

Flora Gould

Flora Gould was born in 1908 and received her political education amidst the deprivation and suffering that so many went through during the depression. Like hundreds, if not thousands of others, she and husband and were forced off their farm. He chased non-existent jobs for what seemed like months on end and she tied to make their meagre monies stretch to feed their two young children. Then he died and 'here I was with two kids and no money'.

She went to Victoria University in Wellington and found a job there and 'interesting people with ideas about politics'. One of her friends introduced her to Gordon Watson who was at that time the editor of the Peoples Voice and told her they needed a part-time worker at the CPNZ office. She took the job and had her first real contact with the Party.

Soon after she joined the Party. As she recounted to Massey University historian Kerry Taylor:

'Gordon talked to me one day, and he said one day, what don't you join the party? So I said, as a lot of people say who don't know any better, oh I think I can do just as good work outside the party. So Gordon very clearly and patiently explained to me that once you join the party you have the benefit of an organization, the benefit of the collective. You get the benefit of other people's ideas and contributed your own ideas, and there really was a collective result. So I joined up.'

Flora married Nat Gould who had himself joined the party after becoming national secretary of the Friends of the Soviet Union. He went on to become editor of the People's Voice and held that position when the party's presses were smashed by the police (using sledge-hammers) in 1940 and he was arrested under war-time legislation for opposing imperialist war and spent eight weeks in Mt Eden prison. He and Flora had moved to Auckland to work on the paper and they stayed there working on In Print, the legal paper that replaced the People's Voice, edited by the poet Ron Mason.

When the war changed its nature after the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union Nat joined up and Flora moved to Christchurch to start a party office there. She returned to Auckland after it was established.

Flora was active in an enormous range of organizations, often taking the secretary's job. The Society for Closer Relations with Russia, the Women's Union, and later the Peace Council. With the Women's Union she organized campaigns around child-care, high prices and inflation, the question of war and peace and encouraged progressive ideas such as towards the Soviet Union within the women the union had contact with.

'I remember doing some dress-making because I remember a friend coming up from Wellington and found out where my little dress making place was in Karangahape Rd and came in and it was a dress making place all right, that's what I did. And he said to me "is this real or is it a front?" Which shows the funny ideas people had, that communists couldn't possibly do dress making, you know.'

During the years after the war through the 1950s Nat and Flora didn't have specific tasks, just working as hard as they could for the party alongside their paid work. They were also regularly opening their home to comrades without jobs. That sort of support was common, as she told Kerry Taylor:

'Communists in general are very caring people. That's why they are in the Communist Party in the first place. Nobody joins the Communist Party thinking this is a good thing for me!'

Among those who stayed with them was Rewi Alley, on his speaking tours of New Zealand to promote the achievements of the Chinese revolution.

Flora got involved in the Peace Council from 1956 when she went on the committee and became the secretary and served in that position for a number of years. The period was very interesting in terms of the ideological struggle against revisionism. Just as divisions between the Chinese and Soviet parties drew their ideological lines regarding imperialism and the 'peaceful transition to socialism', so too were these divisions played out in the Peace Movement. The Soviet line was to 'ban the bomb' the Chinese line, that the New Zealand Peace Council came to agree with through its own deliberations, was that 'policies, not weapons themselves, bring about war'. It wasn't the bomb itself; it was the policies that controlled the bomb.

Flora and Nat worked for the CPNZ through turbulent times in the 1960s and 70s. They pointed to Mao's theories of the two lines and that there would always be two lines and that you needed to struggle to make sure that the correct one dominates. Eventually in their opinion the wrong one did and they left the Party. The CPNZ became increasingly close to the Albanian party and when that party launched an attack on Mao and the Chinese Revolution Nat and Flora were among those who tried to defend Mao's legacy.

At first the majority of the Party shared Nat and Flora's position and Nat was part of a delegation to discuss their differences with the Albanians. Their report back was further critical of the Albanian position and initially enthusiastically received but the CPNZ leadership essentially overruled the investigation and imposed a new line. Nat was subject to an organized attack and expelled, Flora was refused permission to resign but stopped attending activities.

Flora and Nat and other comrades who had left the CPNZ in similar circumstances formed themselves into the Red Flag Group initially through contact with the Revolutionary Communist Party of the USA, a group that shared their criticism of the Albanian position. The Red Flag Group was an early, although not foundation, member of the Revolutionary International Movement or RIM in 1984.

When Nat died Flora kept the group going, although as she got older in decreasing intensity. When interviewed by another historian, in 2001, she looked back at her long life of service to the communist party and a huge range of progressive movements and announced 'you know what I really miss – the ideological struggle!'. She died 3 April 2003.