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## Some Thoughts on Communist Internationalism

### ABSTRACT

After the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, Lenin's and Trotsky's declared aim was world revolution. Even when Stalin declared his policy of 'socialism in one country', the Communist International did not cease to seek to influence developments in other parts of the world. When the Soviet Union established itself as one of the leading superpowers in the bipolar world of the Cold War after 1945, the Soviet Union was the motherland of the revolution and 'big brother' to communist regimes in Eastern Europe and other parts of the world as well as the sponsor of communist revolutionaries in many parts of the developing world. The tensions between Soviet nationalism and communist internationalism shall be explored in this chapter. Especially, it will ask whether communist internationalism was a mere tool in the foreign policy of the Soviet Union or whether it was more. And it shall explore the vexed question of how much independence from the Soviet Union communist parties enjoyed. Furthermore it will examine the Communist International as a transnational life experience and communicative space for its protagonists, and it will propose some *lieux de mémoire* of communist internationalism.

Keywords: *communism, internationalism, Soviet Union, Communist International, lieux de mémoire*

### I

The universal pretension of Marxism-Leninism, even in times of the Cold War, is well known. Lenin himself had conceived bolshevism as a universal movement and he tied his own historical activity up to the French Revolution and Jacobin universalism. In any case, it was taken for granted that philosophical insights, economic knowledge and social predictions could be applied to other countries and, ultimately, to world history. It was in this sense that Maxim Gorky, in 1919, praised "the universal, the planetary significance of the Russian Revolution".<sup>1</sup> And in that sense, the internationalism of the

1 Maxim Gorky: Soviet Russia and the Nations of the World, in: The Communist International 1:1 (1919), p. 146. In general, see François Furet: The Passing of an Illusion: The Idea of

Third International differed markedly from the Second International.<sup>2</sup> It cannot be denied that the spell and universal attraction of the Russian Revolution brought a new and real power into European and World history. When we look at the history of the communist movement in the 20<sup>th</sup> century we can observe both long lasting engagement and adherence to the *universal* idea of communism and, at the same time, personal disappointment and resentment resulting in fierce anti-communism.

At the root of this dissonance was the tension between two conflicting elements of the communist movement. On the one hand, communism was an international and transnational movement, embodied in the Communist International. The Comintern was charged with a world-wide mission: it was supposed to lay the foundations of communist implantation and communist rule in all major countries. In order to achieve these ambitious goals the Comintern was provided with an international apparatus that was without precedent in world history. Moreover, within the organisational framework of the Comintern, some of the potentially most interesting satellite institutions came to work like the International Red Aid, the Red International of Labor Unions or the Young Communist International. On the other hand, with the consolidation of the Soviet Union, there emerged, equally for the first time in world history, a single-party-state. This was a very specific state, different from what types of state were known by then, but, nevertheless, a state: with its own political élite, the *Nomenklatura*, its own *raison d'état*, its own national (and imperial) interests and, last but not least, with its own intestine strife and power struggle. And this state was lead and formed by a communist party that was in *power*, in stark contrast to all other communist parties, which were not only banned from power but were often forced to act on the brink of illegality. All these factors converged to bring about the enduring tension between Comintern internationalism and Soviet power. Two elements contributed to that tension: first, the “national question” (1); second, the problem of “Stalinisation” (2).

(1) One of the most important factors that, periodically, complicated the history of communism as a universal movement was, of course, the nation or the national question. For Lenin himself, and during the first years of the Communist International, national questions and differences seemed to be irrelevant. The only relevant distinction was “between oppressed and oppressor nations” as Lenin told the plenum of the Second Congress of the Comintern: “The characteristic feature of imperialism consists in the whole world, as we now see, being divided into a large number of oppressed nations and an insignificant number of oppressor nations, the latter possessing colossal wealth and

Communism in the Twentieth Century, Chicago 1999, pp. 62ff.

2 See the short overview by John Schwarzmantel: Nationalism and Socialist Internationalism, in: John Breuilly (ed.): The Oxford Handbook of the History of Nationalism, Oxford 2013, pp. 635–654.

powerful armed forces.”<sup>3</sup> Accentuating national questions beyond that statement would have been dangerous, when nationalisms were seen as nothing but rivalries between different “oppressor nations” and their capitalist bourgeoisies. Lenin’s concept, therefore, was to transform World War I, which he considered as the most developed form of those rivalries, into a revolutionary civil war. Communist universalism was of its very nature to be internationalist. After the First World War, this was, of course, different when it came to local practice.

From a theoretical point of view, the communist movement consisted of a multi-national vanguard made up of ideologically trained political leaders who had devoted themselves to the universal goal of world revolution. Their task was to analyse the international (and local) conditions according to rational criteria and to draw the correct conclusions from their analysis. Things were, however, developed differently, not at least with regard to the case of Soviet Russia itself, its multinational structure and the resulting unavoidable emergence of a national question within the Soviet Empire. How was ideological universalism to react to concrete local conditions and identities? How could democratic centralism connect up with the aspirations and traditions of national traditions, local ethnic groups, and with their leaders?

