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The Communist Party of New Zealand in the Era of the Comintern: A survey and report*

New Zealand is a former colony of Britain. Its legal and political institutions are based on the Westminster model. Until 1951 there was a bicameral parliamentary system which between 1912 and 1935 was administered by a series of conservative governments. From 1935 until 1949 there was for the first time a government formed by the New Zealand Labour Party. Through most of the twentieth century the country's economy has been based on agricultural production, relying especially on the export of dairy products, frozen meat and wool. From 1921 to 1945 the population increased by some 400,000 to a figure exceeding 1,700,000. Despite the dominance of agricultural New Zealand is a highly urbanised society. By 1926 one third of the population lived in the four main cities and over half the population lived in towns containing more than 8,000 people.

The Communist Party of New Zealand (CPNZ) was formally established at a conference in Wellington over Easter 1921. Despite its longevity, the history of the Party is still grossly under-researched. There is still no book length history. The little existing literature has largely been written by university graduate students, enthusiastic amateurs, and past or present members of the Party (from the mid 1960s par*ties*). Given these circumstances, it is not surprising that the literature is disappointing, and very patchy in its coverage. However, even within such a limited body of material there are differences not only in the degree, but also in the nature of the treatment of the Party. This article will discuss this literature, then outline the sources on which a more substantial history could be constructed, and finally outline the main contours of the CPNZ's history.

1. Historiographic Progress and Problems

Professional historians, and academics, have been conspicuously absent in the writing of communist history in New Zealand. Far too often the attitude has been that the Communist Party is irrelevant and not worthy of study. For example, R.S.Milne in a major book *Political Parties in New Zealand* relegates his principle reference to the CPNZ to a footnote. The Communist Party, he argues, "...has never been more than a curiosity value in New Zealand."[1]

Unfortunately it would seem most New Zealand historians have not been particularly curious. In most general histories on New Zealand the CPNZ is dismissed with "throw away" lines, if it is mentioned at all. In his contribution to the recent *Oxford Illustrated History of New Zealand* Miles Fairburn talks of a waning of left radicalism in the 1920s without mentioning the Communist Party in the entire chapter. The only manifestation of "left radicalism" he sees at this time is the Labour Party.[2]

There is no sign of an awareness of the complexity and diversity of the political left in New Zealand at the time, whether within or outside the the Labour Party, let alone the role and position of the Communist Party.

To paint an absolutely black picture would be unfair, some published writing does touch on the history of the CPNZ in a more meaningful way. However, much of this writing is very narrow in focus and limited to a number of frequently covered areas such as the Party's involvement in the Unemployed Workers Movement

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* The argument outlined below is currently being developed at greater length in my PhD Thesis, "The Communist Party of New Zealand from its origins until 1946." I would like to thank Phyllis Herda, Malcolm McKinnon and Bert Roth for reading and commenting on this article. The final product has benefited from their suggestions.

[1] R.S. Milne, *Political Parties in New Zealand* (Oxford, 1966), p. 37.

[2] Miles Fairburn, "The Farmers Take Over", in Keith Sinclair (ed.), *The Oxford Illustrated History of New Zealand* (Auckland, 1990), pp.185-209.

(UWM) of the 1930s,[3] and its responses to World War II, especially the period 1939-41.[4] Another area where some good work has been done is in trade union history.[5]

While in many cases making a valuable contribution to the history of the CPNZ, this body of writing has a number of deficiencies. Firstly, the writers treat the Communist Party only as an actor in other events or organisations, rather than as a subject worthy of study in itself. In addition, by focusing on such limited aspects of the CPNZ's activity a very unbalanced and superficial picture of the party emerges. Thirdly, there is little attempt to understand the nature and outcome of internal processes within the Party. Such processes are usually assumed rather than demonstrated, and consequently not researched in any detail. Fourthly, and equally problematic, sources are often treated uncritically. For example, many people cite authoritatively the autobiography of former CPNZ General Secretary Sid Scott[6] without demonstrating any awareness of the limitations and potential problems associated with his writing. By the time his memoir was published, Scott had become a vociferous critic of the communist movement.

All these characteristics lead to the perpetuation of certain myths, misunderstandings and, in some cases, distortions in the portrayal of the CPNZ. The Party is often depicted as an undifferentiated or homogeneous whole, swinging from position to position with the changes in line from "Moscow". Communists are generally portrayed as fickle and manipulative, and influenced by illegitimate external forces. For example, Paul Harris refers to communist "engineering", "toeing the Comintern line", and argues the CPNZ's close involvement adversely affected the UWM.[7] This portrayal is almost a caricature of what 'everyone knows' communists to be like, however, few have bothered to study much evidence to determine the validity of the stereotype. The stereotype is taken for the reality.

Such generalisations are as much a political as an historical statement. They are imported from overseas historical literature and the prevailing political culture,[8] then applied to particular contexts without demonstrating their validity or relevance. For example Erik Olssen dismisses the contribution of the CPNZ's leading theoritician, Sid Scott, to the debate on socialism in New Zealand on the grounds that the distinguishing characteristics of the Third International were apparently "...ideological fundamentalism, a deep commitment to

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[3] See Paul Harris, "The New Zealand Unemployed Workers Movement, 1931-39: Gisborne and the Relief Workers Strike", *New Zealand Journal of History*, 10, 2, 1976, pp. 130-142; R.T.Robertson, "Isolation, Ideology and Impotence: Organisations for the Unemployed during the Great Depression, 1930-35", *New Zealand Journal of History*, 13, 2, 1979, pp. 149-164, and his thesis, "The Tyranny of Circumstances: Responses to Unemployment in New Zealand, 1929-35" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Otago, 1978), with particular reference to Dunedin; and P.G.Morris, "Unemployed Organisations in New Zealand, 1926-39" (MA thesis, Victoria College, University of New Zealand, 1949).

[4] See F.L.W.Wood, *Political and External Affairs: The New Zealand People at War* (Wellington,1958); Nancy Taylor, *The Home Front:The New Zealand People at War* (Wellington, 1986); David Grant, *Out in the Cold: Pacifists and Conscientious Objectors in New Zealand during World War II* (Auckland, 1986).

[5] Bert Roth has made a valuable contribution here. See for example his general history *Trade Unions in New Zealand: Past and Present* (Wellington, 1973). Len Richardson's much awaited history of the New Zealand Miners Federation promises to make a significant contribution also. For an early exploration on this topic see his article, "Class, Community and Conflict: The Blackball Miners Union 1920-31", in Len Richardson and David McIntyre (eds.), *Provincial Perspectives: Essays in Honour of W.J.Gardiner* (Christchurch, 1980), pp.106-127.

[6] Sidney W. Scott, *Rebel in a Wrong Cause* (Auckland, 1960).

