1. THE COMINFORM’S ANTI-AMERICAN CAMPAIGN

In October 1947 the Communist Parties of Western Europe came under the direction of the struggle against cultural decadence that had been officially launched by Andrei Zhdanov at the inaugural meeting of the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform). It was a component of the Soviet Union’s campaign against the ‘Western bloc’ of capitalist powers. According to Soviet propaganda this bloc was preparing for war against socialism and the anti-colonial movements that had been given momentum by the Second World War. For the first time the USA was depicted as the hegemonic Power in the imperialist camp, ousting Britain from the role that had been allotted to it in Bolshevik polemics since 1918. Britain was now depicted as a reluctant junior partner of the USA. Tensions arising from economic rivalry between the partners continued to exist but were subordinate to the common desire to hold back the socialist and colonial revolutions. The rest of Western Europe, according to Moscow, fell in with this pattern. European ruling classes had sold out to Washington whose economic and political dominion was symbolised by the Marshall Plan and an expanding American military occupation. The task of the Communist Parties was to ‘break with the policy of sell-out to America’. All of this implied a reworking of the theory of imperialism, as fashioned by Lenin in 1916. Colonies had featured prominently in Lenin’s account of inter-imperialist rivalries. Now the Communists were saying that the greatest imperialist power was a power without a colonial empire and that those powers which possessed colonial empires – such as Britain and France – were subordinate to it. Whereas the Communist International had repeatedly predicted an inter-imperialist war between Britain and the USA in the 1920s, the focus in 1947 was on the emergence of a consolidated bloc of imperialist powers determined on war with the USSR and preservation of the colonial status quo. No coherent reworking of the Leninist orthodoxy was ever attempted by the Cominform. But the picture of imperialism with the USA at its centre which was introduced in 1947 proved resilient. When theories of neo-imperialism began to emerge from non-Communist leftist sources, particularly in the 1960s, the USA invariably featured as the hegemonic power in a system of global political economy obstructive of democratic, egalitarian, socialist, or environmental progress.

American cultural hegemony was one of the chief objects of the Communist campaign inaugurated in 1947. The defence of national cultural heritage was thus portrayed as part of the popular fight for independence from American imperialism. It would allow Communists to champion the nation and build upon those techniques of class alliances and populism which first blossomed in the 1930s, after the launch of the Popular Front. The Second World War, after 22 June 1941, had further enabled Communists to keep these techniques alive and effective in some countries (such as Britain) and to emerge as powerful symbols of patriotism (as in Italy, France, Greece) in others. The Cominform campaign thus sought to build upon the most successful period of Communist history and take advantage of the fact that in many countries the
campaign to defend the nation from US hegemony was expected to have resonance beyond the Communist Parties.

Culture was perceived as 'a weapon in the struggle'. Communist Parties created cultural committees to orchestrate this struggle through the special groups of Architects, Psychologists, Scientists, Writers, Artists, Musicians, Economists, Historians and other groups of academics and intellectuals which met under their auspices. The common task of these groups was to identify and promote the radical-popular cultural heritage of the nation; to identify the Communists with this tradition; to mobilise the talents of the native working class and peasantry in its service; to defend the Soviet view on important cultural questions and isolate the USA as an enemy. The cause of peace was made to overlap with this Kulturkampf. Communist Parties began to form cultural committees for peace in 1948; the World Peace Council was set up in 1949 and the following year the Stockholm Appeal was launched calling for an absolute ban on nuclear weapons. The peace committees, in Popular Front fashion, spawned Artists for Peace, Teachers for Peace and similar bodies, drawing public figures into the campaign just as the pioneering Willi Munzenburg had done in the 1930s. By the time of the third Artists for Peace exhibition in London in June 1953, the sponsors included Epstein, Matisse, Picasso, Augustus John, Stanley Spencer, Fernand Leger and Jean Lurcat.

The 'Battle of Ideas' was to be waged by placing the nation’s ‘Cultural Heritage in the Service of Peace and National Independence’ to quote the title of the cultural conference organised in London for May 1952. The flavour of this gathering can be gathered from its inaugural address delivered by the classicist, Professor George Thomson, who warned of the need to protect the nation's heritage of writers such as Shakespeare, Chaucer and Burns from a bourgeois culture that increasingly tended to the 'decadent, reactionary and cosmopolitan'. Other speakers were at pains to sound less parochial and nationalistic than Thomson, but everyone knew where the principal threat came from. This had been the theme of an earlier conference attended by over 2,000 people in April 1951. The opening speech on this occasion was given by the full-time secretary of the Communist Party’s cultural committee, Sam Aaronovitch, who was determined that 'the synthetic, imperialist culture of the [United] States, coldly and cynically devised for the debasement of man' had to be stopped. It was, said Aaronovitch, the culture of the sixty families who ran the American monopolies. The men who craved for 'The subordination of the rest of the capitalist powers and their Empires [as] part of their plan for world domination, a plan which involves the launching of a third world war against the Soviet Union, China and the People's Democracies'.

