

Finsbury Communist Association
Ivor Kenna (1931-2021)

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In a one line acknowledgement, *The Actuary* noted, **Mr Ivor Kenna**, an Associate based in the UK, passed away aged 89.

The Oxford graduate (St Catherine's 1949) had a richer life to tell as a veteran activist as his partner in life and politics describes it:

“He always said he did not want to seek idle fame. He never wanted to be famous. But he attended meetings and spoke up for issues he believed in. He was so good at remembering all the facts. He worked all his life for emancipation for the working class.” [Flo Kenna, *Islington Tribune* 25 June, 2021]

They were the first to start a union at the Prudential Assurance Building in Holborn where he worked as an actuary. Called the Guild of Insurance Officials, it was later absorbed into Unite. While a Trojan like expenditure of energy and effort could be said to mark his life, and any historical account of the anti-revisionist movement in London would be peppered by references to Kenna's presence, the actual legacy is harder to discern.

If you live long enough there is an emblematic respond to you: early on, heart-felt sighs would greet the sight of Ivor rising to his feet in a public meeting; a tolerated sectarian irritant would be the most charitable attitude. Forever on the periphery of the political fringe, temporary alignment and relationship were always being made ever since he broke with the Communist Party of Great Britain in the early 1960s when Secretary of the Finsbury branch. Ironically *The New Worker*, weekly paper of the New Communist Party of Britain, reported “*This week's postbag brought in £608 including £200 in memory of Ivor Kenna which pushed the running total up to £2,851.*” [Week commencing 25th June 2021]. In the past their politics were polar opposites.

The CPGB(ML), associated with fellow veteran, and past sparring partner, Harpal Brar, were overly generous in their assessment that “Ivor did everything he could to halt the decline of the movement caused by Khrushchevite revisionism.”

Ivor and Flo was there at the beginning of the struggle initiated by Michael McCreery, who issued a statement denouncing both Khrushchev and the revisionist leadership of the CPGB. The Kennas were involved in the Committee to Defeat Revisionism, for Communist Unity (CDRCU) and were expelled from the Communist Party in 1964. His disruptive, anti-leadership stance within CDRCU was duplicated throughout his attendance of other ML group meetings. (*Research Note: Fracturing of the CDRCU*). Despite its longevity the two=person Finsbury Communist Association was described years later by the Communist Workers’ Movement as not being “a serious ML organisation; it has never offered much constructive criticism, has concentrated on circulating gossip and producing articles which discredit Marxism-Leninism (struggle against the Albanian line is not helped, for example, by silly remarks about how dusty Albanian bookshops are).” (*CWM, Letter to Marxist Industrial Group in 1979*)

The FCA survived around a fractured anti-revisionist movement populated by more notable outliers and small groups who equally failed to move beyond their petty-bourgeois obsession and seriously engage in the party-building commitment.

For their part, Ivor and Flo pride themselves on looking “unpleasant facts in the face with a view to finding a solution ...it is necessary not only to tell the truth oneself but to attack those who are peddling lies and deceit.” (*Finsbury Communist* 49 Feb 1969)

FCA’s main charge, consistently maintained regardless of who they were criticising, is that ultra-leftism had held back the ML movement. To prove their point they were contend to emphasis what they characterise as much of the irrelevance of ML activity in Britain.

In 1978, the FCA judged that “the British ML movement has two outstanding features at present (1) substantial ignorance of, and disagreement about the actual situation in Britain (2) almost compete ignorance of what to do about that situation.” (*Finsbury Communist* 161 June 1978)

Time had jaded that enthusiasm of the FCA. In 1966 it had been of the opinion that” There are now organised ML groups in most parts of the country and some degree of unity in action has been reached.

All that is holding us back from forming a party is the lack of theoretical unity.”

In that year, FCA did contribute to the theoretical struggle over what constituted a class analysis of Britain. There were some criticisms of McCreery’s “*Notes on the*

Lower Middle Class and the Semi-Proletariat in Britain’ and Peter Seltman’s more substantial “Classes in Modern Imperialist Britain”. But it was the production of a 17-paged duplicated contribution, “Class and Party in Britain” that gave the true flavour of the FCA.

Coming from the revisionist CPGB, the FCA had constituted part of the District Committee so spoke of the “past 20 years of revisionist betrayal”. There was also involvement in the CDRCU and Ivor was thrown out of McCreery’s flat after one argument. However the FCA did correctly identified the need for an anti-imperialist and internationalist perspective within the anti-revisionist movement by calling for “complete identification with the cause of the workers and peasants in the colonies and neo-colonies”.

