the Comintern was an “anachronism”.<sup>162</sup> Remarkably, Borkenau even briefly entered into what was, at the time, the

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<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93. This is the same argument that D'Agostino made in relation to the Politburo. Stalin deliberately allowed ideological factions to develop in the wake of the Second World War so that he would always have scapegoats for policy failures. *Soviet Succession Struggles*, p. 160.

<sup>157</sup> In a 1949 letter to Boris Souvarine, Borkenau mentions that he will be travelling to Paris to start work on the book. Franz Borkenau, 1 letter to Boris Souvarine (1949), Boris Souvarine papers, MS Fr 375-375.1 (128), Box: 4, Houghton Library.

<sup>158</sup> Raymond Aron, “Introduction”, in Borkenau, *World Communism*, p. 3.

<sup>159</sup> Franz Borkenau,

- “After the Comintern”, *The Spectator*, 28 May 1943, pp. 495-6;
- “Comintern Dissolved: What Next?”, *Christian Science Monitor Magazine*, 19 June 1943, pp. 3 & 13;
- “Comintern in Retrospect”, *Dublin Review*, July 1943, pp. 36-45.

<sup>160</sup> Hans Kohn, *Nationalism in the Soviet Union*, New York: Columbia UP (1933).

<sup>161</sup> Aurel Kolnai, *Political Memoirs*, Oxford: Lexington Books (1999), p. 14.

<sup>162</sup> Borkenau, “Some Recent Books” (1942), pp. 176-7; Kolarz, *Stalin*.

widespread belief that the Grand Alliance represented a kind of permanent coalition.<sup>163</sup> Russia's freedom from the "incubus" of the Comintern, he suggested, gave the country the opportunity to realise "how great are the prospects of her future role in the comity of nations".<sup>164</sup> In the same article in which he gave this positive view of the new Russia, he excused Stalin's use of the Comintern in the 1930s as a mere diplomatic tool for the building of closer alliances with the Western democracies. "It was *necessary*" [my italics], he wrote, for Russia "to play a complicated diplomatic game" involving the use of the Comintern because of the threat it faced from the combination of fascism and appeasement.<sup>165</sup> Borkenau judged these efforts foolish and unsuccessful, noting, for instance, that the Franco-Soviet Alliance had only been harmed by the political success of the French Popular Front. It alienated a French Right, he argued, which had not previously been overly concerned about negotiating with the Soviets – especially in view of the mutual fear of Germany.<sup>166</sup> But he seemed to have concluded that the Soviet Union had abandoned for good the idea of spreading its revolution abroad and was interested only in establishing good relations with its allies in the fight against fascism.

Borkenau – like Kolarz, who also had links to the German Social Democratic movement – remained firmly anti-communist. He expressed his hope that the treasonous conduct of the British and French Communists would never be forgotten.<sup>167</sup> But, under the impression of the apparently friendly relationship between Russia and the West, and the life-and-death struggle Russia was fighting against Nazism, Borkenau became almost pro-Soviet in 1943.<sup>168</sup> It was the "enemies of the United Nations" he declared, who will refer to the "dissolving of the Comintern as a mere piece of bluff" (which was exactly how he would refer to it a few years later).<sup>169</sup> This tells strongly against the argument that Borkenau's anti-Soviet stance after the War was driven by an intensification of his anti-communism. Rather, his position changed because he came to realise:

- i. that he had been wrong to believe that the Stalin regime had buried its past; and

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<sup>163</sup> Britain and Soviet Russia signed a twenty-year treaty of military and political alliance in 1942. See Michael Foot, *Aneurin Bevan: a biography, Vol. 1: 1897-1945*, New York: Atheneum (1967), p. 367.

<sup>164</sup> Borkenau, "Comintern in Retrospect", p. 45.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 43-4.

<sup>166</sup> Borkenau emphasised that the Franco-Soviet Treaty of Mutual Assistance was negotiated by Litvinov and Barthou prior to the formation of the Popular Front, so the Soviets had no need of a left-wing government to build up an alliance with France. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>168</sup> So much so that, when reviewing George Williams Keeton & Rudolf Schlesinger, *Russia and her Western Neighbours*, London: Jonathan Cape (1942), Borkenau defended its authors' pro-Russian stance (and their suggestion that some of Eastern Europe should be ceded to the USSR) on the basis that "any stable peace will have to be based on the co-operation of the Big Three". This earned him the wrath of the Bishop of Chichester, who was astonished that the author of the "great book, *The Totalitarian Enemy*", had become so soft on Russian totalitarianism. See Franz Borkenau, "Peace Plans in Detail", *The Spectator*, 25 September 1942, p. 291; & A. S. Duncan Jones, "Russia's Western Neighbours", *The Spectator*, 9 October 1942, p. 337.

<sup>169</sup> Borkenau, "Comintern Dissolved", p. 3.

- ii. that his analysis of the dissolution of the Comintern was accordingly mistaken.

To put it another way, Borkenau's "gift for unorthodox yet insightful analysis" failed him most glaringly in 1943, under the impression of the general pro-Soviet optimism of the time, and not in the Cold War period, when he had abandoned his illusions about the cooperation of the Great Powers.