This lurid opening was developed with reference to the USA as the principal aggressor in Korea, as well as the architect of the Cold War division of Europe and the 'McCarthyite' campaigns against Communists the world over. Speakers following Aaronovitch’s lead ritualistically distinguished the imperialist reactionary threat of the USA from 'American culture as such', but the two were just as quickly conflated. Though the American 'way of life' itself was said to reflect the outlook of the sixty families, many of the features of American mass culture with a mass working class

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following in Western Europe were the objects of the Communists’ apparent fear and loathing. The essence of the ‘American Way’ was denounced as ‘glorification of the almighty dollar and of so-called private enterprise. It is an incitement to racialism and hatred of national minorities. It daily worships violence, brutality and gangsterism’. It was only a step, Aaronovitch observed, from 'nigger' to 'gook' (Korea) and then to 'limey' - made all the easier by 'the cult of violence' fostered by the American trusts in their search for world domination. Hollywood films, children's comics, US advertising techniques which Goebbels openly copied in the 1930s, slush novels and magazines - these were among the means by which the USA enmeshed people's minds in lies, destroying their European rivals (film makers, newsreel companies, etc) in the process. This was nothing to do with 'cultural exchange', it represented 'a systematic, well-organised and financed attempt to impose coca-colonization on the British people. We are dealing', Aaronovitch asserted, 'with "cultural imperialism"'.

Alongside 'these arrogant gum-chewers', he continued, stood the British monopolists and the 'right wing Labour leaders'. Concerned only to defend capitalism, these people openly betrayed Britain's national interest in return for dollar support for British imperialism. Their own culture was 'itself so decadent that, far from resisting the American "way of life"...[they]... welcomed it as a more vigorous and full-blooded expression of [their] own outlook', and even contributed to it. Britain produced an Orwell or a Huxley, Aaronovitch observed, and 'America puffs them up, mass produces them and re-exports them back to unlucky Europe'. Yet Aaronovitch also wanted his listeners to agree that 'what is threatened is our entire British cultural heritage' and having rattled off the great national figures of literature and science - 'Just the bare roll call is enough to rouse one's pride', he averred – the Party’s cultural commissar of the moment appealed to 'the genius of the British people' to come to its rescue. Other speakers followed this lead. The historians were enjoined to reinstate the 'militants' and 'ordinary people' of the national past. American literature, films, children's books and newspapers were discussed, or rather exposed, in their turn, as speaker succeeded speaker. The conference demanded that the unions resisted the 'unadulterated class collaboration' of their American counterparts and the techniques of speed-up that were bound to be imported from the USA. They castigated American science for its 'shortage of ideas of any kind' and for its anti-scientific and anti-humanist bent as revealed by its liking for gene theory, eugenics and neo-Malthusianism.

'The American Threat to British Culture' provoked a defence of national culture from the assembled delegates which fused patriotic sentiment with Stalinist dogma. The Communists themselves, of course, believed in 'the opulent and many-hued reality' of Soviet intellectual life which was counterposed to the dying culture of imperialism. For them it was obvious that the 'real moral issues before man' had never been clearer - the choice between socialist construction on the one hand and imperialist war and poverty on the other; and they shared the prejudice that things American were often justifiable objects of ridicule, trusting that 'the biting edge of British humour' would remain sharp and turned against them. The purity of the socialist camp was admittedly obscured by ceaseless media talk of 'moral values', 'freedom and democracy', and 'the western way of life' and the alarms about the alleged lack of 'human rights' in the USSR, China and Eastern Europe. But what was this if not 'the Big Lie technique of Goebbels over again'. It was a lie 'so monstrous

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3 Ibid., p. 4.
5 Ibid., p. 34.
that we cannot be troubled with it, we turn our backs on it, and divert the argument on to more practical questions'.\(^6\) Instead of refuting these lies about the USSR, Communists focused their thoughts on the daily struggle - 'the trade unionists imprisoned and shot in Spain or Greece', as reported in the *Daily Worker*, if nowhere else, 'the hypocrisy of napalm-democracy' and all the other issues which confronted them. They saw, meanwhile, the 'American Way of Life' served up through commercial journalism, which was becoming increasingly 'degenerate and corrupt' in the process.\(^7\)

2. FAILURE

The Communists' anti-American campaign undoubtedly made a certain amount of tactical sense. 'To hear officials in the State Department or the US Information Agency tell it, Western Europe was a hotbed of "anti-Americanism" from the 1940s through the 1980s...they believed there were large numbers of people who seemed to despise everything associated with America.'\(^8\) Various reports talked about the strength of this phenomenon in France, Italy, West Germany and Britain.\(^9\) Numerous points of real conflict between the USA and various European states existed which could be exploited. This was the Soviet calculation. It was also true, however, that America was admired and respected in Western Europe at least as much as it was as an object of distrust – sometimes in the minds of the same people, but also by different sections of society in some of the more polarised societies such as Italy, France and Greece. America was the liberator, bastion of democracy, hope of a better life, source of most of what was socially and culturally appealing, and the adopted country of friends and relatives who had made a better life there. But those (some of them leaders of left-wing parties) who tarred all criticism of the USA as mere 'anti-American' prejudice had to contend with the fact that there were genuine concerns about the dangers of nuclear war which the Communists could exploit, real resentments about US interference in their own country's affairs, envy of US power and wealth, and a sense of national decay or national humiliation which could be turned against Western Europe’s most essential ally. In short there were real problems for the Communists to exploit - from feelings of national subordination to fears of cultural imperialism, of the invasion of American corporations and the imposition of the ruthless techniques associated with American business. These were among the reasons why even the British political elite, for example, could not simply 'co-opt “America”...in an anti-socialist crusade, since that almost certainly would have alienated as many as it attracted'.\(^10\) Most of the evidence suggests, however, that disdain for American mass culture as something irremediably corrupting, vulgar and