[7] Harris, "The New Zealand Unemployed Workers Movement", pp. 131, 138, and 139. The contradiction between Harris's contention of "the left" "engineering" the UWM into existence yet also adversely affecting it does not seem to have struck him! If the first proposition is correct, then the UWM would not have existed without the CPNZ! Are we to assume the very existence of the UWM is "adverse"? I think not.

[8] I mean this in two senses, firstly, the political culture of the historians' own time and, secondly, of the time they were writing about. In both cases this is overwhelming hostile to, and suspicious of, the Communist movement.

revolutionary action, and a strange insensitivity to the aspirations and values of the very 'workers' they claimed to lead...". His 'evidence' for these conclusions on communist theory and practice in New Zealand consists of a biography of Rosa Luxemburg, a history of the Comintern and a history of the Communist Party of Great Britain.[9] All worthy works in their own right, but hardly the stuff to tell us *anything* about the New Zealand experience and the contribution of Sid Scott to the debate on socialism in this part of the world. Historians have too often recklessly ascribed to the CPNZ overseas practice and experience and also put forward their own essentially political assumptions. By and large these stand as a substitute for historically grounded generalisations.

Beyond this body of literature there are a few people who have treated the CPNZ as a valid subject in itself. These writers have made a valuable contribution to our understanding of the history of communism in New Zealand. However, their cumulative efforts have given us only a bare outline rather than a detailed history.

The first text in this group is Joseph Powell's thesis, "The History of a Working Class Party".[10] Although it is used as a standard text for the history of the CPNZ up to 1940, it is very thin on detail, has a number of factual errors and is almost exclusively based on published sources, severely restricting its scope. The second text is Sid Scott's autobiography Scott was apparently asked by the Party to write a history of the CPNZ, unfortunately before much progress could be made he left the Party in a storm of controversy never completing his study. His autobiography is essentially a self-justification, but serves with the Powell thesis as the closest we have to a history of the Party. Scott did publish a number of brief articles on the CPNZ's history in the *New Zealand Labour Review* during the early 1950s.[11] Finally in this group there is a series of articles by Bert Roth, New Zealand's leading historian of trade unions.[12] Roth has undoubtedly made a greater contribution to the history of the CPNZ than any other individual. It is significant that Roth has never been a "professional historian" and has made his contribution as an enthusiastic, and amazingly prolific, "part timer".

Although the writing of these three individuals is often cited authoritatively by other authors, even they are subject to some of the shortcomings which were discussed above, especially the tendency to generalise with insufficient recourse to evidence and a resultant perpetuation of inaccuracies and distortions. One example neatly demonstrating this point is the perpetuation of a fundamentally incorrect version of the foundation of the CPNZ through several generations of writing.

There is almost complete consensus among commentators, they agree the Party was essentially the end product of the development of the New Zealand Marxian Association, formed at a conference in Christchurch at the end of 1918. The new Party, they tell us, resulted from a transformation of the Marxian Association into a new form of organisation, the Communist Party of New Zealand.

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[9] Erik Olssen, "W.T.Mills, E.J.B.Allen, J.A.Lee and Socialism in New Zealand", *New Zealand Journal of History*, 10, 2, 1976, p. 112.

[10] J.R.Powell, "The History of a Working Class Party" (MA thesis, Victoria College, University of New Zealand, 1948). There are a number of other unpublished theses and essays which have made a valuable but far more limited contribution. These include, Julie Hynes, "The Communist Party in Otago, 1940-47" (research essay, post graduate diploma in history, University of Otago, 1979); Janell Grady, "The Reds Who Made the Beds: The attitude of the Communist Party of New Zealand towards women, and its work amongst women in the period, 1933-39" (MA research paper, University of Auckland, 1983); Denis Carter, "The Attitude of the New Zealand Communist Party to Foreign Affairs, 1930-40" (M.Phil. research essay, University of Auckland, 1981); J.B.Dawson, "The New Zealand Communist Party: Ideology and Tactics" (BA (Hons) research essay, University of Otago, 1976).

[11] Sid Scott, "NZ Communist Party 1938-48", *NZ Labour Review*, July 1953, pp.19-23, and August 1953, pp. 6-12.

[12] Herbert Roth, "The Communist Vote in New Zealand", *Political Science* [Wellington], 17, 2, 1965, pp. 26-35; "The distribution of Radicalism in New Zealand, 1890-57", *New Zealand Geographer*, 15, April 1959, pp.76-83; "Marxism in New Zealand: One Hundred Years", *New Zealand Monthly Review*, Part 1, July 1983, pp 3-7, Part 2, August 1983, pp. 5-8; "The October Revolution and New Zealand Labour" *Political Science*, 13, 2, 1961, pp. 45-55; "How Marxism Came to New Zealand: a Note on Ideological Diffusion", *Political Science*, 5, 1, 1953, pp. 56-59; "New Zealand", in Witold S. Sworakowski (ed.), *World Communism: A Handbook, 1918-1965* (Stanford, 1973), pp. 337-340.

The origins of this consensus appear to lie in two texts produced from within the CPNZ itself. The first, by Gordon Watson, was produced in the late 1930s as part of a Party study course and later published in the *New Zealand Labour Review*.[13] The second text is a letter from Andy Barras, a foundation member of the CPNZ, to Sid Scott. An edited version was also published in the *New Zealand Labour Review*.[14] Both texts portray the Marxian Association as central to the establishment of the CPNZ, and are themselves still widely read. Each having been recently re-published by the Socialist Unity Party, one of the fragments of the "old" CPNZ.[15] More significantly the texts have provided the basis for almost all other accounts of the foundation of the CPNZ. Sometimes the influence is quite overt, as in Powell's thesis, where he cites the Watson document as authority for his account of the Party's formation.[16] Even in Sid Scott's autobiography one hears the voices of Barras and Watson coming through, despite the fact that Scott was himself a foundation member.[17] More significantly many historians rely on the two texts indirectly, and perhaps unwittingly, by using either Powell or Scott (or both) as their principal source of information.[18]
Other accounts, especially those of Roth, are not so easily linked directly to these documents, but his work has been influenced by their interpretation, he seldom moves very far from the basic pattern and framework outlined by them.[19] Even contemporary communist groups who believe they carry forward the traditions of the CPNZ do no more than perpetuate the received version.[20] The fact that the received version is moving into yet another

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[13] Gordon Watson, "Pages in NZ Communist History", *New Zealand Labour Review*, October 1952, pp. 20-24.

[14] Andy Barras, "Origins of the New Zealand Communist Party", *New Zealand Labour Review*, December 1949, pp. 27-29.

[15] See *Socialist Politics*, 86/4, 1986.

[16] Powell, "The History of a Working Class Party", p. 5.

[17] Scott, *Rebel in a Wrong Cause*, p. 39.