From the very outset this problem was part of communist internationalism. Earlier research into communism, under the influence of the Cold War, tended to imagine there was an ideologically-based and thought-out master plan behind the subjection of the nations of the Soviet empire: it was assumed that Stalin in particular—the “breaker of nations”—had deliberately turned the Soviet Union into a gigantic prison of the nations.<sup>4</sup> But more recent research has stressed the improvised character of the communists’ earlier way of approaching the “national question”. From this perspective, the actions of the Bolsheviks were marked by numerous tactical turns rather than offering evidence of a clear and purposeful plan to subjugate the nations living in the sphere of Bolshevik domination.<sup>5</sup>

- 3 Vladimir I. Lenin: Report of the Commission on the National and the Colonial Questions, The Second Congress of the Communist International July 26 1920, in: Lenin’s Collected Works, vol. 31, 4<sup>th</sup> English ed., Moscow 1965, pp. 213–263, republished by Marxist Internet Archive, at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/jul/x03.htm#fw3> (accessed on 7 January 2015).
- 4 Richard Pipes: *The Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism: 1917–1923*, Cambridge/Mass. 1954; Robert Conquest: *Stalin: Breaker of Nations*, London 1991.
- 5 Jeremy Smith: *The Bolsheviks and the National Question 1917–23*, London 1999, and, as a case study: Adrienne Lynn Edgar: *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan*, Princeton/N.J. 2004; Ben Fowkes: *To Make the Nation or to Break It: Communist Dilemmas in Two Interwar Multinational States*, in: Norman LaPorte/Kevin Morgan/Matthew Worley (eds.): *Bolshevism, Stalinism and the Comintern: Perspectives of Stalinization: 1917–53*, Basingstoke/New York 2008, pp. 206–225.

In the communist parties outside the Soviet Union, the tension between ideological universalism and local national traditions provoked equally surprising tactical turns. There are many examples of how difficult it was for the Communist movement to deal with local, national and ethnic questions well before Stalin monopolised his power. The tension between universal internationalism and local nationalism was never overcome. On the one hand, the Comintern and the Soviet Union tried to use national liberation movements for their own objectives. And in Poland, nationalism served even as an instrument to legitimise communist rule after 1944.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, there was not much room left for the free, authentic development of local, regional and national movements. After Stalin's death, the suppression of distinct "national" paths of communism in Hungary, in Czechoslovakia 1968, and elsewhere left no great hope of communist internationalism. And it is not by chance, that at the end of the 1980s, in all communist countries the metropolitan centres, that were under control of the centralist party, were challenged from the periphery. National aspirations, regionalism and localism contributed strongly to the downfall of communism in 1989 and to the breakdown of the Soviet Union in 1991.<sup>7</sup>

(2) Besides the "national question", Stalinisation posed the second big problem for communist internationalism. There is a sort of standard narrative explaining this problem. It may begin with Stalin's reported words in the *Politburo* of the Russian party in 1927: "Who are these people of the Comintern? Nothing but mercenaries who are paid by us. In ninety years they will not have made a revolution."<sup>8</sup> From this perspective, it was Stalin, a rather grotesque and uneducated figure, incomparable to the greatness of a Lenin or a Leo Trotsky, who, after having secured his dictatorial power by shabby, vile and violent intrigues, had reduced communist universalism to the tool of an obscure empire.<sup>9</sup> Thus, communist universalism and the idea of world revolution that were given to the world by authentic Bolsheviks degenerated and were thrown into the store-room. The concept of "socialism in one country" triumphed over the idea of world revolution.

- 6 Marcin Zaremba: *Im nationalen Gewande: Strategien kommunistischer Herrschaftslegitimation in Polen 1944–1980*, Osnabrück 2011.
- 7 Ronald Grigor Suny: *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union*, Stanford/Calif., 1993, pp. 127ff.
- 8 Walter G. Krivitsky: *Agent de Staline*, s.l. 1940, p. 96, here quoted after Annie Kriegel/ Stéphane Courtois: *Eugen Fried: Le grand secret du PCE*, Paris 1997, p. 83.
- 9 This is, for example, the rather coarse tendency of the recent book by Jörg Baberowski: *Verbrannte Erde: Stalins Herrschaft der Gewalt*, Munich 2012.