reactionary was stronger within European elites than it was among the people courted by the Communists.

The task which the Communists set themselves was to build their own organisations on the back of anti-Americanism and in this they failed. The evidence suggests that the peak influence of these parties had passed everywhere in Western Europe by 1947. One reason for this was that the truth about the Soviet Union had a tendency to leak, sometimes flood, into Western Europe, alienating socialists – as it had done at intervals ever since October 1917 – who were confronted with the fact that Stalin eliminated all rivals to Communist power in Eastern Europe, including fellow socialists. Communist authoritarianism always characterised the Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe but intensified during the ‘anti-Titoist’ campaigns launched in 1948. The revulsion from Stalinism extended to the Western Communist Parties themselves in 1956 when all the parties were convulsed by the Khruschev revelations concerning the Stalin dictatorship and by Khruschev’s own decision to save Hungarian socialism by force of arms. A second reason for the Communist failure is that for the first time since 1919 the Communists were confronted by a systematic campaign of opposition globally orchestrated by the most powerful state in the world. Much of its cultural effort was designed to win European intellectuals to the American Way and its operational structures were mirror images of those used by the Communists themselves. Throughout the period 1950-67 the CIA ran a Congress for Cultural Freedom, set up in Berlin in 1950, which promoted numerous publications, concerts, art exhibitions and conferences with this end in mind. While covert operations split trade unions in Italy and France and helped mobilise voters against the Communist Parties, the cultural campaign spent tens of millions of dollars enlisting European intellectuals for the anti-Soviet cause. The non-Communist Left was of particular utility because it contained disillusioned former Communists and Trotskyists - erstwhile insiders who could speak with authority on the Communist threat - and ‘democratic socialists’ who were at least as concerned with fighting Communism as they were with advancing democratic socialism.\(^{11}\) Sidney Hook, Philip Rahv, James Burnham, James T. Farrell, George Orwell, Ignazio Silone and Koestler were in the first category; most of the socialist and social democratic party leaders were placed in the second category - not only by the Communists, but also by a sizeable proportion of their own left-wings. The Communists also had to contend with Moral Rearrmament and various Catholic organisations which organised within the socialist parties and trade unions to block the Communist advance. The Party’s own defectors were given huge exposure in the press. Copious amounts of bad news concerning the Soviet Union was given wide coverage; but the good propaganda effect of the anti-Nazi war was already on the wane before the flood of news concerning Communist repression in Eastern Europe further eroded Soviet prestige.

The social democratic parties played an important role in isolating and defeating the Communist challenge. This was not simply because they promoted themselves as the most effective alternative to the Communists in their own countries – given the undoubted shift to the left which all of Western Europe experienced during and immediately after the war. This function was nevertheless acknowledged. US politicians certainly recognised their utility as an obstacle to Communist electoral and ideological expansion and for these reasons nurtured links with the social democratic leaders in every democratic state in Western Europe. In controversies such as the rearming of West Germany – which excited furious and stubborn opposition

\(^{11}\) ibid, pp. 62-3.
among democratic socialists, especially in West Germany itself – leaders of the Labour Party in Britain and the Netherlands intervened to argue the US case and did what they could to overcome the objections of their German counterparts. Within their own parties the Atlanticist case was generally defended and promoted by the leaders of social democracy. There were exceptions, such as the Nenni socialists in Italy, but for the most part the social democratic parties successfully contained the anti-American forces within their own organisations and the trade unions associated with them. Most of these parties had a long history of conflict with the Communists. In Britain the reliability of the Labour Party and trade union leaders rested on such foundations but had also been demonstrated in government between 1945 and 1951 when Labour steered the country into NATO, nuclear armament, conventional rearmament and such a close association with the USA that Britain became a permanent base for US military forces. Throughout the 1950s the Labour leaders successfully defended this system against critics within the party. This was also proof that the anti-American campaign launched by the Communists had ended in failure.

