The Best of all Possible Worlds?:
The Ideology and Practice of British Communism in the Cold War,
1953-1961

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Dedicated to my son, Sam
13 October 1982 to 2 February 2001
Abstract

This thesis examines the ideology and practice of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) in the 1950s. Ever since its formation, the CPGB had adhered to, and modelled itself upon, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Party transformed from its revolutionary ideology and practice towards representing state dictatorship under Stalin. This transformation from Bolshevism to Stalinism had profound implications for the British Party. Following Stalin's death in 1953, British Communism embarked upon a process of de-Stalinisation; a process accelerated by the speech of First Secretary Khruschev to the 20th Congress of the Soviet Party in February 1956.

This period coincided with a general decline in British Party membership and with an increased emphasis on electoral practice. Two contradictions emerged as the CPGB attempted to reconcile the socialist and revolutionary aspirations of its membership with the practices of Stalinism and this concentration on elections. These socialist aspirations were undermined by Khruschev's revelations about Stalin's 'crimes' and his own regime's intervention in Hungary at the end of 1956. Members' response to 1956 threatened to damage the Party beyond repair. A disparate opposition emerged in 1956, but never coordinated into a coherent challenge to the leadership. The continuing loyalty of the majority of members, combined with an increase in industrial unrest during this period, to reverse the sudden decline in membership precipitated by 1956.

In 1957, the Party rescued itself, partly through intervention within the trade union rank and file. In parallel with this rank and file level activity, the Party had, since its formation, operated a strategy which sought to place members into the leadership of the trade unions. The thesis demonstrates the limitations and the damaging implications of this leadership strategy as it examines Communist intervention into the Electrical Trades Union.
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Introduction

Bolshevism, Stalinism and British Communism

the consensus posited an uncomplicated conclusion: No meaningful differences or discontinuity existed between Bolshevism and Stalinism, ...for twenty years this historical interpretation was axiomatic in almost all scholarly works on Soviet history and politics. It prevails even today.¹

The Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) existed throughout as a contradictory political phenomenon. This statement is not the predication of a retreat into the sort of historical relativism which refuses to define either what this organisation was, or what it was not. It is, rather, the only possible description of a party populated with militant socialists, perceived as the repository of the revolutionary Marxist tradition but which, throughout most of its existence, adhered persistently to one of the world’s most oppressive regimes. This thesis identifies a number of contradictions within the ideology and practice of British Communism, but it was this particular conflict between socialism and Stalinism that proved both the most influential and the most destructive. Adherence to Stalinism was a product of the CPGB’s particular historical genesis, its leadership’s persistent misrepresentation about the realities of Soviet life and finally, the need for members to sustain their activity through reference to a model of existing socialism.

The fact that members required the sustenance of Moscow was not only the product of theoretical shortcomings, it also contributed to them. What Edward Thompson described as ‘the Monolith’ which ‘has droned on in a dogmatic monotone’ both replaced the need for, and inhibited and disfigured, the application of Marx’s theories to British circumstances, but also precluded meaningful analysis of the Soviet Union and its post-revolutionary development.² The British Party was not alone in this. Until 1943, it was part of something akin to a world-wide Communist Party, guided and directed by Moscow through the auspices of the Third International.³ Following 1943, even the nominal aspirations about world revolution implied by the existence of the Comintern, were jettisoned when Stalin sacrificed it to diplomatic and military expediency.⁴

³ Constituted Moscow, March 1919.
⁴ The Third International (Comintern) was replaced by the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform) in September 1947. Zhdanov posited a model of the world divided into two camps of Socialism and Capitalism. Cominform included the Eastern European Communist Parties and France and Italy. The CPGB was excluded.
Western Communist Parties retained allegiance to Moscow, but the combined effects of the Comintern’s dissolution and the Cold War’s iron curtain left them ideological refugees in a Stalinist diaspora. At Moscow, Yalta and Potsdam, as Stalin accepted the diplomatic reality of ‘spheres of influence’, even the nominal concept of a single world revolutionary party was vetoed. Western parties began a process of acculturation to their respective national political environments. Some, such as the French and Italian Parties, adapted more successfully than others to the post-Comintern world and to their respective domestic politics. This was largely due to their significantly higher membership and the fact that their role in anti-Nazi resistance gave them considerable credibility within the consciousness of their various populations. The CPGB had neither the size nor the credibility either to challenge Labour Party hegemony within the British working class or to exert influence over world Communism. Throughout the post-war period, however, it sought to retain the credibility devolved from its association with the Soviet Union. As late as 1956, Harry Pollitt, CPGB General Secretary, still insisted that ‘we are a fighting Communist Party, proud to defend the Soviet Union...even if at times we have our differences over certain minor aspects of their policies’.

As a branch of this world-wide Communist Party, the CPGB had enjoyed an inclusive role in an international fraternity of socialists engaged in dialogue about how to change the world. Membership gave British Communism a domestic credibility which belied its size and institutional significance. Robin Page Arnot’s membership of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI), the frequent visits to Moscow by leading CPGB figures and the direct interaction between Pollitt, Rajani Palme Dutt and others with emerging world figures, all served to inflate the importance of this small Marxist organisation, most damagingly in the eyes of British Communists themselves.

Although the egalitarian features of the Comintern had been eroded by the late 1920s, it was still perceived by world Communism as an entity through which to achieve socialism. While this perception remained, however, the paradoxical acceptance of ‘socialism in one country’ precipitated a new role for the Comintern as an instrument of Soviet foreign policy, often in opposition to revolutionary activity

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throughout the world. Comintern membership and continuing association with important Communist parties abroad, distorted perspectives about the position of Communism in Britain. This was most famously expressed at the St. Pancras North by-election in 1948. After Communist John Mahon had received 854 votes, Harry Pollitt announced 'we may not have won St Pancras, but we've got China.'

Had the British Party not been part of the Comintern, it would have been little more than a Marxist-Leninist sect. Some former members went so far as to describe the Party as 'a despised sect'. With the Comintern's changing role and its eventual dissolution, a sect was, in reality, what the CPGB had become by the 1950s. This exposed as fiction, the received wisdom shared by many within the Party, about its domestic and international importance. The Party and those closely associated with it, however, continued, right up until its dissolution, to insist on the reality of this fiction. This had consequences as the Party attempted to intervene in and influence working class struggle. As a result of this confused perception of itself, the Party faced an ongoing dilemma between sectarianism on the one hand and liquidation into institutions which it could never hope to influence politically, on the other. It was a dilemma that the Party never resolved.

The Party's sectarianism was fuelled by an arrogance, born largely from its membership of the Comintern. It emerged as early as 1929, when Stalin's 'Class against Class' anti-social democratic policy, inspired an attempt to build 'red unions' in opposition to the 'social fascists' of the Trade Union Congress. The political arrogance that fuelled sectarianism remained in evidence long after the dissolution of the Comintern. Ralph Russell cited an example from the 1960s when he was a tutor at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London University. Russell said of this period that the attitude of Communists to the students was that 'we're the revolutionary vanguard - if they don't follow us then it's not a revolutionary movement'. Presumptions about its left-wing hegemony remained discernible throughout the 1980s as the Party's main organ, Marxism Today.

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7 The slogan was adopted at the CPSU's 14th Congress in April 1925. See Stalin 'The Question of the Victory of Socialism in One Country' in The Foundations of Leninism. On the Problems of Leninism (Moscow, 1950) 228-246. Also Deutscher, Stalin, 389.
9 Nottingham Marxist Group, 'Why We Left The Communist Party' (Nottingham, 1957), 6.
10 Ralph Russell, interviewed by author 26 May 1998. [Henceforward, 'interview' refers to people interviewed by author, unless specified]. Russell joined the CPGB in 1934. He chaired the Party's University Joint Staffs Committee. He stayed in the Party until its dissolution, joining the Democratic Left.
continued to insist that its own analysis of contemporary capitalism must be the starting point for the whole of the British left.11

The Party also retained enough confidence to allow suicidal lengths of rope to members able to intervene within the bureaucracies of British trade unions. The Party continued to believe that it was theoretically sound enough and politically influential enough to avoid these members being subsumed into such bureaucracies. Contrary to the popular perception that the unions these people administered were 'controlled' by the CPGB, the effect was, largely, the opposite. Rather than exerting meaningful political influence, Communist trade union leaders were dominated by the bureaucratic imperatives of office-holding. Not only was their political influence limited, but in some cases, 'the Party machine' represented an opportunity for personal advancement. As Morris Schaer, a shop steward in the Electrical Trades Union said, 'we began to think from the rank and file point of view, more critically about...members who were in leading positions in the unions - a bit suspicious about whether they were feathering their own nests'.12 The Party continued, throughout its existence, to plough this politically barren furrow and viewed trade union office-holding as being synonymous with socialist leadership of the working class. It also continued to stand large numbers of candidates for Parliament and local government that yielded a similarly meagre return for the disproportionate amount of effort invested by members.

The ability to achieve bureaucratic trade union office, however, reflected a reality in which rank and file activists led struggles and represented discontent, often in a highly effective way. In workplace and local community, it was intervention at this rank and file level where potential lay for building a significant political opposition within Britain. The thesis argues that the bureaucratic sectarianism symptomatic of Stalinism, combined with a despairing liquidation into trade union bureaucracy and electoral politics, impeded the possibility of this rank and file activity generalising into a coherent opposition to the established political culture within Britain. In the 1950s, this was a political culture dominated by a biparty parliamentary consensus over what Leo Panitch called 'a contemporary

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11 Raphael Samuel said of this faction, 'like their hardline opponents, they cling to the antique Communist belief that a 'correct' analysis faithfully followed, will bring the required result'. Samuel, 'Class Politics: The Lost World of British Communism, Part Three', New Left Review, 165 (1987), 53.
12 Morris Schaer, interview, 5 April 2000. Schaer was a shop steward in the Electrical Trades Union (ETU). He joined the CPGB following World War II.
expression of corporatism', as well as almost all aspects of British foreign policy, particularly with regard to the USSR.13

Structure, agency and problems in Communist history

Much historical writing on British Communism has accepted the idea that the CPGB was a significant institutional feature of British society. Histories which have not ascribed to this view have derived from a perspective which has been antagonistic to Marxism. This body of work has not distinguished between Marxism, Bolshevism or Stalinism but has assumed that, if they are not the same, then they share a self-evident contiguity which these writers barely question. This work has included Henry Pelling's The Communist Party: a Historical Profile and, more recently, Frances Beckett's Enemy Within.14 It has pandered to many stereotypes about Communism which, although expressed most aggressively during the Cold War, are by no means the preserve of that period. This perspective has approached this history armed with a dual agenda, seeing Communism, at the same time, as both fallacious and evil. It has sneered at the naïve dilettante intellectual and misguided young militant on the one hand, while demonising the manipulative apparatchik on the other. These writers have also focused upon the Party's hierarchical structures as they have presented the organisation, both as a malign Bolshevik cancer taking orders from Moscow and, at the same time, a barmy army of political inadequates. With their concentration upon scandals relating to 'Moscow gold' and Stalinist infiltration, these writers have marginalized, almost to the point of negation, the real significance of rank and file communist intervention in communities and the trade union movement.

Another significant body of work has been generally sympathetic to Communism and has emanated from writers who have either been members or have been closely associated with the CPGB. Notwithstanding the Party's own historian's objective 'to place this history within the context of the political events of the period', generally this work has been self-referential.15 It has broadly accepted the Party's propaganda about its institutional significance within Britain. This has led

to distortion. The work has emphasised the institutional features of the Party; its hierarchies, structure and leadership as well as its leading personalities, at the expense of the more important activity of individuals or small groups of Communists in work places and communities. Neither of these two tendencies has challenged the received wisdom that the Party represented revolutionary Marxism. As Raphael Samuel wrote later, 'the CPGB may never have been in any meaningful sense a revolutionary party'.

In recent years, a more nuanced approach to this history has emerged. Samuel's engaging analysis, 'The Lost World of British Communism', appeared in New Left Review between 1985 and 1987. Nina Fishman's adapted doctoral thesis, The British Communist Party and the Trade Unions: 1933-1945, whilst the subject of criticism below in terms of its analysis of British Communism and Stalinism, has provided an invaluable 'shop floor' account of Communist trade union activity. Along with Geoff Andrews and Kevin Morgan, Fishman also co-edited Opening the Books: Essays on the Social and Cultural History of British Communism. Morgan has also made a significant contribution, as both editor and author, to this recent trend, which has engaged with the subject from a more balanced and less partisan perspective than previously.

A question has arisen within this recent historiography about the role and motivations of individual Communists. Kevin Morgan identified 'Trotskyist historians', for example, who assumed a 'rigid dichotomy' between individuals as objects of historical forces and these same peoples' subjective role as CPGB members, through which they became potential agents of historical change. The assumption of such a dichotomy, suggested Morgan, allowed these historians to treat this organisation, constituted as it was by a range of individual experiences, as 'something quite apart' from 'the objective framework' of the circumstances in which

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18 Samuel, 'The Lost World of British Communism' [three parts], New Left Review, 154, 156 and 165 (November-December 1985, March to April 1986, January to February 1987) 3-54, 63-113 and 51-91.
21 Morgan, Harry Pollitt.
such individuals lived their lives.23 As a result, such writers have reduced their view of the CPGB to one of 'an organisation of professional revolutionaries' with responsibility for providing 'the correct revolutionary leadership', a task in which, because of the Stalinist dominated 'line', they failed.24 The danger with Morgan's response to this characterisation is that, in its turn, it reduces the CPGB to a collection of well meaning 'ordinary' people with no responsibility at all for the practice, either of their national organisation, or of the international tendency with which it was associated. Although Morgan is careful to point out that these people, whilst 'ordinary in their experiences of the iniquities of capitalism' were nevertheless 'exceptional in their wholehearted refusal to accept their inevitability', there is a danger of characterising this membership as almost entirely separated from, and therefore innocent of, the formulations and strategies concocted in Moscow and King Street. These concoctions did indeed constitute what Alison Macleod and other critics have consistently and witheringly referred to as 'the line'.25 In asking questions about the role of the CPGB, this thesis attempts to analyse the relationship between these members, the organisation they made a conscious decision to join and its leadership, both in Britain and in Moscow. As the chapters concentrating upon oppositional currents within the Party show, even after every member had been made painfully aware of the precise nature of the regime their organisation had so uncritically supported, only a minority were prepared to criticise, either their own leadership or the regime itself.

Ideologically, the British party, in line with the rest of world Communism, moved away, during the course of the twentieth century from the fundamental Marxist idea that the process of achieving socialism 'must be conquered by the working classes themselves' to one in which this process was to be orchestrated from above, either by a party bureaucracy or a parliamentary coalition.26 As discussed below, such a move began as an enforced response to the particular circumstances in which the Bolshevik revolution found itself by the early 1920s. Characteristic of Stalinism, however, was the transformation of this response into a universal guide to action – an ideological 'line' – for consumption by world Communism.27 The subordination of the idea of people's self-emancipation to one where socialist change could be administered from above was expressed, for

23 Ibid., 5.
24 Ibid.
27 The most obvious example of this was the transforming of 'Socialism in one country' from an unfortunate necessity into a central feature of Stalinist ideology.
example, in the acceptance by world Communism of the post-World War II Eastern European states as socialist. For the British party, it was expressed within its seamless and uncritical move towards a parliamentary programme, *The British Road to Socialism*.\(^{28}\)

Much of the history of the CPGB in the 1950s is contained within literature covering its entire history. This includes not only Pelling’s and Beckett’s works, which, as suggested above, both tended towards the negatively partisan, but also Willie Thompson’s more objective, *The Good Old Cause*, whose interpretation of the Party in the Cold War is discussed below.\(^{29}\) The crisis year of 1956 was covered from a biographical perspective by former *Daily Worker* journalist, Alison Macleod, in her book, *The Death of Uncle Joe*.\(^{30}\) Macleod’s record of the events of 1956 provoked discussion among Party activists from the period and others, many of whom noted a perspective affected by her negative experiences at the time and by an increasing antipathy towards Communism since.\(^{31}\) Potential problems of memory and the subsequent interpretation of events by individuals, inevitably exist within the biographical and oral genre that constitutes much of the historiography of this period. This includes Gareth Stedman Jones’ interview with Eric Hobsbawm in 1986, John Saville’s, Malcolm MacEwen’s and Margot Heinemann’s accounts in *The Socialist Register 1976*, as well as MacEwen’s biography, *The Greening of a Red*, published in 1991.\(^{32}\) Biographical and oral sources are also vulnerable to question in terms of historical perspective. As discussed below, the tendency for such interpretations to view 1956, for example, as a political bombshell which, in turn, translated into a discontinuity within CPGB history, stems from the fact that these people were involved personally and that these events profoundly affected their own lives. Whether the impact of 1956 – as devastating as it was for these individuals – was as important in terms of the CPGB’s historical development, is something which the thesis examines. The oral history sources utilised below, present similar dangers regarding memory. The thesis balances its use of biographical and oral sources, however, with large amounts of material drawn from

\(^{28}\) *The British Road to Socialism* (London, 1951).


\(^{30}\) A. Macleod, *The Death of Uncle Joe* (Woodbridge, 1997). Alison Macleod is also one of several oral history interviewees in the following thesis.


the CPGB archives and from the Party press. The thesis also takes a perspective that sees 1956, not just as a visitation by dark Stalinist forces, but also as an expression of contradictions within British Communism between its claims to represent Marxism, its adherence to the Soviet Union and its reformist practice. The major discontinuity in British Communist history might, more usefully, be seen as the Second World War, rather than 1956. It was during the war when the Party’s popular front aspirations and support for the Soviet Union seemed to be more in tune with popular British political sentiment than at any time before or after. The Party’s post-war period can in turn, be seen as an ongoing attempt to recapture this position, on the basis of its leadership of an anti-Conservative front, allied with support for Soviet declarations about ‘peaceful co-existence’ and the public repudiation of a revolutionary strategy.

Apart from these biographical perspectives, Katherine Hudson’s doctoral thesis, ‘The Double Blow: 1956 and the Communist Party of Great Britain’ has concentrated specifically upon the year, 1956. Hudson drew mainly from the Communist Party press and published pamphlets. While this was augmented by some 11 oral sources, her lack of access to the CPGB archives has resulted in a limited range of material for this subject reflected, in turn, by a narrow bibliography contained within just eight pages. Although it is the case that much CPGB material was unavailable in catalogued form in 1992, Hudson restricted her study to just 20 pamphlets and relied for her general history of British Communism on Klugmann, Branson and George Matthews’ 1980 pamphlet, All for the Cause. It is also the case that, although verbatim Congress Reports for 1956 and 1957 were unavailable at the time, Executive Committee Reports to the two congresses were available. Lack of access to the CPGB archives forced Hudson to rely heavily upon the Daily Worker and World News with the result that most membership voices remained subject to the considerable editorial sanction or censorship employed by these publications at the time. Similarly, the leadership’s response to the concerns of members was restricted to articles within the Party media, such as Harry Pollitt’s World News articles of April and May 1956 and the Executive

34 Ibid., ‘Bibliography’.
35 G. Matthews, All for the Cause (London, 1980).
36 Pamphlets were available, both from the British and Marx Memorial Libraries. Reports were available at the British Library.
Committee resolution which appeared in *The Marxist Quarterly* in July.\(^\text{37}\) For her record of the Closed Session of the CPGB's 24\(^{th}\) Congress, Hudson was forced to rely upon 'Monty Johnstone's Notes' from which she cited contributions by Willie Gallacher and Maurice Cornforth, for example, but which did not reflect the contributions of branch delegates and others.\(^\text{38}\) On the subject of the publication of *The Reasoner*, Hudson again concentrated upon Party media, relying heavily upon two articles in *World News* by John Saville and Edward Thompson entitled 'Problems of the Communist Party' and 'Winter Wheat in Omsk' respectively.\(^\text{39}\) The Party's response to *The Reasoner* was limited to the two main Party publications. Finally, although Hudson, unusually for CPGB history, has presented a critique of Stalinism and Moscow's influence over British Communism, this was employed in a mono-causal way, largely omitting the British party's internal contradictions. Although the events of 1956 and the Party's response to them, constitute just three chapters in this thesis, access to the CPGB archives has enabled a far more wide-ranging, balanced and profound analysis of the response of leaders and members than was possible for Hudson.

More recently, Keith Laybourn and Dylan Murphy have drawn upon the CPGB archives for their book, *Under the Red Flag*, a history from before 1920 until the formation of the Democratic Left in 1991.\(^\text{40}\) As with much CPGB history, going back to Macfarlane in 1966, these authors have presented 'the Party's history ...almost wholly in organisational terms.'\(^\text{41}\) They have acknowledged only intermittently that Communist organisation and activity were related to the ideological tradition of Marxism, even if, at times, such a relationship may have appeared nominal. Although referring to Stalinism in phrases such as ‘after the Second World War the CPGB was still very much under the influence of Stalin’, Laybourn and Murphy made little attempt to analyse where Stalin, Stalinism and, by association, the CPGB, stood in relation to Communism's own claimed ideological inheritance.\(^\text{42}\) Concentration upon the Party's activity and organisation marginalizes and even negates its role as both a political and a Marxist organisation. As the chapters dealing with the CPGB in the trade unions discuss, the most intensive and


\(^\text{38}\) Hudson, 'The Double Blow', 83.


\(^\text{42}\) Laybourn and Murphy, *Under the Red Flag*, 142.
successful activity within trade unions or local communities remained at the level of trade unionism and community service unless members and their party could relate such activity to an ideological tradition embodying aspirations for socialist change. The following thesis focuses upon this question of the CPGB as a political organisation claiming to represent the Marxist tradition. The fact that it was generally unsuccessful at this should not be a reason for marginalizing such a question in favour of a concentration upon the things which it appeared to do better.

The perilous task of making judgements about the CPGB's practice has been tackled by historians in two discernible ways. The first has been to judge the Party on the basis of its consistent claims to being both a Marxist and a Leninist organisation. The second has judged CPGB practice almost entirely within the often limited parameters that the Party leadership of the time deemed expedient, either as declared strategy or justified after the event. Thus, in the hands of Nina Fishman, a retreat away from 'the illusory potential of rank and fileism', translated into something called 'revolutionary pragmatism' on the part of Harry Pollitt and J.R Campbell. Fishman evaluated Pollitt's and Campbell's actions on the basis of criteria determined by the parameters to which they themselves proscribed Party activity, with little regard to the question posed, for example, by Kevin Morgan in relation to the 1930s, 'what had this effort and initiative to do with the achievement of Communism?' Matthew Worley, in an account of the CPGB during the late 1920s, appeared to view the Party's actions wholly in terms of a reasonable response to British historical conditions; dislocating almost entirely these actions from the 'Class against Class' line which was, coincidentally it would seem for Worley, being pedalled by the Comintern at the time. The Party's acceptance of a dangerously sectarian strategy was less important than its practical response to the downturn in industrial struggle following 1926. To subordinate its ideological raison d'être, in this way, ultimately invalidates the CPGB's existence as a political organisation and the thesis bases much of its critique on the Party's claims to be both Marxist and Leninist. Although impossible to quantify, such claims constituted at least part of the reason why many joined in the first place. Much of the criticism levelled at the leadership by members in 1956 related to its abandonment of Marxist principles in favour of the very pragmatism that many historians appear to

43 See N. Fishman, 'No Home but the Trade Union Movement: Communist Activists and "Reformist" Leaders, 1926-56' in Andrews, Fishman, Morgan, eds., Opening the Books, 106.
44 Morgan, Against Fascism and War, 21.
46 See below, for example, Chapter 1, 35.
commend. This thesis is less concerned with whether or not the Party's practice can be justified, however, than with the effect such practice may have had upon the development of socialist ideas within Britain.

Reference to the malign influence of Stalinism, whilst repeated as a liturgical refrain throughout British Communist history, is rarely subjected to definition or explanation. There has been little attempt, either to explain what Stalinism was, or to understand its role in the development of the wider British socialist movement, not only during the 1950s, but also, throughout the developing political changes associated with the 1960s. The following thesis attempts to redress this, firstly by offering a definition of Stalinism, then by showing how the British party, and particularly its leadership, accepted and promoted it as the only existing alternative — the best of all possible worlds. At other times, when Stalinism was exposed as negative, either in the USSR in 1956 or in Britain within the Electrical Trades Union, for example, the Party attempted to distance itself from it. It is only by understanding Stalinism's influence as an endemic ideological feature of British Communism that the CPGB's practice can be properly understood. Stalinism produced within British Communism, political features which E.P. Thompson characterised as 'opportunist and lacking in socialist principle'.

The following thesis is not an attempt to present British Communism as a sociological study as in, for example, Kenneth Newton's useful 1969 work. Neither is it an attempt to present Communist history as social history in the manner of Raphael Samuel's 'The Lost World of British Communism'. Apart from Samuel's work, existing published and unpublished biographies have also concentrated upon the socio-cultural aspects of Communist Party membership. Among the best known are Doris Lessing's The Golden Notebook or, more recently, Phil Cohen's Children of the Revolution. Both have studied the social implications of long-term Communist Party membership. This concentration upon the socio-cultural is interesting in itself but has come at the expense of political analysis. The concentration upon the sincerity of individual socialist commitment and positive community contribution has tended to minimise the political impact of British Stalinism upon the development of socialism within Britain. The CPGB was not just the aggregate of members' aspirations and contributions. It was a, finally unsustainable, synthesis between this aggregate and Stalinism.

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49 Samuel 'The Lost World of British Communism'.
The Party claimed to unite 'the vanguard of the militant socialist fighters of the working class'. Such a claim could be substantiated by the fact that the Party's membership included some of the most effective fighters within, and on behalf of, the British working class. It was not just support for the Soviet Union that made the CPGB Stalinist, however. The Party held up Stalinism as the desideratum of British socialism; it imported its demonology and, where it could, replicated its bureaucratic practices. The Lilliputian scale of Stalinism in Britain often gave it an absurd aspect that further undermined the potential of its membership. The more perceptive, who were able to see beyond the caricature, however, often did not like what they saw. As John Saville said of the ' lurid picture' painted by the Party of the transition to socialism, 'the man in the street is entitled to say "Not for me brother!".'

Leninism and Bolshevism

When I first began work on this book, shortly after Lenin's death, 'Marxist-Leninism' was just being invented by the rising Stalin...by the time the original edition...was published, in the spring of 1948, 'Marxist-Leninism' had hardened into a 'monolithic' creed which Stalin had authoritatively defined for two decades.

Any history which aspires towards an analysis of the ideology, strategy and practice of the CPGB cannot commence without making an attempt to understand the forces that motivated and sustained its leadership and membership from its formation in 1920. As well as the writings of Marx and inseparable from this body of work, the overwhelming influence on the Party's early strategy and theoretical direction was the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and its undisputed leader, Lenin. At least until 1956, as far as the leadership and most CPGB members perceived it, this influence had remained essentially the same; described with an unbroken line from Marxism, through early Leninism, to revolutionary Bolshevism and expressed, finally, within the practice of the Stalin regime.

51 CPGB, The British Road to Socialism (London, 1951) 22.
55 The Bolshevik Party (the Bolshevik faction of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party) changed after 1917. Lenin, in The April Theses (Moscow, 1985), demanded 'Instead of "Social Democracy", whose official leaders...have betrayed socialism...we must call ourselves the Communist Party', 9. Subsequently, the party was known as RCP(B) (Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik)) until the USSR constitution of 1923 when it was changed to Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).
The seminal moment for British Communism was Lenin's call for the formation of a British Party affiliated to the newly formed Third International. There had existed a small, but identifiable British Marxist tradition, however. The CPGB owed its existence to the Bolshevik revolution but was also influenced by this tradition, however inconsequential it may have appeared at the time and subsequently. Edward Thompson and John Saville identified 'sectarianism' and 'dogmatism' as they described 'the slow growth of a native Marxist tradition.' The small propagandist organisations which had constituted early British Marxism reflected the specific circumstances that prevailed within Britain and have persisted ever since. Lenin was aware that a revolutionary organisation operating within, and in opposition to, the reformist and hegemonic British labour movement, dominated by the trade unions and the Labour Party, faced particular problems.

This native Marxist tradition notwithstanding, the most profound influence over British Communism was the Bolshevik Party, its leadership, and the revolutionary theory and practice with which it had been successful in 1917. Some have argued that these Russian conditions were so different from those within Britain that they were not only irrelevant, but that attempting to organise on the basis of them was pre-destined to failure. This thesis concentrates, through the personal testimony of those involved and through the available source material, upon how the influences of Bolshevism, Leninism and Stalinism affected British Communism and the degree to which these influences can be characterised either as enabling and constructive or disabling and destructive. Drawing largely from modern Sovietology, this introduction attempts to construct a definition of these terms that can be applied with consistency to the rest of the thesis.

The existence of a qualitative difference between revolutionary Bolshevism and Stalinism and its implications for world Communism was first identified by Trotsky. In 1936, Trotsky wrote of the revolution having 'ebbed back into its channels'. This perspective remained, until recently, the polemical territory of

56 Lenin, "Left Wing Communism" An Infantile Disorder (Moscow, 1935), 76-88. 'In my opinion, the British Communists should unite their four...parties into a single Communist Party on the basis of the Third International' [ibid.84].
57 A recent account of these pre-CPGB formations appears in Laybourn and Murphy, Under the Red Flag, 1-36.
59 These terms are distinguished more carefully below. Stephen F. Cohen criticised their use within the academic world saying, 'the terms Bolshevik, Leninist, Stalinist were used interchangeably', Cohen, Rethinking the Soviet Experience, 39.
Trotskyism, but is fundamental both to coming to a view about Stalinism and to understanding how the regime associated with that term had a qualitatively different influence upon British Communism compared to Bolshevism. If, as this introduction asserts, Stalinism was neither Communism, Bolshevism, nor the embodiment of a workers' state in transition to socialism, then immediately, a contradiction emerges between the socialist aspirations of Communists and the political reality with which they identified through their party. Such a contradiction ran through the heart of British Communism from its acceptance of the Stalinist ‘line’ in 1928, through the criticisms of Stalin by Khruschev in 1956, and beyond.

Leninism has often been seen as synonymous with Bolshevism. As descriptions of a specific kind of theory and practice, the two terms share considerable congruity. In this sense, it may be that Leninism is simply another way of describing Bolshevism. Care needs to taken here, however. While the two terms coincide in the sense that they describe a specific theory and practice, largely stemming from the work of Lenin, and usually thought of as beginning in 1902, the term Leninism refers to one man's ideas and formulations. Bolshevism, although identical in many ways, nevertheless, refers, at the very least, to a collective consensus around such ideas. As historian Moshe Lewin put it, “the two notions are not identical. “Bolshevism” applies to the Party as a whole, which espoused Leninism by and large as its ideology of struggle, but bolshevism included factions which often proposed divergent interpretations.” Stephen F. Cohen has seen the ‘equating’ of the two as a denial that Bolshevism was a ‘more diverse political movement…than is usually acknowledged.’ Cohen described Bolshevism as ‘larger and more diverse than Lenin and Leninism.’ Other Bolsheviks certainly challenged and argued over Lenin’s ideas and much of Lenin’s theoretical work was the result of such dialectical engagement. Subsequent perceptions have, nevertheless, equated Bolshevik theory and practice with Leninism. It is, however, important when using such terms, to bear in mind the distinctions outlined above.

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64 1902 saw the publication of What is to be Done? (New York, 1992). It formed the basis of Bolshevik organisation following the split with the Mensheviks at the RSDLP Conference of 1903. For world Communism it represented the foundations of Leninism and Bolshevism.
66 Cohen, Rethinking the Soviet Experience, 49.
67 Ibid.
From Leninism to Stalinism

Robert C. Tucker identified Leninism as emerging with 'his political writings around the turn of the century' and commented that it was 'a word he himself never used.'\(^{68}\) In opposition to this idea of Leninism as representing a specific body of work, however, the idea of Leninism as a cult began to emerge shortly after his death. The establishment of the Leninist cult had important implications for Stalin's rise to power and for the establishment of his own cult. Stalin quickly moved to establish himself as the heir of Lenin and Leninism. Five days after Lenin's death, before the Congress of Soviets, Stalin proclaimed his 'Oath' which adopted the semi-religious tone typical of much of the language utilised in the establishment of the cult, as he declared, 'in leaving us, Comrade Lenin ordained us to hold high and keep pure the great title of member of the party. We vow to thee, Comrade Lenin, that we shall fulfil honourably this thy commandment.'\(^{69}\)

Tucker identified the celebrations around Stalin's 50th birthday in 1929 as 'the effective beginning of his personality cult, a phenomenon destined to grow to gigantic proportions in the thirties and forties.'\(^{70}\) Before his death, Lenin's elevation to such status was so alien to his nature that he refused to attend his own 50th birthday celebration in 1920 which had, in any case, been hastily arranged as a party affair. Stalin's 50th birthday, on the other hand, was organised as 'a bureaucratic extravaganza' where 'his statues and busts of all possible sizes filled the squares, the halls of public buildings, and the windows of every shop down to the humblest barber's shop. “Stalin is the Lenin of today,” the propagandists shouted themselves hoarse.'\(^{71}\) What motivated these 'idealistic, egalitarian and socially progressive strands in the Russian intelligentsia and working class' to continue to capitulate to Stalin's cult has been tackled by J. Arch Getty and Oleg V. Naumov, who identified 'the Stalinists' as 'prisoners of the symbolic construction – the ideology – that they created. They were ultimately no more capable of escaping it than is the priest of any religion.'\(^{72}\)

Stalinism was a multi-faceted term of which the cult of personality was merely one aspect. It was this aspect, however, through which the others were

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\(^{69}\) Cited in Deutscher, *Stalin*, 272-273.

\(^{70}\) Tucker, *Stalin as Revolutionary*, 463.


established. As Lewin has suggested, 'not much effort is needed to relate the “Stalin cult” to this broader strategy of “sanctifying the state”. The Stalin cult became the linchpin in this revamped secular orthodoxy'.

Stalin's personality cult was crucial to the exercising of state power as it persuaded, coerced and intimidated the population in the collectivisation of agriculture, forced industrialisation and self-sacrificing patriotism that were characteristic of the Soviet Union after 1929.

The sort of adulation to which Tucker and Deutscher referred, was not confined to Russia. For western Communists, Stalin came to represent, not just the development of the Bolshevik revolution but also the highest potential to which revolution, socialism and, therefore mankind, could hope to aspire. Some remained ecstatic up until his death. Harry Pollitt, for example, mourned his former mentor, describing him as 'the leader of all progressive mankind, of all who love peace, value democracy, treasure their national independence and desire the establishment of socialism'.

Neither was it just Communists who, in Barbara Drake's words, 'fell in love with Soviet Russia'. That 'indefatigable Fabian couple', the Webbs, for example, whom Neal Wood described as 'essentially Benthamite utilitarians...with little sympathy either for the masses or for equalitarianism...conceived of Gosplan as the first human agency designed to put into practice the great pleasure pain calculus'. Wood also cited John Strachey and Harold J. Laski as intellectuals who popularised Stalin's government.

By 1956, the term Stalinism began to accrue to itself a range of negative implications related to the authoritarian aspects of Soviet social and political life, mass murder and imprisonment. Roy A. Medvedev, shortly after Khruschev had launched his indictment of Stalin in 1956, wrote that 'the prolonged period of terror had a great influence on the ideological life of the Party, on the country's literature and art, on the natural and social sciences, on the psychology and ethics of the Soviet people, on the methods of governing the Party and the state...on the way that tens of millions think and behave'. Like many writers in Russia and within the Communist movement at this time, however, Medvedev felt that, despite its 'crimes

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74 H. Pollitt, 'We Honour Him With A Pledge', Daily Worker (6 March 1953).
76 Trotsky, The Revolution Betrayed, 2. Wood, Communism and British Intellectuals, 45.
77 Ibid., 43-45.
and lawlessness', Stalinism 'was a time of great accomplishments both at home and abroad'.

Stalin's own, much quoted statement in 1931 that 'we are fifty or a hundred years behind the advanced countries. We must make good this distance in ten years. Either we do it, or we shall go under', identifies the material basis of Stalinism.

For the British Party, the influence of Bolshevism had been dynamic. It had taken the CPGB from a disparate collection of propagandist organisations to a relatively effective, coherent organisation of working class militants and intellectuals. When the CPGB began life in 1920, it was inspired by a party and its leadership which, against all the odds and its own predictions, had led the Russian working class to power. Post-revolutionary Bolshevism (the RCP (B)) recognised that British Communism was operating under a stiflingly bureaucratic tradition of trade unionism which, nevertheless, retained the allegiance of British workers. Lenin recognised these particular problems when he devoted a chapter to Britain in Left Wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder. Trotsky also focused upon 'the political development of England' which, he recognised, 'presents remarkable peculiarities...which now lie directly in the way of its future growth'. Although J.R. Campbell appealed to the ECCI to recognise these peculiarities in May 1927, Braun of the German KPD, nevertheless accused the CPGB and its MP, Saklatvala, of 'Parliamentary cretinism'. Lenin's and Trotsky's understanding of the British problem was in contrast to this insistence upon the unconditional acceptance of a 'line' that was evident by 1927.

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79 Ibid. xxvi; Also see Khruschev, 'The Crimes of the Stalin Era', 13-14.
81 Lenin, Left Wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder, 75-88.
83 '14th Plenary Session, ECCI', (26 May 1927), 75, Manchester, DOC K/132.
84 'Conditions of Admission to the Communist International' Report of Proceedings of the Second Congress of the Communist International (Moscow 1920), 531-537, MML. Condition 16: 'the Communist International and the Executive Committee are naturally bound in every form of their activity to consider the variety of conditions under which different parties have to work...binding resolutions should be passed only on such questions upon which such resolutions are possible', ibid., 535.
Continuity and Discontinuity

Campbell's experience reflected an identifiable change between the post-revolutionary period and the end of the 1920s. The way this affected the CPGB is dealt with in the main body of the thesis. It was not just a change of attitude by the ECCI but also signalled a decisive discontinuity for Bolshevism. The British Party leadership consistently denied that any fundamental change had taken place. For Stephen F. Cohen, however, how and why this shift occurred should have become the 'quintessential historical question' for debate. Cohen continued, 'of all the questions raised by the Bolshevik revolution and its outcome, none is larger, more complex, or more important than that of the relationship between Bolshevism and Stalinism.' Both fervent supporters of Soviet Communism as well as its equally fervent detractors, however, until recently, stressed the continuities, rather than the discontinuities, between Bolshevism and Stalinism.

Cohen dealt specifically with this 'continuity thesis'. Asking why it was that the distinction between Bolshevism and Stalinism 'produced very little dispute in academic Soviet studies', he answered, saying that, 'during the expansion of the field between the late 1940s and 1960s, a remarkable consensus of interpretation formed on the subject.' This implicit consensus relied upon a deterministic view of early Bolshevism which detected everywhere, practices and structures leading, inevitably, to Stalinism. It also involved the arbitrary application of a teleology in which 'reading history backward, projecting Stalinist outcomes on the Soviet past' constituted, according to Cohen, a Sovietological version of 'Whig history.' Cohen identified a consensus within academic writing of the 'Cold War' school in the USA, which located Stalinism's totalitarian aspects within the very nature of Bolshevism and the revolution of 1917. Merle Fainsod summed up this position, observing that 'out of the totalitarian embryo would come totalitarianism full blown.' H. Gordon Skilling, however, referring to Stalinism in Czechoslovakia, wrote that 'although labelled "Bolshevik" by Stalin, the characteristics of the remodelled party were closer to the practice and doctrine of Stalin in the late twenties than of Lenin and the Bolsheviks.' The stress on historical continuity between Bolshevism and Stalinism has survived the collapse of the Soviet Union. Robert Service, for

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85 Cohen, Rethinking the Soviet Experience, 38.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid., 38-70.
88 Ibid., 39.
89 Ibid., 20.
90 Fainsod, How Russia is Ruled, 59.
example, in 1992, though replacing the epithet, 'totalitarianism', with 'authoritarian aspects', implying that such authoritarianism was uniquely Bolshevik, identified these aspects as embryonic Stalinism, as he wrote that the 'Bolsheviks...added to the dimension of political ruthlessness'.

Former Soviet historian and People's Deputy, Yuri Afanasyev, on other hand, was clear that Stalinism was 'counterrevolutionary', saying 'I do not accept this totalitarian course as inevitable, necessary or socialist.'

Sheila Fitzpatrick has recently identified an evolution within Sovietology, from 'the postwar years' where 'generous US government funding', encouraging the project of 'understanding the enemy' was superseded in the 1970s, 'by a new generation consisting mainly of social historians'.

Fitzpatrick identified a third phase, focusing 'on Stalinism as a culture'. Since then, following perestroika and the collapse of the Soviet Union, accessibility to archives and to oral historical subjects has opened up the field considerably. The thesis does not ignore these recent developments but is concerned with the first phase of Cold War historiography which dominated the 1950s perception of Stalinism.

On the other side of the Cold War divide, those proclaiming the Soviet Union as socialist also located Stalinism's antecedence within Bolshevism and Marxist ideology. A spectrum existed across which the ideas of this latter group ranged. At one end, unrepentant Stalinists took the view that, by eliminating the Kulaks and collectivising the peasantry, Stalinism had 'fundamentally' achieved socialism by 1931. At the other end were those who, while admitting that the USSR was not socialist, nevertheless saw Stalin's achievements in industrialisation and agriculture as pre-conditions towards achieving this goal. Marxists have agreed that socialism could not be achieved without the increases in material resources that had been brought about by, for example, capitalist industrialisation. Many Communists drew a crudely utilitarian conclusion from this, maintaining that, as long as the desired ends were achieved, then the means were justifiable or irrelevant. Harry Pollitt reflected this utilitarianism when he wrote, in 1956, 'we must never forget, that when the errors and abuses occurred, they occurred within the framework of a profound socialist advance and transformation'.

In 1956, when British Communism was wracked with collective anguish following Khruschev's revelations at the CPSU 20th Congress, R.P. Dutt commented, infamously, 'that there should be spots on any

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95 Ibid., 3.
sun would only startle an inveterate Mithra-worshipper. If one end of this spectrum of ideas viewed the Soviet Union as socialist, the other characterised it as a workers' state in transition to socialism.

The challenge to the Cold War paradigm of a direct line of continuity between Bolshevism and Stalinism began with Trotsky, who saw the rise of Stalin as representing a 'reaction or even a counter-revolution'. Trotsky characterised Stalin as 'a secondary figure before the masses and in the events of the revolution', but who later 'revealed himself as the indubitable leader of the Thermidorian bureaucracy.' According to Cohen, the challenge to the continuity thesis was left largely to 'Trotskyists (and lapsed Trotskyists)...suffered from an excess of idiomatic Marxist labeling' and 'has been unduly ignored by scholars'.

Several sets of circumstances militated against the 'revolutionary initiative ...spirit of self-sacrifice and plebeian pride' which Trotsky saw as carrying the revolution forward in its early stages. The first was the virtual destruction of the working class by revolutionary civil war between 1917 and 1921. This coincided with an expansion of the RCP (B) and the gradual substitution of party cadres into areas of government that had previously been subject to 'Soviet Power'. This process towards Party dictatorship, while not necessarily altering the actual personnel, nevertheless represented a widening gap between workers and government. A few days after the October revolution, Lenin urged, 'Comrades, Workers! Remember you yourselves now administer the state...unite and take all the affairs of the state into your own hands.' By 1919, as the destruction of the proletariat and its substitution by Party members developed, Lenin was forced to defend the process, saying 'yes, the dictatorship of one party! We stand upon it and cannot depart from this ground, since this is the party which in the course of

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98 In Marxism, Socialism describes a period after the seizure of working class power when abolition of private property and redistribution of resources precedes the move to the classless society described as Communist; 'the first phase of communism (usually called socialism)', Lenin, State and Revolution. (Moscow, 1981), 89.
99 Marx described the workers' state or 'dictatorship of the proletariat' as an 'instrument of class rule', The Civil War in France (Peking, 1977), 236. The history of the Paris Commune of 1871 analysed the natures of bourgeois and proletarian states. A workers' state would be as much an instrument of class rule as the bourgeois state it must smash, though it would differ radically in form: 'the governmental force of repression and authority over society was thus to be broken in its merely repressive organs, and where it had legitimate functions to fulfill, these functions were not to be exercised by a body superior to the society, but by the responsible agents of society itself', ibid., 243.
100 Trotsky, The Revolution Betrayed, 88-93.
101 Ibid.
102 Ibid.
103 Lenin, Collected Works, [45 vols.] vol. 22 (Moscow, 1960), 55.
A second circumstance came about for essentially practical reasons. Trotsky, as People's Commissar for War, first put before the Central Executive of the Soviets, the idea of recruiting ex-Tsarist officers to build and run the Red Army. Trotsky explained, 'as industry needs engineers, as farming needs qualified agronomists, so military specialists are indispensable to defence.' The Red Army's success in the civil war may have encouraged Lenin to demand a similar strategy for government administration once peace had been attained. In 1921, Lenin announced that, for the revolution, while previously, 'the key feature was an orderly retreat...in the present situation the key feature is people...choose the proper men and introduce practical control. That is what the people will appreciate'. As the proportion of workers in the Party in 1921 fell to 41 per cent, many key administrative posts were taken by ex-Tsarist officials. Even when the working class constituted a majority in the Party, its lack of administrative expertise gave it less influence over the execution of policy than those experts and technocrats who had, initially, been recruited as employees and were later rewarded with Party membership.

A third circumstance distorted the revolutionary trajectory of Bolshevism. This was precipitated by a 'scrutiny' of party members in 1921 under the supervision of a 'central verification committee', with the intention of purging 'non-communist elements'. This reduced party membership from more than 650,000 to under 500,000. Combined with the previous post-revolutionary expansion, this purge resulted in an 'overwhelming majority of the party members...composed of adherents who had joined during the civil war. Their main if not their only experience in party and Soviet politics had therefore been during a period of vicious war and of particularly highhanded and coercive methods.' After the initiation of
the New Economic Policy (NEP), a further recruitment drive brought ‘hundreds of thousands of new members into the party...often illiterate workers’. At the same time, the bureaucratic machinery of the Party was expanding under the auspices of Stalin’s secretariat. Members within this machinery were not expected to act as political or ideological leaders, but served as loyal functionaries to the secretariat. Many of those recruited during this phase constituted the Stalin faction in the Politburo and on the Central Committee throughout the 1920s.

Most importantly, the momentum was arrested following the failure of revolutionary activity in the rest of Europe. Whatever differences – real or concocted – may have existed between Trotsky's ideas on 'permanent revolution' and Lenin's thoughts about the possibilities for successful revolution in Russia, both agreed that the Russian revolution, as Carr emphasised, was to be ‘merely the forerunner of the much more important German, European and eventually worldwide proletarian revolution, and was indeed dependent on such a revolution for its own survival.’ Carr continued, ‘if the temporary headquarters of the proletarian world revolution had been set up in Russia, this was no more than an unexpected and rather disconcerting accident.’ The failure of European revolution to materialise following 1918 remains the single most important factor in the subsequent failure of the Russian revolution to survive, either as a workers state or into socialism.

Examples from the economic and social areas of Soviet life, before and after Stalin’s victory, clarify the discontinuities between Bolshevism and Stalinism. It has been estimated that by 1928, there were 30,000 people in internment camps in the USSR. By 1931, after three years of the first five year plan, there were two million, and by 1933-5, this had increased to five million. Wages and salaries were another area where developments in the Soviet Union under Stalin ran counter to the aspirations of 1917. Lenin wrote of the initial stage of revolution, that ‘as equality is achieved for all members of society in relation to ownership of the means of production, that is, equality of labour and wages, humanity will inevitably

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112 Ibid., 24.
114 Carr, Socialism in One Country, 25.
115 ‘Socialism in One Country’ was first mooted by Bukharin, adopted by Stalin in May 1924. See Stalin, The Foundations of Leninism The Problems of Leninism, 228.
116 Cliff, Russia, A Marxist analysis, 30.
be confronted with the question of advancing further."\textsuperscript{118} Lenin saw wage equalisation as a pre-condition for socialist advance and talked about the need 'to organise the whole economy...so that the technicians, foremen and accountants, as well as all officials, shall receive salaries no higher than "a workman's wage".'\textsuperscript{119} Following the seizure of power, the Bolsheviks consciously sought such objectives and by 1921, equalisation of wages was in progress to such an extent that the difference between formerly highly and low-paid workers was virtually zero.\textsuperscript{120}

Following implementation of the NEP in 1921, such equality, while subject to legislation, was already being eroded. By March 1926, the average industrial wage was 58.64 rubles, whilst factory managers' salaries were 187.90 rubles for Party members and 309.50 rubles for others.\textsuperscript{121} Although this represented a reversal under what Lenin described as the 'state capitalism' of the NEP period, wage differentials continued to be subject to law until 1929.\textsuperscript{122} In this year, following the inauguration of the first five year plan in 1928, the law limiting the income of Party members was first modified, then jettisoned altogether and the 'general law of wages' of 1920 was scrapped, leaving the country with virtually no wage legislation. By 1937, Victor Serge noted that 'the extreme inequality of wages bewilders the observer and makes possible various statistical camouflages, the least of which consists in recording an average wage that is really a good deal higher than the wage of the great majority.'\textsuperscript{123}

Following its victory, the Stalin faction reversed much of the revolution's social legislation. For example, unless justified under strict medical conditions, one of the revolution's most progressive achievements, the right to free abortion, was finally outlawed in 1935. Homosexuality was re-criminalised, attracting a penalty of three years in prison. Capital punishment was restored for theft and, in April 1935,
was applied to children as young as 12. Divorce, from being a matter of mutual desire for separation under the Bolsheviks, became proscribed with a range of fiscal and legal obstacles 'in order to strengthen the family'.

The Bolsheviks had wrestled with a contradiction between revolutionary political aspirations and economic backwardness. If Stalinism can be defined as a single phenomenon, it was the abandonment of these revolutionary aspirations in favour of an unrestrained drive towards industrialisation at any cost. The imperative to justify the cost, paid by the victims of famine, torture and execution, can serve as one criterion by which it is possible to describe any one person or group as Stalinist. The primitive accumulation of capital through exploitation of both wage and slave labour and totalitarian forms of political and legal repression, represented a defeat for the revolution rather than a development of it.

Within modern Sovietology it is possible to identify three constituents that, together, combine to define the phenomenon of Stalinism. The first and most obvious is the cult of personality which successfully propagandised a particular kind of state power both in the USSR and abroad. Secondly, there is the series of sometimes adroit, often fortuitous and reactive, manoeuvres by which such power passed into the hands of one particular faction. This took place within a political structure where the internal rules which dictated behaviour and placed limits on the extent to which conflicts could be pursued, were fluid and subject to constant re-invention. Within this structure, there was no constitutional brake on the ruthless prosecution of the ambitions of the strongest and least principled faction. Men such as Zinoviev, Kamenev and Bukharin remained, up until their respective falls, in a state of unbelief at the lengths to which their comrade was prepared to go to achieve ascendancy. Bukharin, following Stalin's defeat of the United Opposition of Zinoviev, Kamenev and Trotsky, attempted a rapprochement with Kamenev in the hope of surviving as the 'Right opposition' within the Politburo. His words to Kamenev imply a great deal more than a man fighting merely for political survival; 'he will strangle us. He is an unprincipled intriguer who subordinates everything to his appetite for power. At any given moment he will change his theories in order to get rid of someone'.

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124 Ibid., 24-25 and 186-190.
125 Economic backwardness was not uniform. Trotsky, in History of the Russian Revolution (London, 1934), noted 'combined and uneven development' in all but the most backward areas of the economy. Economist, Preobrazhensky, shared these ideas and, in 1924, wrote a report entitled 'The Fundamental Law of Socialist Accumulation' stressing 'the expropriation of the surplus product of the country for the broadening of socialist production', cited in Carr, Socialism in One Country, 219.
126 Cited in Deutscher, Stalin, 315.
This inability to come to terms with the implications of Stalin’s ambition was not political naivété, but was endemic within Bolshevism itself. The party under Lenin had never shirked from acrimonious verbal debate while members continued in fundamental comradeship, never expecting to be purged, exiled or assassinated as a result of such disagreements. This, as Cohen pointed out, was one of the qualitative differences between Leninist Bolshevism and the systematic crushing of all opposition that typified the regime under Stalin.  

Most importantly, Stalinism was a socio-economic phenomenon that utilised state power mercilessly in the pursuit of rapid industrialisation. The millions who died, suffered within slave camps or whose labour power was exploited to an almost unprecedented degree, were forgotten by Khruschev in his 1956 condemnation of Stalin. This omission, not only shifted the focus away from the true nature of the Stalinist system, but allowed elements of it to continue or to be reintroduced. Whilst these three aspects of Stalinism can be viewed discretely, they were, nevertheless, dependent upon each other as factors in the survival and promulgation of the Soviet social and economic system and, as such, form constituent parts of a whole definition. Whilst such a definition may be incomplete, it, nevertheless, forms a reference point for a term which has often been applied as if it required no definition whatsoever.

Even after western Communist Parties had formally repudiated Stalinism (or at least the most unpalatable bits of it), after 1956, very few accepted the logic that such a system could not be called socialist and both the misnomers of socialism and Communism continued to be applied to the Soviet Union. This has created problems of definition when attempting to analyse an organisation whose members were socialists but believed in the verisimilitude between the Soviet Union and their own principles. This thesis focuses upon these contradictory aspects within British Communism that existed, not only between the USSR and Britain but, crucially, within the minds of individual Communists.

It is impossible to produce a calculus to quantify the net effect of Stalinism on the ability of millions of people worldwide to radically alter the terms and conditions under which they lived. Examples of Stalinism’s regressive effects have been well documented: China, in April 1926 when thousands of Communists were murdered by the Stalin backed Kuomintang, Germany where Communists (KPD) were forbidden to work alongside the 'Social Fascist' SPD against the rise of Nazism, and Barcelona where 'Trotsky-fascist' members of the POUM and CNT

were rounded up, tortured and killed in their hundreds by Spanish Communist Party troops. These incidents militate against the idea that the regime in Moscow and the world movement that supported it were, on balance, a positive force for socialist change throughout the twentieth century. As Roy Medvedev put it, ‘By his crimes, Stalin did not help, he hindered, he did not accelerate, he slowed the people’s movement to socialism and communism in the Soviet Union and the whole world. In some respects Stalin even turned this movement backward.'\(^{128}\) The insistence that Stalinism, in spite of its ‘crimes and mistakes’ was nevertheless, in Voltaire’s phrase, ‘the best of all possible worlds’ remained the received wisdom of most Communists.

Although impossible to quantify, the thesis attempts to understand to what extent Stalinism in Britain turned the movement backward and to what extent the progressive elements within it can be seen as having been positive. The thesis analyses this question from the CPGB’s position within the political superstructure. The chapters on the Party’s industrial intervention are seen from this political perspective, rather than from the point of view of labour history. There is no doubt that Communist industrial intervention can be seen as a positive contribution in the fight for better wages and conditions. As these chapters demonstrate, however, the Party’s confusion between trade unionism and socialist politics meant that it saw the winning of wage demands or the election of Communist trade union leaders as necessarily equating to an advance for socialism.

The Party never had a mass political base, either for the representation it enjoyed within the bureaucracy of trade unions or to justify a parliamentary strategy. The questions the thesis asks are firstly, was the adoption of these strategies a realistic attempt to build such a political base for British Communism? Or were they a response to the lack of such a mass base; a despairing attempt by the Party to live up to its inflated claims about its institutional significance and its hegemonic position on the left of British politics? Any study of Communism during this period cannot avoid the impact of the events of 1956. Khruschev’s secret speech in February and his suppression of the Hungarian uprising in November had a profound effect upon the Party and precipitated the departure of over 7,000 members. The thesis, however, does not characterise these events as the cause of any subsequent decline, but sees them as a symptom, both of the longer term decline of British Communism and of the destructive nature of Stalinism. 1956 demonstrated to many that, what had been characterised as a synthesis between

\(^{128}\) Medvedev, \textit{Let History Judge}, xxxi.
revolutionary Bolshevism and British revolutionary aspirations was, in fact, a contradiction between something else called Stalinism and left-wing social democracy.

During the 1950s, the Party's membership and its periphery were forced to focus upon and question, the relationship between British Communism and the Soviet Union. Although 1956 was the year characterised as one of 'revelations', of engendering 'shock and turmoil' and precipitated an exodus of over 7,000 members, doubts about Stalinism had existed before this time. Max Morris, for example, remembered that in 1953, he had 'complained...in the CP Executive... over reports of Soviet anti-Semitism.' In contrast to the prevailing attitude within the wider population during World War II when, as Morris Schaer recalled, 'they used to say Joe Stalin for King', by the 1950s, following the formation of Bevin's Communist Information Department, this situation had altered significantly. Not only had Attlee's government reoriented British sympathies against the Soviet Union, but there was also an increase in propaganda and activity against Communism domestically. According to Peter Wright, in 1955, MI5 initiated 'Operation Party Piece', when agents invaded the Mayfair flat 'of a wealthy Party member' and recorded 55,000 files over the course of a weekend. This typically absurd operation to obtain already available information nevertheless reflected contemporary attitudes towards the CPGB and its relationship with the Soviet Union. Wright even claimed it as 'the final proof of MI5's post-war mastery' over its rivals on the other side of the iron curtain.

