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Allison Drew. *Between Empire and Revolution: A Life of Sidney Bunting, 1873-1936.* London: Pickering & Chatto Publishers, Limited, 2007. 256 pp. $99.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-85196-893-0.

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A Pioneer of South African Communism

In this richly detailed narrative Allison Drew traces the unlikely path from "empire to revolution" of Sidney Percival Bunting, a founding member of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) in 1921 and subsequently one of the party's most visible leaders in its first decade. Deftly teasing information from family archives in Britain and South Africa, from the archive of the Communist International (CI) in Moscow, from official archives in Britain and South Africa, as well as from a broad range of published research and memoirs, Drew vividly brings to life not only Bunting's political odyssey, but also his family and social life from his birth in 1873 to his death in 1936, in fourteen amply footnoted chapters.

In the first four chapters Drew first conveys her readers into the prosperous upper middle-class milieus of London and Oxford where Bunting was born, educated, and practiced law. In chapters 5 and 6 Drew transports her readers to South Africa as Bunting responded to the call of service for the British Empire in the Anglo-Boer war and subsequently settled into a legal practice in Johannesburg (including membership in the Rand Club) and an active partnership in a family estate in Natal, producing timber products for export and for South African mines. In the next three chapters she documents Bunting's radical conversion to socialism, first in the "white" politics of the South African Labour Party (SALP), and then his transformation into a homegrown Marxist in the "anti-war" wing of the SALP that morphed into the CPSA, founded as an affiliate of the CI, but also as South Africa's first nonracial political party. In chapters 10 through 13 she continues to chronicle Bunting's remarkable advocacy of full African participation in the CPSA and South African political life generally and his stormy relationship with the authorities of the CI in Moscow, culminating in his rejection by the CI and his consequent expulsion in September 1931 from the CPSA, whose most public face he had been for much of its existence. Drew concludes in chapter 14 with an account of Bunting's fruitless effort at reinstatement in the party that now ostracized him, and then his final years in accelerating poverty, during which he never lost faith in the socialist and nonracial ideals for which he had fought for more than two decades.

Drew's biography of Bunting appears sixty-three years after the first biography of Bunting. In 1943 Edward Roux completed a pathbreaking biography of his erstwhile mentor and long-time associate in the CPSA, *S. P. Bunting: A Political Biography* (1944). Drawing mainly from Bunting's writings, but also adding his own commentary and recollections of his work with Bunting and in the CPSA, Roux offered his book "as a tribute to the memory of a great man whose contribution to the cause of racial freedom in South Africa was unique."[1]

In his 160-page book Roux devoted only five pages to Bunting's childhood, education and professional training in England. Roux noted, "I have been able to obtain very little information concerning his character and interests at this period."[2] Drew has filled the lacunae through imaginative use of primary and secondary sources that permit her to provide ample specific detail and context for this period of Bunting's life, devoting fifty-five pages, almost one quarter of her text, to Bunting's first twenty-seven years.

Drew's two opening chapters present the committed and busy household in which Bunting grew up, drawing upon information gleaned from family reminiscences in the Bunting family archive in London and correspondence of Bunting's father with William Gladstone. She details the diverse activities and interests of Bunting's deeply religious nonconformist father (a barrister who became editor of the *Contemporary Review* and was active in the Liberal Party), and his mother who, like her husband, was extensively engaged with various philanthropic causes rooted in their shared religious and social

values.

In chapters 3 and 4 Drew seamlessly weaves together material from the archives of the St. Paul's School and Oxford University and from contemporary sources and later publications to chronicle Bunting's secondary school and university education. In chapter 3, "A Classical Boy," she successfully evokes the highly structured public school environment of St. Paul's School, where Bunting achieved distinction as a student of Greek and Latin. In chapter 4, "Imperial University," she similarly evokes the heady atmosphere of Oxford University in the 1890s, where Bunting continued his classical education in Magdalen College while participating in a range of university societies. Of particular interest, in light of Bunting's subsequent involvement with chamber music in London and South Africa (including his playing the viola for a traveling theater orchestra after his expulsion from the CPSA), is Drew's depiction of Bunting's passionate involvement in chamber music at Oxford University, based primarily on documentation in the archive of the Oxford University Musical Union.

