

Lund University

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Where Boundaries are Drawn

- An anthropological study of the collective identity in a Scottish communist party



Photo (above) taken by the author

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Abstract

In this paper I will be analyzing a Scottish political party and their collective identity. This includes the party's history and how their collective identity is created by drawing boundaries, as well as showing solidarity. I will be using an anthropological approach and anthropological theory to help define their collective identity. I will be using theories and concepts from Thomas Hylland Eriksen's "We and Us" and "Norms and Social Control", along with Victor Turner on how groups use "performance". I will show how they use their daily paper to draw boundaries towards others, while at the same time showing solidarity with the broader left movement. Different forms of the party's activism will also be explained. Information that I have accumulated is mainly through semi-structured interviews and participatory observation.

Key words: Anthropology, collective identity, performance, politics, communism

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Problem formulation

The reason as to why I became interested in studying specifically leftist activism was because, at the time of this paper, there was a massive growth on a global scale, of right wing politics. The QAnon parrot Donald Trump had not been out of the White House for more than a year and a half, alt-right Marine Le Pen was head to head with the Emmanuel Macron in the French elections, Boris Johnson and his clique of human rights denying political hooligans were still holding a majority in parliament. So after hearing this massive rise in far right wing political rhetorics on a global scale, I wondered what the far left was doing? I wanted to do something related to social anthropology and politics, but I was tired of hearing the same rhetoric over and over again from the right wing and if I was to do my research about them, I would burn out before I would be done. Instead I decided to look towards left-wing politics.

In this paper I will be studying leftist activism in the Communist Party of Britain, the CPB, as well as the Young Communist League, the YCL, and their collective identity. Some of the questions that I wanted to address were: how were boundaries drawn to other leftist organizations and why? Do they show solidarity with others outside of the party who are not communists? Do they even show solidarity with the rest of the communists in the country? How do they perform their activism? Is there a culture in the party? Norms that have to be followed? All of these aspects represent their identity in one way or another. Looking at the aspects individually will not define the party's identity well, but when you put them all together it exhibits the CPB's and the YCL's collective identity.

Previous research and Theory

There has been previous research regarding collective identity in relation to social movements. Kristofer Lindh has written a thesis called *Performance at the Edge of Apocalypse - An ethnographic study of collective identity construction in a neo-nationalist social movement in Sweden* (2017), which I have drawn some inspiration from. When I was first addressing my own paper I was quite lost on how to look at this subject that interested me, all I knew was that I was interested in looking at leftist activism and to learn more about a movement within that category.

Lindh's thesis gave me an insight in how I could observe a politically active group. Even though I will be looking at left leaning politically active groups and Kristofer Lindh wrote about a right-wing party, the way that he conducted his research is still something that I could draw inspiration from. Almost like a different cake batter, but the same cake form can still be used. During his field work, Lindh attended demonstrations. This is also something that I was aiming to do so it was interesting to read how he tried to blend in when taking photos and what social aspects he was focusing on observing, especially when it came to counter-demonstrators. There were no counter-demonstrations at the parades and other activism activities I attended but the thesis proved to be useful in other ways for me as well. It was interesting to see how Lindh laid forth the political party's points of view because this was something that I was quite worried about doing. One never wants to get anything wrong or misrepresent anything. Lindh also brings up the world view of the people who are part of FD, Folkets Demonstration. I found this an important aspect that he brought up because this adds a lot of context as to why people in political parties act or do what they do.

From Radical Counterculture to Pragmatic Radicalism? The Collective Identity of Contemporary Radical Left-libertarian Activism in Sweden (2020), written by Jan Jämte, Måns Lundstedt, and Magnus Wennerhag is another article that I have taken some inspiration from. The questions that they have used have helped me grasp what types of questions are good for identifying a group's collective identity. These questions were how the "other" was defined and what separated them from oneself, how internal boundaries were drawn within the same sort of movements, and if anything has changed from the initial part of the movement until now which would change or affect their ideational development. Staying in the same mindset that their questions were set in, I then could formulate questions better suited for my research field. In this article they also bring up the importance of identity transformations in RLLM, radical left-libertarian movements, in Sweden. This is something that I thought would also be important to try and lift forth because this is a fundamental part of a party's or movement's identity. It can do everything from changing mannerisms in the party to changing what the party is advocating for.

Collective Identity and Social Movements (2001) written by Francesca Polletta and James M. Jasper really helped me form a perspective on collective identity and what to look at when observing it and trying to place one's finger on what forms the collective identity. This article also had questions that inspired the questions that I used in the same way that the previously mentioned article did. They defined a collective identity by one person's emotional, moral, and cognitive connection with a larger community. The article continues on to formulate a collective identity around other points as well, such as if it is imagined or experienced, if their personal identities form the groups identity or if the groups identity affects their personal identities, and how much is a group's collective identity is created by those from the outside projecting inwards? These questions were not as useful to me. Although what was useful for my research was that they mention how narratives, symbols, and clothing amongst other things also play a large role in a group's expression of their collective identity. Reading about this helped me gain the insight needed to better understand what I was going to be looking for at the beginning of my project.

Theories that I will be using to help define the CPB and YCL's collective identity will be Thomas Hylland Eriksen's *We and US: Two Modes of Group Identification* (1995), and another of his works, *Small Places, Large Issues: An Introduction to Social and Cultural Anthropology* (2015). *We and Us: Two modes of Group Identification* is useful to help explain how the CPB and YCL create their identity in relationship to other left-wing entities. It will help explain where they draw the line between themselves and others, and how they do it. Furthermore this article will help explain how the CPB and YCL create the sense of "we" by organizing internal cohesion. *Small Places, Large Issues* will be used to explain how norms can act as a form of social control and how the CPB has their own set of norms which act as rules because it builds upon the basic foundation of communistic ideology. If you do not follow basic fundamentals of communistic ideology, then you are not a communist in their eyes, but this will be touched upon later in this paper.

The Anthropology of Performance (1988) by Victor Turner will aid in explaining the performance and symbolic values that the CPB and YCL use to express their ideology forming a collective identity in their form of expression. Turner brings up performance reflexivity which

is where a group reflects upon themselves and then tries to see what creates their public self, analyzing their actions, social structures, symbols, codes, ethical and legal rules within the group and how all of these things play together to create their self image. The group can then change some of these performances to better reflect outwards the image that they themselves want to uphold or demonstrate; for others to see them as. I will touch upon this later on in this paper again.

Method

Initially, I was uncertain which leftist group I would be able to interact with and who would be willing to talk to an “outsider”. I started off by going to a café not too far from where I lived that labeled itself as a socialist café, but it turned out to be more of a politically left leaning “safehouse”. I saw a possibility of an entry point to chat with people during a week-long event the café was organizing called “culture political week”. I did participatory observation during their politically active week, but I did not go to every activity. Some activities were parties, which I felt were out of place because I might be intruding too much into people's personal space. Due to this I decided to look elsewhere.

I e-mailed left-wing groups that I found on the internet to see if any of them would be interested in talking with me. I reached out to anarchist, antifa, and primarily communist parties. I did not keep myself to just contacting those in Sweden, but Finland, Denmark, England, Scotland, and the US as well. I e-mailed 10 different groups in total. By contacting them this way, it meant that I could go straight to the point and be directed towards people that would be interested in talking within the party from the very start, which had been my biggest challenge so far. While I was waiting for parties to respond, I visited Sveriges Kommunistiska Parti, SKP, in Malmö. Unfortunately this did not result in any significant progress for this work.

After almost a week, only one party got back to me, the Communist Party of Britain, CPB, from Scotland. I did not get only one but two responses from two people within the party. After several e-mails we eventually had the first interview over zoom. Here I was informed that many in the party were “zoomed out” after all of the party’s zoom meetings during COVID-19. This meant that if I was interested in talking to more people, I would have to travel to Scotland and

speak with them in person. Knowing this, I checked to see if the CPB had any activities planned, and they had many. Having so many events would greatly benefit my work because then I could do fieldwork and see first hand how their activism took place, alongside doing interviews with party members.