1 'Telegram to ECCI of the Third International', Communist Unity Convention Official Report, (July 31 and Aug 1 1920), 59., MML.
3 Max Morris, interview, 16 March 1998. Morris was on the Executive Committee of the CPGB during the period covered by the thesis.
4 Morris Schaer, interview, 9 July 1997.
5 P. Wright with Paul Greengrass, Spycatcher (Richmond, Victoria, 1987), 54-56.
6 Ibid., 56.
Both the Cold War and the stifling bi-Party consensus which, according to Leo Panitch, ‘developed in terms of a common response to the difficulties which beset British capitalism’, affected the direction of the CPGB. In the 1950s, the Cold War and quasi-corporatism constituted the context within which British Communism operated. The Party synthesised its support for the Soviet Union as the antithesis of Western capitalism with aspirations to leading a popular front within Britain, in opposition to the prevailing corporatism of the period. The Party’s adoption of The British Road to Socialism in 1951 and the particular circumstances of the Cold War, both gave the popular front strategy of the 1950s a somewhat different coloration to that of the 1930s which is described briefly below. The most obvious expression of this was in 1950, when the Party stood 100 candidates in opposition to ‘Labour reformism and Labour imperialism’. In the 1930s, the struggle was against Fascism and the National Government, whereas in the 1950s, it was pitched against the USA, as the main representative of ‘Western imperialism’ and a British government ‘in pawn to the United States’.

John Callaghan called The British Road to Socialism an ‘abrupt “conversion” to Parliamentary reformism’. The programme, according to Noreen Branson, ‘was first mooted in the summer of 1950 following a visit by Harry Pollitt to the Soviet Union, during which he had a discussion about the British political situation with Stalin who had suggested that the British Party needed a long-term programme.’ Callaghan saw the CPGB as ‘being hustled into a programme of parliamentary reformism’. Milovan Djilas reinforced this perspective, as he recalled Stalin declaring that ‘today socialism is possible even under the English monarchy. Revolution is no longer necessary.’ Despite its claim to be ‘carrying forward the traditions and socialist aims of the British working class’, the new programme was explicitly Stalinist as it referred to the establishment of ‘Socialism ...through People’s Democracy...as in the People’s Democracies of Eastern Europe.’ In 1920, the Party had called for ‘adoption of Soviet system for

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8 British Road to Socialism (London, 1951) 6.
12 Callaghan, Rajani Palme Dutt, 239.
14 The British Road to Socialism, (London, 1951), 14.
achieving power by the workers' and for 'Proletarian Dictatorship'. The British Road to Socialism rejected this, defending a hitherto unexpressed position as it declared, 'the enemies of Communism accuse the Communist Party of aiming to introduce Soviet Power in Britain and abolish Parliament. This is a slanderous misrepresentation of our policy.'

To what extent the analysis emerged from Pollitt's discussions with Stalin and how much it was a British perspective, is unclear. It was, however, an analysis which took little account of the Labour Party's record in office. The analysis was influenced by Labour's huge majority at the 1945 general election as well as the CPGB's own modest achievement with the election of Phil Piratin and Willie Gallacher. The programme which emerged, saw the 1945 election as proof that 'the people of Britain were determined that there should be a change.' By 1951, however, such optimism receded in the face of British political realities with the programme identifying 'the right-wing' leadership as supporting 'the privileges and profits of the capitalists'. The Labour leadership, the programme claimed, was 'disrupting and demoralising the Labour movement...preventing the building up of...an alliance' between militant trade unionists, 'co-operatives, and...sections of the Labour Party', along with the Communist Party which, together, would form the basis of a 'People's Government'. By 1951, the CPGB had lost its MPs and was losing ground in local elections. In addition, the Party was increasingly under attack from anti-Communist and anti-Soviet propaganda.

The CPGB responded to the 'quasi-corporatism' dominating British politics and industrial relations during the 1950s by attempting to build a new popular front in opposition to the barely distinguishable policies of the two established parties. It had become an oppositionist, rather than a revolutionary party. It attempted to maintain this oppositionist position with a Marxist-Leninist ideology, structure and language, whilst at the same time, adopting the practice of radical parliamentary reformism. Along with the incompatibility between its Stalinist association and the socialist aspirations of its members, this represented another contradiction within

16 The British Road to Socialism, 14.
17 Ibid., 4.
18 Ibid., 15.
19 Ibid., 15 and 14.
20 See below Chapter 3.
21 Panitch, Social Democracy and Industrial Militancy, 4, 226 and 234. Also see S. Beer, 'The Comparative Method and The Study of British Politics', Comparative Politics, 1:1 (1968) who talked of 'the new group politics...the system of quasi-corporatism bringing government and producers groups into intimate and continuous relationship'. 
British Communism. The Party's industrial intervention reflected this contradiction in a characteristic dualism between rank and file militancy on the one hand and bureaucratic electoralism on the other. The existence of this duality and its potential for conflict within the corporate climate of 1950s Britain was rarely articulated. Rank and file intervention, in the fortuitous upsurge of industrial militancy in 1957, proved a significant factor in rescuing the Party from the crisis of 1956. Its penetration into the upper echelons of British trade unionism, however, damaged the Party's credibility when the Communist leadership of the Electricians Union's were found guilty of conspiracy in 1961.22

Stalinism was a crucial factor in the Party's inability and unwillingness to position itself as a revolutionary Marxist alternative to the Labour Party. The CPGB not only refused to recognise the negative practices of the Soviet regime, but also failed to understand the ideologically destructive nature of Stalinism. Members criticised their leaders for ignoring the show trials, post-war anti-Semitism and other expressions of state terror. Although 1956 raised these issues amongst members, however, only a minority saw them as irreconcilable with socialism. Even fewer asked how and why their Party had been transformed from a socialist organisation to a Soviet propaganda machine on the one hand and a radical reformist party on the other.

The following chapter studies the effects of Moscow's influence upon the British Party from 1920 onwards. The CPGB remained convinced that adhesion to Moscow, combined with a blindly optimistic electoral strategy would eventually produce results. Association with the powerful Soviet state contributed to political arrogance; the 'smug and supremely self-righteous belief that it was acting in the interests of the working class':23 This, along with a persistent sectarianism, particularly toward those identifying themselves as socialist, continued throughout the Party's history.

The small size of the British Party meant that Moscow's influence was less subject to critical assessment from a wider and more variegated membership. The CPGB had a limited theoretical tradition. There was no one of the credibility of Gramsci or even Louis Althusser and, since its inauguration, the British Party had relied, firstly upon theoretical heavyweights like Lenin and Trotsky and later, on the dubious talents of Stalin. Beginning with the Russian Revolution, through anti-Fascism and finally during World War II, the CPGB had accumulated prestige

22 See below, chapters 6-8.
23 E.P. Thompson to Bert Ramelson, 28 May 1956, Manchester, CP/Cent'Org/18/04.
through its association with the Soviet Union. By the time of the Cold War, the effects of this association had become more negative. The Party, however, stuck to its Cold War guns, persisting with propaganda about the superiority of the Soviet system over Western capitalism.

Whether, had the CPGB broken with Moscow, it could have reconstructed itself as a Marxist alternative to the 'ideologically integrative' Labour Party, is unanswerable. Later configurations, such as the Euro-Communist trend that coalesced around the journal, Marxism Today, would suggest not, however. Like their Stalinist predecessors, these people remained sectarian towards those to their left and retained an intellectually elitist attitude to the labour movement. Although sporting a new Gramscian label, this 'coalition of repentant Althusserians, disenchanted loyalists and born again social-democrats' continued to manifest an abhorrence towards ideas about revolution. Instead, they persisted along the same idealistic trajectory that, like the CPGB in the 1950s, sought to build a popular front, often with people with no interest in socialism or even the radical reform of capitalism. Although they discarded the explicit Stalinism of their predecessors, the contradiction between claims to Marxist ideology and reformist practice became more pronounced. As Raphael Samuel said of 'the Marxism Today faction', they continued to 'cleave...to traditional Party verities' and 'like Communists of old their self-image is first and foremost as strategists, masterminding “realignment” on the left'. Although this formation's industrial intervention went largely unnoticed, Samuel observed that they saw themselves as 'architects, in the trade union movement, of a “new realism”, “hegemonic” in their vision where the Labour Party is merely “corporatist”, pacemakers and pathfinders for the British Left.'

**Bolsheivism, the Comintern and the CPGB**

On 31 July and 1 August 1920, in London, at the Cannon Street Hotel and at the International Socialist Club respectively, The Communist Unity Convention declared the formation of the Communist Party of Great Britain. The Joint Provisional Committee of Communist Unity summoned 152 delegates. Formed after protracted negotiations, the Committee represented the British Socialist Party
(BSP), a descendent of H.M. Hyndman's Social-Democratic Federation (SDF), the Communist Unity Group and the South Wales Communist Council. Delegates came from a variety of organisations including the Socialist Labour Party (SLP), shop-stewards movements of Clydeside and South Wales and revolutionary elements of G.D.H. Cole’s Guild Socialists.  

This convention coincided with the Second World Congress of the Third International at which Zinoviev, the first President of its Executive Committee, outlined ‘twenty one conditions’ to which affiliated Communist Parties around the world should adhere. Conditions 15 and 16 demanded programmes based upon the Third International’s programme and the formation of national parties bound both by Comintern Congress and ECCI decisions. This was a tactic to force ‘centrist’ organisations such as the USPD (Unabhängige Social Demokratische Partei Deutschlands), effectively the left wing of the SPD, to break with reformist politics and embrace revolutionary methods. Given the subsequent history of world Communism, this could be seen as an attempt at Soviet domination of the Comintern, later manipulated so decisively by Stalin. This, however, takes insufficient account of the preoccupation of leading Russian Communists at this fragile stage of the revolution; the necessity of a German revolution.

The London Convention made three crucial decisions. The first was an immediate and unanimous decision to affiliate to the Third International under Zinoviev's conditions. Secondly, the convention voted in favour of parliamentary activity and thirdly, by a majority of 100 to 85 it agreed to apply for affiliation to the Labour Party. Lenin outlined the tactic of affiliation in Left Wing Communism an Infantile Disorder. In his fraternal message to the Unity Convention, he reiterated that he was ‘personally...in favour of participation in Parliament and of adhesion to the Labour Party on condition of free and independent Communist activity’. This was not a proposal for ‘entryism’ but a medium term strategy to orient on what was

28 The Independent Labour Party (ILP) was involved later. Dutt had been part of a Marxist group within this organisation and in 1921, he, Emile Burns, E.H. Brown, S. Saklatvala, Helen Crawford and J. Walton Newbold joined the CPGB. Sylvia Pankhurst's Workers Socialist Federation (WSF) refused to collaborate on the basis of parliamentary activity and affiliation to the Labour Party. Minute details of this inauguration process appeared in Klugmann, History of the Communist Party of Great Britain [2 Vols.], vol.1, Formation and Early Years (London, 1968) 13-74.
29 The Second Congress began in Petrograd on 19 July and continued in Moscow from 23 July to 7 August 1920.
31 Communist Unity Convention Official Report, 9 and 57.
32 Lenin, Left-Wing Communism an Infantile Disorder, 76-88.
still a fledgling institution with mass working class support. The 'political experience of the masses' of a Labour government, wrote Lenin, would make them 'disappointed in their leaders and...begin to support communism.' Typically, however, he admitted, 'I cannot deal here with...the question of affiliation...I have too little material at my disposal...in view of the peculiar character of the Labour Party.' Despite subsequent, repeated rejections of its applications, the CPGB continued agitating around 'the question of Soviets versus the parliamentary democracy', utilising the tactic of the 'united front'. This represented a decisive break with propagandist activity which had previously characterised British Marxism, to the sort of tactical flexibility that had provided the Bolsheviks with success. Lenin's suggestion that Communists should stand for Parliament did not equate to a parliamentary road to socialism but was distinctively revolutionary. Lenin wrote that 'our “soviet” politicians' task should be 'disrupting parliament from within...preparing the ground within parliament for the success of the soviets' forthcoming task of dispersing parliament.'

The decision to adhere to the Comintern ensured British Communism's continuing fealty to the CPSU, regardless of that party's deteriorating Marxist authenticity and even despite the Comintern's dissolution. It is not clear whether members saw adherence to Moscow in devotional terms or whether they viewed it as a practical strategy through which the Party received the benefits of revolutionary experience and theoretical expertise in exchange for support for the fledgling revolution. It was a relationship that stimulated a momentum within British Marxism which, despite the setbacks of the 1920s as revolutionary possibilities receded, nevertheless sustained the Party until 1927.

The initial effects of adherence to Moscow contrast with the effects after 1927. An example from this period demonstrates how, as circumstances and personnel changed in Moscow, British Communism's continuing loyalty had
different consequences. At its Ninth Congress in October 1927, the CPGB was still under the leadership of Albert Inkpin. Despite an accelerated drive, following the General Strike, to expel Communists from trade unions, the Party continued its efforts to 'establish its right to affiliation to the National Labour Party'. The CPGB remained optimistic that the Labour Party's 'reactionary...and bureaucratic leaders' could be replaced 'by militant working class fighters.' Two months later on 15 December, however, Inkpin and Willie Gallacher attended a meeting of the ECCI where they were instructed 'to recognise that the slogan of a LP Govt under the control of the LP EC is wrong...that the main slogan should be the slogan of a revolutionary Labour Govt' and that 'as a RULE no votes should be given for LP candidates.'

This coincided with Stalin's announcement at the 15th Congress of the CPSU, that the stabilization of capitalism had come to an end, that a series of revolutionary upsurges was imminent and that Communist Parties should begin a final offensive against capitalism. Stalin proclaimed co-operation with social democracy to be impossible and, henceforth, it was to be seen as the enemy of Communism and characterised as 'Social-Fascist'. This so-called 'left turn' by Stalin, also sloganised as 'Class against Class', announced traumatic changes within the Soviet Union with the implementation of the first five year plan. This demanded, among other things, the collectivisation of 20 per cent of all farms by 1933.

39 A. Sobolev, ed., Outline History of the Communist International (Moscow, 1971). Contributors included Walter Ulbricht (SED), R.P. Dutt and A. Rothstein (CPGB). The contributors wrote, 'the sectarianism displayed during the “class versus class” tactic led, not to united action between Communists and socialists...It made it difficult for Communists to work among the masses for a united front...and made it easier for the reformist leaders to manoeuvre in their efforts to isolate the communist parties from the masses.', 270. Also see James, World Revolution 1917-1936, 268-372. Also see D. Hallas The Comintern, (London, 1985), 123-138.

40 CPGB Ninth Annual Congress Report (London, 1927),16, Manchester CP/Cent/Cong/02/01.

41 Ibid

42 'Resolution of Small Commission of Presidium. ECCI' (15 December 1927), Manchester, CP/IND/DUTT/14/4.

43 Stalin's line on social democracy was not a development of the Bolshevik position. Lenin wrote, 'the majority of the workers in England still follow the lead of the English Kerenskys...it is true that the Hendersons, the Clynes, the MacDonalds and Snowdens are hopelessly reactionary', but Communists should support the Labour Party 'in the same way as a rope supports the hanged' Left Wing Communism an Infantile Disorder, 78-86.

44 Robert Conquest estimated 14.5 million deaths from famine and 'dekulakisation'. Conquest, Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivisation and the Terror Famine (London, 1986), 394. Whilst Conquest's counterfactual calculation should be treated with caution, most commentators have calculated the figures in millions.
Zinoviev's ejection from the presidency of the Comintern. Trotsky's deportation to Alma Ata completed Stalin's defeat of the United Opposition.

The first directive about the new turn came from Bukharin, who said that while 'Lenin spoke of the necessity of helping the Labour Party to power' the situation was 'now quite different'.\textsuperscript{45} It was time 'to confront the candidates of the Labour Party with candidates of our own'.\textsuperscript{46} Despite these demands, a three day meeting of the CPGB Central Committee in January 1928 decided to continue with the policy of a 'united front' with the British Labour Party and trade unions. The decision was carried by seventeen votes to six, with Harry Pollitt, Shapurji Saklatvala and J.T. Murphy among the dissenters.\textsuperscript{47}

Following this meeting, R.P. Dutt, at the time in Brussels and in close political contact with the ECCI, persuaded Pollitt to join him in composing a statement which was published in The Communist.\textsuperscript{48} The statement admitted that 'since the beginning of 1927, the Communist Party has declined very seriously in membership'.\textsuperscript{49} A year after the defeat of the General and miners' strikes, the pair nevertheless identified 'a leftward advance in the working class'.\textsuperscript{50} Although the epithet 'left-turn' has been appended to the strategy which developed, the statement itself was concerned with the election of candidates to Parliament, whether Communist, Labour or those '...good workers'...prepared to fight on our united front programme.\textsuperscript{51}

Pollitt and Dutt insisted that the downturn in industrial struggle after 1926 was an indication that the working class had turned to political solutions. The reason why the leftward advance of the working class had 'not been able to be so visible in 1927' was because 'interest has turned increasingly to the political field and the question of the Labour Party'.\textsuperscript{52} As the figures below demonstrate, the CPGB, in 1929 and 1931 fielded, respectively, 25 and 26 candidates, the highest number apart from 1950, until 1964. Parliamentary activity suddenly appeared at

\textsuperscript{45} N. Bukharin at 15\textsuperscript{th} Congress CPSU ['Imprecorr' vol.7, no.73], (29 December 1927), Manchester CP/Ind/Dutt/15/1.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{47} R.P. Dutt's papers, Manchester CP/IND/DUTT/28/08. Saklatvala was elected Labour MP for North Battersea at the 1922 General Election.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 150.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 151.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 150.
the core of Pollitt and Dutt's proposals. They further proposed that where a 'Labour candidate refuses to accept our united front demands, we should call on the workers to give him no support, and to refuse to vote.' In February 1928, the CPGB leadership censured Dutt for an article in Labour Monthly that represented 'a thinly disguised attack on the Party Policy with regard to the Labour Party'.

At the Ninth Plenum of the Comintern in the same month, Togliatti and Robin Page Amot ordered J.R. Campbell and Gallacher to denounce the Labour Party as an auxiliary of the bourgeoisie. Following the CPGB's Tenth Congress in January 1929, entitled 'The New Line', the Comintern declared that the British leadership had failed to understand and implement the tactic. Shortly afterwards, the Presidium of the ECCI despatched a 'Closed Letter' to the British Central Committee declaring that 'the last Congress...disclosed serious deficiencies in the leadership, which made a number of mistakes, among them Right mistakes' and demanded changes in personnel. Finally, in December 1929, the Political Bureau of the CPGB circulated a 'Statement On Organisational Changes', saying that 'Comrade Horner and Comrade Rothstein have been removed from leading positions, and Comrades Inkpin, Cant and Wilson have been removed...from their positions as full time functionaries' because they were 'representative of right opportunist tendencies.' The Party adopted the new line at a special congress in Leeds in November 1929 when Pollitt fulfilled a prediction of Dutt's and became General Secretary. Some of those marshalled against the leadership later became prominent Party figures, such as Reg Groves, William Rust and Dave Springhall.

53 The implications for 'electoralism' are dealt with below, chapter 2, 85.
54 Dutt and Pollitt, The Communist (1928), 151.
56 Callaghan, Rajani Palme Dutt, 119.
57 'Closed Letter from Presidium ECCI to CPGB Central Committee' (27 February 1929), Manchester, DOC K/132/25, 1-7.
58 'Political Bureau CPGB to Branches' (28 December 1929), Manchester, CP/IND/DUTT/28/08.
59 R.P. Dutt's role in 'Class against Class' is detailed in Callaghan, Rajani Palme Dutt, 110-140. Also see B. Pearce and M. Woodhouse, A History of Communism in Britain (London, 1995), 184-210. The Leeds Congress was an emergency congress, 30 November to 3 December 1929.
From Class against Class to Popular Front

According to Brian Pearce, as a result of this capitulation, 'the party became completely and utterly isolated from the mainstream of the British labour movement for several years.' The following table shows membership figures from the Party's inauguration until 1935, when Georgi Dimitrov's speech to the Seventh Congress of the Comintern called for the formation of popular fronts against Fascism. The table also includes the average vote for the CPGB in general elections during this period.

Table 1. CPGB membership and electoral performance, 1920-1935

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Membership</th>
<th>Number of candidates</th>
<th>Total vote</th>
<th>Average vote per CPGB candidate</th>
<th>Average CPGB vote in contested constituencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>2,000-2,500</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>5,116</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>52,819</td>
<td>7,545</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>No figure</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>77,641</td>
<td>8,627</td>
<td>25.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>3,000-4,000</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>55,296</td>
<td>6,937</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>6,000-10,000</td>
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<td>1927</td>
<td>7,377</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>5,500</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>3,500-3,200</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>50,622</td>
<td>2,025</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>2,555</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>2,724-6,279</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>74,824</td>
<td>2,870</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>9,000-5,600</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>5,600</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>7,700</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>27,117</td>
<td>13,558</td>
<td>29.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figures fluctuated significantly throughout this period. Broadly speaking, they can be seen to have followed the course of industrial struggle during the 1920s, reaching a peak in 1926 and declining steadily until 1931. It is worth noting, however, that the industrial downturn following 1926 coincided with the CPGB's acceptance that the 'Third Period' represented a 'general crisis of capitalism', characterised by 'sharpening economic battles'. The rise in 1931 and 1932 may be due to the 'relative success of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement'. Despite this rise, both Brian Pearce and Noreen Branson shared the view that

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60 Pearce, A History of Communism in Britain, 197.
61 Source, Newton, The Sociology of British Communism, 159 and 166.
63 Morgan, Against Fascism and War, 20. Walter Hannington, a founder member of the CPGB, was National Organiser for the NUWM.
Class against Class 'left the Party smaller and more isolated than ever before or since'.

Similarly, John Callaghan noted 'the self-destructive character of [the CPGB's] sectarianism'. Membership throughout this period may have been more inconsistent than these bare statistics imply. According to Branson, 'within a few weeks' of February 1935, '2,000 new members were recruited', mainly through the NUWM's activity around unemployment benefit. Many of these new members who 'had joined on impulse...soon drifted away again', so that by July, the figure was 7,700.

The figures for Communist Parliamentary candidates reflect a shift in the Party's attitude to the Labour Party. During Class against Class, as discussed above, the policy was to stand Communists against Labour candidates. By 1935, with the inauguration of the Popular Front, the enemy was no longer Labour, but the National Government, and the CPGB urged voting for any candidate opposing it. In 1935 only Pollitt in East Rhondda and Willie Gallacher in West Fife stood as Communists. The following table shows membership figures from the date of Dimitrov's intervention until 1951.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<th>Number of candidates</th>
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<td>1935</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>27,117</td>
<td>13,558</td>
<td>29.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>11,500</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>12,250</td>
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<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>15,570</td>
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<td>17,756</td>
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<td>22,738</td>
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<td>1942</td>
<td>56,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td>55,138</td>
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<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>45,435</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>102,780</td>
<td>4,894</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>42,123</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>38,579</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>43,000</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>38,853</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>91,736</td>
<td>917</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>35,124</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21,640</td>
<td>2,164</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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65 Callaghan, Rajani Palme Dutt, 133.
66 Branson, History of the CPGB 1927-1951.
67 Ibid.
68 Gallacher was returned as Communist MP. Pollitt had replaced Arthur Horner as the candidate and polled 13,665 votes against Labour's 22,088.
69 Newton, The Sociology of British Communism, 159-160 and 166.
70 Figure from Daily Worker (1 May 1948).
71 Figure from Branson, History of the CPGB, 1941-51, 252.
The figures show a rise in membership during the period of the Popular Front. British Communism attained its highest membership, however, following the launch of Operation Barbarossa in June 1941 and throughout the attacks on both Leningrad and Stalingrad. Despite continuing Soviet popularity following Hitler's defeat, however, membership began to decline. The significance of the popular vote for British Communism is dealt with in the following chapter, but it is worth noting here that the respectable performance in 1945 contributed to the shift towards an explicitly parliamentary programme, signalled by Pollitt's *Looking Ahead* in 1947.

Interestingly, at a time when membership was at its nadir in 1930, the Party made a decision to launch the *Daily Worker*. Notwithstanding membership levels, the paper's launch was 'a political decision, it arose out of the necessities of the situation'. Kevin Morgan saw it as a mistaken attempt to keep pace with the 'deepening revolutionary crisis', identified within the Class against Class analysis. According to William Rust, 'circulation...during the pre-war years, never rose higher than 50,000 a day'; this compared to 82,000 in November 1942, rising to 106,000 by the end of the war. Allen Hutt contrasted the 'tremendous efforts and sacrifices' made towards the paper's sale and distribution during the 1930s with the early 1950s, when he diagnosed the cause of falling sales figures as lying within 'the weakness of branch life', adding that local activity was 'limited'.

In response to Hitler's accession to power in January 1933, the CPGB, on the somewhat tentative and 'ambiguous' orders of the Comintern, initiated proposals for 'joint action' with the Labour Party, the TUC and others. According to Branson, the first moves had been made as early as February by the Labour and Socialist International (LSI) which included the Independent Labour Party. One of the first results of this thawing in the sectarian freeze was an anti-Fascist demonstration in Hyde Park, organised jointly by the ILP and the CPGB. The culmination of this joint work was the formation in July 1934, of the 'Co-ordinating Committee for Anti-Fascist Activity', with John Strachey as secretary. Ironically it

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76 Hutt, 'Review of Daily Worker Circulation', 6 and 12.
78 Ibid., 111.
79 Ibid. 121.
was Trotsky, at the time in exile in Turkey, who pre-dated the call for a reintroduction of the United Front tactic against the rise of Fascism, following the increase in the Nazi vote from 800,000 to over six million in the German elections of 1930.\footnote{Trotsky, 'The Turn in the Communist International' and 'What Next?' in The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany (New York, 1971) 57-60, 248.} For Stalinism in 1930, while Fascism represented 'more and more the dominant method of bourgeois rule', social democracy remained 'the most active factor and pacemaker in the development of the capitalist state towards fascism.'\footnote{Degras, The Communist International: Documents, vol.3, 44 and 159.} By 1933, however, and particularly after the burning of the Reichstag at the end of February, the Comintern was 'forced...to produce its manifesto of 5 March 1933 outlining the United Front against Fascism.'\footnote{Laybourn and Murphy, Under the Red Flag, 76.}

Dimitrov's declaration of the Popular Front can be seen on one level, as a continuation of this 1933 realignment. At another level it was a far more fundamental and qualitative shift. Whereas the United Front stressed 'unity of front...within certain limits and on specific issues', the Popular Front involved both a new Soviet foreign policy of international alliance-building, along with a radical reorientation of national Communist parties towards the so-called masses 'as they are, and not as we should like to have them.'\footnote{Trotsky, The First Five Years of the Communist International, 91-95. G. Dimitrov, cited in Morgan, Against Fascism and War, 33.} While it remains, in retrospect, a piece of idealistic and decidedly nonsensical rhetoric, Dimitrov's supplication appeared to many at the time to signal a new kind of realism. Much subsequent CPGB history has characterised the Popular Front in similar terms. Such a characterisation has only been possible, however, by abstracting the policy from its international context and viewing it almost entirely in terms of the British Party's new 'hail fellow well met' brand of activism. Just as Class against Class was a quasi-ideological vehicle for Stalinist consolidation and the launch of a series of domestic policy initiatives, the launch of the Popular Front signalled a new turn in Soviet foreign policy towards alliance-building, initially with countries opposed to Germany, and finally, in 1939, with Germany itself.

The first such alliance, in 1935, was a 'mutual security pact' with France, at the time headed by a Conservative government under future Nazi collaborator, Pierre Laval.\footnote{See R. O. Paxton, Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order 1940-1944 (New York, 1972).} The PCF now advocated a Popular Front alliance to contest the
election of April and May 1936.\(^5\) The alliance won, with the PCF, campaigning for ‘a free and happy France’, achieving 72 deputies. In France, popular frontism revealed a somewhat less insouciant character than the ‘mass singing, musical turns, theatrical performances and…historical pageants’ with which it has been associated in Britain.\(^6\) In Britain, the CPGB, not only remained too small to feature as a major player within political life but, in the absence of a potentially explosive political situation, was never in the position of the PCF where its decisions would make any fundamental difference.\(^7\) It is, therefore, instructive to look briefly at the Popular Front within the French context, where events exposed it somewhat more starkly.

Following the 1936 election, a wave of strikes against wage cuts amid calls for nationalisation, was underway by June involving some five million workers. More than one and a half million workers occupied scores of factories throughout the country.\(^8\) On 6 June, however, the PCF daily, l'Humanité, denounced rank and file calls for ‘insurrection’ as ‘Trotskyism’, following an appeal by Prime Minister, Leon Blum, to PCF leader, Maurice Thorez.\(^9\) During the course of this activity, ‘some eager workers’ began running the factories themselves. The industrial editor of l'Humanité was dismissed from his post merely for reporting this. The paper declared ‘it is simply a question of making the bosses give back a little of their purchasing power to the men’.\(^9\) In the same issue, Thorez declared ‘One must know when to end a strike’.\(^9\) Following salutations both to the army and to the Republican Senate on 15 July, l'Humanité appeared to propose a united front with Fascism, as it offered to ‘shake hands with the sincere Croix-de-Feu and with the sincere National Volunteers’.\(^9\) Despite a rightward drift within the Popular Front government during the following two years, the PCF continued in its support until 1938, when the Anglo-German agreement at Munich looked in danger of isolating the Soviet Union. The same Chamber of Deputies which French Communism had

\(^{5}\) The alliance was with the Socialists (SFIO), who achieved 182 Deputies and The Radicals, who achieved 116.
\(^{6}\) Morgan, Against Fascism and War, 44.
\(^{7}\) According to C.L.R. James, World Revolution, 389, the PCF numbered 150,000 members in 1936.
\(^{8}\) James, World Revolution, 396.
\(^{9}\) Hallas, The Comintern, 146. Pivert, the leader of the SFIO was one of those calling for insurrection, declaring ‘Everything is possible’, ibid.
\(^{9}\) James, World Revolution, 396.
\(^{9}\) Ibid.
\(^{9}\) Ibid. 397-8.
supported since 1936, agreed, in 1939, to outlaw the PCF and, finally, in 1940, voted to install the Pétain regime.\(^5\)

According to Laybourn and Murphy, the way the Popular Front was expressed throughout world Communism illustrated that, in 1935, 'the Comintern abandoned all the revolutionary tenets of Marxism-Leninism...and effectively accepted the process of Stalinization begun in the late 1920s'.\(^5\) Such a view contrasted with Morgan's view of the British Party, identifying a 'confused' picture, 'a revolutionary party acclimatising itself to a situation offering few opportunities for revolutionary activity without abandoning its fundamental conceptions and expectations'.\(^5\) The experience in France suggests that almost all conceptions about workers' self-activity and expectations about its revolutionary potential were abandoned as the PCF sought unity with anyone willing to accommodate it.

Although the policy was on a smaller scale and within a very different context in Britain, Laybourn and Murphy noted a discernible 'gap between the actions of the executive and local members regarding fascism at the beginning of June 1936'.\(^6\) The British Party's analysis of Fascism led it to direct its opposition towards the National Government rather than towards Mosley and his British Union of Fascists.\(^7\) R.P. Dutt, for example, saw the 'formation of the National Government in Britain' as part of the same trend of 'social, economic and political bankruptcy of the existing capitalist regime' that had led to Nazism in Germany.\(^8\) It was Bourgeois Democracy, in the form of the National Government which, like Trotsky's Aesopian 'cattle dealer', who drove his bulls to the slaughter, became the target for attack, rather than the Fascist 'butcher...with his sharp knife' who awaited them. At the suggestion they should attack the butcher before he massacred them, the bulls, 'who had received their education in Manuilsky's institute', asked 'in what way is the butcher any worse than the dealer?'.\(^9\) Although in practice, the CPGB pursued a dual policy, according to Laybourn and Murphy, it

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94 Laybourn and Murphy, Under the Red Flag, 112.
95 Morgan, Against Fascism and War, 15.
96 Laybourn and Murphy, Under the Red Flag, 91.
97 See Morgan, Against Fascism and War, 19-30. For a recent account of anti-Fascist activity in this-period, see D. Renton, This Rough Game: Fascism and Anti Fascism (Stroud, 2001).
99 Trotsky, 'What Next' in The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany, 248.
was frequently only membership pressure and even ‘threat of rebellion’, which
drove its opposition to the BUF.  

Apart from the political and populist aspects of the Popular Front in Britain
which can be seen to have influenced the Party’s post-war strategy, for reasons
both associated with the new turn and imposed by non-conducive circumstances,
the Party’s industrial strategy began, in this period, to take on a shape that would
remain recognisable by the 1950s. This was the period of, what Nina Fishman has
described as ‘revolutionary pragmatism’, and also of a conscious acceleration in
what is described below as the CPGB’s ‘leadership strategy’. As Fishman wrote,
‘by 1945 Pollitt and Campbell had achieved their ambition…to make the
Communist Party an important force inside the official trade union movement.’

The CPGB; war and post-war

One of the main planks of the CPGB’s policy during the period prior to the
Second World War had been the demand for the signing of an Anglo-Soviet Pact
against Germany. In August 1939, however, Stalin signed a pact, not with
Chamberlain, but with Hitler. The Party continued to call for an Anglo-Soviet
agreement, characterising the Molotov and Ribbentrop concordat in terms of a
Soviet tactic to ensure peace. When war was declared on 3 September, the Party
was calling for a war against the rise of Fascism, fought, not by the appeasers of
Chamberlain’s Government, but prosecuted under the direction of a People’s
Government. Following the receipt of a telegram from Moscow on 14
September, however, the Party executed an abrupt turn in which it was to ‘be
recognised without reserve that this is an imperialist war.’ At the Central
Committee meeting of 2 October, the new line was presented in the form of a
‘Political Report’ by Dutt. This was subsequently released ‘To All Party
Organisations’ in the form of a ‘Political Letter’ on 12 October 1939. Politt and
Campbell, as the two dissenters at the 2 October meeting, were removed from

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100 Laybourn and Murphy, *Under the Red Flag*, 91-92.
101 See Fishman, ‘No Home but the Trade Union Movement’, Andrews, Fishman, Morgan,
edts., *Opening the Books*, 106. Also see Fishman, The *British Communist Party and the
Trade Unions: 1933 - 1945* (Aldershot, 1995). See below chapters 6-8. Also see Morgan,
Against Fascism and War, where he cited the Party’s 14th Congress in 1937, out of 501
delegates, ‘more than two hundred held official union positions’, 37.
103 This line was presented in a ‘Manifesto’ from the Central Committee, released on 2
September 1939.
104 Secretariat, CPGB, ‘Political Letter’ (12 October 1939), 2. Manchester CP/Ind/Dutt/31/7
105 Details of this meeting are in F. King and G. Matthews, eds., *About Turn* (London, 1990).
106 Secretariat, CPGB, ‘Political Letter’. 
their positions on the Central Committee, and leadership passed to a three-man secretariat headed by Dutt. The letter blamed the Polish government for its invasion by Germany, highlighted 'The Imperialist Character of the War' and worried about the danger of a 'new Versailles peace' bringing about 'the dismemberment of Germany, and the establishment of a subservient reactionary government in Germany in order to strangle any popular revolution'. The Party now called for 'immediate peace negotiations', emphasising that 'the question of peace terms is not the issue'. It called for members to fight for increases in wages to offset war price-rises, a campaign against 'ARP and other services' and for a campaign to reduce rents. The letter retained the rhetoric of 'united front' within the trade unions, whilst calling for an end to the 'collaboration of the labour movement with the Chamberlain government.' The Party accepted the new line at a series of district meetings. Pollitt and Campbell returned to their positions following 'Declarations' on 12 and 13 November in which Pollitt admitted the 'entirely incorrect estimation' of the 2 September manifesto. Campbell confessed that he had been wrong to concentrate on 'German Fascism as the main enemy of the British working class'. Pollitt may have had 1939 in his mind when in Moscow in 1956, he confided poignantly to Dennis Ogden, that 'all our problems always came from here.'

In terms of membership figures, the Party's position during this period is difficult to quantify. It may be that the ambiguity in the CPGB line which softened significantly following the German invasion of France in 1940, rescued it from collapse. Ralph Russell remembered that, during this period at Cambridge University, a number of questions were raised to which he did not have an answer. According to Morgan, however, 1939 appears not to have had the same impact upon the Party or its public standing as, for example, the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956. This may further suggest that in an otherwise unquantifiable

107 Ibid., 2-3.
108 Ibid.
109 Ibid. 5.
110 Ibid. 6.
111 Ibid.
112 H. Pollitt to Central Committee, CPGB (12 November 1939), Manchester CP/Ind/Dutt/31/7.
113 J.R. Campbell to CC, CPGB (13 November 1939), Manchester CP/Ind/Dutt/31/7.
114 Dennis Ogden, interview, 3 November 1997.
115 See above, 'Table 2', where figures between 1939 and 1941 do not appear. Morgan, however, has suggested that the figure may have remained above 20,000, Against Fascism and War, 311.
117 Morgan, Against Fascism and War, 315.
way, the Party was generally more popular after the period of the Popular Front, than it was in the middle of the Cold War.

Between the launch of Operation Barbarossa until 1944, the main thrust of Communist Party policy towards the war, was to call for the opening of a second front to Germany's west. The major concern of its industrial policy was to ensure minimum disruption. As detailed below, it was during this period of high popularity for British Communism, that many Communist trade unionists achieved the official positions to which they sought to cling during the 1950s. By 1945, the Party retained over 40,000 members but, as the following chapter discusses, this figure went into a steady decline up to and including 1956. Several factors added up to a new set of circumstances for British Communism following the Second World War. The first of these was the emergence of the Soviet Union as a major world power. Association with the Soviet Union during the war devolved enormous benefit upon the CPGB, and its promotion to world-power status might be thought to have elevated the British Party in a proportional way. In fact, the opposite happened. The dissolution of the Comintern in 1943, the USSR's increasing drift away from even the rhetoric of 'world revolution' and the onset of the Cold War, all combined to diminish, rather than enhance, any status that the CPGB may have accrued from its previous Soviet association. The programme which developed during this period has, routinely been characterised by historians, as reformist and, although perhaps suggested by Stalin, has been accepted as an essentially 'British' idea tailored for domestic conditions. What is omitted from this characterisation, however, is the emergence during this period, of the Eastern European People's Democracies, firstly, from 1945, as 'National Front' coalitions, but after 1947, as Stalinist dominated one-party states. As discussed throughout the thesis, The British Road to Socialism was explicit about these erroneously named 'People's Democracies' as models. The CPGB remained a Stalinist party.

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117 See below chapters 6-8.
118 See, for example, Laybourne and Murphy, Under the Red Flag, 135-138. Also see Branson, History of the CPGB, 1941-1951, 232-239.
119 See, for example, Ben Fowkes, The Rise and Fall of Communism in Eastern Europe (Basingstoke, 1995).
British theoretical limitations and the effects of Stalinism

Persistent adherence to the demands from Moscow inhibited, not only the British Party's practice by repeatedly lurching it in directions that alienated it from its own membership and the rest of the working class, but also undermined its ability to articulate a coherent British theoretical tradition. The development of such a tradition might have equipped the Party both to operate independently of Moscow's vacillations and to remain a consistent force on the British left in contrast to the electorally capricious Labour Party.

The development of a British theoretical tradition was repeatedly undermined as the Party sought to justify Stalin's fluctuating domestic and foreign policies. In pursuit of this, Party intellectuals became adept at utilising Marxist sounding phraseology. James Klugmann revealed this tendency in his book From Trotsky to Tito, an attempt to justify Yugoslavia's exclusion from Cominform and that organisation's subsequent demonising of Tito. Malcolm MacEwen wrote of Klugmann, that while he 'stood both for all that was best in the Party - unselfishness, disregard for making money, lack of personal ambition, devotion to the cause and a keen intelligence', he also represented 'its most fatal defects: carrying loyalty to the point where it silenced his conscience and blunted his good sense.' Klugmann employed Marxist phraseology in order to prove to his and his leadership's satisfaction, that Tito was an agent of imperialism and reaction. Yugoslavia, he claimed, was 'putting forward a theory of a smooth and peaceful transition to socialism, in the style of the Mensheviks and of Ramsey Macdonald ...they were rejecting...what had been taught by Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin.' Few appeared to notice the coincidence with the publication of The British Road to Socialism, which appeared to advocate precisely the same thing. Tito, Klugmann added bewilderingly, had installed a 'Turkish regime' which 'had...led straight to the camp of reaction.'

Moscow's vacillations also created tensions within the day to day activity of the Party. Dennis Ogden recalled his experience as a student in Manchester following the split between Yugoslavia and Cominform. Ogden said that 'the relationships between...the student Communist Party branch and the Labour Party

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120 J. Klugmann, From Trotsky to Tito, (London, 1951).
122 Klugmann, From Trotsky to Tito, 9.
123 See Pollitt, Looking Ahead, 'in a number of countries where popular democracies have been established...it is possible to see how the people will move towards Socialism without further revolution...a new British Road to Socialism in which British democratic institutions will be preserved.', 90 and 92.
124 Klugmann, From Trotsky to Tito, 10-11.
student branch were strained'. He was part of an affiliation called the Student Labour Federation, consisting of Communist, Labour and non-aligned socialists. It was, said Ogden, ‘a reasonably successful example of a broad left wing front...but it was subjected to considerable strains’. One such strain emerged over Yugoslavia; ‘was it a socialist state or was it a semi-fascist state?’. The debate between the Communist students and others focused upon whether ‘the Yugoslav student movement’ should be allowed membership of the International Union of Students and, if they were, ‘should the British National Union of Students be in the International Union of Students...there was a terrific struggle to keep NUS in IUS and to keep Yugoslav students out of IUS.’

The Habits of Adhesion

Khruschev’s secret speech in 1956, combined with the Soviet invasion of Hungary to provoke an exodus of over 7,000 members. This represented a point in British Communist history when socialist aspirations and support for the Soviet Union were revealed as two sides of an irreconcilable contradiction. Many in the Party began to perceive contradictions where, previously, they had assumed harmonious unity. It would be wrong, however, to conclude that Khruschev's revelations and the invasion of Hungary disturbed all members equally. Many remained in the Party, intending to reform it from within. As John Hostettler said, ‘I’d been in the Party so long, it had been my life.’

Members judged that the Cold War had been provoked by the West in general and the USA in particular, for domestic and foreign policy reasons. Under such conditions, it became difficult to disentangle opposition to capitalism from support for what appeared to be capitalism’s antithesis - the USSR. Under such conditions, in the absence of a coherent analysis of the Soviet Union, it was difficult not to take sides. Opposition to capitalism in the form of the USA and Western Europe seemed naturally, to lead to support for the USSR. For most British Communists, the Soviet Union as a nation state was synonymous with Marxism, a conviction reinforced by both Soviet and western propaganda. Such propaganda escalated the illusion of ideological antagonisms to biblical proportions. Whilst both sides sported their respective ideological colours

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125 Dennis Ogden, interview, 3 December 1997.
126 Ibid.
127 Ibid.
throughout, however, in reality, the Cold War was a squabble between the world's two strongest nations over the disposal of other peoples' territory and resources. The Cold War was a post-war scramble for military hegemony and economic influence as the confusion, duplicity and misunderstandings of Moscow, Yalta and Potsdam were resolved by a combination of threats, outright bribes and diplomatic thuggery. Isaac Deutscher saw Stalin's attitude to Germany as a 'conflict between his nationalism and his revolutionism' in which the 'anti-revolutionary element predominated'.

John Saville and Edward Thompson said in 1956, that the shocked reaction to Khruschev's speech was 'the result of our general failure to apply a Marxist analysis to Socialist countries and to the Soviet Union in particular. The absence of such an analysis...bred Utopianism and encouraged attitudes of religious faith amongst us.' This went along with what Malcolm MacEwen called 'uncritical adulation of the USSR'. As theory suffered as a result of the Party's adhesion to Stalinism, so the absence of a coherent Marxist critique strengthened this adhesion. The habit of adhesion survived the factional splits that plagued the Party during the 1960s and 1970s. Almost without exception, the configurations that emerged from splits within British Communism constructed themselves upon the idea that somewhere there existed an example of authentic Communism. For some, this meant reinforcing traditional ties with the Soviet Union. For others it involved abandoning the USSR and identifying with the People's Republic of China. In other cases, states such as Albania were co-opted as concrete examples of existing socialism. These groups attempted to compensate for their small size and incomplete analysis of developed capitalism by redefining nationalist movements in the developing world as incongruous templates for socialism under


131 Deutscher, Stalin, 524.


contemporary British conditions. National liberation was often seen as being synonymou synonomous with socialist revolution as movements of guerrilla armies of intelligentsia-led peasants were characterised as leaders of the worldwide proletarian movement. This, as Lenin had pointed out, confused ‘the interests of the oppressed classes, of working and exploited people’ with a ‘concept of national interests as a whole, which implies the interests of the ruling class’.  

Pollitt identified the theoretical shortcomings that contributed to this habit of adhesion when he wrote in 1956 that ‘we are too prone to concern ourselves with immediate problems and insufficiently with questions of principle’. Lenin had made a similar point, stressing that ‘without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement’ and emphasised the importance of secure theoretical analysis as opposed to ‘an infatuation for the narrowest forms of practical activity’. Pollitt identified a ‘reluctance to consider new ideas which did not seem to fit into practical day to day work.  

### Three Questions about British Communism

The analysis discussed so far in this thesis, raises three questions about British Communism. Firstly, if the Soviet Union was neither Communist, socialist, nor a workers’ state, but was something quite different called Stalinist, and if the CPGB, not only supported that state but drew upon it for the fundamental elements of its theory and practice - does this mean that the British Party was not Marxist, but Stalinist? Or was it a hybrid organisation; Marxist in theory, Bolshevik in structure and social democratic in practice, held together by an uncritical allegiance to, and unqualified faith in the Soviet Union as a socialist state?

The second question involves an arbitrary distinction. Its application is in the interests of clarity rather than to insist that the differences necessarily aggregate to more than the commonalities. This distinction is between leadership and membership. Unlike in the traditional labour movement, the relationship between leaders and members in the CPGB was one of dynamic political interaction and easy social intercourse. The British Party did not manifest the sort of elitism, either of the established labour organisations or of the larger Italian and

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136 Lenin, What is to be Done? , 25.
137 Pollitt, ‘The 20th Congress of the CPSU and the Role of Stalin’, 280.
French Parties. The highly centralised application of democratic centralism, however, nevertheless militated towards exclusion and elitism.

Nominally, the Party was run by a democratically elected Executive Committee. It was never clear, however, who or which body was making decisions on a day to day basis. Alison MacLeod who worked as a journalist at the Daily Worker in the early 1950s, claimed that ‘the Politburo wasn’t the real power’.  

Editors of various Party publications also played a crucial role in the leadership. Macleod claimed that Daily Worker editors ‘were always political appointments’ and that they were ‘approved by Moscow’. The leadership was sensitive to accusations of lack of democracy and, in 1956, ordered a re-evaluation of the application of democratic centralism by a Commission on Inner Party Democracy. The distinction between leadership and membership can be justified by the fact that Party leaders frequently took crucial political and strategic decisions without reference to members. As in 1939, they often left it until after the event to explain such decisions in the Party press.

The second question applies to this leadership. Were the leaders of the CPGB partly or fully aware of the system of repression and terror that existed in the Soviet Union? If, despite being aware of this situation, they continued to support the regime, often justifying or ignoring its most malign aspects, did this mean that the British leaders were as corrupt as those in Moscow from whom they drew guidance and inspiration? Clearly motivated by sincere socialist principles when they joined the Party, all of them continued to defend such principles throughout their political lives. This thesis is less concerned with the sincerity of such principles than with the effects in terms of historical change, of this leadership’s activities.

Disciples of Stalinism ranged across a spectrum which, at one end viewed it as socialist and, at the other, saw it both as ‘the best of all possible worlds’ and as a necessary process in constructing the material conditions for socialism. In 1957, following Khruschev’s speech and the invasion of Hungary, John Gollan was still able to declare that ‘the USSR is not building socialism. It has achieved socialism’. Wherever they stood on this spectrum at any particular time, Party leaders nevertheless remained committed to J.R. Campbell’s position that, in the

138 Alison Macleod, interview, 15 October 1997.
139 Ibid. This claim is difficult to verify. See W. Rust The Story of the Daily Worker (London, 1949) which does not support Macleod’s assertion.
140 MacEwen, ‘The Day the Party had to Stop’, 24-41.
141 J. Gollan, ‘On International Unity and Relations between Communist Parties’ World News Discussion Supplement, 3 (23 March 1957) 7, Manchester, CP/Cent/Cong/10/05.
face of 'the Trotskyites staking all their hopes on international revolution, the
Bucharinites [sic.] wanting to advance to socialism at a snail's pace...it was the
leadership of Stalinism that saved us; and in his glorious and successful period
that pointed the way to socialism.' In assessing this leadership, the existence of
this spectrum must be kept in mind. The possibly unanswerable question is to what
extent was the British leadership's continuing fealty to Stalinism the result of
political ignorance or analytical naivety and to what extent were they conscious
and willing 'dummies, puppets and apologists for Soviet aggression'? Following Khruschev's revelations, Pollitt wrote 'whatever the mistakes and
abuses associated with Stalin's personal methods, the great historic achievement
...is...the superiority of the Socialist system over the capitalist system.'
Domestically, given the size and weakness of the CPGB, its marginal position
within British politics and its unequal relationship with the Labour Party, did the
leadership have any choice but to adhere, with such unerring persistence to
Stalinism? If it had detached itself, would this have improved or retarded the
prospects for socialism in Britain? Definitive answers to such questions are
impossible. The leadership of the CPGB justified Stalinism and its association with
it, by recourse to the idea that, for all its faults, the regime in Moscow remained a
force for socialist change. Even after the secret speech, the leadership persisted
with this argument.

The third question is whether Party members were Stalinist or socialist. If
the CPGB persisted as a contradiction between socialism and Stalinism, how did
members attempt to resolve it? Clearly, most members were not in a position to
know everything about the iniquities taking place in the Soviet Union. How much
any particular individual knew, how much any individual had time to care under the
frenetic circumstances of their political lives, are questions which are both
impossible to quantify.

Commentators have generally acknowledged the CPGB's theoretical
shortcomings, which went along with its lack of analysis of the Soviet Union. Up
until 1956, the idea that the Soviet Union was the concrete expression of Marxism
remained unchallenged by membership and leadership alike. As Morris Schaer put

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142 J.R. Campbell, 'Speech to Closed Session of 24th Congress CPGB' (1 April 1956)
Manchester CP/Cent/Cong/09/02.
143 P. Fryer, Hungarian Tragedy, (London, 1997), 146.
144 H. Pollitt, 'Speech to Closed Session of 24th Congress CPGB' (1 April 1956), Manchester
CP/Cent/Cong/09/02.
it, 'it was a...strong feeling that the Soviet Union was a workers' state.' Roger Simon said, 'I remember...the Soviet brides...I was puzzled about that, but that was about the only thing as far as I remember I was critical about...until 1956.' Brian Pearce recalled that 'we accepted rather easily, the Moscow Trials...the business in Spain, about the POUM...and then of course the Soviet German Pact.' Pearce continued, saying, 'we were...most of us, a bit superficial and...prepared not to pursue a question very deeply, to accept rather easy answers to difficult questions.' Eric Hobsbawm maintained that 'there was very little talk indeed about the Soviet Union, and the people who knew about it kept very quiet.' Education within the Party was limited to a narrow range of Marx's, Lenin's and Stalin's writings or, as Pollitt implied, was directed towards activity rather than attempting to synthesise Marxist theory with revolutionary practice. Alison MacLeod commented, 'oh they'd forgotten all about Marx - who's he?.' Morris Schaer reinforced this, saying 'I was never strong on theory...these people that call themselves Marxists, I can't believe them' and continued, 'Stalin...if you read any of his stuff, it made sense.' During the 1950s, Schaer recalled, 'one of the most important things was...that we held a lot of education around the British Road to Socialism.'

E.P. Thompson and John Saville's regret at the lack of analysis of the Soviet Union reflected a general trend within the CPGB towards parochialism and practical day to day problem solving. It would be simplistic to suggest that there was an anti-theory, anti-intellectual attitude within British Communism, but there was an essentially utilitarian view about theory which drew directly from Stalinism. Stalin, in whom Trotsky observed a 'contemptuous attitude towards ideas', described himself and his cohort in the CPSU as 'we Bolshevik practical workers' as opposed to those 'litterateurs' who now constituted a dying breed.

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146 Roger Simon, interview, 10 December 1997. The 'Soviet Brides' were women who had married Englishmen during World War II. In 1947, the Soviet authorities refused them permission to join their husbands in Britain. On 21 March 1947, the Soviet Union formally forbade its citizens to marry foreigners. Fifteen 'brides' were forced to divorce their husbands.
147 Brian Pearce, interview, 1 February 1999.
148 Ibid
150 Morris Schaer, interview, 9 July 1997
151 Ibid
Russell said of Harry Pollitt that he ‘felt for a long time that he was anti-intellectual and anti-theory for that matter.'\textsuperscript{153} If L. Marks was correct in talking about the ‘undisputed...low level of our theoretical understanding', then Anthony Ryle's diagnosis that 'some of our errors in the past can be attributed to our confusing the needs of Soviet diplomacy with a Marxist analysis of the situation', indicates a connection between the Party's attitude towards theory and members' apparent obliviousness towards the destructive aspects of Stalinism.\textsuperscript{154}

Members received information about the Soviet Union either through the pro-western mainstream press or through its antithesis, the Daily Worker. Under Cold War conditions, the paper saw its job as counter-propaganda on behalf of the USSR as well as presenting ‘the political line...of the Communist Party.'\textsuperscript{155} The leadership at this crucial time, however, suggested making ‘the paper more popular, more easily read' and whilst retaining ‘a minimum of political news', perceived a need to ‘simplify, lighten, humanise and picturise.'\textsuperscript{156} Members related to their leadership largely through the Daily Worker, whose circulation in the mid-1950s averaged approximately 68,000 copies per month.\textsuperscript{157} Although more analytical publications, such as The Marxist Quarterly or Dutt's Labour Monthly, which claimed a circulation of 13,380 for 1953, were available, day to day analysis of world events was subject to such simplification.\textsuperscript{158}

While members saw the Soviet Union as the leader of world socialism, it was never clear to what extent Moscow remained of symbolic significance or to what extent it was seen as a realistic force for political change. Morris Schaer referred to an attitude within the Party which expressed generalised cultural responses rather than anything specifically political when he said ‘Communists - whatever Russia did, they supported them - they wanted them to win the Olympics. When the Dynamo [Moscow Dynamo] came over, they wanted them to win the football match, because they wanted to show that they were superior because they

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{153} E.H. Carr quoted a letter from Stalin to German CP leader Maslow in 1925 in which he described litterateurs such as Lunarcharsky and Bogdanov 'who have passed over to a secondary role' Socialism in One Country [3 vols.], vol.1 (London, 1970), 199. \\
\textsuperscript{154} Ralph Russell, interview, 26 May 1998. \\
\textsuperscript{155} L. Marks to World News, 3:23 (9 June 1956), 369. \\
\textsuperscript{156} Anthony Ryle to World News 3:22 (2 June 1956), 346. \\
\textsuperscript{157} A. Hutt [Circulation Manager Daily Worker] 'The Daily Worker its policy and content'. July 1956) 2, Manchester CP/Ind/misc/Hutt/2/1. \\
\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., 1. \\
\textsuperscript{155} A. Hutt, ‘Review of Daily Worker Circulation' (22 June 1956), 4-5, Manchester CP/Ind/misc/Hutt/2/1. \\
\textsuperscript{158} The Marxist Quarterly was replaced in 1957 by Marxism Today. The Labour Monthly figure was claimed in The Marxist Quarterly [back cover],1 (January 1954).
\end{flushleft}
were socialists.\textsuperscript{159} Max Morris, reporting on a teachers' delegation to the Soviet Union for \textit{World News} was enthusiastic about a 'plentifully stocked' bookshop with its 'large queue waiting...to open'.\textsuperscript{160} Morris described the socialist realism of Soviet art 'with a craftsmanship and technical skill that it would be hard to beat'.\textsuperscript{161} While western Communists saw this cultural superiority as emanating from the Communist system, in the USSR, such perceptions were the result of a conflation with less progressive ideas about Great Russian Nationalism.\textsuperscript{162}

The attitude of members towards the Soviet Union, a combination of naivety and Orwellian 'doublethink', was, outwardly at least, almost totally uncritical. This 'uncritical acceptance of all aspects of the Soviet Union' was partly a response to relentless criticism within the established media.\textsuperscript{163} For those who believed that the Soviet Union and its subject states were Communist, it was easy to digest the universal propaganda that the Cold War was primarily ideological. It was a belief which put British Communism on the defensive in two ways. Ideologically, it had to argue for and defend Communism as a progressive alternative to the various ideologies that, together, constituted capitalist democracy. Secondly, in a narrower political sense, it was forced to mount a defence of the socio-economic achievements of the Soviet state. Although the ideological agenda upon which the Cold War was predicated appeared to make these two ideas synonymous, members began to discover during the course of the 1950s that this was not necessarily the case.