Developments, either in the latter part of the War or in Germany immediately after the War, convinced Borkenau that he had been far too hasty in his judgement regarding both Russian nationalism and the meaning of the dissolution of the Comintern. It is hard to tell which, since he wrote nothing straightforwardly polemical about contemporary politics between 1943 and 1947, when his first article on post-war Germany appeared in *Tablet*.<sup>170</sup> Retrospectively, he would invoke the Greek Civil War, the communist rising in Belgium, and the Tito-Mihailovic conflict in Yugoslavia as signs that the Soviet leadership was as committed to the revolutionary "war against the West... at the time of Stalingrad" as it was "at the time of the Marshall Plan" – even if, he conjectured, there were fierce disagreements in Moscow as to how that war was to be conducted.<sup>171</sup>

Soon after 1945, the *Zhdanovshchina* restored the cultural supremacy of socialist realism in Russia. Though it is commonly held to have been a Russian chauvinist campaign, Borkenau interpreted it as a return to zealous communism, as the wartime use of nationalist symbolism declined dramatically.<sup>172</sup> Zhdanov was – to borrow Buruma and Margalit's concept – undoubtedly part of the tradition of 'Occidentalism', or anti-Westernism.<sup>173</sup> But he attacked the West because of its "reactionary bourgeois" culture, not in the name of Mother Russia, but in that of the "new, universal, human morality" which, Zhdanov claimed, had developed under socialism.<sup>174</sup> Borkenau was one of the first commentators to see him as an extreme Left communist ideologue rather than a Great Russian chauvinist.

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<sup>170</sup> See Borkenau, "Structure of Germany". From 1943, Borkenau was employed by the BBC, before taking employment with the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) towards the end of the war. His few writings from this period can be separated by two major interests. Firstly, German history, inspired by the continuing debate over Versailles and the future of Germany; and secondly, civilisational history, which would continue to be a major side interest for him until his death (the basis of the posthumously published essay collection *End and Beginning*). Regarding the former, see Borkenau, "On Lutheranism", which would make its way into his 1947 collection on the history of Germany (Borkenau, *Drei Abhandlungen*). For the latter, see Franz Borkenau,

- "Oswald Spengler"; &
- "Monastic Revival Coming".

<sup>171</sup> See Borkenau, Partisan Review MS, p. 2.

<sup>172</sup> *Ost-probleme* published an essay in which it was argued that symbols of Russian nationalism had only ever been appropriated in so far as they could be merged with official Soviet ideology and the Stalin cult. Frederick Barghoorn, "Der Stalinismus und das russische Kulturerbe," *Ost-Probleme*, Vol. 4, No. 32, 9 Aug 1952, pp. 1047-58.

<sup>173</sup> Ian Buruma & Avishai Margalit, *Occidentalism*, London: Penguin (2004).

<sup>174</sup> Zhdanov speech of 1946. Quoted in Peter J. S. Duncan, *Russian Messianism: Third Rome, Revolution, Communism and After*, London: Routledge (2000), p. 58.

In Eastern Europe, Borkenau suggested, it was ideological more than imperial subordination which was represented by the new ‘Peoples’ Democracies’.<sup>175</sup> And, by the time he came to write *European Communism*, Borkenau had come under the influence of another ex-communist’s study of the French Communist Party (PCF). Angelo Tasca (*pseud.* A. Rossi) had attempted to show that, during the War, not only the major but also the subtle twists and turns in the propaganda and activity of the PCF – including its campaign to purge political opponents under phony charges of collaboration – had consistently served Moscow’s needs.<sup>176</sup> Another document of the French Communists’ activity upon which Borkenau drew was the second volume of the memoirs of Jacques Soustelle, published in 1950, where the PCF’s apparent dismemberment from Russia was viewed in the context of its attempts to infiltrate the resistance.<sup>177</sup> The books of Rossi and Soustelle encouraged Borkenau to the conclusion that the PCF had never severed its connection with Moscow.<sup>178</sup> He became convinced that the dissolution of the Comintern had been a ruse.<sup>179</sup>

However, Borkenau did not return *solely* to the idea that – even after the dissolution of the Comintern – the Communist Parties remained obedient servants of Stalin. He averred that the extreme zigzag of the communist line throughout the War years had exposed the existence of factions, with individuals’ careers demonstrably linked to policies. Another writer with a communist background, Victor Serge, had predicted the Nazi-Soviet rapprochement after Stalin replaced his Commissar for Foreign Affairs, the Jewish Maxim Litvinov, with Vyacheslav Molotov in May 1939.<sup>180</sup> In a similar vein, Borkenau’s 1952 book traced how the rise and fall of certain ideologues corresponded to key changes in the Moscow ‘line’. In the British Party, for instance, the General Secretary, Harry Pollitt (advocate of the Popular Front), was replaced immediately after the 1939 Pact, only to regain his position shortly after the Russians entered the War.<sup>181</sup> Looking beyond the Comintern, though, as Lowenthal later observed, Borkenau’s unique contribution to the study of the Soviet Union was to take the concept of intra-party feuds and apply it to the Kremlin:

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<sup>175</sup> His account of post-war developments in Czechoslovakia, for instance, was informed by that of dissident Social Democrat Stransky, *East Wind*. See Borkenau, *European Communism*, pp. 496-501.

<sup>176</sup> A. Rossi, *A Communist Party in Action*, Yale UP (1949). The Communists’ role in the *Épuration* has recently been credited with turning Raymond Aron into a ‘Cold Warrior’. See Stewart, *Raymond Aron and Liberal Thought*, p. 105. Also see Alfred Rieber, *Stalin and the French Communist Party, 1941-1947*, New York: Columbia UP (1962), pp. 150-1.

<sup>177</sup> Jacques Soustelle, *Envers et Contre Tout: D’Alger a Paris 1942-1944*, Paris: Robert Laffont (1950).

<sup>178</sup> Franz Borkenau, “Zur Geschichte Der Französischen KP,” *Ost-Probleme*, Vol. 2, No. 37 (1950), pp. 1165–7.

<sup>179</sup> See Franz Borkenau, “Die neue Komintern,” *Der Monat*, No. 4 (1949), pp. 50-60. Borkenau, *European Communism*, pp. 282-3. Based on research in the Comintern archives, the Russian historian Sergei Kudryashov has supported this view. See McDermott & Agnew, *Comintern*, p. 210.

<sup>180</sup> Victor Serge, “Litvinov,” *Esprit* (June 1939), pp. 419-27.

<sup>181</sup> Borkenau, *European Communism*, pp. 233-295.