DIMINISHING POWER OF THE ANTI-AMERICAN CULTURAL WAR

The Communist’s anti-American activities fizzled out as an orchestrated campaign after Stalin’s death and the Cominform was terminated two years later. But the identification of the USA as the chief enemy of the left in Western Europe survived intact. On the cultural front, as it were, this had a basis and dynamic quite independent of anything the Communists said and did. The Communists had not invented the left’s disdain for popular culture and socialist ideologies had not been developed with the USA as a key referent. The key referent was capitalism and after 1945 the USA was its strongest example. It had been an ambition of European socialists to insulate their parties from the hedonism, individualism, and narcolepsy of commercial mass culture since it first began to have an impact in the late Victorian period. In Germany the SPD famously sought to bring the working class within its own range of organisations, linking the party to the unions, sporting clubs, choral societies, women’s and youth groups, and other specialist bodies, including educational forums. The intention was to shield the workers from alien class influences while building their own class consciousness and aptitudes for self-government. The party could be thought of as the legatee of all that was progressive in human culture and to this extent was prepared to embrace the best of bourgeois culture. The class struggle wing of the movement aspired to go beyond this – by episodic enthusiasm for ‘proletarian culture’ - but even those who did not were worried about the shallowness, triviality and opiate qualities of commercial mass culture. These anxieties continued to be expressed within social democracy during the 1950s and 1960s and were often expressed as opposition to ‘Americanisation’. Some of the social democratic parties also continued to operate as parties of social integration, maintaining their own journals, newspapers, and a broad variety of ancillary organisations catering to the needs of the membership. Though the old ambition to defend an alternative culture to that of bourgeois society no longer held credibility even in the social democratic parties which most closely approached this

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12 C. Waters, Socialism and Popular Culture, 1880-1914 (Manchester: MUP);
model of organisation, that did not prevent the left-wing of social democracy from worrying about American-led modernity.

The old aspirations were kept alive in the 1950s and 1960s by the Italian and French Communist Parties, which having adopted ‘national roads to socialism’ in the 1940s proceeded on a parliamentary strategy supported by the construction of a working class ‘counter-hegemony’ designed to displace bourgeois values. Cultural hegemony, according to this theory – most fully elaborated by the ‘Gramscians’ of the PCI – would lead to political dominance. Real power consisted of moral and intellectual authority, as well as numbers of party members and voters. The French Communists, dominating the left vote until 1972, were big enough to attempt a similar approach to their Italian counterparts. Thus crucial to the accomplishment of socialism, in this view, was the construction of a counter-hegemony promoting workers’ self-awareness of their ‘historical’ mission, based on an alternative world view and value system distinct from those reproduced by capitalistic societies. All possible media could be deployed for this purpose – theatre, cinema, music, news and so on. It was clearly a struggle against the odds, even for the largest left-wing parties. But the unequalled influence of American popular culture was a particular target for the fears of socialists even within the social democratic parties. As such it merged and drew from broader nervousness about American-led modernity which could be found across the political spectrum and were by no means confined to Western Europe.

The advent of the affluent society in the 1950s was depicted as a world of alienation and vulgarity, of regimented organisation men and manipulated masses by American liberals such as David Riesman, The Lonely Crowd (1950); Vance Packard The Hidden Persuaders (1957) and The Status Seekers (1959); and William H. White, The Organisation Man (1956); as well as visionaries such as Aldous Huxley who contributed Brave New World Revisited to the genre in 1959. Mass culture was also an object of snobbish distaste for defenders of the 'canon' of literature, some of whom such as the Leavisites in Britain had defined themselves in opposition to its exploitative side since the 1930s. Richard Hoggart's celebrated analysis of 'working class life with special reference to publications and entertainments', Uses of Literacy (1957), worked within this tradition and was full of complaint about the 'regular, increasing, and almost entirely unvaried diet of sensation without commitment' that he found in modern mass culture in the 1950s. His Pooterish tendencies were most fully developed in his discussion of 'the juke-box boys', the young customers of milk bars who seemed, so he thought, to be victims of 'a spiritual dry-rot amid the odour of boiled milk'. Hoggart perceived in these boys with 'an American slouch', the prototypes of the 'directionless and tamed helots of a machine-minding class'. For present purposes it is enough to know that such prejudices, even when delivered in the most florid prose, could pass for cogent analysis. They expressed and sustained a mood of disquiet about 1950s modernity, with which the USA was most closely identified, and gave it a vaguely leftish air, rather like the Angry Young Men of the theatre, whose values and politics were often deeply reactionary.

The corrosion of class consciousness was the particular concern for much of the European left during the post-war boom. With the spread of consumer durables, the growth of affluence, and the expansion of more sophisticated mass media it was

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easy to predict the end of ideology, the demise of solidarity, the rise of a new individualism and the spread of values inimical to socialism. In short, the ‘protection’ of the working class from bourgeois values was becoming more and more difficult. Many socialists initially railed against the commercial mass culture – much of it American in origin - which seemed to be winning the day, impotently denouncing the artificial wants, false values and vulgar materialism which was corrupting the working class and reinforcing the power of big business. But the leadership of the social democratic parties had to do more than simply lament the passing of an age, if that was what it was. They had to compete for votes in the new, affluent circumstances. Consequently they had to embrace modernity by modernising their own parties and programmes – a process that could generate bitter intra-party conflict. But outside Scandinavia (and the peculiar case of Austria), social democratic parties were not conspicuously successful at forming governments and so the modernisers were generally backed by the more pragmatic interests of the labour movement such as the trade unions. The emphasis of the left’s cultural critique thus began to change in the 1960s