It is possible to conclude from this that the membership was, objectively, Stalinist in the sense that, however unwittingly, it nevertheless served the interests of the Soviet regime. While such a formulation is valid for the leadership, however, the contribution made by Communists to the British labour movement in the cause of socialism, may well have outweighed the negative political effects of their association with Stalinism. Members served their work colleagues and communities with a selfless devotion that put enormous strain on themselves and

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{159} Morris Schaer, interview, 9 July 1997.
\textsuperscript{160} M. Morris, 'Where Culture Belongs to the People', \textit{World News and Views}, 32:40 (11 October 1952), 478.
\textsuperscript{161} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{162} M. Fainsod, \textit{How Russia is Ruled} (Cambridge, Mass.,1970) 'Soviet patriotism in its Stalinist manifestation represented a many sided effort to mobilize support for the regime and to combine the specifically Russian nationalism of the War period with an ideological commitment to Marxism-Leninism...with particular accent on the leading position of the Great Russian people in the Soviet family of nations.', 115.
\textsuperscript{163} Lenin wrote in 1919, 'Scratch many a Communist...and you will find a great Russian chauvinist.', \textit{Collected Works [45 vols.]} vol. 24 (Moscow, 1960), 155.
\end{footnotesize}
their families. Under different circumstances, the respect and loyalty they earned for such activity might have had the potential to build an effective socialist organisation. Jack Beeching identified a tension between Party and individual in a letter to *World News*. Objecting to the banning of *The Reasoner*, Beeching referred to 'honest Labour men' for whom the ban reinforced the feeling that 'whilst they respect individual Communists, they mistrust the CP as an organisation.'

The activities of members within the centralised structure of the CPGB could be destroyed very quickly by the effects of Stalinism. Following the Soviet invasion of Hungary, for example, Wolf Wayne remembered speaking outside a factory gate in Cricklewood, North London, where the Party had members 'in factory after factory'. Wayne recalled that 'the crowd was enormous and...they were firing fire crackers at us...that was a shocking experience...they were all local workers from the factories.' Members often transcended these destructive effects, and many overcame the tension between individual and Party identified by Beeching. Stan Turner referred to this, saying that 'credibility was gained by our actions in support of their well being and therefore, whether they were anti-Communist...or not...they certainly didn't reflect it back onto us, they still elected us as their leaders, shop stewards and so on despite the fact that we were Communists.'

**Loyalty, discipline and the recognition of political reality**

Party discipline held the organisation together, but democratic centralism was also the mechanism through which Stalinism often undermined members' positive activity. According to one particularly cynical commentator, C.H. Darke, this centralized discipline relied upon a leadership culture through which 'the Communist, taught to regard himself as the leader of the working-class, is also taught to be an uncritical follower of his own leaders.' Darke continued, suggesting that 'among the ordinary members of the Party there is a fanatical worship of leading Communists, British and Russian' and that 'the leading Communist is never guilty of a mistake. It was always some other fellow.'

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164 J. Beeching, 'Unity is not a Tactic' *World News*, 3:44 (3 November 1956), 702.
165 Wolf Wayne, interview, 10 February 1999.
166 Ibid.

Darké was a Hackney Borough Councillor and CPGB member for eighteen years. He resigned from the Party in May 1951, after which he published his book.
169 Ibid.
absence of a coercive apparatus, Party discipline was essentially self-discipline but
was, nevertheless, rigorously applied and deemed essential by most comrades.
Alison Macleod recalled one aspect of Party discipline, saying 'branches were not
allowed to write to each other...the Secretary of a branch was not allowed to write
to the Secretary of another branch...you see there was the set of rules.'\textsuperscript{170} Lenin
had dismissed bureaucratic rules, saying they demonstrated 'no idea whatsoever
of the real political tasks of Social-Democracy.'\textsuperscript{171} The CPGB, however, rivalled the
most bureaucratic trade union with its Rules Revision Congress in 1957, which ran
to over 436 proposed amendments.\textsuperscript{172} Members, however, accepted that discipline
was necessary. Morris Schaer, for example, felt that 'discipline was the main thing
that made our party different...we were the cadres that would lead, and we could
only do that by discipline.'\textsuperscript{173}

John Hostettler, who chaired the Appeals Committee between 1957 and
the mid-1970s gave some insight into the operation of Party discipline. Following
the War, the Appeals Committee routinely referred decisions about reinstating
expelled members to the Executive Committee which, in turn, passed its decisions
to the Political Committee. The EC decision 'was always in my experience against
the Appeals Committee recommendation...there were more full-timers on the EC
and...there were members on the EC...who would do whatever the Political
Committee said...I can't recall that anyone was reinstated, although we
recommended that.'\textsuperscript{174} Hostettler recalled members being expelled 'for odd
reasons' such as suggesting that a CP member should not stand in an election
against a Labour candidate, for example. This would nearly always end in
expulsion.\textsuperscript{175}

In 1956, the argument that had begun in February with Khruschev's
speech, developed into a row over democratic centralism in the Party. Even \textit{The
Reasoner}, Thompson and Saville's attempt to 'give adequate expression to the
storm of ideas', became diverted into an argument over the constitutional
legitimacy of its publication.\textsuperscript{176} Most of those who resigned their Party cards during

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{170} Alison MacLeod, interview, 15 October 1997
\footnote{172} confirms MacLeod's recollection.
\footnote{173} Lenin, \textit{What is to be Done?}. 115.
\footnote{174} 'Proposed Amendments to Rules' [25\textsuperscript{th} Congress CPGB 19-22 April 1957] (London,
\footnote{175} 1957).
\footnote{176} Morris Schaer, interview, 9 July 1997.
\footnote{178} Ibid.
\footnote{179} E.P. Thompson and J. Saville, 'Why we are Publishing' [editorial], \textit{The Reasoner}, no.1
\footnote{180} (July 1956), 3.
\end{footnotes}
this period do not appear to have done so over discipline, however, but for more profound political reasons. The most significant of these was the question raised by the events of 1956 about the contradiction between Stalinism and socialism.

Under Khruschev, the CPSU promised to de-Stalinise. The British Party also moderated its rhetoric from Pollitt’s declaration in 1956 that ‘...believe it is my duty to defend the Soviet Union at any price.’ In 1957, new General Secretary, John Gollan, was stressing ‘the need for frank and comradely criticism between Communist Parties’. The Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 raised similar questions to those of 1956, about the nature of the Soviet state. Under Brezhnev, the Moscow regime, whilst subject to limited reform under Khruschev, re-acquired a Stalinist contempt for democratically expressed political aspirations. In Britain, many who had justified staying in the Party after Hungary, departed or demanded thoroughgoing change following Czechoslovakia. The eventual cleavage in the Party between those whose support for the invasion earned them the disparaging epithet ‘tankies’ and those who were opposed to intervention, exposed irreconcilable differences. Whether such differences were as ideologically profound as they appeared at the time and has been claimed since, is open to question. Those opposed to the invasion, subsequently constituted much of the Euro-Communist tendency in Britain. As Raphael Samuel said of this group, although ‘the name of Gramsci is invoked to dignify their project ...like their hardline opponents, they cling to the...belief that a “correct” analysis, faithfully followed will bring the required results.’

The fact that three quarters of the membership remained in the Party following 1956 implies that British Communism maintained a powerful political appeal. As discussed below, the large number of resignations represented an acceleration in a decline which had begun at the end of the war. Although, as Wolf Wayne suggested, in some trade unions people could not progress within the bureaucracy ‘unless you held a Party card’, in general, membership of the CPGB was not something embarked upon for career reasons. Joining the Communist

177 H. Pollitt, ‘Speech to Closed Session of 24th Congress, CPGB.’ (1 April 1956), 1.
178 J. Gollan, ‘On International Unity and Relations between Communist Parties’ in World News Discussion Supplement no.3 (23 March 1957), 7, Manchester, CP/Cent./Cong/10/05.
181 Ibid. In 1942, following operation Barbarossa, British membership was 56,000 and, apart from 1948, declined steadily until 1956.
182 Wolf Wayne, interview, 10 February 1999. Wayne was referring to the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU) in which he was a Branch President.
Party gave expression to aspirations that, otherwise might have remained abstract ideals and principles. Members joined the Party for a range of reasons. John Hostettler recalled being inspired when taken to Earls Court to witness the return of the International Brigade from Spain and remembered Paul Robeson singing.\textsuperscript{183} Brian Pearce had concluded in the 1930s, that ‘what we want is some authority that will take all these economic factors by the scruff of the neck and make them work properly. I could easily have gone fascist on that basis but as it turned out I went Communist.’\textsuperscript{184} Morris Schaer recalled that he ‘joined the Young Communist League [YCL] for social life, nothing else.’\textsuperscript{185}

The Party provided a practical framework for the principles that had motivated people to want to change society. Party propaganda made much of the idea that Marxism was ‘scientific’, while rarely specifying what this meant. Raphael Samuel cited Professor George Thompson, for example, who wrote in the YCL paper, \textit{Challenge}, that Communism was ‘more than an idle dream...it is a scientific certainty’.\textsuperscript{186} Similarly, George Matthews wrote ‘to arrive at truth, it is necessary first to make a scientific examination of phenomena...this is the Marxist approach to social and political questions.’\textsuperscript{187} Samuel characterised this faith in the association of social progress with natural science as constituting ‘a metaphysical as well as a political space’ within which British Communists operated, and dubbed it ‘the earthly expression of a hidden God.’\textsuperscript{188} E.P. Thompson, replying to Matthews, cited the CPGB’s response to Yugoslavia, saying in that, as so many other cases, far from being scientific, ‘we have been guided by faith – or wrong information.’\textsuperscript{189}

Propagandists like Matthews, however, remained unclear what they meant by ‘scientific’. Like so much within the Stalinist political cannon, ‘scientific’ and ‘scientific socialism’ were epithets whose persistent repetition negated much of their meaning. J.D. Bernal, Professor at Birkbeck College London, a founder of molecular biology and pioneer in crystallography and water structure, was no more specific than Matthews. During the course of a hagiography following Stalin’s death, Bernal conflated ideas about Marxism as social science with the

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\textsuperscript{184} Brian Pearce, interview, 1 February 1999.  
\textsuperscript{185} Morris Schaer, interview, 9 July 1997.  
\textsuperscript{188} Samuel, ‘The Lost World of British Communism, Part One.’, 42.  
\textsuperscript{189} E.P. Thompson, ‘Reply to George Matthews’, \textit{The Reasoner}, 1 (July 1956), 11.
\end{flushright}
technological feat of 'turning a backward and half-ruined country into a great and prosperous industrial and military power'. In the process of merging these two ideas, Bernal described Stalin, not only as 'the greatest figure of contemporary history' but continued with the bewildering claim 'that he was at the same time a great scientist.'

The habit of conflating Soviet technological progress with both social and natural science within the phrase, 'scientific socialism', was common throughout the literature of the CPGB. The first conflation ignored similar technological advances that had occurred under capitalism and, even more dynamically, under Italian Fascism and German Nazism. The second conflation between social and natural sciences was more interesting. The implication that human development was subject to the same immutable forces which appear to govern the natural world, ultimately negated altogether need for human agency, either in the form of a revolutionary Party or a workers movement. Bernal quoted Stalin, who declared 'that in life which is born and grows day after day is invincible, its progress cannot be checked...the proletariat...in the long run, it must conquer.'

Equating human progress with the immutable laws of natural science remained typical of the determinism within Stalinist ideology and was consistent with the pre-eminence it gave to structural forces within historical development. Marx had said that 'in the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces.' This expressed a determinist element within Marxism that Stalin's phrase, cited by Bernal, reflected and which, along with an emphasis on structural causes, characterised the Stalinist approach towards historical change.

The other element within Marxism that stressed human agency and the significance of man as a self-creating being was, in general, ignored. Marx wrote that 'the outstanding achievement of Hegel's Phänomenologie...is thus first that Hegel conceives the self-creation of man.' Similarly, in the Grundrisse, Marx emphasised, 'nature constructs no machines, no locomotives...They are products of human industry, natural materials transformed into instruments of the human

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190 J.D. Bernal, 'Stalin as Scientist', The Modern Quarterly, 8:3 (Summer 1953), 133.
191 Ibid.
192 Ibid., 136.
194 Marx, Economic and Philosphic Manuscripts of 1844 (Moscow, 1977), 140.
Engels emphasised the role of human agency in human development, saying that 'labour created man himself'. Far from relying 'on the defeat of the decaying forces of society whatever their apparent strength at the time', human agency in the form of labour, was the crucial element in propelling and understanding human historical development. Emphasis upon determinism and structures allowed, according to Charles Taylor, a 'facile view which would assimilate Marxist values to the more hideous aspects of Soviet practice'. Although Stalinist ideology referred frequently to 'iron laws' of development, in practice, Stalinism in the USSR was 'voluntarist' and concerned almost entirely with 'strategy and tactics'. The 'more hideous aspects of Soviet practice' were justified as the result of historical development. At the same time, the relentless exhortations for increased production embodied, for example within Stakhanovism, relied upon extreme appeals to voluntarism.

The frequent reference to Marxism as scientific was also, partly, a response to the charge made against socialism, that it was idealistic. Marguerite Morgan, for example, remembered Communists being attacked as 'naive, misguided, wishy-washy idealists'. The 'scientific' propaganda, however, obscured the principles and moral sense that had inspired many to join the Party and seemed, to E.P. Thompson, to have created a situation where 'correct formulations...have replaced right and wrong'. Reference to the Soviet Union as existing socialism was also, in part, a response to the accusation of idealism. Thompson's frustration with those who were 'more Stalinist than Stalin' and who represented 'a monolith without a moral tongue' identified him and his colleagues in 1956, as representatives of a trend within the Party which stressed human agency within historical development as well as the humanism within Marxism.

The main motivation for remaining within the CPGB was, perhaps, the lack of any credible alternative outside the Labour Party. As Max Morris said, 'the point

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197 Bernal, 'Stalin as Scientist', 136.
199 Carr, Socialism in One Country vol.1, 201.
200 Ibid., 197.
201 M. Morgan, Part of the Main. (London, 1990), 24.
202 Thompson, 'Winter Wheat in Omsk', 408.
is you were socialists. You didn't see the Labour Party as being a socialist party with any conviction at all. The CPGB's roots within the trade union movement were also a factor in why members remained in the Party. Such success, however, was built upon what Lenin had called 'the economic struggle of the workers against the employers' rather than upon the 'far more extensive and complex...political struggle of Social-Democracy.' As discussed below, although the Party's trade union intervention had wide credibility, it did not necessarily translate into political success for the Party.

British Communism's relationship to the Soviet Union was a crucial factor in its genesis and early development and remained a feature of its theory and practice during the Cold War. Even for members who, like Morris Schaer, 'were all so involved in our own struggle' that they hardly noticed it, Stalinism remained all-pervading. It was an influence to which the following thesis refers frequently. It is important to bear in mind, however, the political, social and economic circumstances that prevailed within Britain during this period. The Suez crisis, for example, was a far more prevalent feature of 1956 for most British people than either the secret speech or the Soviet invasion of Hungary. Stuart Hall saw 'the Trafalgar Square Suez demonstration' as 'the first mass political rally of its kind in the 1950s' and as a key moment in inspiring the creation of at least one half of the first New Left, the publication of Universities and Left Review. Stalinism combined with these British circumstances to constitute the conditions under which the CPGB faced the problems of operating in opposition to the political consensus of the 1950s.

British Communism was not an isolated planet spinning in a universe of its own domestic conditions. It was one of a number of such planets of varying sizes orbiting within a system whose order was dictated by the Soviet Union. The following thesis focuses upon the British Party, however. The next chapter discusses how the malign effects of Stalinism were already beginning to weigh down upon the Party before the events of 1956 caused it to buckle. These effects only became truly significant because of the Party's inability to understand the nature of Stalinism. As well as this, the Party became unwilling to present itself as the clear representative of revolutionary Marxism within Britain. In its efforts to retain the respectability it had gained through anti-Fascist struggle and diligent

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204 Max Morris, interview, 16 March 1998.
205 Lenin, What is to be Done?, 109.
trade unionism, it became, as an organisation, more of an apologist for, rather than an exponent of, the revolutionary ideas of Marxism. Its move from revolutionary to oppositionist party meant that an already undistinguished theoretical tradition gave way almost completely to an often uninspiring emphasis on 'practical day to day work'. As Doris Lessing said, 'the Communist Party is largely composed of people who aren't really political at all, but who have a powerful sense of service'.

207 H. Pollitt, 'The 20th Congress of the CPSU and the Role of Stalin', 280.
Chapter 2
Bullets in the East, Ballots in the West

This chapter focuses upon a contradiction. Whilst the British Party justified violent aspects of state terror in the Soviet Union, its domestic programme increasingly denied the possibility of revolution in favour of elections. In the years when the CPGB advocated a ‘far less painful...transition’ to socialism, it defended, just as passionately, the pain inflicted upon Soviet and Hungarian citizens by Stalin and Khruschev. The chapter analyses factors which contributed to the decline of British Communism from the height of its success during World War II. This decline is measured in terms of membership, popular vote and sales of the Daily Worker.

The chapter begins by looking at how the British Party responded to Stalin’s death. It continues with a detailed example of how British Communism previously had colluded with Stalinism in sanitising some of its grossest aspects, focusing upon its response to reports of Soviet anti-Semitic propaganda and terror that emerged at the end of the 1940s. This reveals a characteristic response where outright condemnation of such rumours as capitalist propaganda was, after a period of time, superseded by declarations of remorse as denial became increasingly untenable.

Significantly, this occurred before 1956 and is, therefore, important in two ways. In terms of the Party’s decline, it demonstrates that, both when measured by quantitative criteria and in terms of its long-term historical causes, this decline did not begin with the revelatory moment of 1956, but was the ongoing effect of contradictions that had existed since the late 1920s. Secondly, it is significant in terms of de-Stalinisation. In the Soviet Union during the period following Stalin’s death, the Moscow regime attempted to distance itself from an identification with Stalin, an attempt reinforced by the Malenkov Amnesty. In 1956, however, the new regime demonstrated that the distance between itself and Stalin was narrower than most observers had calculated as it ordered the violent suppression of the Hungarian uprising. The British Party’s response to this can be compared with its response to Soviet anti-Semitism before so-called de-Stalinisation and suggests that the process itself was, at best, a superficial exercise in both countries.

Throughout the 1950s, the British leadership continued to see its job as maintaining the illusion that the Soviet Union was the concrete expression of Marxism. Most within the membership accepted this for most of the time. Even when members

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1 H Pollitt, Looking Ahead, 92. The British Road to Socialism (London, 1951), 14.
felt disquiet over some of the rumours, their political perspective remained dominated by the idea that the USSR and socialism were, broadly, synonymous. As discussed in the previous chapter, the ideological hold of Stalinism meant that, however much they sought to avoid it, members felt bound to defend the practices of successive Soviet regimes. Max Morris articulated the problem, saying 'imagine having to defend...the Russian Brides case...it stuck in one's throat. People like myself just kept quiet'. Morris remembered 'Marjorie Pollitt coming to my branch meeting to give us a defence of...banning the marriages...but these were incomprehensible...they still are.'

The description of 1956 as a 'watershed year'; a radical discontinuity in British Communist history, is common within Communist historiography. Such a view, however, has minimised important continuities in the preceding history which, together, reveal a longer term process of decline. Whilst many in the Party perceived of 1956 as an apocalyptic moment, several discernible pressures, both internal and external, had accumulated since 1945 which contributed to this moment. One such pressure was the influence of Stalinism but, as discussed previously, there were also significant internal factors. The Party's drift away from a revolutionary perspective towards one of radical reformist opposition, demonstrated an incongruous optimism with regard to its own electoral potential, along with a pessimism with regard to the potential of revolution. Building the Party as the vanguard of potential working class power had given it a unique role and a specific focus within the politically uninspiring world of the British labour movement. Whilst such a position often made the Party appear marginal, it nevertheless offered a clear pole of attraction for those disillusioned by the Labour Party and their own trade union leaders. The CPGB's abandonment of this role as representing what Perry Anderson has called 'structured socialist ideology' within Britain, was an attempt to escape from the political margins. The tiny, but sharply illuminated, area it had occupied in the half-light of British politics, however, was perceptibly dimmed once the revolutionary beam had been turned off.

The Party's programme, The British Road to Socialism, reflected its pessimism about revolution along with an unfounded optimism about its own electoral potential. It was not a programme which acknowledged the realities of the Party's position within 1950s Britain. Although, at the programme's inception, the Party retained two MPs, by the time of its publication, it had none and the Party's total vote in the General Election was less than 100,000. In reality, as Morris Schaer put it, the programme was a 'get

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2 Max Morris, interview, 16 March 1998.
3 Ibid.
out', an alternative to the more difficult arguments about revolution. This altered the nature of Party work, as huge amounts of individual effort were invested in return for tiny numbers of votes. In 1950, for example, 38,853 members managed to capture just 92,000 votes, as the Party stood 100 candidates at the General Election. The perspective was also a shift from the Marxist idea of the self-emancipation of the working class, to one where such emancipation was to be carried out by a parliament. Parliament, local councils and their respective elections were no longer seen as forums for propaganda about socialism and for demonstrating the inadequacy of reformist leaders, but became ends in themselves.

It is difficult to be sure whether people voted for Communist candidates because they were good, hard-working and conscientious individuals or because voters agreed with the overthrow of the capitalist system and its replacement with socialism. The first of these was not really a vote for socialism and possibly not even a political act at all, but reflected Doris Lessing's characterisation of Party members' 'powerful sense of service'. If people were voting for the overthrow of capitalism, on the other hand, then they might, more profitably, have been perceived as potential members.

This may explain why the Communist vote remained persistently low. Rosa Luxemburg had said, 'in the bourgeois society the role of Social Democracy is that of opposition party.' The CPGB could claim to represent opposition to the political consensus and to the quasi-corporatist structure it administered. For the Communist Party to win enough votes to make its strategy coherent, either a substantial part of that political consensus would need to shift radically to the left or, in order to become part of it, the Party would need to jettison ideas about the overthrow of the existing order. In the end, neither happened. In what the Party characterised as the most significant leftward shift in British politics in 1945, the CPGB still only managed to achieve two MPs. This indicates the extent to which the political centre of gravity within Britain would have needed to move in order to make the Party's programme viable. In reality, such a radical shift could occur only when confidence in the existing political establishment of Conservative and Labour administrations was so low that people would seriously begin to look elsewhere. A situation, in Jürgen Habermas's terms, of a

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6 Morris Schaer, interview, 9 July 1997.
9 R. Luxemburg, Selected Speeches and Writings (Berlin, 1955), 64.
coping of ‘legitimation’, in itself, potentially revolutionary. The CPGB’s only hope of achieving a position where it could administer a transition to socialism was in a situation where it would have to act as a revolutionary organisation. The existence of The British Road to Socialism was, in itself, a denial of such a possibility, whilst at the same time, it promoted an unrealistic optimism about the possibilities of electoral success. In both ways, it constituted the politics of despair.

Stalin’s death

The death of Stalin was announced on 6 March 1953. Harry Pollitt’s eulogy in the Daily Worker, ‘We Honour Him With a Pledge’, was an echo of Stalin’s own ‘Oath to Lenin’ of 1923. Pollitt described Stalin as ‘loved as no other man in world history has ever been loved by all working people’ and called him ‘the man of steel and vision, who proved by mighty deeds that there are no obstacles which Bolsheviks cannot overcome’. Four days after the death, R.P. Dutt, the Party’s vice-chair, spoke at Shoreditch Town Hall, of ‘the radiance of the immortal creative genius whose lifework...has led the way in liberating one-third of humanity...brought socialism from a dream to a joyful reality...opening up new vistas of uncharted advance to Communism’. James Klugmann, in the Jewish Clarion, declared creatively, that ‘side by side with Lenin, Stalin built up and strengthened the Communist Party. Together with Lenin he was the inspirer and leader of the Great October Revolution’.

Whether all members were so affected is not certain. Max Morris recalled being at a meeting at the time where most people were shocked. When asked what he felt about Stalin, however, Morris replied, ‘mixed feelings, but let’s be clear, most members of the Communist Party just tolerated it all...some of it you had to take with a large pinch of salt’. Morris, however, had himself written of ‘the new life that is being built’ in the Soviet Union, about how ‘culture, in the widest sense of the word, belongs to the people’ and of ‘the fullness and richness of Soviet life’. In the Educational Bulletin which Morris edited, G.C.T. Giles echoed the hallelujahs of Dutt and Pollitt. Giles

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11 H. Pollitt, ‘We Honour Him With a Pledge’, Daily Worker (6 March 1953).
12 Ibid.
13 Cited in Callaghan, Rajani Palme Dutt, 265.
15 Max Morris, interview, 16 March 1998. Morris was a leading member of the National Union of Teachers. He was founding editor of the Party teachers journal, Education Bulletin which became Education Today in November/December, 1953.
described Stalin as having 'faith in the common people, mastery of the facts, a profound theoretical understanding, simplicity of character and style.'17 He described how Stalin 'understood the material as well as the spiritual basis of popular progress'.18 Stalin, Giles suggested, had demonstrated both qualities when he addressed 'the First Conference of Stakhanovites... "Life has improved comrades. Life has become more joyous. And when life is joyous, work goes well".'19

Some members shared their leaders' shock and grief. Helen Mason, for example, said 'I can remember when Stalin died, I thought it was awful'.20 Morris Schaer said that many British people 'still had a lot of respect for Stalin for what he did in the War...so he killed a few million Communists – so what?21 Schaer went on to say that many Communists had seen Stalin 'as one of the real leaders of world socialism, a kindly uncle...deep thinker and lover of children and humanity.'22

The Communist Party was not alone in its panegyrics following Stalin's death. The Fabian and anti-Communist New Statesman, for example, maintained that 'Stalin's achievements are beyond dispute' and that 'many first hand accounts confirm the popular portrait of an extraordinary human being. A Communist with a sense of humour, even if a macabre one, is a rarity.'23 Even The Times admitted that 'in Russia and the adjacent Communist states Marshall Stalin...occupied a position of personal eminence almost without parallel in the history of the world.'24 The following day, the Manchester Guardian noted that, although the British Parliament did not adjourn because Stalin was not officially a head of state, in India, flags were flown at half-mast.25 The paper commented that 'Mr Nehru's speech was curiously emotional'.26 The Times noted that 'the flag of the United Nations flew at half mast' and that, 'before resuming its debate on Korea, the Political Committee stood for a moment in silence.'27 All this was, of course, routine on such occasions. It is notable, however, that a range of publications from the Daily Worker and World News through to The Times and The Listener referred, immediately after his death, to Stalin's greatness, his achievement in industrialising the Soviet Union and particularly his military acumen during World War

18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
24 'Marshall Joseph Stalin', The Times (March 6 1953), 7.
25 Manchester Guardian. (7 March 1953), 5
26 Ibid.
27 'Mr Vyshinsky On Way Home', The Times (7 March 1953), 5.
Elsewhere, such as in West Berlin, the judgement on Stalin was, unsurprisingly, less enthusiastic. The Manchester Guardian quoted from Der Abend which asked 'what after all, are Mr Stalin's achievements? The answers are - annihilation of the middle-class, the organised starving to death of three million Ukrainians, complicity in Hitler's war, the massacre of the Poles at Katyn, enslavement of a large part of Europe and the menacing of the rest of the world'.

The popular perception of Stalin as the main bulwark against Nazism probably best explains these positive responses following his death. In addition, by 1953, the Cold War had raised circumstances which demanded diplomacy rather than antagonism. If praising Stalin was part of the West's diplomatic agenda, however, it must have had little resonance in Moscow where, after a barely decent period of mourning, the new regime proceeded to bury him as soon as possible. There was a discernible retreat away from identification with Stalin and Stalinism. As The Times noted, barely a month after Stalin's death, 'the laudatory tributes and the adulation of Stalin in the Soviet press and on the radio have suddenly ceased.' The article continued with the news, however, that in some Communist countries, 'Stalin's name is still being used to extract production pledges from workers and peasants in a “strength through grief” campaign.'

At the 23rd Congress of the CPGB in April, 1954 there was virtually no mention of Stalin from delegates and none at all from the Party's leadership. In its report to the Congress, the Executive Committee took just four lines to mention that Stalin's death was 'the occasion for a nationwide expression of grief'. At the Congress, John Gollan referred to the role of the 'leading Communist Party of the world, the Party which is a model to all communists', but did not mention Stalin or his death. Whether such an omission constituted part of a coherent policy is unclear.

Within the Soviet Union, several events coincided with the retreat from identification with Stalin. Malenkov, who, like Stalin, had occupied the dual posts of Prime Minister and First Secretary (CPSU), resigned from the second of these jobs almost immediately on 14 March 1953 and was replaced by Khruschev. One of the

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28 See T. Barman and A. Birse, 'The Death of Mr Stalin', The Listener (12 March 1953) 413-4.
29 'How Divided Germany Heard of Stalin's Death; Some Bitter Comments in the West', Manchester Guardian (7 March 1953), 7.
30 'Less Adulation of Stalin', The Times (6 April 1953), 5.
31 Ibid.
33 J. Gollan, 'Reply to Discussion at 23rd Congress CPGB' (16-19 April 1954), Manchester, CP/Cent/Cong/08/06.
34 Nothing in the Executive or Political Committee minutes between Stalin's death and the 24th Congress suggests that such a policy existed.
35 Malenkov survived as Prime Minister until February 1955. He was replaced by Bulganin.
The response to state terror

According to Harrison E. Salisbury, Stalin's death could not have come at a better time for some, 'as I thought to myself that morning [4 March 1953, the day of Stalin's stroke]...if Stalin was dying a natural death it was the luckiest thing that had ever happened to the men who stood closest to him.'** Commentators such as Salisbury had identified the existence of a new Stalinist terror as early as 1948. Salisbury described a 'grim and fear ridden' atmosphere, when 'it seemed to me that by now I could recognise fear in the streets...it was quite apparent that Russia stood on the brink of a reign of terror beside which that of the thirties would seem trivial.'** The key feature of this latest terror was anti-Semitism. The majority of arrests between 1948 and 1952 were of people with Jewish names or known Jews, including Vyacheslav, Molotov's wife, who was banished to Siberia. Salisbury noted that 'any Jew was a fair target'.** Alexander Werth commented that 'it is certainly true that there has in recent years been a good deal of ambiguity in the Soviet Government's attitude to the Jews.'** Also during this period, the regime closed both the Jewish theatre and the Jewish newspaper in Moscow. It also closed the Jewish publishing house and dissolved the Jewish anti-fascist Committee between 1948 and Stalin's death.**

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37 Ibid. These included prisoners convicted of crimes committed in their official capacity, mothers of small children, pregnant women, offenders under 18, women over 50, men over 55 and the incurably sick.
39 Ibid., 157. Salisbury offered no more than this implication that Stalin's death may have had other than 'natural' causes.
40 Ibid., 22 and 141-2.
41 Ibid., 152.
42 A. Werth, 'Jews in Russia', New Statesman (4 January 1953), 87. Also see Dr I. Brodie [Chief Rabbi], The Listener (22 January 1953), 136.
43 Salisbury, An American in Russia, 23. Einheit was the only Yiddish paper in Moscow. The All Jewish anti-Fascist Committee was founded to organise against the threat of Nazi aggression before World War II. Mikhoels, a leading Soviet actor, had been Chairman until 1948, when he was suddenly dismissed. It was later discovered he had been murdered. In 1957, Hyman Levy discovered that the entire Committee had been liquidated by arrest and murder in 1949, their families deported to labour camps. Following the 20th Congress, they were rehabilitated, World News 4: 42 (12 January 1957), 20.
The British Party journal, the Jewish Clarion, however, was emphatic in its persistent denial of the claims of anti-Semitism. The journal’s attitude provides an insight into the way the CPGB often responded to uncomfortable information about the Soviet Union. Although aimed at Jewish Socialists, the Jewish Clarion was more concerned with sustaining an uncritical view of the Soviet Union than with investigating the validity or otherwise of claims about the regime’s anti-Semitism.

As early as 1948, when rumours about the new terror were emerging, Hymie Fagan wrote ‘why is it that in Russia, once the graveyard of the Jews under the Tsar, there is no longer anti-Semitism?’44 Two months later, Ivor Montague and Phil Piratin wrote two articles under the headline ‘Lies that can lead to Genocide’.45 Montague began, suggesting that ‘a glance through the pages of the Jewish press finds ten-a-penny anti-Soviet slanders. Not one can stand the least contact with reality’.46 He admitted that ‘it is correct that the Jewish Committee Against Fascism no longer exists as a separate body’, but concluded ‘why now should there be such a special committee and not one for every other national group in the USSR?’47 Montague identified ‘false witness, evil tongue; thoughtless repetition of another’s rumour directed against the USSR’ as propaganda attacks constituting ‘a crime against humanity’.48 Phil Piratin, MP for Stepney at this time, continued, responding to the Vienna Correspondent of the Zionist Review who had accused the Soviet Union of anti-Semitic practices. Piratin claimed that the rumours had emanated from the ‘State Department in Washington and its unofficial Jewish Division, the All American Jewish Committee.’49

In 1950, H.C. Creighton dismissed the possibility of anti-Semitism in the USSR in disingenuous terms, assuring readers that ‘the truth, of course is that anti-Semitism is a criminal offence in the USSR.’50 Reuben Falber asked, in 1952, ‘what is the purpose of the intense campaign being conducted among Jews alleging the existence of anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union.’51 As late as 1953, Jack Gaster defended ‘The

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46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
49 P. Piratin., ibid. Stepney was an East London constituency with a large Jewish population.
Prague Trial’, accusing Rudolf Slánský, its chief victim and a Jew, of being a ‘Zionist’ who, in 1927, ‘showed Trotskyist deviation’.52

The Jewish Clarion’s advocacy of the Soviet Union continued throughout a particularly unpleasant episode at the beginning of 1953, known as the ‘Doctors Plot’. On 13 January, nine doctors who worked in the Kremlin were imprisoned for being members of a ‘diversionary group’ of ‘criminals’ and ‘terrorists’ whom Pravda accused of having connections, through Zionism, to British and American intelligence.53 The doctors, six of whom were Jewish, were tortured, imprisoned and finally sentenced to death for a number of ‘crimes’ and assassination attempts, including the murder of Zhadanov who, it was claimed, had been deliberately prescribed the wrong medication for his weak heart. The doctors were denounced by a colleague, L.F. Timashuk, who was rewarded for her efforts with the Award of Lenin. According to Salisbury, the plot was invented by Stalin as a move against Chief of Secret Police, Lavrenti Beria. Salisbury cited in evidence, the initial report in Pravda which suggested, pointedly, that the coalition of western intelligence and the doctors was ‘able to carry out its operations through the slackness of the Soviet Security Organs’.54 The Times supported this interpretation and, upon the release of the Doctors, reported both Pravda and Izvestia as referring ‘to the “Former Ministry of State Security”’.55

Hymie Fagan reported in the Jewish Clarion, that ‘nine doctors have been arrested on charges which include espionage and murder...some of these men are stated to be political Zionists who committed their crimes under direction of the “Joint”’.56 Fagan demanded a more accurate interpretation of the facts, calling for proof of anti-Semitism in the USSR. The charges, claimed Fagan, ‘contained no attack on Jews or accusations against Jews as Jews. The charges stated the accused were members of a “Jewish bourgeois nationalist organisation” – an entirely different thing, especially when as it is well known, anti-Semitism is a crime in the USSR’.57

52 J. Gaster, ‘The Prague Trial’, Jewish Clarion, 70 (January 1953). Slánský was General Secretary of the Czech Communist Party (CPCz) after February 1948. In October of that year, following exhortations from Moscow, he introduced a Law for the Protection of the Republic, introduced Labour Camps and forcibly removed ‘reactionaries’ from the towns. Despite such Stalinist credentials, following economic difficulties in 1951, he was deposed by Gottwald and Zápotocký. In November 1951, Stalin sent Mikoyan to Prague to demand Slánský’s arrest. Along with 13 other defendants (11 of whom were Jews), Slánský was tried and hanged.
53 ‘Russian Doctors Released’, The Times (4 April 1953). On their release, it was revealed that there had been 15 doctors.
54 Salisbury, An American in Russia, 151.
55 ‘Russian Doctors Released’, The Times.
57 Ibid.
According to Alison Macleod, although 'the facts about Stalin's anti-Semitism were becoming pretty well known in the West...the only people who wouldn't admit them were Communists'. Referring to the 'Doctors Plot', she recalled 'an evening over a Chinese meal with Alexander Baron while he told us what was happening, and we said "no it couldn't be, it simply couldn't be true."'. When the Doctors were released, however, Macleod's husband, Jack Selford, said 'tell them to come to dinner...they'll eat chicken and we'll eat humble pie.'

A process of absolution?

The Jewish Clarion did not report the release of the Doctors and barely mentioned anti-Semitism for the next three years. In the middle of 1956, however, the journal reproduced an article, 'Our Anguish and Our Solace', which had appeared in the Polish Jewish Workers paper, Folksztyme. The article suggested that the 'tumour' of the 'cult of personality...enabled the Beria clique to provoke inter-nation conflict (in the Soviet Union) and led to a certain growth of nationalism and anti-Semitism.' The Folksztyme article referred to the Jewish anti-Fascist Committee, asking 'how did it happen then that this representative Jewish body...was suddenly liquidated after the war without rhyme or reason, and its leaders sentenced to death?'

The editorial in the subsequent edition of the Jewish Clarion stated that 'condemnation is not enough'. The journal offered a characteristic response by British Communism once it had accepted the truth about Soviet practices. Adopting a confessional tone, the editorial said 'responsibility to our readers...to every Jew who has admired, however grudgingly, the Soviet Union's nationalities policy, and our responsibility to ourselves...as Jewish Communists require that we call for the fullest details of what occurred and the fullest explanation of how such things could have come about in the land of Socialism.' The editorial offered some defence of its own actions, saying that it would have found it 'incredible that there could be racial discrimination in the land of Socialism. Such a thing', it continued, 'was inconsistent with Communist principles and with the practices of the USSR.' The editorial referred to the All Jewish anti-Fascist Committee saying, 'when we were asked from 1948

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58 Alison Macleod, interview, 15 October 1997.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
61 'Our Anguish and Our Solace' [editorial], Jewish Clarion, 8 [New Series] (June 1956), 2.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
64 'After the 20th Congress' [editorial], Jewish Clarion, 9 (July-August 1956), 3.
65 Ibid.
66 Ibid., 8
onwards: “Where are Mikhoels and Feffer?” we did not claim to know the answer. It justified its disinterest in the committee’s disappearance, adding obliquely, ‘but we did know there was a cold war and that those who were most prominent in making these allegations against the Soviet Union were the least willing to campaign against German rearmament’. The journal admitted that its defence of Soviet practices had been based upon an assumption that ‘while we were aware that certain Jewish cultural institutions had closed, that Yiddish cultural activities had ceased and that there was uncertainty about the whereabouts and doings of some leading Jewish figures’ they had, nevertheless, ‘presumed that all was in order’ and that everything that had occurred ‘could have nothing less than the fullest justification’. The journal confessed that its ‘scant treatment’ of the ‘Doctors Plot…at the time reflected some uneasiness’.

In the same issue, Hyman Levy, in a letter entitled ‘Blot on the History of Socialism’, referred to an editorial in the previous issue as ‘a mere bandage across a deep and festering wound’. Replying to Levy, however, a less repentant Max Druck cited ‘the great economic advances, the transformation of a backward peasant country into a great world industrial power.’ Druck agreed that ‘because of our historical background it is understandable that Jewish Communists should feel more deeply hurt than others’. He continued, however, ‘I do feel that both the Editorial and Professor Levy’s letter, whilst genuinely expressing the emotional upset felt by many of us, tend to give a distorted picture’ and suggested, ‘not to see these abuses alongside the unprecedented difficulties in building the first socialist country in the world is to place them out of context.’ By March 1957, the confessional was, once again, vacated as Party Chairman Willie Gallacher declared, ‘as a result of my inquiries I am satisfied that at no time was there, or is there, anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union’.

In 1957, eight years after Salisbury had made his initial observations about Soviet anti-Semitism and despite Gallacher’s protestations, the CPGB addressed the question of anti-Semitism within the Soviet Union. The Party published a statement in World News sub-titled ‘Jews in the Soviet Union’. The task of investigating ‘specific

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67 Ibid. Feffer succeeded Mikhoels in 1948.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
73 Ibid.
74 Ibid.
75 W. Gallacher, ‘There was no Anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union says Willie Gallacher’, Jewish Clarion, 12 (March 1957), 2.
charges in the Folksztyme' was assigned to Hyman Levy. The statement said that 'the charges specifically named a number of Jewish writers, artists and intellectuals as having been tortured and physically destroyed, particularly during the period 1948-52'. Levy's report noted that the 1952 edition of the Soviet Encyclopaedia did not refer to the fact that Marx was a Jew. 1948-52 became known to Jews in Russia as 'The Black Years...the period during which many Jews were dismissed from their posts'. Levy concluded that 'since the death of Stalin, tremendous efforts are being made to make amends for this terrible state of affairs, and to prevent it ever happening again'. The report ended, however, with the news that Suslov (Chair Central Committee CPSU) was still refusing to reinstate the Jewish Theatre and the Yiddish newspaper.

In April 1957, Levy wrote 'it is easy to understand the dilemma in which the leadership of the British Communist Party was placed when, if they knew the facts, their public admission might have weakened Soviet defence. But during the past seven years such considerations have had no weight. To persist in hiding such important historical data was, therefore, a betrayal of Marxism'. Levy's journey towards this conclusion was shared by those who left the Party between the end of 1956 and 1957 as well as by some who, for a variety of reasons, stayed in.

The long-term decline of British Communism

The cause of this biggest exodus in the Party's history has been laid at the double doors of Khruschev's secret speech and his subsequent invasion of Hungary in the same year. There had, however, been a steady decline in membership since the war. Although the figure fell from 33,236 for 'those registered at or about March', 1956 to 24,670 in February 1958, it had already fallen by 23 per cent from a claimed figure of 43,000 in 1948. CPGB historiography has emphasised the dramatic impact of 1956. This has had the effect of minimising the reality of this previous decline as writers like George Matthews, for example, have, characteristically, described 1956 as a 'Watershed Year'. Matthews focused upon the Suez crisis in which 'British...
Imperialism has suffered a major defeat', before mentioning the secret speech, however. On Hungary, Matthews admitted that, at the time 'the Party supports the Soviet intervention' in Hungary. In 1980, however, with the benefit of 24 years hindsight, he continued to insist that the intervention was 'to defeat the counterrevolution and preserve socialism'.

In 1986, Marxism Today, in its introduction to Gareth Stedman Jones' interview with Eric Hobsbawm called 1956 a 'turning point' which, it stressed, is a label which 'can be attached without a shade of embarrassment'. In this interview, Hobsbawm judged that the events of 1956 'began to represent a potential break-up of the international communist movement, and that's what happened'. Katherine Hudson, whilst acknowledging the longer term nature of the CPGB's problems, nevertheless perceived of 1956 as the cause of the Party's subsequent decline, saying 'until...1989, and the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, no single year in the history of the international communist movement had had such a powerful negative impact on the movement itself, and on its standing in the world, as 1956'. These perspectives characterise 1956 as a unique moment of discontinuity in the history of the CPGB. They also see the events of that year as being the cause of the subsequent protracted decline of Communism, rather than as an effect of Stalinism's irreconcilable contradictions. Although 1956 represented a particularly acute crisis within this decline, it was, nevertheless part of a long-term process.

In a broader periodization, Willie Thompson in The Good Old Cause, applied the epithet 'Watershed' to the period 1951 to 1957. This spanned the life of the first edition of The British Road to Socialism, whose explicit statement of reformism was modified in a version produced in 1957. The years 1951 to 1957, beginning with the loss of the two Communist MPs in 1950, ending with the Special Congress and the subsequent revival of the Party in the midst of increased strike activity in 1957, also marks an important period of crisis. It should be borne in mind, however, that Pollitt's Looking Ahead had appeared in 1947 and was, if anything, more explicit than the British Road to Socialism, both about the parliamentary road and the model of the

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84 Matthews, All for the Cause The Communist Party 1920-1980, 22. Matthews was Assistant Secretary of the Party in the 1950s and 1960s and succeeded Campbell as editor of the Daily Worker.
85 Ibid., 22.
86 Ibid.
87 '1956', Marxism Today (November 1986), 16.
89 K. Hudson, 'The Double Blow; 1956 and the Communist Party of Great Britain'.
‘People’s Democracies’. Whilst Thompson’s extended perspective has merit, it probably does not go far enough in identifying the long term continuities within CPGB history that contributed towards its decline. The major discontinuity within this history was World War II, rather than 1956. The war represented an unprecedented and unique set of circumstances, where arguments about Marxism and revolution became secondary to all out support for the Soviet Union and anti-Nazism. For the first and last time in its existence, the Party cut with, rather than against, the grain of public political sentiment. This had an enormous impact upon the Party’s popularity and credibility. Perhaps it was the experience of the war years and the sweet taste of relative popularity which encouraged the Party to mitigate its revolutionary position by an appeal to the more comfortable and familiar concepts of parliamentary representation and reform.

Many writers, including Willie Thompson, have tended towards a mono-causal perspective when diagnosing the reasons for the Party’s decline. Noreen Branson, for example, wrote that ‘the main mistakes which the party made arose from its attitude to the Soviet Union’. Similarly, Thompson wrote that ‘the binding element which tied together all the political and organisational strands was less the Party’s vision of a socialist Britain...than its relation to the existing homelands of socialism and most importantly the USSR...which ultimately determined its policies, its practice and its standing among the British public.’ Whilst this was undoubtedly true, this view which emphasises the external pressures of the Soviet Union, has minimised the British Party’s internal contradictions between Marxist and Stalinist ideologies, Bolshevik structure and reformist practice. Thompson reinforced Hudson and Hobsbawm’s view of 1956 as being of unique significance as he wrote, ‘it is not too fanciful to see the remainder of the CP’s history as representing the working out of the consequences of its 25th Congress.’

Analyses which view 1956 as a political bombshell, reflect the response of members such as Eric Hobsbawm for whom Khruschev’s revelations had come ‘absolutely out of the blue’. This may, in turn, reflect the fact that much of this history emanated from within the CPGB and, on the whole, represents a biographical perspective which has tended to concentrate upon how Party members reacted to events, rather than focusing upon longer term causes.

93 Thompson, The Good Old Cause, 93
94 Ibid., 113.
95 Hobsbawm, interview with Stedman Jones, ‘1956’, 17.
These writers have also adopted a perspective in which the Soviet Union constituted an ever present feature within the political consciousness of individual Communists. Whilst Stalinism was a determining factor in this political consciousness, many members remained only dimly aware of events within the Soviet Union. Several members agreed with John Hostettler, who said 'I personally knew nothing about the problems in the Soviet Union until Khruschev's speech and I think most others were in the same position'. Hostettler suggested that it may have been different for the leadership, however, asking whether 'leaders like Harry Pollitt who would go to the Soviet Union could feel anything, I don't know, but those I mixed with I'm sure knew nothing, and just felt we were hard pressed with our backs to the wall'. Morris Schaer agreed, saying that 'we were worried about this, the ordinary Party member didn't like what he was hearing, but he was so involved in his own struggles, that it didn't have much effect on them'. Dennis Ogden answered that it was not the case 'that all Communists supported the Soviet Union unconditionally and unreservedly...many spoke with two voices...one voice for the public...but in private there were all kinds of doubts'.

Ruth Fisher had been a telephonist at the Daily Worker until she left the Party after Hungary. She wrote of the period before Khruschev's secret speech, saying 'prior to that all stories people tried to tell about what might be happening in the Soviet Union were discounted as part of cold-war propaganda'. She went on to speculate about how Daily Worker editor J.R. Campbell 'had what might be called "hostages to fortune" its more understandable that they might put the personal safety of friends and family before coming clean about what they knew'. Ruth Fisher was referring to Campbell's stepson, William, who had become a Soviet citizen in 1939 and performed in Soviet theatres as Villi the Clown. In the years preceding Stalin's death, William was banned from performing because of his British origins. Ruth Fisher believed that Campbell's silence about Soviet anti-Semitism may, not unnaturally, have been connected to these circumstances. Bob Leeson who joined the Party in 1949, wrote, 'my concerns were only indirectly with the Soviet Union...what troubled me was the departure of the

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97 Ibid.
99 Dennis Ogden, interview, 3 November 1997.
100 Ruth Fisher, written reply to author 30 November 1997.
101 Ibid.
Labour Government from the policies of 1945...my focus, essentially was this country'.

Stalinism, in its ideological guise of Marxist-Leninism and with its highly bureaucratic organisational structure, exerted a powerful, if sometimes only vaguely perceived, influence over British Communism. Members felt bound to defend the activities of the Soviet regime when it became necessary. Where, however, did the line exist between the perception of Stalinism as the ideological and concrete expression of Marxism and Leninism and the acceptance of Stalinist practices within the Soviet Union? Stalinism, as the foundation upon which British Communism had developed, determined, not only its ideology, discourse and practice, but had a determining effect upon the political consciousness of its members. This ideological determining, however, is not the same as saying that the Soviet Union dominated members' lives. Members defended, excused or justified its practices as and when they needed to, but their day to day activities as Communists were dominated by national and local circumstances. Stalinism determined the particular species of British Communist political consciousness. The true nature of this consciousness, however, can only be understood when such a species is seen in relation to its own political environment.

**Criteria of decline**

Numerous indicators demonstrate a decline in British Communism before 1956. The selection of criteria to measure decline during this period is, of course, a matter of availability and preference. However, three such indicators, Daily Worker paper sales, membership numbers and the level of the popular vote all point in the same direction. The following table is taken from a report by Allen Hutt who in 1954, was appointed Circulation Manager at the Daily Worker.\(^{104}\)

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\(^{103}\) Bob Leeson, written reply to author, 5 November 1997. Leeson had written for the magazine *World-Youth* and was a prominent member of the YCL. He stayed in the Party after 1956, working in the features department of the *Morning Star* until the early eighties.

\(^{104}\) A. Hutt, 'Review of Daily Worker Circulation' [Report to EC] (22 June 1956), 5, Manchester, CP/Ind/misc./Hutt/2/1.
Table 3. Membership and Daily Worker Sales

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Membership</th>
<th>Daily Sales</th>
<th>*</th>
<th>Saturday Extra Sales</th>
<th>*</th>
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<td>1950</td>
<td>38,853</td>
<td>89,001</td>
<td>229%</td>
<td>55,473</td>
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<tr>
<td>1951</td>
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<td>91,147</td>
<td>259%</td>
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<td>1952</td>
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<td>84,168</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
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<td>77,533</td>
<td>222%</td>
<td>46,233</td>
<td>132%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>67,524</td>
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<td>1956</td>
<td>33,236</td>
<td>62,547</td>
<td>188%</td>
<td>32,562</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Sales as a percentage of membership (eg. 200 per cent indicates that each member sold two papers on average). For Hutt, this indicated that 'the degree of activity has diminished more than the drop of membership' and the 'table also reveals what can be regarded as the most serious feature of all, namely; the reduced ratio of readers relative to the membership'.

Hutt’s figures demonstrate a combined and steady decline in both membership and paper sales between 1950 and 1957. There had already been a drop of around 15 per cent in membership between 1950 and 1955 and a decline in Daily Worker sales of more than 21,000, representing nearly 25 per cent. The Party also had a persistent problem of high membership turnover. Kenneth Newton drew attention to this saying ‘the high rate of membership turnover suggests that the Party life of many is short.’ A high level of recruitment was necessary, simply to retain membership levels. As the leadership commented following the 23rd Congress, ‘the total number of new members ...is in the region of 7-800. This is very small indeed and...barely offsets the normal turnover due to deaths, lapses, transfers and many other reasons.’ There were many resolutions to Party Congresses under the heading ‘Building the Party’ and the Party issued several pamphlets in the early 1950s such as Build the Communist Party and Forging the Weapon.

The leadership were aware of this decline. Pollitt referred to the period following the 23rd Congress, saying that ‘after the Congress the membership decline continued’. The direct effects of the Cold War are unclear. Membership fell sharply...
between 1950 and 1951, when reports about anti-Semitism in the USSR emerged.\textsuperscript{111} Alison Macleod was certainly convinced that the rumours about anti-Semitism had had an effect. When asked if many Jewish members had left the Party after the news began to break, she replied, simply 'Oh yes!'.\textsuperscript{112} June 1950 was also the month when North Korea invaded the South and in February 1951, China was declared guilty of aggression by the United Nations. The Party consistently claimed that its declining popularity was due to anti-Soviet and anti-Communist propaganda. As Pollitt said 'during the years of the "cold war", we suffered a decline in our membership as the pressure and hysteria developed against Communism and the Communist Party'.\textsuperscript{113} Whilst there was certainly truth in this, it was nevertheless a perception which appeared to blame British workers for their peculiar susceptibility to the propaganda of the British press.

Another indication of decline was the fall in the popular vote for Communist candidates. In Hornsey, North London, for example, the vote in 1945 for G.J. Jones, had been 10,058. By 1950, this had been slashed to 1,191 and remained around this figure at the 1955 election.\textsuperscript{114} The following figures indicate a decline in the Party's popular vote during this period. This decline, however, was less than it appears due to the fact that the Party stood 100 candidates in 1950, which gave it a larger total vote for that year.

\textbf{Table 4. General Election, 1950\textsuperscript{115}}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Votes gained</th>
<th>% of vote</th>
<th>Number Of MPs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>12,502,567</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>13,266,592</td>
<td>46.1</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>2,621,548</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communist</td>
<td>91,746</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>290,218</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{111} Membership fell from 38,853 in 1950 to 33,963 in 1952; Newton, \textit{The Sociology of British Communism}, 160.
\textsuperscript{112} Alison Macleod, interview, 15 October 1997.
\textsuperscript{113} H. Pollitt, 'Political Report to 24\textsuperscript{th} National Congress' (March 1956), 22, Manchester, CP/Cent/09/02.
\textsuperscript{114} 'Electoral statistics' [to the Executive Committee] (8-9 January 1955), Manchester, CP/Cent/EC/03/17. The highest Communist vote in 1955 was for Willy Lauchlan (5,389) in West Fife. Annie Powell in East Rhondda achieved 4,544 and Solly Kaye in Stepney, 2,888. Two other seats in Scotland yielded over 2,000 votes but nationally, the rest of the candidates all scored below 2,000 or below 1,000.
\textsuperscript{115} Sked and Cooke, \textit{Post-War Britain, A Political History}, 85.
Table 5. General Election, 1951

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Votes gained</th>
<th>% of vote</th>
<th>Number Of MPs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>13,717,538</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td>321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>13,948,605</td>
<td>48.8</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>730,556</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communist</td>
<td>21,640</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>177,329</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By 1955, the Party had been relegated to the 'Others' column. In 1951 it stood just ten candidates, but its share of the vote in the constituencies it contested, increased to 3.8 per cent. In 1955, the Party stood 17 candidates and scored 3.4 per cent in its respective constituencies. The departure in 1951 and 1955 from the ambitious project of 1950, may indicate that the poor results of that year undermined the leadership's confidence about its electoral prospects. Noreen Branson suggested a reason for the experiment, saying 'when the party decided to put up 100 candidates in the 1950 general election, it was assumed - quite wrongly - that Tory governments were a thing of the past.'

Poor electoral performance was a persistent cause for concern. The leadership commented in 1953, 'in the twelve Parliamentary constituencies where the position should give rise to the most serious concern...little consistent attention is being given to the work in them by the District Committees and the Party Centre'. The resolution continued, 'it would be fatal for the Party to continue in this way any longer'. Because of fluctuating electoral tactics, it is difficult to come to a precise conclusion about the decline or otherwise of the Party's vote across the country. Figures for individual candidates, however, demonstrate a clear decline in popular opinion.

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116 ibid. 99.  
117 Newton, The Sociology of British Communism 166.  
119 'Executive Committee Resolution on Electoral Activity' (December 1953) 3, Manchester, CP/Cent/EC/06/03.  
120 Ibid.
Table 6. Communist Party candidates in three constituencies in 1945 and 1955

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>West Fife</th>
<th>Stepney</th>
<th>Hornsey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vote</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Vote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>Willie Gallacher</td>
<td>17,636</td>
<td>42.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Gallacher</td>
<td>9,301</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>W. Lauchlan</td>
<td>4,728*</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>Lauchlan</td>
<td>5,839</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Indicates lost deposit.

(NB. Phil Piratin’s vote of 5,075 in 1945 was on a total vote for the constituency of 10,658. In 1950, after reconstruction, demobilisation and boundary changes, the total vote had increased to 47,809. As the percentages indicate, this puts the increase from 1945 into perspective.)

In terms of the national vote, the CPGB declined from 102,780 in 1945 to 21,640 in 1951. This is a more significant fall than between 1950 and 1951 as, in 1945, the Party stood only 21 candidates. 1945 was, of course, an exceptional year. The war had inspired such high expectations that Quintin Hogg was moved to pronounce in the House of Commons that ‘If you do not give the people reform, they are going to give you a revolution.’ There was still a significant decline during the 1950s itself, however, in Stepney and West Fife. Much of this may reflect the fact that Gallacher and Piratin’s successors did not enjoy the same personal credibility.

