

VISITS, VISTAS AND VICISSITUDES: BRITISH COMMUNISTS AND ROMANIAN PEOPLE'S DEMOCRACY

Gavin BOWD*

Abstract: Before the Second World War, Romania barely figured in the concerns of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). However, the establishment of People's Democracy, and the temporary effacement of Britain's diplomatic and economic presence, meant that the CPGB briefly played a central role in trying to shape perceptions of communist Romania. The CPGB presented the new People's Republic as a decolonised workers' paradise that respected national minorities, and, to spread this message, British communists sought to draw into their orbit fellow travellers who visited Romania from 1948 onwards. 'What vistas Socialism has opened up!', wrote Bucharest-based journalist Johnnie Gibbons to CPGB leader Harry Pollitt in 1951. However, the relationship between these 'fraternal parties' was ultimately determined by internal and external vicissitudes of the Cold War. British and Romanian communists maintained cordial relations until 1989, but their respective adoption of polycentrism masked increasing divergences.

Keywords: Britain; Romania; communism; travel; polycentrism

* University of St Andrews, Scotland, United Kingdom. gpb@st-andrews.ac.uk