At the same time a New Left emerged, critical of the established left parties, and their staid doctrines. Though the language was often Marxist, the most influential New Left thinkers were keen to abandon Marxist-Leninist ‘reductionism’ and began to stress the ‘relative autonomy’ of cultural forms and to accord cultural analysis a corresponding weight and to reject theories which depicted culture as a mere reflection of power – American or otherwise – and its consumers as mere dupes. A more tolerant approach to cultural questions and the role of intellectuals could even be found in the Communist Parties. It was partly a question of taking the search for allies more seriously, as the Communist programme required. It was an acknowledgement of the fact that more affluent voters existed in increasing numbers and had to be attracted to the left parties. It was also a response to the greater tolerance of artists and writers which the Soviet authorities demonstrated. In 1962 Alexander Solzhenitsyn had been allowed to publish One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovitch. Though the greater freedom which this event signalled was short-lived Rumyantsev, the editor-in-chief of Pravda, codified aspects of it in his article on ‘The Communist Party and the Intelligentsia’, published in February 1965. This was then disseminated – for example it was reproduced in Soviet News, the publication of the Russian embassy in London in March 1965. In March 1966 the French Communist journal Argenteuil adopted a similar position. The British Communists began to receive thoughts on ‘intellectuals and the Party’ in September 1966 from cultural activists in their own ranks. The process was finally concluded when the ideas of the cultural experts were put before the Executive in the form of a statement on ‘Questions of Ideology and Culture’ in March 1967. The Communists now openly welcomed ‘all those who have come in one way or another to appreciate the importance of Marxist approaches in different fields of research’. The statement expressed ‘hope’ that the Party could ‘work closely in discussion and cooperation with them’. Its claims to possession of a monopoly of Marxist prescience was dented if not abandoned; the Party still claimed that its role was to ‘speed’ and ‘lead’ the transition to socialism. But it now allowed that science required ‘the most critical,

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enquiring and searching spirit’ among its practitioners. The Party would not ‘lay
down a line’ on any aspect of this process and it committed itself to pluralism in the
arts before and after the creation of a socialist society. The Communist Party ‘does
not see its task as being to direct what should be written, painted or composed – either
in terms of subject or of style’, it now averred.\textsuperscript{17}

Some members of the Party may have realised that culture was being
divorced from the question of power and its structures as Communists began to
recognise its ‘relative autonomy’ and rediscover a richer, more imaginative language
than standard ‘Marxism-Leninism’ in which to explore it. They may have sensed too
that this road entailed surrender of the Party’s claims to a unique leadership role, as
the relative autonomy of cultural forms and relationships called forth, and became the
province of, a corresponding pluralism of special interests and subjectivities.

\section*{ANTI-AMERICANISM IN THE SOCIALIST PARTIES}

All the socialist parties were of course divided by the Cold War in the
years between 1947-1991. On the left of these parties the USA suffered from one
overwhelming disadvantage in the assessment of many activists – it was not socialist.
In the same quarter the Soviet Union was often viewed as a brutal dictatorship. Why
then was the Soviet Union often given a benefit of the doubt that was denied to the
USA? One reason was that throughout the 1950s and in to the 1960s the perception of
powerful industrial, technological and social advances in the Soviet Union influenced
socialist thinking.\textsuperscript{18} The left of the party in particular took a more optimistic view of
what was happening to the Communist bloc in consequence of its socio-economic
development. In Britain Nye Bevan, who thought of himself as steering a middle
course between the extremes of the Cold War, envisaged the totalitarian regimes
succumbing to pressures for democratisation. This was a recurring theme of his
contributions to \textit{Tribune}, though it did not prevent him from denouncing the
destruction of the non-Communist left in Eastern Europe or dismissing Communism
as irrelevant in Western Europe and thus earning the hatred of the British
Communists\textsuperscript{19}. His argument was that the economic growth and sociological changes
which resulted from the success of planning called into existence an educated, urban
population that would demand full political status. The same objective processes
depended on political reform for their continuance and Bevan assumed the Kremlin
leaders realised this. After Stalin’s death in 1953, when there were signs of the Soviet
regime liberalising, this position acquired a wider credence. The demand for summit
negotiations with the Russians, taken up by Churchill as well as the Labour left, fed
off the hope that a more reasonable collective leadership now existed in Moscow.
Bevan’s beliefs, however, were rooted in his conception of socialism as a system
based on public ownership and centralised planning. Political democracy was the
natural complement to the socialised economy just as capitalism was ultimately
incompatible with majority rule.\textsuperscript{20} There was a deductive logic at work here based on
assumptions that many socialists found congenial. Empirically it was supported by the
real economic and technological changes which the Soviet Union was undergoing in

\textsuperscript{18} See J. Callaghan, ‘The left and the "Unfinished Revolution": Bevanites and Soviet Russia in the
\textsuperscript{19} Bevan wrote the preface to Denis Healey’s account of the Communist repression in Eastern Europe
the 1950s – changes which persuaded many conservative observers of the potency of the planned economy.\textsuperscript{21} Khruschev’s ‘secret’ speech, which was published in the West in March 1956, was taken as further evidence of de-Stalinization. Bevan also saw signs of this process in the Poznan riots.\textsuperscript{22} On the eve of the Soviet invasion of Hungary, Konni Ziliacus MP, welcoming the signs of de-Stalinization, asserted that the challenge of Communism was social, rather than military. Even John Foster Dulles had admitted as much in Paris in December 1955\textsuperscript{23}. The Soviet invasion of Hungary shattered this optimistic reading, but for many on the left the disillusion was only temporary.