The CPB is a large, well established, group with many people willing to talk to me so I decided to travel to Scotland. All of the people I had gotten in contact with from the CPB had a plethora of knowledge about the party and their communistic values which was perfect for me because I knew very little about communism at the start of this field study. My two weeks in Scotland with the CPB and the YCL mainly consisted of participatory observation. This consisted of: leafleting, standing at their stall and talking to party members, being at the May Day Parade with them, and tagging along when they did food redistribution.

I had one group interview with three people that lasted roughly 2 hours and 30 minutes, which would have gone on for longer but we got kicked out of the area we sat in due to closing times. I was initially meant to interview one member at a bar, but upon meeting him he mentioned that there were two more party members who would want to talk with me not far from where we were. Thereafter the four of us walked to a quiet place to have a group interview. By the end of the interview we had only scratched the surface about them, the CPB, and their relationship to it.

Three longer one-on-one interviews were also conducted, well over an hour each. After the interviews were done we always spent more time together talking or walking around, with the focus of the conversation still about the party. One of the interviews took place in a pub, another over dinner at a restaurant, and the final one at a party member's residence. Four shorter interviews, roughly 30 minutes each, were also conducted when at their outdoor stall.

I have mainly used three different research methods. Snowball sampling was something that was very recurring with party members kindly and constantly recommending me to other party members so that I always had more people I could talk to if I had any questions, wanted more perspectives, or if they knew more about an area I was interested in asking about (Bryman 2012:424).

Semi-structured interviews was how I conducted all of my interviews. This was so that I could give my interviewees as much leeway as possible when answering so that I could gain as much context as possible (Bryman 2012:471). With the extra context it enabled me to have a better understanding of what was important to them or the party which then could lead to more targeted questions regarding their collective identity because they are bringing up what they deem are important aspects of the CPB and YCL (Bryman 2012:471). I was also keen to keep questions open enough for party members to explain if there had been any change in the party's movement, or if there was just one long line of continuous activism towards one single direction (Jämte et al. 2020:2-3). This is important to give interviewees leeway to answer because a group's identity can change depending on these factors, like strategies for conducting their activism and what their goals are and if/how they have changed (Jämte et al. 2020:2-3). Even slight changes in these aspects can change the collective identity of a movement (Jämte et al. 2020:2-3).

My final research method was participatory observation, or as some would prefer to call it "ethnography" (Bryman 2012:432). This was essential for me because then I could be out and about with party members when they were performing their different forms of activism which gave me a better understanding of their vocally expressed collective identity and how well that reflected over to their visually expressed identity (Bryman 2012:432). I collected different books, leaflets, and other forms of propaganda while out on the field which, again, gave me a much better insight to the party as a whole (Bryman 2012:432).

Regarding ethics, for the safety of the people I have been in contact with I will not be using their real names, instead, their names in this paper have been replaced with randomly chosen names. In the photos that I have taken of the parties, I blurred out their faces and tattoos. This safety measure is being taken because I have been informed during my field work that there are other groups trying to identify members from the CPB and YCL. There have been party members that have gone through torture and other forms of physical and mental abuse due to their ideology. This is something that I do not wish upon anyone, hence I am taking these precautionary measures. The names of the parties will be staying the same because I have been informed that there are multiple procedures and methods that they have in place to avoid trolls/spams/and other

forms of iniquitous and ungentle forms of contact. I will also kindly ask that no readers of this paper will try to contact these parties with any negative intent. Even as an “outsider” I have been treated with great respect and warmth so if anyone does try to contact the parties, please treat them the same way that they have treated me; kindly and respectfully.

Disposition

I have now presented the previous research and what theory that will be used in this paper. After that I have explained my method demonstrating how it came to be that I have studied the CPB and the YCL in Scotland and how I have been enabled to do so. Now I will go through the importance of the Morning Star to the party, some of their recruitment methods, and the background information of the CPB and the YCL explaining some of its history. Thereafter I will go through the party’s boundary drawing towards other leftist movements, and how they form solidarity alongside leftist movements as well. In both cases this information will demonstrate how the party creates its identity and how its identity can be fluid and dynamic depending on who the other organization in question is. Following that I will go into the CPB and YCL’s performance which also reflects its collective identity in action. Lastly, I will touch upon the YCL’s cultural goals.

The importance of the Morning Star

The Morning Star is a vital part of the CPB and their collective identity. It is a key political, cultural, and financial building block for the party. Alone, it raises £19 000 a month for the party. Previously the party employed people, who were called “full timers” so that they could work and dedicate all their time to the party instead of having to have a job beside their political activities. Full timers had a wide range of duties but today these duties have been divided up within the party and its members, such as arranging events, distributing leaflets, setting up stalls in different cities, and many other things. The party no longer has any full timers but it does require people to partake in activities that spread and strengthen the communistic movement. Previously the USSR, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, bought a lot of Morning Stars to fund the CPB and brought them to the USSR and placed them in schools and other areas even though it was printed in English. This way many copies were bought and exported to the USSR as a form of showing that the communist movement was something international. Some of the people that

the CPB party members have met throughout the years remember and mention that they had read the Morning Star previously due to this method of the USSR funding the CPB. Some of these copies were also sent to East Germany as well.

Other subsidies that the USSR would give the full timers at the CPB would be health checks, holidays, and more. One of the less discreet ways of funding the CPB was by straight up giving them cash. Back then this was a very secretive piece of information which would lead to people being in car rides following other people trying to figure out who is giving who cash but all this information has come to light since then and is now common knowledge.

Nowadays, selling the Morning Star brings in a large amount of money for the party per month, £19 000 a month as previously mentioned. The Morning Star is sold at their stalls that they put up in multiple different towns, alongside books that the party has published and other purchasable items. The newspaper and its stall acts as a sort of medium for people who want to gain insight to the party and what they stand for. Not only being a social place to meet when buying the newspaper and supporting the party financially, but a place to also hold discussions, ask questions, and become part of a community. The newspaper also brings forth their world view and expresses current national and international problems in a perspective that they agree with and relate to. The Morning Star is a media outlet that does not dilute information the way that the average media outlets do, multiple members explained to me. The paper is sold at the stalls the party has, but the Morning Star is also sold alongside other newspapers in shops throughout the city.

Photo taken by author



Photo taken by author



Recruitment in the CPB and YCL

To join the CPB there is a membership fee but this fee can be exceedingly cheap if need be. It can be anywhere between £1 to £50 per month depending on the members income. Applying to join the party also costs £12 but this is a one time fee. The three members of the CPB that I initially had a group interview with on my first day, had all found and joined the party via the Morning Star in one way or another.

One of these members, who we will call Kevin, joined the CPB back in 1972, after seeing activists in a stall. Back then, Kevin was 18 years old and attending school. While he only knew roughly what the people at the stall stood for, he still found it intriguing. He understood the group wanted a different type of society, which was against the establishment, and that this is the way they wanted to go forward to create a better society. Afterwards Kevin found an advertisement in the Morning Star, which was on a wall, and ripped off the part that said “to join” the party and sent it in after filling it out. “I didn’t know the distinctions between the International Marxist group, the International Socialists, and those were the other two ultra-left groups there... and erhm... The Labour party was there as well”, Kevin explained. He joined because he thought that it was “a sort of cool thing to do”. After joining the party, an activity that he and other party members would do was to sell the newspaper together on the weekends. A member's job within the party changed depending on what branch they were currently in.

Kevin went on to explain that one does not always make a fully informed choice when joining a party like asking oneself “...dialectical materialism, who has the truest take on that? The nature of socialist society, who's got the best take on that?... I didn’t know the ins and outs really of the Soviet Union”. He also admitted that he did not know much about WW2 which he emphasized was a core part of much of communist culture. These were things that he learned after joining the party. People who had been in the party for a longer period of time would act as mentors for newer members.