[18] For examples see: Josephine Milburn, "Socialism and Social Reform in Twentieth Century New Zealand", *Political Science*, 12, 2, September 1960, pp. 168-190; Patrick O'Farrell, *Harry Holland: Militant Socialist* (Canberra, 1964), pp. 109-110 and 115; Conrad Bollinger in *Against the Wind: The Story of the New Zealand Seamen's Union* (Wellington, 1968), pp. 130-131.

[19] See for example his: "The October Revolution and New Zealand Labour", pp. 45-55; "How Marxism Came to New Zealand", *Political Science*, 5, March 1953, p. 59; "American Influences on the New Zealand Labour Movement", *Historical Studies: Australia and New Zealand*, 9, 36, 1961, p. 419; "Marx and New Zealand: A Hundred Years", *New Zealand Monthly Review*, August 1983, p. 5; "New Zealand", in Sworakowski (ed.), *World Communism: A Handbook 1918-1965*, p. 337; and *Trade Unions in New Zealand: Past and Present* (Wellington, 1973), p. 158.

[20] The Communist movement in New Zealand began to fragment during the 1960s, see R.H. Brookes, "The CPNZ and the Sino-Soviet Split", in J. Miller and T.H. Rigby (eds.), *The Disintegrating Monolith* (Canberra, 1965), pp. 165-183; and Bert Roth, "Moscow, Peking and the NZ Communists", *Politics* [Sydney], 4 November 1969, pp.168-185, and "Fragmentation on the Left", *Comment*, 27 June 1966, pp. 13-17. The perpetuation of the version by the "fragments" is evidenced by the already noted reprint of the two texts by the Socialist Unity Party, and is confirmed in the interpretation in their *Communism in New Zealand: An Illustrated History* (Auckland, 1986). The Communist Party of New Zealand, until recently Albania aligned, in their 60th anniversary issue of the *People's Voice*, October 1981, relies largely on the two texts. The Workers Communist League, now disbanded into a loose grouping called Left Currents, also conveyed the conventional portrayal in their CPNZ 60th anniversary commemoration published in their journal *Unity*, March, 1981, pp. 6-7.

generation is disturbing.[21]

This account of the CPNZ's formation has been perpetuated for two related reasons. Firstly, a reluctance by many writers to research the history of the CPNZ in any meaningful way, and secondly, a mistaken belief that there is a paucity of relevant primary material to consult. If one does go to the primary sources, it quickly becomes apparent that there are far more than generally assumed.[22] More importantly, one finds that the received version is inaccurate. Rather than being a product of the evolution of the Marxian Association, the CPNZ was in fact the product of a rival socialist tradition centred in Wellington. Both tendencies grew out of the old Socialist Party of New Zealand, but were quite different in their outlook. The Marxian Association adhered strictly to the ideas of the Socialist Party of Great Britain, while the Wellington socialists were rather more eclectic, at times closer to a syndicalist perspective than anything else. The Marxian Association was not irrelevant to the formation of the CPNZ, but those from this tradition who joined the new Party were essentially rejecting that tradition rather than taking it to its logical conclusion as the received version would have us believe.[23]

This discussion is not intended to belittle the existing literature, rather to point out its limitations, especially the tendency to uncritically reproduce received interpretations. Essentially what is needed is for historians to consult the primary material and produce the hard data from which we can more securely generalise. This may seem a curiously old-fashioned plea in light of recent trends in historical writing, but one cannot put the cart before the horse, history is after all a discipline where generalisations are still made from researching primary material. Communist history in New Zealand is still at this basic fact finding stage.

2. Sources

With the paucity of writing based on detailed primary sources one could be forgiven for thinking that there was a dearth of such material. There is in fact a wealth of sources from which to study the history of the CPNZ.

a) Archives:

While there are no 'official' Communist Party Archives in New Zealand, there is still a considerable amount of material which has been preserved. The type of material includes branch minutes, correspondence, conference reports, bulletins and circulars. There are some significant gaps in the coverage, but given the extremely haphazard way the material has been collected and preserved there is a surprising scope and coverage. The most significant collections and their location are listed below:

- P.W.G. McAra Papers, University of Auckland Library;
- H.O. Roth Papers, Private Collection, Auckland: this collection includes the papers of a number of leading communists; the most notable are Dick Griffin, Vic Wilcox, Fred Freeman and Wally Jamieson;
- Gerald Griffin Papers, F.P. Walsh Papers, and Conrad Bollinger Papers, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington;
- Jack Locke Papers, University of Canterbury Library, Christchurch;
- CPNZ Dunedin Branch Papers, Hocken Library, University of Otago, Dunedin.

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[21] Roger Ellis, "The Disintegration of the Communist Party of New Zealand", unpublished paper presented to the NZ Political Studies Association Conference, Wellington, May 1989, p. 1.

[22] It must be admitted that some important material has only become available relatively recently.

[23] The process of formation of the CPNZ can be seen in the minutes of the Wellington Socialist Party, Gerald Griffin Papers, Acc 86-43, Alexander Turnbull Library, item 2/20; also, E. Beardsley, letter to the Secretary of the Communist Party of Australia, no date [1923?], in Conrad Bollinger Papers, MS 2151, Alexander Turnbull Library, folder 442. For the Marxian Association, see the minutes of the Marxian Students Conference, December 28, 1918, Gerald Griffin Papers, item 3/2.

b) Published Party Sources:

For a very small party, the CPNZ has been remarkably prolific in terms of publication.

Newspapers: The first communist newspaper in New Zealand was *The Communist* [1924-26] published in Auckland. It was the "official" paper for only a few issues, a split in the Auckland communist ranks saw those producing the paper retain control after they had been expelled from the CPNZ. The next Party publication was the *Workers Vanguard* [1926-29], which was initially produced in Blackball and subsequently Wellington. The *Vanguard* was superseded by *The Red Worker* during 1929, which, like the *Vanguard*, was a monthly publication. The CPNZ's first weekly superseded the *Red Worker* in 1933 under the title *Workers Weekly*. This was produced in Wellington on the Party press until 1938, when it was moved to Auckland. In 1939 the *Weekly* was transformed into the *People's Voice*, which remained the title of the CPNZ paper, and in fact is still produced by one of the fragments of the old CPNZ. For the most part the press has been legal, although in May 1940 the *People's Voice* was banned as seditious by the Labour Government. In its place there were area based underground publications and a legal paper the *Industrial Worker* which was essentially confined to industrial matters for fear of being suppressed. From mid-1941 the Party published *In Print*, a weekly paper which was transformed into the *People's Voice*, when the ban on the Party press was finally lifted in 1943. In addition to the main Party paper, the CPNZ for a while produced a paper for women, *The Working Woman* [1934-36], which was superseded by *Woman Today* [1937-39], a publication less closely associated with the Party, in line with the Popular Front ideology.

Theoretical journals: The first journal was produced in 1933 under the title *New Zealand Labour Monthly*. This was later transformed into the *New Zealand Communist Review*, which also appeared monthly. During World War Two, when the restriction on the Party press were lifted, a new theoretical journal was published under the title *In Print*, which in 1945 was re-titled *New Zealand Labour Review*.