The hostility towards the Labour Party and the revisionist CP had not lessened, nor the conviction that higher prices had to be paid for Third World products. Self-determination for Ireland, Scotland, Wales and Cornwall had been adopted as FCA policy. Individually both Ivor and Flo were involved with the Celtic League. And self-determination for the Celtic nations, including Cornwall and the Isle of Man has been a basic principle of the FCA.

However its analysis of classes in Britain, the FCA talked of “a peasantry and a pretty well-subsidised peasantry it is” as existing in Britain seemingly oblivious to the conditions of farm labourers and land ownership patterns in rural Britain. There were references to “non-imperialist capital” which was questionable given the nature of monopoly capitalism and the actual operation of British Capital.

Further ‘theoretical insights’ resulted from the occasional public meetings held at the Sekforde Arms (London EC1) in late 1972. These were on the subject of Marx’s Labour theory attended by Arthur Evans, Mike Earle and Harpal Brar. Evans and Earle excused themselves from a follow-up meeting at which a transcript was produced concluding that everyone in Britain including the working class benefited from imperialism. The FCA claimed this as their contribution to the ML movement:

” Our chief claim to fame was in showing 1) that the British people benefit from imperialism 2) just how exactly they benefit 3) And therefore the British workers much less the Middle Class, are not revolutionary.” (*Finsbury Communist* 121 Feb 1975)

The FCA were never on the wagon-train of ‘revolution is just around the corner’. They maintained the plodding pace of churning out the *Finsbury Communist*, attending other people’s meetings, making interventions and keeping up their correspondence file.

The attitude to China was complete agreement with whatever China's policies was at that time, as he was reported to have explain it: *"I don't think the Communist Party of China can be said to have ever made a mistake because whatever it did seemed like the best thing to do at the time."*

The FCA always qualified as a small group in ML terms: an organisation with fewer members than initials in its name. There was once an attempt in 1976 to join with various local people in, Finsbury in setting up the grandly named 'Working Class Party' but complaints that FCA maintained a separate existence led to a break-up in the project. Later they persisted and worked with the local Islington branch Independent Working Class Association, set up by people from Red Action, but again the working relationship broke down.

The view that they were a flea-like irritant for most of the ML movement, Chairman of the RCLB describing their politics as "a bourgeois game. They have contempt for the revolutionary struggle of the working class and their organisation is a mere excuse for the most self-indulgent individualism ... Their stand is an insult to and an attack on the cause of building the Revolutionary Party of the working class." (*Letter to Cde Hickey (CWM) dated 22.2.1979*)

There were attempts at joint work by the FCA in the late 1970s on the subject of building a movement to oppose Soviet Social-Imperialism. FCA co-operated with the Marxist Industrial Group in a number of meetings, participating for a while in the Interim Committee but such ad hoc enterprises wilted in the face of reality.

It was not until January 1989, twenty-five years after it came into existence that Finsbury Communist contained a reader's letter asking "what do you stand for?"

As far as the ML movement was concerned the FCA favoured "some form of unity between the FCA, the Marxist Industrial Group and the Revolutionary Communist League and various individuals who appear to have a lot in common." (*Finsbury Communist* 288 Jan 1989)

Unfortunately for the Kennas, the RCLB simply failed to acknowledge the existence of the FCA.

But the FCA remained 'steadfast and true' as the old Boy Brigade motto has it. They organised Sunday evening discussion sessions at 72 Compton Street (near Farringdon Underground) as another ritual to the FCA's existence.

The self-assessment the FCA gave of the ML movement applied as much to themselves,

“Briefly, the Marxist Leninists did not succeed in working out how they should function in imperialist society; a society which, for all its inner contradictions, seems likely to continue for many years yet.

The results is that the movement is now obviously reduced to a few small groups and individuals, generally without roots anywhere and with not the slightest ideas where they are going. Unity conferences programmes and manifestos become redundant within: a few months, when faced with reality. At times like this it is useful to remember one’s achievements. But these achievements are only in the realm of ideas. Ideas cannot survive outside the human brain. And so the movement has a duty to consider how best it is to survive and grow.” (*Finsbury Communist* May 1981)

In all of its existence, the FCA did not contribute to the growth of that movement. In: 1970 the FCA claimed that they owed “its existence partly to the correct criticism levelled at the Western Communist Parties by the CPC in 1963” (*Finsbury Communist* 66 July 1970) unfortunately the FCA never took those criticisms to heart, and remained largely irrelevant, on the fringes of the ML movement, opportunistically tolerated by some sections, shunned by others.