The situation in local councils was not very different. In the Municipal elections of May 1953, for example, the Party lost eight seats in Scotland and 12 in London, compared to 1949. As the Resolution on Electoral Activity put it, ‘the complete absence of Communist representation in Parliament and in the main authorities has been a major weakness’. As discussed above, it is not clear why the 91,000 who voted Communist in 1950 did so. It may be that this figure represented the Party’s periphery; those who were sympathetic but unwilling or unable to commit to the considerable demands of membership. Apart from 1945, this represented the highest national vote the Party ever achieved. For a Party whose programme was about to be launched on the basis that it could constitute a ‘People’s Government’ and manoeuvre

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122 Newton, The Sociology of British Communism, 166.
124 ‘Report to Political Committee’ (7 May 1953), 7, Manchester, CP/Cent/PC/02/15. Also, ‘London Report to the Political Committee’ (2 October 1953), Manchester, CP/Cent/PC/02/20.
125 ‘Executive Committee Resolution on Electoral Activity’ (1953), Manchester, CP/Cent/EC/03/06.
for power along the line of the Communist Parties in the ‘People’s Democracies of Eastern Europe’, the result hardly provided grounds for optimism.126

The same optimism which had impelled the Party to stand 100 candidates and to persist in its electoral strategy regardless of the results, however, continued into the 1960s. Phil Cohen remembered his own childhood, when his father stood for local elections in London in 1968. Cohen wrote, ‘Dad got very nervous’ near to the election as he hoped to increase his vote ‘from the 200 odd… anyone… got when they stood for the CP. On the night of the count we… were woken… they were all shouting something about 303… the next day I realised the Labour candidate won with over 5000.’127 Max Morris recalled fighting ‘two elections as a Communist candidate. What a bloody waste of time. Oh God!’128

Occasionally it is worthwhile to judge the Party’s strategy and practice against its claims to represent Marxism and Leninism. Although Lenin had advocated parliamentary action as a tactic, he opposed the notion that socialism could be instituted through parliamentary means.129 As he made clear, ‘a democratic republic is the best possible political shell for capitalism and, therefore, once capital has gained possession… it establishes its power so securely, so firmly, that no change of persons, institutions or parties in the bourgeois democratic republic can shake it’.130 Marx was equally against what he referred to as the ‘Parliamentary Republic’.131 Engels identified the ‘democratic republic’ as part of the bourgeois state, saying ‘the state is nothing but a machine for the oppression of one class by another, and indeed in the democratic republic no less than in the hereditary monarchy’ which the victorious proletariat ‘cannot avoid having to lop off at once’.132

For a Marxist Party, electoral activity was, at best, a necessary tactical evil and a marginal side of the Party’s over-all activity. The leadership remained adamant, however, that ‘we have as our aim a firm Parliamentary majority… using Parliament to legislate for the people, and not for the monopolists.’133 This, as Pollitt and Dutt’s response to the ‘class against class’ perspective of the late 1920s made clear, was not an entirely new position for the Party. Noreen Branson suggested that the change had

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126 The British Road to Socialism (London, 1951), 12-14.
128 Max Morris, interview, 16 March 1998.
129 Lenin Left Wing Communism an Infantile Disorder, 77-88.
130 Lenin, The State and Revolution, 15.
131 Marx, The Civil War in France, 66-86.
132 Engels, ibid. 17.
come about ‘over the previous 15 years’ between 1935 and 1950. Over this period, continued Branson, ‘the Party’s views about the way forward had greatly changed...in its programme ‘For Soviet Britain’ adopted in 1935, it had been assumed that, if a socialist society was to come about, the existing Parliamentary structure would have to be abolished and replaced by workers’ councils or soviets. Similarly, John Callaghan characterised this ‘new found Parliamentary reformism’ as a relatively abrupt turn. He went on to say that the new strategy had emerged from ‘Stalin and stealth rather than Lenin and revolution’ and commented, ‘Stalin had prodded the Party to adopt the British Road to Socialism...Dutt and company had simply been directed to give the appearance of democrats. Callaghan, however, underestimated, both the degree to which this leadership was committed to a parliamentary road in the 1950s and the extent to which the strategy had, in reality, been significant for a number of years.

Since 1928, the Party’s emphasis on Parliament had implied something more than a tactic ‘to reduce it to absurdity while ostensibly defending it’. The electoral strategy had been developing steadily since 1928 and, when the Party finally sloughed off its withering commitment to revolution in 1951, emerged as an already fully formed strategy. It was not the abrupt turn characterised by Callaghan and Branson, but was part of a developing process which represented a long-term retreat from revolutionary Bolshevism throughout world Communism. Pollitt and Dutt, in their statement against the British leadership following Stalin’s ‘class against class’ thesis, proclaimed a left-sounding strategy which called for the withdrawal of support for ‘a second reformist Labour Government’ in subsequent general elections. The CPGB had, until ‘class against class’, followed Lenin’s strategy of participation in Parliament, so that ‘the majority will be disappointed in their leaders and begin to support communism’. According to Pollitt and Dutt, by 1928, British workers were already sufficiently disappointed ‘in consequence of the experience of the Labour Government and the General Strike and repeated exposure of the entire reformist leadership’ and, furthermore, ‘in consequence of the...increasing mass influence of the Communist Party’. The situation since 1924 had ‘basically changed’ and the pair, echoing Stalin’s...
rhetoric, called for a 'direct fight against the Labour Party leadership'. This confrontation, however, was to be fought at the ballot-box where 'the open fight between the Communist Party and the Labour Party leadership' would involve 'placing Communist candidates against the nationally prominent Labour Party leaders'. The new strategy, in which 'the entire propaganda and press of the Party should focus working class attention on these fights' consisted of placing a 'selected number of candidates in the field...on the election programme of the Communist Party'. At the 1929 election, Pollitt stood against Ramsey MacDonald in Seaham Harbour. Later, Pollitt stood in a by-election in Clay Cross, Derbyshire in 1933 and in the Rhondda at the General Election in 1935. The contradiction between parliamentary and revolutionary means was emphasised in Clay Cross, when Pollitt, 'charged with wanting violence...replied "I don't want you to get rifles, I want you to get trade union cards"'.

By the late 1940s, the emphasis on a parliamentary road to socialism was beginning to correspond conveniently with the rise of Stalinism in countries under the Soviet sphere of influence. As Pollitt wrote in Looking Ahead, 'in a number of countries where popular democracies have been established, a new road to Socialism has opened before the People'. In 1955, Pollitt reassured the Labour movement, 'that the Communist Party considers that, in British conditions, this battle of democracy can be won by democratic means'. John Mahon, in a pamphlet published in 1955, wrote that the role of 'the Communist Party which is the advanced section of the working class...works to develop a united movement of the people to elect a Parliament and a Government which will...take all the measures necessary to make Socialism possible.'

John Callaghan's suggestion that the CPGB leadership 'had simply been directed to give the appearance of democrats' is also brought into question as the following notes towards a report from a Party 'Electoral Commission' suggest. The notes related to the 'Executive Council Resolution on Electoral Activity', discussed in September 1953, and were probably Pollitt's.

EC dissatisfied slow growth and stagnation Party But no aspect so unsatisfactory as Electoral. Party existed 33 years – advanced many respects... But no voice today in H of C. – smaller no of Councillors.

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142 Ibid., 145.
143 Ibid.
144 Ibid., 150.
146 Pollitt, Looking Ahead, 90.
149 Callaghan, Rajani Palme Dutt, 242 and 244.
British Road quotes. If these mean anything – that we must be in Parliament. Discussed many time next step re Programme. Shd. have led to big advance our electoral work...our work last Local Elns. at lowest possible ebb...Impossible to think of any adv. into Parliament without big development local elections activity. If can't win Council seats – never win Parliamentary.\textsuperscript{150}

The notes stated the importance of elections, 'Don't win because don't regard Elns, as vital as T.U.' and concluded, saying 'In the end the vote that counts ...cannot allow to go on'.\textsuperscript{151} The resulting resolution stated, 'our electoral position is in sharp contrast with the general position of the Party...of its influence in the Labour Movement, as well as among the general public and the extension of its mass activity and organisation.'\textsuperscript{152} Although this represented an optimistic assessment, if the leadership believed it to be correct, it called into question the wisdom of its electoral strategy. Finally, if, as Callaghan implied, the British leadership were reluctant about Stalin's reformist instruction, it is not clear why they did not allow it to pass away with the rest of him in 1953. Following Stalin's death, the Party intensified its focus upon elections. The Organisation Department saw its function as 'providing assistance and guidance to districts and branches in campaigns – particularly during elections.'\textsuperscript{153} The Party sold out of the first edition of the pamphlet Win the Local Councils and, in 1954, issued a statement entitled 'The Boundary Commission's proposals for altering Parliamentary Constituencies'.\textsuperscript{154} In a speech to the 24\textsuperscript{th} Congress, Pollitt concluded that the Party must 'develop still further the basic principle contained in the British Road to Socialism.'\textsuperscript{155}

Many members felt at ease with the parliamentary strategy. Morris Schaer, after suggesting that The British Road to Socialism 'was our get out' went on to say that it demonstrated that 'we were...pursuing socialism in this country in the English way.'\textsuperscript{156} Similarly, Stan Turner was asked if The British Road to Socialism provided an easier argument than the one about revolution, and replied 'I don't think we ever articulated about the revolution...we never spoke about it'.\textsuperscript{157} Some members, however, were concerned at the Party's move towards electoralism, demanding that 'the Executive

\textsuperscript{150} Notes towards 'Report of Electoral Commission' [19-20 September 1953], Manchester, CP/Cent/EC/03/06. 'H Pollitt' is underlined at end.
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{152} 'Executive Committee Resolution on Electoral Activity' (1953), Manchester, CP/Cent/EC/03/06.
\textsuperscript{153} 'Departments at the Party Centre', Report of Executive Committee to 24\textsuperscript{th} National Congress, 11.
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid., 11, 12, 19.
\textsuperscript{155} H. Pollitt, 'Speech to Closed Session of the 24\textsuperscript{th} Congress of the CPGB' (April 1956), Manchester, CP/Cent/Cong/09/09.
\textsuperscript{156} Morris Schaer, interview, 9 July 1997.
\textsuperscript{157} Stan Turner, interview, 9 July 1997.
Committee must be firm in its attitude and not allow candidates to go forward merely because it has become a tradition for the Party to put up a candidate in a certain ward receiving the same few or even a declining number of votes.  

This chapter has demonstrated that some of the worst practices of Stalinism were supported by British Communism. The influence of Stalinism, however, was complex and operated on a number of levels. Although members felt bound to defend the Soviet Union, for much of their lives, they remained only dimly aware of what was going there. It is not clear whether Stalinism, with its impatience about ideas and its incongruous contradictions between abstract notions about determinism in historical development and applied voluntarism can be characterised as an ideology at all. Perhaps, more accurately, it was a counter-ideology, utilising Marxism as a theoretical justification for the crudest utilitarianism in which almost any means were justified by the proposed ends. This counter-ideology had a determining effect upon the political consciousness of British socialists who had sought expression for their principles within the Party. This created a particular kind of political consciousness where, as Raphael Samuel said 'the writ of the Political Committee went unchallenged' and where, as he continued, Party meetings were 'not a forum for debate, but...a kind of refuge from politics itself.  

Some members seized upon the ideas within the British Road to Socialism as a less challenging argument with work colleagues and others outside the Party. The move from revolutionary Party to one of reformist opposition, however, began a process whereby the basis of the Party's existence, the self-emancipation of the working class, ultimately disappeared. Once this process had begun, the Party's decline as a Marxist organisation was assured. It was no accident that all the formations which emerged from the splits of the 1960s and 1970s, were attempts to recapture this revolutionary heritage from its relentless eclipse by 'popular front' reformism. As Mike Power, a 'member for 32 years' said, 'we weren't really a revolutionary party at all...we had the rhetoric...we were part of the anti-Tory movement'.  

In a statement reinforcing Max Morris's earlier observation, Power also said of Party electoral work that 'I now look back on [it] as a complete waste of time'. The question about the decline of the CPGB remains, however; was it caused by the malign influence of the Soviet Union or by its own internal contradictions? Both, as discussed

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158 Prestwich Branch, 'Resolution to 23rd Congress CPGB' (April 1954), Manchester, CP/Cent/Cong/08/05.
159 Samuel 'The Lost World of British Communism, Part One', 13 and 65.
160 M. Power in Cohen, Children of the Revolution, 177.
161 Ibid.
above, were the result of Stalinism. The Party vowed to de-Stalinise following the Khruschev revelations, a process through which it promised to put political distance between itself and the Soviet Union. The next chapter looks at how the Party responded to Khruschev's secret speech in 1956 and how it failed to seize this critical moment to reconstruct itself as the representative of British Marxism. The chapter charts the intriguing exposure of the speech in Britain and how attempts were made to minimise its impact and then its importance.
Chapter 3
1956: Revelation, Counter-Revolution and the Response of British Communism

the principle editorial task of the Daily Worker in the days of the cold war...was the need to defend the Soviet “line”.¹

This chapter analyses the events of 1956 and their immediate impact upon the British Party. The chapter concentrates upon the leadership’s response to Khruschev’s secret speech and its attempts to deal with its implications. The emergence of an opposition within the CPGB is dealt with in the two subsequent chapters. The invasion of Hungary by Soviet forces at the end of 1956 accelerated the development of anti-leadership, anti-Soviet feeling amongst some members. In terms of the growth of an oppositionist current within the CPGB, the secret speech and Hungary were two events which were not only linked, with coincidental ill fortune, by their chronology, but became linked within the minds of many Communists as proof of the malign nature of Stalinism. For some members, Hungary was ‘the last straw’ in the sense that it finally broke the back of residual Party loyalty.² For others, it brought them into opposition with their leadership for the first time although they did not leave the Party.³ Still others either ‘rallied around the Party’ over Hungary - believing the Soviet invasion to be defending socialism against counter-revolution - or remained loyal, largely because of their need to remain within what they perceived as the hegemonic organisation of British socialism.⁴

As discussed in the previous chapter, the events of 1956 should be seen within the context of the long-term decline of British Communism. This should not suggest that the events themselves and the way members received news of them, was not as ‘devastating’ as Max Morris suggested.⁵

Within the context of the Party’s long-term decline, the year began relatively well. Membership had fallen from 38,853 in 1950 to 32,627 by 1955, but at the beginning of 1956, this decline showed signs of levelling off.⁶ A slight rise to

² E.P. Thompson to Howard [Hill], (9 November 1956), Manchester, CP/Org/18/04.
⁵ Max Morris, interview, 16 March 1998.
33, 236 in March 1956 might even have provided grounds for optimism.\(^7\) Sales of the *Daily Worker*, however, fell from 67,524 per day in 1955 to 62,547 in 1956. For the first time since before 1950, average sales per member dropped below two, possibly suggesting a fall in membership activity.\(^8\) Allen Hutt, when discussing circulation problems, diagnosed that 'the main problems are within the Party and will need to be resolved by the efforts of the Party leadership'.\(^9\) He also noted 'the weakness of Party branch life and the lack of collective work' and commented on the 'sectarianism which isolates comrades from the mass of workers'.\(^10\)

Hutt's observations imply that the Party lacked the confidence it would require to face the problems generated by 1956. It was an eventful year. Sandwiched between the twin body blows of Khruschev's speech and the Soviet invasion of Hungary, were calls for increased democratisation in Poland. This, despite the deaths of several hundred protesters in June, could have been presented as evidence of a new spirit of compromise by Moscow when, in October, the 'reformer' Gomulka was drafted in.\(^11\) As well as this, there was the accession to power of Gamal Nasser in Egypt, the subsequent nationalising of the Suez Canal and the exposure of Britain and France's true world status as they were forced into humiliating withdrawal in December.

For British Communists, the news that Khruschev had delivered a speech denouncing Stalin, seeped slowly through a wall of obfuscation between February and its publication in the *Observer* in June.\(^12\) The Party held its own closed session at its 24\(^{\text{th}}\) Congress in April. Delegates were aware of the nature of Khruschev's speech following the release of a copy of *Soviet News*, which reprinted an editorial from *Pravda*, addressing the content of the speech.\(^13\) Details of how the British Party first heard news of the speech from Moscow, tried to repress it, and finally, discussed it openly, are set out below. As John Saville wrote, 'the lid was certainly intended to be kept tightly shut within the British Party'.\(^14\) According to Jean

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\(^{\text{7}}\) A. Hutt, 'Review of Daily Worker Circulation' (22 June 1956), 5, Manchester, CP/Ind/misc/Hutt/2/1.
\(^{\text{8}}\) Ibid.
\(^{\text{9}}\) A. Hutt, 'Letter to Executive Committee' (May 1956), 4-5, Manchester, CP/Ind/misc/Hutt/2/1.
\(^{\text{10}}\) Ibid., 5.
\(^{\text{11}}\) N. Bethel, *Gomulka His Poland and His Communism* (Harmondsworth, 1972) 208-224.
\(^{\text{13}}\) The speech was reprinted in the *New York Times* (5 June 1956) from which the *Observer* took its copy.
\(^{\text{14}}\) 'Why the Cult of the Individual is Alien to the Spirit of Marxism-Leninism' [from *Pravda*] *Soviet News* (29 March 1956) [published by Soviet Embassy].
Pronteau, a member of the Central Committee of the French Party (PCF), the French leadership was equally obstructive. Following the CPSU 20\textsuperscript{th} Congress at a meeting of the French Central Committee, Duclos, the Party's Assistant Secretary General, 'summarised the Congress without revealing anything more than we could have read in \textit{L'Humanité}'.\textsuperscript{15} Pronteau travelled to Poland following this meeting. There, he met a 'leader of the Polish Party' who asked about the discussion of the 'K. report' in the French Central Committee.\textsuperscript{16} Pronteau 'looked at him astounded: "A secret report? What secret report?".' On his return to Paris, he met with Maurice Thorez, the PCF Secretary General, and confronted him about the secret speech. Thorez replied, 'There is no secret report' before going on to explain 'in a pontifical manner: "Anyway just remember one thing. This report doesn't exist ...soon it will never have existed".'\textsuperscript{17}

**Revelation from above**

Khruschev's speech to took place on 24 February 1956. Whether it was a sincere attempt to lay the ghost of the recent past or a cynical political manoeuvre goes beyond the scope of this thesis.\textsuperscript{18} The speech had been due at six o'clock in the evening but arguments between Khruschev and Stalin's remaining supporters meant it was postponed until midnight. Anatole Shub has referred to a 'paradoxical dualism' in Khruschev's speech where 'from start to finish...Stalin's crimes against his Communist associates are vividly spelled out and deplored' while at the same time 'his infinitely greater crimes against the Russian people are applauded in the name of "Socialist construction".'\textsuperscript{19} By directing his criticisms at Stalin, the individual, Khruschev avoided criticising the system he had dominated. The effect of this, wrote Shub, was to reaffirm 'the basic Stalinist policy line...although now it is affirmed in Lenin's name'.\textsuperscript{20} As discussed below, the British leadership adopted a similar tactic.

Khruschev began by quoting from a letter, which Krupskaya had passed to the Central Committee just before the Party's 13\textsuperscript{th} Congress in 1924.\textsuperscript{21} This

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 59.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} The relevant Party archives in Moscow are, even now, subject to limited access.
\textsuperscript{19} A. Shub, 'Introduction' to N. Khruschev, 'The Crimes of the Stalin Era' [Special Report to the 20\textsuperscript{th} Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union], \textit{New Leader}, A. Shub, ed. (New York, 1956), 5, BL: X709/14/36.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
consisted of notes, dictated by Lenin in December 1922 which, according to Krupskaya, he had insisted should be revealed to 'the next Party Congress'. This became known as 'Lenin's Testament' and had been withheld from public gaze since 1924. Quoting Lenin verbatim, Khruschev read out, 'after taking over the position of General Secretary, comrade Stalin accumulated in his hands immeasurable power, and I am not certain whether he will always be able to use this power with the required care'. He continued, 'because of this, I propose that the comrades consider the method by which Stalin would be removed from this position and by which another man would be selected for it'. Khruschev then quoted a letter from Krupskaya to Kamenev from December 1922 in which she complained about Stalin, saying 'during all of these thirty years I have never heard from one comrade one word of rudeness...I am turning to you and to Grigory [Zinoviev] as much closer comrades of Vladimir Illych and I beg you to protect me from rude interference with my private life and from vile invectives and threats'.

In March 1923, shortly before his third and fatal stroke, Lenin wrote to Stalin, 'I ask you therefore, that you weigh carefully whether you are agreeable to retracting your words and apologising or whether you prefer the severance of relations between us'. Although much of this appears trivial, had Lenin's health not deteriorated, his opposition would have been sufficient to remove Stalin from the position into which he had moved. By 1953, Stalin not only embodied the socialist aspirations of Communists, but also had a reputation as a highly moral figure. Morris Schaer recalled that he had been seen as 'a kindly uncle' whilst Willie Gallacher, who had 'experience of him in commissions', still saw him in 1956 as 'a quiet, kindly unassuming comrade'. Khruschev's picture of a spiteful boor upsetting a sick man and his wife was in stark contrast to such perceptions.

Khruschev described Lenin as a leader with 'the ability to induce people to follow him without using compulsion, but rather through the ideological influence on them of the whole collective'. He contrasted this with Stalin who 'discarded the Leninist method...for that of administrative violence, mass repressions and terror'. Khruschev provided lurid details of Stalin's terror, asking in relation even

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22 Ibid., 289.
24 Ibid.
26 Lenin, cited in ibid., 12.
29 Ibid.
to Trotskyists, ‘was it necessary to annihilate such people?’ He later quoted Lenin on capital punishment, saying ‘we were forced to use terror...when strong world powers threw their hordes against us...but as soon as we attained a decisive victory...we gave up the use of the death penalty’. In contrast, said Khruschev, Stalin’s ‘terror was actually directed, not at the remnants of the defeated exploiting classes, but against the honest workers of the Party and of the Soviet State’. He described Stalin as ‘a very distrustful man, sickly suspicious...he could look at a man and say: “Why are your eyes so shifty today?” or “Why are you turning so much today and avoiding to look me directly in the eyes?”’.

Khruschev admitted that Stalin had actively encouraged the NKVD ‘in the application of physical pressure’ and referred to the investigative Judge, Rodos, whom he described as ‘a vile person, with the brain of a bird, and morally completely degenerate’. Rodos told a subsequent investigation about two cases involving Kossier and Chubar and of how, having been informed they were enemies of the people, it was his job ‘to make them confess they are enemies’. Khruschev continued, ‘he would do this through long tortures...receiving detailed instructions from Beria’.

Khruschev questioned the myth of Stalin’s military acumen, contrasting his inactivity just before the German invasion with the role of ‘the Party as a whole, the Soviet Government, our heroic army, its talented leaders and brave soldiers, the whole Soviet Nation...who assured victory in the Great Patriotic War’. This was greeted with ‘tempestuous and prolonged applause’. Khruschev then asked ‘where were the members of the Politburo of the Central Committee? Why did they not assert themselves...in time?’ He answered this, saying that many on the Central Committee had supported Stalin because he was one of the strongest Marxists. He compared him to ‘skeptics and capitulators, Trotskyites, Zinovievites, Bukharinites and Kamanevites’ against whom the ‘leading core of the Party...upheld the great banner of Lenin’. This cohort, in which Khruschev included himself, was led by ‘the guiding force of the Party and the State...Comrade

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30 Ibid., 16-17.
31 Lenin, [At the All Union Central Executive Committee (2 February 1920)] cited in ibid., 25.
32 Ibid., 25.
33 Ibid., 34.
34 Ibid., 35.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid., 43.
37 Ibid., 60.
38 Ibid., 54.
39 Ibid.
Stalin.\textsuperscript{40} Stalin was, therefore, essentially correct, but had begun ‘abusing his power more and more’.\textsuperscript{41} Khruschev thus reduced this system of repression to the slogan, ‘cult of the individual’.

The impact of Khruschev’s speech was slow to materialise in Britain. Members of Cominform were the only foreign delegates at the Congress allowed to see a copy. Access was denied to the British delegation of Pollitt, Dutt and George Matthews. Pollitt claimed that ‘the first and only information I have received about what was said at that session was on March 18 from...Sam Russell’.\textsuperscript{42} He later claimed that, at the time of the speech, ‘I was being conducted round a French letter factory. At my age, I suppose that was a compliment’.\textsuperscript{43} John Saville was certain ‘that leading members of the British Party knew the main facts...by the middle of April at the latest’.\textsuperscript{44} Alison MacLeod claimed that ‘later Pollitt said that he had first heard of the existence of the speech on March 11, which was not true’.\textsuperscript{45} Dennis Ogden, however, the first British member to hear an account of the speech, confirmed that Pollitt’s claim coincided with the timing of Russell’s despatch.\textsuperscript{46} Ogden also felt that Pollitt’s initial ignorance about the speech was genuine. He met him and the other British delegates just after the speech and ‘there was a great sense of bewilderment...Harry said, “I can't understand what’s going on – I wish I did”’.\textsuperscript{47}

Dennis Ogden had learned Russian at Cambridge before leaving after nine months because of his pro-Soviet sympathies. In 1952, after obtaining his degree at Manchester, he went to work at the Daily Worker as a librarian before moving to the foreign desk. At the end of 1955, he went to work at the Foreign Language Press in Moscow. From 1955 to 1959, he worked on a journal called International Affairs, before succeeding Sam Russell as Daily Worker Moscow correspondent; a position he held until 1962. At the Daily Worker, Ogden began to develop doubts about the Soviet Union which, he felt, was typical, saying ‘to say that all Communists supported the Soviet Union unconditionally and unreservedly is not the case.’ Such doubts began in 1951 on a visit to the USSR about which he remarked, ‘it was impossible not to see that there were serious

\begin{footnotes}
\item[40] Ibid.
\item[41] Ibid., 60.
\item[42] H. Pollitt, ‘Speech to Closed Session of the 24\textsuperscript{th} Congress CPGB’ (April 1956), Manchester, CP/Cent/Cong/09/09. Sam Russell; Moscow correspondent, Daily Worker.
\item[44] Saville, ‘The 20\textsuperscript{th} Congress and the British Communist Party’, 2.
\item[45] Macleod, The Death of Uncle Joe, 66.
\item[46] Dennis Ogden, interview, 3 December 1997.
\item[47] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
problems...summed up in the whole question of political discussion, democracy and so on.\textsuperscript{48} Alison Macleod, however, remembered that British Communists visiting the Soviet Union 'went on looking at what was in front of them and not seeing it'.\textsuperscript{49}

Ogden gave an example of the attitude of British Communists towards the Soviet Union. Peter Fryer, who became a leading critic of Stalinism after his experiences in Hungary, also worked at the Daily Worker and, in the early 1950s was, in relation to Party matters, according to Ogden, 'more Catholic than the Pope'.\textsuperscript{50} Fryer approached Ogden, who had been reading a copy of Pravda, and remarked, 'One day the Daily Worker will look like that' to which Ogden replied, 'Peter, you must be mad'. During this period, Ogden had contact with visiting Soviet artistes and musicians, such as David Oistrach and ballerina, Raisa Stoychova. The discussions with these people were frank and they would say, 'Don't have any illusions, we have serious problems...they would talk mainly about living standards, housing, food and consumer goods'.\textsuperscript{51} In Moscow, he quickly became aware that 'one was in a society which really had terrible problems...among the people in the publishing house, at least half a dozen had recently come back from prison camps'.\textsuperscript{52}

Ogden is 'the only remaining Brit who heard a reading of that speech'. He described how, along with colleague, John Gibbons, he was invited to a special meeting of the Publishing House Branch of the Soviet Communist Party by chief editor, Vladimir Pavlov, on the first Friday in March, about two weeks after the speech. Pavlov had been Stalin's translator at Yalta and Potsdam and 'if you see photos...you see a rather slight figure in an overcoat, many sizes too big, standing or sitting very close to Stalin...that is Pavlov'. Ogden recalled that, although 'Moscow was full of talk and rumour...we never dreamt what it was going to be...we were told not to take notes'.\textsuperscript{53} At the meeting, first Pavlov, then 'a chap called Misha' read out the speech, verbatim, over a period of nearly four hours. Ogden recalled that 'Pavlov read the whole thing in a rather detached way but Misha read it with feeling...he was absolutely delighted that this was confirming something he'd known'. Ogden estimated that there were about 200 people in the hall and

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{49} Alison Macleod, interview, 15 October 1997.
\textsuperscript{50} Dennis Ogden, interview, 3 November 1997.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
recalled that 'one third were absolutely stunned, just silent...one third actually wept and the other third rejoiced'.

Ogden described how he informed Sam Russell of the details. Asked if Russell was at the meeting, he replied, 'No Christ no! Nobody told Sam anything'. Ogden typed out a summary and 'on the Saturday I gave it to Sam'. Russell spent time attempting to confirm the story and eventually despatched it to the Daily Worker on 18 March, about a week later. Alison MacLeod recalled that Malcolm MacEwen got hold of the first page as soon as it had been typed and 'rushed through the office waving it and crying: “Look what Sam’s sending over!” Campbell snatched the page from him and told him to shut up'. It was Russell's version which the British leadership saw. Another version was smuggled out of the Soviet Union by Reuters news agency. Dennis Ogden guessed that this version 'was deliberately leaked because it was given to him by a translator that Reuters employed'. The KGB vetted such people and 'the fact that he gave it to Reuter ... implies that he was told to'. This, however, left the Reuters correspondent with the problem of despatching it; 'bourgeois correspondents were subject to censorship and...the censors would simply have vetoed it'. This correspondent eventually sent it to the USA via Helsinki, whilst the Daily Worker ‘was getting dribs and drabs...bits...and they didn’t know what to do'.

Confused reactions

During the open sessions of the CPSU Congress, Mikoyan had referred to the 'cult of the individual'. As early as February 1956, George Matthews, in an article based on these sessions, took the opportunity to emphasise that criticisms of the Stalin era should not wipe out everything from the past. Matthews had not seen Khruschev's speech but his report set a pattern for the British leadership which persistently contextualised Stalin's 'mistakes' in terms of 'his positive services to the Soviet Union and the cause of Socialism'. On Wednesday 29 February, the Daily Worker invited readers to submit letters arising from the 20th Congress. Malcolm MacEwen, who was responsible for 'Readers Forum',

54 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
56 MacLeod, The Death of Uncle Joe, 69.
57 Dennis Ogden, interview, 3 November 1997.
58 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
61 Daily Worker, (29 February 1956).
recalled how during this period before members knew the details of the secret speech, 'letters on Stalin flooded into the Daily Worker, and I had the utmost difficulty...getting them published'.\(^{62}\) One of the first of these letters came from S.A. Edmonds who asked, 'as Marxists should we accept everything that happens in the Soviet Union uncritically "as the best of all possible worlds"?'\(^{63}\) As early as 12 March, however, editor J.R. Campbell proposed a guillotine on 'questions connected with the "cult of the individual"," as they had 'been dealt with and the letters are tending to be repetitive...we now invite letters dealing with the coming Congress of the CP in this country'.\(^{64}\)

The Daily Worker published a small piece on 17 March headlined 'Stalin: a strange story' and on the following Monday carried the headline, 'The Khrushov [sic] Speech'.\(^{65}\) This referred directly to 'the report given by the First Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party...to a special private session of the Congress on the cult of the individual and its consequences'.\(^{66}\) It talked of 'the mistakes of Stalin' following the 17\(^{th}\) Congress of the CPSU, with the apparently legitimate objective of 'anti-Trotskyism', an epithet barely used by Khruschev.\(^{67}\) In the same issue, the paper published an editorial emphasising the enormous economic advances in the Soviet Union which, 'since Tsarist times' when it had been amongst the poorest countries, had brought it to 'second in the list'.\(^{68}\) Following the news that there had been a speech by Khruschev, Malcolm MacEwen said that 'the Readers Forum had to be re-opened...and the flood of letters became a torrent'.\(^{69}\)

Campbell met the Daily Worker staff on Friday 23 March to explain his views on the speech.\(^{70}\) Staff at the paper were a close-knit group. Alison Macleod recalled, 'we were all chummy...in the same boat...living on a very small salary...bringing out the paper on a shoestring and there was great camaraderie.'\(^{71}\) The day after the secret speech had been leaked in Bonn, the Hungarian Government announced the rehabilitation of former Party Secretary, Lazlo Rajk, who had been shot in 1948. At Campbell's meeting, MacEwen referred to Rajk and proposed that the Daily Worker publish an article on 'judicial murder'.\(^{72}\) Campbell overruled this,
with one columnist, Walter Holmes, dismissing ‘the idea with “who the hell cares about Rajk?”’. Campbell admitted that ‘we defended the indefensible…but we also defended the Socialist achievements’. Alison Macleod recalled that ‘Phil Bolsover was incensed because Pollitt was still making speeches about Stalin’s “mistakes”,…Phil said “Mass murder is not just a mistake.”

Discussion continued throughout Party press, up to and beyond the Party’s 24th Congress at the end of March. Two letters from Felicity Crump and J. McD. were typical of this correspondence. Both appeared the day after the Daily Worker published ‘The Khrushchov Speech’. Felicity Crump complained that ‘In Britain...the Soviet Union is always right, even in detail, and if it proves to have made a mistake it is not our place to say so until afterwards because it is “perfectly capable of correcting any mistakes it may make”.’ J. McD. wrote that ‘the errors of the past...are directly attributable to the slavish adherence to a policy of not criticising anything in the Soviet Union – in face of the facts’. Two days later, a letter signed by four members called for a ‘full debate and condemnation of Stalin’s murder of innocents’. The next week Bridjit [sic] and Christopher Hill identified a tendency within Communism to put ‘loyalty to Party before loyalty to Socialism’. J. St. John continued this theme, writing of ‘Communists throughout the world [who] either shut their minds to things which were unpleasant or, whatever they thought, kept silent’.

At the time, according to John Hostettler, ‘many Party members continued to believe the speech had been rigged in some way’. Ralph Russell said that many ‘took the line that it had been an unreliable text’. Morris Schaer recalled members blaming ‘the capitalist press’ for conducting ‘a propaganda exercise’. Schaer added, ‘we tried to justify it, because if we didn’t justify it, we were lost …so you’d try and find ways round it’. Max Morris recalled ‘greater and greater anxiety’ on the Executive Committee, ‘it was pretty clear…that these leaks were

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73 Ibid.
74 Macleod, The Death of Uncle Joe, 71.
75 Ibid., 72.
76 Nothing of the speech itself was in this report.
77 F. Crump to Daily Worker (20 March 1956).
78 J. McD., ibid.
79 J. Bradley, V. Bradley, J.L. Redding, M. Redding to Daily Worker (22 March 1956).
80 B. and C. Hill to Daily Worker (27 March 1956).
81 J. St. John to Daily Worker (27 March 1956).
84 Morris Schaer, interview, 9 July 1997.
85 Ibid.
authentic'. 66 Morris admitted that ‘at first it was all denied. Even in our own Exec. it was all denied’. 67 Ralph Russell speculated that the leadership may have ‘hoped that Khruschev might be out before the knowledge about the speech really gained any head of steam’. 68

The Executive Committee met on 9 and 10 March, the weekend before Pollitt claimed to have first heard about the secret speech. The meeting drafted a resolution on the 20th Congress, confirming that many within the leadership had only a hazy idea about the detail of the speech, but were, nevertheless, aware of its existence as well as its theme. 69 The resolution welcomed ‘the decisions of the 20th Congress as an outstanding contribution to the cause of peace and Socialism’. 70 It gave details of optimistic economic forecasts following the adoption of the sixth five-year plan. The resolution declared that ‘by 1960 industrial production will increase by 65 per cent, consumer goods output by 60 per cent, agricultural output by 70 per cent’. It continued, saying that ‘the seven hour day will be introduced. Real wages will go up by 30 per cent...4,000,000 scientists and technicians will graduate’. 71 Towards the end, however, the resolution said that ‘Past mistakes and weaknesses were frankly and boldly recognised and corrected’ and referred to ‘criticism and self-criticism’. 72 It went on to mention that ‘the re-establishment of collective leadership’ had been ‘warmly endorsed by the Congress’. 73

This emphasis formed the basis of the leadership’s tactics throughout the following week. Its failure to mention Khruschev’s speech during this period is difficult to understand. Much of the anger expressed by members throughout 1956 focussed upon the fact that their leadership knew of things that were going on in the Soviet Union about which they had kept silent. Roger Simon remembered that members were ‘shocked at the way our leadership handled it...they seemed to keep it quiet as long as they could’. 74 Similarly, Margot Heinemann wrote, ‘if our

66 Max Morris, interview, 16 March 1998.
67 Ibid.
69 ‘Draft Resolution of the Executive Committee of the Communist Party on the 20th Congress of the CPSU’ (10 March 1956), Manchester, CP/Cent/ EC/03/23.
70 Ibid. The word ‘outstanding’ is handwritten [possibly by James Klugmann] and replaces the word ‘important’.
73 Ibid. The prefix ‘re’ before ‘establishment’ was added by hand.
74 Roger Simon, interview, 10 December 1997.
leaders had felt it possible to make at the time...sharply critical statements...some, though not all, of the later divisions, resignations and waste might have been avoided'.

Whilst the leadership appreciated the explosive potential of the secret speech, they do not appear to have calculated for it being so much more volatile once the charge of their own dishonesty was placed alongside it. In the Daily Worker of Monday 12 March, George Matthews in his report of the CPGB Executive Committee meeting did not mention the secret speech. Neither did Pollitt in a speech at Friends Meeting House in London where he applauded the 'increase in technicians and scientists' in the Soviet Union and, whilst mentioning the cult of the individual, did not refer directly to the secret speech. Neither did Campbell who, following his 'guillotine' the previous Monday, wrote on Thursday of that week that most of the letters arriving at the paper were 'concerned with “the cult of the individual” ' rather than with the 'tremendous prospects which the congress has opened not only to the people of the Soviet Union but throughout the world.'

The 24th Congress of the CPGB

This Congress took place at Battersea Town Hall between 30 March and 2 April 1956 and was notable for its own 'Closed Session' from which press and observers were excluded. This was on Sunday 1 April, but before this, Khruschev's speech was barely mentioned. Pollitt's political report concentrated on the issues of 'Peace' and the 'Fight against the Tory attacks'. He outlined the issues over which the CPGB should take a lead in the struggle against the government and called for an 'immediate programme...to defeat the Tory offensive'. In spite of the 'rising mass struggle which is developing', Pollitt, nevertheless, referred to the Party's decline, saying that in 1954, 'it was stated that the entire Party and every leading comrade would be judged by the efforts made to overcome the decline in

96 G. Matthews, Daily Worker (12 March 1956).
97 H. Pollitt, 'Speech at Friends Meeting House' [reported], Daily Worker (13 March 1956).
98 J.R. Campbell, Daily Worker (15 March 1956).
100 Ibid., 14.
Party membership and Daily Worker sales. Similarly, John Gollan's reply to the discussion did not refer to Khruschev's speech.

Copies of Soviet News were circulating around the congress, having been issued the day before its opening. The article, reprinted from Pravda, included a transcript of The resolution of the 20th Party Congress on the report of the central committee of the Soviet Union. Alongside Marx, Engels and Lenin, the resolution cited leading Menshevik, Plekhanov's, condemnation of attempts at 'personal exaltation'. It accused Stalin of encouraging such 'personal exaltation ...even resorting to self-glorification'. The resolution talked about 'eliminating the vestiges and survivals of the cult of the individual from our life' and can have left little doubt in the minds of delegates about the new regime's attitude to its predecessor. At the Congress, Maurice Cornforth referred to the article, saying pointedly, 'to read Pravda on the cult of the individual, one wouldn't think that Pravda itself was the main vehicle of that cult'.

On the Saturday of the Congress, the CPGB's weekly journal, World News, published an extract from Togliatti's statement on Khruschev's speech to the Italian Communist Party Central Committee. Ralph Russell said that, once he began hearing rumours about the speech, he 'phoned up George Matthews' to try and persuade him to publish Togliatti's statement. The Daily Worker had published some reports from Italy in March and, Russell said, Togliatti 'was much more forthcoming than anyone had been'. George Matthews 'agreed to publish it as a supplement to World News...he never agreed very readily'. Togliatti's report was, according to John Saville, 'more detailed and much more sophisticated than George Matthews' account' and 'did much to encourage speculation and discussion'.

At the closed session, Pollitt claimed that on 18 March, when they spoke about the speech, Sam Russell had 'stated that his information was confidential

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101 Ibid., 22.
102 J. Gollan, The People Will Decide, 30-38.
103 'Why the Cult of the Individual is Alien to the Spirit of Marxism-Leninism', Soviet News.
104 Ibid., 1
105 Ibid., 1-2.
106 Ibid., 1-2.
107 Ibid. 3.
108 M. Cornforth, 'Speech to Closed Session of 24th Congress CPGB' (1 April 1956), no.5, Manchester, CP/Cent/Cong/09/09.
and under no circumstances had to be published'. This was more than a week after Dennis Ogden had heard the speech on the first Friday in March. Pollitt, however, emphasised his ignorance, reminding delegates that 'the Communist International was dissolved in 1942 and no facilities for connections between Communist Parties existed'. He reminded delegates that their 'own closed session ...should not be given any outside publicity'. Following a summary of Khruschev's speech, he asked 'What lessons have we to draw from this re-assessment of Stalin?'. He stressed that 'we have to be strong and resolute...and defeat the efforts of the capitalists and elements like Gaitskell, who seek to exploit the situation in their campaign against Communism'. Pollitt asked delegates to avoid underestimating 'the confusion and doubt about the policy of the CPSU and of our own Party'. He also warned against refusing 'to face it or to understand why it has taken place, and...why it has been necessary to make this new assessment of Stalin's role'. Pollitt mitigated this, however, warning the Party against going 'to the other extreme' and not recognising 'the positive contribution which Stalin has made to the developments in the Soviet Union'.

Two themes dominated the leadership's arguments at the congress and throughout 1956. One was to refer consistently to the Soviet Union's industrialisation in terms of 'socialist advance'. The other was to justify Stalin's 'mistakes' in terms of the historical circumstances under which he had been forced to operate. Dutt, for example, just a month before his notorious 'spots on the sun' blunder in Labour Monthly, suggested that Stalin's abuses were 'perfectly understandable' due to the fact that he had 'been brought up in a harsh school, a school of revolutionary struggle', a 'training' which apparently led him 'to see enemies everywhere'. He also talked of 'the direction of socialism' pitched against 'capitalist critics' and echoed Pollitt as he called for 'just a little humility when we see how much...the Soviet Union has done'. He concluded that 'in the bounds of history that achievement of theirs a hundred times outweighs the costs – however heavy those costs accompanying it'. J.R. Campbell reiterated this, saying 'I want to shout...don't forget that capitalism has vanished...that the Soviet Union...is now the second greatest industrial power, without capitalists and

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113 H. Pollitt, 'Report to Closed Session of the 24th Congress CPGB' (1 April 1956), Manchester, CP/Cent/Cong/09/09. [Subsequent speeches to 'Closed Session': Manchester, CP/Cent/Cong/09/09]. Sam Russell declined to be interviewed.  
114 H. Pollitt, 'Report to Closed Session of 24th Congress'.  
115 R.P. Dutt, 'Speech to Closed Session of 24th Congress', no.8.  
116 Ibid.  
117 Ibid.
Maurice Cornforth agreed that, for all his mistakes, Stalin appeared to have presided over the development of socialism. He began by admitting an 'extraordinary state of affairs, not allowed for in any of the books...that it became possible for the workers' power under which socialism was to be built to be distorted into a quite different sort of dictatorship'. Despite this distortion, however, 'under this system, socialism was built, the first socialist country did become a great world power.' How this contradictory situation had developed was, said Cornforth, 'something which calls for a great deal of new thought as a problem of contemporary history'.

Pollitt dealt with another aspect of the 'deviation from Marxism Leninism', for which he blamed 'Beria and his men'. This was the schism between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia in 1948. Pollitt admitted that 'we too, in the Executive Committee of the British Communist Party, supported the resolutions of the Communist Information Bureau, and have, therefore, to take our share of the blame'. The CPGB leadership, added Pollitt, 'unreservedly withdraw all the statements and books which contained unjust accusations, including the statement made by Harry Pollitt at the London membership meeting in 1948 and, with his full agreement, the book of James Klugmann'.

Pollitt concluded by stressing that, for British Communism, 'The Soviet Union is and remains the greatest Socialist power in the world...[where]...the exploitation of man by man has been abolished'. He asked finally, 'are we ashamed of the fact that we defended the Soviet Union?' and answered 'No – this was the essential basis of the victories of Socialism'. The task for the British Party was to 'develop our theoretical basis – applied in British terms and conditions'.

Discontent, both with the British and Soviet leaderships, did emerge during the debate, however. Speakers expressing unease and criticism were, in general, from the branches and were called alternately with those from the leadership. Derek Robinson, a branch delegate, referred to the 'blind acceptance of theoretical ideas from the Soviet Union'. He complained that 'no discussion is allowed to take place on an extended scale in the Daily Worker' and asked 'do our members

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118 J.R. Campbell, 'Speech to Closed Session', no.12.
119 M. Cornforth, 'Speech to Closed Session', no.5.
120 Ibid.
121 H. Pollitt, 'Report to Closed Session'.
122 Ibid.
123 Ibid.
124 Ibid.
125 Ibid.
126 D. Robinson, 'Speech to Closed Session', no.1.
have to be treated like dummies? Do we have to accept the party line on such problems as the cult of the individual, Tito etc., without adequate explanation, because it is claimed that not enough information is available.'\textsuperscript{127}

Willie Gallacher followed, describing Stalin as 'a quiet unassuming comrade'.\textsuperscript{128} He reassured delegates that 'all of us can make mistakes, some slight, some serious', before uttering the bewildering analogy that 'Comrade Stalin was the steel sprung mattress around which the best comrades gathered'.\textsuperscript{129}

MacFarlane, from Maudsley Hospital Branch, read out a resolution criticising the 'series of excesses which appear to have been committed by Stalin and his associates.'\textsuperscript{130} This resolution made a qualitative shift towards criticism of the British leadership, deploring 'the complete failure of the EC...to admit to the British public the responsibility of the Party for its uncritical support of all aspects of Soviet Policy since 1934'. MacFarlane demanded 'full acceptance by the EC of Khruschev's account of the errors and crimes of Stalin' and attacked its 'failure...to admit its share of responsibility for such gross violations of Communist principles'. The Maudsley resolution expressed 'its most serious dissatisfaction with the Party leadership in its handling of the present critical situation'.\textsuperscript{131}

Khruschev had identified 1934 as the beginning of the Stalinist period of terror following the assassination of Kirov.\textsuperscript{132} Khruschev, however, had omitted to mention the first five-year plan, collectivisation and the exile of most of the early leading Bolsheviks which had all occurred before this date. Peter Fryer nevertheless, agreed with him. After insisting that 'we should base our policies and our conclusions only on facts, as revealed and tested by science', Fryer held rigidly to 'the period between 1934 and 1953' as the years of 'the cult of the individual and the substitution of one-man rule'.\textsuperscript{133} Like Khruschev, Fryer reduced the problem to one of the cult of the individual, ignoring the role of others within the Soviet leadership whose personal position had depended upon their association with Stalin's methods. McLaherty of Glasgow referred to this question of individual versus collective responsibility, saying 'it would have been better had Stalin died at that earlier period because another leader would have been found'.\textsuperscript{134} Andrew Rothstein took up the possibility of Stalin's early death asking, obscurely, that

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid
\textsuperscript{128} W. Gallacher, Speech to Closed Session', no.2.
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{130} McFarlane [Maudsley Hospital Branch], 'Speech to Closed Session', no.3.
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{132} Khruschev, 'The Crimes of the Stalin Era', 21.
\textsuperscript{133} P. Fryer, 'Speech to Closed Session of 24\textsuperscript{th} Congress', no.3a.
\textsuperscript{134} McLaherty, 'Speech to Closed Session', no.10.
'comrades consider this question...from the point of view of the class struggle'.\textsuperscript{135} Pollitt, rounding up the debate on Sunday evening, pledged the British leadership to a continuing commitment 'to defend the Soviet Union at any price'.\textsuperscript{136} Referring to the CPGB leadership's persistent support for Stalin, Pollitt posed the, presumably rhetorical, question to delegates, asking 'in such a situation what would you have done?'\textsuperscript{137}

\textbf{After the 24\textsuperscript{th} Congress}

The \textit{Daily Worker} published a transcript of Pollitt's opening speech on the day before the closed session.\textsuperscript{138} This did not engage with the secret speech, but talked of 'the amazing new perspectives now opening up for the Soviet people'.\textsuperscript{139} Peter Zinkin wrote a report on the following Monday, entitled 'Frank Criticism is Congress Keynote'.\textsuperscript{140} Peter Fryer was more concerned with reporting Gollan's standing ovation, as he called 'for unity in action with Labour', than the debate about Khruschev's speech.\textsuperscript{141} Although members did not see a copy of the speech until the \textit{Observer} published it on 10 June, Pollitt wrote a long article for \textit{World News} at the end of April and beginning of May.\textsuperscript{142} This could be interpreted as evidence that the leadership was not attempting to repress the speech. It does not, however, explain why they did not publish Russell's report. What seems likely is that the closed session and Pollitt's article represented attempts to forestall the impact of Khruschev's candour upon members. Much of the debate following the Congress, focussed upon the question of the British leadership's honesty, rather than on the broader political questions about Stalinism raised by the speech. H. Silver wrote 'it is not a minor question of whether we did or did not know what was going on in the last twenty years – the entire question of whether British Communists think for themselves, are prepared to discuss and apologise openly and honestly is involved'.\textsuperscript{143}

Again, Pollitt's article began by pointing out that since the Comintern had been dissolved, the British Party had not been a member of Cominform. Like

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{135} A. Rothstein, 'Speech to Closed Session', no.14.
\textsuperscript{136} H. Pollitt, 'Speech to Closed Session', no.21.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{138} H. Pollitt, \textit{Daily Worker} (31 March 1956), 2.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{140} P. Zinkin, 'Frank Criticism is Congress Keynote', \textit{Daily Worker} (2 April 1956).
\textsuperscript{141} P. Fryer, 'Report on Congress Debate', \textit{Daily Worker} (2 April 1956).
\textsuperscript{142} H. Pollitt, 'The 20\textsuperscript{th} Congress of the CPSU and the Role of Stalin', \textit{World News} 3:16 and 18 (21 April and 5 May 1956), 246-248 and 278-280.
\textsuperscript{143} H. Silver to \textit{Daily Worker} (24 April 1956).
\end{flushleft}
Khruschev, he identified 1934 and the CPSU's 17th Congress as the point at which the 'series of purgings and wrongful arrests took place' and when Party rules were 'violated'. Pollitt identified 'the rise of Fascism' and 'capitalist threats and interventions' as part of the reason for Stalin 'placing himself above the Party'. Stalin had, during this period, looked towards 'intensification of the class struggle' and the continuing 'Dictatorship of the Proletariat meant greater and greater dependence on the security forces instead of on the people'. He identified the 'capitalist agent', Beria, as responsible for this who, along with others, 'had wormed their way into the CPSU...to build up unfounded accusations and take measures of persecution and repression against innocent comrades'.

Under the sub-heading, 'Cult of the Individual', Pollitt reassured members that following Stalin's death, 'the Leninist principle of collective leadership has been restored'. The adoption of the sixth five year plan by the CPSU was, according to Pollitt, as important as its reassessment of the role of Stalin. He went on to say 'We are all deeply shocked to learn that many of those presented as traitors were, in fact, devoted Communists, victims of...deliberately organised violations of justice'. Such 'errors and abuses', however, had 'occurred within the framework of profound socialist advance'. Like Khruschev's speech, Pollitt's article was characterised by the 'paradoxical dualism' identified by Shub, as it regretted the attacks on leading Party members whilst ignoring the millions who were executed, starved or imprisoned by Stalin and the people around him. Under the sub-heading 'What Were They Doing?', Pollitt justified their collusion, suggesting that Stalin's 'prestige in the eyes of the people was such, that any inner or open fight...would have divided the people and the nation'. Justifying his and his own leadership's implicit collusion in not protesting against Stalin's 'mistakes', Pollitt declared 'There are enough hostile capitalist forces in the world attacking the USSR without our bringing grist to their mills'. This defiance was mitigated by the claim that 'we have never said that there was nothing wrong with the Soviet Union or claimed it was a paradise'. Pollitt stressed the 'political independence' of the British Party and, in a posture frequently adopted by the leadership throughout 1956, proclaimed that

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145 Ibid. 246-7.
146 Ibid. 247.
147 Ibid.
149 Ibid., 279.
150 Ibid., 280.
we are engaged in the class war...international solidarity is absolutely essential'.  

The CPGB needed to ‘improve our theoretical understanding’, improve ‘Party democracy’ as well as its own ‘collective leadership’. The British leadership, he concluded, had ‘not listened sufficiently sympathetically or carefully to points and criticisms raised’.  

Following Pollitt’s article, beginning with a letter from John Saville, the debate within World News continued virtually unabated until the ‘Special’ 25th Congress in April 1957.  

Much of this is dealt with in the following chapters.

In May, 1956, following Dutt’s ‘spots on the sun’ article in Labour Monthly, the debate took an acrimonious turn. Max Morris recalled ‘terrific anger amongst some members’ about this article, ‘I actually moved on the EC that he be removed from the Political Committee but got no support for that at all’. John Hostettler also recalled that the article had made ‘a lot of people furious. Dutt really put his foot in it there’. Anger over Dutt’s comment forced him to publish a statement apologising for his ‘incidental remarks’. In this, he admitted that ‘A number of letters of criticism have reached me...I should like to take the earliest opportunity of stating that I regard the criticism as justified’.

In the same issue of World News as Saville’s letter, the Executive Committee published a resolution, following its meeting on 13 May. It was at this meeting that the Executive Committee received Pollitt’s resignation as General Secretary ‘on the best medical advice’. John Gollan, the Party’s National Organiser, replaced him. Whilst the medical grounds cited by Pollitt for his resignation were genuine, its timing suggests that recent events and their potential consequences may also have been a factor in the decision. Pollitt was sixty-six and, according to John Mahon, had suffered a haemorrhage behind the eyes in April. He had suffered from ill health since 1953 and in July 1954, was admitted to a Soviet clinic. Ralph Russell, however, felt that ‘Pollitt probably felt unable to

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151 Ibid.  
152 Ibid.  
155 Max Morris, interview, 16 March 1998.  
157 R.P. Dutt, Daily Worker (23 May 1956).  
158 Ibid.  
160 H. Pollitt to Executive Committee CPGB (9 May 1956), Manchester, CP/Cent/EC/03/24.  
162 Ibid., 411.
carry the Party at that stage'. Max Morris said, ‘we all would have preferred Pollitt to continue’, and felt that the secret speech had expedited his retirement. Although this meeting was the first for the new Executive Committee elected at the 24th Congress, there were only seven new members out of a total of 42.

The draft resolution agreed at this meeting was reprinted in its essentials in World News and followed a similar pattern to Pollitt’s article. It talked of ‘amazing economic, social, cultural and political advances...in the USSR, People’s China and the People’s democracies’. The resolution was less sure-footed, however, in its attempt to explain the contradiction between such practices and socialism. The ‘lapses in democratic functioning of the Party...violations of socialist law, and grave injustices to loyal comrades’, whilst they were ‘alien to socialism’, were nevertheless carried out ‘within the framework of gigantic socialist advances’. As with Maurice Cornforth’s congress speech, this resolution suggested that the achievement of socialism had been in spite of, rather than because of, means identified as ‘alien’ to it. The Executive Committee apologised to members for its previous ‘mistaken attacks’ on Yugoslav Communists. It, nevertheless, pronounced itself ‘proud of our long record in the field of international working class solidarity’. The resolution welcomed ‘the fully free atmosphere’ in which discussions about the 20th Congress were taking place, but was concerned about ‘a certain lack of balance’ in which discussions tended to concentrate on the weaknesses revealed at the 20th Congress rather than...the great advances, new perspectives, and new theoretical approaches’. It was ‘wrong to see nothing but errors and abuses’ as this would result in ‘a purely negative attitude’. The lessons the Party should draw from the 20th Congress included ‘steps to improve the theoretical work of our Party from top to bottom’. The resolution outlined ‘three main lines’ for forthcoming discussion.

Regarding the first of these, ‘Problems of Unity’, the leadership committed itself to ‘initiate a discussion on...relations [with] the Labour Party...the Popular Alliance, etc.’. The second heading for discussion was ‘The British Road to Socialism’ over which the Executive Committee admitted, it had ‘not done enough

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164 Max Morris, interview, 16 March 1998.
165 ‘Executive Committee Meeting, 12 and 13 May 1956’, Manchester, CP/Cent/EC/03/24.
166 ‘Draft of EC Resolution: Lessons of the 20th Congress of the CPSU’, 1, Manchester, CP/Cent/EC/03/24.
167 Ibid., 2.
168 Ibid., 2-3.
169 Ibid., 4.
170 Ibid., 5.
to carry the analysis further' and committed itself to 'preparing a new edition'. The third 'line' headed, 'The Communist Party' began by claiming '50,000 members...and 5,000 members of the YCL' and continued by announcing 'a special Commission' on Party democracy. The resolution correctly predicted a 'great wave of struggle...on economic and social issues, a mounting anti-Tory feeling' and urged members to build to make the CPGB a credible alternative to Labour.

‘By hand or by brain’ – a false dichotomy?

