

# Communist Women



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## Celebrating Midlands Communist women

Communists and their friends and families gathered in Coventry to celebrate the past and present of Communist Women in the Midlands. Over fifty people attended the event on Saturday 30 April which through talks, poetry, songs and posters testified to the rich and vibrant history of activism among Communist Women in our region.

### Time to get involved

Dear Sisters  
As the Party moves forward following Congress 2021 - building membership, implementing policies, strengthening the class struggle - women comrades play a vital rôle in explaining to our labour movement allies how replacing capitalism with a socialist system is linked to ending the oppression of women and the racism faced by Black and Asian women.

We do this in our Trade Union work when we raise the demands of the Charter for Women and in our interactions within our community organisations as we fight against the cuts to services that women need and use.

Continued on back page

#### SONYA ANDERMAHR OUR HISTORY, OUR HEROINES

FOLLOWING a delicious lunch of samosas, home-made pizza and 'Commie cupcakes' baked by comrade Chloe Bushell, the afternoon began with a series of fascinating talks based on the Communist Party centenary book *Red Lives: Communists and the Struggle for Socialism*. We were joined by the authors of some of the entries including Andrew Maybury who spoke about Black Country woman Fanny Deakin, and Joe Clark who paid moving tributes to one of the women included in the book - Ida Hackett - and two who aren't, Betty Heathfield and Rose Smith.

Fanny Deakin was born in a mining village near Newcastle under Lyme in 1883. She was the first woman elected to Wolstanton Council in 1923 on a Labour ticket. She was known both for her campaign work for women and children and for her staunch defence of local mining communities. She played a key role in supporting miners in the 1926 General Strike and in 1927 she was re-elected standing as a communist. She visited the Soviet Union in 1927 and 1930, which earned her the nickname 'Red Fanny' by locals. In 1942 a new maternity home in the Newcastle-under-Lyme borough was named after her and she is still remembered widely by local people.

My talk was on Jane Wyatt (1879-1969), a schoolteacher from Leicester who joined the Women's Social and Political Union in part to protest the low wages and unfair discrimination against women teachers. Wyatt joined the Communist Party in 1936 after hearing Harry Pollitt and Palme Dutt speak at Leicester Guildhall. One of the highlights of Jane's life was surely when aged 79 she went with Dora Russell's Peace Caravan across Europe in 1958.

Among the notable Chesterfield women whom Joe Clarke spoke about was Betty Heathfield who became well known through her leadership of Women against Pit Closures. Betty was a great friend to the Communist Party and considered herself a committed Communist from her early YCL days. According to Joe: 'As a speaker, Betty was fiery, passionate and had a directness and clarity on the issues that appealed to audiences far outside political circles'. He also recalled the fascinating life of Rose Smith who grew up in Chesterfield and worked for the party. She was likely its first women's organiser in the early 1920s and was sent to Lancashire to organise mill workers there. Rose's eventful life also included being imprisoned for 'disaffection', standing for parliament for the party, and being a *Daily Worker* journalist. She eventually emigrated to China and was interred in the Revolutionary Martyrs Cemetery in Beijing.

Ida Hackett (1914-20), as Joe wrote in *Red Lives*, 'was a miner's daughter. She was hugely respected by the most courageous of the Notts miners. Ida was given honorary membership of the NUM for her work mobilising the Women's Support Groups during the 1984/5 pit strike. As a long-standing party member and East Midlands activist himself, Joe knew Ida and Betty well and had met Rose and shared many wonderful memories and anecdotes about their lives.

