

George Rudé: The Contours of a Career

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The Marxist historian George Rudé wrote thirteen monographs and over sixty journal articles and book chapters. Two collections of his essays appeared; he edited three collections of documents; and his works were translated into several languages.¹ It was a very respectable output, both in quality and quantity, the more remarkable in that he published his first journal article at the age of 42.² He was recognised in his time as a leading historian of the French Revolution and of popular protests and disturbances. The two coalesced in his first, and perhaps most famous, book, *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (1959), where he made a distinctive methodological contribution to the study of popular protest. The questions he asked concerning “the nature of the crowd” were basic but not easily answered: “How were the crowds composed...? Who led them or influenced them? What were the motives that prompted them? What was the particular significance and outcome of their intervention?”³ His methodology involved a degree of quantification, meaning the use of sources beyond the more traditional ones, which included the judicial and fiscal records in the *Archives Nationales*, *Bibliothèque Nationale*, *Archives de la Préfecture de Police* and various departmental archives in France. In a subsequent monograph on “the crowd”, which incorporated England as well as France, Rudé itemised his sources as including “police, prison, hospital, and judicial records; Home Office papers and Entry Books and the Treasury Solicitor’s reports; tax rolls; poll books and petitions; notarial records; inventories; parish records of births, deaths and marriages; public assistance records; tables of prices and wages; censuses; local directories and club membership lists; and lists of freeholders, jurymen, churchwardens and justices of the peace.”⁴ His approach was “pre-eminently ‘pointillist’ involving the amassing of small details about the lives of ordinary people into a collective portrait.”⁵ Rudé’s methodology remained standard practice well over two decades. In 1979, for example, Richard J. Evans applied Rudé’s methodology to Germany for the first time, using the records of the *Politische Polizei* to account for a political riot in Hamburg.⁶

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¹ Rudé’s bibliography is most readily consulted at <https://h-france.net/rude/who/>.

² Rudé, “La composition sociale des insurrections parisiennes.”

³ Rudé, *The Crowd in the French Revolution*, 1.

⁴ Rudé, *The Crowd in History*, 11–12.

⁵ Nicholas Rogers, “George Rudé (1910–1993),” 10.

⁶ Evans, “‘Red Wednesday’ in Hamburg.”

At this point the *life* of George Rudé, as distinct from his *oeuvre*, is hampered by a lack of evidence. Doubtless there is much more to find but for the meantime we make do with what we have and acknowledge what we don't have. For that reason, I thought it useful to pour some old wine into a new bottle – an expression that would have appealed to Rudé – by approaching his life from the vantage point of “respectability”. It seemed worthwhile to calibrate the enquiry around that issue and to see what outcome emerged. As will be seen, the notion of respectability is a useful lever to challenge some of the misperceptions that have sprung up around Rudé's life and career.

By way of disclosure, I knew Rudé as a third-year undergraduate at Flinders University in 1969 and attended his historiography class, which was mandatory for students aspiring to an Honours year. Our acquaintance informs my perceptions of Rudé but the present paper is based on far more than youthful observations. I have also gathered a good deal of testimony (usually via e-mails) from Rudé's academic colleagues and have consulted the scattered archival record to the extent that I have been able. Lack of sources at many junctures has been a problem, hence the need to gather evidence from whatever sources come to hand.

A salient point about George Rudé's career is that he became an academic historian late in life, taking up his first university position after spending the previous three decades as a schoolteacher. He was a convert to communism and was made to pay for it, or so legend has it, in being disqualified from academic employment in England. Among other things he was an active functionary of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). He was arrested for disorderly behaviour during the Battle of Cable Street, an anti-fascist demonstration in London in 1936. He was under the surveillance of MI5, the United Kingdom's domestic security intelligence agency. He was effectively dismissed from teaching at a public school because of his communist activities. Unable to obtain a university position in Britain despite being eminently qualified, he was forced abroad to pursue his calling as a historian. Arriving in Australia in 1960 to take up his first appointment as Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Adelaide at the ripe old age of fifty, he immediately found himself under the watchful eye of ASIO (the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation), but he prospered all the same.⁷ It was, to say the least, an unusual career trajectory.

Yet Rudé, born in 1910, was brought up in a genteel and resolutely respectable middle-class environment. He attended an English public school (Shrewsbury) as a scholarship boy, and on another scholarship went up to Cambridge to study modern languages. He graduated in 1931 with an upper second-class degree and immediately commenced teaching modern languages at another public school (Stowe), which in English parlance means a private, fee-paying school.

To that point, Rudé had shown no inkling that he would embrace communism. He was more interested in visiting museums and art galleries than in political issues. Of somewhat conservative outlook, given his family background, he was mildly admiring of Mussolini's Italy. According to his close friend Hugh Stretton (1924–2015), who was his head of department at Adelaide, it was a chance meeting at a party in mid-1932 that changed his outlook when another young man persuaded Rudé to join him on a visit to Russia. Organised by Intourist, which served as the travel agency for foreign visitors to the Soviet Union, the pair travelled on the steamship *Alexis Rykov*. These secular pilgrimages were popular and reached their zenith with the publication of Sidney and Beatrice Webb's laudatory account, *Soviet Communism: a new civilization?* (1935).⁸ The hundred or so other tourists on Rudé's voyage included a leading King's Counsel, three candidates for Parliament at the previous general election, the cartoonist David Low (1891–1963) and the journalist Kingsley Martin (1897–

⁷ The University of Adelaide history department at that time is evaluated in Munro, “The House that Hugh Built.”