Following the 24th Congress, arguments about Stalinism were in danger of being lost within an argument about workers versus intellectuals. Throughout 1956 and 1957, 'intellectuals' were identified as responsible for the splits. This had been a perceived dichotomy throughout the Party's history, its roots going back to the Plebs publications of the early 1920s. John Lewis, for example, wrote in 1922 that 'I don't think I'm altogether up the pole when I suggest that the PLEBS has been much too full of...the intellectual squabbles of very clever cranks' and the 'irrelevancies of brainy specialists who are not doing the spade work and are doing too much thinking'. Lewis described 'these intellectuals...as a lot of conceited asses'. The debate took a serious turn in the 1930s when Freda Utley wrote, 'we have hardly any intellectuals worthy of the name...those in our movement who could be the "revolutionary socialist intelligentsia" are, for the most part, only anxious to show that they are as good as anyone else at "bowing to the spontaneity of the masses"'. The leadership, writing as 'the Politbureau', replied to Utley, admitting that 'no-one will dispute the British contempt for theory which exists in our ranks...including the leadership'. Brian Pearce, when asked if there was an anti-intellectual atmosphere within the Party, replied, 'In the Party generally,

\[^{171}\text{Ibid., 5-6.}\]
\[^{172}\text{Ibid., 6. Allen Hutt put Party membership at 33,236 at the beginning of 1956, 'Review of Daily Worker Circulation' (22 June 1956), 5, Manchester, CP/Ind/misc/Hutt/2/1. Newton put the figure for February 1956 at 33,054.}\]
\[^{173}\text{Draft of EC Resolution: Lessons of the 20th Congress of the CPSU', 7, 1957 was the most strike-ridden year since World War II, with the highest strike rate until 1969-70.}\]
\[^{174}\text{See H. Pollitt, 'The Communist Party and the Labour Party' (London, 1955), 6., 'In the interests of the working class and all workers by hand and brain'.}\]
\[^{175}\text{J. Lewis, Plebs 14:2 (February 1922).}\]
\[^{176}\text{Ibid.}\]
\[^{177}\text{F. Utley, 'Economism Today: The Iskra Period and Ourselves', Communist Review 2:5 (May 1930), 200. MML.}\]
\[^{178}\text{‘The Theoretician of the "Left": Sectarianism and Spontaneity', Communist Review 3:1 (January 1931), 12. MML.}\]
I think there was. A number of delegates at the 24th Congress, referring to their own credentials as 'workers', made the distinction between themselves and 'intellectuals' within the Party.

In 1956, 'A.R.L.' of London began the argument in the press, writing, 'In connection with the recent revelations in the Soviet Union, Harry Pollitt is reported to have drawn attention more than once to a division between intellectual members...and Working Class members'. Lenin's view that, in a revolutionary party, 'all distinctions as between workers and intellectuals...must be effaced', was largely ignored in the subsequent debate. J. Marsh from Bristol wrote that 'The Party is based on the Working Class struggle and a group which is opposed to what is consciously felt by the workers must be incorrect'. Neal Wood felt that, following 'the twenties the "political" activities of the Party intellectuals were curtailed' and identified 'the entrenchment of a Stalinist bureaucracy with its natural suspicion of intellectuals' as being responsible for this. Ralph Russell agreed. When asked to give his views on Harry Pollitt he replied 'I felt for a long time that he was anti-intellectual and anti-theory for that matter'.

This argument had two beneficial effects for the CPGB leadership. As it carried through into the period of the publication of The Reasoner, it diverted discussion about the nature of both Soviet and British Stalinism into a fruitless debate about intellectuals in the Party, as well as the rights and wrongs of the journal's publication. Secondly, it successfully marginalised one group within the Party as trouble makers, whose criticisms of the leadership and of Stalin were characterised as attempts at 'dissolving our Party'. Contrary to this idea that dissatisfaction was the creation of recalcitrant intellectuals, a small piece appeared on the front page of the Daily Worker in November. George Sinfield's article announced the resignations of John Horner, General Secretary of the Fire Brigades Union and Alex Moffatt, District Secretary of the Lothian District of the National Union of Mineworkers. Sinfield said of Horner that 'for six months he had had his doubts and that "Hungary was the culmination"'. Horner spoke later...

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179 Brian Pearce, interview, 1 February 1999.
180 See Sam Taylor [Brierley Pit, Yorkshire], and 'Comrade Wilson' [Surrey], 'Speeches to Closed Session 24th Congress CPGB' no.1 and no.13.
181 A.R.L. to Daily Worker (25 April 1956).
182 Lenin, What is to be Done? 109.
183 J. Marsh to Daily Worker (30 April 1956).
184 N. Wood, Communism and the British Intellectuals, 167.
186 S. Taylor, 'Speech to Closed Session 24th Congress CPGB', no.1.
about how painful the process of leaving was, saying 'People who were leaving the Communist Party – had their lives ruined'.

Many intellectuals joined in the debate, however. Rodney Hilton, for example, asked why it was that 'in the social sciences, much of our discussion has been bedevilled by the imposing of a straitjacket in the form of formulations by Stalin'. E.P. Thompson wrote to James Klugmann as early as March, saying the 'leadership of our Party is opportunist and lacking in socialist principle' and called into question Klugmann's own 'intellectual integrity' regarding his retraction of From Trotsky to Tito. Thompson insisted that in order to 're-establish confidence ...nothing less than an apology to the Party is due' and informed Klugmann that he was 'moving to a position of opposition within the Party'. Thompson's article 'Winter Wheat in Omsk' which appeared in World News at the end of June, was also a significant moment in the debate.

Eric Hobsbawm saw a process developing throughout 1956, which he described as 'a continuum' involving 'virtually everybody on the intellectual side and a good many other people too, trade unionists for instance [who] were dissatisfied.' Such a process, although articulated by people like Thompson and the various correspondents to Party organs, was largely leaderless. Alison MacLeod suggested why dissidence in the Party was not organised, saying, 'Party rules prevented it...it isn't really possible to organise anything if, as soon as you write anything down and start duplicating and circulating it, you're told to stop.'

The nature of this opposition and the way in which the leadership responded to it is the subject of the following two chapters.

By mid-October, events in Poland were reaching a crisis. At the time, these events drew more attention than Hungary. As Nicholas Bethel wrote, 'An announcement on 17 October that Imre Nagy had been readmitted to the Hungarian Communist Party merited only a small newspaper paragraph.' In Warsaw on 19 October, Khruschev met with members of the ruling Polish Communist Party, which restored the formerly imprisoned Wladislaw Gomulka to power.

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189 R. Hilton to Daily Worker (12 April 1956).
190 E.P. Thompson to J Klugmann (22 March 1956), Manchester, CP/Cent/Org/18/04.
191 Ibid., underlining in original.
192 Hobsbawm, interview with Stedman Jones, 19.
193 Bethel, Gomulka, 208.
Revolution from below

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to detail the events in Hungary between October and November 1956. Imre Nagy, towards whom many Hungarian radicals and intellectuals looked for leadership was a moderate reformer, and not the counter-revolutionary of world Communist demonology. Even the 'Petofi circle' of Hungarian young Communists, maligned within Communist literature as counter-revolutionary, was, little more than a dissident discussion group. This did not prevent the British Party from describing 'rebels and students' who had demonstrated in Budapest as 'Formations of counter revolutionaries' and as 'class enemies'. There were demonstrations of unarmed people in Budapest on the evening of 22 October in support of Polish workers and students. They also demanded the formation of a government under Nagy. These demonstrations grew to revolutionary proportions when the police fired into a crowd attempting to storm the radio station. This was the cue for Russian tanks, waiting near the edge of Budapest, to enter the city. They were fought by youths with stones and petrol bombs. By 24 October, Nagy had been installed as Prime Minister with a policy to restore order, but two days later, Budapest workers were forming councils. Nagy's government attempted to contain the situation by granting concessions and asked the Russian troops to leave Hungary.

A period followed in which revolutionary councils governed in parallel with the official government, before Russian troops again entered Budapest on 4 November and took over Hungary. Strikes continued to plague the government, however, now under the control of Moscow's preferred leader, Janos Kadar. By December, this regime, backed by 200,000 Soviet troops, began arresting members of the Central Workers Council of Greater Budapest, the main representative body of the uprising. On 11 December, the regime arrested the entire Council and the revolution was effectively defeated.

The account of Daily Worker journalist Peter Fryer, who was in Hungary from the end of October until the middle of November, described, not only the situation itself, but also the response of the British leadership. By the time he arrived in Hungary, Fryer had already become more sceptical about Communism.

196 Harman, Class Struggles in Eastern Europe, 144-146.
197 'Hungarian Workers Answer' and 'Nagy Promises Reforms', Daily Worker (25 and 26 October 1956).
199 P Fryer, Hungarian Tragedy (London, 1997).
He quoted a fellow journalist who, returning from Eastern Europe, appalled at what he had witnessed, approached Pollitt 'and told him everything that had distressed him. Pollitt replied, "My advice to you is to keep your mouth shut".\textsuperscript{200}

On 28 October, a week after the uprising in Budapest, Fryer was in the town of Magyarovar. On the previous day, Hungarian secret policemen had machine-gunned a peaceful demonstration for 'four minutes'.\textsuperscript{201} J.R. Campbell suppressed Fryer's account of this massacre. Fryer blamed 'those who led the Hungarian Communist Party for eleven years', insisting 'this was no counter-revolution'.\textsuperscript{202} When Fryer came to telephone the despatch to London, however, 'the call was cut off after twenty minutes'. The first ten minutes of the call 'had been taken up by three different people giving me contradictory instructions as to the 'line' I should take. Mick Bennett insisted on giving me a long extract from a resolution of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers Party'.\textsuperscript{203}

The debate within the Party reflected members' confusion about how Communists should characterise the uprising and its suppression. John Warwicker wrote that the 'prevailing fashion' which saw 'the Soviet Army as the villains of the piece is disgusting'.\textsuperscript{204} At the beginning of November, Peter Fryer broke the news that former Daily Worker correspondent, Edith Bone, had been languishing in a Hungarian prison since 1949.\textsuperscript{205} The paper expressed condemnation but denied all knowledge. Two days later, with the paper still referring to the uprising as a counter-revolution, S.M. Dublin called for the Party to 'face the facts' that the Hungarian regime had been 'tyrannical and dishonest' and 'a legacy of Stalinism'.\textsuperscript{206} On 7 November, John Gollan continued to blame 'counter-revolutionary planning' for the uprising.\textsuperscript{207} Two days later, D.N. Pritt, QC, advocated thinking 'quietly a little about Hungary and you will realise that nearly all the information you have heard about it comes from the capitalist press...it is plainly fantastic'.\textsuperscript{208} Pritt complained that many British Communists had been 'nearly had' by the press. Eric Hobsbawm suggested that although the uprising had

\textsuperscript{200} Ibid., 14.
\textsuperscript{201} Ibid., 23.
\textsuperscript{202} Ibid., 27.
\textsuperscript{203} Ibid. Polish United Workers Party (PZPR) was formed from the Polish Workers Party (PPR) and Polish Socialist Party (PPS) which united in 1948 on Moscow's instructions. It formed the basis of the Communist Party of Poland (KPP).
\textsuperscript{204} J. Warwicker to Daily Worker (29 October 1956).
\textsuperscript{205} P. Fryer, Daily Worker (3 November 1956).
\textsuperscript{206} S.M. Dublin to Daily Worker (5 November 1956).
\textsuperscript{207} J. Gollan, 'Hungary – The Choice for Socialists', Daily Worker (7 November 1956).
\textsuperscript{208} D.N. Pritt to Daily Worker (9 November 1956). Pritt, a CPGB 'fellow traveller', was Labour MP for North Hammersmith between 1935 and 1950.
been 'a wide popular movement', its suppression by Soviet troops was, nevertheless 'a tragic necessity'.

At an emergency meeting, the Executive Committee declared that Soviet troops had rescued Communism from the forces of reaction. Malcolm MacEwen, who had been invited to attend, produced a statement from several Daily Worker journalists, condemning 'the imprisonment of Edith Bone in solitary confinement without trial for seven years' and stating that the lack of 'protest from our Party ... involves us in its crimes'. The Executive Committee's response to Hungary is detailed in the following chapters. The crucial meeting on the subject, however, was not until 15 December, when a resolution characterising the first Soviet intervention as a 'mistake' was defeated by 27 votes to seven.

1956 was a wasted opportunity for British Communism. Not only did its concentration on internal problems mean that it 'found it difficult to bring in support around Suez', but it forfeited the opportunity to de-Stalinise itself and create the conditions under which it could have tackled its post-war decline. The Party survived the period and the loss of members largely due to a fortuitous upsurge in industrial militancy during 1957, within which, the Party's strongest quality, its effective intervention into the trade union rank and file, asserted itself. The increased confidence this gave to the leadership, however, may have contributed to the fact that the 'free and open debate we'd been having did close up to some extent' in the period immediately following the 25th Congress of 1957. Many in the Party saw this 'tightening up' as a result of the 'quite rigid' political personality of Gollan. As the following two chapters discuss, however, the return to a more rigid policy may also have been an intuitive impulse by the leadership, which responded to the disorientation of 1956 with a reassertion of familiar structures and hierarchies. Mick Bennett at the 25th Congress, for example, summed up the leadership's position with regard to the 'handful of people who have dropped away', saying 'I don't think we need to waste time worrying about these people'.

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209 E. Hobsbawm to Daily Worker (9 November 1956).
210 'Executive Committee Statement on Hungary' (3 and 4 November 1956), Manchester, CP/Cent/EC/04/01.
211 Signatories included MacEwen, John Gritten, 'Gabriel' (Jimmy Friel, Cartoonist), Cayton (Racing Tipster), Llew Gardner, Leon Griffiths, Sheila Lynd, Manchester, CP/Cent/EC/04/01.
212 'Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting' (15-16 December 1956), Manchester, CP/Cent/EC/04/03.
214 Ibid.
215 Ibid.
216 M. Bennett, 'Speech to 'Special' 25th Congress, CPGB' (20 April 1957), Manchester, CP/Cent/Cong/10/07.
Bennett talked of the 'rebirth of militancy' and how the Party was again 'marching in the vanguard'.\textsuperscript{217} Despite the Party's admissions of its mistakes, its gestures towards de-Stalinisation and the efforts of many who took up a position of opposition in the Party, little changed between the time that Khruschev made his speech and this 25\textsuperscript{th} Congress. The fact that the Party, for whatever reason, was able to reconstitute itself in its previous form, rendered 1956 a lost opportunity. Those who moved into a position of opposition during this period, are the subject of the following two chapters.

\textsuperscript{217} Ibid.
Chapter 4

Managing the Crisis: The leadership and its critics, March 1956 to April 1957

The Party was pathetically, almost criminally slow in absorbing the lessons of the Twentieth Congress.¹

Following the impact of the secret speech, John Hostettler recalled, ‘my impression was that there was a considerable loosening in discipline as far as debate and discussion were concerned... and this continued over the Hungarian situation, although, of course, the Daily Worker gagged Peter Fryer’.² Hostettler continued by referring to 1957, however, saying that ‘after the Special Congress, there was very much a tightening up’. If this impression is correct, it suggests that the period between Khruschev’s speech and the 25th Congress of April 1957 represented an opportunity for those wishing to reform the CPGB. Who these people were, how they went about proposing reform and the leadership’s response to their criticisms is the subject of the next two chapters.

To characterise, as an opposition, the discontent expressed during this period, implies a level of organisation which did not exist. Although occasionally and erratically, the various strands of criticism and dissent looked as if they might coordinate into an organised opposition, the very structure against which they were directed militated against such a development. Alison Macleod said of such potential organisation, ‘the Party rules prevented it’ and, as the editors of The Reasoner discovered, ‘the whole culture of the Party’ viewed ‘duplicating and circulating’ and even private letter writing between members as factional.³ Edward Thompson wrote of the ‘processes of written discussion and sustained theoretical debate’ being ‘clogged or under the editorial censorship of the leadership’.⁴ He articulated a dilemma for the opposition, asking ‘how are we to present a fair challenge at a Conference... if facilities to raise and sustain the arguments ... are denied to us?’.⁵ Those, like Thompson, who were potential leaders of such opposition, moreover, consistently forbore from responsibility for leading an

¹ Dennis Ogden, interview, 3 November 1998
² John Hostettler, interview, 25 June 1997
³ Alison Macleod, interview, 15 October 1997
⁴ E.P. Thompson to Howard [Hill - Yorkshire District Committee] (20 August 1956), Manchester, CP/Cent/Org/18/04.
⁵ Ibid.
organised alternative. As late as March 1957, four months after leaving the CPGB, Thompson continued to protest that he and John Saville were 'not political leaders'. As discussed below, the denial of this responsibility may have had long-term implications for the British left.

There were discernible developments within these oppositional currents. In the months before the Hungarian uprising, they were characterised by confusion and a general commitment to reform from 'within the Party'. Many expressing concern following Khruschev's speech and Hungary, but who nevertheless remained in the Party, shared John Hostettler's view that 'although things had gone wrong, that's what it was, they'd gone wrong and it could be put right'. Eric Hobsbawm said that 'those of us who stayed...were fighting for the same things' as those who left and that whilst he had been 'prepared to get expelled...we still believed...it was more important to stay in the Communist Party than not'. Roger Simon saw himself as 'a dissident member from that time on', feeling that the 'leadership was not critical enough of the Soviet Union and our own structures were too authoritarian'. He nevertheless 'felt it was right to go on belonging to a Party'.

For many, the Soviet invasion of Hungary exacerbated the concern and disillusion engendered by the secret speech. For some, however, the effect was the opposite. John Hostettler recalled, 'although I was full of disquiet about Khruschev's speech, I rallied around the Party about Hungary'. Brian Pearce recalled local reaction to the uprising and was 'shocked at the way in which many people in my branch treated that automatically...it must be fascist or counter-revolutionary'. Ralph Russell's impression was different. When asked if there was more anger over the Soviet invasion than there had been over the secret speech, he replied 'yes – there was'.

Critics expressed themselves in a variety of ways. 'Comrade Connor' from Liverpool, took a clear revolutionary line, declaring at the 1957 Special Congress, 'I believe this revisionism came about because of political degeneration in the Soviet

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7 See E.P. Thompson to J Klugmann (22 March 1956), Manchester, CP/Cent/Org/18/04.
8 John Hostettler, interview, 26 June 1997.
9 Hobsbawm, interview, Stedman Jones, 21.
11 Ibid.
13 Brian Pearce, interview, 1 February 1999.
Union, which led to the development, internationally, of a counter-revolutionary theory now known as Stalinism.\textsuperscript{15} Connor continued, 'internationally this theory led to many working class defeats. In particular the defeat of the Chinese Revolution in 1925.'\textsuperscript{16} This line of opposition drew Trotskyists, such as Gerry Healey, into the argument, whilst some members such as Brian Pearce and Peter Fryer, went on to join Trotskyist organisations. In general, however, the opposition avoided Stephen F. Cohen's 'quintessential historical question' about the 'relationship between Bolshevism and Stalinism' and concentrated upon structural defects within British Communism; focused upon inner party democracy, the role of the leadership and the need for more open discussion.\textsuperscript{17}

The leadership made several positive responses. It ordered a Commission for Inner Party Democracy and a Commission to re-draft The British Road to Socialism.\textsuperscript{18} It also organised a Special Congress at Hammersmith on 19-21 April 1957, specifically on the crisis. In advance of the congress, World News published monthly 'Discussion Supplements' designed as forums for debate about the problems facing the Party.\textsuperscript{19}

The diffuse political focus of the opposition

The leadership and the majority of its critics at this time, did not divide over the question of whether Stalinism was a continuation of revolutionary Bolshevism or whether it represented a fundamental break with such principles. Eric Hobsbawm said about any analysis of Stalinism before 1956, that although 'there were people who took an interest in contemporary Soviet history...there wasn't much chance of dealing with this in public without stepping on somebody's toes, or being stepped on'.\textsuperscript{20} At a 'Socialist Forum' conference, organised in April 1957 by dissident Communists and Trotskyists, ex-Communists remained guarded about the Soviet Union. Others were less coy. Eric Heffer, for example, was reported as saying that 'in order to protect the interests of the bureaucracy in the Soviet Union the Stalinists had been prepared to hold back the class struggle in country after...

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{15} 'Comrade Connor' [Houghton, Liverpool], 'Speech to Special 25\textsuperscript{th} Congress' (21 April 1957), Manchester, CP/Cent/Cong/10/06.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Cohen, Rethinking the Soviet Experience, 38
\item \textsuperscript{18} Details of the Commission on Inner Party Democracy appear below.
\item \textsuperscript{19} 'World News Discussion Supplement', 1 (26 January 1957), 2 (23 February 1957), 3 (23 March 1957), Manchester, CP/Cent/Cong/10/05.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Hobsbawm, interview, Stedman Jones, 19.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
country'. Martin Flannery, an ex-Communist from Sheffield, sounded a more familiar note, saying that 'the economic basis of socialism had been laid in the Soviet Union despite all the bad things that happened'.

The first number of The Reasoner was published in July 1956. Thompson and Saville produced a second issue in September before they were suspended in November after insisting on publishing a third. The first issue called for an analysis of Stalinism 'unless we are to succumb once again to the error which has dogged us for so long...failing to make a Marxist analysis of the developments in Communist movements...and in the socialist countries in particular'. Ralph Russell saw no sign of this, saying 'it would have depended very much on whether such a Marxist analysis would have been accepted by the British Communist Party, but there was never any prospect of that happening'. Saville and Thompson's ideological position remained unclear even following The Reasoner's publication. Saville wrote to Pollitt in September, saying 'I want to get across my passionate conviction in our Party...I feel certain, for example, that the developments in the Soviet Union and the socialist countries are going to provide us with the kind of political framework in which to operate which would enable us to transform the political situation here'.

Although The Reasoner called for an analysis of Stalinism, the debate nevertheless focused, as Thompson colourfully described it, on 'how much seed from Omsk, Tomsk and Irkutsk' had been ploughed into 'British furrows...raising a thin and straggling crop of dogmatism and opportunism'. Thompson framed his arguments throughout this period in essentially parochial terms, focussing on the question of Stalinism's importation into Britain as an alien political culture, rather than assessing whether or not it represented a force for change throughout the world. Thompson betrayed this parochialism as early as March 1956. Writing to Klugmann, he accused the leadership of being 'opportunist...declassed, remote from the working class...contemptuous of theory'. He continued, however, referring to 'the 20th Congress' only in terms of 'the monolithic party in relation to British conditions'. This parochial tendency exposed Thompson to the accusation

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22 M. Flannery, ibid., 82.
26 Thompson, 'Winter Wheat in Omsk', 408.
27 E.P. Thompson to J. Klugmann (22 March 1956), Manchester, CP/Cent/Org/18/04.
from George Matthews that he was veering towards 'a narrow type of nationalism'.

By the time they published *The Reasoner*, Thompson, Saville and their co-authors were beginning to cut dangerously close to the ideological bone, implying that the present problems lay within the creation of the Party itself and related particularly to 1922 when it restructured on the basis of the Comintern's conditions. This located the antecedence of British Stalinism within the Party's acceptance of revolutionary Bolshevism, and remained a feature of *The Reasoner's* polemic. It was an assumption which ignored the counter-revolutionary aspects of Stalinism noted by Connor and, crucially, failed to recognise the historical discontinuity this represented. Although, as discussed above, this was not unusual, from a tactical point of view, it remained problematic. Diagnosing the problem as Leninism was fundamentally different from calling for the Party's rehabilitation from Stalinism and took *The Reasoner* perilously close to challenging the basis of the CPGB's existence. The principles behind this are not in question here but, whereas many members were sympathetic to a polemic which continued Khruschev's condemnation of Stalin, they could not accept that the logical outcome of his speech was to throw out the Leninist baby with the Stalinist bathwater.

The potential perils of this position were illustrated within the Commission on Inner Party Democracy. This Commission split between a minority that wanted thoroughgoing reform of democratic centralism, and a majority which held to the leadership line of no fundamental change. Joe Cheek, a teacher, had originally allied himself with the minority but later supported the 'Majority Report' with reservations. Cheek criticised the majority, saying 'it has not been sufficiently critical of the present application of Democratic Centralism'. He also referred to the 'Minority Report', however, and whilst conceding that much of it was of 'great value', disagreed with subjecting the 'aims and ideals of Communism' to 're-examination', saying that 'Party members should regard these as beyond criticism'. Like Thompson and Saville, the minority had located the problem within Leninism rather than as a result of the victory of Stalinism. This, according to

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30 J. Cheek, 'Joe Cheek has now decided to sign the Majority Report with the following reservations', Report of Commission on Inner Party Democracy to Executive Committee, Manchester, CP/Cent/EC/04/04. When the Reports were first presented, Cheek signed with the minority. By early 1957, he had decided to support the Majority 'with reservations'.
31 Ibid.
Malcolm MacEwen, allowed the full-timers in the majority to succeed 'in detaching ... Joe Cheek from Christopher Hill, Peter Cadogan and myself'. Such an analysis, as Cheek implied, was not one which would lead to the reform of the CPGB, but was a rationale whose trajectory appeared to by-pass the theory and practice of Leninism altogether, would invalidate the Party's foundation and was, therefore, unacceptable even to those who harboured misgivings about the Soviet Union and the British leadership.

Within a Party whose membership had, as Morris Schaer said, accepted Stalin as 'one of the real leaders of world socialism', his role and the system with which he was associated had to be addressed if members were to break with such ideas. Khruschev had sought to exculpate the system by focusing upon the role of the individual. Many Communists remained convinced that the reason for the 'mistakes' was, as Saville said, 'the assumption of personal power by Stalin'. This was close to Khruschev's message that saw 'Stalin's mania for greatness' as the problem and only one step away from Pollitt's reassurance that, following Stalin's death, 'the Leninist principle of collective leadership has been fully restored'.

In their eagerness to scourge the Party of Stalinist phraseology, Thompson and Saville appeared to question principles which, whilst often expressed as monotonous slogans, nevertheless remained fundamental verities for any Marxist. They criticised John Gollan, for example, saying that 'to argue...that "We do not believe (that) the interests of the British working class and people conflict with the interests of the working class and people of other countries"...is to include the complexities of the real world within a platitude'. Whilst Gollan's statement appeared like sloganeering, the message was essentially that of The Communist Manifesto that 'the working men have no country'. Marx and Engels characterised the role of communists saying, 'In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries, they point out and bring to the front the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality'. Years of presenting such ideas as dogma had rendered them virtually meaningless. Rather than rehabilitate the internationalist

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32 MacEwen, 'The Day the Party had to Stop', 31.
33 Morris Schaer, interview, 9 July 1997.
39 Ibid., 38.
principles behind Gollan's 'platitude', however, Thompson and Saville were provoked into appearing to attack the principles themselves.

Occasions when Party members engaged directly with Stalinism were rare. When they did, it was often qualified or all but immediately retracted. Maurice Cornforth, for example, author of such works as *In Defence of Philosophy*, asked 'how it became possible for the workers' power under which socialism was to be built to be distorted into a quite different sort of dictatorship'.\(^3^9\) Cornforth ended his speech, however, with a vindication of the British Party, saying 'we have nothing to be ashamed of in this country'.\(^4^0\) The lack of a critique of Stalinism left dissenting members staring into an ideological vacuum with no choice but to leave the Party or remain wedded to the twin formulæ of *The British Road to Socialism* and unconditional, if marginally more critical, support for the Soviet Union. In May 1956, Thompson, attacking the 'crack-pot religious dogmatism' of the leadership, added 'I suppose we must wait for some Communist Luther'.\(^4^1\) Luther, however, had remained clear that his argument was with Rome and not with the higher authority it claimed to represent. It was never clear to many within the CPGB, whether the critics of the leadership were attacking deviant Stalinism, revolutionary Bolshevism or the fundamental principles from which Marxism had evolved. Some members saw Thompson and Saville as unwitting stalking horses for Trotskyism. Jack Beeching and Jack Lindsay, both of whom had some sympathy for Thompson's overall position, wrote, warning of 'Trotskyites...who use a Marxist or quasi-Marxist analysis to explain, or objectively to defend, capitalism'.\(^4^2\)

The Party had imported its structure, believing that replicating Bolshevik practice would replicate Bolshevik success. The Party failed to recognise the limitations of this rationale but, more crucially, it failed to appreciate the qualitatively different situation following Stalin's victory. Both were the results of flawed and lack of, political analysis, which L. Marks identified as 'the undisputed ...low level of our theoretical understanding'.\(^4^3\) Ralph Russell was similarly critical of the theoretical level, seeing a 'tremendous contrast between the British Party


\(^{4^0}\) M. Cornforth, 'Speech to 24th Congress'.

\(^{4^1}\) E.P. Thompson to Bert Ramelson [Resignation from Yorkshire District Committee] (28 May 1956), Manchester, CP/Cent/Org/18/04.


and the American Party". Brian Pearce agreed, saying "generally speaking, looking back, the level of theory was not particularly brilliant. A great deal was taken on trust". Thompson and Saville wrote, "if we turn to our political appraisal – and compare R.P. Dutt's analysis in...Labour Monthly with the recent statement of Togliatti, it is unfortunately clear that the seriousness of the situation has not been matched by our understanding". The leadership were also aware of such shortcomings, as the Executive Committee said in May 1956, "we need to take steps to improve the theoretical work of our Party from top to bottom". Harry Pollitt agreed, saying that "we have to develop our theoretical basis".

**The consequences of The Reasoner**

The Reasoner was published...in a situation when the democratic processes, and especially the written processes...of our Party were being obstructed by the leadership of our Party.

Members' reactions to The Reasoner and the suspension of its editors were varied. Discussion rarely focused upon the journal's political content, but oriented upon whether members had the right to publish separately and whether the Party had the right to discipline them as a result. This, in itself, represented a victory for the leadership as political discussion became marginalised in favour of a debate about the Party's disciplinary procedures. The Political Committee which met Thompson and Saville on 31 August 1956 said that "such journals would be completely beyond the control of the Party membership...produced by individuals not elected or responsible". Thompson and Saville responded by complaining that discussion about Stalinism had "scarcely even begun in our Party, and it would be

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45 Brian Pearce, interview, 1 February 1999.
46 Thompson and Saville, 'Taking Stock', 4. Togliatti gave an interview to non-Communist journal Nuovi Argomenti in which he 'initiated an attack on the inadequacies of the "secret report" and on the concept of the "personality cult" ' ['The Khrushchev Speech, The PCF and The PCI', Socialist Register 1976, 61]. He said that 'in so far as the attack is limited to denouncing the personal defects of Stalin as the cause of everything, we remain within the compass of the personality cult', cited in I. Birchall Workers Against the Monolith (London, 1974), 107.
48 H. Pollitt, 'Report to Closed Session of 24th Congress CPGB'.
49 E.P. Thompson to Howard (20 August 1956), Manchester, CP/Cent/Org/18/04.
a very serious setback...if it was now curbed or guided into channels decided beforehand by considerations of expediency'.

Sam Taylor, a miner from Barnsley, was clear that The Reasoner constituted 'a breach of discipline', describing it as 'anarchy at the least'. In support, Ken Andrews complained that the 'current organs are inadequate' and that 'it is difficult for new ideas to get a fair hearing'. S. Bloom of Leeds, on the other hand, accused Thompson and Saville of 'unintentionally creating a cult of the individual'. Gerald Marks from London wrote to the Daily Worker in September asking 'how dare the executive committee instruct comrades Thompson and Saville to cease publication' and, talking of the 'high handed impudence' of the 'Popish executive', concluded his letter with 'down with the systematic suppression of conscience'. With J.R. Campbell on holiday, Malcolm MacEwen as features editor replied to Marks. Despite being a leading critic of the leadership and notwithstanding his role within the minority on the Commission on Inner Party Democracy, MacEwen toed the bureaucratic line, reinforcing the impression of ambivalence amongst the opposition. He wrote that 'as the matter you raise is one affecting the internal affairs of the Communist Party...we do not feel it would be helpful for a discussion to be opened in the columns of the paper'.

From elsewhere, the West of England District Committee wrote that it 'deeply regrets' the publication of a 'separate journal' and considered Thompson's and Saville's action 'a departure from Communist principles'. The District Committee asked the EC to 'call upon them to cease publication forthwith'. Solly Kaye, Communist Parliamentary candidate for Stepney, declared 'I cannot for the life of me see how our Party can allow this...how much longer they are going to allow this to go on?' The debate continued within the Party press and through private correspondence. Raphael Samuel, for example, wrote to 'Johnny' [Gollan or Campbell] saying, 'I disagree with much of the tone and argument in the Reasoner', but from the experience of the Oxford branch...the publication...has done much good for the Party. As Thompson and Saville themselves wrote, on

52 S. Taylor to World News 3:44 (3 November 1956), 702.
53 K. Andrews, ibid.
54 S. Bloom to World News 3:45 (10 November 1956), 723.
55 G. Marks to Daily Worker (11 September 1956), Manchester, CP/Cent/Org/19/04.
56 M. MacEwen to G. Marks (17 September 1956), Manchester, CP/Cent/Org/18/05.
57 'Extract from Minutes of West of England DPC' (22 July 1956), Manchester, CP/Cent/Org/18/04.
58 Ibid.
59 S. Kaye to Political Committee, CPGB (20 July 1956), Manchester, CP/Cent/Org/18/04.
60 R. Samuel to Johnny (undated), Manchester, CP/Cent/Org/18/05.
announcing their decision to cease publication, 'the attention concentrated upon the...Reasoner may divert comrades from the general question of securing their basic rights within the Party'.

Thompson recognised 'the weight of the argument that the right of unofficial publication is in doubt' and offered 'to suspend The Reasoner...until the Party Conference' if the leadership agreed to certain conditions. These included the leadership, himself and Saville collaborating on 'a duplicated or printed journal/booklet (not entitled the Reasoner)...debating the question of the right of publication'. Again, the question of the right or otherwise of publication was to take precedence over political arguments about Stalinism and the Soviet Union.

The Yorkshire District Sub-Committee summoned Thompson and Saville on 10 August. The full District Committee met on 18 August and passed a resolution by 21 votes to 19, asking 'Comrades Thompson and Saville to cease the publication of The Reasoner.' Following several meetings, both with their District Committee and with members of the Executive and Political Committees, Gollan wrote to Thompson with an order which 'specifically instructs you not to bring out a third number of "The Reasoner"'. In a letter to Howard Hill, following their suspension, Thompson wrote that 'both decided the right course would be to resign and carry on the journal'. This was largely because 'this Hungary business is the last straw...I don’t see how I, or you, can stay in the Party beyond this coming weekend'.

Surprisingly, the Daily Worker agreed to publish an advertisement for the first issue of The Reasoner, but refused to continue after the first print run was exhausted. Initially, this limited run hindered circulation and, as Saville wrote to bookshops at the time, it 'was sold out within a fortnight of publication'. Initially, The Reasoner was sold through Collets in London and Glasgow, bookshops affiliated to the CPGB, but the leadership quickly intervened to inhibit its sale through such outlets. In August, Iris Walker of Key Books in Birmingham sent

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62 E.P. Thompson to Howard (20 August 1956), Manchester, CP/Cent/Org/18/04.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid.
65 Saville was unable to attend this meeting.
67 J. Saville, Circular to Bookshops (10 August 1956), Manchester, CP/Cent/Org/18/04.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
70 J. Saville, Circular to Bookshops (10 August 1956), Manchester, CP/Cent/Org/18/04.
Saville’s circular letter to James Klugmann, saying ‘I should be interested to know what the attitude of the Centre is, since there has been no information in the blurb’. George Matthews replied, saying ‘we do not think that you should sell this publication as it is not authorised by the Party’. The next day W. Wainwright, ‘Central Propaganda Department’, wrote to bookshops in Belfast, Chatham, Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield and Swindon, with the order from Matthews that ‘this publication is not authorised by the Party’. This prompted J. Field to write to the Daily Worker, asking ‘why does the executive … take it upon itself to act in such an arbitrary, absolutist and antidemocratic manner?’. A Political Committee meeting in September indicated the urgency with which the leadership viewed The Reasoner. Handwritten notes reported Gollan as saying ‘if EC retreats on this issue will be making greatest mistake of its life… we’ll make it worse for them and for intellectual sections. We must get clear on the one thing – which unites Saville and T and Hill and Co.’.

Much of the acrimony centred on an argument about who was responsible for the ‘revisionism’ within the Party. Many members associated the ‘Mr Let-downs, Mr How-could-it-happens, Mr Why-wern’t-we-told and Mr What’s-going-to-happen-nows’ with the intellectuals and particularly with The Reasoner. Whether or not this was the case, critics of the leadership, as Raphael Samuel’s letter to ‘Johnny’ implied, were not always in accord. Peter Fryer, for example, although contributing an article to New Reasoner in 1957, does not seem to have been an uncritical supporter of Thompson and Saville’s original journal. In 1986, Eric Hobsbawm discounted The Reasoner saying, ‘its wrong to focus on the New Reasoner [sic.]… the most massive expression of dissidence was a letter which the Party refused to publish, and which subsequently appeared in Tribune and New Statesman’.

71 I. Walker to J. Klugmann (13 August 1956), Manchester, CP/Cent/Org/18/05.
72 G. Matthews to I. Walker (16 August 1956), Manchester, CP/Cent/Org/18/05.
73 W. Wainwright (17 August 1956), Manchester, CP/Cent/Org/18/05.
74 R. Field to M. MacEwen (17 September 1956), Manchester, CP/Cent/Org/18/05.
75 Handwritten notes [anonymous, undated] Political Committee meeting. Manchester, CP/Cent/Org/18/05.
76 Hackney Town Hall Branch, ‘Have we time for further polemics?’, World News, 3:43 (27 October 1956), 689-690.
77 R. Samuel to Johnny (undated), Manchester, CP/Cent/Org/18/05.
79 Hobsbawm, interview with Stedman Jones, 19.
This letter appeared in *New Statesman* on 1 December 1956. It began, saying that "the following letter was sent to the *Daily Worker* on November 18. As it appears it will not be published there, the signatories would be grateful if you could find space for it". The authors referred to Khruschev’s speech as ‘the exposure of grave crimes and abuses in the USSR’ and talked of Hungary as a ‘revolt of workers and intellectuals’ against the ‘pseudo-Communist bureaucracies’. After claiming that the CPGB had previously based its ‘political analyses on a false presentation of the facts’, however, the letter concluded in a way which again, reinforced an impression of incoherence, saying, ‘not all the signatories agree with everything in this letter, but all are in sufficient sympathy with its general intention to sign with this reservation’.

Hobsbawm’s own inclusion in this emphatic rejection of the Soviet invasion was, in itself, symptomatic of ambivalence. The signatories must have composed their letter before 18 November, when they sent it to the *Daily Worker*. As recently as 9 November, however, Hobsbawm wrote to the *Daily Worker*, identifying a ‘Mindszenty Hungary’ as a potential ‘base for counter-revolution and intervention’ and concluding that although the uprising was ‘a wide popular movement, however misguided’, its suppression was, nevertheless, ‘a tragic necessity’.

Much of the discussion following the secret speech focused upon the two articles Harry Pollitt had published in *World News* on 21 April and 5 May and which are discussed in the previous chapter. One of the first replies came from John Saville, who blamed the Party’s loss of membership on the leadership’s inability to admit mistakes. Saville identified ‘our political honesty as a Party’, the Party’s attitude to the USSR, the political forms of the transition to socialism and the preservation of inner-Party democracy as being aspects of theory and practice requiring discussion.

Ralph Russell said that, as far as the leadership was concerned, ‘the important thing was to...maintain the structure’. Although nominally, Khruschev’s
speech had intended to accelerate an uneven process of de-Stalinisation begun in 1953, the British Party proved reluctant to disengage with old habits. Whilst, as John Hostettler said, the leadership did temporarily make its various forums available to 'criticism and self-criticism', in almost every case, the Party responded to such criticism within the terms of its own bureaucratic structure. John Saville referred to the leadership's response to *The Reasoner*, noting that 'the Political Committee made a wholly constitutional reply to our points; and the publication of *The Reasoner* was considered entirely within the context of Party rules and regulations'. The leadership also reacted to Peter Fryer's claims about the Hungarian uprising, not with political argument, but by denying everything he had reported and expressing support for the invasion. The London District Committee then suspended Fryer following an interview in the *Daily Express*. Describing the District Committee's statement as 'bureaucratic...concerned with form and not content', Fryer went on to characterise it as 'not merely a bureaucratic statement, but a dishonest and inaccurate one'.

Saville and Thompson described the 'shock and turmoil engendered by the revelations'. The intensity of this shock, not only appears to have militated against organisation, but may also have rendered the initial responses of members less articulate than they otherwise might have been. John Saville, following the first issue of *The Reasoner*, described the 'widespread discontent' as 'vague, unformulated, often very emotional'. The debate took place across a range of forums. The Party press, for example, gave space to members within its various letters pages, although Thompson's 'Winter Wheat in Omsk' was the only substantial article published. Eventually published in *World News*, 'Winter Wheat in Omsk' only appeared following a cantankerous exchange between Thompson and the editor, Bert Baker. Thompson set the irascible tone, writing, along with his initial submission of 1500 words, 'I hope that it cannot be said that our Party press prefers to fill up space with third rate Russian articles, in preference to allowing real controversy on issues fundamental to our whole political advance'. Despite the Executive Committee's

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87 See Pollitt, *The 20th Congress of the CPSU and the Role of Stalin*, 279.
90 Ibid., 100.
93 Thompson, 'Winter Wheat in Omsk', 408-409.
94 E.P. Thompson to Bert Baker (undated), Manchester, CP/Cent/Org/18/04.
resolution ‘to open out our Party periodicals to more discussion’, Baker offered to include the article only at a reduced length of 800 to 900 words. Thompson replied, ‘you know perfectly well that to “accept” an article and request it to be cut by 50% is the same as a rejection’. The truncated article which eventually appeared was, in fact, more sharply polemical than Thompson’s original submission. It is not clear whether this was a direct result of Baker’s procrastination, which had obviously annoyed Thompson, or whether it was indicative of his own hardening attitude.

In the branches, the extent of discussion about the crisis remained uneven across the country. John Hostettler, who was in Coulsdon in Surrey, said of discussion in his branch ‘I just don’t remember whether we did or not, which may mean we did not ... I don’t remember a branch meeting about it’. Roger Simon, on the other hand, who was in Holborn Branch, remembered the period up to the Special Congress as ‘a turbulent one’ when they had ‘terrific discussions in the lawyers group and in our local Party branches’. Stan Turner recalled ‘we did have Party meetings to discuss [the issue]... Gollan came down to our meeting... the room packed with people there for a discussion... over the question of the CPSU and the twentieth congress’. Alison Macleod recalled, in the Muswell Hill Branch, one member lamenting ‘when Labour Party people speak to me these days, I can’t answer back. I just cry and cry’. Fellow branch member, R.P. Dutt, however, responded to anger about Fryer’s suspension by explaining ‘that what Peter Fryer had done was exactly like what Zinoviev and Kamenev had done in 1917’. Thompson’s branch, Halifax, expressed ‘profound dissatisfaction with the totally inadequate re-action to the revelations following upon the 20th Congress’.

Communist Party members in Nottingham wrote one of the most powerful anti-leadership polemics. The Nottingham Marxist Group published a statement entitled Why we Left the Communist Party. Signatories included four Area Committee members, three Branch Secretaries and two YCL District Committee

95 Executive Committee CPGB ‘Draft of EC Resolution. Lessons of the 20th Congress of the CPSU’ (12-13 May 1956), Manchester, CP/Cent/EC/03/24.
96 E.P. Thompson to B. Baker (9 June 1956), Manchester, CP/Cent/Org/18/04.
97 E.P. Thompson, ‘Suggestions for statement of EC’ (undated), Manchester, CP/Cent/Org/18/04.
100 Stan Turner, interview, 9 July 1997.
101 Macleod, The Death of Uncle Joe, 188.
102 Ibid., 189.
103 Halifax Branch Resolution to Executive Committee (undated), Manchester, CP/Cent/Org/18/04.
104 Nottingham Marxist Group, Why We Left the Communist Party.
members. The statement began by referring to Khruschev’s speech saying, ‘we started to realise that we were not merely fighting a local leader, or even “Pollitt and Co.” but that there was something wrong with the international Communist movement’.

After suggesting that ‘twenty years after the Moscow trials, it became clear that Bukharin and many other leaders of the October Revolution ...were really framed’, the statement accused the British leadership, saying it was impossible to believe that they ‘had not seen the monstrosities of the leader-cult, had not noticed, the complete lack of democracy’. It accused ‘Harry Pollitt, Palme Dutt, Campbell and Gollan’, saying they had ‘simply cheated the Party and the people’.

Describing Hungary as ‘the last straw’, the signatories went on to say that the ‘Peter Fryer incident demolished any doubts’. They concluded, describing the British leaders as ‘no more than the agents of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ and diagnosed the reason why ‘the Party is a despised sect’ as being ‘not because it is loyal to the principles of Socialism, but because it has betrayed them’.

Many branches, 25 in all, sent resolutions to the December meeting of the Executive Committee, calling for a Special Congress before the end of 1956. Other resolutions indicated the level of unease throughout the Party during this period. There were 27 resolutions demanding that the Executive Committee criticise the Soviet intervention in Hungary. Manchester University Graduates Branch warned that the CPGB is exposing itself to complete and irremediable isolation through its uncritical support of the Soviet Union. John Gollan replied, expressing sorrow ‘that your Branch does not find itself in agreement with...the Executive Committee on the events in Hungary’. Gollan, however, remained ‘certain that the Executive Committee is correct in its attitude; that further developments will show this, and that many comrades who are now critical...will realise later on that the Executive Committee has taken up a correct attitude on this question’. Cambridge Senior University Branch called for the current Executive to be suspended and a ‘caretaker Political Committee’ elected. There were 27 resolutions criticising the Daily Worker, whilst 14 branches attacked the
suppression of Fryer's articles on Hungary. Although seven branches supported the Executive Committee, nine criticised the leadership over the imprisonment of Edith Bone and its failure to protest.\footnote{112}

At this December meeting, Dutt introduced a resolution on Hungary calling for broad support for the Soviet action. An amendment characterising the intervention as a 'mistake' was defeated by 27 votes to seven.\footnote{113} A further amendment supporting the first Soviet intervention as 'necessary' lost by 29 votes to four.\footnote{114} According to Arnold Kettle's son Martin, 'I subsequently realised that my father actually voted on the EC against support for the invasion of Hungary; he was in a minority of two with Gollan'.\footnote{115} The minutes show, however, that, following the failed amendments, there was only one dissenter from Dutt's resolution and it is not clear who this was. Max Morris claimed to be 'one of the two members of the CP Executive who voted against the Soviet invasion of Hungary at the time – myself and Arnold Kettle'.\footnote{116} Morris added, 'Arnold Kettle stopped his criticisms as long as he remained on the EC. He was a very close friend of the Gollans'.\footnote{117}

The impression of confusion worsened with the Executive Committee qualifying the vote on the second amendment, stressing, incongruously, that 'it was made clear that comrades voting against this amendment were not necessarily against the viewpoint expressed in it'.\footnote{118} They, nevertheless, felt bound to support Dutt's resolution, saying that 'the Executive Committee as a whole should support the paragraph in the resolutions suspending judgement on the first intervention'.\footnote{119} The leadership had moved from its position of early November when it had supported intervention because the Hungarian government had 'called on the Soviet forces...for assistance in preventing the victory of the counter-revolution'.\footnote{120} Peter Fryer characterised this vacillating position as one confused between explaining the uprising as 'a fascist plot prepared outside Hungary' and 'a mass movement whose leadership was taken over by reactionary forces'.\footnote{121} Both positions were some distance away from Fryer's own view of Stalinism as counter-revolutionary. His experiences in Budapest and Magyarovar led him to conclude

\begin{thebibliography}{119}
\footnote{112}{E.C. Minutes (12 and 16 December 1956), Manchester, CP/Cent/EC04/03.}
\footnote{113}{'Resolution on Hungary', E.C. Minutes (12 and 16 December 1956), item 6.}
\footnote{114}{Ibid.}
\footnote{115}{M. Kettle, interview with Cohen, Children of the Revolution, 182.}
\footnote{116}{Max Morris, interview, 16 March 1998.}
\footnote{117}{Ibid.}
\footnote{118}{E.C. Minutes (12 and 16 December 1956), Manchester, CP/Cent/EC04/03.}
\footnote{119}{Ibid.}
\footnote{120}{'The Events in Hungary' [Executive Committee Statement], World News, 3:45 (10 November 1956), 713.}
\footnote{121}{Fryer, Hungarian Tragedy, 131.}
\end{thebibliography}
that 'the Hungarian revolution was a bold attempt to solve...by the setting up of workers' councils, the problems which the bureaucracy creates when it usurps working-class power'.

In general, the leadership's response to criticism, whilst bureaucratic, was characterised by respect. As John Saville wrote of a meeting with Gollan and Matthews, 'as always, they listened to what we had to say and the discussion was conducted in a civilised way.' The leadership deflected criticism by referring to proposed changes within the Party, such as to inner party democracy or the introduction of a new journal, Marxism Today. As John Gollan wrote to Thompson in October 1956, 'the Executive Committee is giving full facilities for discussion in the Party press, is encouraging the maximum discussion of Party policy and organisation in every Party organisation and has convened a National Party Conference'. Gollan continued, saying that 'the Executive Committee has the duty to protect the Party, uphold its rules', a position which Thompson perceived of, as precluding the possibility of real change.

The leadership's continuing defensive attitude towards the Soviet Union resulted in the Party adopting contradictory positions throughout the 1950s. Support for Soviet hydrogen bomb testing, for example, created a contradiction where many of its members supported, intervened in, and led sections of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), whilst the official line remained opposed to unilateral disarmament. Unilateralism remained a stumbling block between the CPGB and CND throughout the 1950s. Although Wolf Wayne, a Communist engineer in London, could claim it was the Party's Peace Committee in Hendon which first coined the slogan 'Ban the Bomb', according to Max Morris 'the British Party was slow to adopt a thoroughly anti-nuclear attitude'.

The leadership characterised the opposition as 'revisionists', accusing them of attempting to liberalise the Party and lead it in the direction of reformism. Few critics, however, pointed out the incongruity of such an accusation coming, as it

122 Ibid., 154.
124 J. Gollan to E.P. Thompson (16 October 1956), Manchester, CP/Cent/Org/18/04.
125 Ibid.
126 The Soviet Union had offered a moratorium on H Bomb testing. This did not prevent it exploding one in April 1957. Jimmy Reid, a future strike leader on Clydeside, reflected the confusion at the 25th Congress: 'The Soviet Union would probably strengthen its leadership on this issue if they could come out and state they were not for any more tests', J. Reid, Speech to 25th Congress, April 20 1957, Manchester, CP/Cent/Cong/10/05. The CPGB did not see the USSR as its 'main responsibility', but concentrated upon persuading the UK government towards its own ban.
127 Wolf Wayne, interview, 10 February 1999.
Max Morris, interview, 16 March 1998.
did, from a leadership so persistently oriented upon elections. Unlike the leadership, which after the 'loosening' identified by John Hostettler, retrenched on the basis of traditional structures, the opposition's criticisms tended to be abstract and, to many members, 'woolly headed'. The 'Minority Report' of historian Christopher Hill, journalist Malcolm MacEwen and teacher Peter Cadogan, which the leadership agreed to addend to the 'Report on Inner Party Democracy', was, to a limited extent, the exception to this but appeared too late to provide a pole of attraction around which opposition might have coalesced. The leadership, on the other hand, presented unsure and confused members with the security of structures to which they had, over a number of years, become accustomed. As John Hostettler again observed, 'halfway through the discussions of the Committee on the British Road to Socialism...the line...stiffened...the free and open debate we'd been having did close up to some extent.' This may have been partly to do with leadership style. In contrast to the gregarious Pollitt, Hostettler considered Gollan 'quite rigid'. Whilst Helen Mason thought him an 'excellent chap...a quiet and unboastful man', she contrasted him with Pollitt, 'who, of course was someone who...everybody knew'. Similarly, Max Morris said he 'was much colder...but Gollan was a very able chap'.

The 25th 'special' Congress

At its 25th Congress, the leadership argued that the working class needed the Party and its paper to reorient 'towards fulfilling our duty' and away from internal battles. 'McGehey' articulated this argument, saying 'it is necessary to understand this point, that without the Communist Party there can be no real leadership for the workers'. The possibility of the Party reconstructing on the basis of the upturn in strike activity in 1957, was raised by Tom Hopkins from Bedwas Colliery. Hopkins complained, 'we spend so much time on our

128 J. McLoughlin, [Briggs] 'Speech to 'Special' 25th Congress CPGB' (19 April 1957) no.12. McLoughlin was defending Peter Fryer.
129 C. Hill, M. MacEwen, P. Cadogan 'Minority Report', addendum to J. Mahon, 'Report on Inner Party Democracy' [25th Congress] (April 1957), 45-60, Manchester, CP/Cent/Cong/10/05. Following the Special Congress, the Party published a pamphlet, Inner Party Democracy (1957). This did not include the 'Minority Report'.
131 Ibid.
133 Max Morris, interview, 16 March 1998.
134 M. Bennett, 'Speech to 25th Congress CPGB' (20 April 1957), Manchester, CP/Cent/Cong/10/07. Bennett was Assistant Editor, Daily Worker.
135 'McGehey' [probably Mick McGahey, future President of the Scottish National Union of Mineworkers] 'Speech to 25th Congress' (20 April 1957), Manchester, CP/Cent/Cong/10/07.
contradictions that we do not forge ahead with our activity'. Reg Birch asked 'the intellectuals...how do you see yourselves in assisting in this particular battle?'. Frank Turner referred to the strike at Metro-Vickers in Lancashire, saying 'there never was such unanimity'. Another delegate saw potential for unity on the basis of 'binding the widest sections of the labour movement'. John Gollan, in his 'Political Report', referred to 'the great mass movement against Suez...against the proposed H Bomb tests...the struggle against the Rent Bill' as aggregating to 'an entirely new political situation in Britain with a nation-wide revolt against the Government'.

Despite being an initiative by the Political Committee in July 1956, some interpreted the agreement to hold a Special Congress as a concession to the opposition and a response to critical pressure. Ralph Russell, however, saw the whole thing as a tactical mistake. Many who had criticised the Party had already decided to leave by 1957 and so 'it was obvious the leadership would win'. Peter Fryer was one who was eventually expelled by the Party. The London District Committee had suspended him on 26 November 1956 for making 'attacks on the Communist Party', both in an interview in the Daily Express and in a letter resigning his post at the Daily Worker which the paper refused to publish, but which appeared in the Manchester Guardian. As the number of resolutions calling for the lifting of Fryer's suspension indicate, many members saw his stand over Hungary in contrast to the denials and confusion of the leadership. His case acquired totemic significance for many disillusioned members. In April 1957, Fryer sold copies of his appeal against expulsion outside the annual Daily Worker shareholders meeting at Conway Hall, London. Prior to this meeting, George MacDougall, Allen Hutt's deputy, resigned in protest against the paper's reporting of the exploding of the Soviet Union's second H bomb. According to Alison MacLeod, Fryer, at this time, was staying with MacDougall and 'rumours were...
flying around the Party'. At the 25th Congress, Fryer handed out a daily 'Congress Special', produced each night on a duplicator at the home of Trotskyist, Gerry Healy. The opposition remained fragmented, however, and, apart from The Reasoner and the occasional recalcitrant communication to the establishment press, the opposition was remarkable for its adherence to Party discipline.

A heterogeneous monolith? Democracy and the CPGB

Never, for a single moment, have the Bolsheviks conceived of the Party as anything but a monolithic organisation hewed from a single block, and possessing a single will and in its work, uniting all shades of thought into a single current of practical activities.

The common description of the British Communist Party as a monolith, whilst reflecting the omnipresence of Stalinism in world Communism, can, in practice, prove misleading. The idea of the monolithic party was qualified by Raphael Samuel who wrote, 'the unity of the Party was naturally never as monolithic in practice as it was in theory'. Samuel's qualification reinforces George Matthews' characterisation of 'Winter Wheat in Omsk', as 'A Caricature of our Party'. The British Party, like other world Communist organisations, was in the habit of ruthlessly mobilising its centralised structure whenever it needed to justify or deny unpalatable Stalinist practices. Peter Fryer wrote in 1957, 'it is only liars who could be afraid of branches communicating with each other. It is only liars who could wish to canalise discussion...for whom the process of hammering out a policy is a strictly one-way process'.

Although superficially, a different type of organisation, the CPGB was hardly less democratic than the Labour Party. There was more political discussion within its branches compared with the organisational meetings and savagely guillotined conference debates typical of the Labour Party. In the 1950s, the parliamentarians and their advisors who constituted Labour's leadership were drawn largely from an Oxbridge and public school milieu, giving it a class ridden coloration which, for a

145 MacLeod, The Death of Uncle Joe, 245.
146 Ibid., 256.
147 Stalin, Collected Works, vol. 6, 23.
148 See Thompson, 'Winter Wheat in Omsk': 'the monolith...from its cave somewhere inside For a Lasting Peace, For a People's Democracy has droned on in a dogmatic monotone', 408.
151 Fryer, Hungarian Tragedy, 144.
working class party, was an incongruous replication of British society at this time. Following the St Pancras Labour Party's condemnation of Woodrow Wyatt for making a BBC Panorama programme about the ETU, the North London Press commented that the incident 'demonstrates the split in the socialist ranks between the starched shirts and varsity accents of the respectable right-wing of the [Labour] Party...and the red-blooded, cloth capped Keir Hardies.' The CPGB, on the other hand, was consciously – not to say self-consciously – proletarian. It paid considerable, if sometimes condescending, attention to the views of its working class membership as opposed to those of its frequently vilified intellectuals. The Labour Party saw its role as reforming capitalism on behalf of the workers who supported it. Ideologically, it viewed workers as passive objects, rather than, in Marx's terms, as the active agents of their own emancipation. The structure of the Labour Party and the trade unions reflected this. Members were mobilised only to canvas during elections but, for most of the time, their views were subordinated to those of trade union bureaucrats and MPs.

