

Edited by **MICHAEL WALLER & MEINDERT FENNEMA**

COMMUNIST PARTIES IN WESTERN EUROPE

DECLINE OR ADAPTATION?



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Edited by Michael Waller and Meindert Fennema

Basil Blackwell

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Communist Parties in Western Europe

Preface

The history of this book goes back to a workshop entitled 'Inside Communist Parties' which was held as part of the Joint Sessions of the European Consortium for Political Research in Freiburg in 1984. That workshop was attended by both editors of this work. It was concerned almost exclusively with ruling parties, and with problems that were particular to that situation of power.

Disappointed with the restriction of the Freiburg workshop to the ruling parties, one of this book's editors, Meindert Fennema, undertook to organize a further workshop with a similar title, but this time concentrating on the non-ruling communist parties of Western Europe, and involving scholars with first-hand experience of these parties. However, the link with the earlier workshop was maintained by the presence of the book's co-editor, Michael Waller, at the later one, which was held as part of the Joint Sessions of the ECPR in Barcelona in 1985. It was there that the idea of this book was discussed, and where we decided to work together on the venture.

It seemed to us that a serious and fruitful discussion had taken place between scholars of communism and communist scholars, and that the gap between the traditional view of communism from the outside and those from within – both in self-defence and in self-criticism – had been sufficiently bridged to make a homogeneous book not only possible, but desirable.

Although the book in its final form does not contain all the papers presented at the Barcelona workshop, and includes several contributions written specially for the volume, the spirit of the Barcelona workshop has, in our view, been maintained. As the list of contributors will make clear, in almost every case the authors have first-hand knowledge of the

country about which they write. In some cases they either have been, or still are, members of the communist party of the country treated. The remainder are political scientists who have had a long experience of studies of communism in Western Europe and elsewhere. Three of the authors are editors of academic journals about communism. The political positions of the contributors range from membership of a central committee to being long-standing critics of communist parties. They share, however, a genuine wish to understand, and to reveal as far as possible what has happened to the West European communist parties over the past twenty or so years, and they all go beyond the political-strategic vantage-point that has for so long dogged the discussion of communism.

The emphasis in this volume is on structural factors that affect the political strength of communist parties: changes in the social composition of the constituency of these parties; changes in the political and economic environment that influence or challenge them as political parties; and, finally, internal factors such as their organizational principles. The treatment overall is comparative. The aim has been to present a living description of the present predicament of the Western European communist parties, and an analysis of that predicament that is informed by experience. As far as we know, this is the first book of its kind; that it has been possible to compose it at all is a mark of the change that has been taking place both within the communist parties and within the academic community's attitudes towards communism. If it has proved impossible to eliminate altogether political preferences of one kind or another, we venture to hope that where they obtrude they will illustrate rather than obscure the points that the book is making.

Finally, acknowledgments are due to those who have helped to prepare the manuscript for publication: Karen Hall and Marilyn Dunn in Manchester, and Do Overtoom and Marianne Pauli in Amsterdam. With authors in eleven different countries involved the task has not been an easy one.

Michael Waller
Meindert Fennema

Abbreviations

Abbreviations are not given here for titles and terms that occur once only in the text.

AES	Alternative Economic Strategy (UK)
APK	<i>Arbetarpartiet kommunisterna</i> (Labour Party Communists) (Sweden)
ApO	<i>Ausser-parlamentarische Opposition</i> (Extra-parliamentary Opposition) (FRG)
CC.OO.	<i>Comisiones Obreras</i> (Workers' Committees) (Spain)
CESPE	<i>Centro Studi Politica Economica</i> (Centre for the Study of Political Economy) (Italy)
CESPI	<i>Centro Studi Politica Internazionale</i> (Centre for the Study of International Politics) (Italy)
CFDT	<i>Confédération française démocratique du travail</i> (French Democratic Federation of Labour)
CGIL	<i>Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro</i> (Italian General Confederation of Labour)
CGT	<i>Confédération générale du travail</i> (General Confederation of Labour) (France)
CISL	<i>Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori</i> (Italian Confederation of Labour Trade Unions)
CNS	<i>Central Nacional Sindicalista</i> (Central National Trade Union Organization) (Spain)
CNT	<i>Central Nacional del Trabajo</i> (Central National Labour Organization)
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
CPN	<i>Communistische Partij van Nederland</i> (Communist Party of the Netherlands)