⁸ Webb and Webb, *Soviet Communism*.

1969).⁹ What Rudé and his companion witnessed during their chaperoned six weeks in the Soviet Union was clearly a profound encounter and, according to Stretton, Rudé returned to England “a committed communist and anti-fascist.”¹⁰

In this way, Rudé became one of a cohort of middle-class recruits who gave communism marginally less disrepute than it would otherwise have had in the eyes of the wider British public. He was not, in other words, in the majority of converts to communism who were motivated by the Spanish Civil War; they came later. Rather he was a Depression-era communist, for whom the failures of capitalism, exemplified by poverty and mass unemployment in Britain, contrasted with the seeming success of Russia’s Five-Year Plans. Communists were not only on the side of the poor and underprivileged but at the forefront in their opposition to the rise of fascism in Germany and Italy.

There is no questioning the idealism of British communists in the 1930s. Perhaps the sentiment is summed up best by the retrospective of James MacGibbon (1912–2000), from a wealthy background: “It was the feeling that we were part of a movement that would change the world that kept us going. It was for people like us a time of political innocence; we believed that the Soviet Union would lead us to a new, enlightened age and must be supported.”¹¹ Historian Sidney Pollard (1925–98) thought the same. Although his membership of the CPGB in the late-thirties only lasted only a few months, he remained a sympathiser and for similar reasons: communists were on the side of the poor and underprivileged; “the new social system in Russia appeared to work,” while the capitalists countries “had stumbled into depression”; and the Soviet Union (who only entered into the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact to buy time to prepare for war) had made a disproportionate contribution to the outcome of World War II.¹²

Rudé delayed in joining the Communist Party until mid-1935, after reading the Marxist classics and a period of deliberation. In all likelihood he left Stowe School, in Bedfordshire, for another teaching position at St Paul’s School in order to live in London and participate more fully in CPGB activities. He became an active functionary with involvement in several Party committees, one of which was chairing the Party’s Westminster Branch.¹³ It is not hard to see why Rudé was given such wide-ranging responsibilities, precisely because his people skills could be turned to good account within a fractious organisation. He was an extraordinarily pleasant and even-tempered person who could persuade people to cooperate. As well as exuding a natural charm, his ability to deflect confrontation and to defuse unpleasantness by force of his quiet authority and being an exponent of the soft word made him “a good man to have in the chair.”¹⁴

He also participated in the Battle of Cable Street – the demonstration against the march of Sir Oswald Mosley’s para-military British Union of Fascists through the Jewish areas of London’s East End. Mosley’s Blackshirts met with staunch resistance; the protesters, in turn,

⁹ Nicholas Hiley, the then Head of the British Cartoon Archive at the University of Canterbury at Kent, provided these details from Low’s collection of press cuttings at the Archive (e-mail to author, Dec. 13, 2013). Some 20,000 visitors went to the Soviet Union in the Summer of 1932 alone. Friguglietti, “From Stalin to Robespierre,” 142, n.6.

¹⁰ Stretton, “George Rudé.” David Low recorded the event in *Low’s Autobiography*, 223–32. Low’s experiences may have been similar to those of Rudé and his companion but we don’t actually know.

¹¹ Quoted in MacGibbon, “James MacGibbon”, 136. See also Morgan, ‘Middle-Class Recruits to the Communist Party’.

¹² Sidney Pollard, “In Search of a Social Purpose,” 202. A similar explanation is provided by Saville, “The Communist Experience.”

¹³ See Rudé’s CPGB résumé, June 17, 1952. His applications for admission to CPGB National Schools are housed in the Communist Party of Great Britain Archives, CP/Cent/Pers/6/05, Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Manchester. Copies of these documents are in the Papers of Hugh Stretton, National Library of Australia, MS Acc09, 193, Box 7. They were given to Stretton by James Friguglietti (1936–2018), who also favoured me with copies.

¹⁴ John Saville, *George Rudé, 1910–1993, Marxist Historian*, 16.

were set upon by the police, including mounted constabulary, and Rudé was arrested. The court imposed a £5 fine, which was perhaps the equivalent of his weekly pay packet.