Marx's position was that 'the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves'. As discussed earlier, the CPGB's adoption of electoralism militated against this idea of self-emancipation towards that of social democracy which envisaged emancipation through the election of MPs. This constituted another contradiction within the CPGB between the revolutionary structure it had inherited and idealised and the reformist method demanded by its programme. On the one hand, members saw themselves as the vanguard of working class self-emancipation. On the other, the Party's electoral practice encouraged a surrendering of grass-roots sovereignty to institutionalised political bodies and trade union bureaucracies.

Within the Party itself, Stalinism distorted the balance between democracy and centralised control which militated towards the negation of one, and the predominance of the other. Stalinist centralism encouraged all ideas and discussion to be channelled towards the Party centre through Area Committee, Executive Committee, or Party press. Despite Lenin's subsequent association with such centralisation, he had called, even 'in an autocratic country', for 'all revolutionary organisations' to maintain 'the most continuous...contacts with each other, thus creating real Party unity'. Lenin also emphasised 'the flexibility

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152 North London Press (31 January 1958). See below for details of this incident.
154 Lenin, What is to be Done?, 173-4.
required of a militant Social Democratic organisation'. Without the coercive methods to which Stalin had recourse, centralised control was based partly, as Don Hunter put it, on 'information not having been given to the Party as a whole'. The Party also relied upon the bureaucratic traditions which the British labour movement had fostered within its membership, a habit of surrendering decision-making to higher bodies. The structure of the CPGB resembled the inflexible structure of a British trade union, with its bureaucracy acting on behalf of its members. This appealed to those who had grown up in this tradition and, in turn, informed a particular interpretation of democratic centralism. Don Hunter expressed this, saying 'the best trade unions have undoubtedly got a structure resembling that of democratic centralism'. The Party nevertheless retained a nominally democratic culture within which anyone and everyone could have their say. As Thompson, Fryer and the Nottingham Marxists discovered, however, it was unusual for such debate to affect policy or direction. As Morris Schaer said, 'I don't think, when you think back, it was as democratic as we thought it was'.

The Party introduced this centralised structure in 1922. It superseded the federal basis of the Party, whereby geographical branches organised into districts, sent delegates to the Executive Committee, and replaced it with 'a small and strong Executive...bringing together the most capable members irrespective of where they lived'. This was prompted by Zinoviev's 21 Conditions. Condition 12 stated that 'All the Parties belonging to the Communist International should be formed on the principle of democratic centralisation'. Such a structure, however, could only function 'when the party centre enjoys the confidence of the members of the party'.

The British Party formed a Special Commission, including R.P. Dutt, Albert Inkpin and Harry Pollitt, to bring itself into line with these objectives. The fifth Congress of October 1922 unanimously adopted a system of Central Committee,
Political Bureau and Organising Bureau. As Ken Alexander said in 1956, these ‘forms of organisation...presented problems in the first year of the Party’s existence.’ Alexander quoted Tom Bell, the Party’s first National Organiser, who said ‘it was not an easy job getting the comrades to understand the meaning of centralised direction...we had to combat the “Federalist” and “constituency” notions of the comrades who came from the provinces, and to try and get them to think “executively”’.

The guidelines on decision making within the Party introduced at this time, however, were generalised and imposed little institutional discipline upon the leadership. This put responsibility upon the leadership itself as to how it interpreted its executive power and to what extent it deferred to the views of members. The 1922 Commission stressed the importance of political and polemical discussion within the Party, but stressed that ‘once the decision has been reached, it should be loyally accepted by the whole Party’. The use of the passive tense was crucial. It neatly avoided specifying by whom, in which forums, and to what mandatory extent, such discussions should take place and apply. As was discovered during 1956, the interpretation of such guidelines varied enormously.

Revolutionary Bolshevism had relied upon the fact that its members and leaders were socialists as proof against abuses of power. The structure of their Party tried to avoid the bureaucratic checks and balances which cynicism about leadership within traditional party structures had made obligatory. This, however, placed enormous responsibility on those within positions of leadership. By the 1950s, however, as Khruschev pointed out, the abuse of power in the Soviet Union had evolved to an almost unprecedented extent. Adherence to such a model, therefore, meant that, despite Pollitt’s claim that ‘no other Communist Party in the world has such regular meetings of its Central Committee...or more democratic reporting of its discussions’, the CPGB had evolved, in parallel, towards a ‘rigidly conservative’ practice.

Brian Pearce described the CPGB as ‘something like a military organisation, and something like a religious organisation...you took the line and you carried it out and you didn’t question it’. Most members, however, accepted

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168 Brian Pearce, interview, 1 February 1999.
the need for discipline. As Morris Schaer said, 'discipline was the main thing that made our Party different from everybody else's'.\textsuperscript{169} Pearce expanded upon his military-religious characterisation, seeing the one as a strategic function and the other as ideological. He said 'you’re like a soldier who obeys the orders he receives from above...And the religious, of course...the idea of the dogma that you mustn’t question closely'.\textsuperscript{170} Pearce observed that the 'military religious aspect...was very important for some people'.\textsuperscript{171} Surrender to Party discipline was, of course, entirely voluntary and is perhaps best described as volitional obligation.

In spite of its apparently established structure, it was not always clear who was in charge of the Party. Alison MacLeod did not believe that sovereignty within the Party lay within its formally created bodies. As she said, 'the rules said that the governing body of the Party was the Executive Committee. Well it wasn’t, the governing body was...the Political Committee or whatever it was called at the time'.\textsuperscript{172} She claimed that decisions made at Political Committee level were ‘never known’ and suggested that ‘the Politburo wasn’t the real power because Piratin belonged to that and he said he never felt he was part of the inner circle’.\textsuperscript{173} Executive Committee member, Max Morris, agreed, describing the idea that the Political Committee was a sub-committee of the EC as ‘utterly phoney’.\textsuperscript{174} Morris claimed that ‘the show was run by’ the General Secretary, Industrial Organiser, Propaganda Secretary, Nora Jeffries, and Deputy General Secretary, George Matthews.\textsuperscript{175}

By 1956, a ‘Panels Commission’ consisting of outgoing Executive members provided a ‘recommended list’ of names to Congress. This operated along with limited balloting, whereby delegates voted for or against the list as a whole, but could also call for the deletion of individual names. In addition, there was a secret ballot of names nominated by the branches which, in theory, could be added to the recommended list.\textsuperscript{176} According to Wolf Wayne, even after 1956 ‘the recommended list still almost always got voted on’.\textsuperscript{177} The organisation’s 20 district committees were elected by the ‘recommended list’ method, although ‘area, borough and city committees’ were considered ‘in a different category, since their powers are

\textsuperscript{169} Morris Schaer, interview, 9 July 1997.
\textsuperscript{170} Brian Pearce, interview, 1 February 1999
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{172} Alison MacLeod, interview, 17 October 1997.
\textsuperscript{173} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{174} Max Morris, interview, 16 March 1998.
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{176} Source, Mahon, ‘Report on Inner Party Democracy’.
\textsuperscript{177} Wolf Wayne, interview, 10 February 1999.
determined by the district committees which authorise their formation.\textsuperscript{176} With this level of centralised control, separate organisation was difficult. Communication between individuals by writing was considered potentially factional. As Alison MacLeod said ‘It isn’t really possible to organise anything if you can’t write anything down…you got expelled.’\textsuperscript{179}

Although the Party made various changes over the years to the maintenance of its structure, such variations did not make the structure less rigid. In fact, the more reforms the Party introduced, the more complex and bureaucratic its structure became. The ‘Report on Inner Party Democracy’, however, declared that ‘merely to state the many variations in the election procedure…and the frequent changes…is to expose the falsity of allegations that any particular method has been imposed upon the Party’.\textsuperscript{180} Whilst the system had, to some extent, evolved in response to changing circumstances, the 1922 blueprint not only became atrophied, but as Stalinism entrenched itself, it became a vehicle for authoritarian forms of decision-making. For some, this structure remained the essence of the problem. As the ‘Minority Report’ stated, ‘our impression is that in fact hardly any changes are made at any stage in the list recommended to it by the Political Committee’\textsuperscript{181}

Thompson and Saville carried with them into the New Left, a trepidation about organisation born from their opposition to Stalinist practice. Subsequently, the association of organisation with Stalinism, meant that much of the British left expressed antipathy towards it. This may have contributed towards the left’s limited success in focusing the militant energy of the late 1960s into a coherent political movement. The May Day Manifesto, produced largely by Thompson, Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall between 1967 and 1968, is one example of this. As one sympathetic author has said, the Manifesto called ‘for a realignment of the left in a coalition of single-issue groups, political campaigns and autonomous, local Manifesto cells’.\textsuperscript{182} Even with the intellectual triptych of Hall, Thompson and Williams towering in the foreground, however, ‘the project fell apart’ through lack of serious organisation and ultimately ‘failed as a political movement’.\textsuperscript{183}

\textsuperscript{179} Alison MacLeod, interview, 17 October 1997.
\textsuperscript{180} Inner Party Democracy (London, 1957). 16-17. [Published following 25\textsuperscript{th} Congress].
\textsuperscript{183} Ibid., 162.
Thompson continued to pedal so softly on the subject of organisation that he remained virtually immobile. As late as 1980, he noted that 'a part of the Left' was turning away 'in disgust' from 'national political life' and opting 'for building an alternative culture'.\(^\text{184}\) He highlighted 'the feminist movement' as one section who 'for evident reasons, has taken a similar option'. While Thompson was able to identify such movements which confronted the 'ineluctably advancing 'official culture of power' with 'only a disgusted back', he was loath either to criticise such fragmentation or to offer an organisational alternative.\(^\text{185}\) Thompson's perspective involved exhorting these 'alternative cultures' to 'find ways of influencing...in active ways, the national political life'. In his eagerness not to offend anyone with even the most faintly audible echo of *What is to be Done?*, Thompson assured his readers that he was 'not asking any group or movement to surrender its values or its autonomy' and emphasised his belief that there was not only 'one "correct" or useful way to act'. Whilst challenging 'sisters' and black movementists 'to think more urgently of their roles as citizens, jurors, trade unionists or electors' before the 'primary existential facts' of their colour or gender, however, he failed to offer any organisational means through which their experience of oppression might generalise into a wider political movement.\(^\text{186}\) Thompson, of course, was as susceptible as any other white male at this time to accusations of 'political imperialism' or of patronising women, but his experience of the political leaderships of Stalin, Pollitt and Gollan may well have contributed to his apology for meaningful political organisation.

This chapter has summarised some of the disparate strands of criticism and opposition that emerged during the period between the secret speech and the Congress of April 1957. These critics, whilst taking advantage of this window of opportunity, never coordinated into a coherent opposition within or outside the Party. The leadership responded to criticism with a combination of comradely condescension and bureaucratic stonewalling through which it bought itself enough time to retain both its own position and the structure of the Party. The opposition's failure to confront the question of Stalinism and the nature of the Soviet Union left an ideological vacuum which the leadership were able to fill by appealing to deep seated loyalties and traditional habits of mind within the membership. A fortuitous upturn in industrial activity in 1957 allowed the leadership, for the first time since the war, to reaffirm the Party as a significant force within rank and file trade


\(^{185}\) Ibid., xii.

\(^{186}\) Ibid.
unionism. The next chapter records how the opposition within British Communism during this period asserted itself. It did this in two ways; through its own initiatives, such as *The Reasoner* or the 'Socialist Forums', and by attempting to utilise the opportunities presented by the leadership's own response to the crisis.
Chapter 5
Responding to Criticism

While we have made some errors in the course of our defence of the Soviet Union, we have been overwhelmingly correct when capitalist and right wing Labour critics have been slanderously and continuously wrong.\(^1\)

This chapter discusses the various forms of opposition which emerged within the CPGB between the secret speech and the 25\(^{th}\) Congress in April 1957. It is impossible to know exactly who, to what extent, and upon what basis, different members opposed the leadership of their Party. As is shown below in the meetings of the Socialist Forums, opposition was often, in John Saville’s words, ‘emotional’, often ‘unformulated’ and, in many cases, flared up only for as long as it took the leadership to control it.\(^2\) This chapter deals with those aspects of this disparate opposition which coalesced, albeit temporarily, into something which, whilst not coordinated, can be described as collective. For some, it ‘was rather like a Roman Catholic...suddenly discovering unequivocally the non-existence of God’\(^3\). The confusion felt by many, probably best explains the inability of these oppositional elements to build successful alternatives to, or to reform, British Stalinism.

Whilst the Party gave an impression of homogeneity, it nevertheless, contained variegated aspects. The disparate nature of the opposition reflected this. It should not, of course, be surprising to find diversity, even within an apparently homogenous being such as the CPGB and the epithet ‘monolithic’ has often disguised its existence. There was often tension between the tightly unified structure presented to the world and the Party’s capacity to accommodate diversity. When such diversity seriously threatened the appearance of unity, however, the leadership moved to bring it into line.

Some members saw the chance to discuss the Party’s traditional centralist structure as an opportunity to challenge received Stalinist verities. Ralph Russell, for example, cited Rosa Luxemburg’s critique of centralism, emphasising that ‘this

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3 Ruth Fisher, written reply to author, 30 November 1997.
wasn't public knowledge at the time' and constituted 'forbidden fruit for most CPs'.\(^4\) Ken Alexander had referred to Luxemburg as a critic of what she described as 'Lenin's ultra centralism'.\(^5\) This provoked a revealing response from Jack Beeching and Jack Lindsay who, writing to Thompson, seized upon this reference and associated it with 'anti-Communist spies' recruited by MI5, who, whilst still in the CPGB, 'were losing their conviction and contemplating leaving'.\(^6\) Lindsay and Beeching were not on the Stalinist end of the Party spectrum and were, in many ways, sympathetic to The Reasoner. Whilst insisting it was 'not a Stalinist fantasy', they associated Luxemburg's criticism with 'arguments the Trotskyites have worked extraordinarily hard in the past' and added, 'did you know that?'.\(^7\) Such implicit condescension provoked Thompson into responding, 'you really do not credit John and myself with the political responsibility or understanding of mice'.\(^8\)

Ralph Russell saw 'the centralising tendency...everywhere in world Communism'.\(^9\) It presented a dilemma which, notwithstanding the 'cloud-screen of Trotskyists, loyal comrades, and police', was a real one for Party members.\(^10\) Most recognised that there should be strong discipline within a Party opposing the stifling political consensus which prevailed after World War II. As The Reasoner said in its first issue, 'we accept the need, as do all members...for a degree of self-imposed discipline in action, based upon collective decisions'.\(^11\) Members surrendered themselves to collective discipline, believing that this translated into a unity of purpose and action that made their organisation stronger. Even as recently as 1982, the Party declared that 'the Communist Party...must be able to act as a single unified force' and continued to insist upon a 'centralised leadership capable of directing the entire Party'.\(^12\)

The validity or otherwise of democratic centralism is not at issue here. Unlike in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, however, members' careers,\(^\text{4}\) Ralph Russell, interview, 26 May 1998. The Party's attitude to Luxemburg reflects the discontinuity between its Leninist foundation and its Stalinist development. In 1923, one of the first 'campaigns' of the newly formed YCL was 'the commemoration of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg'. (Klugmann, History of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1919-1924, 224). By the 1950s, as Beeching and Lindsay indicated, she had become synonymous with Trotskyism.\(^5\)

\(^\text{5}\) Alexander, 'Democratic Centralism', 7.

\(^\text{6}\) J. Beeching and J. Lindsay to E.P. Thompson (undated) [?July 1956], Manchester, CP/Cent/Org/18/04.

\(^\text{7}\) Ibid.

\(^\text{8}\) E.P. Thompson to Jack Beeching and Jack Lindsay (1 August 1956), Manchester CP/Cent/Org/18/04

\(^\text{9}\) Ralph Russell, interview, 26 May 1998

\(^\text{10}\) Thompson to Beeching and Lindsay.

\(^\text{11}\) Thompson and Saville, 'Why we are Publishing', 3.

livelihoods and lives in Britain were, in general, not dependent upon their submission to the Party. As Beeching and Lindsay said it was 'voluntary discipline'. This situation demanded qualities of leadership which were in contrast to the punitive disciplinary practices associated with Stalinism. Given the persistently inadequate size of the CPGB, the sanction of expulsion was, ultimately, self-destructive. Under such conditions, it might appear that the only recourse for the leadership would be to engage in constructive dialogue with dissident or recalcitrant members. Although attempts in 1956, to impose discipline from above, provoked Thompson into declaring 'Thank God there is no chance of this EC ever having power in Britain', it is by no means clear that members were unanimous in their attitude towards authoritarian practices.

The barrier between voluntarily opting in to the rigours of organisational life and voluntarily opting out again was secured by a combination of individual loyalty and political commitment. The leadership relied heavily on both during this period, but also appeared to delude itself about the nature of its own authority. Mick Bennett at the 25th Congress, for example, railed against the leadership's critics, talking of 'their conceit, their moral and political cowardice'. That some delegates were unhappy with this approach was indicated by an insertion at the end of Bennett's speech, noting 'from the hall – “is the statement made in Mick personal capacity”.' Similarly, Arnold Kettle appeared oblivious to the recent decimation in the Party as he attacked his fellow intellectuals as 'disgusting' and compared Peter Fryer and Daily Worker cartoonist, 'Gabriel', to 'scabs...poisoning the minds of many thousands' by showing 'those claiming to be innocent people, being shot down by Soviet tanks'.

Much of this affected ferocity, however, served to clarify the disciplinary parameters of Party membership. Bennett and Kettle reflected an illusion about the reality of leadership authority. The fact that the Party retained three-quarters of its members, however, may indicate that many members also colluded in the propagation of this illusion and that the Party sustained a myth of authority on the basis of its mutual acceptance by both sides. It was an illusion which emanated from two sources. Firstly, it was born of the persistent misconception of the CPGB, about its own importance within British and world politics. Max Morris referred to this when he recalled how the Executive Committee 'became involved in Chinese

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13 Beeching and Lindsay to Thompson [underlining in original].
14 E.P. Thompson to Bert Ramelson (28 May 1956), Manchester, CP/Cent/Org/18/04.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 A. Kettle, 'Speech to 25th Congress CPGB' (19 April 1957), No.22.
affairs and I often used to think the Party a bit absurd – what the hell could we do about it?'.

Secondly, it resulted from the very strength of purpose which had motivated people to join the Party in the first place. Brian Pearce admitted that his own 'authoritarian tendency' had attracted him to the Party. Raphael Samuel agreed, saying that the 'Principle of unity [was] indissolubly linked to that of authority.' The volitional obligation to which members surrendered, could not, in all cases, be sustained on the basis of self-discipline alone. For most members, in a position of permanent opposition within work and community, the 'private little world of our own...tight...self-referential group' was a reaffirming structure without which, such activity would have been more difficult. Party discipline and the knowledge that it would be ruthlessly applied, provided this private world with a defined and, crucially, a familiar landscape. Some members implicitly demanded that their own self-discipline be augmented by a reciprocal discipline imposed from above. In this way, leaders and members entered into a mutually supportive concordat, in which the significance of the Party and the indispensability of belonging to it, were continually reaffirmed by the illusion of leadership authority. The illusion was further sustained by repeated reference to an actually existing historical model; faith in which demonstrated that submission to such authority had led to a mutually desired goal. It may be that the real fault line between opposition and supporters of the leadership at this time, lay between those who accepted this illusion of leadership authority and those who began to see it for what it really was.

Raphael Samuel referred to the destructive potential of the uncompromising attitude reflected within Bennett and Kettle's contributions. Samuel asked, at the time, with regard to Thompson and Saville, 'isn't it pure gain over the past that such devoted comrades have stayed within our ranks instead of leaving? He continued, regretting that 'in the Oxford student branch...every one of the seven recruits we had made over the past three years was on the point of leaving the Party.' Members such as Eric Hobsbawm and Ralph Russell, took a fatalistic attitude to discipline during the crisis. Russell, who chaired the Joint Staff Committee of Communist University lecturers which included people like Kettle and

18 Max Morris, interview, 16 March 1998.
19 Brian Pearce, interview, 1 February 1999.
22 R. Samuel to 'Johnny' (undated), Manchester CP/Cent/Org/18/05.
23 Ibid.
24 Hobsbawm, interview, Stedman Jones, 21.
Brian Simon, felt that the ‘committee should continue in existence and put forward their views regardless. If the Party chose to discipline them, then so be it’.26

Discipline was not always consistent. As discussed above, John Saville stressed that Gollan and Matthews ‘listened to what we had to say and the discussion was conducted in a civilised way’.26 Thompson reinforced this impression, saying ‘Gollan was very much more reasonable and even friendly than any EC member we had had to deal with before’.27 Those who had written a ‘Reasoner-type letter’ to New Statesman, however, ‘were each in turn addressed by John Gollan in tough language of a kind never used to Edward and myself’.28

**A challenge to Stalinism or co-option of dissent?**

Discipline and democratic centralism were the most important questions throughout the period between the secret speech and the 25th Congress. As discussed in the previous chapter, meaningful debate over the ideological nature of Stalinism was marginalised in favour of this argument about structures. Subsequently, Malcolm MacEwen, referring to the Commission on Inner Party Democracy, made a link between arguments about Party structure and Stalinism, saying ‘although the Commission was confined to an abstract debate about democratic centralism within the British Party, the thoughts of the minority were dominated by...the degeneration of democratic centralism in the Parties of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe’.29 The Executive Committee ordered this commission ‘to examine the methods and working of our Party Congress, its committees, methods of discussion and election, and criticism and self-criticism’.30 The Commission on Inner Party Democracy, however, was an exercise in bureaucratic choreography, forestalling, from the outset, the possibility of meaningful reform.

The Executive Committee conceived the commission in May 1956.31 The resolution declared, ‘we need at all levels to learn to listen more attentively to those who raise points, suggestions, criticisms’.32 The Commission first met in September 1956.

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27 E.P. Thompson to Howard [?Hill] (9 November 1956), Manchester, CP/Cent/Org/18/04.
29 MacEwen, ‘The Day the Party Had to Stop’, 34.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
Table 7. Composition of the Commission on Inner Party Democracy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Years in Party</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Position in Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emile Burns</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Full-time writer</td>
<td>EC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin Halpin</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Vehicle inspector</td>
<td>Factory Branch Secretary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christopher Hill</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>University Lecturer</td>
<td>Grads Branch Sec</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nora Jeffrey</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Full-Time, Nat Women's Organiser</td>
<td>EC</td>
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<tr>
<td>James Klugmann</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Full-timer</td>
<td>EC</td>
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<td>William Lauchlan</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Full-timer</td>
<td>EC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Malcolm MacEwen</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>Daily Worker Journalist</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Mahon (chair)</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Full-timer</td>
<td>EC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Betty Reid</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Full-timer</td>
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<td><strong>Appointed by Party Districts</strong></td>
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<td>Joan Bellamy</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Full-timer</td>
<td>Area secretary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harry Bourne</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Full-timer</td>
<td>District Secretary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peter Cadogan</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Dist. Sec., Branch Sec.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joe Cheek</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Branch Membership Organiser</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alex Clarke</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Full-timer</td>
<td>District Organiser</td>
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<td>Charles Miles</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Full-timer</td>
<td>District Organiser</td>
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Those members not working full-time for the Party are shown in bold type.

Only Kevin Halpin was an industrial worker. Cadogan, Hill and MacEwen already had reputations as critics of the leadership. Chair of the Commission was London District Secretary, John Mahon. Described by Malcolm MacEwen as 'an inflexible Party functionary with limited imagination', Mahon had emerged as a supporter of 'class against class' in the late 1920s. He was Pollitt's official biographer following his death in 1960. MacEwen wrote that Mahon 'did not see his role as leading an investigation; he saw it as securing the defeat of the "revisionists" who were critical of democratic centralism'.

The Commission received 104 communications from branches, districts and individuals within the Party. It did not investigate individual views on Party democracy but 'discussed a series of draft statements on the problems and the

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33 'Report on the Commission for Inner Party Democracy' to 25th Congress (April 1956), 1, Manchester, CP/Cent/Cong/10/05.
34 MacEwen, 'The Day the Party had to Stop', 29.
35 Mahon, Harry Pollitt A Biography.
36 MacEwen, 'The Day the Party had to Stop', 29-30.
principles on which the Party should operate'. From the beginning, Kevin Halpin supported the minority over their criticism of the unbalanced composition of the commission. Halpin eventually attached his own addendum to the 'Majority Report', detailing his reservations about its conclusions, but refused to sign with the minority. According to MacEwen, 'immense moral and political pressure' was exerted on Halpin and Joe Cheek by the full-time members, appealing to their loyalty at a time when the Party was under attack. The opposition was further undermined following Peter Cadogan's suspension by his District Committee for writing in News Chronicle attacking the Party. After agreeing not to repeat such an action, he was reinstated, but not before Betty Reid had emphasised the divisions by refusing to sit down with a traitor.

There is no need here to examine minutely the differences between the majority and minority positions within this commission. John Mahon accused the minority of launching 'proposals...which would mean a retreat...from democratic centralism.' Notionally, the difference between the two sides was one of emphasis rather than substance. As the 'Minority Report' said, 'we support the broad principles of democracy and of centralism as the basis of Party organisation, provided that there is a proper balance between the two'. As with the split between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, however, within Communism, apparently marginal disagreements over forms of words often represented more fundamental differences. The gulf in this instance was between the Stalinist method, 'the self-perpetuation of an authoritarian leadership', on one side, and, on the other, a perception that lack of democracy within Bolshevism had led to Stalinism.

When the Executive Committee discussed the two reports in December 1956, MacEwen presented the 'Minority Report', signed by himself, Hill and Cheek. Peter Cadogan was, at this time, under suspension. Mahon presented the 'Majority Report', which was signed by all the full-timers. The Executive Committee agreed that 'the reports should be printed with an introduction by the EC as a

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37 Ibid.  
38 Ibid., 31  
39 Ibid.  
41 MacEwen, Hill, Cadogan ' Minority Report', 47.  
42 MacEwen, 'The Day the Party had to Stop', 34. MacEwen was indirectly quoting Jack Beeching, one of those who sent his views to the Commission.  
43 Minutes of Executive Committee CPGB. (15-16 December 1956), Manchester, CP/Cent/EC/04/03.
Congress document, open to amendments.\textsuperscript{44} Just one member of the Executive Committee voted for the 'Minority Report' with 33 backing Mahon's majority.\textsuperscript{45} The minutes do not specify who voted for MacEwen. Max Morris said of the minority, that he 'supported a number of things they stood for, but got little or no support'.\textsuperscript{46} 

As outlined in the previous chapter, Joe Cheek eventually agreed to sign the 'Majority Report...with...reservations', saying that it had 'not been sufficiently critical of the present application of democratic centralism, nor has it recommended sufficiently the extension of democratic rights to meet the needs and demands of the membership'.\textsuperscript{47} In fact, the ' Minority Report' called for little more than that individual members should be allowed to discuss issues in opposition to the 'line' laid down by the Party centre. In a five point conclusion, the authors called for the Executive Committee to recognise 'the right of branches to receive speakers from other branches representing minority points of view'.\textsuperscript{48} The final point asked that congress time be allowed for opponents of the leadership position to put their case, as long as 'a clear trend in opposition emerges'.\textsuperscript{49} 

As limited as these demands appear, the 25\textsuperscript{th} Congress conceded no ground to them. Arnold Kettle, in his attack on the minority, neatly avoided political argument whilst demonstrating an ingenuity with semantics. Kettle seized on ideas within the 'Minority Report' which addressed the potential problem of individual conscience coming into conflict with the Party 'line'. Kettle said, 'it is a curious way of fighting the cult of the individual to be constantly playing down the validity of collective leadership and majority decisions and substituting an appeal to individual conscience'.\textsuperscript{50} As preposterous as Kettle's formulation was in equating questions of individual conscience with the Stalinist cult, it nevertheless found a resonance amongst members who had surrendered to the collective disciplines of the Party.

**Confronting the demon**

Near the beginning of the crisis, perhaps in an effort to forestall potentially damaging interaction between dissident Communists and Trotskyists, the London District of the Party took the uncharacteristic step of organising a series of

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{46} Max Morris, interview, 16 March 1998.  
\textsuperscript{47} Minutes of E.C., Early 1957 (undated), Manchester, CP/Cent/EC/04/03.  
\textsuperscript{48} MacEwen et al, 'Minority Report', 60.  
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{50} Arnold Kettle, Speech to 25\textsuperscript{th} Congress of the Communist Party, reprinted in *World News* 4:18, (10 May 1957), 279.
meetings with groups of Labour Party left-wingers. Most of these people constituted an interventionist Trotskyist group which coalesced around John Lawrence. Lawrence was leader of St Pancras Council which, in 1957, confronted government housing policy, as it cut rents and embarked on a policy of house building; a practice widely supported by council tenants but for which Labour councillors were surcharged.\(^{51}\)

The first of these meetings took place as early as July 1956 and, apart from Lawrence, around ten Labour Party members met Communists from the London District Committee, including Dennis Goodwin (London District Industrial Organiser), Claude Berridge (London District Chairman), Sam Aaronovitch and John Mahon.\(^{52}\) Although the Communists at the meeting 'restrained our contributions', Mahon appeared surprised that the other side 'were not all agreed amongst themselves and argued quite freely'.\(^{53}\) Lawrence, who chaired the meeting, gave the opening address and made immediate reference to the incoherent politics behind the CPGB's electoral strategy. Whilst admitting that intervention by Trotskyists had, under current conditions, remained 'not effective', he identified the Labour Party as the mass electoral party of the working class.\(^{54}\)

Under these conditions, especially as the 'CP said clearly their aim was to bring Labour into power', the CPGB's tactic of standing candidates 'raised doubts as to whether this was what they wanted'.\(^{55}\) This raised the question; was the CPGB an electoral party involved in a hopelessly unequal competition with Labour, or a revolutionary party? Was it, Lawrence asked, 'to be an alternative to Labour party' and if not, what was 'the role the CP would play'?\(^{56}\)

Lawrence gently referred to the Communist Party's tendency to over-inflate its significance within British politics, quoting a favourite Party phrase that 'every Left was a potential CP member' and contrasting this with the dominant left trend within the Labour Party, represented by Nye Bevan.\(^{57}\) The report continued, saying

\(^{51}\) Florence Keyworth 'A Council that is Cutting Rents', *Daily Worker*, (4 January 1957), 2.

\(^{52}\) J. Mahon to 'Johnnie' [? Gollan], 'Memo of meeting on Sunday July 22nd 1956' (27 July 1956), Manchester, CP/Cent/Org/18/06.

\(^{53}\) Ibid.

\(^{54}\) Ibid.

\(^{55}\) Ibid.

\(^{56}\) Ibid.

\(^{57}\) Ibid.
that 'all present agreed that sooner or later there would be a revolutionary situation in Britain'. None of the Communists appeared to notice any contradiction between this and the Party's retreat from a revolutionary strategy. Mahon, in his notes, followed up the reference to a revolutionary situation with a, presumably unconscious, echo of Stalinist political banality as he added 'without naming the date'. Although another meeting was planned, it is not clear how many took place nor whether these initiatives were repeated across the country. Following their expulsion from the Labour Party, Lawrence and about 20 of those who had coalesced around him, joined the CPGB.

**Oppositionist attempts at coordination**

Although discontent did not coordinate into an organised opposition within the Party; through private communication or through what became known as the 'Reasoner list', an uncertain number of members made attempts at convening meetings of dissidents. The leadership sent observers to some of these meetings whose job was to report to the Party's Organisation Department. These reports reveal that opposition to the leadership was split in several ways. Firstly, it was divided between those wishing to remain within and attempt to reform, the Party. Secondly, there were divisions between those who planned to stay, form a faction and wait for expulsion. Finally, there were those members who saw the existing structures of the Party as being adequate. There were more fundamental splits, however, between those like Fryer and Pearce who saw revolutionary salvation in Trotskyism, those like Les Cannon who inclined towards the Labour Party and those like Thompson and Saville who saw the future for the left as lying within a specifically British conception of Marxism, labelled socialist humanism.

Between 1956 and 1957, this divided opposition cooperated around antagonism towards the leadership of British Communism. Apart from the fact that most, though not all, of these people remained socialists, however, this antagonism was their only unifying factor and did not last beyond 1957. Once the respective tendencies of British Trotskyism and the New Left had plundered what they could from stubbornly unreconstructed Stalinism, they went their separate and mutually hostile ways.

One of the Organisation Department's anonymous observers wrote a report of a meeting at The Pindar of Wakefield public house in Kings Cross on 7 December 1956. The report's tone, throughout, betrayed a contempt which, if in

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58 J. Mahon, ibid.
any way reflective of the CPGB leadership, reinforced accusations of arrogance. The report identified ‘the Swinnertons’ as the organisers of this meeting, describing Dennis Swinnerton as ‘ex IBA [International Brigade] ex-Party functionary etc. etc.’. It dismissed Jane Swinnerton as ‘wife to the above’, adding that she appeared ‘to wear the trousers in this matter…she kept chipping in…‘Don’t be silly, Denis – you know we decided etc. etc.”. According to the report’s author, the number present at the meeting was 15. Alison Macleod’s husband, Jack Selford, counted ‘17 comrades…from 12 different branches, which meant they were “forming a faction” and thereby defying Party discipline’. Some, like Frank Brown, ‘Tulse Hill; age 74; Foundation member of Labour Party’, were from outside the CPGB or ‘(?Andrew) Pickering. Labour Party member from Birmingham – told by Christopher Hill of this meeting’. Most were Communists, however, including Brenda Chalmers who, the report continued, ‘left meeting before end in company with Pickering’ adding gratuitously, ‘the connection might be sexual rather than geographical’. The report continued in this sordid tone, noting that this information was an ‘extraneous bit of dirt gleaned from later knowledge’. What the leadership hoped to gain from this exercise is not clear and, in retrospect, it appears as a distinctly unsavoury caricature of the worst Stalinist practices.

The report, however, provides insight into the politics of the opposition and reinforces the impression of a critique in some confusion about whether it was aimed at Leninist fundamentals or Stalinist deterioration. Referring to Dennis Swinnerton’s opening remarks, the report quoted him as saying ‘need for great changes in party – ever since its foundation under the influence of Lenin, modelled itself too much on Russian pattern’.

The discussion, as it was reported, revealed the group’s inclination to remain within the Party and focused initially on whether or not they were, or should be, a fraction within the CPGB. Frank Brown, who was reported as saying ‘there are so many of us that the EC would never dare to discipline us’, was supported by Jane Swinnerton who agreed ‘there are so many like us in the party that the old methods of organisation will have to be changed, whether the EC like it or not’. Dr Brierley, however, was concerned that ‘as a minority we are completely at the

59 ‘Report to Organisation Department CPGB’ [meeting held, 7 December 1956] (undated), 1, Manchester, CP/Cent/Org/18/06.
60 Macleod, The Death of Uncle Joe, 198.
61 ‘Report to Organisation Department’, 1.
62 Ibid., 1.
63 D. Swinnerton, cited in ibid., 2.
64 F. Brown and J. Swinnerton, cited in ibid.
mercy of the machine' and accurately predicted that 'the majority of the party is loyal to the EC who would...not be in the least adverse to letting a number of malcontents go'. The discussion revealed the diversity of members' response to the crisis. Brenda Chalmers, for example, saw 'the loyalty of the mass of members' as 'terrifying, but there are a lot like us, and so we have to continue the fight within the party'. Mr Knapp from Islington agreed, saying 'when it comes to a vote loyalty triumphs...we must continue fight within party'.

Dick Goss, described as an 'arch-liquidationist', however, called for 'some kind of organisation of scientific socialists', saying 'the Party is no good – it has learnt nothing and its name is mud...we need an independent Marxist organisation, independent of but associated with the Labour Party'. Another contributor, 'Armstrong', revealed that 'the Uxbridge Labour Party Sec.' had informed him of resigning Communists applying to join the Labour Party. Following a longer contribution about the re-drafting of The British Road to Socialism from someone identified only as YYY, a general discussion ensued over whether those present were prepared to risk expulsion. Judith Todd, who described herself as 'a non-liquidationist and non-leaver', felt that the democratic centralist structure of the Party was satisfactory 'if interpreted in the right spirit'. This, she continued, needed a new executive 'which would interpret them in that way'.

According to the report, these proceedings 'were informal, not to say anarchic...there was no positive statement of aims...but there was a general assumption that everybody was pro-Reasoner and anti-EC on inner-Party democracy, Hungary and everything else'. The meeting closed with Swinnerton reading a note from John Saville saying 'that he was worried about the slackness of Abramsky and Hobsbawm...they would have to get a move on if they wanted to make any impression on the EC'. The report suggested that 'other groups of this type' were in existence, including 'one in North London attended by 60 people, and another in the East End'. This particular group also discussed further meetings, formed a committee and arranged another meeting for the beginning of January.

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65 Dr. Brierly, cited in ibid.
66 B. Chalmers, cited in ibid.
67 Mr Knapp, cited in ibid.
68 D. Goss, cited in ibid. 2.
69 Armstrong, cited in ibid. 3.
70 J. Todd, cited in ibid. 3.
71 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid., 4.
The report provided an ‘estimation’, describing the group as ‘a clueless lot of scruffs, potentially quite dangerous from nuisance value point of view’. The final remarks are interesting, however, as they identify with cynical clarity, the confusion of those opposing the leadership. The observer noted ‘no clear idea what they want except “freedoms” leading to party anarchy, or what kind of an organisation they want and who is to be in it, or the consequences of fighting as a faction “within” a party whose rules exclude factions’.

The leadership carried out a similar exercise at the London Socialist Forum, held in Holborn in March 1957. The report was characterised by a similar cynical tone. This meeting was wider in political scope than the Swinnertons’ and was attended by around 500 people with an impressive list of celebrities including Thompson and Saville, Hyman Levy, Gerry Healey, Les Cannon, Raphael Samuel and Peter Fryer. The report noted that the meeting was ‘mainly middleclass elements – sprinkling of beards – all ages. Trots very plentiful’. Significantly, the report continued, ‘Thompson and particularly Saville not political leaders (on own admission)’. This, the report concluded, meant that ‘Trots will take over the “Forum” or steer it from behind’ and reinforced the impression of the opposition’s lack of political focus, saying ‘the four CPers didn’t seem to have a clue of where they’re going’.

The report outlined speeches by Saville then Thompson. Saville pointed to the political development of the CPGB having been subordinated to the CPSU and called for an analysis of contemporary capitalism as well as Stalinism. Saville went so far as to suggest that ‘an evaluation of Trotsky’s work is needed – will help analyse Stalinism’. Thompson called for de-Stalinisation ‘especially in SU’ and for a move towards ‘socialist humanism’.

The report of the discussion, again revealed a range of perspectives, both of the current position and the way forward. A ‘mid-aged woman...fluent speaker... (Shields or Sheels)’ asked ‘don’t these groups add up to a new Party? What kind of Party? A Party of critics...Marxist critics or just critics?’ The report referred to ‘Paddy McMahon’ who said the ‘speakers give impression that Marxism has no

74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
76 ‘Report of London Socialist Forum to Organisation Department CPGB’ [held, 15 March 1957] (undated), 1, Manchester, CP/Cent/Org/18/04.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
79 J. Saville, cited in ibid., 2.
80 E.P. Thompson, cited in ibid., 2-3.
81 Cited in ibid., 3.
future...but as a rail worker my wage packet etc. etc. (applause).

After Peter Fryer had exhorted the meeting to 'read Trotsky's works' a 'big built baldish man...moved successful resolution to Hungarian authorities..."Set Lukas [sic] free".

A Party member called Kendall accused the speakers of 'errors', calling for them to 'explain...by economic causes' the 'purges etc and bureaucracy'. An exchange followed which helps to explain Fryer's unenthusiastic attitude towards The Reasoner and the New Left tradition it generated. Saville replied to Fryer's call to read the works of Trotsky, by saying 'we must evaluate Trotsky's works — Trots are dogmatic and which Trot group is being referred to?'. Thompson, in a more ameliorative tone, 'agrees to read Trotsky and discuss with them' and replied to 'Shields or Sheels', saying 'the Forum is not a new Party but similar in idea to L/B [Left Book] Club' and emphasised 'we are not political leaders'. The meeting ended with an announcement about the Socialist Forum Conference at Sheffield, to which the CPGB observer added 'another Trot field day?'. In fact, Gerry Healey was not reported as contributing to this meeting which, given his reputation for logorrhoeic intervention, was significant.

An inconvenient history

In the midst of the crisis over the secret speech and just after the publication of the first number of The Reasoner, the Executive Committee ordered a Commission to write the Party's history. In August 1956, Frank Jackson wrote to several members, reminding them of an informal meeting 'for exchange of views on the method of compiling the History of the Party' to be held on 28 August. This was the result of an 'EC decision of 16th July "to proceed with the preparations for the publication of the history of the Party", and the consequent setting up of an Editing Commission by the Political Committee in August'.

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82 P. McMahon, cited in ibid., 3.
83 Cited in ibid. György Lukács wrote mainly on cultural and literary subjects, but produced a collection of essays in 1923 called History and Class Consciousness (London, 1971) which was attacked by Zinoviev and repudiated by Lukács at a public confession in 1930. The work re-emphasised, as central to Marxism, the role of alienation in the creation of false consciousness. He had been People's Commissar for Education in the 1919 Hungarian Soviet Republic and was Minister for Education under Nagy between October and November 1956. He was briefly interned as a result.
85 J. Saville, cited in ibid., 3.
87 Ibid., 4.
88 F. Jackson, 'Circular' (21 August 1956), Manchester, CP/Cent/Comm/10/01.
89 Ibid.
Brian Pearce called this 'short-lived...you might say, aborted commission', took place at a time when the leadership was attempting to reinforce an impression of listening 'sympathetically' and 'carefully' to its membership. Within this context, the history of the commission reinforces the impression of an obsessive preoccupation with control as the leadership fretted about how the respective difficult periods of 'class against class' and 1939 were to be interpreted. Throughout the discussions, despite the fact that the Communist Party Historians' Group contained some highly respected figures, the leadership consistently manoeuvred to marginalize them. Eric Hobsbawm wrote that this was because 'the gap between what historians thought it necessary to write and what was regarded as officially possible and desirable...proved too large'. Apart from A.L. Morton, who had published the well received *People's History of England* in 1938 and Christopher Hill who had gained a considerable reputation as a historian of the English Revolution, the Historians Group, between 1946 and 1956 had published 34 books and 61 historical articles outside of Communist Party media. Ignoring the classic exhortation, 'from each according to his ability', however, the leadership favoured the more ideologically reliable talents, firstly of Robin Page Arnot, then James Klugmann. As Hobsbawm added, 'Pollitt and some of the others, for reasons which are quite incomprehensible, seemed unenthusiastic about any history other than what might be called the regimental variety'.

According to Hobsbawm, a weekend school had been organised as early as 1952 to discuss writing a 'Marxist history of the movement'. The planned book was never written, however, as the political requirements of the Party appeared in danger of being compromised by a too perceptive historical analysis. The same concerns emerged in 1956. Point four of the 'Executive Committee Report', ordering the commission, requested that it 'submit to Political Committee step by step the main political problems for discussion – eg, 1929-30 period or attitude to war in 1939.

92 Ibid., 35.
95 Ibid., 29.
96 Ibid.
97 Executive Committee CPGB, 'Report on Party History' (July 1956), Manchester, CP/Cent/Comm/10/01.
The meeting in August 1956 chose an Editing Commission which included Hobsbawm, Brian Pearce and A.L. Morton from the Historians Group. A working party of four also emerged from this meeting, consisting of Robin Page Arnot, Frank Jackson, Harry Pollitt and Andrew Rothstein, none of whom were members of the Historians Group. The Commission met formally on 10 December with two Party historians, Pearce and Morton, present; Hobsbawm having sent apologies. Chairman, Harry Pollitt, read out a note from the Historians Group communicating their desire to assist in the writing of the history and expressing regret that the Executive Committee had not consulted them prior to the setting up of the Commission. The meeting decided that 'in view that there were three members of the group on the Commission, that the group be consulted and brought in if necessary on special items or periods'. Initially, Page Arnot was given the job of writing the history. He had represented the British Party in the Comintern in the late 1920s and had remained a firm supporter of the Stalinist faction throughout the 1930s. He had been a member of G.D.H. Cole's Guild Socialists, but was part of a small group who renamed themselves Guild Communists and went on to become founding members of the CPGB. The four man working party met on 24 January 1957. Pollitt, now a sick man, sent apologies, and the Committee consisted of Andrew Rothstein, Page Arnot and Frank Jackson. Hobsbawm described Jackson as 'an ancient, stubborn, droopy-moustached building worker whose loyalties and - sometimes sectarian – memories went back to the days of the SDF [Social Democratic Federation]'. According to his notes, Jackson 'joined the SDF in 1903, when I was 16 years old'. He continued, 'in 1912 I joined the SLP and was a member for some months, and then rejoined the BSP'.

Andrew Rothstein was the son of Anglo-Russian historian Theodore Rothstein, who was later to become Soviet Ambassador in Persia. Andrew was a leading intellectual figure in the CPGB and a member of the Central Committee as early as 1923, when he was known as C.M. Roebuck. He had worked in Moscow for the Soviet News Agency, TASS, and lectured at the School of Slavonic Studies in London University. In 1950, the school refused to renew Rothstein's

98 The full list was sent in a letter from Gollan to Hymie Fagan (14 September 1956); Harry Pollitt (Chair), Robin Page Arnot, Emile Burns, R.P. Dutt, Hymie Fagan, Hobsbawm, Allen Hutt, Frank Jackson (secretary), James Klugmann, A.L. Morton, Brian Pearce, Andrew Rothstein, Bob Stewart, Manchester, CP/CENT/Comm/10/01.
99 Minutes of meeting of Editing Commission, (10 December 1956) note 1, Manchester, CP/Cent/Comm/10/01.
100 Ibid.
102 F. Jackson, 'Some Recollections' (1956-7), Manchester, CP/Cent/Comm/10/03.
103 See Deutscher, The Prophet Armed, 223.
contract on the basis of ‘a lack of scholarship’. The truth of this is not clear. Rothstein may have been a victim of Cold-War nerves on the part of the university authorities. The Educational Bulletin pointed out that the authorities had cited his work for TASS as preventing him from ‘treating his subject with scholarly detachment and impartiality’. In 1953, Rothstein’s case was discussed in Convocation, where ‘the result was a heavy vote in favour of an enquiry’, but the University Senate refused to act on Rothstein’s behalf. As a contemporary Sovietologist, Rothstein carried an uneven reputation. Ralph Russell described him as one of the ‘great falsifiers’. Peter Fryer said of him that he ‘defended Stalinism and routinely slandered its victims’.

In 1956, he became involved in an argument over an alleged attempt to tailor history to fit political exigency which appeared in New Statesman, and involved another member of the commission, Brian Pearce. The journal had cited E.H. Carr who accused Stalin of altering lines in ‘Lenin’s Testament’ from ‘I propose to the comrades to remove Stalin from that position’ to ‘The comrades should discuss the question of dismissing Stalin’. Rothstein claimed that the translation Carr had used was by Eastman, an American Trotskyist, and that the original translated to the milder ‘I propose to the comrades to think over a means of transferring Stalin from this position’. In Khruschev’s speech, however, Lenin’s language was more direct than Rothstein claimed. According to this version, Lenin wrote ‘I propose that the comrades consider the method by which Stalin would be removed from this position and by which another man would be selected for it’.

Two replies to New Statesman followed. The first came from ‘Marxist’, accusing Rothstein of ‘misrepresentation’. Another, from ‘Communard’ on 4 August expressed surprise at Rothstein’s admission that a ‘Testament’ even existed. ‘Inside the Party’, the reply continued, ‘it was usual, I found to tell the innocents (skilled workers...and keen bright eyed university students) that there never was a Testament’. Rothstein, wrote ‘Communard’, had done ‘our Party no service by his zealfulness in arguing about the Party’s treatment of Lenin’s

105 Ibid.
106 Ibid.
108 Fryer, Hungarian Tragedy, 182.
110 Ibid.
"testament". It has since emerged that Brian Pearce was the author of this correspondence and although, at the time, the leadership did not know this for certain, he was nevertheless held in suspicion on the history commission.

Pearce wrote to the working party, complaining that the minutes of the December Commission meeting were 'Not true record'. The Commission's Secretary, Ted Jackson replied, 'reminding him of the promise to raise the assistance to the Commission by the Historian Group'. Pearce also wrote a letter to the Daily Worker, which J.R. Campbell refused to publish. The letter dealt with the 'class against class' period and asserted that 'Harry Pollitt and R.P. Dutt became the most important leaders of the Communist Party in 1929...as a result of Comintern intervention in Party affairs'. Pearce related the history in much the same way as it appears above, citing the CPGB's 'act of defiance' when it attacked 'supporters of the Comintern "line"'. It was this that provoked the Comintern to demand 'that the British Communists appoint a leadership which could be "counted on to carry out consistently the line of the Communist International"'.

Following Pearce's interventions, on 4 March 1957 the full Commission 'agreed that members should treat the business of the Commission as private, not discuss our affairs with other committees, except by agreement with the Commission'. It is not clear why the writing of the Party's history should be subject to such secrecy, but this was reinforced at the next meeting in May when James Klugmann 'moved and it was accepted that: it should be accepted by all members of the Commission that the proceedings of the Commission are confidential and should not be reported without the consent of the Commission'. This meeting decided, finally, to ask the Historians Group for 'their views and suggestions' once 'the main lines our actions have been worked out and agreed by the Commission'. Dutt was deputed to write political introductions to the two periods raising concern. This followed the line of the Political Committee which

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114 Ibid.
115 Brian Pearce, interview, 1 February 1999.
116 Minutes of Working Committee on Party History (24 January 1957), Manchester, CP/Cent/Comm/10/02.
117 Ibid.
118 B. Pearce to J.R. Campbell (15 December 1956), Manchester, CP/Cent/Comm/10/02. Campbell's refusal is contained in a note to Frank Jackson (24 January 1957), Manchester, CP/Cent/Comm/10/02.
119 B. Pearce to J.R. Campbell (15 December 1956).
120 Ibid.
121 Ibid.
122 Minutes of Editing Commission (4 March 1956)
123 Minutes of Editing Commission (2 May 1957).
124 Ibid.
believed that 'as an essential preliminary to the writing of any history of the Party, a series of scrupulously careful studies of the chief episodes in the Party's struggle since its foundation must be prepared'.

The Commission had planned to utilise members for research and placed a letter in the Party press calling for volunteers. Finally, however, in February 1958, Page Arnot proposed that 'the present plan of the Commission should be abandoned in view of the failure up to date to obtain the necessary help in gathering factual details'. It was also suggested that James Klugmann should be appointed, full-time, to write the history, that a time limit of one year be placed upon the writing and that 'the draft should then be submitted to the Executive Committee'. Hobsbawm asked if 'this would mean the ending of the Commission', but was told that although it would not be wound up, members need not hold themselves available. Klugmann's 'openly partisan' History of the Communist Party of Great Britain was published in 1968 and ran to two volumes. The Historians Group, according to Hobsbawm 'was not to be associated with the actual history'. Indeed, in his Preface, Klugmann, whilst acknowledging the assistance of several Party figures, did not cite any of the CPGB Historians Group. The writing of the Party's history is one example of how the leadership's preoccupation with control during this period meant that its practice persistently fell short of its rhetoric.

**New formations**

Although over 7,000 left the Party during the period between the secret speech and the 25th Congress, a coherent opposition or sustained alternative to established British Communism did not emerge. The Reasoner put itself in the forefront in terms of the debate, arguing that 'this is the time to examine our mistakes. Their effect has been to isolate us from the Labour movement, to diminish our political influence and to hinder the devoted work for Socialism of a generation of Communists'. Apart from The Reasoner and the New Reasoner Minutes of Political Committee CPGB (15 April 1957), Manchester, CP/Cent/Comm/10/01. Minutes of Editing Commission, (27 February 1958). Ibid. Ibid. Ibid. Klugmann, History of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1919-1924. 11. Klugmann published the second volume on the period, The General Strike 1925-1927, in 1969, after which Noreen Branson took the history up to 1951. Hobsbawm, 'The Historian's Group of the Communist Party', 30. Thompson and Saville, 'Taking Stock', 6.
which superseded it, another journal emerged in 1957, edited by four Labour Party members, two of whom were ex-Communists, with the aim of creating 'a mass basis in the universities for socialist thought'.\textsuperscript{132} The proposed title was \textit{New University Left}, but it appeared as \textit{Universities and Left Review}.\textsuperscript{133} Its editors included Raphael Samuel and Stuart Hall and it boasted an impressive range of contributors for its first two issues, including Saville, Thompson and Hobsbawm, as well as Richard Crossman, Michael Foot, Lindsay Anderson and Issac Deutscher.\textsuperscript{134} This journal merged with \textit{New Reasoner} in 1959 resulting in \textit{New Left Review}, but the tendency which these publications represented never recaptured the 'political influence' for which \textit{The Reasoner} had called.

Driven as they were, by powerful intellects, these journals more than held their own in the political debates of the period, both with the CPGB and within the established political culture. The headquarters, a coffee shop in Soho, became a centre for organising the Aldermaston Marches and New Left writers frequently engaged in discourse with the fashionable media. Despite these considerable achievements, the New Left made little appeal to the organised working class.\textsuperscript{135} Its clear position on unilateralism found a resonance, particularly amongst students. Calls for other political objectives such as workers' control, however, were heeded only by those for whom, in any practical sense, the idea would always remain abstract.

The Communist Party, by contrast, retained genuine roots within British trade unionism. Although probably not an accurate reflection of CPGB membership, statistics showing the occupational composition of National Congress delegates, indicate that the Party had a real relationship with the British working class.

\textsuperscript{132} R. Samuel to Kim (undated), Manchester, CP/Cent/Org/18/05.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{135} See M. Kenny, \textit{The First New Left}, 44-46. Kenny's language, 'it has become commonplace among later critics of this formation to comment upon its lack of connections with the working class', implied that such critics were incorrect in this assumption. Under the sub-heading 'An Industrial Wing of the New Left?', however, Kenny devoted just over two pages to the subject focusing upon a \textit{New Reasoner} conference in April 1959, 'attended by thirty trade union officials.', 45. Following this, the New Left released a bulletin, \textit{Searchlight}, which 'ran for only four issues, from January to April 1960'.
Table 8. Occupational Composition of National Congresses, 1952-1963

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A fall in the manual trades, such as engineering and building around 1957, coincided with a rise in occupations such as teaching and professional and technical. It is not clear whether university lecturers are represented under teaching or professional. There were several lecturers such as Christopher Hill, Ralph Russell and Arnold Kettle at the 1957 Congress. Kettle, however, as a member of the Executive Committee may be represented as a CPGB official. Bearing such uncertainties in mind, it can be seen that those occupations broadly described as manual were represented by 53 per cent of delegates in 1952. This fell to 44 per cent in 1957, but climbed back to 52 per cent in 1959. If teachers and housewives are included, the figures increase to 64, 61 and 66 per cent respectively. Across the period as a whole, 51 per cent of delegates, on average, were manual workers, a figure increasing to 64 per cent when teachers and housewives are included.

Comparisons between the CPGB and the work of the New Left are problematic. The New Left's repudiation of structures and organisation made it a qualitatively different organisation from the highly structured CPGB. It is impossible

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136 Source: Newton, The Sociology of British Communism, 162.
137 Engineering, Building, Mining, Transport, Clothing, Distribution, Printing and Agriculture are included in this calculation.
138 The 'First New Left' lasted from 1956 until 1962, when Perry Anderson began editing New Left Review. Universities and Left Review was, in part, a response to the large Trafalgar Square demonstration against British intervention in Suez in 1956.
to say who read the journals of the New Left and who they may have influenced, but there is little evidence that those who had repeatedly surrendered claims to political leadership, were able to appeal to sections of the trade union movement, either at a bureaucratic or rank and file level. This is not to devalue the work of this much looser affiliation but in its own terms, by 1959, it did not appear to have won anything like the loyal support throughout the country that the CPGB had retained.

Figures for membership are not available, but the final issue of New Reasoner listed ten 'Left Clubs', with another five 'in active formation' throughout the British Isles. David Widgery calculated that 'between 30 and 40 local Left Clubs ran on a modest scale outside London' with a number of loosely autonomous sections operating throughout the capital at various times. Stuart Hall recalled that the London Club 'attracted to its weekly meetings audiences of three and four hundred drawn from across the whole spectrum of the left'. It is unclear whether these figures refer to political meetings or to the club's skiffle and jazz socials. Such activity was, of course perfectly respectable, but could hardly be said to be fulfilling the objective of a return to 'the main highway of British revolutionary traditions' which had been prescribed in The Reasoner. Although Thompson may have been correct that 'the British people do not understand and will not trust a monolith without a moral tongue', they were even less prepared, it would seem, to support the moralism of the New Left. Thompson, in 1963, gave his own verdict on the early New Left as he wrote 'I am not, I think, betraying a closely guarded state secret when I say that the movement which once claimed to be "The New Left"...has now, in this country, dispersed itself both organisationally and (to some extent) intellectually. We failed to implement our original purposes, or even to sustain what cultural apparatus we had'.