...this speculation on the background of Soviet and Communist policy during the late Stalinist period sprang from what was... a real merit of the book: an early attempt to interpret the policy of a totalitarian regime... not as ‘monolithic’ but as characterised by persistent personal and political rivalries behind the scenes, which could be inferred from the interpretation of what later came to be called ‘esoteric communications’ in official Communist statements.<sup>182</sup>

The realisation that “the whole course of Soviet history... betrays the existence of internal strife” was what Borkenau called the “entering wedge” for anyone wishing to study what was happening behind the Iron Curtain.<sup>183</sup> He was arguably ahead of his time in this endeavour, as it was only *after* the death of Stalin – during what the majority of contemporary observers viewed as the “façade of ‘collective leadership’” (although revisionist historians like Fitzpatrick have more recently challenged this interpretation)<sup>184</sup> – that analysts began to pay significant attention to the role of personal rivalries in the Politburo.<sup>185</sup> “The four or five years following Stalin’s death,” wrote T. H. Rigby, “were the heyday of Kremlinology”.<sup>186</sup> For this reason, not only Lowenthal, but Ploss, Conquest, Griffith and Barghoorn were among those who acknowledged Borkenau as one of the major innovators of the method.<sup>187</sup>

### Kreml-Astrologie

But Lowenthal’s reference to the interpretation of ‘esoteric communications’ – statements appearing in the Soviet press with disguised or veiled meanings, used by elites to signal an impending purge or policy change – points to two troubling aspects of Kremlinology. Firstly, just how could an analyst reliably interpret a deliberately veiled communication? Secondly, what expertise would such an analyst require?

Some advocates of Kremlinology invoked the concept of reading “between the lines”, which Leo Strauss had introduced in 1941 as a method for unveiling heterodox ideas in supposedly orthodox

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<sup>182</sup> Lowenthal, “Introduction”, p. 7.

<sup>183</sup> Borkenau, “Getting at the Facts”.

<sup>184</sup> The term was probably first used in Myron Rush, “The Rise of a Secretary”, *Problems of Communism*, Vol. 6, No. 5 (1957), pp. 50-1. Also see Sheila Fitzpatrick, *On Stalin's Team: The Years of Living Dangerously in Soviet Politics*, Princeton University Press (2015), p. 277.

<sup>185</sup> Probably only Boris Meissner [*Russland im Umbruch: Der Wandel in der Herrschaftsordnung und sozialen Struktur der Sowjetunion*, Frankfurt (1951)] and Boris Nicolaevsky (several articles in *The New Leader* and in Russian-language Menshevik journals) can be said to have preceded Borkenau in making analyses of Soviet policy through investigations into factional feuds in the Politburo. Notable Post-Stalin examples of Kremlinology are: Myron Rush, *Khrushchev and the Stalin Succession: A Study of Political Communication in the U.S.S.R.*, RAND (1957); Conquest, *Power and Policy*; Wolfgang Leonhard, *The Kremlin Since Stalin*, OUP (1962); and Sidney Ploss, *Conflict and Decision Making in Soviet Russia*, Princeton UP (1962).

<sup>186</sup> T. H. Rigby, “Crypto-Politics”, in Frederic J. Heron Jr. (ed.), *Communist Studies and the Social Sciences: Essays on Methodology*, Chicago: RAND (1969).

<sup>187</sup> Sidney Ploss, *The Roots of Perestroika: The Soviet Breakdown in Historical Context*, London: McFarland (2010), p. 201; Conquest, *Power & Policy*, p. 3; William E. Griffith, “Communist Esoteric Communications: Explication de Texte,” in I. de Sola Pool et al. (ed.), *Handbook of Communication*, Chicago: Rand McNally (1971), pp. 512–520; Frederick C. Barghoorn, *Politics in the USSR*, New York: Little, Brown (1966), p. 213 & 224.

historical texts whose authors might have suffered persecution had they written openly.<sup>188</sup> The Soviet Union was undoubtedly a persecutory society, but there were plenty of scholars who were highly sceptical – even if there were ‘esoteric communications’ in the Soviet press – about the idea that they could be identified and correctly interpreted. Daniel Bell gave an example of an instance of two Kremlinologists who – on the basis of their respective readings of Soviet sources – reached opposite conclusions about whether Kozlov was backing Malenkov or Khrushchev.<sup>189</sup> The discipline assumed the aura of pseudoscience and was known in Germany by the somewhat derisive title of *Kreml-Astrologie*. One young scholar, unimpressed by some lectures Borkenau gave at the Russian Research Centre at Harvard, reported that he used to justify his conclusions by claiming he had “*Fingerspitzengefühl*”, or intuitive flair, a boast which hardly advertised the scientific credentials of his method.<sup>190</sup> Nevertheless, Khrushchev himself, during his ‘Secret Speech’ in 1956, lent credence to Kremlinology, when he revealed the level of attention Soviet citizens paid to details in the Soviet media:

I can remember how the Ukraine learned about Kosior’s arrest. The Kiev radio used to start its programme thus: “this is radio Kosior”. When one day the programme began without naming Kosior, everyone was quite certain that something had happened to Kosior, that he had probably been arrested.<sup>191</sup>

If the ability to interpret ‘esoteric communications’ was treated with a fair degree of scepticism, the question of who might be qualified to do the interpreting was another thorny issue. At the Berlin Congress, Trevor-Roper had been bristled by Borkenau’s claim that “the ex-communists alone understood communism”.<sup>192</sup> The quotation might have been an exaggeration – Sidney Hook reported it as: ex-communists understood communism “better than most others” – but it nevertheless hinted that Borkenau had a somewhat dogmatic confidence in his own

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<sup>188</sup> Leo Strauss, “Persecution and the Art of Writing,” *Social Research*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (1941), pp. 488–504. Griffith, “Esoteric Communications”, noted the affinities between the Kremlinological method and Strauss’s. Borkenau used the term “between the lines” in an article in which he alleged that a leader attacking “sensationalism” in the French Party newspaper, *L’Humanité*, was meant as a censure of the CPGB’s *Daily Worker*, which had mistakenly promoted the wrong “line” the day before. See Franz Borkenau, “Währungsabwertung und Atombombe: Das kommunistische Echo”, *Ost-Probleme*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 5 October 1949, pp. 83-4. Hazan also borrowed the term [B. A. Hazan, *From Brezhnev to Gorbachev: Infighting in the Kremlin*, London: Westview (1987) p. ix].