## II

This narrative is barely maintainable; historically, the belief in a pure Leninist phase of true proletarian internationalism had the function to allow disillusioned communists to stick to their principles and to stay within the movement. Even for Mikhail Gorbachev whose policy departed more and more from Leninist principles from 1986 onwards to evoke Lenin's heritage remained, for a certain period at least, an important legitimising strategy.<sup>10</sup> For historical analysis, however, we need to take seriously the structure and the principles that dominated the different branches and departments of the communist movement right from its beginning. As to ideology and organisation communist internationalism was inseparably connected to Bolshevik dominance, Soviet statism and Stalinism. There was always a deep divide between Soviet Bolsheviks and revolutionary internationalism. And this concerned not only the question of power but also of moral superiority. For, by giving once the wheel of world history a decisive push forward, the Bolsheviks had become, within the world of communism, a universal authority that, by party members, could not be called into question any more. Thus the history of communism and internationalism equalled the history of a double disappointment: first, a disappointment immediately after the war that pushed left wing militants to Lenin and the Comintern (1) and a second disappointment that originated in concrete experiences with the realities of bolshevist discipline, Russian predominance and Stalin's reign of terror (2).

a) First, it was the disappointment coming from the experience of a *revolution manquée* in the western and central European states that drove syndicalists and left socialists into the arms of the Third International. To some extent, the proletarian internationalism of the communist movement was the continuation of the Second International. But it was fuelled by both the high expectations many leaders and militants of the working class movement nourished at the end of the First World War and the great disappointment that prevailed by 1920 when the hopes for a transition of power and of social revolution were dashed in Western and Middle Europe. Many left wing socialists and syndicalists were driven to Moscow and to Lenin's conception of a vanguard party only by their disappointment over the outcome of the revolutionary vague of the immediate aftermath of war.<sup>11</sup> The wide spread discontent that had been accumulated during the war erupted between 1918 and 1920 in many European societies and regions. While this discontent was linked to quite different political and ideological traditions its common denominator

10 For the twisted road of Gorbachev's break with Leninism cf. Archie Brown: Gorbachev, Lenin, and the Break with Leninism, in: Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization 15:2 (2007), pp. 230–244.

11 See Andreas Wirsching: Vom Weltkrieg zum Bürgerkrieg?: Politischer Extremismus in Deutschland und Frankreich 1918–1933/39: Berlin und Paris im Vergleich, Munich 1999, pp. 107–111.

remained the idea of the revolutionary “spontaneity of the masses”. Syndicalists, localists and left wing socialists agreed in demanding the social revolution, while the vanguard voluntarism of some leaders (Lenin included) was by no means always appreciated. This was the breeding grounds for numerous but heterogeneous movements and groups of the extreme left that gained momentum after the end of the war. In Germany, for example, this concerned forces like the *Kommunistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands* (KAPD), Paul Frölich’s *Bremer Linksradikale* and the *Internationale Kommunisten Deutschlands* (IKD) or other localist groups.<sup>12</sup> In France and Italy, syndicalism and anarchism traditionally played a major role within the working class movement. The guiding light of these groups was a federalist model based on Council democracy. These different but related groups formed a truly international movement; many of them were represented at the Zimmerwald left during the war. The movement caused the splits of the Socialist and Social Democratic parties in France, Italy and Germany and thus made the springtime of the Communist International possible.

It was only after the failure and disillusionment with the idea of a revolution achieved by the spontaneous masses that these groups began to realign their hopes to bolshevism and Leninist principles. The shortcomings of the “subjective” factor in an apparently “objective” revolutionary situation were made responsible for failure of the revolutionary movements after the war. For a short period, organisations like the short lived first *Parti communiste français* (PCF) of 1919, the *Fédération de la Seine* of the *Section française de l’Internationale Communiste* (S.F.I.C) or the KAPD believed that they could combine federalist and anti-centralist principles with allegiance to the Comintern.<sup>13</sup> In French communism, even a year and a half after the Congress of Tours an “ultra-left” tendency led by Maurice Heine held a dominant position particularly in the Paris district. These ultra-leftists continued to trust in the spontaneity of the masses, and to warn against “oligarchic centralism”.<sup>14</sup>

In France, the transition from syndicalism to international communism was particularly powerful. Again, subsequent disappointment over the failure of the attempts at a revolutionary general strike in 1919 and 1920 gave rise to a kind of “New” Syndicalism,

- 12 See Hans Manfred Bock: *Syndikalismus und Linkskommunismus von 1918–1923: Zur Geschichte und Soziologie der Freien Arbeiter-Union Deutschlands (Syndikalisten), der Allgemeinen Arbeiter-Union Deutschlands und der Kommunistischen Arbeiter-Partei Deutschlands*, Marburg 1967.
- 13 The programme of the Paris ultra leftists is contained in: Maurice Heine: *La Seine et la Moskowa*, in : *L’Humanité*, 27 June 1922, and id.: *La Seine et l’Indre-et-Loire*, in : *L’Humanité*, 14 July 1922. See Henri Dubief: *Contribution à l’histoire de l’ultra-gauche: Maurice Heine*, in: s.n. (eds.): *Mélanges d’histoire sociale offerts à Jean Maitron*, Paris 1976, pp. 87–93.
- 14 *Manifeste de l’extrême-gauche du Parti Communiste Français (Comité de Défense Communiste) au deuxième Congrès National (Septembre 1922)*, in: Siegfried Bahne (ed.): *Origines et débuts des partis communistes des pays latins 1919–1923*, Dordrecht 1970, pp. 580–587.