As well, Rudé wrote *Why Russia is Strong* (1941), a booklet for CPGB education purposes.¹⁵ This assignment was a function of the CPGB, despite its proletarian underpinning, liking to think of itself as a mass party with a broad popular appeal. Just as the CPGB leadership insisted that its university student membership work hard at their studies and thus cultivate skills that could be put to good use by the Party, so did the Party seek to capitalise on the skills of its middle-class membership. This ran counter to widespread rank-and-file prejudice toward the intellectuals in their midst who were disproportionately represented by the Party's middle-class members.¹⁶

For his pains, Rudé came under the surveillance of MI5, being described as “a well-known Party member in London.” If his MI5 file were available, we would know a great deal more than the scanty details we have about Rudé's life in England. It is clear from other people's MI5 files that he was an active and committed Party member.¹⁷ Perhaps Rudé's file is among the 375,000 MI5 surveillance files (out of some two million) that have been destroyed.¹⁸ The file, if it exists, might one day tell us the extent to which Rudé's communism impinged on his contribution to the war effort. His comrade and future co-author Eric Hobsbawm (1917–2012), ruefully described himself as “an intellectually overqualified and practically underqualified oddball with no gifts for the military life.” Because of his communism, Hobsbawm could not be risked being sent abroad in any capacity whatsoever: “Reluctantly I got used to the idea that I would have no part in Hitler's downfall.”¹⁹ In similar fashion, Rudé stayed at home, in his case being assigned to a position of responsibility within the fire service, helping to save London from burning down during the Blitz.²⁰

There were two further developments during the 1940s. One was the continuation of Rudé's university studies. He enrolled as an external student at the University of London and graduated in 1948 with a second BA, again achieving an upper second. This was a History degree, probably motivated by a desire to gain a better understanding of Marxism. He then re-enrolled, while still being a schoolteacher, as an external PhD student, again at the University of London, under the supervision of Alfred Cobban (1901–68), the subject of his thesis being “The Parisian Wage-earning Population and the Insurrectionary Movements of 1789–1791.”

The second development came that fateful day in June 1949 when he was summoned to the High Master's office at St Paul's School. The school knew about Rudé's communism but turned a blind eye because he never preached his creed in the classroom or the staffroom. It was a different matter when a horrified parent lodged a formal complaint after witnessing Rudé on a street platform wearing a Party placard. The School's board of governors decreed that Rudé be given the ultimatum to either cease his Party activities or tender his resignation. Adamant that he would not turn his back on the Party, he was let go. Thus begins the legend of George Rudé as martyr.

It was not as bad as it sounds. Rudé was certainly being victimised for his convictions but he was also extremely fortunate not to have been dismissed on the spot rather than being given a choice in the matter. This was the very time when communists were being purged from the civil service and when stern measures were being taken against communist schoolteachers,

¹⁵ Rudé, *Why Russia is Strong*.

¹⁶ Thorpe, “The Membership of the Communist Party of Great Britain”; Deakin, “The Radiant Illusion,” 34.

¹⁷ See, for example, the entry for Mar. 1, 1938, and telephone check, Sept. 17, 1941, Emile Vivian Burns (KV 2/1761); and file on Dave Springhall (KV 2/1596), both in Records of the Security Service, The National Archives (UK). I owe these references to Russell Campbell (Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand).

¹⁸ Smith, *British Writers and MI5 Surveillance*, viii–ix. It would have been helpful had the National Archives responded to my enquiries about Rudé's MI5 file, even if only to say that it doesn't exist.

¹⁹ Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times*, 156.

²⁰ Rudé's Certificate of Service, National Fire Service (copy in Stretton Papers, Box 7).

not least by the National Union of Schoolteachers.²¹ The High Master at St Paul's, R.L. James, although he thought the board's decision perfectly reasonable, did not sack Rudé, who had been a good teacher and agreeable colleague. Instead, it was amicably agreed that Rudé would "leave in good order" at the end of the academic year. To keep up the pretense, Rudé tendered a letter of resignation saying that he needed time to finish his PhD thesis. To his great credit, James then wrote a glowing reference on behalf of Rudé that made no mention of his CPGB membership.²² In fact, Rudé continued school teaching throughout the 1950s. He completed his thesis in 1950 and commenced work that same year at Sir Walter St John's Grammar School, also in London.²³ In 1955 he transferred to Holloway School to assume responsibility as head of History. Even then some on the board of governors of Holloway were not keen on Rudé because of his CPGB connections, but Margaret Cole, in her capacity as chair of the board, successfully countered these attempts to exclude him.²⁴

In these ways Rudé was able to remain employed throughout the 1950s, but his career had taken a curious downward trajectory in the prestige stakes. He had started at private schools (Stowe and then St Paul's) followed by a grammar school (Sir Walter St John's) and now he was at a comprehensive school (Holloway). It seems a curious downward progression but there was a reason, quite apart from need for employment. He had been frustrated at St Paul's by his prospects for advancement being blocked by two other senior masters being relatively young and he had applied for work in at least one other school of get around this "quite hopeless barrier."²⁵ The trade-off was that continued employment (at Sir Walter St John's) and promotion (Holloway) came at the "cost" of working in schools of ever-decreasing prestige.

As the 1950s progressed, Rudé's priorities were changing and he started scaling down his work for the CPGB. He aspired to eventually becoming a university academic, which meant that he had to start publishing. The only way to do this was to engage in intensive archival work in Paris and London which, in turn, meant shedding some of his Party commitments. He was fortunate that the frequent enough school holidays enabled him to engage in extended periods of research in Paris. He was, moreover, a disciplined and single-minded researcher and writer as well as being something of a loner when it came to his academic work. The partial exception was his association with Georges Lefebvre (1874–1959) – "the acknowledged master of the study of the [French] Revolution 'from below'" – and his "friendship and collaboration" with two other historians of the Revolution, Albert Soboul (1914–82) and Richard Cobb (1917–96). Lefebvre called them *les trois mousquetaires*.²⁶ Rudé's active network extended little beyond that.