By 1957 ‘the astounding surge of material progress’ in the Soviet Union was symbolised by \textit{Sputnik} and the theme of Russia’s march of progress was taken up again in the pages of \textit{Tribune}.\textsuperscript{24} Bevan’s last speech at a Labour annual conference, given in the autumn of 1959, shortly before his final illness, returned to his conviction that the real challenge came from the socio-economic advances of a Soviet system based on planning, not the might of its military. Some architects of Cold War policies in the West – Paul Nitze, Frank Roberts, George Kennan and Denis Healey among them – admitted that the Soviet military threat to Western Europe was exaggerated, and to this extent there was something in the left-wing position.\textsuperscript{25} Likewise left critics of Labour’s Front Bench were right to insist that it was simply untrue to construe social revolutions around the world as manifestations of a Soviet conspiracy. Many were old-fashioned nationalist movements and anti-colonial campaigns and it was essential, according to the critics, that British Labour should be seen to take the side of victims of imperialism and landlordism, not its perpetrators. But it also true that the left underestimated the determinate and enduring role of the totalitarian institutions of power, as Kennan said it did, as well as the irrationality, cruelty, and waste which the Soviet system entailed. Wishful thinking and ignorance explain these errors to some extent, but also an opposition to and hatred of capitalism which often pre-dated any love affair with the Soviet Union in the development of socialist convictions. It was, after all, a matter of belief (and experience) for many socialists that capitalism generated inequality, poverty, and war. Such people could not easily look upon the USA as a friend and the Soviet Union as an enemy. The USA had many virtues, but a commitment to socialism was not among them.

The Soviet Union’s nationalised economy, on the other hand, as Bevan told the annual conference in 1959, was the source of dynamism; ‘Our main case is and must remain that in a modern complex society it is impossible to get rational order by leaving things to private economic adventure. Therefore I am a Socialist. I believe in public ownership’.\textsuperscript{26} Richard Crossman took a similar view of the Soviet economic challenge, so did Harold Wilson. Both believed that the winning combination was political democracy and economic planning but that, as things stood,
the Soviet system would supersede lethargic free enterprise.\textsuperscript{27} Wilson and his advisers – economist such as Thomas Balogh and scientists like J. D. Bernal – continued to invoke the superiority of Soviet economic performance right up to the general election of 1964. The defence of public ownership and planning as central to socialist convictions took on an urgency during the long boom as party elites began to stress the virtues of Keynesian macro-economic planning for the achievement of goals such as full employment and the corresponding redundancy of old methods such as nationalisation. As socialist parties diluted old commitments and modernised themselves (as at Bad Godesberg in 1959) the internal struggles thus generated gave the defenders of the old orthodoxy a stake in playing up the evidence of Soviet advances.

It would have been more surprising if there had been no relationship between domestic struggles and national histories and the left’s interpretations of world politics. In France, for example, ‘the rhetorical hegemony’ of the Jacobin tradition, given renewed vigour by the anti-Fascist war, the moral authority of Soviet wartime heroics and Resistance, has been invoked to explain the left’s obeisance before ‘the Revolution, any revolution’.\textsuperscript{28} Communists in all countries were disposed to deny the veracity of reports of Stalinist terror, when they did not justify them as necessary growing pains in the revolutionary process. What is more interesting is the non-Communist left’s attempt to explain this violence in ways which reinforced their own domestic preoccupations. The British left latched on to the supposed dynamism of the 100% publicly-owned, centrally-planned economy to reinforce their ideological war with ‘revisionists’. French intellectuals such as Merleau-Ponty invoked History; Sartre continued to do so after the invasion of Hungary, on the grounds that the USSR was uniquely committed to progressive goals. Armed with this double standard pro-Sovietism and anti-Americanism could be seen as two sides of the same coin. It was argued that if one wanted to do something against violence, one could begin at home by opposing colonial wars (Madagascar, Indochina, Tunisia, Algeria), for example, and struggle against that diffuse violence visited upon the poor and downtrodden by one’s own state – as the PCF did! One could also protest against the friends kept by one’s own state and government, especially the biggest of them – the USA. When the civic religion of pro-Sovietism collapsed in France from the late 1970s – as French intellectuals belatedly discovered the gulag – anti-Americanism did not disappear with it. In the French case, of course, anti-American sentiments had never been the monopoly of the Left. They also survived in countries without either a strong Gaullist or Communist tradition – such as Britain.