Joining the party and learning to see society through the Marxist perspective was also one of the best things for him intellectually, Kevin explained. This has greatly shaped how he sees the world today. During his time in school he perceived, as did many others, that anything to do with

the Soviet Union was cool because it was a large counter culture. It was also quite a bit of chance that he joined the CPB because if he would have been around members of other parties, he would probably have been influenced to join their respective party instead.

Another one of these three initial individuals was a 21 year old who joined the party at the age of 15. We are going to call him Miles. He joined the YCL, the Young Communist Youth League, which is the CPB's autonomous youth party after speaking with Kevin. Kevin was standing at one of the CPB's stalls which they still place up every Saturday in several cities. Miles agreed with Kevin that one does not always join knowing all of the ins and outs and policies that the party stands for, rather it is something that you learn with time. Miles often passed one of their stalls and eventually stopped to have conversations with those standing by it. After having multiple conversations with Kevin about the party and that it "generally opposes this, and generally opposes that", Kevin then further directed Miles towards books, pamphlets, the Morning Star that they sold at the stall for Miles to gain a more in depth understanding of the party and what they stood for. One stays in the party because "it all makes sense and it's in line with what is real", Miles described. Eventually Miles also became a party member of the CPB, so he is in both the YCL and the CPB.

The third man of the three that I initially spoke to, joined the party in 1983. He was 68 years old at the time of our semi-structured group interview. He will go by the name Andrew. Andrew was the exact opposite to the other two members because he knew a lot about communistic politics before joining the party. This is also something that these three party members bantered about during the group interview, because Andrew could not believe that they joined just because they thought it was a cool counter culture. This led to many laughs during the rest of the group interview.

The reason Andrew decided to join the CPB was because he had grown up in poverty. He lived with his mother and siblings while growing up. The mother had a hard time settling in one place which led to him attending 6 different schools within 6 years of schooling. A core memory that he had from when he was 5 years old was that when he was getting up in the morning to get ready for school, the house was an icebox. They used coal to heat up the house but it took a

while to warm up the home in the mornings because no one could keep feeding it during the night. Thereafter one could let it run throughout the day which meant that you could be warm in the evening. To try and solve the icy mornings, the mother bought an electric heater, but she was unemployed so very little money was coming in. The benefits were just enough to keep the family going. This meant that the electric heater could only be put at the lowest setting because the mother was terrified that the heating bill would be too high. The lowest setting was not enough to heat him up so while his mother went upstairs, he would turn on the heater to the highest setting to warm up the room. As soon as he heard his mother coming back down from the upstairs part of the house, he would instantly turn it back down to the lowest setting so that he would not be caught.

Andrew never went without food or without clothes and, initially, he never thought that he was living in poverty. He believed so until he went to a school friend's house. This friend had a pantry, with many shelves fully stacked with food. He had never seen so much food in a house in his entire life. This was not the food that Andrew ate at home either. This was “the nicer kind of food” which made him believe that his friend's family was rich. One of the foods that stood out to him was a jar of honey. He wondered who could afford so much honey. Andrew noticed a difference in the quality of food that they served him compared to what he ate at home. This made him realise that you do not always know what you do not have if you do not see it.

Another factor for Andrew deciding to join the CPB was that he had always been interested in understanding why the world is how it is. This led to him studying history and politics. Due to him choosing to study these two subjects at school, WW1 and the Russian Revolution were part of his classes. This is where he first learnt about Lenin. There was a basic introduction book that the students got about the Russian Revolution and this was where his interest for Lenin started. At this same point in time the Labour Party was not at all a party he would have liked to join because, in his eyes, they were performing poorly. That led to Andrew wanting to find a communist party.

Shortly after hearing an inspiring public speech by a socialist, Andrew saw a man outside of the subway station who was selling the Morning Star. Andrew bought a copy and he saw that there

was a form that one could fill out. It read “I want to join the communist party”. He filled it in and sent it off to the party, but he heard nothing back from them.

After a few weeks had passed he walked up to the same man that had sold him the Morning Star and explained to him that he had filled out the form, sent it off, and had not received a response. The CPB party member who sold him the paper contacted the YCL. Later on that day, Andrew got a phone call and that is how he got recruited. After being in the YCL for some time he then moved up to be a member of the CPB because the YCL is only for those between the ages of 12 and 29. “So the reason I joined, it was not because it was cool” he said while giving some side eye and a smile to the other two sitting with us “it wasn’t because I liked their haircut or uniforms, I joined because of the politics”. Politics was the key reason which kept Andrew in the party, and the other two members instantly agreed with him. This was of the utmost importance for all three of these party members.

The YCL is autonomous from the CPB but yet they both strive for the same goal and the YCL aims to become CPB members and the CPB hopes to have the YCL grow in number. To become a member of the YCL it is not just as straightforward as applying and you are in, there are a few steps in between. First you apply, then you get an interview. If the interview goes well for you then you get accepted into the party and are seen as a full member - but only kind of. You are still on a three month trial period.

During these three months they will see if you are right for the party, and if the party is right for you. You will still be out doing activism with other party members, and the way you treat other party members will also be brought up in the review period after your three first months. During the review the party can decide if you can be accepted fully as a member, or if they need to extend it for another three months if they need to see more to be able to make a decision. Reasons could be if you have been sick and not able to partake in the YCL’s activities, they will of course not hold that against you and give you the time you need to get better and come back to the party when you are up on your feet again. E.g. COVID-19 or the such.

You can also be instantly denied party membership, but this is very very rare. This is if someone starts a physical fight with another party member or something along these lines. The CPB and YCL also have a manifesto that everyone in the party is expected to read. It changes every few years to stay updated. It is their hard proof of them having a plan for the wide range of problems in society and that they have an idea as to how to solve them. It is expected that all members in the YCL and CPB will join a union if possible so that one can mobilize the workforce against the employer. It is also expected that in one's free time one will continue to try and advocate for communistic values or take part in different forms of activism. These norms are in place to ensure that not only is the party growing, but it is growing with the right people that are there for the right reason in the YCL's eyes. Quality is just as important as quantity, if not even more so because the quality is also the backbone of the party in a way. The YCL has set up their recruitment procedure in a way that underlines the importance they place in committed members and how well organized they really want to be.

Thomas Hylland Eriksen has written about norms and how it can be a form of social control (Hylland Eriksen 2015:76). Norms vary in levels of importance and the norms, as their respective importance, also change depending on what social institution and situation in life one is currently in (Hylland Eriksen 2015:76). The YCL and CPB have their own way of governing their norms and have sanctions for their party members who follow, as sanctions can also be something positive (Hylland Eriksen 2015:76), or punish members who do not follow the norms that are set in place by the party. Individuals who follow these norms set in place by the party get rewarded by gaining entrance and membership to the party whereas those who disobey them without legitimate reason are deemed not to suit the party and are therefore kicked out. This is a form of social control that the party executes to avert violation of the social norms that they have set in place thus upholding the quality they desire in the party (Hylland Eriksen 2015:76).

The CPB and YCL's background

I feel like injecting some information regarding the CPB and their ideologies early on because it will bring a well needed context for the rest of the information that is to come. They are a Marxist-Leninist group that strongly stands for peace, with so much emphasis on their strive for

peace that they have the peace dove as part of their party's symbolism. The party is also very pro-CCP, the Chinese Communist Party, and pro-USSR.