The audience was then treated to a fantastic performance by the Birmingham Clarion Singers, led by conductor Jane Scott who shared reminiscences about her mother Elsie Marshall and party members, Irene Rickman and Katherine Thompson, who were all Clarion singers. As Jane said, 'there was a terrific friendship between the women. Their lives show



that working-class struggle is the way to fight for the future'. Comrade Annie Bannham sang a beautiful song written by Peggy Seeger called *Tomorrow* with the wonderful lyric 'I've come to claim tomorrow'. We also heard the real story of Jessie Eden of 'Peaky Blinders' fame. Born in Birmingham in 1902 Jessie became an accomplished union organiser, famously leading ten thousand non-unionised women out on a week's strike, which led to their eventual unionisation. Jessie was also sent by the party to the Soviet Union in 1934 to help rally women workers building the Moscow Metro. On her return she led a rent strike of nearly 50,000 Birmingham tenants. In honour of Jessie the choir sang 'Union Maid' and in tribute to women workers everywhere, they sang 'Rise Ye Women'. Indeed, through their wonderful music, the Clarion Singers speak for all oppressed workers without a voice. What all these inspirational women share is their tireless work for their class, which earned them the respect of their communities, and their desire for revolutionary social transformation.

Another highlight of the afternoon was a presentation by comrade Moz Greenshields about Alice Wheeldon, a Communist woman from Derby framed by the British state for supposedly plotting to kill Lloyd George. Alice was found guilty and sentenced to ten years of penal servitude. She went on hunger strike while in Aylesbury Gaol and was released on licence in 1917. Sadly, she died in the flu pandemic the following year and never got to join the newly formed Communist Party. This fascinating story was accompanied by images of Wheeldon and the trial from the Morai film production of her life. As Moz said, 'Their struggle resonates down the years wherever people organise for a better future, a socialist future.' Wheel-

don's image was also part of a poster exhibition created by Sonya Robotham and displayed at the event which depicted notable women activists from the Derby region. There was also a fitting tribute to the late Graham Stevenson who had done so much to archive the party's history.

The rest of the afternoon was filled with poetry: Joginder Bains from Derby branch and the Indian Workers Association, performed in Punjabi her moving poem about the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre of 1919, which is seen through the eyes of a young woman survivor, Ratan Devi, whose beloved is murdered in the massacre. As she laments, 'Among the piles of corpses, at the embankment of the river of blood/ I sat with my sweetheart, lifeless'.

Linda Hisgett from the Clarion Singers read two poems from Black Country poet Emma Purhouse's 'Tipton Tales', one of them 'That Day', remembering the terrible industrial explosion of 1922 that killed 50 people. To round the afternoon's cultural entertainment off, Carol Stavris read two peace movement poems, underlining the theme of peace campaigning that many of these Communist women shared. The event concluded with a raffle in aid of Women's Aid and the *Morning Star*, which raised an incredible £200.

Our event, the first of its kind to be held at district level, was by all accounts a great success, enabling comrades to come together, in many cases for the first time since the pandemic, to collectively celebrate the important contribution of the region's women to the history of the Party and the movement, and to recognise the vital role of working-class culture as well as politics in the struggle for socialism. As one comrade said, 'It was a fantastic event - a lovely way to celebrate the inspiring women from the past who made our today possible'.

It is hoped that other districts and nations will follow the Midlands' example and mount similar events to celebrate their own "red lives" and party history. A recording of our event is available to view via YouTube.

SONYA ANDERMAHR IS THE MIDLANDS DISTRICT WOMEN'S ORGANISER

ABOVE RIGHT: The Birmingham Clarion Singers performing at the event

CENTRE: Betty Heathfield

ABOVE LEFT: Rose Smith and Fanny Deakin visited the Donetz coalfield as part of a trip to the USSR in 1927.



# AGAINST US IMPERIALISM

*“As a black woman, my politics and political affiliation are bound up with and flow from participation in my people's struggle for liberation, and with the fight of oppressed people all over the world against American imperialism.”*

**Angela Davis** philosopher, academic, scholar, and author and former Communist Party candidate for US vice president



**SONYA ANDERMAHR**

## EDITORIAL

Welcome.

As the Midlands District women's organiser, I'm delighted to introduce this issue of *Communist Women* which, at four pages, is our biggest edition to date. As well as my write up about the recent Celebrating Communist Women in the Midlands event in Coventry, it features fascinating and important contributions from sisters from the London, Southern and North West districts.