based predominantly in the railway union. This New Syndicalism declared its support for disciplining the forces of the revolution, hence also for joining up with Moscow and cooperating closely with the communist party. The PCF initially drew tremendous vitality from the syndicalist hope that Bolshevik theory and French practice could be combined together.<sup>15</sup> It is well known that this optimism rested on the continued ideological misconception that the October Revolution had been a genuinely syndicalist uprising. French syndicalists like Alfred Rosmer therefore hoped to achieve a “welding” (*soudure*) of communism and revolutionary syndicalism.<sup>16</sup>

Against this backdrop, Moscow and the Bolsheviks were praised enthusiastically and became, as it were, the new fatherland for proletarians who had, according to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels as is well-known, no fatherland at all. At the Second Congress of the Communist International, participants from all over Europe hailed bolshevist Russia as the centre of proletarian internationalism. Alfred Rosmer, the French delegate, promised to strive to convince the French proletarians “with ten times more energy” that in Russia “people are fighting and dying for the common cause of the world”; and Giacinto Serrati greeted, on behalf of the Italian Socialist Party, the Red Army, “the defender of the sublime ideal of the world proletariat”. “Brothers in the Red Army”, he acclaimed the Red Army in “on behalf of all the parties represented in the Communist International”, “know this: [...] You are not only fighting for the interests of Soviet Russia but also for the interests of the whole of labouring humanity, for the Communist International.”<sup>17</sup>

(2) Very soon, however, many communists and true believers in proletarian internationalism came to know a second disappointment. The moral authority wielded by the Bolsheviks and the idealism it attracted came into conflict with real experiences. In fact, in the long run bolshevism and the Communist International offered no room to

- 15 Gaston Monmousseau: *La Dictature du Proletariat*, Paris 1922; id.: *Le Syndicalisme devant la révolution*, Paris 1922. See Adrian Jones: *The French Railway Strikes of January-May 1920: New Syndicalist Ideas and Emergent Communism*, in: *French Historical Studies* 12:4 (1981/82), pp. 508–540, in particular pp. 536–540; Kathryn E. Amdur: *Syndicalist Legacy: Trade Unions and Politics in Two French Cities in the Era of World War I*, Urbana/Ill. 1986, p. 153 as well as the same author’s work: *La tradition révolutionnaire entre syndicalisme et communisme dans la France de l’entre-deux-guerres*, in: *Le Mouvement Social* 28:139 (1987), pp. 27–50. In general see: Ralph Darlington: *Syndicalism and the Transition to Communism: An International Comparative Analysis*, Aldershot 2008.
- 16 Alfred Rosmer to Pierre Monatte [July 1921], in: Pierre Monatte: *Syndicalisme révolutionnaire et communisme: Les archives de Pierre Monatte: Présentation de Colette Chambelland et Jean Maitron*, Paris 1968, p. 293.
- 17 All quotations in: *Minutes of the Second Congress of the Communist International*, Petrograd, July 19-August 7, 1920, first published in 1921, republished by Marxist Internet Archive, at: <http://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/2nd-congress/ch01a.htm> (accessed on 7 January 2015). See Jerzy Holzer: *Das einzige Vaterland des Proletariats—die Sowjetunion: Ob gut oder schlecht, sie ist mein Land!*, in: *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung* (2008), pp. 24–31.

those syndicalists and left wing socialists who viewed federalism, spontaneity and trade-union autonomy as an inviolable value, despite all their sympathy for communism. This was demonstrated by the subsequent crises in the communist parties. Already in October 1919, Paul Levi, the political heir of Rosa Luxemburg and leader of the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* (KPD), compelled the syndicalist and localist wing to leave the party before he fell victim himself to the disciplining forces of the Communist International in 1921.<sup>18</sup> Equally, in 1924, the great crisis of French communism culminated with the expulsion of the syndicalists Alfred Rosmer, Pierre Monatte and Maurice Chambelland.<sup>19</sup> The basically powerful movement of communist internationalism was no doubt weakened by these conflicts.