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CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CRS	<i>Centro per la Riforma dello Stato</i> (Centre for the Reform of the State) (Italy)
DEVA	<i>Demokraattinen Vaihtoehto</i> (Democratic Alternative) (Finland)
DFFG	<i>De förenade FNL-grupperna</i> (The Combined FNL-Groups) (Sweden)
DKP	<i>Deutsche Kommunistische Partei</i> (German Communist Party) (FRG)
EAM	<i>Ethniko Apoleutherôtiko Metôpo</i> (National Liberation Front) (Greece)
EDA	<i>Eniaia Dêmokratikê Aristera</i> (United Democratic Left) (Greece)
ELAS	<i>Ethnikos Laikos Apoleutherotikos Stratos</i> (National Popular Liberation Army) (Greece)
EVC	<i>Eenheidsvakcentrale</i> (United Federation of Unions) (Netherlands)
FO	<i>Force ouvrière</i> (Workers' Strength) (France)
INSEE	<i>Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques</i>
IPSO	<i>Instituut voor Politiek en Sociaal Onderzoek</i> (Institute for Political and Social Research) (Netherlands)
IU	<i>Izquierda Unida</i> (United Left) (Spain)
KFML	<i>Kommunistiska förbundet marxist-leninisterna</i> (Communist League of Marxist-Leninists) (Sweden)
KKE	<i>Kommounistiko Komma Elladas</i> (Communist Party of Greece)
KPD	<i>Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands</i> (Communist Party of Germany) (FRG)
LCDTU	Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions (UK)
MFA	<i>Movimento das Forças Armadas</i> (Armed Forces Movement) (Portugal)
MUC	<i>Mesa por la Unidad de los Comunistas</i> (Platform for Communists' Unity) (Spain)
ND	<i>Nea Dêmokratia</i> (New Democracy) (Greece)
NVB	<i>Nederlandse Vrouwenbeweging</i> (Women's Movement of the Netherlands)
PASOK	<i>Panhellêniko Socialistiko Kinêma</i> (Panhellenic Socialist Movement) (Greece)
PCB	<i>Parti communiste de Belgique</i> (Communist Party of Belgium)

PCE	<i>Partido Comunista de España</i> (Communist Party of Spain)
PCF	<i>Parti communiste français</i> (French Communist Party)
PCI	<i>Partito Comunista Italiano</i> (Italian Communist Party)
PCP	<i>Partido Comunista do Portugal</i> (Communist Party of Portugal)
PCPE	<i>Partido Comunista de los Pueblos de España</i> (Communist Party of the Peoples of Spain)
PdA	<i>Partei der Arbeit</i> (Labour Party) (Switzerland)
PRD	<i>Partido Renovador Democrático</i> (Democratic Party of Renewal) (Portugal)
PREC	<i>Processo revolucionário em curso</i> (Revolutionary Process in Progress) (Portugal)
PSOE	<i>Partido Socialista Obrero Español</i> (Socialist Workers' Party of Spain)
SAP	<i>Socialdemokratiska Arbetarpartiet</i> (Social Democratic Party) (Sweden)
SDS	<i>Sozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund</i> (German Socialist Student League) (FRG)
SED	<i>Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands</i> (Socialist Unity Party of Germany) (GDR)
SFIO	<i>Section française de l'internationale ouvrière</i> (French Section of the Socialist International)
SHB	<i>Sozialistische Hochschulbund</i> (Socialist College League) (FRG)
SKDL	<i>Suomen Kansan Demokraattinen Liitto</i> (Finnish People's Democratic League)
SKP	<i>Suomen Kommunistinen Puolue</i> (Finnish Communist Party)
SOL	<i>Sosialistinen opiskelijaliitto</i> (Socialist Student Association) (Finland)
SPD	<i>Sozial-demokratische Partei Deutschlands</i> (Social Democratic Party of Germany) (FRG)
SSV	<i>Sveriges socialdemokratiska vänsterparti</i> (Social-Democratic Left Party) (Sweden)
SUN	<i>Socialistische Uitgeverij Nijmegen</i> (Socialist Publishing House, Nijmegen) (Netherlands)
TUC	Trades Union Congress (UK)
UCD	<i>Unión del Centro Democrático</i> (Union of the Democratic Centre) (Spain)
UCS	Upper Clyde Shipbuilders (UK)
UDP	<i>Union démocratique et progressiste</i> (Democratic and Progressive Union) (Belgium)

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UGT	<i>Unión General de Trabajadores</i> (General Workers' Union) (Spain)
UIL	<i>Unione Italiana del Lavoro</i> (Italian Labour Union)
USO	<i>Unión Sindical Obrera</i> (Workers' Trade Union) (Spain)
VPK	<i>Vänsterpartiet kommunisterna</i> (Left Party Communists) (Sweden)

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Introduction

The End of Bolshevism in Western Europe

Michael Waller and Meindert Fennema

The publication of this book highlights the recently celebrated seventieth anniversary of the October Revolution that brought the Bolsheviks to power in Russia.