The FCA found new opportunities and associates were made of old opponents, when it became active in the political conglomerate that united self-described Stalinist, Marxist-Leninists, pro-Soviets and the odd maoist in the Stalin Society.

Organisationally, Ivor kept busy as London Branch secretary of Celtic League and the friendship organisation Society for Anglo-Chinese Understanding – SACU, and the anti-revisionist **Finsbury Communist Association**. In later years he was a stalwart of the Stalin Society and spoke at the CPGB (ML) meetings. Compiler of online China Eye’s “Sinophile by Flo and Ivor Kenna”, he maintain a record of postal contributions going back to SACU’s foundation and SACU News in the 1960s. Ivor was a constant letter writer, his name attached to many missals to a wide range of publications from the local *Islington Gazette*, *Camden New Journal*, to less mainstream outlets like *Morning Star* and *Weekly Worker*.

And over the years, he would churn out the Twitter equivalent The *Finsbury Communist* and maintained the production of this four-paged duplicated monthly since February 1965, as the vehicle for a running commentary on life and politics in Islington’s Finsbury ward, the Left movement and the world.

Ivor Kenna died aged 89 on June 3 2021

..... Samples of his contributions

Letter to What Next? No.14 1999

Police Spies and Madmen

THERE ARE probably police spies and certainly mad people in the left movement. However, calling a comrade a police spy or a madman effectively blocks discussion. May I offer an alternative explanation? Some of us believe that the objective situation is ripe for revolution or, at least, for radical change. These I term the instant revolutionaries. Others on the left believe that it will be a long haul.

The instant revolutionaries keep themselves in a state of continuous alert. But still revolution or radical change does not happen. They try every means that they can think of to convince people to rise up. Still nothing happens.

The first explanation that occurs to them is that people are being misled. It is but a short step from there to a belief that they are being deliberately misled. Who would deliberately mislead people? Agents of the ruling class, of course.

I was in an organisation once where one of the members was convinced that the leadership was a ruling class fifth column and circularised all and sundry accordingly. The leadership over-reacted and the comrade was expelled. The real explanation for the comrade's conduct is that he is an instant revolutionary who was disappointed with the organisation's progress. This does not just happen with those of us who are, like John Maclean, on the left of the left. When the Socialist Labour Party was formed, Ken Livingstone as much as asserted that Arthur Scargill had been put up to it by MI5. Ken Livingstone has plans for the Labour Party which entail keeping the left within the party.

So, please, let's stop throwing round labels such as police spy, madman, or even stalinist, trotskyist or maoist, etc, in order to avoid reasoned analysis of other comrades' arguments and of the objective situation.

Ivor Kenna

Letter to Labour Affairs , part of the former B&ICO stable of publications

JULY 9, 2021

It is with great regret that we learn of the death in London of Ivor Kenna, an Anti-Revisionist and campaigner for national rights. He died on Thursday, 3rd June. As Flo Kenna has told us: "He really enjoyed your publications". Ivor was born on 28th July 1931, so he just missed his 90th birthday. Flo and her husband were true comrades: they were married for sixty years. A sad loss.

Ivor Kenna's Last Letter

The Anglo-Saxons

I was very interested to read Brendan Clifford's quotation from Sir Charles Dilke: "The Anglo-Saxon is the only extirpating race on earth". The Anglo-Saxons extirpated the Maoris, until the Maoris stopped them, the Australian aborigines to some extent, the Tasmanians complete, the North American nations, to some extent.

New Zealand, Australia, Tasmania and North America are in temperate climates, suitable for Anglo-Saxon settlement.

Nearer home there were white Christian nations to deal with. If the inhabitants were prepared to become English-speaking they would play a useful role in the British Armed Forces alongside Englishmen in conquering as much of the world as possible.

The Cornish were to be treated as English (see John Angarrack's book *Our Future Is History*).

The Scottish and Welsh languages were banged out of their speakers by such devices as the Welsh Not.

Ireland was more of a problem. Seventeenth century English population experts such as Petty seriously discussed getting rid of the Irish out of Ireland by any means necessary and settling English people there.

Later on in the 1840s, potato blight spread remarkably quickly to Ireland and North-West Scotland, leaving England untouched.

The Penal Laws did have some success in turning Catholics into Protestants.

Henry of Navarre, who turned Catholic to become King of France said "Paris is worth a mass".

Irish people who turned Protestant were of the opinion that material possessions and higher social status are worth not having a mass.

Ivor Kenna