Pamphlets: The CPNZ was a prolific producer of pamphlets, especially from the early 1930s, when they purchased their own printing press. The earliest known publication of the CPNZ was *What is the Communist Party?*, produced in 1921, copies of which appear no longer to survive.[24] Most of the pamphlets were written by New Zealanders, including Sid Scott, Gordon Watson and Harold Silverstone, who were the Party's leading theoriticians. However, there were a number of New Zealand editions of overseas pamphlets and the reproduction of a number of Comintern and RILU (Profintern) publications.[25] Some of the most significant pamphlets are described in a bibliography compiled by Pamela Dansby-Scott.[26]

c) Memoirs, Biographies, etc.:

The most significant published memoir is Sid Scott's autobiography. The only other published book length memoir is Jim Edwards, *Break Down These Bars*.[27] Edwards was a communist leader of the Auckland UWM. There is also a lengthy unpublished reminiscence of Alex Galbraith, a foundation member of the Party and a leading figure until his death in 1959,[28] and a book which brings together biographical information on, and a

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[24] See Ken Baxter, letter to Bert Roth, October 6, 1969, Roth Collection.

[25] For example, *The Programme of the Communist International*, (Wellington, 1929); *Strike Strategy and Tactics* (Wellington, ca 1930), a publication of the resolutions of the Strassburg RILU Congress; *Labour Socialism in New Zealand (Paradise of the Second International)*, (Wellington, 1934), a reprint from the journal *Communist International*.

[26] Pamela Dansby-Scott, *A Selective Bibliography of the Communist Party of New Zealand, 1920-57* (Library School, National Library of New Zealand, Wellington, 1974).

[27] Jim Edwards, *Break Down These Bars* (Auckland, 1987). This was published long after the death of Edwards.

[28] There seem to be several slightly different versions of this memoir, copies are in the P.W.G. McAra Papers, University of Auckland Library.

selection of writings by, Gordon Watson, the leading Party intellectual who was killed in action in 1945.[29] In addition to this, there is the occasional short reminiscence published in the Communist Party newspapers and journals.

Beyond this, the most interesting and valuable source of personal recollection is oral history interviews. The leading collector of oral history has been Doug Crosado who has made extensive interviews of a significant number of communists including most significantly John Mitchell, Mavis Drennan, George Jackson and Ella Ayo. Since the mid-1970s, when Crosado began his work, others have begun to rely at least in part on interview material. The most significant example is Janell Grady in her thesis on women and the CPNZ in the 1930s. The Alexander Turnbull Library have received the Crosado tapes, and with this have the beginnings of a major oral history archive on the history of the left in New Zealand.

d) Non Party Sources:

There is a considerable amount of material on the CPNZ contained in the records of other organisations. There are two key categories of such material:

Labour movement: The records of other labour organisations such as Trade Unions, Trades Councils, the Alliance of Labour, the Federation of Labour, Labour Party branches, Labour Representative Councils and the Labour Party Executive all have relevant material. Communists were active in many of these organisations and their actions are recorded. Such records also contain correspondence to and from the Communist Party, and the discussions about communist policy and actions by these organisations themselves.[30]

State agencies: From 1920 the Police conducted systematic political surveillance on radical organisations, especially the CPNZ. The Army also undertook political surveillance from 1919. The relevant Police records are now almost exclusively in the hands of the New Zealand Security Intelligence Service (SIS),[31] who refuse to grant access for researchers.[32] There are a few items which did not reach the hands of the SIS, these include copies of the Police Commissioner's Weekly Intelligence Summary to the Prime Minister during World War II, and a log book on West Coast revolutionary organisations. These indicate that the SIS material will be a major source when, and if, it is made available to researchers. In addition to the Police material, there is material in the archives of a number of other state departments including the External Affairs, Army and Prime Ministers Departments.

3. Periodisation and Historical Contours

What follows is a brief outline of the main contours of that history derived from secondary writing and supplemented by material from my own primary research. The history of the CPNZ in the era of the Comintern can be divided into several periods, each defined in part by international developments, but also by developments within New Zealand.

a) 1921-28:

Historians agree that the years from foundation until 1927-28 were characterised by the struggle to build the Party. The CPNZ in the years immediately after its foundation was little more than a loose affiliation of communist groups, a national party in name only. The main centres of Party activity were Wellington, where the headquarters were situated, Christchurch, Napier, and Auckland. These groups had only limited contact with each other and differed in their activity and to some extent their ideology. The leadership, like the party as a

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[29] Elsie Locke (ed.), *Gordon Watson. His Life and Writing* (Auckland, 1949).

[30] At least some records of such organisations are held in each of the leading archive institutions in the country. Some of the Labour Party records are still in the hands of the Party Headquarters in Wellington.

[31] The SIS took over the political surveillance role from the Police in 1956.

[32] Since 1989, I have been engaged in an as yet unsuccessful attempt to gain access to the material held by the SIS.

whole, was unstable. There were several changes in Party Secretary in the first few years.

Membership levels were subject to significant fluctuations, but would not have exceeded50 in the very early years. The social composition of the Party is difficult to assess with any real certainty, however certain patterns seem clear. By and large they hold true for the history of the communist movement in New Zealand until after WWII. The first characteristic is the relative youth of party members and leaders when compared to the Labour Party, especially in the early years of the CPNZ. There does appear some merit in O'Farrells suggestion of a generational conflict within the New Zealand labour movement,[33] although evidence and research on this matter is very limited. Secondly, a very limited ethnic composition, when compared to similar communist parties such as the Communist Party of Australia (CPA). Like the bulk of New Zealand's European population, most Party members were of British derivation, whether by birth or lineage. The main exception being a significant Irish component, especially in Wellington. However, this diminished as a proportion of the membership from the late 1920s. Maori, the indigenous people of New Zealand, have never been a significant presence in the Party. It was not until the 1930s that a real effort was made to attract Maori members, and then only after the prompting of the Comintern.[34] For a short while in the 1940s there was a Maori branch in Wellington, but its life appears to have been short. Thirdly, membership was overwhelming male. While there were women prominent in the Party leadership in almost every period, for example Hetty Weitzel (1921-22), Sophie Doyle (late 1920s) and Elsie Locke (1930s and 1940s), this was the exception rather than the rule. There has never been a woman National Secretary of the Party. Lastly, in terms of class composition the CPNZ has been predominantly, though not exclusively, a party of working-class members. While there has always been a middle-class element, they have always been a minority, although some like Gordon Watson did rise to the leadership level.