<sup>189</sup> However, Bell did note that one of the Kremlinologists (Lowenthal), turned out to be right, concluding that Kremlinology could be a useful method in the hands of a skilled and knowledgeable practitioner. Daniel Bell, “Ten Theories in Search of Reality: The Prediction of Soviet Behavior in the Social Sciences,” *World Politics*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (1958), p. 355.

<sup>190</sup> Alfred G. Meyer, *My Life as a Fish*, Michigan: Ann Arbor (2000), p. 164.

<sup>191</sup> Quoted in Arthur E. Adams, “The Hybrid Art of Sovietology”, in George R. Urban (ed.), *Scaling the Wall: Talking to Eastern Europe*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press (1964), p. 288.

<sup>192</sup> Trevor-Roper, “Ex-Communist”.

interpretations.<sup>193</sup> Palpably, he esteemed his personal experience. As he wrote in the famous essay in which he explained his method:

The investigator must know the history and content of numberless party controversies in the past as thoroughly as a learned theologian would the countless disputes that marked the course of Christian dogma. He must know the formulas used by the various parties in these controversies, and the historical situations for which they were devised.<sup>194</sup>

As well as the belief that, as an ex-communist, he was uniquely positioned to understand what many Western experts could not – and Borkenau’s Kremlinological writings do contain several dismissive and ironical references to some of the consensus interpretations of his contemporaries – he had a habit of stating his conclusions too categorically. As Conquest put it: “I know that as it stands it [Borkenau’s work] has put off a number of readers, really rather unfairly, by an air of omniscience which even the non-expert realises cannot be seriously sustained.”<sup>195</sup>

In mitigation, it should be noted Borkenau was a correspondent for newspapers and magazines, his work appearing frequently in Britain, the US, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France and Brazil, and was not working as an academic. He was not trying to painstakingly prove a thesis, but to interpret events for a general audience. It is, of course, sometimes true of the journalistic medium that it encourages a degree of sensationalism, and Borkenau’s analyses were often predictive, leading one admirer to question whether he was a “seer or [an] analyst”.<sup>196</sup> Probably the most remarkable prediction that Borkenau made in print, in *Merkur* in January 1953, was that of Stalin’s imminent death, which proved, of course, to be an accurate one. He subsequently explained that he intuited the tyrant’s demise by reading a resolution published in the name of the East German Communist leader, Walter Ulbricht, which repeatedly referred to the authority of Malenkov and barely mentioned Stalin.<sup>197</sup> Though Stalin did die weeks later, it appears to have been coincidental, since all the accounts published over subsequent years seem to concur that he collapsed in March, only days before his passing. Thus, Ulbricht would have had no reason to assume that he was dying as early as January.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Hook, *Out of Step*, p. 439.

<sup>194</sup> Borkenau, “Getting at the Facts”.

<sup>195</sup> Conquest, *Power & Policy*, p. 3.

<sup>196</sup> Robert A. Graham, “Franz Borkenau: Seer or Analyst?”, *America: A Catholic Review of the Week*, 3 March 1956, p. 603.

<sup>197</sup> See Walter Laqueur, *The Fate of the Revolution*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson (1967), pp. 180-1.

<sup>198</sup> As a coda to this, however, it should be noted that Stalin’s apparently precarious state of health has been linked to the intensification of the power struggle in the Politburo after the War. See Ra’anan, *International Policy Formation*.

## Two Schools of Kremlinology

An unresolved dilemma of Kremlinology was whether policy and ideological commitments should be understood solely as means in the cynical struggle for power, or whether, and to what extent, individual members of the Soviet elite had genuine ideological convictions. There were certainly Kremlinologists – Conquest being the preeminent exemplar – who believed that the power struggle stood above everything. “It is vulgar and regrettable,” the author of *The Great Terror* wrote, “that important historical crises should be decided by personal ambition, but it is also, unfortunately, true.”<sup>199</sup> In the same vein, Hazan, in his contemporaneous account of the rise of Gorbachev, stated that “real issues play little role in the actual succession struggle”.<sup>200</sup> In retrospect, however, the common view of Gorbachev is that he genuinely felt the imperative to reform – precisely because he was alive to the real issues he inherited after years of stagnation.

Another school of Kremlinology, which, Breslauer observed, emerged in opposition to the ‘power’ theorists, posited the primacy of ideology.<sup>201</sup> Its adherents claimed that Soviet leaders were fighting, not for power *per se*, nor even to save their own skins, but to carry through their own ideological conceptions. Khrushchev’s struggle for power, for instance, was seen as an attempt to carry through a hard-Left domestic agenda, on the basis that he had always been a partisan of the acceleration of collectivisation and of ‘heavy’ over ‘light’ (consumer goods) industry. Once again, this was too simplistic a view. For the ‘anti-Party’ group defeated by Khrushchev in 1957 included both supposed moderates (Malenkov) and Leftists (Molotov), while Khrushchev’s subsequent behaviour – he did adopt policies which aimed to increase consumer goods and raise living standards in the later years of his leadership – arguably told against the thesis that he was a ‘Left extremist’.<sup>202</sup>

Facts like this did not necessarily tell in the favour of the ‘power’ school, who often made a point of noticing how Soviet leaders adopted the policies of their adversaries after they had defeated them.<sup>203</sup> For, as Nove argued, real issues existed – even in the Soviet Union – which leaders were

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<sup>199</sup> Robert Conquest “In Defence of Kremlinology”, in *Tyrants and Typewriters: Communiques in the Struggle for Truth*, London: Hutchinson (1989), pp. 156-166.