Anti-Americanism as an anxiety and loathing about certain forms of modernity and individualism was obviously not confined to the left and did not dissolve with illusions about the USSR. Furthermore one did not have to believe in the Soviet workers’ paradise to believe that the US was responsible for the Cold War and the continuation of world tensions. The leftwing picture was further complicated in the 1960s as a New Left emerged armed with a revived and rejuvenated Marxism, which was often defined in opposition to Stalinism. There is clear evidence that this


New Left – with its anti-imperialist, ‘Third Worldist’, pacifist and Cold War ‘revisionist’ emphases - found its way into the British Labour Party, the SPD, SFIO, the Dutch PvdA and other socialist parties in the 1970s. These elements were at least as zealous as the old socialist left-wing in finding new reasons for depicting the USA as the real villain of the piece in international politics. Drawing from ‘revisionist’ histories of the Cold War – which dominated New Left discussions in the 1960s and 1970s – together with theories of neo-imperialism a new generation of leftwing activists began to see the USA as the key problem in the international system.

Even before the Second World War had ended the growth and expansion of US power abroad was identified as a problem for socialists. The intensity of this conviction flared up during the Korean War when US foreign policy was linked to domestic defence budgets and the risk these posed for domestic reform programmes and economic recovery. The critics argued that too close an association with the USA committed their country to rearmament, military occupation by US troops, German rearmament, alignment with foreign reactionaries who were useful tools of anti-Communism, a strategy of nuclear defence/war and many other evils. Debates on these issues could be extremely acrimonious and divide the parties as deeply, if not more deeply, than arguments about the domestic elements of party programme. Defenders of NATO and ‘Atlanticism’ were as inclined to perceive these critics as ‘fellow-travellers’ as much as their critics depicted them as having sold out to capitalism. During the period of American military intervention in Vietnam the conviction that the US was the main danger to world peace deepened in these circles and the circles themselves spread out to include previously dormant populations, as in West Germany.

VIETNAM AND AFTER

‘If I had to choose between life in the Soviet Union and life in the United States I would certainly choose the Soviet Union’ (Graham Greene). 29

[The United States] ‘has exercised a sustained, systematic, remorseless, and quite cynical manipulation of power worldwide, while masquerading as a force for universal good…[The United States has been] the most dangerous power the world has ever known.’ (Harold Pinter). 30

[I have come to] ‘the reluctant and terrible conviction that the greatest threat to the peace of humanity is the United States. I can no longer stomach America’s insidious meddling across the face of the world. Wherever I go I find myself more and more repelled by the apparently insatiable American urge to interfere in other people’s business.’ (Jan Morris). 31

‘Whenever there is hunger, wherever there is exploitative tyranny, whenever people are tortured and the masses left to rot under the weight of disease and starvation, the forces which hold the people stem from Washington.’ (Bertrand Russell). 32

30 Ibid. p. 128
31 Ibid. p. 153.
32 Ibid. p. 153.
US intervention in Vietnam had much to do with these attitudes. In 1951 Russell had argued that Europe’s freedom was ‘only capable of being maintained by cooperation with America’. In Greene’s case (incidentally, he actually chose the south of France!) the charge of anti-Americanism was made at the time of his opposition to the McCarran Act and McCarthyism in the mid-50s, especially when The Quiet American was published. Greene defended himself by arguing that he was simply a critic of certain US policies, especially foreign policies, pointing out that he had never regarded American criticism of the British Empire as anti-British in inspiration and saw no justification for the anti-American charge. (In 1953 he co-founded the Anglo-Texan Society which survived until 1976). ‘What he disliked was the vast influence of America spreading inexorably around the world’. In The Quiet American this influence is depicted as righteous, naïve and dangerous because of the power wielded in support of American political messianism abroad. (The central British character of the novel - Fowler – is cynical and duplicitous, but Greene was never accused of being anti-British). Greene’s view of US actions in Vietnam – the blunderings of a super-power full of its own moral superiority and certitude – undoubtedly had wider currency, not least in the old power elites of Western Europe.

Anxious to safeguard the ‘special relationship’ the Labour Government (1964-70) in Britain supplied the only leadership of a left-wing party in Western Europe which actually defended LBJ’s Vietnam policies – to its great cost in terms of party divisions and loss of membership. In West Germany the hitherto marginal and ineffectual peace movement (just 1,000 members in 1960) grew powerfully and an ‘extra-parliamentary opposition’ had sprung into existence by 1966 around the interconnected themes of political authoritarianism at home, membership of NATO, opposition to the war in Vietnam, and the question of nuclear weapons. This opened up a chapter in West German history which began with a revival of political protest and the emergence of New Leftism, but developed by way of the growth of factionalism in the main party of the Left and led to the radicalisation of its programme. A similar process was observed in Italy, the Netherlands, France, Britain, and Sweden. Far left terrorist groups were an offshoot of these developments in some of the countries concerned. Revisionist readings of Cold War history were hegemonic within the broader left activist milieu in the late 1960s and 1970s, with the USA featuring as a prime cause of the conflict, as a technological pace-setter in the arms race and the dominant force of Western imperialism (much as the Soviet Union had depicted it in 1947). A more or less coherent story told of how the USA’s ‘Grand Area’ strategy, developed during the Second World War, made conflict with the USSR inevitable of how the Cold War followed, leading to the further expansion of US military and political power, and support for dictatorial regimes all over the world as long as they were anti-Communist. When dictatorships fell in Portugal, Spain and Greece in the mid-70s, much of the left accused the USA of having been complicit in their longevity (for example by supplying economic and military aid in exchange for military bases). Actions taken at times of enormous bitterness and division, such as the Pact of Madrid in 1953 in the case of Spain, were bound to be registered in the