While the CPNZ has itself always been a legal party, the state has consistently acted to hamper its activity, especially with regard to restrictions on the importation of literature, usually under sections of the War Regulations Continuance Act (1920), which stayed on the statute books until 1947. Prosecutions for speaking and selling proscribed literature were common place, especially in the early years, and was to be a persistent problem until well into the 1940s.[35]

In the early years key sections of the communist movement on the West Coast remained aloof from the CPNZ and in April 1922 formed a separate West Coast Communist Federation (WCCF). The WCCF to some extent continued the Marxian Association tradition, which had been rejected by the CPNZ. It was influenced in this direction by a visiting Canadian radical Jack Macdonald and also the previous connection of some members to the earlier movement. The WCCF questioned the need for a Communist International.[36]

The key issue in dispute between the CPNZ and the WCCF was the correct relationship to the New Zealand Labour Party (NZLP), the main social democrat organisation in New Zealand. The CPNZ favoured working with and within the Labour Party, while the WCCF was uncompromisingly hostile, especially to the idea of the affiliation to the Labour Party, which the CPNZ tried unsuccessfully to do in 1924. This debate is one of the key themes of the history of the CPNZ. The relationship with the NZLP has always been problematic, with the Party radiating periodically between the desire for unity and cooperation, on the one hand, and separatism and hostility to the Labour Party, on the other.

In the early years of the CPNZ the broad labour movement, while sceptical and suspicious of the communists, was generally willing to cooperate with them. Early campaigns, such as the Jim Larkin Release

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[33] P.J. O'Farrell, "The Russian Revolution and the Labour Movements of Australia and New Zealand", *International Review of Social History*, 8, 1963, pp.177-197.

[34] See for example, "Resolution on the Tasks of the Communist Party of New Zealand", 1928, Roth Collection, and "Special Letter to New Zealand Comrades, from the Communist International", *New Zealand Labour Monthly*, March 1934. The Comintern also suggested a focus on Samoa as a colonial issue.

[35] For a discussion of one early incident, see Roger Openshaw, "A Spirit of Bolshevism: The Weitzel Case of 1921 and its Impact on the New Zealand Education System", *Political Science*, 33, 2, December 1981, pp. 127-139.

[36] On the WCCF see, the minutes of the West Coast Communist Federation Conference, Gerald Griffin Papers, item 3/2. The reference to the Comintern is in the minutes of the Wellington Communist Party Branch, April 21, 1922, Gerald Griffin Papers, item 3/2.

Campaign, the Russian Famine Relief Committee and the work to remove the ban on working-class literature, all saw cooperation between sections of the labour movement regardless of ideology. The CPNZ had influence in a number of unions especially the Christchurch Printing Trades Union and the Seamen's Union, and on local Trades Councils, especially that in Christchurch. They were also tolerated within the Labour Party.

By late 1924 the party was in poor shape both organisationally and financially, some members even questioned whether they should continue as a political party. There was still a lack of national cohesion and in some areas, especially Auckland, there were rival communist groups competing with each other.

Two key changes pushed the CPNZ down the path of greater cohesion, organisation and therefore viability. The first was the decision of the December 1924 conference to dissolve the Party and instead become the New Zealand section of the Communist Party of Australia. This arrangement lasted until late 1926, when national autonomy was regained, after an extensive organising tour by CPA representative, Norman Jeffery. The CPA was by far the most significant international influence on the CPNZ in the 1920s, and perhaps in the whole history of the Party. The second change was a move against the communists by the Labour Party. At their 1925 conference the NZLP instituted a membership pledge which effectively banned communists from membership. The next year saw another change which meant that communists could not represent affiliated trade unions at the Labour Party conference or at the local district organisations. These moves were accompanied by a particularly bitter verbal campaign against the CPNZ by leading Labour figures Peter Fraser and Bob Semple, and also a move against communists in the trade union movement.

Both these changes served to bolster organisation and group identity within the CPNZ. The Party was given another boost in 1925, when the West Coast Communists decided to join up with the CPNZ, bringing with them a dominant influence in the important West Coast Miners Unions.

By 1927 the Party had a membership of around 100, a relatively successful monthly newspaper *The Workers Vanguard* and considerable influence in the trade union movement, especially in the West Coast Miners Unions and the Seamen's Union. A communist initiated "Hands Off China" campaign had been a remarkable success, with the sale of over 3,000 copies of a pamphlet on the issue.[37] As an organisation the Party had made considerable progress. It was no longer an exaggeration to speak of a Communist Party of New Zealand as it had been in 1921.

b) 1928-35:

Most historians argue that the period 1928-35 was one of Comintern inspired sectarianism. This is only partly accurate.[38] The Party had not initially been affiliated to the Comintern. Some writers suggest the first direct contact was via George Marks, who visited New Zealand in 1921-22. He is said to have had credentials from Moscow.[39] Evidence for this is thin, Marks did organise a Russian Famine Relief Campaign, but there is no evidence he initiated discussion of the Comintern. One of the Auckland splinter groups falsely claimed to be the New Zealand section of the Comintern, but in reality during the mid-1920s the CPNZ was only connected to the Comintern indirectly via the CPA. It was not until 1928 that the CPNZ was represented in its own right. That year Dick Griffin, the principal party leader for much of this period, attended the Eighth Comintern Congress as CPNZ delegate, beginning a formal association with the central body of world revolution.

It is generally agreed by historians that the connection and its timing was disastrous for the tiny CPNZ. The linkage came, when the so called "Third Period" doctrine was being consolidated in the Comintern, and is said to have propelled the CPNZ into a period of barren sectarianism lasting until 1935-6. This period more than any other, with the exception of 1939-41, is portrayed as one where the CPNZ had an uncritical dependence on "the dictates of Moscow".[40]

There can be no doubting the significance of Comintern influence in this period. There were at least two New Zealanders who studied at the Lenin School, most importantly Fred Freeman, who became

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[37] Hands Off China Anti-War Organisation, *Hands Off China - No Intervention* (Auckland, 1927).

[38] See for example Scott, *Rebel in a Wrong Cause*, chs. 5 and 6; Powell, "The History of a Working Class Party", esp. chs. 5 and 6; NZSUP, *Communism in New Zealand*, pp.19-23.

[39] See Scott, *Rebel in a Wrong Cause*, p. 41 and Powell, "The History of a Working Class Party", p. 14.

[40] Hynes, "The Communist Party in Otago", 1940-47, p. 11.

General-Secretary of the Party on his return from Moscow in 1933, and Nellie Scott.[41] There were others who visited the Soviet Union, including Alex Galbraith, who attended the RILU Congress in 1930.[42] There was also communication and "instructions" from the Comintern to the CPNZ. For example the "Resolution on the Tasks of the Communist Party of New Zealand", brought back to New Zealand by Dick Griffin.[43] These communications and contacts with the Comintern were obviously very important in shaping the CPNZ perspective and their actions. But all the actions of the CPNZ were not simply a translation of Comintern "dictates" or precipitated by some external influence. CPNZ sectarianism in this period also had domestic sources, most particularly as a response to the moves of the leaders of the Labour Party and trade unions against communists from the mid-1920s. The "Third Period" doctrine merely confirmed for the CPNZ the things they had already concluded from the actions of the so-called "social-fascists". The Comintern connection gave them a language to use, and undoubtedly took the hostility to an unfortunate new height, but the basic conflict was home grown.