Upon entering one party member's residence, there was communistic memorabilia all over the walls, cabinets, refrigerator, and anything else that had a surface. Many of these memorabilia were from the CPB but there were also some of Stalin, Mao, USSR flags, Cuban currency, and everything else you could imagine. This CPB member was not the only one who held respect for these leaders though, even with the negative history that many in today's society remember them for. Multiple party members that I have spoken to have said that they respect what Lenin, Stalin, and Mao have done but emphasized that their party had learned from their mistakes. They want to keep the Marxist theory as a fundamental base and ratify that theory into practice much like Lenin did. One party member said that they had to respect Stalin because he had accomplished so much for communism in 19 years that others had not in hundreds of years. I was then asked "Can one make an omelet without breaking a few eggs?" during one of our interviews in regards to Stalin and the party's perspective of him.

The 1970s and 1980s was a rough time period for the CPB. During the 1970s there were materialistic changes in society that led to the CPB having a harder time to keep pace with society. There was a growth in technology, like computer chips, which led to technology overtaking traditional manufacturing jobs. People who worked in these manufacturing jobs started to lose their jobs so they decided that if they would go to a variety of factories and try to sell the Morning Star to the people coming and going, then maybe they could have an impact. This was much harder than they initially thought because the people who would come and go would be passing the factory gates in cars rather than "weary looking people in overalls trudging towards us that we can convert".

Another thing that happened in 1980s Britain was that Margaret Thatcher had passed the "Housing Act 1980". This Right to Buy act allowed the state to sell off its council houses. Council housing is public housing that is built through local authority funding. The housing being sold off could have up to a 70% discount. Council housing today was not what it was before in the UK. Previously, central governments would give money to the local councils. This

monetary transfer was called a block grant. Thereafter the council itself decided how they would spend that money. Much of the money went to building new council housing and improving the old council housing that was already in place. The block grant was also used to keep rents low for people living in council housing.

When these legislations changed, it interfered with the communities that lived in council housing and caused some people to move out, like one of my informants whom I will call Tom. Tom refused to buy council housing because it was against his morals, because part of the communistic ideology is to rent housing from the state owned housing sector. Instead, Tom went to purchase an apartment from the private sector. I asked members of the CPB if the Right to Buy act had affected any relationships between members in the party that 1, chose to stay in council housing and rent even if the rent prices were going to change, 2, chose to buy the council housing that they lived in, or 3, if people went off and bought something in the private housing market. They all responded with a no. They held the idea that party members had to do what was best for themselves in the changing capitalistic market, so it caused no tension within the party.

One thing that the Right to Buy act did do though was that it changed the relationship between industrial activity, housing, and finance as Tom continued to explain the situation to me. If workers had to go out on strike, thus getting none or next to no income during its duration, and they had an ordinary landlord who one did not pay rent to, you would obviously be kicked out. To avoid being kicked out you could go to a labour council and explain to them that you were in an “industrial dispute”, out on strike, and you will not be able to pay rent, they would then say not a problem, they have got you covered until you get paid again. They would pay off your rent and then when you start working again, because you never know if the strike will be over in 1 day or 1 month, then you can start paying back the rent to the labour council with a certain percent increase until the rent they paid off for you is paid back to them. This was always granted unless you had a very bad history of paying back the missed rent. The financial assistance took away the “fear element” Tom explained, when one would go out on strikes because you knew that your rent would be covered until you can pay them back alongside solidarity actions that would help feed those who are out on strikes. The Housing Act made it much more difficult for this to take place because instead of having rent, you had a mortgage, and it was much harder to

arrange a compromise with a bank than it was to negotiate with the local labour council. The outcome was that strikes started to reduce.

The party members continued to explain to me that some of the other stuff that had happened during this time period was that there was also a lot of confusion when it came to the theory at the time as well. A lot of books were Marxist oriented but none of the theories in them would last in the eyes of the CPB because it was inspired by academics. On a wider scale, in other places in the world, there was also a lot of academic Marxism at the time. The reason none of this form of Marxism would last is because of its influence by idealism, it was turning into subjective idealism. "That the truth is inside of you, you can only know your subjective impressions of things" and other versions of that which they thought was turning into postmodernism. This led to a feeling within the CPB that the party was not producing theorists which was discomfoting for the party.

The members explained to me during an interview that Eurocommunism, which came about in the mid 1970s and started in Europe, eventually spread its way into the UK where it reached the party. They said that Eurocommunism was a theory developed by communist parties in Western Europe to have an easier time implementing communism in their countries, primarily France, Italy, and Spain. Many Eurocommunist parties also rejected aid from the USSR and strived to be independent of the USSR thus breaking their international ties with them.

Eurocommunism was another point that greatly impacted the party they explained. It has had a massive role in shaping the CPB to be what it is today, but not because they aligned with the ideology. When the Eurocommunitic ideology eventually reached the CPGB, the Communist Party of Great Britain, people who believed in it started building factions and dividing the party. The Eurocommunists within the party eventually took control of Marxism Today which was the party's theoretical magazine. The paper was then changed from being a theoretical discussion magazine into a tool for the Eurocommunist's faction within the party. The change was so drastic that it was even noticeable on the covers. You could clearly tell apart the covers from before the magazine got revamped to after when the Eurocommunists took control. Some members that I spoke to within the CPB expressed the difference to be so big that the Eurocommunist's version

of the magazine “just looks like a normal magazine on the shelf. It doesn’t look like a communist magazine”, which shows in its own way how drastic the two ideologies differ.

A party member explained that in 1991 the CPGB was dissolved by the Eurocommunist group leading it to create a new “very liberal” party that was called the Democratic Left which has since also dissolved again in 1998. Although prior to the CPGB dissolving, in 1988 the anti-eurocommunism group from the CPGB had formed the CPB. Due to the Democratic Left being the successors of the CPGB they kept all of the assets of the CPGB. This meant that the CPB had to essentially re-start from the bottom again only being able to keep the Morning Star from the CPGB, which is another reason to its utmost importance and sentimental value of the CPB.

Here we can see the importance of how even “small” changes in a movement from an outsider's perspective can be so large and important for those in the group (Jämte et al. 2020:2-3).

Eurocommunism changed the fundamental identity that the party originally upheld, thus also affecting what their end goals are and how they plan their strategic action to reach them (Jämte et al. 2020:2-3). What strategic forms a group chooses to use reflects who the people in the group are, what they are comfortable with, and what they stand for (Polletta et al. 2001:284). This is something that would happen naturally within the group (Polletta et al. 2001:284). A simple example of this would be that pacifists would not advocate for peace through harming others, because it goes against the fundamental core of their belief. This is the same thing that happened with the members in the CPGB that did not align with eurocommunitic beliefs. They shied away from the CPGB because it no longer represented the identity and ideology that they stood for. They sought out others that upheld the same values as themselves so they could commit to a strategy that best suits their beliefs, thus recreating the group and its collective identity (Polletta et al. 2001:284).

Luckily for the YCL they were not affected by the dissolution of the CPGB, due to their autonomy. They were formed a year after the CPGB, so back in 1921. The CPB still counts itself as being formed in 1920 even though they had to re-establish themselves from the Eurocommunists takeover of the CPGB. One can not forget that while all of this is happening,

the Soviet Union also collapsed in 1991 which led to there being some party members having a feeling of uncertainty because of all of the changes happening.

I spoke to a party member who said “The future of the YCL is the CPB and the future of the CPB is the YCL.” which I personally found to be a very good way to frame the relationship of the two parties. The YCL members aim to become members of the CPB, hence why the CPB is the YCL’s future. At the same time for the CPB to stay alive and hopefully grow in the future they need the YCL members to eventually move up into the CPB carrying on the future of the CPB as a party.