<sup>200</sup> Hazan, *From Brezhnev to Gorbachev*, p. 8.

<sup>201</sup> George W. Breslauer, *Khrushchev and Brezhnev as Leaders: building authority in Soviet politics*, London: Allen & Unwin (1982), p. 9.

<sup>202</sup> In fact, Khrushchev’s consumer goods drive suggests a genuine effort to gain legitimacy from the population at large, a trend which was continued in some of Brezhnev’s policies (e.g. price-fixing). The underlying assumption of Kremlinology was that – the Soviet Union being an autocracy – studying classes and social forces was of little importance, because only the leadership counted (they had no need to seek legitimacy from the masses). Contemporary historians tend to suggest that social forces – and social protest – grew significantly in the years after De-Stalinisation, calling into question whether Kremlinology remained relevant (and whether the USSR remained totalitarian). But Borkenau died in 1957, so we can’t know what he would have thought about that.

<sup>203</sup> See Ra’anana, *International Policy Formation*, p. 85.

forced to address regardless of personal rivalries or ideological predilections. Policy makers, as he put it, have before them “a range of choices which may be small or more considerable”.<sup>204</sup>

Kremlinologists have been known to argue that the fact that politicians have adopted their opponents’ policies after achieving power lends support for their viewpoint. On a superficial level it could be said that such behavior proves the primacy of the power struggle, but on reflection it is as likely to prove the opposite, that after all perhaps there was only one thing to do.<sup>205</sup>

Part of what made Borkenau’s contribution to the method unique, and his Kremlin-watching writings so entertaining to read, is that he clearly straddled the divide between the two approaches. One of the major aspects of Borkenau’s particular method was extensive research into the personal histories of elites (members of the Politburo) and sub-elites (their patronage networks). He used the word *chefstvo* to describe the process he sought to trace, believing that where, when and how individuals made steps up or down the ladder of power could tell a researcher much about who their allies and antagonists were. For, given the absence of political, economic or intellectual freedom in the U.S.S.R, Borkenau argued, ambitious political climbers could only rise to power by throwing in their lot with one or another *Chef* (leader). An example Borkenau gave, which showed the stakes on which the game of political power was played, was Dekanosov, a diplomat whose biography demonstrated a subservience to Beria, and who lost his life at the same time as his *Chef*, December 1953.<sup>206</sup>

Whether partisans of the ‘pure power’ or ‘ideology’ school, Kremlinologists’ concern with elites was seen as excessive by some contemporaries, especially those on the liberal and socialist left who did not necessarily share their view that the Soviet Union was an autocratic or oligarchical polity. “However unnatural and repugnant it may seem to the Western mind,” Adam Ulam bluntly contended,

the fact remains that the destiny of the Soviet state was for most of its existence determined not by its people, not by impersonal social and economic forces, but by the decisions, first of a despot, then by that of a small oligarchy.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Alec Nove, “The Uses and Abuses of Kremlinology”, pp. 40-50, in *Was Stalin Really Necessary?*, Abingdon: Routledge (2011), p. 45.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid*, p. 50.

<sup>206</sup> Borkenau, “Getting at the Facts”.

<sup>207</sup> Adam B. Ulam, *Understanding the Cold War: A Historian’s Personal Reflections* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), New Brunswick: Transaction (2002), p. 183.

But this was an assessment rejected by, for instance, the editors of the left-wing *London Tribune*, who considered it excessively cynical to disregard social forces. Thus, the reviewer in that journal resented that *European Communism* was:

...in the direct tradition of those old-fashioned diplomatic histories, in which only the Great Ones, only the wire-pullers and the Grey Eminences of this world are considered to be worth attention.<sup>208</sup>

Borkenau, however, would have argued that this was precisely the result of the Leninist doctrine which he held to be the basis of the totalitarian state: the belief that only a *déclassé* group of professional revolutionaries could direct the historic tasks involved in building socialism. In a regime founded and successfully built on the concept of a political elite, totally independent of social forces, Borkenau held, the elite were the only relevant object of sociological study.<sup>209</sup>

#### Background of Borkenau's Kremlinology

The conjecture can be made that Borkenau was influenced by the circle associated with the Rockefeller Foundation's War Communications Research Project, who began to conduct what they called 'content analysis' of Nazi propaganda during the Second World War. In its early days, 'content analysis' was a fairly uncomplicated quantitative method, and its pioneering researchers were doing things like tallying up key words used in Nazi Radio broadcasts to the United States. With these key words, they drew speculative conclusions about what the major goals of Nazi propaganda were at different times, and made observations about how propaganda related to policy.<sup>210</sup> Gradually, these researchers' methods became more sophisticated, and, concomitantly, after the war, they began to turn their attention towards Soviet communications.

One of the major figures associated with the enterprise was Nathan Leites, who published a study under the auspices of the RAND Corporation on *The Operational Code of the Politburo* and was later well-known as a Kremlinologist.<sup>211</sup> Leites had co-edited, with Harold Laswell, a collection of papers based on 'content analysis' in 1949, and it is likely that Borkenau would have read them, as his *Communist International* had been cited in the studies, while he also later used the term 'content analysis' when describing his own method.<sup>212</sup> Moreover, Leites and Borkenau both published similar analyses of the Bulgarian Kostov Trial in 1949.<sup>213</sup> *Ost-probleme* also carried a review of Leites'

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<sup>208</sup> Mary White, "Anti-Communists", *Tribune*, 1 May 1953, p. 6.

<sup>209</sup> "It is the innermost meaning of Leninism-Stalinism to segregate a small *élite* from the masses." Borkenau, *European Communism*, p. 549.