One particularly active area under the auspices of the New Left was the Fife Socialist League, founded by former Communist, Lawrence Daly in 1957. Daly left in 1956, along with around 25 per cent of local Party membership, in an area which had traditionally been one of the party's strongholds. Daly, a County Councillor and an area delegate for the National Union of Mineworkers, stood in the General

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139 New Reasoner, 1:10 (Autumn 1959).
143 Thompson, 'Winter Wheat in Omsk', 408.
145 Ibid. West Fife had been Willie Gallacher's constituency.
Election of 1959 as a Fife Socialist League candidate. According to Michael Kenny, this provoked debate in the New Left, with Saville and Dorothy and Edward Thompson supporting, but a number of people, whom Kenny described as ‘devotees’, unhappy about ‘standing candidates against the Labour Party’.\footnote{Kenny, The First New Left, 41.} As Daly absorbed himself more in the NUM, the League published its last journal of The Socialist in May 1961, and had ceased to exist by the end of the year.\footnote{Ibid.}

The other pole of attraction for the opposition was Trotskyism. Brian Pearce and Peter Fryer were two prominent members who joined Gerry Healy around this period. The Trotskyist tendency came together with CPGB oppositionists in April 1957, at the Socialist Forum Conference near Sheffield. Such interaction was short-lived, however, and Healy went on to form the Socialist Labour League in 1959. Whilst demonstrating a more profound – if often impenetrable - understanding of Marxism than either the CPGB or the largely empiricist New Left, the SLL and its successor, the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP), retained a rigid perspective, based almost to the letter, on Trotsky’s final writings. Apart from these two tendencies, many oppositionists, ‘far from finding that we were under suspicion as ex-Communists...were warmly welcomed’ by the Labour Party.\footnote{MacLeod, The Death of Uncle Joe, 266.}

Opposition within the CPGB had its roots in an increasing awareness throughout the 1950s, that Stalinism, both in the Soviet Union and Britain, was in crisis. The secret speech and the invasion of Hungary confirmed these suspicions, provoking both anger and a desire to reform the British Party and its relationship to the Soviet Union. Those, like John Hostettler and Ralph Russell, who believed that such reform was possible, stayed inside the Party. Those who did not, left. Most of the oppositionists, however, right up until the time they left or were expelled, and in many cases afterwards, continued to believe in ‘The Party’ as the hegemonic expression of British socialist aspiration.

The opposition continued to work from a political analysis that characterised Stalinism in terms of a Bolshevik revolutionary heritage. It retained a remarkable and self-defeating adherence to British Stalinism’s methods and practices. As long as the opposition stuck to the rules, the Party leadership would win. In the years following 1956, the inability of any alternative to relate to the organised working-class, meant that British Communism retained a real, if politically sterile, hegemony within the trade union movement. The following chapters investigate how British Communism survived in the late 1950s on the
basis of two related factors – one fortuitous and the other the result of years of hard work and sacrifice by a large proportion of its membership. The first was the rise in industrial struggle which culminated in 1957, the most strike-ridden year between 1945 and the turbulent years of 1969 -1973. The other was the Party's roots within the trade union movement, both at rank and file and leadership level. The Party's rank and file intervention boosted its credibility during 1957, enabling it, in time, to replace members lost during 1956. The Party's belief, however, that it could substitute for socialist leadership of the working class by manoeuvring individuals into positions within the trade union bureaucracy, not only did not work, but in the case discussed in detail below, proved disastrous. If 1956 can be viewed as the seminal moment in the political decline of British Communism – the point from which it never recovered – then 1963 and the trial of Communists within the Electrical Trades Union, can be viewed as its industrial equivalent.
Chapter 6

Trade Unionism and Communist Politics

to be effective, Social Democracy must take all the positions she can...However, the prerequisite for this is that these positions make it possible to wage the class struggle from them.¹

The area of activity which did most to sustain the Party through the crisis of the mid-1950s was its work within the trade unions. The following three chapters discuss Communist intervention into British trade unionism. The variegated nature of this movement reflected British society and affected this intervention. The Teachers' Union (NUT), for example, lay between popular perceptions of working and middle-class. Party members trod a difficult line between professional responsibility and responsibility to the militant traditions of Communism. Marguerite Morgan, for example, a Communist teacher in Coventry, discussed how, following her election as representative to a Women's Assembly in Geneva in 1954, her head-teacher insisted that she 'make up the lessons to be missed...so that I could not be accused of a dereliction of duty'.² C.H. Darke described how a teacher in his Hackney Branch was 'regarded as an intellectual', who was 'concerned with the Party activities within parent-teacher organizations...she will be astute enough to show the proper humility before her proletarian comrades'.³ Max Morris was on the Executive Council of the NUT in the 1960s. He alluded to the dilemma between militancy and professional responsibility when he discussed how NUT Communists 'got the union involved in action, but we were never strike happy...I don't think we ever engaged in an unofficial strike at any time'.⁴

The Electrical Trades Union (ETU), on the other hand, consisted of skilled and semi-skilled workers and was formed in 1889 following the merger of two established unions.⁵ Communist intervention in the ETU was its most successful under what can be described as its leadership strategy. According to notes written towards a report on

¹ R. Luxemburg, Selected Speeches and Writings, 61.  
² M. Morgan, Part of the Main (London 1990), 70.  
⁴ Max Morris, interview, 16 March 1998.  
⁵ The ETU was the result of a merger between the Amalgamated Society of Telegraph and Telephone Construction Men and the Union of Electrical Operatives. In 1968, the ETU merged with the Plumbers to form the Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunications and Plumbing Union (EETPU). In 1992, it merged with the AEU, to form the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union, D. Bishop, Modern Records Centre Catalogue (February 1999) MSS. 387.
Party cadres, Communists, in January 1955, occupied the positions of General President and Assistant General Secretary. Four out of five National Officers were Communists, as were six Executive Council members and 19 Area Officials. This did not necessarily translate either into industrial militancy nor into political advantage for the Party, however. As these 'notes' continued, 'today, it is hardly an exaggeration to say that there is barely enough speaking time at the Conference for the able advocates of a militant line of policy to express themselves.'

Party intervention at this level was also successful in other unions. Leo Panitch described how 'the ETU and AEU were led by Communists and Communist influence was appreciable in the TGWU, NUM, NUR and USDAW.' Wolf Wayne referred to the North London District of the AEU, saying that 'the vast majority on that district committee...and the full-time organisers of the union in that district were Communists.' Wayne suggested that in the London AEU 'you couldn't get there unless you held a Party card, because the weight of the Party machine would be fighting for its nominee...these people really went to town.' He also referred to the ETU, suggesting that 'here was a particular example of the Party being used as a kind of scaffold around the union and you climbed the scaffold to get wherever you wanted in the union.'

Despite Communist leadership, between 1953 and 1959, electricians were not the most militant group in Britain. Shipbuilding, for example, accounted for 12.7 per cent of strikes during this period, whilst motor and allied trades and non-electrical engineering accounted for 10.8 and nine per cent respectively. ‘Electrical engineering’, on the other hand, accounted for just 2.6 per cent of all strike activity.

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7 Ibid., 6.

8 Panitch, Social Democracy and Industrial Militancy, 33. AEU; Amalgamated Engineering Union, TGWU; Transport and General Workers Union, NUM; National Union of Mineworkers, NUR; National Union of Railwaymen, USDAW; Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers.

9 Wolf Wayne, interview, 10 February 1999. Wayne became Hendon CPGB Borough Secretary on 22 April 1952 whilst remaining President of his Union Branch in the industrialised area around Cricklewood and Edgware in North London. As he said, 'while I was a full-time Party worker and everyone knew I was a full-time Party worker, I was president of my union branch.'

10 Ibid.

over the period. Similarly, within the coal industry, there was considerably more strike activity throughout this period than in electrical engineering. Between nationalisation in 1946 and 1960, the mining industry lost, on average, 513 days a year through, largely unofficial, strikes. This equated to 20 per cent a year, on average, of all days lost to British industry. In spite of this, and although the NUM had Communists Arthur Horner as General Secretary, Abe Moffat as Scottish President and Will Paynter as Welsh President during most of this period, the union remained one of Hugh Gaitskell's key supporters in the fight with Nye Bevan for both Treasurer and later leadership of the Labour Party. Bevan, an ex-coalminer, complained to Sam Watson, the Durham miners' leader, 'how can you support a public schoolboy from Winchester against a man born in the back streets of Tredegar?' Just as Communist bureaucracy did not necessarily equate to a militant rank-and-file, a militant rank-and-file did not automatically translate into support for left-wing policies and figures.

A rise in mining industry strikes during the mid-1950s coincided with a general rise in strike activity. The Economist identified this trend in 1955 as it noted 'more working time was lost in industry through strikes last year than in any year since the war – nearly two and a half million working days.' According to Durcan and MacCarthy, between 1953 and 1959, on average, 1,087 of these strikes related to wages whilst 1,253 were over non-wage issues. In terms of days lost, an average of 4,690 were lost through wage related strikes, whereas 1,028 were lost through non-wage related issues. The ETU was involved in 16 strikes with 138 days lost between 1953 and 1959. Shipbuilding, by contrast, lost 594 days in a series of 77 strikes over the period. Notwithstanding The Economist's protestations about 'the guerrilla strikes called by the Communist Electrical Trade Union', the proportion of strikes involving electrical workers was unremarkable.

\[\text{Ibid.}\]
\[\text{M. Jackson, Strikes Industrial Conflict in Britain, USA and Australia (Brighton, 1987), 84.}\]
\[\text{The key figure in this process was Sam Watson, the Durham Miners' leader. See B. Brivati, Hugh Gaitskell (London, 1997), 186 and J. Campbell, Nye Bevan (London, 1997), 290.}\]
\[\text{B. Brivati, Hugh Gaitskell, 186.}\]
\[\text{The Economist, (29 January 1955), 398.}\]
\[\text{Durcan, McCarthy, Redman, Strikes in Post-war Britain, 66.}\]
\[\text{Ibid., 62. The total number of strikes during the period was 608. The total number of days lost to strike action was 3407.}\]
\[\text{The Economist, (18 June 1955), 1013.}\]
The following chapters analyse the Party's industrial intervention in the light of one of its most traumatic ordeals. This was the civil action in 1961, brought against Communist leaders of the ETU by Jock Byrne and Frank Chapple over accusations of ballot rigging in the election of union officers. Byrne and Chapple won the case which resulted in a ban on Communists holding office. Although the Party repudiated the veracity of the judgement, it nevertheless accepted the resignation of Frank Haxell, the ETU's Communist General Secretary, in 1961. The Party attempted to distance itself from what it characterised as aberrant practices and unacceptable tactics.

The Cold War introduced a set of institutional and political circumstances in Britain which encouraged the resolve of those launching the attacks on the ETU. The role of the trade union leadership and the TUC General Council was critical to this as it sought to consolidate its position within the quasi-corporatist consensus into which it had been co-opted during World War II. The most effective anti-Communists were sections of the Labour Party and the trade unions. Clement Attlee's 'witch-hunt' of civil servants, Woodrow Wyatt's targeting of the ETU as well as Ernest Bevin's creation of an anti-Communist propaganda machine, the IRD, all sought to promote corporate social democracy against what was characterised as an alien political form. Although these politicians and union leaders were backed by an often histrionic Conservative supporting press, Conservative politicians were not generally at the cutting edge of anti-Communism. In a parliamentary debate provoked by Attlee's attack on Communist civil servants, for example, C.E. Mott-Radclyffe was concerned to protect the individual from victimisation, saying 'I think the House will agree with me that it is clearly desirable to avoid a kind of witch hunt in which anybody who had ever had any association with the Communist party in the past, however temporary, becomes automatically suspect.'

**Trade union intervention: Class against Class to the post-War period**

Historically, the CPGB's orientation on the unions was characterised by dualism. Nina Fishman described a 'culture [which] contained two generalised guides

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20 'Press Statement from the Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain' (4 December 1961), Manchester, CP/Cent/EC/08/04.
to action... "trade union loyalism" and "rank-and-filism". Fishman defined trade union loyalism as 'an acknowledgement of one's place in the order of things, a voluntary act of allegiance to one's primary social institution'. Rank and filism concerns those elements associated with militant shop-floor organisation, often in conflict with its leadership. According to Fishman, during the 1920s, Harry Pollitt and J.R. Campbell 'seized on the rich vein of rank-and-filism in British trade union culture and audaciously appropriated it for the Communist Party' while accepting as 'its first commandment', the 'culture - and solidarity' of 'trade union loyalism'. There were tensions for Communists between loyalty to the institution on the one hand and shop-floor opposition to its leaders and their policies on the other. At the end of the 1920s, the 'class against class' perspective exacerbated these tensions. Fishman described people like Bill Rust and John Mahon in this context as 'Young Turks' who 'exhorted Party members to lead mass revolts of workers against the capitalists [and] forge new, red trade unions.'

A breakaway trade union movement was the logical outcome of this strategy. The apparent revolutionary nature of this shift requires qualification, however. Fishman viewed 'class against class' uncritically as a Comintern call to world revolution, seeing the actions of its most zealous adherents in the same light. Stalin's perspective, however, was explicitly non-world revolutionary when he addressed students at Sverdlov University in 1925. He repeatedly emphasised the importance of the Party's decision at its 14th Congress in April 1925, which adopted his slogan 'Socialism in one country'. Stalin's perspective between 1925 and his eventual victory was dictated by the struggle within the Politburo and on the Central Committee. 'Socialism in One Country' remained the political premise of his faction, a premise which 'demanded the gradual subordination of Comintern policies to the needs of Soviet diplomacy.' 'Class against class', far from representing a left turn was a typically Stalinist utilisation of 'Marxist-Leninist' discourse through which the first five year plan and collectivisation

23 Ibid., 10
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., 33. Bill Rust was imprisoned along with 12 others, in 1925. He had lived in Moscow with his wife and three year old daughter, Rosa. See Macleod, The Death of Uncle Joe, 3-12. Rust worked for the Youth Section of the Comintern. In the late 1920s. He led the YCL in Britain and later became editor of the Daily Worker.
27 Deutscher, Stalin, 369.
gained revolutionary credibility. Whilst the policy was extreme in its sectarianism, it was neither revolutionary nor left wing.

The other aspect of Fishman's thesis which requires comment is her coupling together of Pollitt and Campbell as 'the key figures in formulating and overseeing the Party policy towards the trade unions.'

Campbell 'became habituated to translating Pollitt's emotional and subjective reactions', wrote Fishman, claiming that 'non-Party historians...failed to discern their partnership.' This partnership rescued the Party from 'class against class' as 'Pollitt pulled the British Party back from the brink of repudiating trade unions'. Whilst there is no doubt about each man's contribution, the idea that they acted consistently in tandem does not always coincide with the facts. Noreen Branson referred to the London District Committee's response in April 1928 to J.T. Murphy's proposal calling for a dilution of 'class against class'. On the question of affiliation to the Labour Party, 'the ... Committee responded with a resolution urging that the affiliation fight be abandoned, a view...supported by Harry Pollitt.'

Branson continued, 'Campbell and Gallacher both urged continuation of the...fight for affiliation.' On the Central Committee, Campbell was one of nine voting in favour of continuing to seek affiliation, whilst Pollitt was one of nine voting against. Far from pulling back from the brink, Pollitt further argued that in by-elections, 'if the Labour candidate rejected the Party's united front demands, electors should be urged not to vote for him or her.' Only three members agreed with this expression of the Stalinist line. At the Party's 1929 Congress, 'it was decided, this time unanimously, that the demand for Communist affiliation to the Labour Party be dropped.' Branson described Pollitt as 'the member of the Central Committee most convinced of the correctness of the new policy.' Brian Pearce said of Fishman's characterisation, 'It's all presented in a Manichean way. Everything she approves of is associated with Pollitt and Campbell, everything she disapproves of is associated with Dutt and Rust'. Pearce suggested that Fishman appeared to want to 'exonerate Pollitt and Campbell

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29 Ibid., 6.
30 Ibid., 10.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid., 32. Published italics.
35 Ibid., 33.
36 Ibid., 34.
37 Brian Pearce, interview, 1 February 1999.
from any activities which she thinks were a mistake'.38 The significant partnership during this period, as John Callaghan implied, was between Pollitt and Dutt.39

This was the only time that the CPGB attempted to break with traditional trade unionism. For most of its life, the Party retained 'trade union loyalism' which people like Pollitt, Gallacher and Campbell had 'imbibed...with their first experiences of work and economic conflict'.40 The Party attempted to reconcile the often conflicting ideas of loyalty to the institution and rank and file militancy. As time passed, however, it avoided locating where the potential for this conflict lay. The Party consistently attacked 'right wing union leaders'. It saw potential conflict, however, as arising from these expressed political positions of right and left, rather than as a conflict inherent within the very different social conditions of a trade union bureaucrat on the one hand and a rank and file activist on the other.

The two poles of British trade unionism were expressed, in the 1920s, by the National Minority Movement (NMM) and 'Mondism'. The NMM had grown in the South Wales and Fife coalfields, which 'recorded support for the Red International of Labour Unions'.41 It held its founding conference in August 1924 with Tom Mann as President and Pollitt as Secretary. Addressing this conference, Pollitt cited the aims of the movement in specifically Soviet terms as he stated 'Our sole object is to unite the workers in the factories by the formation of factory committees'.42 On the other hand, he stressed that the movement was 'not out to disrupt the unions, or to encourage any new unions', but continued to talk of the 'creation of a real General Council' which would lead to 'complete workers' control of industry'.43 Following the General Strike, the TUC urged unions against affiliation to the NMM. The 1926 TUC Congress at Bournemouth began a series of bans and proscriptions on Communists and NMM members from holding office in some unions.44

In 1927, at the TUC in Edinburgh, President George Hicks invited ' "a direct exchange of practical views" between those entitled to speak for both sides of

38 Ibid.
39 Callaghan, Rajani Palme Dutt, 116.
40 Fishman, The British Communist Party and the Trade Unions, 10.
42 Cited in ibid., 99 n.1.
43 Ibid.
44 In 1926 these included National Union of General and Municipal Workers, the Railway Workers, Transport Workers, the Electrical Trades, as well as the Boilermakers (Pollitt's own union). Hutt, British Trade Unionism, 117.
industry'. This was accepted by Lord Weir, who wrote to Ernest Bevin on behalf of a group of leading industrialists. The result was the Mond -Turner talks of 1928, which sought to rationalise collective bargaining and to standardise agreements across industries. In opposition, the Minority Movement convened in April 1931, a Convention in London endorsing the NMM's 'Workers Charter'. A month later 2000 delegates met in Manchester to demand the 40 hour week and to pledge resistance to wage-cuts.

Largely through the NMM, the CPGB had influenced the calling of the General Strike. Its limitations were exposed, however, following the TUC's ending of the strike in May 1926. The Party had neither the numbers nor the influence to exploit rank and file disillusionment with its leadership. 'Class against class' exacerbated the effects, both of the TUC bans and of Mondism. The CPGB either had to accommodate to the official move to more formalised negotiations or attempt to initiate a new alternative on the basis of remaining rank-and file organisation. The Party's failed attempt at the latter coincided with 'class against class'. Following its abandonment of the NMM, it adopted a dual strategy which attempted to reconcile rank and filism with trade union loyalism. The CPGB, according to Fishman, 'became expert in dispensing token formal rhetorical obeisance to Independent Leadership and then directing members' attention to the mundane practical issues of the economic struggle'.

Programmatically, the Party's trade union strategy fell into two phases following World War II. These two phases were marked by the 1951 and 1958 versions of The British Road to Socialism. The second phase, following 1956, coincided with rising industrial struggle within Britain. This programmatic change was a shift in emphasis, however, and did not correspond to a change in the Party's practice. This programmatic realignment was articulated, in 1957, by Abe Moffat, the Scottish Miners' President who wrote that there was a tendency in our Party that our new approach in the use of Parliament to achieve the peaceful transition to socialism ...would come through this means only and without mass struggle of the people outside Parliament.' The 'revised text' said Moffat, must emphasise the centrality of 'mass struggles...to take power from the present ruling class'. The 1951 programme

49 Ibid.
emphasized that 'the path forward...will be to establish a People's Government on the basis of a Parliament.'\(^{50}\) Whilst delegating 'a key role' for the unions, this version proposed confining this role within specifically trade union limits. The one paragraph devoted to the unions envisaged them restoring 'full powers of collective bargaining ...ensuring the basis for steadily advancing wages and conditions.'\(^{51}\) They would also 'participate in the work of the ministries of Labour and National Insurance and ensure the operation of the labour laws', functions similar to those they had undertaken during World War II. The 1958 version, by contrast, was clear that 'working class power is the essential condition for far reaching change'.\(^{52}\) The new version continued to emphasise the centrality of 'Parliament' where a 'socialist Labour and Communist majority' would 'establish a Socialist government'.\(^{53}\) It now stated that 'this change can only be brought about through struggle' and, in two pages devoted to 'The Communist Party and the Labour Movement', said that 'the advance to socialism requires the building up of the movement in struggle.'\(^{54}\) The 1958 version saw trade unions leading the working class 'from the immediate struggles under capitalism right up to the struggle for political power and the building of socialism.'\(^{55}\)

This shift in emphasis did not represent a change in policy, as the Party retained its commitment to 'a general election fought on the issue of a socialist solution'.\(^{56}\) It was, however, a response to changing circumstances within Britain. It was also a response to 1956 and represented part of the Party's attempt to de-Stalinise. As discussed above, the first British Road to Socialism was specifically Stalinist, as it referred explicitly to the achieving of socialism 'through People's Democracy...as in the People's Democracies of Eastern Europe.'\(^{57}\) The Party expunged reference to the Eastern European states from the 1958 version and replaced the term 'People's Democracy' with 'Socialist Government'.\(^{58}\) Another factor militating towards the emphasis on struggle was the Party's increasingly poor record at

\(^{50}\) The British Road to Socialism (1951), 14.
^{51}\) Ibid., 16.
^{52}\) The British Road to Socialism (1958), 10.
^{53}\) Ibid.
^{54}\) Ibid., 10 and 28
^{55}\) 'Political Resolution to the Twenty Fifth Congress' (April 1957), 71, Manchester, CP/Cent/CONG/10/05.
^{56}\) The British Road to Socialism (1958), 10.
^{58}\) The British Road to Socialism (1958), 10.
the polls. Moreover, during the 1950s, with Gaitskell’s victory in the Labour Party and a continuing Conservative majority, the prospect of a parliamentary road looked correspondingly bleak. A rightward shift at the top of British politics coincided with an increasing recalcitrance in the rank and file of many trade unions, which culminated in 1957.  

Although the Party continued in the 1960s, to note uncontentiously that ‘trade unions are mass organisations of the working-class’ and advocated ‘the greatest possible measure of trade union activity’, it drifted away from the 1958 emphasis on unions as organisations of political struggle and repositories of workers’ power. By 1961, the Party had become somewhat vague as it explained that ‘wages, hours and conditions of work are determined by trade union power’ and spoke of unions as forums where ‘Communists have been more concerned with convincing the workers ...of the necessity for a socialist transformation.’ It would be over simplistic to see a direct relationship between levels of strike activity and the Party’s emphasis or otherwise on trade unions as vehicles for socialism, but there is no doubt that this was a factor.

A consistent feature of the Party’s industrial orientation in this period was that it continued to support the institution of trade unionism rather than challenge it as ‘the ideological enslavement of the workers by the bourgeoisie’. The Party concentrated its fire on ‘right-wing’ leaders, seeing these individuals as the main barrier to militant organisation. At the same time, it continued to support and participate, along with such people, in those bureaucratic structures and procedures which represented the most conservative aspects of British trade unionism.

Lenin wrote that ‘the Social Democrat’s ideal should not be the trade union secretary, but the tribune of the people.’ In 1961, the Party claimed that its objective was not ‘the winning of trade union posts for Communists...not the winning of official positions, but the winning of the support of the workers for a progressive policy’.

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59 Durcan, McCarthy, Redman, *Strikes in Post-war Britain*, 66. The authors noted that ‘the number of days lost’ in 1969 ‘exceeded five million for the first time since 1957’.
60 Industrial Department, CPGB, ‘Did Communists Control the ETU?’ (1 September 1961) 15, Manchester, CP/Cent/IND/1/5.
61 Executive Committee CPGB, ‘The Communist Party and the Trade Unions’ (8 July 1961), 2, Manchester, CP/Cent/Math/05/02.
62 Lenin, *What is to be Done?*, 41.
63 Ibid., 80.
64 ‘Did Communists Control the ETU?’ (1 September 1961), 15, Manchester, CP/Cent/IND/1/5.
Party's leadership strategy, however, was confused between a political strategy, which represented Communist trade union leaders as a socialist leadership of the working class, and the election of Communists to office as an end in itself. Wolf Wayne suggested of these leaders, 'there was no question of enlightening the people about the aims of socialism'. The Party, having discovered a formula through which its members could attain office, utilised it routinely with minimal regard to political conditions or implications. Stalinism and The British Road to Socialism had closed the revolutionary door at the same time as working-class resignation towards the governing consensus appeared to choke off Parliamentary possibilities. Under such circumstances, the Party's leadership strategy represented a barely coherent retreat into the one corner where apparent power still seemed available. Whether it served any useful purpose or not, it remained the only place the Party retained apparent institutional credibility.

Anti-Communism

Following the World War II, the TUC supported the Labour government in its increasing antagonism towards the Soviet Union. The TUC owed its influence in the Cold War to three specific circumstances. First was its crucial role during the war under Walter Citrine as General Secretary and Ernest Bevin as Minister of Labour. The second was the fact that it was a Labour government which, through the Foreign Office Committee on Policy Towards Russia, initiated Britain's early belligerence towards the USSR. The third circumstance lay in the position and political personality of Bevin who, along with Citrine, was one of the architects of modern trade unionism. Bevin had formed the National Transport and General Workers Union in 1921, had been its General Secretary between 1921 and 1940 and had been a leading figure in the General Strike. He took these credentials into the wartime coalition, where Churchill had requested his services as Minister of Labour. As Foreign Secretary in Attlee's administration, his perspective in which Britain still had its 'historic part to play' in the world, included showing the Soviets that 'there is a limit beyond which they

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65 Wolf Wayne, interview, 10 February 1999.
66 Bullock, The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin, 651-654. After Churchill met the King on 10 May 1940 he offered a third of the places in his government to Labour. He spoke to Attlee requesting 'four men 'whose services in high office were immediately required'. The first name on the list was that of Ernest Bevin', 651.
cannot safely go'. According to Allen Hutt, 'Mr Bevin...personified those forces... which were able...to harness the trade union movement, by and large, to a Churchillian foreign policy.'

In 1946, Attlee's government conceded that 'the Soviet Union's popularity inside the labour movement remained too strong to allow Bevin to come out openly against it.' The Labour Party, nevertheless, in July, again rejected the CPGB's bid for affiliation. According to Peter Weiler, although 'criticism of the Soviets was still to be regarded as exceptional, requiring Bevin's approval', the CPGB remained a legitimate target.

Following the war, under Vincent Tewson, the TUC continued supporting Attlee's government. It supported, for example, the White Paper, 'Statement on Personal Incomes, Costs and Prices', which emerged at the beginning of 1948 as continuing wartime austerity was exacerbated by the harshest winter in living memory. Sam Watson, the Durham miners' leader, said 'I would advocate a reduction of wages to save the Labour Government.' The TUC, at this time, 'ascribed all opposition and unrest to the activities of the Communist Party' and issued two anti-Communist pamphlets.

By this time, signalled by the Truman Doctrine on the one side and Zhadanov's 'two camps' characterisation on the other, anti-Soviet Communism was becoming as acceptable as it had been domestically. The most important institutional expression of anti-Communism during this period was the formation by Bevin's parliamentary under-secretary, Christopher Mayhew, of the Communist Information Department in 1948. Bevin identified this organisation's remit as ranging across 'the Middle East and...Far Eastern countries' and articulated its objective, saying that 'Communism will make headway unless a strong spiritual and moral lead...is given against it, and we are in a position to give such a lead.' This evolved into the Information Research Department (IRD) and 'for three decades poured out a stream of anti-Communist

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68 Hutt, British Trade Unionism, 173.
69 Weiller, British Labour and the Cold War, 200.
70 Ibid., 202.
71 Cited in Panitch, Social Democracy and Industrial Militancy, 31.
72 Ibid., 33. See below, 221-2.
74 Cited in Weiler, British Labour and the Cold War, 206-7.
propaganda for domestic and (primarily) foreign consumption'. According to Weiler, the IRD utilised British Council auspices to include the TUC in its work. This involved trade unionists visiting from abroad, mainly from 'backward countries', with the object of instilling 'the right kind' of British trade union practice.

In December 1947, Labour Party General Secretary, Morgan Phillips, initiated a campaign to remove Communists from leading positions in the unions. The Times and the Daily Telegraph ran articles about Communist influence. In January 1948, The Times reported, 'Yesterday a committee within the Civil Service Clerical Association [CSCA] announced a campaign to unseat the whole of the present executive committee...on the grounds that they follow Communist policy'. The CSCA was committed 'to correcting the anomaly of having a communist-dominated National Executive Committee in a movement which has not more than 3 per cent Communists or fellow travellers.' The article revealed that L.C. White, CSCA General Secretary, was on the editorial board of the Daily Worker and concluded that 'the struggle is going on in trades councils as well as in the trades unions...there will be special interest this year in the election of officers and committees of the London trades council, in which Communist influence is particularly strong.'

During autumn of 1948, the TUC responded to accusations of Communist domination of affiliated unions. It released two circulars called Defend Democracy and Tactics of Disruption. The pamphlets directed 'the serious attention of all trade unionists to the malignant character of Communist agitation and organisation.' The TUC urged 'affiliated unions...and District and Branch Committees and responsible officers and loyal members, to counteract every manifestation of Communist influence'. It stopped short of recommending a ban, however, suggesting it was 'a matter for...the unions whether it is consistent with the policy of the union and to the

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75 Ibid., 207.
76 Ibid., 210. The British Council, a nominally neutral disseminator of British culture abroad, was described by Labour Colonial Secretary Arthur Creech Jones as 'an agency of His Majesty's Government'. Cited in ibid., 210.
77 'Communists in the Unions', The Times (6 January 1948), 4.
78 Ibid. L.C. White was on the editorial board of the Daily Worker. He also sat on the National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCL).
80 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
Movement as a whole that any member should serve...the Communist Party whilst holding executive or delegate office in the union'.

Anti-Communism in the late 1940s culminated in a purge of the civil service. This was prompted by W.J. Brown, Parliamentary representative of the CSCA. Brown accused E.J. Hicks, the union's president, of being a Communist sympathiser. This was a repercussion from an internal dispute between the union and Brown, who had moved from the left to an independent 'quasi-religious individualist' position. His objections provided the government with a lever with which to prise Communists out of the civil service. Brown called for an 'advisory committee' to operate between the individual and the minister or a 'committee of three or four persons of standing' to subject 'the facts to assessment before a decision is made'. Willie Gallacher made a protracted intervention in this debate. Quoting St Paul to the Corinthians, he accused the 'combination of Tories and Tory-dominated Labour leaders' of 'using the same low, vile slanders against the Communists'. 'The Communist Party' said Gallacher, 'fights for the complete independence and economic prosperity of this country, while the Tories and Labour leaders are selling this country to the big dollar boys of America' and asked the uncomfortable question, 'is this attack...connected with a demand from Marshall that wages in this country must come down?' Attlee insisted, however, 'I think there is a prima facie case against members of Communist and Fascist organisations that they have a divided loyalty.' He supported Brown's system in which accused Communists should attend before their Departmental Head 'who must consider whether it is a matter in which action must be taken...they will then consider whether or not there is a prima facie case for transferring this man...or... for dismissing him.'

The legislation put pressure on the TUC as both representative of workers' interests and supporter of the Labour government. Tewson and his deputy, George Woodcock, eventually dampened down disquiet at the 1948 congress by promising a union representative on the committee of three deputed to hear evidence of

82 Ibid.
83 Weiler, British Labour and the Cold War, 223.
85 W. Gallacher [Communist West Fife], ibid., cols.3398-3402.
86 Ibid.
87 C. Attlee ibid., cols.3419-3421.
88 Ibid., col.3423.
Communist involvement. Despite protests at successive congresses, the General Council held to the government line and between 1948 and 1955, 135 civil servants were investigated. Of these, 24 resigned, 25 were dismissed and 86 were transferred.89

‘The politics of productivity’89

The continuing effort to conquer the bureaucratic heights had implications for Communism under the conditions of quasi-corporatism following World War II. Was it possible to remain a Party of opposition when a section of its membership were associated with trade union leaders closely involved in increasing the efficiency of the post-war neo-Keynesian project? According to Chris Wrigley, ‘trade union leaders backed what they felt to be their government’ during the immediate post-war period.91 Clearly, however, Communist trade union leaders could hardly view any liberal-democratic government in this way, however left wing it may have appeared. Keith Middlemas wrote that, in this period ‘the TUC made a considerable effort to increase production, and responded to Cripps’ first Export Conference in September 1947 by accepting that industry should benefit from Marshall Aid rather than the social services.’92 The CPGB’s leadership strategy should be viewed within this context.

Following the Labour Party’s inclusion in the coalition government in 1940, the TUC was incorporated into the National Joint Advisory Council which gave rise to the Joint Consultative Committee. The JCC consisted of ministers, industrial leaders and the trade unions, whose function was to direct policy on productivity and conditions. During the war, the TUC’s relationship with its members was often resonant of the antagonisms associated with worker versus employer, rather than of fraternal trade unionism. After Hitler’s invasion of the USSR had ‘evoked a tidal wave of pro-Soviet sentiment inside Britain’, Citrine concocted the Anglo-Soviet Trade Union Committee.93 According to Weiler, this was a success from the TUC’s point of view ‘because the

89 Weiler, British Labour and the Cold War, 228.
93 Weiler, British Labour and the Cold War, 55.
Soviets agreed not to deal with the British Communist Party. British workers, however, ‘failed to heed demands for increased productivity’, refusing ‘to respond to the pleas of their nominal leaders’. Citrine responded by inviting Soviet trade unionists to visit British factories. Having ‘as usual, put national self-interest ahead of any loyalty to an international Communist movement’, the visitors were ‘insistent that “more and still more production” should be the order of the day.’

In 1947, the TUC recommended re-forming the Joint Production Committees (JPCs), following a fuel crisis. The TUC spelled out its attitude to increasing productivity in a situation in which ‘the “whip” of unemployment which some employers held in order to enforce discipline had disappeared.’ The TUC called for ‘a genuine effort to establish Joint Production Committees’ and in 1948 organised a conference on improving production which was, according to Wrigley, attended by representatives from 144 unions. Following the Conservative victory in 1951, the TUC continued this role as it participated in the British Productivity Council (BPC). According to Les Cannon, then a Communist, the BPC consisted of the Federation of British Industry, the British Employers Confederation, the Association of Chambers of Commerce, the National Union of Manufacturers, representatives from the Nationalised Industries as well as members of the General Council of the TUC.

Productivity had become the lingua franca of government, opposition, industry and the trade union leadership and constituted the focus for consensus across this spectrum. J.N. Browne emphasised productivity in 1954, as he commended the ‘Gracious Speech’ to the House. Browne said that ‘by its reference to the encouragement and expansion of industry,’ the speech recognised ‘the need to increase the national wealth.’ Les Cannon’s pamphlet pointed out that increased productivity, however, did not equate to higher wages. Under the ‘Work Study Incentive Schemes’, designed ‘to measure the rate at which an operator is working’, a pieceworker could produce twice as much and only receive a third increase in

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94 Ibid., 56.
95 Ibid., 57.
96 Ibid., 57 and cited in ibid., 58.
98 Ibid., 38 and 39.
wages. Cannon produced the following table to show how productivity increased during the period.

Table 9. Productivity growth in Britain between 1947 and 1954

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Percentage Growth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chemicals</td>
<td>71.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood and cork</td>
<td>49.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper and Printing</td>
<td>49.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor cars</td>
<td>75.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shipbuilding, engineering, electrical</td>
<td>52.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

He asserted that productivity increases not only outstripped wages, but that overtime alone sustained workers' purchasing power. Robin Blackburn confirmed that real wages did not increase. Blackburn quoted Guy Routh, the author of a report for the National Institute for Economic and Social Research, who said of wages throughout the twentieth century, 'As with Alice, it is sometimes necessary to run faster and faster to stay in the same place'. Blackburn also confirmed that increased purchasing power owed less to rising wages than to increased overtime working, 'despite nominal reductions of the working day...the average number of hours worked was the same in 1965 as it had been in 1938 (i.e. 47 hours a week)'. The Economist offered further support for the assertion that real wages did not increase. Under the heading 'Facts About Real Earnings', the journal said 'it will be seen that wage rates have kept in remarkably even step with consumer prices'.

Frank Haxell had referred to the danger of the co-option of the leadership when he said, 'It is necessary to recognise that when trade unions become part of management they become committed by the decisions taken and to that extent lose their independence and freedom of action.' Such pronouncements notwithstanding, John Lloyd described how the ETU Communist leadership were, during the 1950s,
negotiating constantly with the National Federated Electrical Association under the
corporate auspices of the National Joint Industrial Council, over issues of productivity
and bonus rates.\textsuperscript{107} Haxell urged Mr Penwill, the employers' negotiator, to accept that
'individual companies or area JICs could pay site or company bonuses', a drift away
from the unifying principle of national wage negotiations.\textsuperscript{108}

The co-option of union leaders into the corporate directing of the economy
exacerbated an already existing gulf them and their membership. The \textit{Economist}
recognised the existence of this gulf. Discussing the 'consensus on unrest in industry',
it wrote of the 'really dud argument' that workers were worse off under the Tories, as
one 'already being used by some of the rank and file (though not by its leaders)'\textsuperscript{109}
The journal suggested that 'if small unofficial strikes...could be stemmed', then official
strikes 'might also be discouraged' if 'agitators' were not constantly pressing 'upon
union officials who naturally want to keep their jobs.'\textsuperscript{110} The state should contain
pressure from below so that union leaders, released from the occupational need to
respond to such militancy, could get on with the business of maintaining industrial
order. Were Communist trade union leaders, in this regard, significantly different in
practice from their 'right wing' counterparts, however? John Lloyd wrote that Les
Cannon 'never forgave the [ETU] executive' for their abandonment of him and nine
others, sacked from English Electric in Liverpool.\textsuperscript{111} Despite a strike by 233 workers in
support, Haxell and fellow Communist, Frank Foulkes asked for the strike to be called
off and were supported by the majority Communist executive.

In 1957, \textit{The Economist} praised left-winger Frank Cousins of the TGWU as a
'colossus...at heart a very moderate man.'\textsuperscript{112} This was after Cousins had 'pushed up'
London Transport's offer of six shillings a week to London busmen to seven shillings
and sixpence, although this did not cover inflation and the busmen had struck for a
pound a week.\textsuperscript{113} The journal also heaped praise on Albert Hallworth of ASLEF who,
after conceding a three per cent rise following a claim of 15 per cent, 'soothed the

\textsuperscript{107} J. Lloyd, \textit{Light and Liberty The History of the EETPU} (London, 1990), 378.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{109} 'Mr Butskell's Dilemma', \textit{The Economist}, (13 February 1954), 439.
\textsuperscript{110} 'Strikes and the Stricken', \textit{The Economist}, (14 May 1955), 547.
\textsuperscript{111} Lloyd, \textit{Light and Liberty}, 377. This was 1954, when Cannon was still a Communist.
\textsuperscript{112} 'Two Days Strike?', \textit{The Economist}, (12 January 1957), 98.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid. Cousins had asked for nine shillings, which, as \textit{The Economist} pointed out, was the
minimum 'to cover the cost of living increase...since the busmen last had a rise' (12 January
1957). Cousins represented a move to left in the TGWU, which had been led by Bevin and 'his
equally tough but less gifted successor... Arthur Deakin'. Campbell, \textit{Nye Bevan}, 60.
delegates by pointing out that this left the executive free to make another claim when they judged the moment ripe'. Such ‘moderate’ leaders were lauded in contrast to Communists, ‘it is evident that the Communists have heard some home truths from other Trade Union leaders in the course of the negotiations [during the London Newspaper strike] and left in no doubt of their considerable unpopularity.’ The journal added, without comment, ‘But that has not prevented Mr Haxell...from being elected General Secretary of the ETU while the strike was on’.

**Trade Union Bureaucrats or Tribunes of the People?**

The Party’s leadership strategy demonstrated limitations in translating industrial influence into political influence. Lenin wrote that ‘for the socialist, the economic struggle serves as a basis for the organisation of the workers into a revolutionary party...if the economic struggle is taken as something complete in itself there will be nothing socialist in it’. He later asserted that ‘Class political consciousness can be brought to workers only...from outside the sphere of relationships between workers and employers.’ The agency for bringing such consciousness from without was the Party. Lenin’s formulation was in contrast to the idealism implicit within Ted Jackson’s statement that ‘The outlook of the working class is superior to that of the capitalist class and it is this that makes socialism and communism possible’. It was not enough for Communists to be trade unionists, even very good ones, unless they could ‘divert the working-class' from ‘trade unionism' which 'means the ideological enslavement of the workers by the bourgeoisie'. This tension between trade union work as something ‘complete in itself and as a means to bringing ‘political consciousness' from without was emphasised in the document ‘Party Cadres’, which stated ‘there is a serious weakness among some of our cadres...a lack of political perspective, of sometimes sacrificing political principle to tactics’. Wolf Wayne talked

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114 ‘Two Days Strike?’, *The Economist*, 98. ASLEF; Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Footplatemen.
116 Ibid.
118 Lenin, *What is to be Done?*, 78-79.
119 T. Jackson, ‘Speech to 25th Congress’ (21 April 1957), Manchester, CP/Cent/Cong/10/06.
120 Lenin, *What is to be Done?*, 41.
about the ETU leadership, suggesting 'I doubt that they ever saw a local [Party] branch meeting.' Wayne added, 'They weren’t contemptuous of the branch, but they had no relationship with what they were doing.' It was also illustrated by successive resolutions to the 23rd Congress of the Party in 1954. Shipley Pit Branch called for ‘more industrial branches’ and for ‘the strengthening of the factory branch’ so that work could be directed ‘towards the trade union, the women, apprentices, rank and file, or shop-steward and trade union officials etc.’ Whilst it was possible, as with the ETU’s series of ‘guerilla strikes’ in 1954, to lead from the front in confrontations with employers, such activity was possible only on the basis of wages and conditions. The Party’s Industrial Department alluded to such limitations when it noted that ‘experienced Communists could get the support of active members...because it was widely known that they had no ambitions beyond being efficient officers of the union.’

Communists in positions of leadership relied upon a credibility, gained through being ‘efficient officers of the union’. In the eyes of a trade union membership which was generally non-socialist and often conservative, the maintenance of this credibility could be in conflict with left wing ideas and positions. Communist leaders constituted the left wing of the trade union bureaucracy, but the imperatives inherent within membership of that bureaucracy meant that they remained closer to their fellow leaders than to the rank and file of their unions. They even, occasionally, scored victories. At the 1950 TUC Congress, for example, the ETU proposed a motion against wage restraint calling for ‘a reasonable limitation of profits, a positive planning of the British economy’ in order to meet ‘wage increases... without... increased prices’. The motion won narrowly by 220,000 votes (3%) and, according to Wrigley, ‘resulted in the first defeat for the General Council for many years.’ The resolution’s need to accommodate to the idea of profits and ‘positive planning’, however, demonstrates limitations as far as socialist leadership was concerned, for Communists operating within such circumstances.

122 Wolf Wayne, interview, 10 February 1999.
123 Ibid.
124 Shipley Pit Branch, ‘Resolution to 23rd Congress of the CPGB’, no.71 (1954), 11, Manchester, CP/Cent/Cong/08/05.
125 Industrial Department of CPGB, ‘Did Communists Control the ETU?’ (September 1961), Manchester, CP/Cent/IND/1/5.
126 ‘ETU Motion to 82nd Congress of the TUC’, in C. Wrigley, British trade unions 1945-1995, 2.
127 Ibid.
Wolf Wayne emphasised that for 'industrial comrades...it was union affairs, it was factory affairs they argued about'.\(^{128}\) Asked if the Party ever attempted to translate industrial strength into political influence he replied, 'it did, but it never really got anywhere with it.' He explained how he would attempt to draw political implications from the struggle for wages and conditions, but added 'it didn't cut much ice and not all our members did it, especially the industrialists'.\(^{129}\) Wayne concluded that pressure on shop-stewards when union issues arose on a daily basis was such that 'you had no time and you had no thought for the higher ideas of Marx, Engels and Lenin...I think basically the Party gave up on that stuff...we just made a nod in that direction, but that's about it'. This, Wayne added, 'was common to the Party...from the top to the bottom.'\(^{130}\) Similarly, former ETU Communist, Jim Layzell, recalled 'about 20 members of the Communist Party' in his union branch, but they were 'not all political'.\(^{131}\) Layzell added 'This was the peculiar thing about the CP...a lot of people in it are not political...they might manoeuvre a bit on different policies'.\(^{132}\)

Stan Smith, a congress delegate in 1957, wondered why 'Communists are elected as shop stewards and convenors...not on the political line of the Communist Party but as ordinary workers and trade unionists'.\(^{133}\) This was, Smith continued, because 'workers think they are the best and they have been elected on the basis of this activity in industry. When it comes to winning the workers politically, let the same shop steward or convenor stand in the local election and he gets 100 votes.'\(^{134}\) The Party leadership admitted in 1961, that 'hundreds of thousands of miners voted for Mr Paynter as General Secretary of the miners...Quite a different result would have been registered if they had been voting for the Labour Party versus the Communist Party.'\(^{135}\)

\(^{128}\) Wolf Wayne, interview, 10 February 1999.
\(^{129}\) Ibid.
\(^{130}\) Ibid.
\(^{131}\) Jim Layzell, interview with Louise Brodie (5 September 1995), NSA C739/01-05 C1 F4901-5.
\(^{132}\) Ibid.
\(^{133}\) S. Smith (London), 'Speech to 25th 'Special' Congress of the CPGB' (19 April 1957), Manchester, CP/Cent/Cong/10/05.
\(^{134}\) Ibid.
\(^{135}\) 'Did Communists Control the ETU?', 3. Paynter was Communist President of the Welsh miners from 1951. He was elected NUM General Secretary in 1959. Paynter introduced a book on British trade unionism with a section headed 'A Personal Testament'. Whilst referring to the National Unemployed Workers Movement and its Communist Secretary, Wal Hannington, at no time did Paynter reveal his Communist Party membership. W. Paynter, British Trade Unions and the Problem of Change (London, 1970), 16-27.
The existence of the Party 'machine' which allowed members to attain leadership positions obscured the reality of the Party's political weakness.

C.H. Darke described how the Party 'machine' relied upon those 'Communist unionists [who] always attend meetings, and because they are always in attendance the donkey work of union business is willingly handed over to them'.\textsuperscript{136} Communists not only attended their own union meetings, but during crucial elections would attend non-Communist branches. During the 1959 General Secretary elections, 'the communist party organised visits by ETU communists to every single London branch. Their main purpose was to give us another nauseating dose of how good Bro. Haxell is and to vilify his opponent, Bro. Byrne.'\textsuperscript{137} Communists developed an intimate knowledge of union rules and procedures which they utilised at, often thinly attended, meetings in order to progress comrades through the bureaucracy or to achieve resolutions favourable to Communist policy. Darke recalled how Communists 'eased through...resolutions on Peace, on Korea, on Russia, long after the fixed time for union business to end [when] the men who might have opposed them...have looked at the clock and gone home.'\textsuperscript{138} The announcement in the Daily Worker the next day might refer to 'Twenty thousand Hackney Workers' in support of a particular position.\textsuperscript{139}

The lack of real support for such resolutions indicated the lack of a political basis for the Party's leadership strategy. On the other hand, the fact that Communists were elected to such positions did reflect a reality about the way other trade unionists perceived them. This, as much as an inexhaustible stamina for bureaucratic tedium and committee work, was why workers frequently elected Party members. Even The Times admitted in 1948, when it was busy attacking Communists at Morgan Phillips' behest, that 'good reasons are needed to justify the attempt to remove from office so many men who are active and industrious trade unionists.'\textsuperscript{140} A knowledge of Citrine's ABC of Chairmanship and the existence of the Party 'machine' were not sufficient in themselves for Communists to progress through trade union bureaucracies. As effective trade unionists, Communists were often elected in spite of, rather than because of their politics. As a former Communist shop-steward in the building trade

\textsuperscript{136} Darke, The Communist Technique in Britain, 51.

\textsuperscript{137} 'The Communist Technique', October, 1959 [Circular to ETU members], MSS 137/157.

\textsuperscript{138} Darke, The Communist Technique in Britain, 52.

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{140} The Times (10 February 1948), 5.
put it, 'the credibility was gained by our actions in support of their well being...they still elected us as their leaders, shop stewards and so on despite the fact that we were Communists.'

Communist trade unionists met within what at different times were called Party Fractions or Communist Advisory Committees. In the ETU, the advisory committee was chaired by Frank Haxell and was attended by the Party’s industrial organiser, Peter Kerrigan. With what, in retrospect, were bewildering tactics, the ETU Communists consistently denied the existence of this committee up to and including the civil action of 1961. As an anti-Communist circular had it, 'Bro. Haxell says that there are no Advisory Committees of the communist party dealing with ETU affairs. Yet many rank and file communists...have admitted their existence. We leave you to choose who is the liar.'

Wolf Wayne recalled that 'nearly every industry had its own Advisory Committee' but they ‘had nothing to do with politics...they were to do with internal questions of the union...about standing for elections within the trade union movement'. There were district advisories which included people from the shop-floor, ‘but the national one was the one that set the tone’. In an incongruous reflection of trade union bureaucratic hierarchy, the national committees were specifically for leading industrial comrades. At ‘shop-steward and branch level you would have one or two people on, but mainly the Advisory Committees were people at the top. The leading people in the union.

Les Cannon gave some idea of the nature of such committees after his resignation from the CPGB in 1956. Cannon had been Acting Education Officer in the ETU while still a Communist and, in 1956, asked for his salary to be increased to that of a National Officer. After months of discussion, Bob McLennan, the union’s Communist Assistant General Secretary, suggested outside arbitration. Cannon agreed, but was surprised to discover that ‘in September the Communist Party National Industrial Organiser was asked to arbitrate on the matter’. The consequent meeting ‘led to no new agreement’, but on the day of Cannon’s resignation from the

\[141\] Stan Turner, interview, 9 July 1997.
\[142\] ‘How Much Longer’ [typed circular] (December 1959), MRC, MSS 137/150/2.
\[143\] Wolf Wayne, interview, 10 February 99.
\[144\] Ibid.
\[145\] L. Cannon, Transcript of taped interview [Henceforward 'Transcript'] (undated), 6, MRC, MSS 137/180/2.
Party, McLennan suggested arbitration by John Gollan.\textsuperscript{146} As Cannon had left the Party, Gollan's arbitration was not acceptable, but this incident is indicative of the power that the CPGB could represent through its Advisory Committees.

**Unity and the danger of ‘liquidation’**

The *British Road to Socialism* stressed the need for ‘unity of the Labour movement’, whilst calling on the ‘progressive forces of the nation’ to ‘open up the way for the advance to socialism’.\textsuperscript{147} The terms on which the Party sought unity, however, were vague. Whilst the Party consistently criticised ‘right wing leaders’, the priority it gave to popular front building meant that it blurred the distinction between people with ‘progressive social aims’ and Marxists. Although contradicted by much of its practice and even under its diluted programme, Communist discourse maintained that social and economic inequalities could not be resolved under capitalism. Patrick Seyd defined the difference as one where ‘socialists are committed to the transformation of property relationships and social democrats are committed to the modification of property relationships; Managing Capitalism set against replacing Capitalism.’\textsuperscript{146} Unity across the labour movement meant unity with the majority who believed that capitalism could be managed. Marxism, by far the weaker force in society, specifically denied this, but in the hands of an organisation pursuing unity at almost any cost, Marxism, as reformism’s ideological alternative, was rendered vulnerable.\textsuperscript{149} Some were aware of the danger. Bert Ramelson wrote, ‘The crucial question in discussing unity is – unity for what?’\textsuperscript{150} Ramelson suggested that the Party should seek ‘unity in action on issues directly affecting the people’ but warned against ‘sectarianism’ on the one hand, and ‘liquidation...tending towards minimising the role of the Party’ on the other.\textsuperscript{151} Ramelson did not identify the nature of the respective dangers, but in reality, the Party had constructed an iron curtain of sectarianism to its left whilst presenting a crumbling edifice to anything to its right. The Party called for unity across a wide spectrum of

\textsuperscript{146} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{147} *The British Road to Socialism* (1958), 29-30.
\textsuperscript{148} P. Seyd, cited in Brivati, Hugh Gaitskell. 146.
\textsuperscript{149} Marx and Engels opposed ‘socialism’ which did not understand the ‘abolition of the bourgeois relations of production’ but sought ‘reforms...that in no respect affect the relations between capital and labour.’ *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 67.
\textsuperscript{150} B. Ramelson, ‘Problems of Unity’, *World News Discussion Supplement* (23 February 1957), 18, Manchester, CP/Cent/Cong/10/05.
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid., 20.
society. The 1958 version of the Party's programme said, 'a united Labour movement...would rally round it all the progressive forces of the nation' including those 'not associated with Labour but who are striving for progressive social aims and a better life through tenants'...associations, youth organisations, women's institutes, British Legion sections, church organisations'. The Party's weakness combined with its misconceptions about its strength to make the danger of liquidation even greater than Ramelson had envisaged.

**Rank and filism**

Emphasis on the bureaucracy ran alongside a continuing orientation on the trade union rank and file. Sometimes this orientation appears as a means towards success at the bureaucratic level. As with the Party's political electoralism, which directed members' activity towards increasing the vote, CPGB trade union leaders owed their position largely to the credibility and effectiveness of their rank and file comrades. These rank and file members, however, were often successful in mobilising workers, as the significantly large number of unofficial strikes during this period indicates.

Despite historiographical caricatures of the 1950s as an age of equipoise, there was ample opportunity for such intervention. In 1955, for example, London was without newspapers for four weeks, 'there were strikes by miners, busmen, tugmen, bargemen, dockers and footplate men of varying duration and inconvenience to the public'. The item continued, 'Mrs Braddock the Socialist MP spoke for the vast majority when she told an audience of strikers that British housewives were sick of unofficial strikes'. Michael Jackson reinforced Bessie Braddock's description of this activity as unofficial when he observed, 'in the post-Second World War years up to 95 percent of all strikes...were the result of unofficial stoppages'. Harry Pollitt drew attention to less traditional militancy when he noted activity by 'bank clerks...
teachers...musicians [who] have attracted nation-wide attention and are something new in the political situation'.

Occasionally trade union leaders endowed such activity with official sanction. Often this was due to sheer weight of rank and file pressure, though it also constituted part of the ongoing need for this leadership to reaffirm its position as representing working-class aspirations. This was a situation where CPGB members could often be particularly effective. Party members' organisational skills could threaten bureaucratic control, often resulting in decisive moves by the leadership to regain it. The winter of 1956-1957 marked the first serious down-turn in Britain's economy since the beginning of the decade. The recession may have contributed towards the intervention of the trade union leadership as cracks in the corporatist consensus became perceptible.

In 1956, engineers, initially with the backing of their union, took action in response to employers' plans to remove working practices deemed to be 'restrictive'. The official strike lasted for only 24 hours, indicating the flimsiness of official support, but engineers joined shipbuilding workers in March 1957 in a strike 'embracing a million workers'. The strike, 'a demonstration of mass lunacy', according to The Economist, was a key moment for many in the Party, which, as the figures for CPGB Congress delegates detailed above imply, contained a high proportion of engineering workers.

May Halfpenny gave an account of action at the Singer Sewing-Machine factory in Clydebank. The media had targeted the 14,000 strong, largely female, workforce as a possible 'weak link' in the national strike action and had sent in cameras and reporters to record the union's discomfort. As Halfpenny continued, however, they were very disappointed, because although a number of workers went into work, five or six thousand of them stayed out on that first morning, and picketed the gate.