Chapter 5, "Fighting for Empire," straddles Bunting's last years in London and his migration to South Africa to fight with British forces in the Boer War. Drew states that "Imperial London allowed Sidney [Bunting] the life of a toff" (p. 46), a life whose features she conjures from documents in the Bunting family archive and from secondary sources. She suggests the nature of his social life within his immediate and extended family, where social issues and politics were vigorously debated. She describes the steps in his legal training as a solicitor, his regular participation in chamber music groups and, intriguingly, his more than three-hundred-page handwritten analysis of tsarist Russia's role in international relations that she found in the Bunting family archive. She speculates about Bunting's possible military training prior to his departure from London in mid-1900 and, drawing from limited direct evidence about Bunting's activity during the war, indicates how Bunting most likely participated in British military campaigns against the Boers.

In chapter 6, "An English Gentleman in Johannesburg," Drew draws heavily from documents in the Bunting family archive to highlight the features of Bunting's life in South Africa from the end of the war until 1910, a period to which only three pages were devoted in Roux's biography. She gives considerable attention to Bunting's continued passionate involvement with chamber music organizations and outlines how he established a law partnership. Most fascinatingly, she describes another handwritten document from the Bunting family archive, a travelogue in which Bunting analyzed class and color in Mauritius on the basis of his observations during a two-week visit at the end of 1903. The major focus of chapter 6, however, is how Bunting and his cousin undertook to develop the family lands in Natal for the production of wattle trees as timber for the mining industry and in the process confronted issues of employment of black and Asian labor. During the same period Bunting also became friends with individuals in Johannesburg who were concerned more generally with the role of white labor and the enhancement of white settlement in South Africa. After returning from a trip to England in 1909 he helped to found and became honorary secretary of the short-lived White Expansion Society. By 1910, Drew observes, Bunting "was very much a colonialist and a champion of empire" (p. 77).

The remainder of Drew's biography details how Bunting moved into principled opposition to empire, colonialism, and the established South African order of white domination and capitalism and how, from 1921 onward, he expressed his opposition through the CPSA. Bunting's evolution into one of South Africa's most prominent communists, at the forefront of campaigns to advance the interests of the African majority of the country's population, bitterly opposed by the government and white society (and ultimately the CI in Moscow), has been seriously considered in political and scholarly works focusing upon the CPSA for many decades, including Edward Roux's *Time Longer than Rope: The Black Man's Struggle for Freedom in South Africa* (1948); Roux's memoir, *Rebel Pity: The Life of Eddie Roux* (1970); Sheridan Johns' study of the ISL and the first decade of the CPSA, *Raising the Red Flag: The International Socialist League and the Communist Party of South Africa 1914-1932* (1995); and Drew's own *Discordant Comrades: Identities and Loyalties on the South African Left* (2000). Drew's biography of Bunting further amplifies and expands our knowledge of Bunting's political role and, above all, how he juggled his passionate advocacy of socialism and nonracialism with his personal and professional life.

In chapter 7, "A New Gospel," Drew lays out Bunting's first steps to socialism within the SALP from 1910 through the outbreak of World War I in August, 1914, by which time Bunting was solidly with the majority of the party's leadership who opposed participation in the "imperialist" war. In chapter 8, "The Star in the East," Drew details Bunting's further steps to militant and Marxist socialism within the antiwar International Socialist League (ISL), which formed in 1915 after the SALP voted to support the Botha government's par-

ticipation in the war. Most consequential were Bunting's efforts to educate African workers about the message of socialism, efforts that found fruition with the formation of the International Workers of Africa (IWA) in September/October 1917. Drew also sensitively considers Bunting's courtship of and marriage to Rebecca Notlewitz in December 1916, and the start of his family life. In chapter 9, "The Earth is the Workers," Drew describes how the Bolshevik revolution galvanized Bunting and other left-wing socialists and led to the formation of the CPSA at the end of July 1921, against a backdrop of rising worker militancy culminating in the Rand "Revolt" of 1922 in which Bunting and other prominent CPSA members were directly involved. Drew's account of this period in chapters 7 through 9 draws extensively from ISL publications, the writings of Edward Roux, and other published sources, but she adds important new information about pressures in Bunting's personal and professional life, drawing from letters and documents in the Bunting family archive as well as from documentation about the IWA found in files of police informants in the National Archives of South Africa.