<sup>210</sup> On this, see Anthony Olcott, Ch II "Intelligence Analysis and Open Sources – the Early Days", in *Open Source Intelligence in a Networked World*, London: Continuum (2012), pp. 23-46.

<sup>211</sup> Nathan Leites, *The Operational Code of the Politburo*, New York: RAND (1951).

<sup>212</sup> Harold Laswell & Nathan Leites, *The Language of Politics: Studies in Quantitative Semantics*, New York: George W. Stewart (1949); Borkenau, "Getting at the Facts".

<sup>213</sup> Franz Borkenau, "Bulgarien Und Die Südslawische Frage." *Ost-Probleme*, Vol. 1, No. 15 (1949), pp. 432-34; Elsa Bernaut & Nathan Leites, *The political meaning of the Kostov trial in Sofia, Bulgaria*, Santa Monica: RAND (1949).

RAND paper, along with another which was part of the Hoover Institute's "Elite Studies" series led by Laswell in the early 1950s, "The Politburo", by George Schueller.<sup>214</sup> Schueller had previously collaborated on a study of "The Nazi Elite" with Franz Neumann, someone Borkenau knew well from Frankfurt and London.<sup>215</sup> Indeed, Borkenau appropriated one of Neumann's main theses from *Behemoth*<sup>216</sup> – which, he wrote, "showed that a totalitarian state actually tended to be less monolithic than a democratic one" – when outlining his method.<sup>217</sup> Boris Nicolaevsky, meanwhile – another contact, whom Borkenau respected above all others in the field – had helped Schueller with his MS.

Schueller's was perhaps the first detailed study of the personal and political histories of each of the 27 individuals who had served in the Politburo from 1917 to the time of writing, 1951. The study included some rather pedestrian insights – like that the composition of the Politburo had undergone a shift from the domination of intellectuals to that of administrators – a phenomenon which had been noted by many observers.<sup>218</sup> But Schueller also drew attention to some intriguing commonalities among the second generation of the Politburo; for instance, that many of them had served apprenticeships in the secret police apparatus.<sup>219</sup> And a particularly interesting finding was that of the geographical distribution of their pre-Politburo careers. His study revealed that almost all of the post-revolution members of the Politburo had risen by serving the Party in one of three provinces – the Ukraine, the Caucasus or Nizhni Novgorod. Schueller did not expand on this finding, except to point out that the former two areas had been trouble spots for the Bolsheviks. As for Nizhni, he referred only in a footnote to Nicolaevsky's speculation that Kaganovich, who had been Party Secretary there, had recruited the others into the local Party machinery.<sup>220</sup>

This last realisation just hinted at Borkenau's concept of *chefstvo*. For it was reasonable to question whether the members who had risen under Kaganovich's tutelage were either his clients or were closely allied with him. And the same question could be posed about other provinces, too. Though Borkenau may not always have reached the correct conclusions, his *chefstvo* concept has undoubtedly aged well. Historians have subsequently reached a strong degree of consensus, for example, that the machinations of the Party leaders in Leningrad had been a persistent concern of

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<sup>214</sup> G. Schueller, "The Politburo" [1951], in H. Laswell & D. Lerner (ed.), *World Revolutionary Elites*, Cambridge, M.I.T. Press (1965), pp. 97-178; "Politbürobücher," *Ost-Probleme*, Vol. 4, No. 9 (Mar., 1952), pp. 283–284.

<sup>215</sup> Daniel Lerner (ed.), *The Nazi Elite*, Stanford University Press (1951). In London, before Neumann's emigration to the United States, he and Borkenau would both commonly deliver lectures to an exile community which used to meet at a German bookshop near the British Museum. See Gilbert, *A European Past*, p. 173.

<sup>216</sup> Neumann, *Behemoth*.

<sup>217</sup> Borkenau, "Getting at the Facts".

<sup>218</sup> Schueller, "Politburo", p. 100.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid*, p. 128.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid*, p. 130.

Stalin, who worried that the City could be an alternative centre of power.<sup>221</sup> Indeed, it was the Leningrad Party which was the first victim of the purges carried out after the deaths of both Kirov and Zhdanov.<sup>222</sup>

With the hypothesis that the power struggle was not a question of all-against-all (beneath Stalin), but that it was a question of factions – the knowledge of who achieved promotion, where, and under whom, providing evidence as to how those factions may be constituted – Borkenau also treated it as a natural probability that they would often run on ideological lines. “There are deep differences,” he wrote, “within the Soviet leadership, and ‘deviating’ subordinates often have the *sub rosa* backing of highly placed persons who are in disagreement with the official line and even ready to sabotage it.”<sup>223</sup> Thus, contra Conquest and Hazan, who probably exaggerated the cynicism of the men in the Kremlin, Borkenau painted a picture in which ideological or policy commitments played a key role in the infighting among the Soviet elite. Undoubtedly, given the lack of available information, ideological positions were probably the most difficult thing to establish reliably. As Schueller had noted, the trend towards administrative personalities – not to mention the fear of being accused of ideological deviation – meant Soviet elites virtually never published any theoretical works, or even made pronouncements – at least, not in their own names.<sup>224</sup>

Naturally, therefore, Borkenau’s attempts to establish the ideological commitments of the men in the Politburo was the area where his speculations could, perhaps, have benefitted from a modicum more modesty, as Conquest later hinted. Even now, evidence is thin in some of the areas in which Borkenau prognosticated (for instance, as to whether the founding of the Cominform was an act of rebellion on the part of Zhdanov and Tito, who wanted to raise support for aggressive, ‘forward’ tactics in the West).<sup>225</sup> A Wittgenstein or a Popper might demur that many of his conclusions were neither verifiable nor falsifiable.<sup>226</sup> But, as Laqueur wrote, “Borkenau’s mistakes were frequently more interesting and suggestive than the less erroneous analyses of other writers.”<sup>227</sup> And the attempt to untangle the often seemingly intractable problem of interpreting Soviet developments was, in Conquest’s estimation, the reason Kremlinology merited a spirited defence. He complained that the best way to acquire a reputation for scientific competence was “to leave hard problems ostentatiously alone”, an attitude which often led observers to greater bemusement than any false

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<sup>221</sup> See, for example, Yoram Gorlizki & Oleg Khlevniuk, *Cold Peace: Stalin and the Soviet Ruling Circle, 1945-1953*, OUP (2004), pp. 81-2.