Boundaries and differences within the left

I asked members in the YCL and the CPB why they preferred to stay in a more traditional party structure and not go off to join a single issue political group. With single issue political groups I mean groups that only focus on one thing, like racial injustice in the BLM movement, or the climate crises in the Extinction Rebellion movement, and other movements like these. These YCL and CPB members said that the “anarchistic inspired” one issue groups do not have the solutions needed to solve the problems we see in society today. They do see the single issue political groups work as charitable, but their “rejoice” in lack of structure can lead to “gurus” entering the movements and gaining power, which then opens the door to possible forms of corruption. It is for this reason that YCL and CPB members see the party as the one way to solve all of the problems in society. It is a meta version of these groups and it is the “intellectually deeper” way to solve the problems because one sees how class problems encompass everything in society as some party members expressed. Everything stems from a class based injustice and through the Marxist theory and Leninist party structure and ratification of its theoretical politics, they believe that it will enable them to have the discipline that is needed within the party to be able to solve problems like race, housing, climate, and other economic injustices.

Moreover, the YCL and the CPB there are obviously other left-wing political parties and movements in Scotland as well. Everything from anarchists, trotskies, other Marxist-Leninist communist parties, and more. I wanted to see what differences and distinctions the CPB and YCL members saw between themselves and the other leftist groups and parties. The way they

distance themselves from these parties is another form of how they represent themselves and how they uphold their collective identity. One of the most important things that they mention is their age. The CPB often brings up that they are over 100 years old, even if they essentially emerged in 1988 because of the Eurocommunist infiltration in the CPGB. From my understanding they see this just as them continuing on the political railway they were already on and had set for themselves before other people came in and corrupted their party.

The Trotsky communists in Scotland often would not agree to work together with the CPB because the CPB are also Stalinists. The trotskies do not see the Soviet Union as a socialist state but as a state capitalist Tom explained to me. This difference would lead to these two communistic groups having very different ideas about their ways forward politically. Trotskies were explained to me as being people who would “destroy what they touch” and that they are “too busy splitting into each other”. They used infiltration tactics and tried to change other political parties from within to a more Trotsky perspective. Of course, there would be some relationships on individual biases. An example of this was that some of them were coming to Tom’s birthday party for example; but on party levels? Definitely not.

Anarchists are seen by Miles to have the wrong understanding of the state and that they misunderstand capitalism. He explains to me that the anarchists see the state as the problem because the state uses class as a tool to suppress people. The CPB on the other hand sees the state as a tool to suppress class injustices. Anarchists have never led a revolution either, which communists have. So if anarchists want they can aid in creating a revolution, but they will never be leading it or be at the forefront of the movement Miles continued on to explain.

The CPGB-ML is another, but much smaller communist party. Miles explained that they had the correct analysis, but their strategy is different. They are also stuck in the past with their fixation laying there, unlike the CPB that is looking forward and actively trying to do what they can in today's society for the progression of communism. The CPGB-ML does not actively try to organize the working class so they do not practice what they are preaching. They are “a fucked Marxist-Leninist party”.

Thomas Hylland Eriksen uses the term creating an “us” to define how a group distinguishes itself from other groups (Hylland Eriksen 1995:427). To create an “us” one also creates a “we-hood” which is what holds a group together and this is done in multiple different ways even if it is intentional or not (Hylland Eriksen 1995:428). “We” is something that I will touch upon in the next part of this paper though, right now the CPB and YCL’s creation of “us” is our focus point here.

The CPB and YCL draw pride on how centralized their form of organization is. They strive to act as in uniform and united as possible. This is the reason they respect Lenin, Stalin, Mao, and other communist leaders that were strategically smart when it came to political organization. When the CPB and YCL act in this manner it is to differentiate themselves from other self-splitting parties like the trotskies, eurocommunists, anarchists, and they also distance themselves from the potential corruption of gurus in single issue movements which in its own turn creates the CPB’s identity of an “us” against these groups because they are not as well organized as the CPB and YCL is. The definition of CPB’s “us” changes though regarding what problem is at hand. Hylland Eriksen emphasizes that social identities are produced through the validation of contrasting others, and is furthermore upheld and strengthened by said validation (Hylland Eriksen 1995:435). These contrasts are not consistent and they change depending on what situation the groups find themselves in, which is a way for groups, in this case the CPB and YCL, to identify themselves against a variety of other groups (Hylland Eriksen 1995:435); even if they coexist under the wide leftist umbrella.

The CPB’s solidarity with other leftists

A large distinction between the CPB and other leftist organizations is that the CPB has the Morning Star. It is a large newspaper and most importantly, it is theirs. Other parties have weekly newspapers, but theirs is daily. It promotes their values of peace and socialism but even though the Morning Star follows the CPB’s political lines, it also gives other leftists space in the paper. “Voices of Scotland” is a center page spread of the Morning Star that is in every Tuesday’s edition. Here a wide range of leftist groups, parties, or even individuals have a chance to express their views. This could entail trade unions, strikers, Members of the Scottish Parliament, and more, can write articles and have their pieces published. To be able to cover the wide spectrum of

leftist opinions, the “Voice of Scotland” changes weekly. Those allowed to publish must be leftist enough in the eyes of the CPB, but even if someone is for example a communist, they can still be denied paper space. If you are leftist but writing from a Trotskyist perspective then you would not be allowed to have your piece published. The center page is an opportunity utilized by the CPB through the paper is another aspect that separates them from other parties and groups. The Morning Star becomes an intellectual left-wing forum for people to exchange ideas and advocate for progressiveness for a wider part of society.

Here we see the perfect example of Hylland Eriksen’s “we” and “us” being used at the same time(Hylland Eriksen 1995:435). The creation and fluidity of “we” is being shown by the CPB’s Morning Star being a facilitation of a shared value with other leftist groups even though they might not be part of the communist party which would be the CPB’s default “we” (Hylland Eriksen 1995:427). The Morning Star creates a wider leftist “we” because everyone publishing in the paper shares the same end goal which creates a larger form of solidarity (Hylland Eriksen 1995:435), which is mainly against the right-wing and the trotskies in this case. The fluidity is being demonstrated here because the CPB’s “us” has now changed from the CPB’s identity being produced by being compared against other organizations in general to the CPB and other leftist groups and individuals values being put up against the right-wing and their values (Hylland Eriksen 1995:435). This is also a demonstration of how the CPB utilizes the creation of a wider “we-hood” in a peaceful way and for a larger cause than just their own (Hylland Eriksen 1995:428).

Kevin mingled other leftist groups while he was still in the CPB, but on a world sized scale. After Kevin had graduated from university he did not really know what he wanted to do so he traveled to a kibbutz in Israel with the specific thought in mind that he was traveling to a commune. He wanted to learn the nature of work, people, and other things that he felt he could best learn through living in a commune. His experience there impressed him profoundly. He learned that people really form themselves through the circumstances that they live through and so do societies because it is a reflection of the people. Kevin felt that if you lived in a communistic society everything was a lot more straightforward. While in the commune he and the others there worked hard in olive groves, building sites, chicken farms, and they also mucked

about a fair deal as well. All of this under the intense Israeli heat. Another thing that impressed him was that he felt that he was not part of a commercial society and this had a positive lasting effect on him.

In 1973 he traveled to the Soviet Union and thereafter to China after spending some time in the USSR. There when visiting factories he also saw how the production was and other interesting stuff like the large amount of Lenin statues and plaques of different sorts that were spread out all over the place. Kevin then traveled to France to spend some time with communists there and then traveled on to Portugal to be with the Portuguese Communist Party and partake in their Avante! Festival which they started in 1976, named after the Portuguese Communist Party's newspaper.

When in Portugal he attended one of the party's schools in Portugal to continue learning more about communistic theory with their party while meeting new people. This fit well because it was only just some years after the revolution in Portugal that happened in 1974. The school that he was in was one of the mansions that the party had taken over in Lisbon. While in Portugal Kevin spoke with people who had experienced the revolution and got to hear about some of them being captured and how they had been tortured and about those who had disappeared. Afterwards they went to visit a collective farm where they explained how they got the aid they needed from the Soviet Union.