The period 1928-35 was one of mixed fortunes for the CPNZ, although perhaps not as barren and negative as many suggest. Roth argues correctly, that the Party lost its influence in trade unions through requesting unrealistic feats of militancy. The communists in the West Coast miners unions defected in 1929. There was a similar loss of supporters in the Seamen's Union the next year.[44] In the early 1930s Party activity was focused on the unemployed, not least because the vast majority of Party members were themselves among its ranks. As suggested earlier, a disproportionate amount of research has been done on the UWM, when compared to other areas of CPNZ activity.[45] Other important areas of work, for example in 'fraternal organisations' such as the Friends of the Soviet Union (FSU) (est. 1932), the Movement Against War and Fascism (est. 1933) and the Working Woman's Movement (est. 1934), have been relatively neglected and their significance little understood.[46]

These organisations, especially the FSU, brought new members to the CPNZ, including for the first time significant numbers from the middle class. They also brought propaganda opportunities via publications such as *Soviet News* and the *Working Woman*. Greater success was undoubtedly hampered by the sectarianism of the Party, which brought a ban from the Labour Party on their members associating with what they saw as communist fronts. However, despite such difficulties, these organisations were clearly positive achievements for the Party, their limited success runs counter to the almost solely negative view of the era.

The period as a whole saw a steady increase in Party membership and the first publication of a weekly newspaper, a considerable achievement for such a tiny organisation. In general there was a greater strength in terms of organisation. The "Third Period" doctrine with its emphasis on party-building undoubtedly served the CPNZ well in this regard. The move towards better organisation was helped by the return of Fred Freeman from Moscow in 1933. His organisational skills cannot be underrated, nor those of the young and talented leaders he cultivated in this period.[47] However there were countervailing costs, including a new willingness to expel dissenting individuals. The principles of democratic centralism were applied for the first time.

Those historians willing to write off the CPNZ in this period sometimes fail to take certain factors into account in their analysis. It is easy to slip into a crude reductionism, whereby every problem is laid at the feet of the Comintern. However, other factors were at play, most significantly the actions of the state. Suffice to say that the state remained hostile to the CPNZ. The Party headquarters in Wellington were frequently raided and

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[41] H.J.Scott, *A New Zealand Woman in Russia* (Auckland, 1932).

[42] This trip is discussed at length in his autobiography.

[43] The originals are in the Roth Collection.

[44] Roth, *Trade Unions in New Zealand*, p.48-50, 158-59.

[45] See footnote 3 above.

[46] On the Friends of the Soviet Union, see Whinston Rhodes, *New Zealand and the Soviet Union*, (Auckland, 1985); on the Movement Against War and Fascism, see David Grant, *Out in the Cold*, pp.27-30; on the Working Woman's Movement, see Grady, "The Reds Who Made the Beds".

[47] Both Elsie Locke and Gordon Watson were closely associated with Freeman. In fact Locke (née Farrely) was for a time married to Freeman.

members of the Party often arrested for the possession or production of seditious literature. It is clear that in the wake of unemployed riots during 1932 the state worked very hard to isolate and debilitate the CPNZ. At one stage in 1933 the entire Central Committee was behind bars.

Another failing of the dominant analysis is that it tends to treat the experience as almost uniformly sectarian. That this is not so is indicated by the success of the fraternal organisations mentioned above and activities such as the free speech struggle conducted in Auckland during 1934, which brought communists and Labour supporters into cooperation, despite the normal hostility on both sides.

If the period is not as barren as generally portrayed, there is still little doubt that the Party was a contributor to its own isolation. The best example of this is the Party position with regard to the 1935 general election. This election was a turning point in New Zealand political history, being the first time a Labour Government was elected. The tide was dramatically in favour of Labour, yet the CPNZ still advocated an ultra-left policy of "neither reaction nor Labour". The Party stood four candidates and urged voters to write communist on their ballot papers in the electorates where there was no communist candidate. It was a surprise only to the communists that all their candidates lost their deposits. At a time when the tide was moving in the direction of Labour, the CPNZ were still labelling them social-fascists.[48] The general election of 1935 was one of the last acts of a particularly turbulent period in the Party history.

c) 1936-39:

If the previous period showed some of the dangers of an overly sectarian policy, the period which followed showed some of the problems of being insufficiently revolutionary. However, the old polices were not relinquished without a struggle. Leo Sim had attended the Seventh Congress of the Comintern in 1935 and come back to New Zealand with the new policy of building the united front against fascism. The CPNZ published an edition of Dimitrov's report to the congress which served as one of the key texts in Party education in this period.[49] However, the leadership, particularly Freeman, were reluctant to adopt the new policy. It took the removal of Freeman as Party Secretary, who was replaced by Sim, and the intervention of the CPA before the CPNZ took on fully the new Comintern policy. Despite the admission of left-sectarian errors as early as the December 1935 conference, this transition took until 1937.[50]

Party policy eventually moved to a position of critical support for the Labour Government, and occasionally to a position of uncritical support, as in the 1938 general election where the Party advocated the return of the Labour Government. In Auckland communists took a leading role in the organisation of a huge rally to greet the re-election of the Labour Government. The Party again campaigned for affiliation to the Labour Party,[51] which was rejected categorically, although there was some support for admission from inside the Labour Party. There were some members who remained more hostile to the Labour Party than CPNZ policy would imply, they were generally expelled. Among them Fred Freeman, who was expelled in 1937.

In the industrial sphere the Party was making giant strides. The formation in 1937 of a unified national trade union organisation, the New Zealand Federation of Labour (FOL), was keenly supported by the Party. By 1938 most of the Party's 300 members were employed in industry, a far cry from earlier in the decade. This gave the basis for a growth of influence in the union movement and by 1938 the Party had amongst it ranks 36 Trades Council delegates, six full time trade union officials and two FOL National Councillors.[52] The Party was particularly strong in the Watersider's, Carpenters, Labourers, and Railways unions. Geographically the strength of the Party was increasingly in Auckland which had also become the site of the Party headquarters.

The Party campaigned vigorously against fascism. Organisations such as the Spanish Medical Aid

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[48] Roth, "The Communist Vote in New Zealand", p. 29.

[49] CPNZ, *The Working Class Against Fascism: Dimitrov's Report to the Seventh World Congress [of the] Communist International*, (Wellington, 1936).

[50] Scott, *Rebel in a Wrong Cause*, pp. 82-85.

[51] See, Leo Sim, *Unity, Peace and Progress: Why the Communist Party Wants Affiliation to the Labour Party* (Wellington, 1937).