Before I say more about those, I'll introduce myself: I joined the Communist Party in 2020, following the defeat of Labour in the 2019 General election and the election of Keir Starmer as leader. As a life-long socialist, the Communist Party seemed to be the only credible radical alternative to the right wing and anti-working class turn of social democracy in Britain. I'm a member of the Northampton branch and at the 56th Congress was honoured to be elected to the Executive Committee. I've also been attending monthly meet and greets held online by Midlands district women and eventually began chairing them. During the pandemic, which was a politically and socially isolating time for many of us, it was wonderful to make contact and share experiences with other communist women from across our large district: from Peterborough in the east to Shrewsbury in the west, and from Oxford in the South to Derby further north.

It was out of these online meet ups that Midlands women formulated the idea to hold an event to celebrate the lives and achievements of communist women in the Midlands both past and present. It was a wonderful collective effort which drew on the skills and talents of Midlands women. My article in this edition gives an account of that event which was held in Coventry on 30 April.

As that event demonstrated there is much to celebrate about women's historical contribution to class struggle and our own emancipation as women. However, we cannot be complacent: in contemporary Britain and across the capitalist world, women's rights are under renewed attack. In her article, Dominique Mei identifies the threats to women posed by the capitalist crisis and neoliberal ideologies and argues that only a communist movement committed to a class-based analysis of women's oppression will enable us to resist them.

In her contribution, Judith Cazorla eloquently describes the particular oppression and exploitation faced by migrant women and highlights the importance of integrating them at all levels into our movement. Dominique and Judith are both young communist women; in this edition, we also hear from Caroline Tandler, an older comrade who provides a fascinating account of her own communist life including her time in the GDR.

Last but by no means least, Vicky Knight, the North West women's organiser, gives a lovely write up of the recent memorial event held in honour of Helen MacFarlane, who made a historic contribution to our movement by translating the *Communist Manifesto* into English. It is a timely reminder, if one were needed, that women have always been at the heart of the socialist movement. And, as communist women we recognise that our emancipation goes hand in hand with the eradication of class exploitation and the socialist transformation of society. ★

## Old comrade, new comrade: what's it like being a young woman today?

**DOMINIQUE MEI**  
**REAL LIVES**

COMING OF AGE during a crisis is one thing, coming of age during a never-ending spiral of crises is another. Post-2008 crash we were told that the crisis is temporary. That the free market would correct itself and we would just have to buckle down until it did. “We're all in this together!” the elite said as they hit record high rates of profit.

Over ten years later and this apparently temporary crisis still hasn't resolved itself. And dare I say, it has gotten worse?

The global decline of capitalism has led to an increasing intensification of class warfare, and women are suffering the worst of it. Inflation is at its highest level in decades. 20% of women are earning below minimum wage and 60% have problems with debt. Women typically have less in savings than men and caring responsibilities mean they cannot easily increase their work hours. Childcare costs have soared, with nursery costs in London rising seven times faster than wages. Domestic violence is on the rise and women are finding it more difficult to leave due to these financial problems. As in every crisis, the capitalists respond by attempting to force out of the workplace what they view as their reserve labour force: immigrants and women. The former can be achieved by stricter Right to Work in the UK checks. The latter, by forcing women back into the home by, for example, banning abortions.

Across the pond, just a few weeks ago the U.S. Supreme Court voted to strike down the landmark Roe v. Wade decision, leading to some states rushing to ban abortion even in cases of rape and incest. Meanwhile, here in Europe, Ukrainian women fleeing war are being trafficked and preyed upon by men. But many of the headlines are instead focusing on them fleeing with a particular commodity: babies. Or to be more accurate, foetuses that are contracted for sale to (usually) bourgeois couples.

And throughout all this, we are constantly reminded that we cannot say the word “woman”. “Birthing bodies” is the en vogue language of choice. “Birthing bodies” should have full autonomy over their bodies! One would be forgiven for thinking that the undoing of Roe v. Wade would shut down dairy farms. After all, cows are birthing bodies too. Lactators, gestational carriers, egg producers and more. In the creation of new markets the capitalists are dividing up women's bodies into whatever function can be exploited and profited from. And whilst doing so, a popular neoliberal ideology tells us that there's no such thing as a woman anyway. Birthing bodies, lactators, gestational carriers and egg producers aren't the same type of body being exploited. There's no sex binary or one half of a hierarchy whereby the bottom half is exploited by the other specifically for having the capacity to gestate. Instead, we're told that individuals have nothing in common with each other and

therefore can't possibly work with each other toward a common goal.