At the same time, not a few simple workers and party militants took the spell of communist internationalism too literal and “emigrated” to their new “fatherland”. In spring 1920, ca 70 German working families left their homes in the Leipzig region to move to Kolomna near Moscow where they contributed to the workforce of the local machine factory. What they experienced there, however, did not increase their love for Russia. On the contrary: the daily practice and material conditions of Soviet communism caused the urgent desire to return to Germany as soon as possible. Wilhelm Dittmann, member of the *Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (USPD) who had participated in the Second Congress of the Communist International but categorically refused the transition of his party to the Third International was explicit in his critique: “Ruinous illusions” and a “blind delusion of the masses” as to the realities in Soviet Russia existed among the German workers. The only remedy for that was the “naked truth”: “Only the clarification without reserve concerning the Russian reality could convert the masses from their error and bring them back to reason and reflection.”<sup>20</sup>

18 Hans Manfred Bock: *Syndikalismus*, pp. 139ff. See Andreas Wirsching: *The Impact of ‘Bolshevization’ and ‘Stalinization’ on French and German Communism: A Comparative View*, in: Norman LaPorte/Kevin Morgan/Matthew Worley (eds.): *Bolshevism, Stalinism and the Comintern: Perspectives on Stalinization: 1917–53*, Basingstoke/New York 2008, pp. 89–104, and Jean-François Fayet: *Paul Levi and the Turning Point of 1921: Bolshevik Emissaries and International Discipline in the Time of Lenin*, in: Norman LaPorte/Kevin Morgan/Matthew Worley (eds.): *Bolshevism, Stalinism and the Comintern: Perspectives on Stalinization: 1917–53*, Basingstoke/New York 2008, pp. 105–123.

19 Michel Dreyfus: *PCF, crises et dissidences: de 1920 à nos jours*, Brussels 1990, pp. 21ff.

20 Wilhelm Dittmann: *Deutsche Arbeiter in Rußland*, in: *Die Freiheit*, 31 August 1920 (Morgenausgabe), and id.: *Die Wahrheit über Rußland*, in: *Die Freiheit*, 1 September 1920 (Morgenausgabe), both quoted in: Wilhelm Dittmann: *Erinnerungen*, vol. 2, Frankfurt/Main 1995, pp. 752–761. See Jürgen Zarusky: *Die deutschen Sozialdemokraten und das sowjetische Modell: Ideologische Auseinandersetzung und außenpolitische Konzeptionen 1917–1933*, Munich 1992, pp. 119–120.



These examples that could easily be augmented reveal the twilight in which the internationalism of the Comintern was continuously immersed. To live communist internationalism meant to accept the realities and ideological conditions of the Comintern whose numerous “turns” proved to be unpredictable. By the 1930s they depended completely on the Russian party and on Stalin’s will. Living communist internationalism, therefore, stood not only for idealism and revolutionary engagement but also for new disappointments, self-deception, and increasingly, by the 1930s, for physical danger.

It is this twilight that formed the environment of communist internationalism. But today, twenty-five years after the end of the Cold War, histories of communism need be used neither to legitimise nor to condemn a political system. Accordingly, there is no need to focus on normative and ideological questions. Communist history has profited from the broader availability of source material and from the historicising process of its object of study. So, we can concentrate empirically on new and interesting aspects of the communist movement. While historical experience of communist internationalism always remained embedded in the above mentioned tension it becomes, nevertheless, an object of study in itself. By focusing on the concrete experience of concrete actors a fascinating kaleidoscope of transnational life courses and living environments, but also of many personal tragedies, may be opened.

### III

It is in this sense that the history of the Communist International as a living environment, a life experience and a communicative space needs to be taken seriously and to be made the object of research.<sup>21</sup> If the Comintern became the true organisational and communicative framework of communist internationalism, its infrastructure, funded by the Soviet state, gave room of manoeuvre to those communists, who were delegated by their national parties to fulfil mandates or charged by the Comintern to execute specific assignments. These were truly transnational activities leading the actors across Europe and sometimes to Asia. In the first place, those individuals were primarily left wing socialists who had already

21 In spite of the flourishing research on the Comintern in the wake of the archival revolution there is still relatively little done on these questions. For an interesting case study see Karin-Irene Eiermann: *Chinesische Komintern-Delegierte in Moskau in den 1920er/1930er Jahren: Kommunikations- und Herrschaftsstrukturen im Zentrum der internationalen kommunistischen Bewegung*, Berlin 2009, in particular pp. 63–82.

participated in pre-war international socialism. Prominent examples are the Suisse Jules Humbert-Droz, a pastor's son,<sup>22</sup> the Polish Jew Karl Radek,<sup>23</sup> the French Boris Souvarine<sup>24</sup> or the German Clara Zetkin<sup>25</sup> who all became important figures of the early Comintern.

For them, and countless others, the Comintern constituted an international arena. For many participants, the Comintern made it possible for the first time in their lives to travel across Europe and to make the acquaintance of foreign countries, especially of Soviet Russia. Travel funds, interpreters, local guides, and diplomatic assistance provided by the Soviets made travelling a sort of material privilege while, on the other hand, it remained, politically, a personal risk.