Yet it has been claimed that Rudé was an important member of the Historians' Group of the Communist Party, to the extent that he "evolved through the ... Group".²⁷ Hobsbawm, who is sometimes a source of misinformation, asserts that Rudé formed the bridge between the Group's seventeenth- and nineteenth-century sections: "we simply had nobody who knew

²¹ Parsons, "British Communist Party School Teachers," 46–49.

²² R.L. James to Registrar, June 29, 1959, Rudé's staff file, University of Adelaide Archives (hereafter UAA), Series 200, 1959/207; Rudé to James, Feb. 9, 1949 (copy provided by James Friguglietti).

²³ James [to whom it may concern], Jan. 26, 1951 (copy), Rudé's staff file, UAA, Series 200, 1959/207 (another copy in Stretton Papers, Box 7). Some of the correspondence relating to Rudé's departure from St Paul's is quoted in Friguglietti, "The Making of an Historian," 19.

²⁴ Headmaster, Holloway School to Registrar, June 26, 1959, Rudé's staff file, UAA, Series 200, 1959/207; Nicholas Rogers, e-mail to author, Oct. 21, 2020; Vernon, *Margaret Cole*, 127; Partington, *Party Days*, 150–51. Margaret Cole (1893–1980), was the wife of the historian G.D.H. Cole (1889–1959). A Fabian Socialist of activist disposition, she was a member of London County Council's education committee and an alderman. Her experience led to her being appointed to the board of governors of several schools, including chairing that body at Holloway.

²⁵ R.L. James to Headmaster, Strode's School, Surrey, Feb. 9, 1949 (copy in Stretton Papers, Box 7).

²⁶ Rudé, 'The Changing Face of the Crowd', 191–93 (republished in Kaye, *The Face of the Crowd*, 56–71); Jones, "Richard Charles Cobb," 99.

²⁷ Kaye, *The Face of the Crowd*, 3.

much about [the eighteenth century], until George Rudé, a lone explorer, ventured into the period of John Wilkes".²⁸ Rather, Rudé was always on the margins of the Group, to the extent of rarely being mentioned in its extensive records.²⁹ He only took out membership in 1953 and 1954, by which time the Group was in decline. Neither was he involved with, or a contributor to, the Group's major initiative, the *Festschrift* in honour of Donna Torr (1883–1957).³⁰ He played no part in the establishment or the running of *Past and Present*, the journal that emerged from the activities of the Group, and which was viewed askance by the historical establishment until it shed its overly Marxist image.³¹ Despite a strong ethic of collaborative effort within the Historians' Group, Rudé was a loner when it came to his own work, which stands in contrast to his otherwise inclusive nature.

These years saw the height of the Cold War and communist academics were regarded in a very unfavourable light. They were neither academically nor politically respectable. Indeed, Hobsbawm bitterly complained that: "What made the rhetoric of Cold War liberals so intolerable was their conviction that all communists were simply agents of the Soviet enemy and their denial that any communist could therefore possibly be a member of good standing of the intellectual community" – to which former communist Jenifer Hart (1914–2005) added that membership of the CPGB did not, *ipso facto*, make one a Russian agent.³² This disapprobation translated into it being very difficult for known communists to get appointed to academic positions during the 1950s. Hobsbawm has stated that "the curtain went down" on communists getting academic job after the Berlin airlift in mid-1948. Those already in the system were safe in their jobs but, like himself, didn't get promoted until a thawing of the Cold War.³³ That is not quite true because communists did occasionally get academic employment – for example, Brian Simon (1915–2002) in Education at Leicester and Peter Worsley (1924–2013) in Sociology at Hull. Rudé, by contrast, languished, despite a growing reputation for articles in mainstream journals, including the *Economic History Review*, and winning the prestigious Alexander Prize of the Royal Historical Society for an article on the anti-Catholic Gordon riots of 1780.³⁴

The enduring narrative that Rudé was excluded from university positions because of his communism is difficult to establish.³⁵ At present, we only know of two occasions when he applied for such work in Britain – for unspecified positions at Chiswick Polytechnic in west London in 1953, and an unspecified job at Cambridge University in an unstated year.³⁶ What we need is to know is what other positions he might have applied for and the reasoning behind his being rejected. In any case, few such positions were on offer in the 1950s. But there were rumours going around at the time which led fellow historian Olwen Hufton (b.1938) to directly ask Rudé, in 1964, about his not getting a university job in Britain – to which he replied "What jobs?"³⁷ The rapid expansion of the British university system only commenced in the early

²⁸ Hobsbawm, 'The Historians' Group of the Communist Party', 37. Rudé had started work on what became *Wilkes and Liberty* (1962).

²⁹ Howe, 'George Rudé, the Group, and "History from Below."' (I am grateful to Dr Howe for providing a copy of his paper). Richard J. Evans, discussion with author in Wellington, Oct. 15, 2017.

³⁰ Saville, *Democracy and the Labour Movement*.