We may therefore question how are women supposed to come together to fight against women's oppression? How are women supposed to achieve class consciousness under said ideology? Or perhaps that's the point: there are no classes or groups with common interests, just individuals and their subjective, unprovable ‘identities’?

This ideology has been central in the war against women.

Here in Sussex where I'm based, rape victims are self-excluding from rape crisis centres because they are being told their trauma and fear of men are bigotry. A victim called Sarah Summers is suing Survivor's Network because she was denied a single sex service which should be provided by law. For context, there are ten organisations in Brighton alone that run trans specific support groups. There are now none that offer any to women specifically.

We, as Communists, need to step back and look at the larger picture here. All of this is connected. Women's rights are under attack from every angle and it's not just some disembodied culture war unrelated to the condition of capitalism. We need to stay vigilant because it will only get worse from here on out unless we are able to organise women more effectively. ★

DOMINIQUE MEI IS A MEMBER OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY'S WOMEN'S COMMISSION

## The critical importance of organising migrant women

**JUDITH CAZORLA**  
**OPINION**

WHEN I MOVED to Britain, it was an adventure. My intention to migrate had been forming for several years until I finally decided to buy my plane tickets. I'd been offered a job as a waitress back in Spain where I would have earned just three euros per hour and I was also running away from an abusive relationship. Whatever was waiting for me in this part of the world, had to be better than what I had.



All migrant workers move from their countries to seek a better life. Often the reality is not what we've dreamed of. In Britain today, we are facing a cost-of-living crisis and women suffer the worst consequences of it. Working-class women not only have to face rising costs of necessary goods and the housing crisis but we also experience the double burden which capitalism condemns us

to: low paid and part time jobs, the responsibility for care work in our private lives and so on. Migrant women's conditions do not differ so much from British women; however we find ourselves with additional burdens that can make life a misery.

As well as the socio-economic challenges, migrant women in this country may face significant language barriers: if you don't talk the language properly, it can make it very difficult to find any job which requires interpersonal skills and can act as a barrier to involvement in society at any level. Government funding cuts to language services mean a shortage of translators available in public services such as council housing and NHS practices. This can disproportionately impact migrant women who lack the support to access these vital services.

This situation makes us more vulnerable to sexual abuse and prostitution. Our precarious employment status alongside the frequent sexualization of migrant women's bodies can make sites such as OnlyFans and other forms of prostitution seem like a viable choice. Particularly among younger women there is a normalization among us of

using this platform as a legitimate way of earning money.

Historically, Britain has been the home for thousands of migrant workers over the development of capitalism. Imperialist states use international workforces to fulfil their national needs while encouraging lower wages and worse conditions. Recent legislation re-enforces vicious discriminatory migrant policies such as the post-Brexit point scheme or the new Immigration Act which criminalises illegal entry into the country among other policies.

As internationalists we need to make sure we don't forget the 9.6 million people in Britain who weren't born here: migrant women, who make up half that number, suffer from specific conditions that make us essential for the struggle against capitalism. We need to be listened to and encouraged to take part in all Communist Party campaigns. Our voices should be incorporated into the party's statements and policies. It's the only way to build socialism. ★

JUDITH CAZORLA IS A MEMBER OF THE LONDON DISTRICT COMMITTEE OF THE CPB



# AGAINST THE RULING CLASS

“Don’t let the ruling class use you against your own fathers, brothers, uncles and cousins.”

For these words following the 1926 General Strike, **Isobel Brown**, Communist party leader and foundation member of the party was arrested and imprisoned for three months in Hull prison for sedition, or “committing acts and uttering words likely to cause disaffection amongst His Majesty’s troops.”