A lot of the stuff that impressed Kevin was the stuff that was happening abroad and he built many relationships with people from these other left-wing communities/communist parties that he traveled to be with and meet. This gave him the feeling that it was a movement that spread world wide that he was a part of. Having a sense and experiencing communism as a worldwide movement is a good demonstration of how Hylland Eriksen's "we" can be created on a global scale as well based solely upon solidarity within a political belief and that the creation of a groups "we" does not have to be restrained to local or even national movements (Hylland Eriksen 1995:427, 435). These types of trips that Kevin did were commonplace in the party. Many in the party would, when they could, travel to other communist countries or societies and spend time there. Cuba, Venezuela, and many more places have people in the CPB traveled to

and made friends in. One of the members that I spoke to even explained it as “work holidays” because you would just instantly start talking about how the state of communism is in one's own country and how it is where they were currently traveling in, what tactics one had in place to try and make the movement grow and so forth.

The International Meeting of Communist and Workers’ Parties was explained to me by Tom saying that it was a parliament of parties where communist parties report their work, seek advice, and can also seek aid from other communist parties around the world. It was through this organization the CPB got aid from a Vietnamese contact when there was a shortage of masks due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In a letter that the CPB had received from them there was information saying “We have agreed to send you fraternal aid”, in other words, they were going to be sending some masks. A CPB member gratefully responded and gave them his address. A few days later there was a man at the CPB members door with a very large box, saying that he had a delivery for the CPB. He thanked the delivery person, but he was then told to wait because there was more. After unloading an entire truckload and sacrificing two rooms of his house to be able to accommodate the hundreds of thousands of masks, this CPB member's wife was apparently not happy with him, Tom laughingly explained to me. The CPB thereafter went around to many different food banks and charities to donate masks so that poorer people who could not afford masks could still stay protected. They also sent masks around to all of the communist party branches so that their members could stay safe and follow the laws that were in place in Scotland at the time. The YCL also took some of the masks and added it to the emergency packs they were giving to people who were sleeping on the streets. Tom was proud of what he defined as “proletarian internationalism in action”. Here Tom further demonstrates here that the fluidity of the party’s “we”, which is now internationalistic proletarianism, and how dynamic it is due to “us” always depending on who the contrasting other is in the situation at hand (Hylland Eriksen 1995:427, 435).

Another organization that the YCL has supported through its activism is the GMB Union, - a union with over 500 000 members. The GMB made a video thanking the YCL for supporting them in creating larger picket lines with them. Miles showed me this video of them and one

could see that it really meant a lot to him that they made a public statement as a thank you for their support.

This is not the only union that has protested alongside the CPB and/or the YCL. Many unions have partaken in protests with them. Before trying to look for allies to support or to ask for support from, one has to first decide if it will be a static demonstration, a march, or other forms of protesting such as picketing. There are many forms to choose from. Tom explained to me that because the CPB and YCL are still small on the whole scale of things, they have to look for allies. These allies are chosen by the large percent of stuff that one does agree on instead of focusing on the small percent that you do not agree on. This is the way that “you win allies”. You then make the topics that you do agree on the only focus point of the demonstration so that everyone involved in the protest feels good about what is taking place.

The TUC, the Trade Union Congress, and the STUC, the Scottish Trade Union Congress, play vital roles in finding these other groups to either help, or seek help from. The STUC is turning 125 years old this year so it is a well established trade union congress. These bring together left political groups, trade unions, as well as community groups. Tom explained to me that this is an endeavour at recreating the relationships between the people in the community, the trade union movement, the people in industry, and politics that was destroyed by the government selling off council housing. So if a union or a leftist group wants to seek allies to help them with a cause that they want to strive for, they will send in their request to the STUC. The STUC will then go around and contact other leftist groups and unions that stand for the same values that the application is stating. Then heads of the union or leftist groups will get these applications, and then send the memo to members of their respective groups. This is how they build up their alliances.

The STUC will also sometimes provide trains or buses so they can transport people to the destination that the activism will take place at. When the STUC does this, they are removing the cost factor for the activists which can enable more of them to be able to take part in the activism, thus enabling more people to get their voices heard. Another important role this plays is the sign of unity across Scotland or even Britain because then you see banners from all over the place

showing up at different protests. An example of this is how the RMT got buses to bring more people, the CPB amongst others as well, to their protest against P&O, a cruise company, so they could create a larger picket line protest.

Performing identity

The YCL does not need to uphold the same level of professionalism as the CPB as previously mentioned. This is intentional and allows for the YCL to pull more attention to themselves and the cause that they are fighting for through for example ending up in the media. Then, hopefully, they have more people interested in the YCL because they would see the party's activism and see it as something fun, cool, or intriguing, as members of the YCL put it thus making them want to join. The CPB needs to have its level of professionalism so that people take the party as it portrays itself, at a serious level.

Miles used their protest at COP26¹ as an example for me. At COP26 they were protesting peacefully until they got kettled by the police and led off to a side street. Reasons as to why? There was none Miles continued to explain. On the side street they were faced with aggression, verbally and in some cases physically. The police did not even allow one of the YCL party members to leave the kettle to be able to go and breastfeed her child even though they had held her there for multiple hours. The kettling gained a lot of mainstream media publicity and because of the YCL not having to portray themselves at the same level of professionalism as the CPB, this benefited them. It allowed them to be in a situation like the kettling without it having a negative impact on how people perceived the YCL, on the contrary, more members joined after the COP26 incident and it was the police that faced the public backlash.

Leafleting was a form of activism that the CPB did while I was there, and I took part in it. Initially I thought that I was just going to tag along with my notebook taking notes and talking about this form of activism with the members, but their centralized form of work distribution quickly fell upon me too. Local elections were coming up and we were going to distribute leaflets that we had been given to promote the CPB's candidate. We met at the designated place

¹ COP26 is a United Nations Climate Change Conference that took place in Glasgow, Scotland, in 2021.

that was sent out via e-mail. There we stood in a circle and one individual was given a map and was designated to coordinate the evening's event. We were each given a partner and a long street to distribute the leaflets. When we were done with the street, we would call each other to see if we had to go and help other members finish off their street. I ended up leafleting with Miles. Upon our arrival to our designated street, Miles told me to take one side and that he would take the other. Towards the end of the road we came across large apartments and houses. Miles said that "they are too bourgeois" and that they would never vote for the CPB so it was no use, so we might as well just skip them and not waste our time.

I noticed that the mailboxes were different between Sweden and Scotland, or rather the lack thereof. The Scots used letterboxes and often placed draught excluders behind them. This made it exceedingly hard to put leaflets through. It all depended on the toughness of the bristles. One would have to shove one's hand through to get the leaflets in because the thin paper was not strong enough. This is important to note because of two instances.

One being that I was trying to shove a leaflet through a very old letterbox that was making a very large amount of noise. The metal pieces scraping against each other produced a nail-on-chalkboard worthy sound. Unlucky for me there was a man standing on the other side of the door smoking. Almost as soon as I started trying to get the leaflet through the draught excluder that was behind this vocal letterbox, the smoker opened the door. Ripping the leaflet out of my hand he asked "What's this then?" and before I could complete what I was saying, he said "Fucking communists? Get lost man." - shoving the leaflet into my chest, and shoving me out onto the sidewalk. Shortly after this incident I was done with the side of the road I was designated to do and joined back up with Miles as well as Kevin and Andrew, who were also out distributing leaflets that day. I shared my incident with them and they seemed not all too shocked. Similar experiences had happened to them before, which they shared stories of.

The second part of why it was important to note the difficulty of pushing in the leaflets through the draught excluder is because of the risk of dogs. Only after I was done with my rounds did Kevin ask me if "any dogs had bitten my hand". I responded that I had not been bitten which led to him going on to share multiple stories of incidents where, silent waiting dogs, had bitten his

hand when he was trying to push the leaflets through this draught excluder. Some dogs had even left scars on his hand. This information would have been very nice to have prior to my leafleting adventure but I am very glad that it was shared with me nonetheless because the scars could almost symbolize the fight for communism in a more modern and peaceful society. Even if it is unintentional. It is something that is permanently on his body with history behind it; a story to be told.