The numerous personal contacts between people coming from so many different countries gave the communist movement the flavour of a truly trans- and multinational enterprise. Moreover, in all countries, a huge machinery of media production was established so that a large flow of communist papers and periodicals informed their readers incessantly of questions and problems of communist internationalism.<sup>26</sup> Finally, uncounted personal ties and not a few love affairs were forged within the international communist movement. So, for many communist functionaries, a transnational *mode de vie* became, as it were, normal and formed their living environment.

The Hungarian József Pogány (alias John Pepper) whose biography has been under study recently<sup>27</sup> may serve as a good example. Coming from a Jewish lower middle class background, Pogány studied literature and became, by 1914, an acknowledged journalist with left wing leanings. In 1918/19 he played a leading, yet controversial, role in Bela Kun's short-lived Soviet Republic, serving as Commissioner of War. Early in 1921, when exiled in Austria, Kun and Pogány were charged by the Communist International to go to Germany in order to kindle the revolutionary flame there. Grigory Zinoviev even hoped for a "revolutionary breakthrough" in Germany.<sup>28</sup> From now on, Pogány remained in the service of the Communist International, first in Germany, then in Moscow and in the United States. After having been cited to return to Moscow he was expelled from

22 See, especially, the first volume of the edition of the Archives de Jules Humbert-Droz: vol. 1: Siegfried Bahne (ed.), *Origines*; vol. 2: id.: *Les partis communistes des pays latins et l'Internationale communiste dans les années 1923–27*, Dordrecht 1983; vol. 3: Castro del Amo/Bernhard H. Bayerlein (eds.): *Les partis communistes et l'Internationale communiste dans les années 1928–32*, Dordrecht 1988.

23 Jean-François Fayet: *Karl Radek (1885–1939): Biographie politique*, Bern 2004.

24 Jean-Louis Panné: *Boris Souvarine: Le premier désenchanté du communisme*, Paris 1993.

25 Ulla Plener (ed.): *Clara Zetkin in ihrer Zeit: Neue Fakten, Erkenntnisse, Wertungen*, Berlin 2008.

26 Sean McMeekin: *The Red Millionaire: A Political Biography of Willi Münzenberg: Moscow's Secret Propaganda Tsar in the West*, New Haven 2003.

27 Thomas Sakmyster: *A Communist Odyssey: The Life of József Pogány/John Pepper*, Budapest/New York 2012.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 62.

the Comintern for indiscipline in 1929. Even though he managed to be reinstated he fell victim to Stalin's purges and was tried and executed in 1938. Fluent in Hungarian, English and German, equipped with considerable intellectual gifts but also with highly visible personal weaknesses, Pogány lived the adventurous, sometimes romantic, sometimes dangerous life of a communist international. And as it was the case with many thousands it ended in tragedy.

Communist transnationalism was, of course, lived by communication. In order to be operative communists needed not only a large technical apparatus for translation and media production. Communist practice and relations within the communist movement may be understood as an enduring process of communication. Communication needed, of course, language, which posed an evident problem for internationalists. Already in the course of the Second Congress of the Comintern, the choice of language depended on the respective proficiencies of the participants. About half of the discussions were conducted in French but, when the question of trade unions was on the agenda, Zinoviev, chairing the session, proposed "to use the English language now instead of the French language for the following reasons. Six or seven more comrades have come who do not understand French. We have held half of the Congress in French. We must now save time, and since the question of the trades unions and of parliament is now particularly being discussed we must speak English."<sup>29</sup>

What merits some attention in this context is the Esperanto movement. Invented in 1887 by the Polish Ludwig Zamenhof, it aimed at international communication with a view to transnational understanding. Within the working class movement, advocates for Esperanto thought it a useful tool for promoting internationalism, class struggle and revolution. The underlying assumption was that a common international language that was easily to be learnt would integrate those mass of workers who disposed only of an elementary education. Thus revolution through a common language seemed possible. Even in China, at the Shanghai National Labour University that was under control of the Guomindang but had many international faculties and students teaching of Esperanto was compulsory.<sup>30</sup> When the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) invited the mass organisations of the communist movement to vote for an international language some of them voted for Esperanto, others for IDO, another artificial language, or English. But besides its genuine internationalist aspects, the Esperanto movement implied

29 Minutes of the Second Congress of the Communist International, Petrograd, July 19-August 7 1920, first published in 1921, republished by Marxist Internet Archive, at: <http://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/2nd-congress/ch08.htm> (accessed on 7 January 2015).