## Jailed for sedition!

Not for the first time Communist leader Isobel Brown was charged with sedition – defined by the judge as any action setting one class against another – and sentenced to three months in jail for contrasting the privileged life of the young Princess Elizabeth pictured above giving the nazi salute with the children of miners.

**RULING CLASS COLLABORATION WITH NAZIS CONTRASTED WITH WORKING CLASS PRINCIPLES.** Buckingham Palace said it was disappointed that 1933 footage showing the future queen performing a Nazi salute was released.

The black and white footage, which lasts about 17 seconds, shows the young princess on the lawn at Balmoral following the Queen Mother in raising her arm in a Nazi salute. The future Edward VIII, a friend and confidante of Adolf Hitler and a fascist sympathiser is also seen giving the salute.

The early 1930s footage was shot at a time when bosses and bankers gave Hitler state power to imprison and murder first the communists, socialists and trade unionists and then Jews, Roma, the disabled and gay people.

**GRAHAM STEVENSON**

**Isobel Brown**

**B**ORN 6 December 1894 on Tyne-side, the youngest of three sisters in a working class family, thanks to her parents’ sacrifices Isobel was able to obtain a high school education, later winning a scholarship to Sunderland Teachers’ Training College. The experience of the First World War, like so many of her generation, shattered her religious beliefs and her acceptance of the norms of conventional society.

When Isobel became a teacher, a local NUT activist and member of the county committee of the union, her experience aroused a sense of social injustice. She taught classes of sixty or so seven and eight year olds, whose lives were rooted in abject poverty. Learning of classes being run by the National Council of Labour Colleges in the Boldon miners’ hall for the local miners’ union, she was the only woman present.

The tutor was Tommy (T.A.) Jackson, whose Marxist exposition won Isobel to a lifetime’s commitment.

Having joined the Labour Party in 1918, Isobel was also a foundation member of the Communist Party. Isobel married Ernest Brown, then a full time organiser for the Communist Party, in 1921. Although she was obliged to conceal this at first, since married women were compelled to vacate their teaching posts. Becoming pregnant she had to cease teaching and their son, Ken, was born in December 1922.

In 1924, Ernie was appointed British representative to the Executive Committee of the Communist International and they moved to live in Moscow. There, Isobel mixed in circles that included Dolores Ibaruri (Spain), Clara Zetkin (Germany) and Helen Stasova (Bulgaria). She was now set on a course that was to see her subsequently become the leading Communist woman of the late 1920s and 1930s.

Ernest Brown was recalled to Britain after the arrest of the Communist Party

leadership in the run up to the General Strike and the couple threw themselves into the struggle.

In 1926, Isobel spoke at the May Day rally in the Yorkshire railway town of Normanton. Seeing some soldiers on the edge of the crowd, she urged them: ‘Don’t let the ruling class use you against your own fathers, brothers, uncles and cousins.’ For this, she was imprisoned for three months for sedition, or ‘committing acts and uttering words likely to cause disaffection amongst His Majesty’s troops.’

Five weeks after Isobel was released, the General Strike was over but the miners were fighting on alone, amidst grinding starvation. In the small village of Alltofts, in Yorkshire, she contrasted the treatment of the newly born Princess Elizabeth – later Queen Elizabeth – with the fate of miners’ babies. For this, she was again charged with sedition, the judge defining this as any action which set one class against another class. Isobel was sentenced to three months hard labour plus either the option of another three months or £50, a considerable sum, instead. Naturally, working class solidarity saw to the necessary collections to avoid the extra term.

Isobel was soon back in the fight, first in Scotland and then back to Yorkshire, where, in 1929, she was active in the woollen workers’ struggles against a 10% imposed wages cut. It was during the campaign to raise funds for the wool workers and then the Lancashire cotton workers that Isobel acquired platform skills as a unique raiser of funds. She was also a decisive figure in the National Union of Unemployed Workers’ Movement and saw to it that women developed their own sections. The first such contingent appeared on the 1928 march in Edinburgh, and between 1932 and 1936 the number of women’s contingents on the national hunger marches doubled. She stood for the Party in a 1929 by-election, achieving 4.4% of the vote.