The first of May, May Day Parade. Also known as “the communist Christmas” as I have been told by people in the party. Many of the party members, both in the YCL and the CPB that I have spoken to, have really looked forward to this day. I started off the morning by taking a train with Miles. We were chatting back and forth about what the plans were for the day and Miles explained that we will meet up with the other YCL members at one of their facilities, then we will go and attend the parade, and thereafter we will re-distribute food to the homeless in the city.

Miles and I arrived early to the facility. People poured in regularly shortly after with every individual pulling up a chair and slowly forming a sitting circle. There was a sense of nervousness in the air, which was also later on expressed by one YCL member asking the others if they also felt butterflies in their stomach, which started a long row of banter. With the tension in the air, the banter, and the visibly close knit community; it gave me a very large sense of nostalgia. It was the feeling of being back in a soccer changing room just before a game. Here, red face masks were distributed so members could cover their face while they were marching in the parade. There was also a dress code that had been sent out to all of the party members. Alongside the red facemask, one was to have a black jacket or sweater, worst case as dark as possible. One was to wear trainers. One should also tidy up one's facial hair, either shave or make it look presentable. For those who have long hair, it was to be pulled back and be set up into a ponytail. Moreover, many wore communistic pins on their clothes as a further mark of symbolism and unity towards, and within the party. The dress code was in place to show unity within the YCL, to show that they are well organized, which in its own turn would also lead to them looking like a larger group.



Photo taken by author

Moreover, in terms of presentation for the May Day Parade, the CPB decided that they will march behind the YCL. The symbolism here is that the YCL is leading the party. That the YCL is the future and that it is a very active young party. The CPB sees the youth as the future of the party so there is a very large emphasis on showing how young the party is and how well coordinated they are in the parade. They even organized themselves so that they stood in distinct lines and rows while walking and chanting during the parade. This was important because then it also shows how organized the YCL is as a party. It was also important so they could show that no one steps out of line in the YCL, both literally and as a figure of speech. While they were organizing themselves in preparation for the parade, in the main plaza square, there was an individual that stood out who approached the group of YCL members. He was rather tall with mid parted dark brown hair. Alongside his half black and half red bandana that he used as a mask, he had a black bomber jacket on with black cargo pants. His shoes were what caught the YCL's members' eyes though. They were black knee high boots; but with red laces.

The red laces were very important. Lace culture as a form of activism and lace coding is still used by people today to make a statement about their identity. Originating back in the 1970s from a skinhead punk culture in Britain, they would use steel-toed Doc Martens as part of their standard outfit. The reason behind this was partly because it was already part of their working

class uniform, but also because the steel-toes helped when in fights. They would then change their laces to a certain colour to be able to express themselves, and each colour had its own meaning. While they were changing their laces, they would often laderlace the boots. Still to this day it is most commonly used with Doc Martens, and the culture of people changing the laces to express themselves has lived on. Black is a neutral colour because it is what Doc Martens are sold with. Yellow means that you are an anarchist. Purple represents gay pride. Blue shows that you have killed a police officer or that you support the killing of police officers. White represents white supremacy; and lastly, red. Red means that you have beaten someone until they bleed for the cause of your race, so it's affiliated with Nazism. The red symbolizes the person's blood on your white laces.

Instantly many YCL members started shouting and warning their comrades to step away from this individual. CPB and YCL members already face enough social stigma and backlash, the last thing they needed was for someone to take a photo of them standing beside this individual and start a false-narrative story on social media. It would instantly gain a lot of traction due to the already existing stigmatization. Apparently it is not enough for the YCL and the CPB that they have the peace dove as part of their party symbol to show how against violence they are as a whole for them to still not be afraid of being misconceived. Within minutes this mysterious individual was gone and nowhere close to the party. I lost sight of him within 2 minutes of the initial shouting.



Photo taken by author

After that incident the YCL were instantly back on track with their goal. To finish organizing themselves behind the banner they had made a few days prior to the first of May so that they could then walk to their place in the parade. They were the only group out of the many other groups that attended the parade that were visually this well organized. The YCL was also the only group that shouted chants during the parade. Anti-fascist, anti-Tory, and anti-monarchy chants were being sung alongside pro-unionization, pro-working-class, and pro-communist leader chants. Again, all in union. The sounds of their chants gained a lot of smiles and clapping from the onlookers on the sidewalks where I was walking beside the parade, with only a few looking with a gaze of disapproval towards the YCL. Then again, there was no counter movement in place so it would mainly be left-wing supporters being the onlookers alongside random shopkeepers and pedestrians that were passed by the entire parade. People also took up their phones to specifically photograph the YCL followed by the CPB. The parade made its way through almost every part of a city you can imagine. Living areas, corporate complex areas, areas going through renovation, local stores and services shops, gardens, you name it. They were clearly trying to target as much of a diverse part of the population as possible if one was to look at their route.

Everything regarding how the YCL organized themselves prior to the march, facemasks, learning the chants, the dress code, to how they executed their march, the formation they upheld the entire parade, the synchronization of the flags being raised, everything, made me think of performative reflexivity (Turner 1988:24). Turner mentions that performative reflexivity is when a group self reflects about how their actions, relations, codes, symbols, social structures, and more, makes them be understood as a group (Turner 1988:24). It is all about how they present themselves and how people outside perceive them. Performative reflexivity is a well orchestrated work of art that does not come naturally but is instead really well planned ahead of time (Turner 1988:24). This is exactly how the YCL has gone through their preparations for the first of May judging from their performance. They want to represent themselves as a well functioning organized group that can execute their plans and they want to make sure that this is understood by onlookers of the parade. This was another reason as to why it was so important to take distance from the red-laced individual because it did not follow the performance that they had planned to demonstrate for the onlookers, as well as the risks that it could entail for them as a group being seen with someone that might be intentionally or not expressing those fascist values.

After the parade had slithered its way through the city, it was time to make one's way back to the facility and start organizing groups for the food distribution. The YCL split itself up into three different groups. One group was to spread propaganda by stickering different places and things throughout the city. The second group set up plastic tables outside of supermarkets and explained to those going in and out that they were collecting food, sanitary products, toiletries, medical products, water, and anything else that they would like to donate so that they could put the goods down in to different bags for the third group to walk around re-distribute. I tagged alongside the third group. They were 10 people in the third group, each person with four large plastic bags filled with the previously mentioned goods. Every plastic bag had a YCL sticker on it.



Photo taken by author



Photo taken by author

After splitting up into groups again so that they could cover more space, we walked around the city, stopping at every homeless person we saw to ask if they would want a bag of goods. When we stopped by these individuals, the rest of the group would walk away a bit and give some distance to respect their personal space and not to cause any stress. It is much nicer having one person approach you rather than multiple people surrounding you, they explained. To pass time between while looking for more homeless people, the YCL members bantered with each other, and me as well at times. They also explained more of their communistic values to me and how that ties in to the changes they hope to see in Scotland and the cities that they live in. One of these being “Red Veg”. Red Veg is another thing that the YCL is doing for the homeless. They are growing potatoes and other vegetables in their housing complexes so that they could continue to produce and get their hands on more fresh food to be able to give to those who can not afford it. They wanted not to sink the population down to the bottom, but to raise the bottom bar up so that everyone would live a better quality of life.

The food redistribution is a very symbolic part of their activism because it shows how much importance they put on not leaving any one in society behind which falls under their equality for all part of their ideology. For them it does not matter if you are poor, disabled, or even for whatever reason that you might be in a less well off or less fortunate position. My interpretation of this is that the YCL has as one of their goals to show solidarity amongst those who have in their eyes been left behind by society and help them back up as much as they can.