<sup>222</sup> See Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment*, OUP (2008), p. 218.

<sup>223</sup> Franz Borkenau, “Was Malenkov Behind the Anti-Semitic Plot”, *Commentary* (May, 1953), pp. 438-46.

<sup>224</sup> Schueller, “Politburo”, pp. 135-7.

<sup>225</sup> The major speculative thesis in the latter chapters of Borkenau, *European Communism*.

<sup>226</sup> On the problem of verification in Kremlinology, see Erik P. Hoffman, “Methodological Problems of Kremlinology”, in Heron (ed.), *Communist Studies*, pp. 129-149.

<sup>227</sup> Laqueur, *Fate of the Revolution*, p. 180.



conjectures. An example was the naïve and widespread acceptance by Western experts, after the infamous Twentieth Congress in 1956, that the Soviet leadership had accepted the ‘parliamentary road to socialism’ on the basis of what Conquest considered a speech obviously intended as propaganda for Western consumption by the police chief, Suslov. By contrast, Conquest contended, Kremlinology attracted a quite different kind of thinker: one who was drawn to areas where the information was not quite adequate and where a great effort had to be made to make deductions from recalcitrant material.<sup>228</sup> Kremlinologists generated a lot of heat – and, no doubt, a lot of hot air. Then again, light comes from heat.

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<sup>228</sup> Conquest, “Defence of Kremlinology”.

## Conclusions

Franz Borkenau lived through the most eventful period since the age of the French and American Revolutions. He made a major intellectual contribution to the understanding of that period, as a pioneer of the theory of totalitarianism; as the author of one of the few contemporary books on the Spanish Civil War to have stood the test of time; as the first historian of the Comintern; and, later, as one of the originators of the method of Kremlinology. If he was not a systematic thinker, he was nevertheless an original one, whose work is of lasting value, also, because he was willing to challenge the orthodoxies of his time. It is no surprise, then, that I am not the first to have been attracted to the study of his work. I hope, though, that this thesis has added something to the picture of Borkenau which has been established by other historians.

My original contribution, as I see it, to the study of Borkenau, has, firstly, been to have placed particular emphasis on the impact of the National Socialist *Machtergreifung* on his intellectual and political development. Where others who have looked at his work have seen his theory of totalitarianism mainly as a product of intra-Marxist discourses and debates in Germany stretching back to the works of Hilferding and Thalheimer, I have attempted to show that Borkenau's alienation from Marxism, as a result of the defeat suffered by the German Left, was *also* essential. I have been able to link biographical facts to this development of his ideas away from Marxism by utilising one source in particular – Borkenau's testimony at the Nuremberg Medical Trial – which has not been used by anyone who has previously written about him. His newfound scepticism with regard to the deterministic, or prophetic, aspect of Marxism led him to engage with alternative literature – namely, with the works of Pareto – and to consider quite un-Marxist explanations of contemporary political developments. Borkenau may have continued, in the Pocockian sense, to use Marxist language and concepts – like the *déclassé* – but he also saw totalitarianism as a parody of proletarian revolution, and fascism as something much more epochal than suggested by the contention of Marxist contemporaries that it was merely an extreme form of capitalism.

While, for Löwenheim and the Neu Beginnen group, German events had proved the need to adapt Marxism to the present, Borkenau had quickly been driven to the conclusion that it needed to be historicised. Marxism, which proposed that historical development was conditioned by class conflict, was perhaps relevant to the conditions of nineteenth century *laissez-faire* capitalism, he felt, when the interests of the working class and the “bourgeoisie” were actually sharply divorced. But Borkenau came to see class conflict as less and less integral in his own age. The German proletarian revolution had failed to arrive, and all classes had been equally crushed under the iron heel of the

National Socialist one which had. For the crisis period through which the world had been passing since 1914, marked by the unravelling of nineteenth century ideals, Borkenau saw Pareto as a surer prophet than Marx. Contemporary history had come to be dominated by irrational sentiments, rather than rational self-interest, while Lenin and the Bolsheviks had shown that revolutions depended for their success on an elite body of professional revolutionaries. It was the power of the classless elite, not of the proletariat, which had been established in Russia and Germany.

Borkenau went to Republican Spain as a supporter, but with a scepticism about the idea that any of the parties of the Left had a panacea. His own estrangement from the communist movement, and his experience of the failure of any part of the German Left to respond appropriately to the crises of the early 1930s, had instilled that scepticism. His book challenged the central notion of the Popular Front Left, that the Spanish Civil War was a straightforward confrontation between democracy and fascism in the European sense. But, in his own submission – in the autobiographical radio lecture cited – his experiences in Spain were also the catalyst for his decision to take up the pen against communism. My emphasis on this moment in the development of his major political commitment (anti-communism), having arrived as it did before the publication of his most celebrated books, tells against the thesis that his pre-war and post-war writings should be divided – the former representing his “gift for unorthodox yet insightful analysis”, and the latter revelatory of a Cold War journey into anti-communist obsession. While researchers should always be wary that their protagonists may be unreliable narrators, Borkenau also wrote of his Spanish experiences – in less dramatic language – in the introduction in which he explained why he had decided to write the *Communist International*.