³¹ Evans, *Eric Hobsbawm*, 315–19.

³² Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times*, 183; Hart, *Ask Me No More*, 78. Hart was a Fellow of St Anne's College, Oxford.

³³ Hobsbawm, [interviewed by Pat Thane], 34. See also Renton, *Sidney Pollard*, 24.

³⁴ Rudé, 'Prices, Wages and Popular Movement' (republished in Rudé, *Paris and London*, 163–97); Rudé, 'The Gordon Riots' (republished in *Paris and London*, 268–92).

³⁵ Assertions to this effect are by Eley, review, 797; Brass, review, 538.

³⁶ James to Principal, Cheswick Polytechnic, Jan. 28 1953; Principal to James, Jan. 30, 1953, Stretton Papers, Box 7; John Bromley to Hugh Stretton, Jan. 18, 1959, Rudé's staff file, UAA, Series 200, 207/1959.

³⁷ Olwen Hufton to Eric Hobsbawm [early Jan. 2003], Hobsbawm Papers, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick, 937/1/1/1 (courtesy of Emile Chabal, University of Edinburgh, who is writing an intellectual biography of Hobsbawm). To underscore the dire employment situation in Britain in the late 1950s, Rudé's colleague Trevor

1960s, by which time Rudé was established at the University of Adelaide. It would be naive to believe that Rudé did not suffer victimisation of some sort, but further evidence is needed to carry the argument further. This is not setting impossible standards of evidence but a matter of asking for firm evidence of *any* sort.

Another recurring narrative is that Rudé was blackballed by his PhD supervisor, Alfred Cobban. Rudé's comrades at his memorial service in 1993 were adamant that this was the case, although when questioned about this a decade later one of them admitted that his information was "not really first-hand."³⁸ The background to the Cobban saga was the Soviet invasion of Hungary in November 1956, which led to wholesale resignations by disillusioned CPGB members, including most of the Historians' Group. E.P. Thompson (1924–93) was among their number. He had previously toed the Party line but the disenchantment of Hungary was too much, and his wife Dorothy Thompson (1923–2011) later acknowledged "the deliberate blindness of many of us to the abuse of state power in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe."³⁹ Rudé (and Hobsbawm) remained in the Party. It may be surmised that Rudé drew a distinction between the creed of communism and its actual practice. Whatever the case, Cobban demanded that he denounce the Soviets over Hungary, which Rudé refused to do. Whereupon Cobban banned Rudé from his seminar at the Institute of Historical Research. There is no dispute over this, but it is also alleged that Cobban ensured that Rudé would not obtain the university position he deserved in Britain. Rudé was thus forced to look for university work abroad and eventually, in 1960, he had to settle for an overseas job and was "exiled" to Adelaide.

These are plausible enough allegations in the climate of the Cold War, given Cobban's anti-Marxism and his being a powerful figure within the historical establishment, especially within his chosen field, and the extent to which communist and even Marxist historians were viewed with distaste and suspicion. Rudé's slightly younger contemporary Hugh Trevor-Roper summed up a common enough sentiment in opposing the appointment of communists to British universities: "I do think the question of ... politics is important. On this subject my view is fixed: fellow-travellers, apolitical sillies, – yes, if they are good enough; party members, – no, however good. This is a view I am prepared to defend, and which I am not prepared to change."⁴⁰

Pamela Pilbeam has closely examined the bases of the allegations against Cobban and points out that he was renowned for his dedication to his students, herself included.⁴¹ This is also attested by the Australian historian Bruce Mansfield: when studying in London in 1953, he was impressed by the extent to which Cobban was "helping out and encouraging his graduate students." Concerning Cobban's alleged behaviour toward Rudé, Mansfield told me that "I do not recognise the man I knew in the picture that emerges here."⁴² Indeed, being involved with the *Bulletin of the Institute for Historical Research*, Cobban would have been the person recommending Rudé's first article in an English journal.⁴³ Pilbeam also points out that despite their differences in interpreting the French Revolution, Cobban always encouraged his students to read Rudé's work. Cobban, in fact, had such high regard for Rudé's scholarship

Wilson (b. 1928) applied for a lectureship at the University of Adelaide in 1959 because "there were no jobs" on offer in his field (twentieth century English history) at that time (Wilson, interview with author, Adelaide, Sept. 5, 2015).

³⁸ Hobsbawm, in *George Rudé, 1910–1993, Marxist Historian*, 8; Saville, in *ibid.*, 17; Hobsbawm to Hufton, Jan. 15, 2003, Hobsbawm Papers, 937/1/1/1.

³⁹ Quoted in McIlroy, "Another Look at E.P. Thompson and British Communism," 530.

⁴⁰ Davenport-Hines and Sisman, *One Hundred Letters of Hugh Trevor-Roper*, 52 (Hugh Trevor-Roper to Isaiah Berlin, Feb. 18, 1955).

⁴¹ Pilbeam, "Alfred Cobban."

⁴² Bruce Mansfield, letter to author, Feb. 3, 2016. Mansfield (1924–2017) was foundation Professor of History (later Pro-Vice-Chancellor) at Macquarie University, Sydney.