It is ironical that today, at a time when the Soviet Union's image and standing in the world are possibly better than they have ever been since those revolutionary days, the fortunes of so many of the Western European communist parties should be in a state of crisis. It is ironical, too, that many of these parties, which have always set so much store by organizational unity, should today be beset by factional strife to at least the same extent as their bourgeois counterparts. This book examines the current malaise within Western European communism. It will be seen that this malaise has many sources: declining electoral performances, frequently ambivalent relationships with the Soviet Union, and a tendency towards organizational splits and strains are in fact but symptoms of a much broader and deeper phenomenon. Since the moment when these parties were born, in a multiple birth, of the division in the European Left brought about by the Russian revolution and formation of the Comintern, the political landscape in which they operate has changed out of all recognition. They have therefore had a problem of adaptation, and it will be seen in the chapters that follow that some communist parties have had greater success in adapting than have others.

It is worth spelling out some of the more prominent features of the problem of adaptation, since this will serve to highlight the themes that will be found to recur in the studies presented here of the experiences of individual parties.

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First of all, these parties have operated very much in an international context, and have had to take account of international factors much more than have their social democratic rivals. This has introduced complexities into their political stances that are all too familiar, but it has also aggravated the problem of adaptation. It is true that 'internationalism' has been interpreted rather narrowly as support for Soviet positions and Soviet ways of doing things, and it has proved difficult to escape this orientation, given the massive predominance of the Soviet Union, the country of the Great October, in the international movement to which these parties belong. But the tension between national and international goals and orientations, and the tendency since the turning-point of 1956 for the former set to be favoured, is amply illustrated in these pages.

Secondly, these are relatively old parties, old enough for the myths and practices of one generation to be a burden on successor generations. This is a problem for any political organization, but it has been compounded in the case of the communist parties by the defensive position into which they have in general been forced in the period since the Second World War. The tendency to withdraw 'into the fortress' – to quote a phrase that will appear frequently below – has invested the past with a certain aura, and has led often to a fear of change. When the future and the present are uncertain, the past becomes a source of comfort and support.

That the present is so uncertain is a third feature of the problem of adaptation that has faced the Western European communist parties. And this is a most surprising thing for parties that have a radical vocation and a view of the movement of history that is total in its scope. Around them, since the 1960s, has arisen a whole series of movements, parties and groups that share their radical vocation, but which the communist parties have, until recently and with rare exceptions, either ignored or execrated.

There are three reasons why this should be so. One is precisely the fact that the communist parties' view of the world is all-embracing. Since it provides its own answer to – along with everything else – problems of peace, the ecology, gender and ethnicity, there has been a tendency to write off external groups espousing these causes. The second is the 'class reductionism' of the communist parties' – that is, their tendency to subordinate all these problems, and the movements that grew up around them, to the class struggle and in particular to the vanguard organization of the class struggle. And thirdly, the communist parties of Western Europe are quite simply less radical than their basic philosophy would suggest, and in many, if not most, cases they have aided a corporatist process that necessarily casts them in the role of defenders of existing structures, and their policies tend to be derived from this stance. The state and the party systems of Europe stand high in their scale of values.

For these reasons, and no doubt others, the Western European communist parties have so far in most cases allowed a rising tide of extra-parliamentary contestation to pass them by, and the situation is exacerbated by the reinvigoration of the Trotskyist version of the Marxist–Leninist tradition. They have thus come, with few exceptions, to be hemmed in within an increasingly variegated European Left, ‘going it alone’ not only against the bourgeois political parties (including their long-standing social democratic rivals) but also against a more radical strand of Marxism–Leninism and even, in many cases, against new social groups and movements that are serving increasingly as the foremost channel of protest in Western – and indeed Eastern – Europe.

The Western European communist parties are unlikely to founder, individually or collectively, as a result of their present malaise. The crisis of adaptation through which most of them are passing has in some cases involved, for example, a move towards the ‘new social movements’, whilst certain parties, most notably the Italian, dealt rather successfully in the post-war period with problems of adaptation. But the malaise raises rather acutely the question of what ‘communism’ is to mean in Western European circumstances in the closing years of the twentieth century. It is open to any party that sports the Marxist label to claim to be basing its policies on a goal of the ‘radical transformation of society’; in fact it is bound to do so. It is a goal, however, that can be interpreted in a number of ways. The question facing the Western European communist parties is to what extent, in addressing themselves to an acute problem of adaptation, they can produce an interpretation that is distinctive from that of their social democratic rivals, and alive to new currents of protest.