Continuing in chapter 10, "Fighting against Empire," with rich personal material drawn particularly from letters written by Bunting to his young children and family in London, as well as from correspondence of his cousin, Jack Lidgett, in Natal, Drew offers a multifaceted portrait of Bunting in the seminal period in his party life, when he represented the CPSA at the fourth congress of the CI in Moscow in 1922, and then, as an almost full-time party activist, led the party to redirect its focus to black workers and actively recruit them.

In chapter 11, "For a Native Republic," Drew considers Bunting's opposition to the slogan of "an independent native republic" imposed upon the CPSA by the CI in late 1927, including details of his second trip to Moscow where he conveyed the opposition of the majority of the CPSA in the meetings of the sixth congress of the CI in 1928. Throughout chapter 11 Drew smoothly interweaves evidence from published sources, especially Roux's biography, with archival material from the previously closed CI records in Moscow. The result is an amply nuanced account of the saga of Bunting's opposition and his ultimate acceptance of the new slogan when the CI leadership definitively imposed its writ upon the reluctant CPSA leadership at the end of 1928.

In chapter 12, "Into the Wilderness," Drew brings to life Bunting's pathbreaking, but unsuccessful, campaign in 1929 for a parliamentary seat in the Thembuland constituency in the African "reserve" of the Transkei, where Africans comprised just under one-half of the registered voters. In the full twenty-one pages of chapter 12 Drew details Bunting's motor tour through the main towns of the Transkei to bring the Communist electoral program to prospective voters and the far-larger number of African residents who were not qualified for the franchise. Gana Makabeni, an African CPSA member, accompanied Bunting and acted as his translator. With evidence from police reports and court records, Drew strikingly conveys the police surveillance, the hostile court appearances, and the social ostracism that Bunting and Makabeni endured. In his 1944 biography of Bunting, Roux devoted eight pages to the campaign, using Bunting's reports of it published in the party newspaper. Roux characterized the campaign "as one of Bunting's most outstanding achievements."[3] Drew's account, drawn primarily from archival sources, fully validates Roux's assessment.

Drew's thirteenth chapter, "Falling from Grace," tells the sorry tale of Bunting's efforts to adapt the party to Moscow's new line in 1929 and 1930 amidst rising state repression and increasingly blunt opposition to him from Moscow and its supporters within the CPSA, capped by Bunting's expulsion from the party in September 1931. In her account Drew relies extensively upon documents from Roux's archived papers and published sources, but she adds further specifics and context by also introducing evidence from documents in the CI archive and from Bunting family letters.

Drew's final, fifteen-page chapter, "A Weary Soul," is similar in length to Roux's final chapter, "Last Days." Both Drew and Roux consider Bunting's feisty, but unsuccessful, challenge of his expulsion in the context of continuing turmoil within party ranks and then the decline in circumstances and health prior to his death in 1936. Not surprisingly, Drew's account gives additional color and poignancy to Bunting's post-CPSA years with vignettes of Bunting's family life and his reliance upon dividends from the wattle plantation in Natal. Unlike Roux, Drew was able to draw not only from family documents, but also from recollections shared by Bunting's second son, Brian. Through sleuthing in the archives of the South African Institute of Race Relations, Drew further reveals how Bunting in 1933 unsuccessfully sought African Studies funding for research from the International Institute for African Culture and Languages in London.

Drew's biography of Bunting is a worthy successor to Roux's biography. Roux's biography still should remain required reading as the testament of a committed

and admiring co-advocate with Bunting for racial justice in South Africa. With this biography of Bunting, Drew illuminates previously unexplored dimensions of the history of radical socialism in South Africa. Unquestionably this very readable volume will remain the authoritative scholarly study of Sidney Percival Bunting, one of South Africa's most remarkable communist pioneers.

Notes

[1]. Edward Roux, *S. P. Bunting: A Political Biography* (Cape Town: African Bookman, 1944), 6.

[2]. Ibid., 12.

[3]. Ibid., 106.

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