⁴³ Rudé, "The Motives of Popular Insurrection" (republished in *Paris and London*, 130–62).

that he commissioned his former student to write a pamphlet for the Historical Association on *Interpretations of the French Revolution*, and Rudé later contributed to Cobban's *Festschrift* volume.⁴⁴

To further cloud the picture, Rudé never criticised Cobban in print, or even mentioned that he had been excluded from the latter's seminar. On the contrary, Rudé praises Cobban for his considerable assistance both as his supervisor and afterwards, and he later suggested Cobban to his Adelaide Honours student Bill Murray as a possible PhD supervisor.⁴⁵ That is in keeping with Rudé's gentlemanly instincts; he was not one to hold grudges and was averse to calling people out, which is of no assistance in the present discussion. Even when pressed on the matter by fellow historian Olwen Hufton, Rudé was "anxious to stress" that Cobban had been "very helpful over Adelaide", but there is no evidence in the University of Adelaide file on Rudé to support the notion that Cobban was involved in his appointment. Cobban was not one of his referees and he did not correspond with the university on the matter of Rudé's appointment.⁴⁶ It all adds up to a confusing picture. Cobban may have written a couple of unenthusiastic referee's reports on behalf of Rudé and this might be the basis of the allegations that Cobban blackballed Rudé. But their relationship soon returned to an even keel. It is still the case, as James Friguglietti pointed out two decades ago, that "formal proof [against Cobban] has never been offered."⁴⁷ Until such evidence comes to light, it would be better for the accusers to refrain from further comment.

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Had Rudé waited a few more years, he would likely have been appointed to one of the new "plateglass universities" that sprang up in the 1960s in the wake of the Robbins Report recommendations for university expansion, when the Cold War was thawing and when his publications were continuing apace. Sussex seems the obvious destination. His broadly-conceived brand of social history, which included a willingness to consider the findings of sociologists and psychologists, was in accord with the interdisciplinary strand of the new "map of learning" enunciated by Sussex's foundation professor of history, Asa Briggs (1921–2016), who had written a highly favourable review of his first book, *The Crowd in the French Revolution*.⁴⁸ But even had Rudé realised that there would be openings in a few years' time, he wasn't prepared to wait. By at least 1958 he was looking overseas, for which there was ample precedent among British academics.⁴⁹

Again his reputation preceded him to Australia and his communism disqualified him for jobs at the University of Tasmania and the New South Wales Institute of Technology.⁵⁰ It was different at the University of Adelaide because Hugh Stretton, the chair of History, arranged that he be appointed so long as his impartiality as a teacher could be assured. Enquiries revealed that this was indeed the case. He immediately prospered, and the 1960s through to the early 1970s were the most productive period of his career when he was writing a book every three years and roughly three journal articles every single year. In fairness to his wife Doreen

⁴⁴ Rudé, *Interpretations of the French Revolution*; Rudé, "The Growth of Cities and Popular Revolt" (republished in Kaye, *The Face of the Crowd*, 221–41).

⁴⁵ Rudé, "The Changing Face of the Crowd", 193 (republished in Kaye, *The Changing Face of the Crowd*, 56–71); Rudé, *Paris and London*, 14; Bill Murray, e-mail to author, Nov. 6, 2020.

⁴⁶ Hufton to Hobsbawm [early Jan. 2003], Hobsbawm Papers, 937/1/1/1 (also Evans, *Eric Hobsbawm*, 438); Rudé's staff file, UAA, Series 200, 1959/207. Rudé's referees were John Bromley (1913–85), Albert Goodwin (1906–95) and Georges Lefebvre.

⁴⁷ Friguglietti, "A Scholar 'In Exile'," 4.

⁴⁸ Briggs, "Faces in the Crowd."

⁴⁹ Taylor, "The Dominion of History"; Richards, "Emigrants and Historians."

⁵⁰ Munro, "The Politics of George Rudé's Appointment to the University of Adelaide."

– they were a truly devoted couple – he never worked after six o’clock in the evenings but got up very early the next morning for a few hours’ writing before the start of teaching. It was a successful formula for advancement through the ranks. He was appointed to the second chair of History at Adelaide in 1966 (by advertisement) and went on to further full professorships at Stirling (1968), Flinders (1968–70) and (the then) Sir George Williams universities (1970–87).

ASIO was dismayed that Rudé had slipped under its guard.⁵¹ The organisation was not pleased that the University had withheld the fact of his communism during the appointment process. ASIO agents came on to the campus and warned Rudé that he would likely lose his job should he step out of line. They need not have worried. Although he never resigned from the CPGB, neither did he join its Australian counterpart. As with his school teaching in England, Rudé was not in the business of indoctrinating students or peddling his views, as former colleagues and students attest and as ASIO’s informants soon related to their masters. He was a first-rate – and undogmatic – teacher, fully justifying Stretton’s prediction that his long experience in secondary schools would transfer to a university setting.⁵² He never denied his Marxism or his communism, but neither did he flaunt them. As one of his academic colleagues said to me, “You’d never have known he was a Marxist from talking to him.”⁵³