33 Quoted in R. Pells, Not Like Us, p. 69.
36
minds of suppressed leftists and their overseas supporters, underlining the obvious point that in making such agreements the USA was seen to be taking sides in deeply divided societies. In the Greek case, not only had the USA supported the anti-left forces since 1947, it was regarded as a conspirator in the division of Cyprus for purposes of NATO’s convenience in the Cold War (preservation of the military bases/defeat of the Greek Cypriot left). A visitor to Athens in 1976 would have seen posters of Henry Kissinger at every news vendor’s kiosk, describing him as a war criminal because of his part in US policy in Vietnam, Cambodia, Greece and Cyprus. A few years later the sort of anger expressed in Athens was widespread across Western Europe. The so-called ‘Second Cold War’ of the early 1980s led to a resurgence of the peace movements, especially in countries which were to receive Cruise missiles because of decisions taken within NATO. Once again the focus of criticism was the USA which was regarded as the main belligerent in worsening relations with the Soviet Union.

CONCLUSIONS

The Cold War assumption that pro-Soviet leftists were invariably anti-American is born out by this paper. The Communists themselves obviously fall into this category, as do the fellow-travellers. Substantial sections of the non-Communist left (e.g., Nenni’s socialists in Italy, Bevan’s supporters in Britain, Marxists within organisations such as the SFIO) also found reasons to support the Soviet Union – even while admitting the existence of terror, slave labour, and economic backwardness in the ‘socialist bloc’. The USA could never command the same confidence in these quarters and was often indicted, both as a society and in terms of its foreign policy. The rival teleology of the USA was perceived as a danger to socialism, and so aspects of the USA were ‘bad’ even when they were ‘good’ (such as affluence, individual choice, popular appeal). But there is not a country in Western Europe which has been free of class conflicts and the divisions of left-right politics since 1945 and in which the USA has avoided being charged with active support for the right. So in practical terms too the USA has been easy to identify as an enemy of the domestic left.

The collapse of the Communist bloc in Europe in 1989-91, coinciding as it did, with reversals for the left in France and Britain, and the hegemony of liberal economics (witness the policies in office of the Spanish and Greek socialists in the 1980s), contributed to a retreat from the shibboleths of socialism across Western Europe. The talk was of globalisation; the evidence included shrinking trade union membership, the decline of collective bargaining, a loss of confidence in planning, public ownership, and egalitarian welfare and tax policies. The left activist base of many parties shrank and alternatives to the orthodox economic policies of party leaderships were only notable for their absence by the 1990s. Not only was the workers’ paradise gone but the idea of such a paradise was discredited. Socialism as an alternative system no longer existed even as a plausible idea. This development alone does not explain why the whole socialist left was thrown into disarray by the early 1990s. To explain that we must also take into account the collapse of confidence in the idea of socialists managing mixed economies in such a way that the strategic goals of socialism – full employment, equalisation of incomes and wealth, elimination of poverty - could be achieved.

There is still a left, of course, but socialism is probably weaker than at any time since 1929. Anti-Americanism, by contrast, is not weaker on the left today. George Lichtheim said of anti-fascism and anti-Stalinism that they were not
distinctive political creeds and were too diffuse and vague to lend themselves to analytical treatment. Perhaps that is also true of anti-Americanism. This analysis, however, at least suggests that there is something to be learned from attention to the context of anti-Americanism which was often expressed in, and inspired by, domestic disputes within the parties of the left as well as arguments against their right-wing rivals. Arguments about programmatic reform, the nature of foreign policy and the problems of modernity featured strongly in these disputes. Anti-Americanism survived the collapse of confidence in socialist alternatives to capitalism. This suggests that if we are looking for the ideological roots to leftist anti-Americanism we have to look beyond socialism. For example, the left has always drawn upon pre-socialist, radical ideas. The critique of power politics, secret diplomacy, the arms race, imperialism, and militarism was not invented by socialists. It pre-dates liberal democracy itself. The subsequent spread of liberal democracy only served to emphasise the need for legitimacy in foreign policy. Foreign policies are rarely, if ever, justified in terms of balance of power considerations or other aspects of raison d’etat. Yet the noble ideals in which they are justified are often brought into doubt when the facts come to light (as in the arming of Iraq). Foreign policy is also notoriously elusive of democratic control and accountability and this problem is magnified when we start thinking in terms of ‘the West’, with the USA as its leader. For these reasons radicals, democrats, patriots and pacifists (in the original meaning of the term as believers in the possibility of war avoidance) will all have something to complain about when their country is allied to a much more powerful world power.