30 Dongyoun Hwang: Korean Anarchism before 1945: A Regional and Transnational Approach, in: Steven Hirsch/Lucien van der Walt (eds.): *Anarchism and Syndicalism in the Colonial and Postcolonial World 1870–1940: The Praxis of National Liberation, Internationalism, and Social Revolution*, Leiden 2010, pp. 95–129.

also a critical attitude towards those polyglot intellectuals who, based on their education and cosmopolitanism, were able to set the tone in the Communist International. That is probably also why the ECCI hesitated to promote the movement and tried even to outmanoeuvre the Esperanto militants.<sup>31</sup>

However, communist internationalism also needed a common *political* language to communicate ways and means of communist policy to local followers. Indeed, international communism can be seen as a textual system constituted through language. Language appears, to be more precise, as a “surface of texts” (Michel Foucault) which determines the reality experienced by the protagonists. These surfaces of texts, which stand in relationship to each other, are to be analysed independently of intention and motivation, tradition and author. Decisive is not what someone intended through the action of speech, but what was possible to say within a “discursive formation”.<sup>32</sup>

The epistemological surplus value of taking communist language as a “discursive formation” has significant consequences for questions concerning the relationship between communist ideology and propaganda, and between the politics of the central party leadership and the social practice of communists in their particular socio-cultural environments. A methodology informed by cultural and discursive history would stress the social power of language itself as a tool for internationalism. If taken as a discursive formation along the lines of Foucault’s approach communist language produced a close-meshed web conjoining people’s thoughts and actions regardless of their national, regional or ethnic origins. By giving meaning to tangible reality, it became itself constructed reality. As such, language was experienced by the participant protagonists as an international force which greatly determined their social practice.<sup>33</sup>

Communist internationalism may therefore be best understood as an enduring process of communication. In order to decode this in terms of discourse analysis, various possible frameworks for questions may be formulated. For one, *sites* must be identified wherein the linguistically-produced reality originated, was present, and exercised communicative power. Where were communist systems of meaning communicated? What processes of institutionalisation can be observed? In what context must a speaker be situated— or have been situated—in order to speak legitimately? Historians need, therefore, to investigate to what extent the communist linguistic system was disseminated and at which levels it was encountered. The institutions and communications of the communist media need to

31 See Jean-François Fayet: Eine internationale Sprache für die Weltrevolution?: Die Komintern und die Esperanto-Frage, in: *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung* (2008), pp. 9–23. In the German Democratic Republic (GDR), Esperanto was illegal until 1965. Torsten Bendias: *Die Esperanto-Jugend in der DDR: Zur Praxis und Lebenswelt sozialer Strömungen im Staatssozialismus*, Münster 2011.

32 Michel Foucault: *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, London/New York 1989, pp. 34–35.

33 Andreas Wirsching: Violence as Discourse?: For a ‚Linguistic Turn‘ in Communist History, in: *Twentieth Century Communism: A Journal of International History* 2:2 (2010), pp. 12–39.

be researched and evaluated, thereby providing a reconstruction of the communication process through which a system of meaning was developed, legitimised, and issued from Moscow down through the varied levels of communist party organisation. Crucial to this, of course, were those secretaries and emissaries of the Comintern who functioned as communicators and legitimising “narrators” of communist discourse. As such, the role, the biographies, itineraries and profiles of communists such as Jules Humbert-Droz and Karl Radek were crucial.

At the same time, there were obvious *limits* of communication. Communist internationalism legitimised—or de-legitimised - itself as a process of successful or unsuccessful communication. There are numerous examples of interrupted communication, concerning not only the disciplining and, when necessary, expulsion of dissenting functionaries. But more important for the analysis pursued here, perhaps, were those situations in which communist language could simply no longer be understood because of socio-cultural or political differences. The ability to “speak Bolshevik” was an absolute necessity for party functionaries;<sup>34</sup> but how well they could communicate this in their own national and cultural environments was another question. Many functionaries forgot how to speak to local workers simply and clearly.<sup>35</sup> Once communist communication failed or broke down, however, party members developed other, competing perceptions of reality and communist internationalism was in danger.

## IV

If we analyse concrete examples of communist *modes de vie* and of communist communication we can observe some focal points of communist internationalism. This leads over to the last point of this paper, namely the question of how far we can identify a sort of *lieux de mémoire* of communist internationalism. Current research interested in communist sites of memory tends to concentrate more or less exclusively on those sites where the victims of communism can be commemorated.<sup>36</sup> But beyond that, it is

34 Stephen Kotkin: *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization*, Berkeley/Calif. 1995, pp. 198–237.

35 See the examples in Bert Hoppe: *In Stalins Gefolgschaft: Moskau und die KPD 1928–1933*, Munich 2007, p. 238.

36 See for example: Ewa Ochman: *Post-Communist Poland—Contested Pasts and Future Identities*, London 2013; Michal Kopeček: *Von der Geschichtspolitik zur Erinnerung als politischer Sprache: Der tschechische Umgang mit der kommunistischen Vergangenheit nach 1989*, in: Etienne François et al. (eds.): *Geschichtspolitik in Europa seit 1989: Deutschland, Frankreich und Polen im internationalen Vergleich*, Göttingen 2013, pp. 356–395. An overview in Andreas Wirsching: *Der Preis der Freiheit: Geschichte Europas in unserer Zeit*, Munich 2012, pp. 102–113, 386–391.