He was also a greatly liked and extremely pleasant person. He was anything but an academic street-fighter and it was not his nature to be disputatious or disagreeable. Bill Murray recalls an episode at the 1979 George Rudé Seminar in Adelaide when he and Rudé had an evening with Albert Soboul and the Australian communist writer Judah Waten (1911–85), who were soon squabbling over “the relative merits – or rather demerits – of Moscow and Peking. George kept right out of it.”⁵⁴ He was a highly-regarded colleague at the University of Adelaide and when he became head of department in 1965 he was, like Stretton, supportive and approachable, the very antithesis of the “god professor” of that day and age.⁵⁵ His personal warmth was commented on by others. On a research trip to Hobart, Rudé encountered the same Vice-Chancellor who had helped to block his appointment at the University of Tasmania a few years earlier. Afterwards, the Vice-Chancellor pulled the history professor aside – namely, Douglas Pike (ex-University of Adelaide) – and said in tones of amazement, “But Pike, he’s a *gentleman!*”, struggling to comprehend that a communist could fit such a description.⁵⁶

But you can’t please everybody. One colleague, who was determined not to be impressed, recalls finding Rudé “rather aloof” and “schoolmasterly” and regarded his methodology in the study of crowd behaviour as being “very wooden.” He also saw Rudé as a champagne socialist, saying that “as a real prole I am always suspicious of posh wannabe lefties who seem to know better than the workers what the workers ‘want’, as distinct from should want’.”⁵⁷ It recalls the working-class British communists viewing the intellectuals in their midst askance.⁵⁸ At the same time, Rudé was fully aware of his academic standing and scholarly achievements. Another young lecturer at the time recalls that “George was modest, and

⁵¹ See Rudé’s ASIO file, National Archives of Australia, Canberra, A6119, 2489. A digital copy is available at www.naa.gov.au.

⁵² Hugh Stretton, interview with Rob Linn, Nov. 14, 2006, University Oral History Project (page 27 of transcript), UAA, Series 3145, D2008/7248; Prest, “Professor George Rudé,” 3–4; Hyslop, “Two Tales of One City”; Murray, “George Rudé,” 170.

⁵³ Brian Dickey, discussion with author at Flinders University, Mar. 21, 2014.

⁵⁴ Bill Murray, e-mails to author, Nov. 6 & 23, 2020.

⁵⁵ Prest, “Professor George Rudé,” 4; John Young, telephone interview with author, Sept. 29, 2013.

⁵⁶ Hugh Stretton to Barrie Rose, Feb. 5, 2002, Stretton Papers, Box 7; Patricia Stretton, e-mail to author, Mar. 25, 2014.

⁵⁷ Personal communication to the author.

⁵⁸ The autobiographies of academics from working-class backgrounds commonly reveal their authors’ self-consciousness about their origins and the difficulties encountered in fitting into the academic environment. See Dews and Law, *This Fine Place so Far from Home*; Michel, Wilson and Archer, *Bread and Roses*.

charming, but he also possessed considerable intellectual authority. He gave the impression, at least when I first knew him in Adelaide [1966–67], of being absolutely on top of his subject – and having a real international presence and profile.”⁵⁹ In 1963, John McManners (1916–2006), who had no sympathy for Rudé’s politics, made clear just how exciting his scholarship was regarded at the time. When soliciting support for Rudé’s election to the (then) Australian Humanities Council in 1963, McManners wrote:

For weight of publication there can be few candidates who would rank higher than George Rudé of Adelaide. *Wilk[e]s & Liberty* [1962] was scholarly enough, though not in any way startling, but *The Crowd in the French Revolution* [1959], I suppose, is really established as something new in history writing, and very learnedly and neatly done too. And, of course, he has written a whole stack of articles, forty or fifty I’d say, scattered through some of the major journals.... He has made a very powerful contribution to original scholarship; in a sense he has created a new genre, the sociology of riots (or something of the kind).⁶⁰

Rudé’s academic credentials were, indeed, eminently respectable, and he was duly elected.

Beyond the university, the affable Rudé quickly assumed high standing in the (then) straight-laced and conservative atmosphere of 1960s’ Adelaide. Part of the reason was because he was so pleasant. Another part of the reason may have been because he was uncontroversial. There was no overt political involvement on his part. He seldom wrote for newspapers and, to my knowledge, never went on radio to express his views. Nor were his views sought – unlike Eric Hobsbawm whose later defenses of communism put him under severe attack in some quarters. Instead, Rudé poured his energies into catching up on lost time and consolidating his academic reputation. The fact that he was still a communist, which was well-known, was conveniently overlooked because he was so non-threatening and simply did not fit the stereotype of the dangerous communist.

The extent to which this “dangerous communist” was a recognised and respected figure in Adelaide society was impressed on me, as a third-year undergraduate student, when he delivered a public lecture at Flinders University in September 1969 on “The Study of Revolutions.”⁶¹ It attracted a capacity crowd. I was surprised at just how powerful a drawcard he was; and even more surprised at the composition of the audience, which looked upper-middle-class, even upper-crust, and decidedly unradical. There was no doubting that he was nothing if not respectable, although ASIO did not see it that way. The lecture, under the title “History of Revolutions”, had been presented the year earlier as the third annual Brian Fitzpatrick Memorial Lecture, organised by the University of Melbourne Labor Club.⁶² Rudé’s departure to Melbourne to deliver the original lecture, in conjunction with his attendance at the ANZAAS Conference, was duly noted by ASIO. So was the company he kept during his visit to Melbourne.