Borkenau has been seen as an anti-fascist publicist in the latter interwar period – which he certainly was. Yet, an integral aspect of his writings was the challenge they offered to the Popular Front style of “anti-fascism”, which characterised fascism as “monopoly capitalism” in its last stage. Borkenau also used the history of the Comintern to dispute the idea that Leftist unity, encompassing communism, was the answer to the threat posed by fascism; and the view that the Soviet Union was the inheritor of the Western democratic tradition, forging a path for a new civilisation free from economic exploitation. Instead, he defined the ideological conflict which emerged from this confused period as the conflict between totalitarianism and the liberal and democratic values of the West. The Nazi-Soviet Pact was a moment of clarity, as it put the totalitarian powers on one side and the democratic ones on the other.

During the War, Borkenau’s disagreements with the section of the Left which had identified with Popular Front ideas in the 1930s continued. He was on the same side as them in his opposition to

Vansittartism, as he had been in his opposition to appeasement, but he saw their hopes of a federated and socialist Europe as a utopia. Instead, he put his hopes in the Atlantic alliance, foregrounding his commitment to that same Atlanticism – and to the Western orientation of the Bonn Republic – in the Cold War. Borkenau’s response to Vansittartism has not received serious examination before, nor has anyone previously treated his book, *Socialism: National or International*, in the context of the debate over Vansittartism. Another aspect of this chapter which is new is my examination of Borkenau’s intellectual links to Labour moderates in this era.

Excepting a short period upon the dissolution of the Comintern in 1943, which temporarily convinced him that communism was finished as a world revolutionary movement, Borkenau’s politics hardly changed after he experienced the “horror” of the Soviet police in Spain in 1937. The world around him, however, did change. In the period of the Grand Alliance, debates on the Left about communism and the Soviet Union had been largely buried. After 1945, it became clear that the ideological war was not over. The two main protagonists, as Borkenau put it, had only just arrived upon the stage. The Cultural Cold War was predominantly a war of ideas within Western countries, fought out by members of the intellectual elite. While ideas of Europe as a Third Force or a neutral bloc between the two superpowers were persuasive to much of the intelligentsia in countries, like Britain and France, which felt themselves secure and distant from the fault lines of the conflict, choosing sides was easier for German and Central European intellectuals. A recurring piece of evidence for the argument that Borkenau succumbed to the cliché complex of the ex-communist – an obsessional, or hysteric, anti-communism – has been Hugh Trevor Roper’s account of the BCCF. I have argued that the main value of Trevor-Roper’s article has been to demonstrate the divergence of outlook, generally speaking, between the British and German intelligentsias in June 1950, in the week when the Korean War had just broken out. To Trevor-Roper, Berlin was a city of hysterics shrouded in a Cimmerian darkness. Little wonder that the ex-communist and representative *par excellence* of the “metaphysical” Hegelianism of the Germans should have been painted by the British Tory empiricist as the hysteric-in-chief.

As my British/German contrast has been limited to one part of one thesis chapter in the intellectual biography of one participant in the Cultural Cold War, perhaps further work on this chapter of intellectual history could examine that contrast in more detail. Previous work on the Cultural Cold War has arguably been much too dominated by its supposed orchestration by the US State Department and the CIA, so a focus on purely European intellectual currents and debates would surely add something new to that topic.

The development of the method of Kremlinology and its practice – which has been only touched upon in previous work on Borkenau – would also make for an original topic for further research. I have, of course, paid attention exclusively to Borkenau’s contribution. But Nicolaevsky, with his background as a Menshevik historian of the Russian revolutionary movement, who, during the Second World War, applied the same method to the study of the German High Command, is perhaps an even more important figure in its history.<sup>1</sup> As far as I am aware, there has been no intellectual biography of Nicolaevsky, although whoever writes one will probably need to read Russian.

A political biography which is waiting to be written, meanwhile, is that of Patrick Gordon Walker, whose activities and relationships with German-speaking émigrés in the Socialist Clarity Group have been looked at by Knowles, but who has otherwise remained a neglected figure. As the author of several historical books and articles, who played an important role in the Gaitskellite wing of the Party, there is surely justification for more interest in Gordon Walker.

Another, smaller, topic which might interest historians of the Labour Party in wartime is the Labour Book Service. I found almost no secondary literature which discussed the LBS, but, since it was conceived as a competitor to the Left Book Club, it could be looked at as one facet of the conflict between Labour moderates and the Labour (and non-Labour) Left in that period.

Finally, further work on Borkenau could touch a topic which this thesis did not: his writings on the comparative history of civilisations, and the origins of Western Civilisation. There are clearly connections to be drawn between those writings and Borkenau’s reflections on the politics of his own time. Periods of barbarism, as Borkenau defined them, were those periods when the accepted standards and values which anchor a civilisation break down, so that no accepted standards or values are left; certainly, that was a concern which had contemporary resonance.

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<sup>1</sup> Nicolaevsky was the biographer of the revolutionary and Okhrana spy, Yevno Azef. See Boris Nikolajewsky, *Aseff the Spy: Russian Terrorist and Police Stool*, New York: Doubleday (1934). Also see Nicolaevsky’s wartime article on power struggles in the German High Command, Boris Nicolaevsky, “The Crisis in the German High Command”, *New Europe and World Reconstruction*, Vol. 2, No. 5 (1942), pp. 121-6.

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[**Note:** in the latter years of his life, when Borkenau was working as a freelance writer on Soviet affairs, many of his articles appeared simultaneously in different publications in different languages. As the vast majority of his Kremlinological writings appeared in English in such publications as the *Tablet*, the *New Leader*, or in condensed form in regional syndicated publications in the United States (Borkenau joined James V. Spadea's syndicate in 1953), I have excluded from my bibliography German language versions (which appeared in Switzerland in *Die Weltwoche*, and in Austria in *Forum*), French language versions (which appeared in the CCF's *Preuves*), and Portuguese translations (which appeared in the Brazilian newspaper *O Estado de S. Paulo*). I have included original articles Borkenau published in Melvin Lasky's *Der Monat* and the journal of which he was the editor, *Ost-Probleme*, which did not appear in any other language.]

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