In 1939 Isobel went to the Lenin School in Moscow to gain a more thorough grounding in Marxism. She became the driving force behind the British Committee for the Relief of Victims of Fascism, which inspired the creation of the British Medical Aid Committee and Medical Aid Unit. She led the international campaign for Georgy Dimitrov’s release, organising a counter-trial to that being held in Berlin that was seeking the life of the Bulgarian Communist who was falsely accused of burning of the Reichstag parliament building.

Out of this campaign came the Committee for the Relief of Victims of Fascism, which saved many lives as Hitler’s stormtroopers extended their reach across Europe.

Isobel was also a towering force in the

‘Aid for Spain’ funds campaign. By her actions, during the 1930s, Isobel Brown almost personified the fierce determination of communists to stem the tide of fascism. She became famous throughout Britain as the key orator for the mobilisation of mass action, in turn, in defence of Dimitrov, for Spain, for the Second Front and for the Anglo-Soviet alliance. Her talent as a fundraiser for all these causes was so widely admired that her interventions in the role of applier for donations at meetings after mass demonstrations and at rallies was often more eagerly awaited than the main speeches themselves.

The Earl of Listowel in his memoirs described her as ‘one of my best friends ... with no more than an elementary education but an extraordinary gift for tear-jerking platform oratory that brought in a great deal of money for the victims of aggression’. ([www.redrice.com/listowel/CHAP4.htm](http://www.redrice.com/listowel/CHAP4.htm))

She was by now the British Party’s national women’s organiser. She contested the Bow and Bromley by-election on 12 June 1940. The seat had become vacant when the constituency’s Labour MP, George Lansbury, died on 7 May 1940, aged 81. A former leader of the Labour Party, he had held the seat since the 1922 general election, and previously from 1910 to 1912.

The main political parties in the Coalition Government had agreed not to contest by-elections in seats held by the other parties in the coalition and this accord left the field clear for Labour.

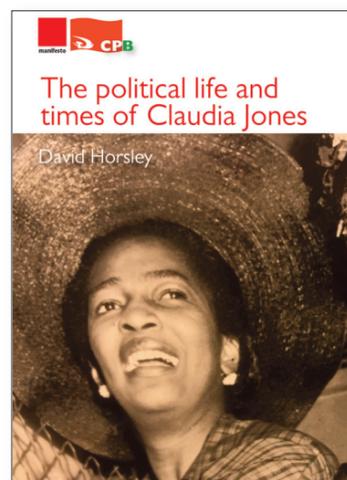
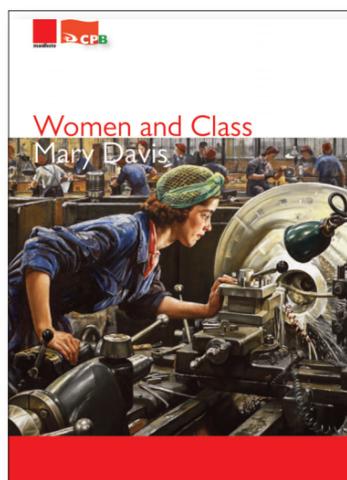
Isobel Brown was the only opposition. She had been a Parliamentary candidate in Scotland, in Kilmarnock and Motherwell; she had previously worked in the Ministry of Education in Moscow.

The British Union of Fascists had intended to put up Mick Clarke as a candidate although this had to be abandoned when he became one of the first bunch of fascists rounded up under Defence Regulation 18B. Predictably, Key held the seat for Labour with 95.8% of the votes. Isobel’s 4.2% was no insult, however, especially since the war had yet to turn from its completely phoney character.

Isobel was seriously injured in an air raid in December 1940 and never really recovered properly, having spent six months in hospital and six months recuperating. With her health in jeopardy, she thus scaled down her Party commitments significantly although during the Second World War she was especially noted for speaking at meetings for Soviet Aid.