In other words, George remained under ASIO scrutiny, and so did Doreen, in her capacity as president of the South Australian branch of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). As someone who valued her privacy, Doreen was very upset in

⁵⁹ Wilfrid Prest, e-mail to author, June 16, 2016.

⁶⁰ John McManners to J.A. La Nauze, Feb. 4, 1963, La Nauze Papers, NLA, MS 5248, Box 25, Folder 219. At the time, McManners was a Professor of History at the University of Sydney. He went on to become Regius Professor of Ecclesiastical History at the University of Oxford. La Nauze (1911–90) was Professor of History, Institute of Advanced Studies, Australian National University.

⁶¹ The pre-publicity is in *The Flinders University of South Australia Newsletter* 1, no. 3 (Aug. 1969), 2.

⁶² The lecture was published in the Marxist journal *Arena* (Rudé, “The Study of Revolutions”) and republished in Kaye, *The Face of the Crowd*, 72–79). See also Rudé’s ASIO file (pages 38 & 72).

later life to discover that she and George had been snooped on.⁶³ What Rudé's ASIO file reveals is the reach of the organisation's surveillance, the extent to which it had snitches with the wider community (including the University of Adelaide), and the sheer waste of resources that this entailed.⁶⁴ His ASIO file also reveals that he gradually became sufficiently emboldened to involve himself, although not in an office-bearing capacity, in such organisations as the Australian-Soviet Friendship Society, the Committee for Democracy in Greece, as well as anti-Vietnam War activities and even a symposium held by the Communist Party of Australia, none of which posed a threat to national security. By this time there was little ASIO could have done to rein him in considering that many respectable and prominent people in Adelaide were becoming increasingly critical of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War and of ASIO itself. Rudé was popular and highly regarded among a broad cross-section of respectable Adelaide society and to single him out would have provoked widespread outrage. Besides, he was only exercising his right of association with others.

Whereas Eric Hobsbawm only became "academically, if not politically, respectable" from the 1970s,⁶⁵ it can be argued that Rudé was never anything other than respectable. His academic respectability, however, diminished after from the 1970s, because he largely gave up the archival research that was once his hallmark. After the research on the agricultural labourers' uprising of 1830 for the book that became *Captain Swing*, Rudé ceased to frequent archival repositories. Rudé was mindful of his late start in academic life and fearful that Doreen would not be provided for if he died young, so he concentrated on writing textbooks and general accounts.⁶⁶ His academic reputation did suffer as a result of this shift from the telescopic to the kaleidoscopic.⁶⁷

As well, Rudé was highly principled. To give just one example, he was placed in an awkward position in 1968 having accepted the chair of History at Flinders University in Adelaide, but not yet arrived. Soon after he was unexpectedly offered a chair at Sir George Williams University in Canada, which was a preferable appointment. Rather than going straight away to Sir George Williams, Rudé insisted on a delayed arrival, even if it might have meant him not getting the job. He felt honour-bound to give Flinders at least two years and it was agreed that there would be no announcement of the Canadian professorship until he had settled matters with Flinders. He also stipulated that he could not arrive until the end of the Flinders teaching year in December 1970, meaning that someone else would have to take his classes at Sir George Williams from September until his end-of-year arrival.⁶⁸ You wonder how many others in the same position would have done the same decent thing. He was a very pleasant and decent person, without a mean bone in his body. More to the point, he stuck by his principles and undertook his obligations.

There were costs, however. There are only so many hours in a day and decisions have to be made how to balance the competing demands of work, family and miscellaneous obligations. In Rudé's case, it was whether to prioritise his scholarship or his political activism. As we have seen, his research and writing took precedence over his work for the CPGB from about 1950, and the result is a magnificent corpus of scholarly writing. His arrival in Australia confirmed his retreat from formal Party activity; he never resigned from the CPGB but neither did he join the Communist Party of Australia. There are signs that he had some regrets about

⁶³ Doreen Rudé to Hugh Stretton, Apr. 27 [1999], Stretton Papers, Box 7.

⁶⁴ See Burgmann, *Dirty Secrets*.

⁶⁵ Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times*, 304.

⁶⁶ McPhee, in Panel Discussion (starting at 31.40 minutes); McPhee, e-mail to author, Oct. 20, 2020; Hobsbawm and Rudé, *Captain Swing*.

⁶⁷ An earlier statement to this effect is Friguglietti, "Dispersing the Crowd."

⁶⁸ Judith Adamson, e-mail to author, 6 Nov. 6, 2013 (as told to Judith Adamson by John Hill, who was the Chair of History when Rudé arrived at SGWU in late-1970.)

prioritising his scholarship, because on his deathbed he told Doreen, “if I had it all to do again, I’d be a better Communist.”⁶⁹

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⁶⁹ Quoted in Doreen Rudé, in *George Rudé, 1910–1993, Marxist Historian*, 21.

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