[52] Roth, "Marx and New Zealand", p. 6.

Committee were very active, and again served as a link between the party and other sectors of society. Several CPNZ members saw active service with the International Brigade in Spain.[53] The Labour Party was still hostile to such organisations and did its best to prohibit its members from participating in them. The CPNZ also began to move into the realm of "culture" with the beginning of a People's Theatre Movement and the New Zealand Left Book Club, again bringing an amalgam of leftists into cooperation.[54]

Contact with the Comintern continued in this period, although historians have made far less of the connection. Gordon Watson, who by the end of the 1930s was the leading figure in the CPNZ, and Sid Scott, probably the next most influential member, both visited the Soviet Union in this period. Watson stayed only a brief time in 1937. However Scott stayed for a considerable time, to some extent for medical treatment. He returned in late 1940. In this period the CPNZ seems also to have been less open to criticism for the connection with the Comintern, the main exception being their support for the "Moscow Trials" which caused some disputes most noticeably within the FSU, although there are no apparent signs of divisions within the CPNZ over the trials. A direct Comintern influence was apparent with regard the CPNZ's attitude to local Trotskyists and, as it more often seemed to be, those using a Trotskyist analysis to criticise the Soviet Union and the CPNZ.[55] There is evidence of contact between New Zealanders and the Australian Trotskyist movement,[56] and during the early stages of World War II a Trotskyist influenced critique of the Soviet position is in evidence. However, the label Trotskyist was used rather liberally by Party members to brand those who were deviant, regardless of the exact nature of their difference with Party policy.

Contact between the CPA and the CPNZ was again extensive in this period having been less significant in the period 1928-35. Both Parties periodically sent representatives to each other. It is undoubtedly true that in this period the CPA was influential on the general outlook of the CPNZ. For example, Lance Sharkey conducted study schools, when he visited in 1936, and Australian delegates were key note speakers at CPNZ conferences.

By the end of the period the Party had taken the united front policy to the logical extreme by re-naming its paper the *People's Voice*, claiming in effect to represent the people of New Zealand. This was an absurd claim, less absurd was the CPNZ claim to be the most consistent and active anti-fascists in the country. This activity and the growing prestige in the industrial sphere meant that the Party was growing on the eve of World War II, its membership stood at around 400. Some of the new members were attracted more by the desire to combat fascism than to create a revolution, a problem derived in part from the submergence of the CPNZ's revolutionary principles in favour of support for Labour at home and opposition to fascism abroad. When the political winds changed, the resolve of the membership was tested considerably.

d) 1939-41:

The Soviet Union's Pact with Nazi Germany came as a surprise to the CPNZ, and took some thinking through before a response was produced. The CPNZ proclaimed boldly in their published statement on the pact that "The Soviet Union is Right". Historians have generally characterised this and the other changes in policy during this period as a slavish following of the dictates of Moscow. A simple case of loyal, and presumably misguided,

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[53] See Susan Skudder, "'Bringing it home': New Zealand Responses to the Spanish Civil War, 1936-39" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Waikato, 1986).

[54] On left culture see Rachel Barrowman, "Culture and the Left in New Zealand, 1930-50" (MA thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 1987) and her article, "R.A.K. Mason and the Auckland People's Theatre, 1936-1940", *SITES: A Journal for Radical Perspectives on Culture*, no. 16, 1988, pp.6-18. Barrowman's thesis is soon to be published in revised form by Victoria University Press.

[55] See, Copy of Letter Received from the Secretariat of the ECCI: The Conducting of the Campaign Against Trotskyism, Roth Collection.

[56] Secretary of the Workers Party of Australia to F.P. Walsh, July 28 and December 29, 1934, F.P. Walsh Papers, MS Papers, 274, Alexander Turnbull Library, items 391 and 602, and articles in *Militant*, March 1936, pp. 7 and 12.

Communists doing their 'duty'.[57] Again this is only partly accurate.

The CPNZ had difficulty establishing a clear and consistent policy with regard to the war, bringing with it two tendencies which were difficult to reconcile. Firstly, opposition to fascism, secondly, opposition to the policies of the Chamberlain Government in Britain. Prior to the war these two tendencies seemed closely intertwined. With the advent of war they were less easily reconciled.

Immediately after the outbreak of war the CPNZ was convinced that the war was imperialist and should be opposed proclaiming that Hitler would only be defeated by a struggle against Chamberlain, who had to be removed before the war could be supported by socialists.[58] This was the line until mid-September, when a new and more comprehensive statement on the war was published. The Party policy became one of struggle on two fronts, one against Hitler, the other against Chamberlain's imperialism. The policy change came after communication between the CPA and the CPNZ. Not all the members were so keen on the new policy, the Foxton branch was rebuked for not focusing on the defeat of Hitler in its leaflets. This branch, led by former CPNZ leader Leo Sim, later formed the basis of a breakaway New Zealand Bolshevik Party, which advocated a policy of turning the war into a civil war.[59]

By late October policy was changing again. The Party leadership, taking note of developments in parties overseas, was moving to a policy of opposing the war as wholly imperialist. The trend was consolidated by the change in policy of the Communist Party of Great Britain, and the publication of the Comintern's statement on the war. However, it was not until early December that the new policy was finally consolidated and announced to the world in the *People's Voice* of December 8, 1939. The CPNZ argued that the war was imperialist on both sides and had nothing to offer the working class, they said that it had been incorrect in its earlier characterisation of the war and that it should have been opposed from its beginning. From this point the Party was consistent and unbending in its opposition to the war until the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941. The general climate in response to such a policy, of course, was one of hostility to the CPNZ and those others who opposed the war. This hostility was not restricted to conservatives in the political spectrum, both the Labour Government and the Federation of Labour supported the war and resolutely condemned the CPNZ.

The CPNZ and its members met a series of formal sanctions, the most noticeable being imprisonment. In 1940 most of the 59 charges of subversion were against communists. The CPNZ was not declared an illegal organisation, but the government had begun to take steps towards that end by the time the CPNZ changed its policy in mid-1941. The Party press was suppressed and forcibly dismantled by police. Censorship of literature was very severe, as were restrictions on importing literature.

Both the Labour Party and the Trade Union movement took steps to limit the influence of the communists. The Labour Party was especially severe on any of its members who were working with communists or active in organisations they deemed to be communist fronts. In the union movement the Party suffered some major set backs, especially in the Wellington Carpenters Union, where their influence was systematically attacked amidst a context of financial impropriety.

There were also a series of what might be called informal sanctions on the Communists which also made life difficult. Physical attack was not uncommon. Some Party members were dismissed from their jobs on political grounds. Bob Semple, a Labour Cabinet Minister, declared his intention of ridding the public service of communists.