While we are on the topic about party members and what they do with their housing, there was something too symbolic to not point out in Tom's residence. Upon entering his apartment it was impossible to miss all of the communistic memorabilia that filled the very tall walls. When I say filled, I mean that you saw more memorabilia than wall colour. Each had its own story tied to it. We walked around multiple rooms with him pointing out and sharing the stories behind many of them, and all I could do was stare completely flabbergasted. All I could think was that this is what over 50 years of dedication to the Communist Party of Britain looked like. We eventually made our way to his living room where he had a 3 piece bow window overlooking the entire city, a really wonderful view. There, on the bow window, were two custom made stained glass pieces of art. On the left window there was the red hammer and sickle representing communism, his belief. On the right window there was a Christian cross with a peace dove flying above it, representing his wife's belief. It felt like I was there for only an hour, but it was actually over three.



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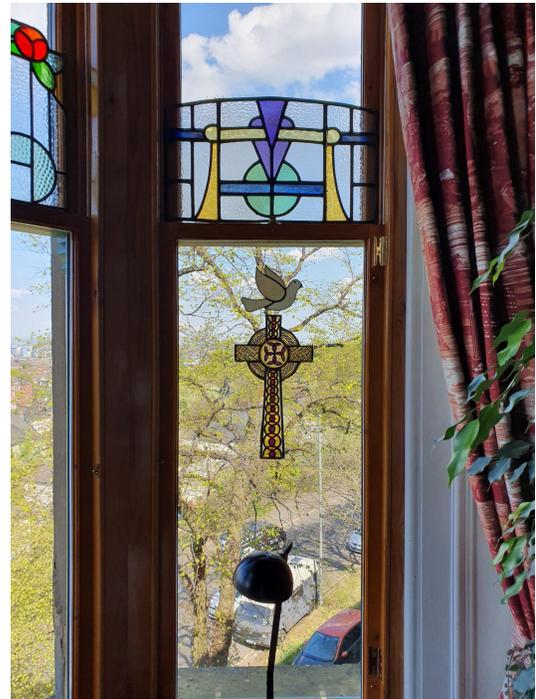


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The YCL's cultural goals

While in a bar with Miles he was explaining his aspiration to make the YCL grow so that both the YCL and CPB could continue growing in the future. He is a member in both parties, which is very common for people his age to be, so he was the perfect person to talk to regarding growth

strategies. He started off by saying that the YCL being autonomous of the CPB is important even though they are striving to become part of the CPB later on because this enables the YCL to have its own way of conducting its activism, recruitment, and create its own rules that they believe will continue making the YCL grow, thus creating a larger CPB in the future. One of these rules was that anything the YCL did together, it had to have a fun aspect to it. The YCL can go around and do activism, and act out a bit, while the CPB has to be straight backed and formal so that it would continue being seen as a professional party. This was so that any form of activism, anything, would either in itself be fun, or have a fun thing planned for after. When stuff is fun, people tend to stay.

Miles wanted to further shape the YCL's culture by implementing a "communistic culture" instead of partaking in "capitalist culture" or "escapism" as he expressed it. Miles defined capitalistic escapism as going out and getting really drunk, and that's how people would perceive having fun, but there are many other things that one could do instead of that. I then asked what the YCL would tend to do together for fun, to which he responded laughingly: "basically only drinking" - and I couldn't help myself but to point out that he was saying this to me while drinking a beer and we both laughed about it, and then continued on. Communistic culture was something they wanted to implement in ways of doing stuff together.

He brought up an example of when he was in Greece with a large communist party there, the KNE's Odigitis event. The KNE is the Communist Youth of Greece which is the youth wing of the KKE, the Communist Party of Greece. It was a very large gathering and then late in the night, around 1am or 2am he realized that no one was drunk. Everyone was just "out having a blast together". This is when he realized that they needed to change the communistic culture in the YCL to something other than a capitalist escapism so he started addressing it and bringing it up during party meetings.

Miles continued on to say that they want specific people running and taking care of clubs. Chess, music, dancing, boxing clubs, you name it. This is not something that they could do at the moment though because they were "still coming from a very weak point" where they are still growing and the growth is first needed to then later on be able to establish clubs and activities.

The YCL is focusing on getting as wide of a network as possible to be able to recruit more people. Some people just need a place to belong and the YCL could be a place for them if they align ideologically, Miles mentioned. The YCL has grown so much in the past years that they do not have to go out of their way to get new members. They have become large enough that as long as they are out doing their activism, people will ask to join. Part of their growth is because they have understood what excites people, and people get drawn to the excitement because it is perceived as “cool”. Also, people join the YCL because they already have a friend in the party. The CPB is also seeing a rise in membership numbers which is associated with the YCL’s growth.

When Miles goes to such an extent to reflect upon the type of culture that the YCL currently has and where he aspires his party’s culture to be at, changing it from capitalistic escapism to communistic culture, it made me think of Victor Turner writing about Milton Stinger and what Stinger called “cultural performances” (Turner 1988:23). Cultural performances would be active programs that would have a designated place, performers, and an audience and could be understood in one single experience by an outsider looking inward (Turner 1988:23). This falls perfectly in line with the goals that Miles had for the YCL. Let's take his boxing idea as an example. You have an organized activity, a designated place, and performers; being the boxing, the boxing ring, and the boxers. You would even have an audience depending on if it would be a match day or not.

Turner writes while using Singer's words periodically that there are other important modes of communication when it comes to cultural performances (Turner 1988:23). Spoken language is important, but also nonlinguistic modes of expression as well, such as graphics, acting, songs, arts, and dances which as a whole can communicate the intent of the culture (Turner 1988:23). Going back to Miles, this falls even more in line with his expressed desire for how he wants these communistic clubs to be. He wanted the clubs to be a connecting point for communists to mingle where they could feel like they are in a communistic place with other communistic people experiencing communistic culture which is where cultural performance is needed to be able to be experienced.

Summary and conclusion

In this paper I have analyzed the collective identity of the CPB and the YCL. The Morning Star is an essential component to the identity of the CPB. It is a mode of their identity expression. They show their solidarity with other leftist organizations and individuals by allowing them space and giving them an outlet to have their voice heard in their newspaper. It also brings in funding for the party to be able to afford costs that naturally come along on their endeavour towards their various goals. The Morning Star is also a way for people to find their way into the CPB.

The YCL have their own recruitment method. They try to ensure that individuals seeking their way into the party fits what the party is looking for, and just as much that the party is right for the aspiring individuals. Here I use Hylland Eriksen's *Small Places, Large Issues: An Introduction to Social and Cultural Anthropology* to demonstrate their form of internal governing through norms that the party expects their members to follow. When analyzing how a group governs, you see how it expresses its identity because it is following rules and norms that are set up in a way to achieve the desired end goal.

Hylland Eriksen's *We and US: Two Modes of Group Identification* help demonstrate how dynamic and fluid their identities can be and what/who causes the differences in how the parties unite or distance themselves from other leftist organizations. Points brought up in the paper, like the "Voice of Scotland" part, show their boundaries being an undulating political landscape depending on what the situations and circumstances are.

Turner's *The Anthropology of Performance* has been very helpful to explain the YCL's performance when it comes to their first of May parade and their aspirations to change the party's culture. We can see how they have taken into consideration how they should perform their activism to reflect how they want to be seen and understood by onlookers.

The CPB and YCL have a steadfast identity as a core and central party of leftist activism in Scotland. Their fluid and dynamic solidarity with other leftist organizations further enhance their reach in leftist culture and progressivism.

Beyond this paper, with further research towards this subject, one could potentially gain insightful perspective to other factors that play a role in the CPB and YCL's identity. It truly is an extraordinarily interesting political party structure that these two parties have made together, distinguishing themselves from other organizations, while at the same time showing solidarity alongside a very wide left-wing spectrum.

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