interesting to discuss the question to what extent specific sites might represent the specific twilight of the history of communist internationalism. Tentatively some of those *lieux de mémoire* of communist internationalism may be proposed. For example, an important albeit clandestine site where international communism was practised was the school of the legendary “M-Apparatus” of the Comintern. Course participants came from many different countries. Participation in the military training could mean working at the spearhead of the international vanguard; but this was also the place where the military flavour of the existence of an international communist was most visible.<sup>37</sup>

Later, the Spanish Civil War became the centre of “red” internationalism. The Red Brigades were composed primarily of socialist volunteers, and the national communist parties as well as the Comintern were the most important supporters. The communist participation in the Spanish Civil War remained a strong symbol of international solidarity. Even though the members of the Red Brigades stood under close surveillance from Moscow, suffered from the “anti-Trotskyist” activities of the NKVD and were more or less abandoned after their escape from Spain in 1939, the *Spanienkämpfer* for example were later to become a highly praised *lieu de mémoire* in the German Democratic Republic.<sup>38</sup>

The Spanish Civil War betrays all ambiguities of communist internationalism. On the one hand, until the end of the 1930s, many followers coming from all European countries kept their true idealism and a more or less unfettered belief in the political and moral superiority of bolshevism. Thus the Comintern succeeded time again in recruiting an international rank and file, and many idealists lost their lives on Spanish soil in their fight against Franco. On the other hand, by the 1930s it became more and more obvious that communist internationalism had long lost its moral innocence. It had become an instrument of national interests of Soviet Russia and its party as well as an almost personal tool for Stalin. In this sense, the notorious Hotel Lux in Moscow became the most gloomy *lieu de mémoire* of communist internationalism. As has been frequently attested living in the Hotel Lux during the 1930s had nothing to do any more with the once attractive, adventurous and romantic aspects of communist internationalism and its *mode de vie*. Thousands of international communists, often with their families, remained trapped there during the late 1930s. The basic instinct of fear and the many desperate attempts of rescuing oneself at the cost of denouncing others replaced any remains of international

37 Andreas Herbst: Unteroffiziere der Revolution: Zum Schicksal von Kursanten der M-Schule der Kommunistischen Internationale, in: Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung (2008), pp. 339–350.

38 Michael Uhl: Mythos Spanien: Das Erbe der Internationalen Brigaden in der DDR, Bonn 2004.

idealism. According to many grim reports, communist internationalism ceased to exist in that place. With countless international functionaries facing arrest, prosecution and death from Stalin's terror, international solidarity simply disappeared.<sup>39</sup>

This dramatic loss of solidarity within the Comintern was hastened and, as it were, sealed by the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact of 23 August 1939. Largely considered a "betrayal" on Stalin's side, this notorious agreement created a brutal shock among the communist rank and file all over Europe. For many communists it had dire consequences and caused a long lasting disappointment which motivated not a few militants to break definitely with communism.<sup>40</sup> So, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact may rightly be considered a sort of, so to speak, bleak *lieu de mémoire* in the history of communist internationalism.

Of course, it would be easy to multiply problems and examples of the many failures of communist internationalism. However, as stated above, more than twenty years after the end of the Cold War it is of no avail to legitimise or to delegitimise communism politically. What is needed, instead, is to define new and strategic fields of empirical research that will broaden our historical knowledge of that huge and influential movement that communism was in the twentieth century. The light shed by the "archival revolution" in communist history since 1989/91 will promote further research. And in this respect, the aspects designated in this paper—the twilight of communist internationalism, the national question, the Comintern as a living environment and a communicative, finally the question of the *lieux de mémoire* of communist internationalism - seem to be a particularly rich and seminal research field.

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39 Among many studies see esp. William J. Chase: *Enemies within the Gates?: The Comintern and the Stalinist Repression: 1934–1939*, New Haven 2001; Alexander Vatlin: *Der Einfluss des Großen Terrors auf die Mentalität der Komintern-Kader: Erfahrungen und Verhaltensmuster*, in: Brigitte Studer/Heiko Haumann (eds.): *Stalinistische Subjekte: Individuum und System in der Sowjetunion und der Komintern 1929–1953*, Zurich 2006, pp. 217–232.

40 See the interesting source collection: Bernhard H. Bayerlein: „Der Verräter, Stalin, bist Du!“: *Vom Ende der linken Solidarität: Komintern und kommunistische Parteien im Zweiten Weltkrieg 1939–1941*, Berlin 2008.