The Party took a number of steps to deal with the hostile environment in which it found itself, effectively switching to a semi-illegal basis from May 1940. This involved among other things the printing of underground newspapers, and the establishment of safe houses for use by the Party leadership. Local branches were reduced in size to give greater internal security, and this was coupled with a general reduction in branch activity as a consequence of the semi-illegality. There was an associated increase in activity under the name of other organisations such as the Peace and Anti-Conscription Council,[60] the Democratic Defence League and

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[57] See for example, Taylor, *The Home Front: The New Zealand People at War*, pp. 51 and 57; Hynes, "The Communist Party in Otago, 1940-47", p. 11.

[58] *Peoples Voice*, September 8, 1939.

[59] The Bolshevik Party was never more than a few individuals.

[60] See Grant, *Out in the Cold*, pp. 58-73.

the Civil Liberties Union.

Obviously these were difficult times for the CPNZ, some members did not last the distance and left the party. By mid-1941 membership stood at around 650.[61] The overall impact of the period is hard to assess. Certainly, the Party suffered some significant set backs. But this was lessened by the fact that the Party was to some extent prepared for the actions against it. In others ways the Party progressed. Membership did increase, and the Party demonstrated to itself and the rest of the country that they were able to sustain themselves even under the most difficult conditions. Again the seemingly worst conditions had benefits for the Party. Undoubtedly, it was stronger in terms of internal cohesion and organisation by mid-1941 when there was another major change of policy.

e) 1941-46:

The Nazi attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941 was a shock for the New Zealand communists. They had no hesitation in declaring themselves for the war as a genuine "people's war".[62] The Party threw itself into the war effort with vigour, selling Victory Bonds, organising Patriotic Carnivals and urging increased industrial production. Members joined the armed forces in quantity. The Party exhibited what Bert Roth has termed an exaggerated enthusiasm for the war.[63] However, like the "Popular Front" period the experience for the CPNZ was contradictory. What some commentators see as the most successful years of the communist movement in New Zealand also had a down side.

On the positive side membership grew to unprecedented levels, peaking at about 2,000 in 1945. Branches were formed in many places for the first time. Similarly sales of the Party newspaper were to reach a peak of approximately 14,000 by the end of the war.[64] Party influence within the trade union movement grew tremendously, especially in Auckland, where by the end of the war the party completely dominated the Trades Council. Growth in the industrial sphere was less spectacular in other areas, but no the less significant.[65] Unity became the watch word for the CPNZ, they even named their Wellington headquarters the Unity Centre, a reflection of their essentially class collaborationist position. The revolutionary message was put on hold in favour of defeating Hitler first.[66]

Real progress was made in establishing cooperation between the CPNZ, trade unions and the Labour Party, especially at local and rank and file level. For example, the Auckland Communist Party, Labour Representative Council and Trades Council as early as July 1941 were cooperating in an Aid to Russia Campaign. While this became a national campaign, the support of the Labour Party and Federation of Labour National leaderships was tempered with the proviso that support for the Soviet Union in no way implied support for the local communists. The Society for Closer Relations with the Soviet Union, a successor to the FSU, attracted considerable support. The Party went out of its way to support the Labour Party and keep it in office, even assisting the formation of new branches of the Labour Party in Dunedin.

While at face value the Party was thriving, there were limits to the success. Many of the new members appear to have joined as a way to show sympathy for the Soviet Union, and knew little about the CPNZ, and what it stood for. The rapid influx of members put considerable pressure on the resources of the Party, this was exacerbated by the absence of many experienced members on active service. Many new members remained little more than book members.

The policy of collaboration created internal problems within the Party. CPNZ opposition to a Miners

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[61] Wood, *Political and External Affairs: The New Zealand People at War*, p. 155.

[62] Sid Scott, *The People's War* (Wellington, 1942).

[63] Roth, *Trade Unions in New Zealand*, p. 64.

[64] For both membership figures and newspaper sales, see Roth, "The Communist Vote in New Zealand", p. 33.

[65] Roth, *Trade Unions in New Zealand*, p. 64.

[66] See Harold Silverstone, *The Case for National Unity: fight Hitler first* (Wellington, 1943).

strike in 1942 caused considerable disquiet within some sections of the Party.[67] So, too, did the decision to work for the re-election of Prime Minister Peter Fraser in the 1943 general election, even though he was opposed by a popular left candidate. This caused the Party to loose two former Party Secretaries, Jim Dyer and Dick Griffin, who found Party policy intolerably collaborationist and were expelled for supporting Fraser's opponent. By the end of the war serious divisions were emerging, some members of the Party accusing the leadership of trying to liquidate the Party as Earl Browder had attempted with the CPUSA.[68]

The surprise dissolution of the Comintern in 1943 caused barely a ripple within the CPNZ. They took two lessons from it. Firstly, they believed the dissolution placed greater responsibility on them to be self-reliant in their political analysis. They would no longer have the Comintern for guidance. Secondly, they reconfirmed their belief that the struggle against fascism should take precedence over all else.[69] This relative lack of debate on the demise of the Comintern may appear surprising given the dominant place the Comintern is generally assumed to play in the life of the CPNZ. However, if one accepts the general proposition that historians exaggerate the importance of the Comintern and that contact with the Comintern during the war appears considerably less than in previous periods, this seems far less aberrant. Sid Scott came back from Moscow with instructions as to the general line the Party should adopt towards the war, only to find that the CPNZ had arrived at the same position of its own accord.[70] For the CPNZ the year 1943 was more a turning point on the grounds of the resurrection of the *People's Voice* than for the dissolution of the Comintern.

The period begun in 1941 more logically ends at about 1946, when the CPNZ was at its peak of influence in terms of membership, newspaper sales and position within the Trade Union movement. Since 1946 there has been a steady decline into the fragmentation and division which remains a characteristic of the communist movement in New Zealand.

Conclusion

The CPNZ did not achieve its ultimate goal of revolution, the reasons for this and much of the history of the Party are still in need of detailed and systematic research. The history of the Party exhibits the classic dilemma of revolutionary parties in 'western democracies' with a mass based 'social democrat party'. How to win both a mass base and achieve the ultimate goal of revolution? The Party's history has revolved around two extreme solutions to the dilemma, one characterised by separatism and sectarianism, the other collaboration and reformism. The CPNZ in the era of the Comintern radiated between the two extremes, never finding a solution to the dilemma. Paradoxically, in their times of greatest success they were apparently at their least revolutionary. At the times when they were most revolutionary, they were attacked and ostracised, seriously hampering Party activity. The connection with the Comintern was a significant aspect of the development of such a pattern within the CPNZ although, contrary to the received wisdom, it was merely one of a number of factors.

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[67] Roth, *Trade Unions in New Zealand*, p. 63.

[68] See Scott, *Rebel in a Wrong Cause*, p. 143.

[69] See the Draft Resolution on the Political Situation and Work of the Party, September 15, 1943, Roth Collection.

[70] See Scott, *Rebel in a Wrong Cause*, pp. 128-29.