In this book the experience of individual communist parties is examined. First, however, a treatment is offered of one particular aspect of the problem of adaptation that the communist parties of Western Europe face. In one area the past appears to weigh particularly heavily – that of party organization. True, the deadening influence of traditional democratic centralism on today’s parties is probably exaggerated. The Italian party has managed to combine organizational flexibility with a loose interpretation of democratic centralist norms. The material presented in this book will show, too, that the much-proclaimed organizational uniformity of communist parties accommodates very considerable variation. But there is no doubt that, in general, the practices associated with democratic centralism have worked in such a way as to enable party leaderships to resist challenges to their own power and to the orthodoxy that sustains that power. There is a paradox in the fact that democratic centralism has been defended with the argument that it is needed in order to react swiftly and effectively to events; yet by the way in which it works

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it acts at the same time as a barrier to change. To that extent adaptation, for communist parties, is no simple matter. It is to the practices associated with democratic centralism, and to the psychology that lies behind those practices, that we turn in the opening chapter.

Before that, however, it should be made clear what the term 'Bolshevism' means in this book. From their origins in the Russian revolutionary movement, and in the revolution itself, the ideas and practices of the Bolsheviks, in the formation of which Lenin played a crucial role, have been carried forward as a broad tradition that has constituted the dominant strand of the communist movement. Bolshevism has been defined, in historical terms, by the task that it has performed, which has been to mobilize the masses for the making of insurrectionary revolution, and for the subsequent process of national development that ruling communist parties have typically addressed. If it was Lenin who presided over the creation of Bolshevism, the Stalinist period in the Soviet Union gave it a particular form in which popular mobilization was attended by abuses of power that have become legendary.

Those abuses of power have overshadowed what was distinctive about the Leninist period, and have made it difficult for innovative spirits in communist parties to restore a form of popular mobilization that is clear of the trammels of Stalinism. The parties of Western Europe now broadly acknowledge the problems that Stalinism has caused them. The question that this book addresses is whether there is any sense in which Bolshevism offers them, as it were, a ledge to withdraw to in their retreat – fitful, and not universal – from Stalinism. Or is there no ledge, and does any retreat from Stalinism lead to a slide either into social democracy or into the abyss?

It would be appropriate in this introduction also to give some advance indication of the key themes that will emerge from the chapters on the individual parties. There is, first, the tension already mentioned between proposals for an increasing integration into the pluralist party systems of Western Europe on the one hand, and on the other the countervailing tendency to hold back from accepting the full implications of that strategy and to withdraw into familiar and traditional strongholds of a local, syndicalist and cultural nature, together with a reaffirmation of the link with the Soviet Union. But secondly, it will be seen that, with a few important exceptions that prove the rule, those strongholds have been undermined, in particular by the shrinking of the traditional working class constituency of these parties in heavy industry. Thirdly, a major shift in the thinking and the assumptions of the Left in Western Europe, especially among the young, took place during and after the 1960s, bringing often volatile new forces – most notably students, and workers in state-dependent sectors – into the communist parties, but

bringing also a problem of relationships with new social movements concerned with issues of peace, the ecology, gender and ethnicity, problems that were in part a matter of party structures and in part a matter of attitudes.

If any particular period is worth noting in this story it is the 1970s, when so many of these issues came to a head. It was then, too, that the Spanish, Portuguese and Greek parties emerged into legality. If the experience of these three parties has seemed at times untypical, it is in good part because their circumstances have themselves been untypical, and it will be seen in the chapters devoted to those parties how their individual stories add an important perspective to the more general canvas of the recent development of European communism, of which they constitute an important part.

It was in the 1970s, too, that there emerged another key theme – Eurocommunism – which might appear to be less prominent than expected in this book. If that is the case, it has not been a matter of editorial intervention. The authors of the various chapters have given their accounts using the terminology and the concepts that are current in the parties that they deal with, and Eurocommunism has been much more a term used in works about communism than in the parlance of the communist parties themselves. In a very general sense, the term encapsulates the forces for change within Western European communism. Over-written in Western commentary when the term first appeared, Eurocommunism has never had very precise contours, and apart from a few summit meetings of party leaders and a sprinkling of international conferences (involving parties from every continent) it has never had an inter-party organizational existence. In a few cases, however, the term has been prominent in the internal life of the communist parties treated in this book – for example in the Spanish party in the 1970s, and in the British party more permanently.

The term ‘Eurocommunism’ is notoriously vague in its reference. It will be found in this book to indicate a strategy along three dimensions. First, and foremost, it has referred to a process wherein communist parties have taken their distance from the Soviet Union. Secondly, it has connoted an acceptance of pluralism before and after the achievement of a radical transformation of society, and has thus involved the abandoning of the notion of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Thirdly, it has referred in general to a greater integration into the contemporary political processes of Western Europe, as opposed to a sectarian, ‘go it alone’ policy. It is thus best seen as a strategic rather than an organizational matter, a set of assumptions that are shared, in very broad terms, by one side in the general debate that has gripped almost all the communist parties of Western Europe in recent years.