She died just two months short of her 90th birthday on October 1984. ★

Edited from the website of the late Graham Stevenson <https://grahamstevenson.me.uk>



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# WOMEN TO THE FRONT



'The IWW [Industrial Workers of the World] has been accused of pushing women to the front. This is not true. Rather, the women have not been kept in back, and so they have naturally moved to the front.' **Elizabeth Gurley Flynn** US workers leader, active in the birth control, women's suffrage and women's rights movements and chair of the US Communist Party



## Remembering Helen MacFarlane 1818-1860

Helen MacFarlane was the first English translator of the 'Communist Manifesto'

VICKY KNIGHT  
WOMEN'S HIDDEN HISTORIES

**N**ORTHWEST COMRADES have for some years now undertaken an annual walk in Helen MacFarlane's memory. The walk is usually held on the Sunday closest to the date of her death, (29 March) with this year's delegation welcoming China's Manchester consul general Zheng Xiyuan who joined us at her final resting place in Baddiley, Cheshire.

It is not widely known that Helen was the first person to translate the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* from its original German text to English in 1850. The MacFarlane family were originally Scottish mill owners and the workforce had radical



views. Within weeks of her father's death the mill, famous for its Turkey red bandanas, had closed.

In time Helen found herself in Vienna during the revolt against the Hapsburgs. Having had a good education and political awareness, she wrote. Helen had become a Chartist; she knew Marx and Engels and as a journalist she regularly contributed (under a nom de plume) to the Chartist's publications *Democratic View* and *Red Republican*. Helen was a revolutionary journalist and feminist who was described by Marx as "The most original

writer in the Chartist press." After spending time in Austria in 1848 she returned to Britain. She went to Burnley, where today, there is a heritage plaque marking her contribution through the manifesto's translation, then she went to London. Helen had a clear understanding of Chartism and a clear knowledge of world politics. She opposed sectarianism within the movement, her writing demonstrated this and showed a clear grasp of what we today know as 'Marxism'.

Helen fell out with George Harney, editor of the *Democratic Review* and in 1851 dropped out of politics completely. She was critical of the established church in her early scripts, which would deem to be ironic in later years. Early marriage ended in tragedy for Helen and rebuilding her life would have been extremely challenging. It is recorded that whilst Helen was living in Burnley, Lancashire she at some point met her future husband, a 51-year-old Minister of the Church of England, who had been widowed with a grown-up family.

As a woman who had visited the major cities of Europe, where she had met the revolutionary thinkers of that time, Helen was brought to a Cheshire "backwater" to be mistress of a huge ministerial home, which can still be seen to this day.

After living a quieter pace of life Helen died at the age of just 41 from pneumonia, embraced in the arms of the church about which she had written so critically years previously.

Helen was for so long lost to history as with many of these revolutionary women of Victorian society, until David Black succeeded in locating her resting place at St Michael's Church, Baddiley, Nantwich. There are no known photographs of her.

The Northwest district would love to invite comrades to join us at next year's annual memorial walk and wreath laying in memory of Helen MacFarlane and help us raise some much needed funds for the *Morning Star*.

We would also love to establish a Helen MacFarlane memorial lecture annually around September time, starting in 2023 at the Burnley Mechanics Institute, which stands close by the Heritage Plaque dedicated to Helen. Details of both events follow and we welcome all to attend. ★

VICKY KNIGHT IS THE CHAIR OF MERSEYSIDE COMMUNIST PARTY AND NORTH WEST DISTRICT WOMEN'S ORGANISER

ABOVE: Gathering in honour of Helen at St Michael's Church, Baddiley.  
LEFT: Cover of *The Red Republican*



## CAROLINE TENDLER MY LIFE AS COMMUNIST

**I** WAS BORN into a Communist family. My German father was imprisoned after making a speech against Hitler. Via the resistance he fled to Britain, staying with a member of the Labour Party. He learnt English and studied at the London School of Economics. In 1936 he was offered a place to do his PhD in the United States.

My mother's family arrived on the Mayflower in 1620! My parents met working in President Roosevelt's New Deal. They served in the US Navy during World War Two and fought in the 1948 presidential campaign for the Progressive candidate Henry Wallace.

I was born in 1947. My father worked as a professor of economics, my mother was a student. My father was subpoenaed to appear before HUAC (the House Un-American Activities Committee) and took the Fifth Amendment, refusing to testify. I still remember the newspaper headlines.

My aunt lost her job through HUAC red-baiting. My mother became the main breadwinner as a housing economist building low rent housing while my father taught Adult Education and Marxism classes for comrades.

I first joined the Communist Party USA when I was 19 and when I finished university was one of two from the CPUSA delegated to study in the German Democratic Republic. I arrived in August 1969. I studied German and was lucky as my father's brother, his wife and daughter and friends from when he lived in Frankfurt were also living in GDR along with American friends who lived in Berlin.

It was quite something to study in a foreign language. All courses were in German including Marxism-Leninism. We had many students on our course which had three strands (language and literature, another Germanic language, or pedagogy). Most students were Slavic Poles, Hungarians, Russians, Bulgarians, Yugoslavians, and a few others (Arabs from Israel and Iraq) France and me. There were many foreign students in Leipzig, many studying medicine and veterinary medicine. The other student delegated from CPUSA studied ethology.

In July/August 1973 the World Youth Festival was held in Berlin. I was a translator for the US delegation. *That is me pictured above right*. It was a fantastic time and I made many friends. We heard the Chilean young communist leader Gladys Marin speak.

How terrible was the US-backed coup in Chile that September 11. Many Chilean refugees came to live in the GDR and were

given housing, jobs and the right to study. After my dissertation, viva and degree, I left friends in the GDR and came to England. I married into a left wing family – my husband and mother in law were comrades and my sister in law got me interested in the co-operative movement and its children's organisation the Woodcraft Folk.

After joining the Communist Party I soon became a district delegate. I joined the National Assembly of Women and, with a friend, campaigned to a maternity home in Corby. In 1977 I became a mother and helped to set up the Woodcraft Folk there.

We then moved to Fareham where I was active in setting up the Fareham Woodcraft Folk and my second son was born. During this time there were divisions in the CPGB and we joined the breakaway New Communist Party.

In 1985 my marriage broke up and I was left with two small children. Although my parents had since died, I decided to remain in Britain for the sake of the children. My father had left his library in the name of my mother and together with the library of Rosco Proctor it became the Niebyl-Proctor Library for Social Research in Oakland, California.

I also became active in the Co-operative Group area committee and chaired the Southwest Region, their Member Relations Committee and was elected to the National Members Relations Committee. I was their representative to the Woodcraft Folk. We worked very hard to save democracy within the Co-operative Group however we lost this fight but we still fight on!

I became active nationally in the Woodcraft Folk and served on the Conference Standing Orders committee I also served on the Co-operative College board nationally.

I then taught German in adult education in Fareham, and my work in the Woodcraft Folk continued, but as I no longer had a car my party work didn't. I was a member of NATFE and then the NUT.

In 1992 I took a two-year PGCE course at Southampton university, bought a car and was mobile again. In the late 1980s I joined the reconstituted Communist Party. I was still active in the Woodcraft Folk as well as teaching part time in secondary school and adult education.

Due to ill health I had to retire but thanks to modern technology and zoom I was/am able to fulfil my role in the party, as well as the unions (NEU and Unite community). I am proud to be one of our Southern district delegates to the party's Women's Commission together with Dominique. I think the conference we held last year was exciting and interesting and hope we shall continue with those events. I also look forward to Mary Davis's Women and Class course running nationally.

I remain active in the NAW, People's Assembly, Liberation and Cuba Solidarity. ★

## CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

The wisdom and experience of all the women in our Branches, Districts and Nations is needed for the big objectives we have set for ourselves - to recruit more women into the Party; to promote a class analysis of the issues surrounding violence against women and girls, working with other women's organisations to put an end to it and our plan to hold a national event discussing why a unified women's movement in Britain is needed.

I'm heartened by Districts and Nations that are encouraging women members to meet - informally or formally. Working towards setting up District/Nation Women's Advisories is a good way of involving women to discuss and propose local events which attract women.

Get in touch if you would like me to come and speak to your Branch, District or Nation - we need the support of our male comrades too!

Carol Stavris  
All-Britain Women's Organiser