A 19 year old Arthur Skargile [sic.] anticipated future oratorical élan when he discussed how 'During the recent strike we got the apprentices to come out on

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156 H. Pollitt, 'Political Report to the 24th National Congress' (30 March 1956), 14.
157 T. Benn, Years of Hope-Diaries. Papers. Letters 1940-1962 (London, 1994), 176. Benn noted in 1954, that 'the trade union honeymoon with the Tories is over and they need us now—a good sign'.
158 'Executive Committee Report to the 26th Congress' (1958), 12.
159 'Two Days Strike?', The Economist, (12 January 1957), 98.
strike with the engineers at Metro-Vicks in Manchester, they stormed the gates to get into work, and then came out on strike with the other engineers.\textsuperscript{161}

A key group during this period were the London bus workers as 53,000 took official strike action at the end of 1956, demanding an extra one pound a week.\textsuperscript{162} The following year, Chancellor, Peter Thorneycroft, formulated an incomes policy with the cabbalistic description of ‘a guiding light’ policy for wages. Bus workers struck against this threat to free collective bargaining between 14 May and 20 June 1957. The bus workers gained support from 2,000 meat transport drivers, 4,000 Smithfield market workers, 3,500 cold-store workers and around 20,000 dockers.\textsuperscript{163} The fragility of official support was again demonstrated, when the TUC, on 4 June, refused to extend the strike.\textsuperscript{164} The busmen eventually went down to defeat in May 1958, but both the engineering and busworkers strikes indicated the sharpening conflict during the latter part of the 1950s. As one commentator wrote, ‘the engineers strike of 1957 and the London bus strike of 1958...developed into a major class conflict, dispelling the fashionable euphoria about a classless, affluent society’.\textsuperscript{165}

The targeting of the ETU

Not surprisingly, the union in which the CPGB apparently had the most influence became the focus for the intensifying attack on Communism during the 1950s. The High Court action of 1961 was part of the generalised attack on Communism. As an ETU pamphlet said of the anti-Communist attacks, ‘until quite recently these efforts took the form of attacking the leadership and seeking to discredit the elected officials’, but having failed to dislodge Communists from the leadership ‘a

\textsuperscript{161} A. Scargill, ibid., 281. Scargill described how he organised a meeting of young miners ‘at the pit bottom’ to protest against working an extra two hours, until 9 o’clock at night. The next day, the ruling was overturned. Scargill never joined the CPGB but remained in the YCL until 1962, joining the Co-operative Party in 1963 and the Labour Party in 1966. After succeeding as National leader of the NUM in 1981, in 1984-5, he led one of the most bitter strikes against the Thatcher government’s proposed pit-closures. Although the miners lost, they attracted massive support from the left, precipitating an unexpected and temporary, realignment of the Left in Britain. The CPGB in the form of Marxism Today was ambivalent in its support. Industrial organiser, Peter Carter, accused the miners of believing that ‘the strike can be won by picketing alone, by the miners on their own’. (March 1985).

\textsuperscript{162} ‘Pay Row May Stop London Transport’, Daily Worker. (1 January 1957), 1.

\textsuperscript{163} Widgery, The Left in Britain 1956-68. 164-5.

\textsuperscript{164} ‘EC Report to 26th Congress’, 12.

\textsuperscript{165} P. Foot, ‘The Seamen’s Struggle’ in The Incompatibles, 169.
new angle had to be found – one which it was hoped would prove more fruitful than previous attempts'.

From within the union, Les Cannon and Frank Chappie, both ex-Communists, led the attack. Cannon left the Party, believing that 'in order to win a united British Labour Movement for the ideas of Marxism it is necessary to dissolve the Communist Party.' Although he left near the end of 1956, he later said that he had 'become disillusioned about the role of the British Communist Party...before the Khruschev speech' and that on leaving the Party 'I had come not only to reject the role of the Communist Party but the efficacy of Marxism.' Cannon had been on good terms with the leadership. Fellow Lancastrian Harry Pollitt, for example, wrote to Cannon's wife, Olga, in 1950, referring affectionately to her husband, as 'that lad from Wigan.' In 1949, Pollitt was to have been best man at their marriage in Prague. In the event, Pollitt, 'because of a mix up in the date of the wedding' could not be there, and his place was taken by the equally prominent Willie Gallacher. Cannon was not a peripheral figure within the Communist Party, nor, as Education Officer, was he on the margins of the ETU leadership.

Chappie remained in the Party until 1959 although, according to Cannon, this was so that he could continue 'the fight against the Party within the Party'. Upon resigning, Chappie declared 'I no longer regard the Party as the means whereby the Socialist organisation of society will be brought about'. He described the CPGB as 'undemocratic, whose organisational form is conspiratorial'. Whether his view that 'democratic centralism is a cover for a fascist type of leader' referred to the CPGB or to Stalinism in general, was unclear, but it was certainly 'the CP's monopoly in any sphere' which Chappie saw as 'fearful and stifling'. According to Morris Schaer, of all the Communist ETU leaders, 'Chappie struck me as the most militant and revolutionary I had ever met'.

From outside the union, the attacks on the ETU began in 1956 with an article in Illustrated by ex-Labour MP Woodrow Wyatt. Wyatt, an ex-public schoolboy and

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166 L. Cannon to Maurice Cornforth (January 1957), 2, Cannon's Papers, MRC, MSS/137/16.
170 Ibid., 29.
171 Ibid.
172 F. Chappie to CPGB (undated 1959), MRC, MSS 137/30.
173 Ibid.
Oxford graduate, was one of the ‘younger friends’ of a similarly influenced Hugh Gaitskell. These included ‘Tony Crosland, Roy Jenkins, Christopher Mayhew’ who, in 1951, were organised ‘to make sure the right’s case was properly put’. Wyatt had written for *New Statesman* until 1948 and, despite his Gaitskellite loyalties, continued contributing to the Bevanite journal *Tribune*. Anxious to be seen at the centre of events, Wyatt claimed that, following pressure from Bevan over defence spending in 1951, ‘Gaitskell and I were the principal defenders of Labour’s rearmament programme.’ Wyatt discussed his role as Stafford Cripps’ assistant in the Cabinet mission to India in 1946. He again ascribed for himself a pivotal role in negotiations between Congress, Jinnah and the British. Wyatt utilised his literary exposition to great effect in his last job with the *News of the World*, a newspaper famous for titillating allusion rather than journalistic veracity. His prose, however highly coloured, may not have always merited his own father’s rebuke to his eight year old son that ‘you’re a liar’, but a damascene conversion to Thatcherism in the 1980s did not suggest political consistency.

In 1958, Wyatt produced two BBC ‘Panorama’ programmes on Communist influence in the trade unions. He also contributed an article to *New Statesman* which accused Communists of ballot fraud in the 1955 General Secretary elections. ‘It is easy’ he wrote, ‘for an official who is a Communist or a fellow traveller... to fill in the votes in any way he likes – and no questions asked – provided he has access to the forms.’ There was nothing in the article, however, beyond the inference that, because this was possible and Communists were involved, it must, therefore, have happened. He speculated about how easy it would be for such ‘sympathetic secretaries’ to ‘convert...63 votes...into 363 before posting the return.’ The final message to the TUC, to whom his hypothesis was directed, was that they should investigate the fact that in 1955, the national vote in the ETU increased from 19 to 34 per cent. This contradicted *The Economist*, however, which said of Haxell’s election, ‘it

175 Campbell, Nye Bevan, 262.
177 Ibid., 135-163.
178 Ibid., 28. Wyatt met Thatcher in 1975 and found her ‘pleasently appealing with pretty legs and complexion’. Ibid., 343.
180 Ibid., 62.
181 At the subsequent trial, no evidence was brought to substantiate this accusation.
is perhaps significant that less than 25 per cent of the union bothered to vote either for or against him.  

The campaign against the Communist ETU leadership is detailed in the following chapters. As with anti-Communism generally, its impetus came, not from the Conservative establishment, but from Communist renunciants and Gaitskellite politicians. Although public accusations were spread across the politically affiliated spectrum of British journalism, the charge was led by the Fabian oriented New Statesman, whose editor, John Freeman, wrote an introduction to All Those in Favour? by one of the journal's contributors, C.H. Rolph.  

The episode is interesting, not just as a feature of Cold War anti-Communism but also as an expression of the working of the corporatist consensus. As industrial relations in the mid-1950s began to deteriorate, those who had gravitated into the influential orbit where decisions were made and rewards, monetary and honourable, were potentially available, became concerned about rank and file militancy disrupting such a situation. The trade unions were also seen as the most unpopular institution in Britain, and there was significant pressure from many on the right of the Labour Party to end the traditional relationship.  

In reality, Communist union leaders posed little threat, either to British industry or the state. Militants, able to organise within the rank and file of trade unions did, however. The main challenge, both economically and politically, during this period, emanated from unofficial activity. Many within the British establishment, however, continued to perceive trade unions with Communist leaderships as a threat. As such, they were bound to be targeted.

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182 'Newspapers Return', The Economist, (23 April 1955), 756.
184 See Benn, Years of Hope, 292. Benn cited Hugh Gaitskell who, following Labour’s defeat in 1959 'thought we must review our relations with the trade unions', 317. He also cited Roy Jenkins who thought Labour should 'watch out for the dangers of the union links', 318.
Chapter 7

Turning off the Power: The Debacle in the ETU

Between April and July 1961, a High Court Action lasting 42 days, was fought between John Byrne and Frank Chappie and leaders of the Electrical Trades Union, including General Secretary, Frank Haxell and General President, Frank Foulkes. The plaintiffs alleged that this leadership had rigged ballots to ensure the election of Communist or Communist supported candidates. The trial was terminal for Communist leadership in the ETU and destroyed the reputations of the individuals involved. The judge removed all the defendants from office before the new leadership set about banning Communists from all official positions.

The following two chapters focus upon the history behind this trial. There is no doubt that the Communist leadership performed a series of semi-legal and bureaucratic manoeuvres in order to gain and retain power. Whether such manoeuvres amounted to conspiracy or merely strayed outside the parameters within which trade unions normally operated is open to question. This was largely unresolved by the often subjective judgements of Mr Justice Winn, the trial judge. Trade unions, bound and constrained by complex sets of, largely self-created, rules have always given the appearance of strict political and legal rectitude. Traditionally however, union leaders have been skilful at manipulating such rules to their own advantage. The ETU leaders appeared to have done this on behalf of Communism, and it was this which motivated the unprecedented campaign against them. The campaign was not the result of an outcry from union members, but was initiated and orchestrated by a few individuals led by ex-Communists and supported by the British press.

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1 Writ issued, 10 May 1960. There were 11 defendants.
2 Justice Winn judged on 3 July that John Byrne ‘was elected General Secretary...in the December 1959 election’, although no-one had scrutinised the returns and, as the defence lawyer, Lawson, contested, ‘any other members of the ETU could now challenge the validity of the election’, Rolph, All Those in Favour?, 241.
3 This was a civil trial. The burden of proof was decided on the balance of probability rather than beyond reasonable doubt. There was no jury, and judgement of guilt was left to the judge, whose ‘Judgement’ was punctuated with personal observations upon which many of his decisions were based. Winn noted that Haxell answered questions about the 1959 General Secretary election ‘in a firm, well controlled voice and with steady eyes.’ Winn was not taken in by such ‘practice and will-power’ being used to ‘produce such appearances’, however, and ‘was watching Mr Haxell very closely when he gave that last answer...I distinctly saw on his face an expression not of indignation or repudiation...but of self-satisfaction over finding the supposedly convincing materialist answer’, Rolph, All Those in Favour?, 231.
The history leading to this trial reveals much about the priorities and practices of Communists in the leadership of trade unions. It also exposes the limitations of the Party's leadership strategy. Consistent with the traditional duality of the CPGB's trade union orientation, members, throughout this period, remained active within the rank and file of the ETU. Whilst not ignoring this intervention, the following chapters are, however, concerned with the political implications of the Party's attempt to substitute trade union office-holding for the socialist leadership of the working class. Just as earlier chapters were not an attempt to present CPGB history as a sociological study or social history, the following chapters do not attempt to re-write labour history from the point of view of Communism. Whilst the Party's industrial intervention was certainly part of British labour history and influenced its development, such influence was relevant to a political party, only when and if it could be translated politically. As discussed in the previous chapter, this happened only to a limited extent and in an erratic way; broadly following the unpredictable vacillations between periods of industrial conflict and industrial peace. Although the Party appeared to recognise this, it remained committed to an industrial intervention which mirrored the practice of a party 'bedevilled by elections', as it focused upon achieving union office wherever and in whatever way, it could.4

Following the trial, the Party's Executive Committee, after censuring the ETU Communists for having 'gravely compromised the Communist Party', repudiated 'as an absolute lie' that the practices of the ETU represented 'a normal feature of Communist trade union activity'.5 The Party attempted to scapegoat the ETU leadership, presenting its activities as an aberration. Just as Khruschev had exculpated Stalinism by arrogating responsibility to one safely departed individual, the British leadership condemned 'such malpractices' as 'completely against the principles of the Communist Party'.6 This negated the need for meaningful analysis of the Party's industrial intervention and avoided uncomfortable questions, particularly with regard to the political basis for such office-holding. Although other Communist leaderships may not have engaged in ballot rigging, the same circumstances in which political argument was constantly under pressure from the bureaucratic imperatives of office-holding,

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4 Macleod, The Death of Uncle Joe, 13.
5 'Press Statement from the Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain' (4 December 1961), Manchester, CP/Cent/EC/08/04.
6 Ibid., 5 and Executive Committee CPGB 'The Communist Party and the Trade Unions' (8 July 1961), 1, Manchester, CP/Ind/Math/05/02.
were universal throughout the Party’s leadership strategy. The main imperative, in all cases, was staying in office. The Party provided an unrivalled structure, which the ETU leadership, for example, used in a highly efficient way in order to achieve this. Whether this was a process of ‘feathering their own nests’ or whether these people seriously believed they were offering socialist leadership, is unknowable. What is clear, is that despite, its post-trial protestations, the Party leadership encouraged bureaucratic office-holding and offered little argument against members involved in it, whether they were bending the rules or not.

It remains a matter of opinion whether or not the practice of the ETU Communists was merely an extreme manifestation of Communist and non-Communist bureaucratic practice or whether it was something unique. As Les Cannon said later, ‘[the rules] were bent by both sides, because there were big branches led by Communists and big branches led by anti-communists’. Jim Layzell, former ETU Communist Branch Secretary in East Ham, confirmed that ballot rigging had occurred. When still Assistant Branch Secretary, Layzell visited his secretary, Tom Vetterlein. He found Vetterlein ‘filling in these ballot papers, and he said, “oh you can give us a hand with this Jim”. I said “Oh what’s that?”’. “Fill in some of these ballot papers”. I said “You can’t do that” and he said, “oh both sides do it, they do it every election”.

As the figures below suggest, ballot rigging, even at its most widespread, would not have been sufficient to overcome a concerted expression of rank and file discontent with the leadership. Had the anti-Communist case had real resonance amongst ETU members, the Communists would have been swept out of office with ease. The six year campaign was never a campaign against fraud, but against Communism. Once war on the leadership had been declared by Woodrow Wyatt in 1956, the anti-Communists set out to ensure their victory by one method or another. For example, after Vincent Tewson had proposed that the TUC should publicly condemn the leadership of the ETU, Wyatt wrote suggesting it ‘would be inadvisable ...

The next time I see you I would like to have a brief chat when I can explain certain

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7 Morris Schaer, written reply to author, 20 March 2000.
9 Jim Layzell, Interview with Louise Brodie (5 September 1995), NSA, C739/01-05 C1 F4901-5. Tom Vetterlein left the CPGB in 1958. He was an ETU Executive Councillor from 1949 to 1957.
matters which lead me to the above conclusion'.

Wyatt continued, ominously, 'There are alternative methods'.

Against the odds

In 1961, membership of the CPGB was 27,341 whilst membership of the British trade union movement was around nine and a half million. If every Communist had been a trade unionist, as a group they would have constituted less than 0.29 per cent of this total membership, with nearly 350 trade unionists for every Communist. Had these nine and a half million members all been active, even to the extent of exercising their voting rights, such a minority position would have made Communist intervention in the unions extremely difficult. Had a significant proportion of this total membership expressed definitive anti-Communist views, intervention would either have been limited to general propaganda or proscribed altogether.

The disproportionate number of Communists achieving leadership within the unions during this period has been explained by reference to a general passivity amongst the majority of members. As C.H. Darke said, 'The British working-man has many fine qualities...but his tendency to let those he regards as his leaders...do his thinking for him is the Party's greatest opportunity'. Les Cannon's biographers asked how the CPGB 'could control, or largely influence, great trade unions with memberships running into hundreds of thousands'. The authors asked, 'Did no one care?' and talked of 'the appalling apathy' which 'was the Communist Party's fertile ground.' Whilst remaining a stereotype, this characterisation of British trade unionist passivity is not without foundation, as figures below imply. However, virtually every member, including Labour Party activists, would need to have been affected by apathy for it to serve as an adequate explanation for Communist success. The assertion of apathy, moreover, does not take into account the vacillating conditions in terms of industrial unrest, which characterised the latter half of the 1950s. Far from being a symptom of apathy, Frank Haxell was elected General Secretary during the London Newspaper strike of 1955, in which large numbers of ETU members were active.

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10 W. Wyatt to Vincent Tewson (14 September 1956), MRC, MSS 292/91/90.
11 Ibid.
13 Darke, The Communist Technique in Britain, 54.
15 Ibid.
Those authors dismissing 'the British working man' as apathetic were, to an extent, justified by voting figures in the ETU. According to Wyatt in a report to the TUC, 'around 1947 not more than 10% of the membership of the ETU voted in elections for National Officers.'\(^6\) Even this level of passivity, however, represented more than enough votes to overwhelm the ETU Communists. Accurate figures are not available for the number of Communists within the ETU. Based upon two sources provided by Newton, however, a figure of 900 to 1,000 can operate as an approximate guide.\(^7\) By 1959, according to Haxell, ETU membership had increased to 240,000.\(^8\) Wyatt later claimed that the national vote within the union had increased to 34 per cent in 1948, 'to get Haxell elected...to Assistant General Secretary.'\(^9\) According to the TUC, 'In the Division 9 election in September 1957, the total poll... represented about 13 per cent of the total membership.'\(^10\) On such figures, the lowest turnout of 10 per cent still equated to 24,000 members who could easily have out-voted the Communists, had they represented a definitive anti-Communist constituency.\(^11\)

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\(^{6}\) W. Wyatt, 'Confidential Memorandum on the Electrical Trades Union' (undated), MRC, MSS 292/91/90.

\(^{7}\) Newton, The Sociology of British Communism, 164-165 and 162-163. 'Occupational and Industrial Composition of National Congress Delegates' and 'Occupational Composition of South Midlands District 1964' are two sets of statistics showing that combined electrical and non-electrical engineering as a percentage of total CPGB membership between 1954 and 1963 was 23.0 per cent. As a proportion of the 1961 figure, this equates to 6,288 members in engineering. In the South Midlands, this combined total in 1964 was 18.5 per cent - 4.5 per cent lower than the national figure. Members in electrical engineering in this area constituted 3 per cent of this total which, if translated nationally would make a total of 850 members in electrical engineering. The South Midlands total for engineers can be rounded up by 5 per cent to equate to the national average giving an approximate figure of 900.

\(^{8}\) F. Haxell, 'Letter to the Finance and General Purposes Committee of the TUC' (23 January 1959), MRC, MSS 292/91/91.


\(^{10}\) TUC Report, 'Recent Events in the ETU' (1959), 6, MRC, MSS 292/91/91.

\(^{11}\) By 1961, British Communism was represented by General President, Frank Foulkes, General Secretary, Frank Haxell and Assistant General Secretary, Bob McLennan. Executive Council included Communists James Cosby, Ivor Davies, James Feathers, John Frazer, John Hendy and Ronald Sell. Between January 1956 and 1958, and 1958 and 1959 respectively, Samuel Goldberg, a Trotskyist supporter of the leadership and H. West, a Labour Party member with Communist sympathies, were also E.C. members. J. Humphrey, a Communist, was, as well as being an Executive Councillor, the ETU's Office Manager until December 1959. J.W. Rengert and Charles Shipman, National Scrutineers who checked complaints about voting 'infringements', were cited as Communist sympathisers, as was George Scott, National Officer. Another National Officer, A.C. Batchelor was a Communist.
Rank and file rancour or Cold-War campaign?

As early as 1943, some ETU leaders raised questions about Communist influence and called a special conference to deal with Communist intervention. A vote of 31 to 19 agreed that 'interference has taken place in the internal affairs of the ETU by the Communist Party of Great Britain'\(^{22}\). The General Secretary at the time, E.W. Bussey, tried to have all CPGB members debarred from holding office. The fact that Britain and the Soviet Union were the two European countries which remained allied against, and undefeated by Nazism, may have contributed to the quiet withdrawal of the resolution. Frank Foulkes was elected General President of the union in 1945.

Woodrow Wyatt wrote 'a series of articles in *Illustrated* and followed with a pamphlet called *Peril in Our Midst*'.\(^{23}\) By 1957, the *Daily Express* was warning 'There is something sinister and alien about the affairs of the Electrical Trades Union...now the iron curtain flavour is completed'.\(^{24}\) The *Daily Telegraph* wrote of 'Communism' being 'at the top and is ruthlessly determined to stay there' and denounced 'the chief officials - Mr Foulkes, Mr Haxell and Mr McLennan' as 'in fact all zealots...cold, dedicated men who...crushed timorous hostility and silenced the isolated voices of daring malcontents'.\(^{25}\) The article warned that 'Power obsessed Communists will not voluntarily retreat'.\(^{26}\) Morris Schaer recalled that 'the ETU was a particular target' for this 'daily propaganda being put out by the media'.\(^{27}\) Schaer saw this as being connected to the fact that 'membership in the power industry had the ability to bring the country to a standstill'.\(^{28}\)

Such propaganda in the national press meant that ETU members were fully aware of the politics of their leadership. Had there been generalised discontent with the Communist leaders there was no substantial reason why such a constituency could not have been mobilised by the anti-Communists. In fact, from Haxell's election in 1955, it took six years, unequivocal support from press and media and, finally, the weight of the judiciary, to achieve their removal. The fact that the anti-Communists were forced to rely upon the press and the courts, suggests that if membership discontent existed, it was not of a size or intensity which made it responsive to calls for

\(^{22}\) Cited in Cannon and Anderson, *The Road From Wigan Pier*, 82.
\(^{23}\) Wyatt, *Confessions of an Optimist*, 254.
\(^{24}\) *Daily Express*, (2 December 1957).
\(^{25}\) 'How to Win Power and Keep it', *Daily Telegraph* (2 December 1957).
\(^{26}\) Ibid.
\(^{27}\) Morris Schaer, written reply to author, 20 March 2000.
\(^{28}\) Ibid.
the Communists' immediate removal. It does not appear that the 240,000 ETU members were especially disgruntled with Haxell and company as union leaders. Communists were eager to be seen as 'good officers of the union', both at rank and file and bureaucratic level and, in the main, they achieved this. Apart from a few committed anti-Communists, members, in general, do not appear to have been particularly concerned about their leaders' Communist politics. There existed, within British trade unionism, an apolitical tradition and a habitual separation between politics and economics, both of which help to explain this lack of concern. As Morris Schaer put it, 'on site CP members were usually elected ...because they were the most active trade unionists'.

According to Stan Turner, this was 'despite the fact we were Communists'. C.H. Rolph admitted of the rank and file that 'Most of them, probably, had never much minded...that their Union leaders were Communists.'

Passivity of some members on the one hand, in combination with disciplined Party organisation on the other, goes some way to explaining how the leadership of the ETU could pass into the hands of Communists. It does not explain how this group could retain control if it were as universally unpopular, or if Communism was as reviled as the anti-Communists claimed. According to New Statesman, the 'tactics followed by the Communist leaders have...aroused discontent among the rank and file.' Scant evidence exists for such a claim, however. The TUC found 'no evidence as to the attitude of the mass of ETU members towards the allegations of election irregularities'. Letters were sent to the TUC or to people like Les Cannon, but over the period of the conflict, this never aggregated to generalised discontent. One member who wrote to Vincent Tewson was R.T. Reno, 'of Fulham Branch', calling for TUC intervention. Reno was a member of 'an increasingly lively group of genuine Trotskyists' who moved into opposition against the Communist leadership. Reno wrote to Tewson in 1959 after the anti-Communist campaign had been in progress for some years, however. There is a significant paucity of material from around 1955 to 1956 which would confirm that Wyatt was responding to rank and file discontent. Wyatt himself, having already attacked the AEU Communists from his position as 'Panorama'
presenter, 'had a letter from Mr Jock Byrne' before being approached by Les Cannon.\textsuperscript{36} Despite the implication in \textit{New Statesman} that he was responding to pressure from members, it was these two approaches which encouraged him to begin his 'investigation'.\textsuperscript{37} Evidence suggests that, although members became discontented as the anti-Communist campaign progressed, the impetus for that campaign did not come from the rank and file. Manny Shinwell referred to the hazy origins of the anti-Communist crusade asking 'When the right hon. Gentleman referred to public concern about this matter, was that statement based on newspaper reports or because he had previously sought to make investigations into this matter and ascertain all the facts?':\textsuperscript{38}

Between September and December 1957, the TUC received letters 'from 9 branches of the ETU – Burnley, Kingswear, Portsmouth, Gosport, Bournemouth, Whitley Bay, Totnes, Middleton and Tenby' demanding 'a full enquiry into irregularities in ETU ballots'.\textsuperscript{39} This was a year after Wyatt had published \textit{Peril in our Midst}, however, and also followed his 'Panorama' broadcasts. It also represented a tiny proportion of a national membership constituted within 703 branches. The TUC also received, during this same period, letters from three Trades Councils 'asking for an enquiry into ETU ballots'.\textsuperscript{40} During the same period, five Trades Councils wrote 'protesting against BBC Panorama spotlighting Communism in ETU.'\textsuperscript{41}

One letter to Vincent Tewson in 1956 came from W.W. Blackmore of Aldershot Branch. Blackmore wrote, saying 'I am appalled by the news of the gift of £20 to the Cyprus Fund' and said of the ETU Communists, 'If the candidates for office in...the ETU – had the guts to state their political views, I am sure the Communists would lose their hold'.\textsuperscript{42} Although those Communists within the leadership demurred at public discussion of political questions, there is no evidence that they kept their Communist Party membership a secret. Similarly, whilst they consistently denied the existence of Communist Advisory Committees, most of them attended Party Congresses openly, which were covered by much of the Labour Party supporting press.\textsuperscript{43} Despite Attlee's

\textsuperscript{36} Wyatt, \textit{Confessions of an Optimist}, 251, 252 and 254.
\textsuperscript{38} E. Shinwell [Durham, Easington], \textit{House of Commons Debates}, 5\textsuperscript{3} Series, col.608, 5 December 1957.
\textsuperscript{39} TUC, 'Electrical Trade Union' (undated), 1, MRC, MSS 292/91/91.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{42} W.W. Blackmore to \textit{Daily Mail} (29 June 1956), MRC, MSS 137/32.
\textsuperscript{43} See 'Demolitions in King Street', \textit{New Statesman} (27 April 1957), 529.
purge of civil servants, Communists in Britain were never under the same pressure, as
in the USA, to ‘conceal their views and aims’, although many remained reticent about
declaring that ‘their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of existing
conditions’. The Party itself wrote that ‘the Communist Party works in the open. It
states its aims in scores of pamphlets...its members are known throughout the various
unions’. Helen Mason, a teacher, recalled one of her students saying ‘You’re a
Communist aren’t you’, to which she replied ‘Yes, how did you know?’ The student
answered, ‘you put something through our door’.

How the anti-Communists mobilised

C.H. Rolph characterised the anti-Communists as ‘forces...that professed to see better than the membership what was good for them – and...saw grave danger to the country in a Communist domination of the trade union movement’. Blackmore is indicative of those forces within the union. Whilst accusing the Communists of not having ‘the guts’ to state their politics, in a letter to Cannon, he hinted at his own inclinations. Referring to an exchange between himself and Haxell, he stated ‘You may guess that being a true and loyal supporter of the British Crown and Constitution I wrote and told him what he could do. If there is anything I can do to oust these Russian fifth columnists I will do so gladly.’

One of the forces behind anti-Communism in this period was the Catholic Church. Cannon’s biographers cited ‘the Roman Catholic Church and its association of Catholic trade unionists’ as perhaps ‘the most eloquent of the anti-Communist forces’. John Lloyd reinforced this, suggesting that ‘much of their anti-Communist inspiration sprang from a profound Catholic belief’. Lloyd, on the whole, highly critical of the ETU Communists, accused The Catholic Herald of ‘recommending particular executive council nominees to the faithful’.

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44 Marx and Engels, Communist Manifesto, 78.
45 Industrial Department CPGB, ‘Did Communists Control the ETU?’ (1 September 1961), 16, Manchester, CP/Cent/Ind/1/5.
46 Helen Mason, interview, 9 July 1997.
47 Rolph, All Those in Favour?, 14-15.
48 W.W. Blackmore to Cannon (18 December 1957), MRC, MSS 137/31.
49 Cannon and Anderson, The Road From Wigan Pier, 179.
50 Lloyd, Light and Liberty, 393.
51 Ibid., 394.
Another loyal affiliate of Cannon's was Richard Keill, Branch Secretary of Gillmoss Liverpool Branch who, in a letter to Cannon in 1961, reinforced the unpalatable aura characteristic of some of the anti-Communist constituency. Referring to a meeting at which Communist ETU members opposed his branch leadership, Keill wrote, 'As I forecasted they were all there in force last Monday night including a crowd of women' and complained that 'Gillmoss Branch has now an ex-Dock labourer as a Branch Secretary'. He ended by offering to give Cannon 'a story for the Daily Express'. Olga Cannon described how Cannon, whilst working in Liverpool in the early 1950s, and still a Communist, had returned home one night 'dreadfully upset' because 'he had hit another Party member for calling him a "bloody liar".' Following this assault, Olga Cannon 'couldn't help laughing' as she 'disliked the victim of Les's blow. "My only criticism darling," I said, "is that you should have done it ages ago".'

On the other side, Frank Haxell, for example, was orthodox in his Communism. At the 25th Congress, he spoke against workers' control, saying, 'it would be no plan at all if it were merely a gathering together of the proposals of the workers in their respective industrial units.' Haxell favoured central economic planning, looking to 'the Soviet Union where they have considerable experience of running of industry and of workers' control...this problem is being critically examined in the light of experiences.' Referring to Frank Foulkes, Les Cannon admitted that whilst the TUC 'General Council didn't have any particular love or regard for Haxell, many of them did have a personal friendship for Foulkes'. Cannon referred to Financial Times correspondent, Ron Stevens, who wrote small biographies of Foulkes and Cannon respectively. Cannon admitted that Stevens had been 'highly critical' of him, whereas the biography of Foulkes was a highly favourable one. Morris Schaer said 'I always felt that Foulkes was a good Trade Unionist'.

52 R.C. Keill to Cannon (31 March 1961), MRC, MSS 137/86.
53 Ibid.
54 Cannon and Anderson, The Road From Wigan Pier, 114. The victim may have been Lancashire and Cheshire District Secretary, Syd Abbott. Cannon had written a letter complaining about Abbott swearing at a meeting, ibid., 113 and MRC, MSS 137/10,11 and 12.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
57 F. Haxell, 'Speech to 25th Congress CPGB' (20 April 1957), Manchester, CP/Cent/Cong/10/05.
58 Cannon, 'Transcript', 34, MRC, MSS 137/254.
59 Ibid.
Despite their consistent criticism of the CPGB organising within the ETU, the anti-Communists managed their own constituency with remarkable efficiency. This included circulating a model resolution which specified a 'breach of rule 10 clause 4 by Brothers Haxell, Frazer...divulging ETU business inside the Communist Party'. The resolution cited 'a statement by Bro. Cannon' and called upon the Executive Council to 'institute charges'. In 1961, in advance of the High Court action, Cannon began organising personnel in anticipation of the court's decision to reconstitute the union. In a letter to 'Tom', Cannon emphasised 'It goes without saying that all the work will come to nought unless we can bring about a change on the EC'. Cannon wrote 'if Tom Breakell could get Widnes, Prescot, Liverpool East, Liverpool Instrument Makers, Gillmoss nominations it would be a great step towards winning the division'. He referred to the potential impropriety of such activity, however, saying 'As can be appreciated it would be unwise for me to write many of these letters so I would be very glad indeed if you could see that the word gets around to the people involved'.

Writing to Bert Blore, Cannon asked 'What is the chance of getting a fair attendance at the quarterly meeting to ensure that Tom Breakell...gets the Executive Council nomination?'. In a letter to 'Bob', Cannon admitted 'We are making a lot of preparations in other parts of the EC Division' and revealed his role as organiser of this constituency, saying 'What is required however is for you to see that the whole of the South West of England is covered including Cornwall'. Confidence was clearly high after six years of media propaganda, as Cannon added 'If you can do this you will certainly win'. This continued during the trial with letters to 'Alf', suggesting 'J. Sharman, secretary of Northampton Branch' as a candidate able to secure very wide support' and asking 'which other branches in EC Div 6...do you think you will be able to contact with this information?'. All this might appear unexceptional were it not for the fact that much of the criticism of the Communists related to their ability to gain nominations via 'their nation-wide organisation'.

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61 In Cannon's Papers (undated), MRC, MSS 137/62.
62 Ibid.
63 L. Cannon to Tom (23 May 1961), MRC, MSS 137/92.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
66 L. Cannon to Bert Blore (23 May 1961), MRC, MSS 137/92.
67 L. Cannon to Bob [?Lawrence] (23 May 1961), MRC, MSS 137/93.
68 Ibid.
69 L. Cannon to Alf (25 May 1961), MRC, MSS 137/94.
70 'The Communist Technique' (October 1959), MRC, MSS 137/158.
The press characterised the battle as between 'the isolated voices of daring malcontents' pitted against 'a small group, corrupted by power'. The Daily Express asked rhetorically 'if there were any desire among members to change the present leadership, could it succeed? Rather than suggest that members should vote against their leadership, however, the paper attacked 'The present ETU leaders... have, it seems, discovered the formula for which every dictatorship searches – the formula for permanent power'. Despite such support, Cannon characterised himself as one against 'the resources of the Union' which 'were far greater than anything I could muster'. His biography is sprinkled with phrases such as 'Les was left to go it alone' and 'This was the formidable fortress that Les set out to storm single-handed'.

The forces mustering behind Cannon during this period were, in fact, formidable and included most of the popular press, trade unions such as USDAW and politicians such as Herbert Morrison. Even Cannon's biographers moderated, to some extent, the image of an isolated Cannon. Woodrow Wyatt, for example, 'responded with sufficient cash for Les to make what we called his “grand tour” of branches...travelling up the East coast as far as Dundee and back via Glasgow and the West coast.' The Times reported at the end of 1957 that Conservative MP Farey-Jones was to demand a tribunal into the affairs of the ETU. Farey-Jones asked MacMillan if he was aware 'that there are millions of proud citizens in this country who ...will not tolerate Communist domination in any of our traditional institutions?' At this stage, the Prime Minister was content to leave the matter 'which it is primarily the duty of the members of the union to cure.' Farey-Jones' concern for such traditional...

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72 Daily Express, (11 December 1957).
73 Ibid.
75 Cannon and Anderson, The Road From Wigan Pier, 179 and 157.
76 Morrison spoke to the Colne Valley Labour Party in December 1957 and talked of ‘a matter of Communist dictatorship, namely, the Electrical Trades Union.’, cited in Cannon and Anderson, The Road From Wigan Pier, 180.
77 Ibid., 182.
80 H. MacMillan, Ibid.
institutions was shared by Conservative MP for Totnes, Mr Mawby who suggested the TUC should investigate. 81

Apart from the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists, the ETU cited IRIS News, ‘the Conservative Trade Unionists, the Economic League, the People’s League for the Defence of Freedom’ as forces backing the anti-Communist campaign. 82 Newspapers and journals accusing the ETU leadership of ‘the systematic and vicious persecution of their political opponents’ ranged across the political spectrum. 83 The Daily Worker presented the campaign as being against trade unionism rather than Communism, saying ‘The Tories, the Press and those who control the BBC are not just against Communist trade unionists. They are against any trade unionist and every trade union which puts up a real fight against the employers.’ 84

Power and purpose

According to Les Cannon’s biographers, ‘Harry Pollitt, always sensitive to British working class feeling, tried to get the ETU Advisory Committee to soft-pedal on the election of Communist candidates…and to work for the election of more “progressive” Labour Party men.’ 85 The Party had always allowed its industrial cadres a large degree of autonomy. Even at the height of the press and media campaign, the Party’s report to its 26th Congress mentioned the ETU only briefly under the section, ‘Industrial Department’. 86 After discussing the 1957 strikes, the report referred to the ETU, saying only that ‘Faced with unprecedented attacks and slanders against members of the Communist Party…our Party members have fought back well against all obstacles.’ 87

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81 Mr Mawby, ibid., 608.
82 The ETU Replies To The “New Statesman” (March 1958), 3, MRC, MSS 137/258. IRIS (Industrial Research and Information Services) ‘circulates to industry the names of militants and warns of the danger of employing subversives’, T. Bunyan, The Political Police in Britain (London, 1977), 249. This organisation was active in the mid-1960s. Ex-Labour Minister for Labour, Ray Gunter, became Chairman in 1969. The Economic League has the stated aim of ‘exposing the experiences, the intentions and strategy of subversive organisations and providing positive education to combat misrepresentation by industrial agitators.’ Cited in ibid., 248.
83 ‘The TUC Must Probe the ETU Scandal’, Forward (19 September 1958).
84 Daily Worker (11 December 1957).
85 Cannon and Anderson, The Road From Wigan Pier, 33.
86 CPGB, Executive Committee Report to 26th Congress (London, 1958), 12.
87 Ibid.
One example of how ETU Communists dealt with politics arose at the London Area Committee in August 1958.\textsuperscript{88} Chiswick and London Electronic Engineers No. 4 Branch submitted a resolution condemning the execution of Imre Nagy, the former Hungarian leader. E.J. Turner, the Communist London Area Secretary, dismissed the resolution, saying that the ‘execution of Imre Nagy had been dealt with fully by the Millionaire Capitalist Press Lords’ who had been ‘successful in splitting the Labour movement’.\textsuperscript{89} Another Communist ‘Brother Humphreys’ added, ‘Nagy was a traitor to his country’.\textsuperscript{90}

The ETU leadership’s persistent refusal to admit the existence Communist Advisory Committees, up to and including, the trial, proved particularly damaging. This fuelled the charges of dishonesty levelled by Wyatt and others. Frank Haxell was chair of the ETU Advisory Committee, whilst Executive Council member John Frazer acted as Secretary with the Party’s Industrial Organiser, Peter Kerrigan, also in attendance. An ETU pamphlet in March 1958, responded to Wyatt’s article of 18 January. The pamphlet dealt directly with Wyatt’s ‘allegation of special Communist committees within the ETU. This theme,’ the pamphlet declared, ‘is nothing more than another figment of Wyatt’s extremely vivid imagination.’\textsuperscript{91} The union continued to refute claims about Communist-run committees in a reply to the TUC following allegations by Mark Young, secretary of Finchley Branch of the ETU and a recently expelled Party member. Young wrote to New Statesman in August 1958, alleging ‘ballot-rigging’ and stating that ‘The Communist Party maintains its control of the unions through factions called “Advisory Committees” at the national and local level.’\textsuperscript{92} Haxell replied to the TUC, saying ‘The allegation is not new and I can only inform the General Council of the advice given to our members, that if any member has evidence of interference in the affairs of the Union by the Communist Party or any other political party...then it will be acted upon in accordance with the Union’s rules.’\textsuperscript{93} At the trial, the Plaintiffs’

\textsuperscript{88} Minutes of London area Committee Meeting (28 August 1958), MRC, MSS 387/6/1/3/1-15
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{91} The ETU Replies To The “New Statesman”. 10. New Statesman refused to publish Haxell’s reply because of its length. Haxell wrote to Tewson on 20 March 1959, ‘We anticipated that the New Statesman, which is regarded as a publication of the Labour Movement, would have given us sufficient space to deal with the allegations in detail...The farthest, however, they were prepared to go was to agree to publish an article up to 1, 200 words.’, MRC, MSS 292/91/91.
\textsuperscript{92} M. Young to New Statesman (9 August 1958), 170. Young had recently been expelled from the CPGB.
\textsuperscript{93} ETU to TUC (23 January 1959), MRC, MSS 292/91/91.
barrister, Gerald Gardiner, referred to evidence from seven ex-Communist ETU members as he put it to Haxell that 'They all say they saw you at meetings of the Advisory Committees.' Haxell replied, 'Well, they are wrong.' The Communists' persistent denial in the face of overwhelming anecdotal evidence, only served to increase doubts about their honesty.

TUC policy was ambiguous. Whilst it did not specifically proscribe 'Communist Party Fractions', a 1955 pamphlet stated that 'the Trades Union Congress has watched every twist and turn of Communist tactics over a period of 35 years. Congress has repeatedly issued warnings against the methods of the Communist Party out of the conviction that these constituted a threat to our democratic way of life and the independence of the Trade Union movement.' Previous policy statements drew the attention of 'Communist agitation and organisation' as being 'maintained not by means of open meetings but mainly by means of fractions.' Such fractions, the statements continued 'determined whereby Communist policy can be projected inside the organisations with which they are individually connected'.

It is not clear why the Communists denied the existence of these committees. Jim Layzell recalled an Advisory Committee meeting in Whitechapel to select candidates for Executive Council elections and said, 'although in later years this has been spoke about as if it was some great conspiracy...I didn't think there was anything in particular wrong with it and I don't...now.' Morris Schaer agreed, saying 'this was not unusual as all the main political parties did the same'. Justice Winn referred to 'Communist Committees', saying that, because 'the assiduity...of Communists is greater than that of those whose political and economic aims are different it would not be surprising to find candidates for office favoured by Communists...achieving success in the ballots.' Under the conditions of the Cold War, the Party remained consistently nervous about 'bans and proscriptions' on Communists both by the trade union

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94 Rolph, All those in favour?, 121.
95 Ibid.
97 TUC, Defend Democracy and Tactics of Disruption respectively, cited in ibid. 8
98 Ibid.
100 Morris Schaer, interview, 20 March 2000.
movement and by legislation. The government would have faced considerable constitutional problems, however, had it attempted legislation proscribing political organisations. As Justice Winn observed, ‘Communism...is not illegal in this country’. A ban on Communists would have had implications for all political parties.

Although the TUC published propaganda about Communist intervention, there is no evidence that it sought to ban Communists or their activities. The TUC’s priority was to maintain the corporate status quo which had brought knighthoods for Vincent Tewson and Walter Citrine. As Woodrow Wyatt remarked, they ‘wanted to avoid the agony of declaring themselves against evil for fear they would get hurt in the ensuing fracas’. In a phrase which revealed as much about the Party’s leadership strategy as it did about the TUC, Wyatt added, ‘The horror of most of them was at me, washing their dirty linen in public...disturbing their amiable relations with the Communist rulers of the ETU, who were popular with the bulk of the TUC leaders.’ It was not until the anti-Communist crusade made such action unavoidable, that the TUC were forced to act.

**From propaganda to conflict**

The battle for control in the ETU ended with its exclusion from the TUC in 1961 and, finally, with a ban on Communists holding office. It began in the middle of 1956, following a visit to Prague by Cannon and his Czech wife. Cannon met a young Communist ‘whom I had last seen in 1948’ when he had been ‘a great enthusiast for the Party’. Now, finding this young lawyer ‘utterly disillusioned’, Cannon ‘hardly met a single person who expressed support for the Czechoslovak Communist Party.’ Following this, ‘My wife and I discussed my decision to leave the Communist Party.’ Cannon wrote to Maurice Cornforth saying that ‘in order to win a united British Labour

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102 See ‘Political Resolution to 27th Congress CPGB’ (31 March 1961), 10, Manchester, CP/Cent/Cong/13/02. Also Industrial Department CPGB, ‘Bans and Proscriptions’ (7 June 1961) Manchester, CP/Ind/Math/05/02.
104 Wyatt, Confessions of an Optimist, 254.
105 Ibid.
107 Ibid. This was following the Slansky trial of 1952. 60,000 Communists were imprisoned in this period. 130,000 people were sent to labour camps, see Harman, Class Struggles in Eastern Europe, 187-8.
108 Ibid.
Movement for the ideas of Marxism it is necessary to dissolve the Communist Party’. 109

As Acting Education Officer in the ETU, Cannon was employed at the Union’s College in Surrey and had already been in conflict with the leadership over his pay. The series of Engineering strikes in March 1957, in which ETU members were involved, cost the union around £200,000.110 In April 1957, the Executive Council discussed a report detailing these costs which showed how savings of £57,000 per year could be made by, amongst other things, closing the union’s college. Cannon described this as ‘an act of political victimisation that would never have been tolerated in any other union.’111 At a meeting with Haxell, Cannon asked what was to become of his job as Education Officer. According to Cannon, Haxell answered, ‘with ill concealed glee..."You will be out of a job mate – you will have to get a fresh job mate”.112 Since the previous September, continued Cannon, ‘my political beliefs had changed considerably...I had not only come to reject the role of the Communist Party but the efficacy of Marxism as a system for organising society’.113 Political disillusionment combined with behaviour perceived as arbitrary, provoked Cannon into direct opposition with the leadership.

Cannon stood in the Executive Council elections against the Communist incumbent of Division Nine, John Frazer. This Division covered South West London, stretching westwards as far as Reading and south-westwards as far as Bournemouth. It had returned a Communist Executive Councillor since 1938. For elections within the ETU at this time, Branch Secretaries issued individual ballot papers to members. Next to the names on these ballot papers, appeared the names of the branches nominating that particular candidate. Woodrow Wyatt noted, ‘As is well known in union elections ...a preponderance of nominations is likely to secure a victory for the candidate’.114

The anti-Communists rightly argued that Communists acted under instructions from the Communist Advisory Committee which organised ‘for Party members to be elected as officers of the union’ and, at the appropriate quarterly meeting, would nominate a particular candidate.115 This Executive Council election was to be held in

109 L. Cannon to M. Cornforth (January 1957), MRC, MSS 137/16.
111 Ibid., 8-9.
112 Ibid., 9.
113 Ibid., 10
114 W. Wyatt, ‘Confidential Memo to the TUC’, MRC, MSS 292/91/91.
September 1957, but candidates were nominated at the June quarterly branch meetings. Cannon described his campaign as he began his 'odyssey...in an old car which I had bought for the purpose and travelled to places like Southampton, Portsmouth, Newbury, Basingstoke, Reading and so on' until he 'succeeded in receiving sufficient nominations'. Apart from Division Nine, out of the 11 divisions of the ETU, seven seats were actually contested. The anti-Communists believed that in three divisions, they had a realistic chance of defeating the Communist supported candidate. Hadley opposed Potter in Division three; Durham, Northumberland and Yorkshire, whilst in Division 11; NE London and East Anglia, Frank Chappie, still a Communist, was opposed by Bill Sullivan. During Executive Council elections, under rule, an Executive sub-committee was empowered to make decisions. This sub-committee, whose decisions had to be unanimous, was constituted by Frank Foulkes, Frank Haxell, Assistant General Secretary, Communist, Bob McLennan and two Executive Council members from the divisions closest to the ETU's Kent Headquarters. These were John Frazer and John Hendy, both Communists.

Election results were to be announced at quarterly branch meetings at the end of November 1957. Two weeks before this date, the News Chronicle reported that Cannon had beaten Frazer by 300 votes. The Executive Council, however, announced on 28 November 1957, that Cannon, Sullivan and Hadley, the anti-Communist ticket, had all been defeated. When the figures were finally released on 17 January 1958, Frazer had beaten Cannon by 552 votes (Frazer, 2003; Cannon, 1451). The Executive sub-committee had instigated an investigation into 'election irregularities, particularly in the case of branch returns from Mitcham and LSE 14, two branches voting decisively in favour of Cannon'. W.H. Fairlam of Doncaster Branch wrote to Haxell, 'this branch deplores the action of the Gen sec in delaying the publication of the EC election results'. W.T. Sullivan of Dagenham also wrote in January and February appealing against the EC decision. Frazer's majority followed the disqualification of eight branches throughout the division, 'six of which were known to have voted in favour of Cannon'.

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117 TUC, 'Recent Events in the ETU' (1959), 2, MRC, MSS 292/91/91.
118 W.H. Fairlam to F. Haxell (28 November 1957), MRC, MSS 387/6/1/1/2.
120 TUC, 'Recent Events in the ETU' (1959), 3, MRC, MSS 292/91/91.
The anti-Communists were confused as to whether it was this sub-committee which ‘faked the results of the said election by all or some of their usual methods’ or whether it was Haxell, who ‘had no power to disqualify any of the said branches’.\(^{121}\) According to the ETU leadership, it was ‘The National Scrutineers’, Alfred McBrowse of Poplar and Mr. Rowles of Chatham who had ‘reported to the Executive Council’ the final result.\(^{122}\) The politics of these scrutineers is not known, but they were not Communists. According to Haxell, the National Scrutineers had the final say over disqualification; ‘had they disagreed with the decision taken the Branch Return would have been accepted and the branches advised accordingly’.\(^{123}\) Haxell suggested to the TUC, ‘You may want to interview the National Scrutineers’.\(^{124}\)

The TUC did not take up this suggestion but McBrowse submitted evidence to the trial. This confirmed Haxell’s claim that National Scrutineers made the final decisions regarding disqualifications. McBrowse’s evidence appeared within the context of questions relating to ETU Head Office practice. He referred to a time when outgoing office manager, Robert Oliver, had allowed certain branch returns to pass. On this occasion, McBrowse and Rowles suspected that a Branch Secretary had acted as Branch President. The two scrutineers overruled Oliver and ‘insisted that the warning was sent. And it was sent.’\(^{125}\)

In the Cannon versus Frazer election, the anti-Communists pointed out that ‘The grounds for disqualification...were technical and minor’.\(^{126}\) Strict adherence to bureaucratic technicalities was hardly unusual throughout British trade unionism, however. ETU rules were so complex that they required the maintenance of a Research Department. Most of the branches were disqualified, either because they failed to elect branch scrutineers in accordance with union rules, because they were late in posting their returns to headquarters or because members had voted outside the terms of the rules. Rule 20 Clause 5 (a) outlined rules for who could or could not vote, depending upon whether they were up to date with their weekly subscriptions. More than 12 weeks in arrears invalidated that member’s entitlement to vote. It was alleged that at ‘Southampton Docks Branch, (a branch voting for Cannon)’, a

\(^{121}\) Plaintiffs, ‘Statement of Claim’ to the High Court (10 May 1960), 4 and 6, MRC, MSS 292/91/93.


\(^{123}\) Ibid., 7.

\(^{124}\) Ibid.

\(^{125}\) Rolph, All Those in Favour?, 147.

\(^{126}\) TUC, ‘Recent Events in the ETU’, 3, MRC, MSS 292/91/91.
Communist named Gibbs, 'on discovering a majority in favour of the said Cannon', reported a breach of the rules with regard to his own election as a branch scrutineer for the EC elections. Haxell replied that 'the matter was raised with HQ in a letter from the Southampton Docks Branch Secretary' and had been 'raised at the wish of the scrutineers'. The anti-Communists concluded that disqualified votes totalled 830 in favour of Cannon and 223 for Frazer, which would have resulted in a victory for Cannon by 35 votes. Following the result, Wyatt presented another 'Panorama' programme. Because the rules of the union prevented members disclosing union affairs outside of the union, all of those appearing 'but one had to conceal their faces and sometimes had their voices muted'.

At the same time as the Executive Council election, there were elections for delegates to a Rules Revision Conference to be held between 29 and 31 November 1957. According to the TUC, the Executive Council disqualified the Branch Secretary of Mitcham on this occasion 'and declared his communist opponent elected'. Another London branch, LSE No. 4, was disqualified for voting irregularities. According to Haxell, the Mitcham Branch Secretary had 'claimed a membership of 1,084, all of whom were in benefit and entitled to receive a ballot paper and vote'. On examining the branch contribution ledger, however, the Executive discovered 'that 699 members were not entitled to vote because of arrears; that 699 ballot papers had been claimed and forwarded to the branch in excess of requirements.' Only one of these papers was returned unused 'leaving 698 unaccounted for.' In the case of the other branch, Haxell wrote, 'a membership of 970 was claimed, of which 932 were in benefit and entitled to vote'. According to the branch ledger, only 829 of these members had been entitled to vote.

In the same article, Haxell remarked on the 'violent press campaign' against the ETU leadership following the conference and 'observed that the executive would not normally engage in public controversy on matters which were of direct concern to members only.' As Haxell implied, such press interest in the affairs of a trade union

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127 Plaintiffs, 'Statement of Claim', 5, MRC, MSS 292/91/93
128 F. Haxell, Reply to 'Statement of Claim', 3, MRC, MSS 387/6/1/2/37.
129 Cannon, 'Transcript', 21. Tapes of this programme are unavailable.
130 TUC, 'Recent Events in the ETU', 4, MRC, MSS 292/91/91.
132 Ibid.
133 Ibid.
134 Ibid.
was virtually unprecedented. The *Daily Express*, for example, revealed a hitherto unexpressed concern for rank and file trade unionists as it accused the ETU leadership of changing the rules so 'that no non-Communist will ever be able to challenge their rulings'. The *Times* claimed that 'the Communist leaders of the Electrical Trades Union...have secured support for a number of proposed changes in the rules of the union'. The paper speculated that 'the effect of a number of the changes will be to make it much more difficult in the future to challenge their domination of the union'.

Whilst the conference was an example of bureaucratic manoeuvring by the leadership, it did not add up to 'a matter of Communist dictatorship' as Herbert Morrison suggested. The Conference increased the weekly subscription from one shilling and ninepence to two shillings and threepence. Cannon had previously urged such an increase and referred to 'numerous occasions when many of us were demanding the lifting of contributions in order to boost the reserves'. He was opposed, both by the leadership of the ETU and the CPGB. Apart from this, rule changes included re-arranging the composition of the Executive sub-Committee, so that instead of co-opting Executive Council members from the two branches nearest the Kent Headquarters, they could come from anywhere. It is hard to see how this could have been to the advantage of the leadership as the two Executive Councillors nearest the Headquarters were both Communists. Qualification for voting in ETU elections was further restricted, however. Whereas it had been the case that 13 weeks in arrears would disqualify a member from voting, this was reduced to five. This would render more branches susceptible to disqualification on this basis.

The *Times* exhorted members to 'protest against the executive's decision' and predicted that 'if this failed, it might still be possible to seek the protection of the courts'. The journal, *Forward*, claimed that 'the Rules Revision conference last week-end resulted...in various rule changes designed to clamp Communist control on the union more firmly than ever'. At the trial, the significant aspect of this conference

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135 *Daily Express*, (2 December 1957).
136 'ETU Leaders Entrenched', *The Times*, (2 December 1957), 10.
137 Ibid.
139 Cannon, 'Transcript', 8.
140 TUC, 'Recent Events in the ETU', 4, MRC, MSS 292/91/91.
141 *The Times*, (2 December 1957).
142 *Forward*, (6 December 1957).
was held to be a resolution from Sam Goldberg, a Trotskyist supporter of the leadership. Goldberg proposed that there should be no leave of appeal from branches disagreeing with the decisions of the National Scrutineers. Justice Winn accused Haxell of slipping this into the agenda by sleight of hand, including it only in a supplementary errata sheet which constituted 'a wicked fraud upon the members of the ETU.'

A war of words

Following the 1957 Executive Council Elections and Rules Revision Conference, repercussions in the press became more widespread. The Daily Express accused the leadership of 'something sinister and alien' and of being akin to a 'Police-State', whilst the Star led with the headline 'How Communists Fixed the Election so that Chosen Men were Ousted'. Even the international press joined in. Newsweek alleged that 'Communist cells have grabbed control of ETU locals by the use of forged ballots...and outright falsifications of returns.' It declared that 'a meeting of two big London locals swept anti-Communist Leslie Cannon...on the union's eleven member Executive Committee.' Had the disqualified branches been included, Cannon's majority would have been 35 votes. Newsweek also identified an 'outcry from the rank and file' which, as discussed above, is only discernible on a small scale in the evidence. The fact that an American journal took such an interest in these parochial affairs reflects the Cold War context within which this war of words took place. The ETU leadership was assailed from the right, as the Spectator objected that 'The Electrical Trades Union is pervaded with a nasty smell.' The left-wing Tribune also spoke of 'methods of secrecy, evasion and contempt' as it attempted to find reasons as to why 'the ETU Communists [took] fright so easily when Leslie Cannon quit the Communist Party after Hungary'. New Statesman claimed that 'If, indeed, the activities of the Communists...could be properly investigated, it is doubtful whether

143 Rolph, All Those in Favour?, 229
145 Newsweek, (16 December 1957).
146 Ibid.
147 Ibid.
148 Spectator, (29 November 1957).
149 Tribune, (6 December 1957). This was inaccurate. Cannon said, 'The document [of resignation] was submitted eventually to the Party coincident with the uprising of the Hungarian workers and so I have always been regarded as having left the party because of the events in Hungary.', 'Transcript', 5.
one party member would ever again be elected to a union office.'\textsuperscript{150} It also suggested that Cannon's election would have threatened 'a veto on the advice tendered by Mr Peter Kerrigan, the Industrial "specialist" of the Communist Party.'\textsuperscript{151}

The Communist leadership was not without support. Activists in Holborn and St Pancras South Labour Party sent a letter to members referring to a resolution passed by its 'General Management Committee on January 16'.\textsuperscript{152} The Committee wrote that it 'completely dissociates itself from the anti-working class activities of one of its members, Mr Woodrow Whyatt' [sic] and whilst Wyatt had 'been well praised in the capitalist Press', the letter said 'we...condemn him.'\textsuperscript{153} The Committee called on the Labour Party National Executive, by a majority of 27 to 25, to have him removed from the list of Parliamentary Candidates.\textsuperscript{154} One activist, Bernie Holland, recalled it as a 'famous meeting', saying 'there had been so many complaints about Woodrow Wyatt ...the question arose about his fitness to be a member of the Labour Party...and we carried the day, which was that he should be suspended or expelled'.\textsuperscript{155} The local party, however, 'had to get the OK from further up...but this was just thrown out of the window' and consequently, 'next thing we knew was this overnight suspension of the entire Holborn and St Pancras Labour Party'. Members received letters from Barbara Castle, requesting them 'to say why we felt we could continue as members of the Labour Party...we were all expelled.' They were given leave to appeal to the Labour Party Congress at Scarborough. Holland was sure that 'The basis of it all seemed to be that we'd too closely associated with the CP.'\textsuperscript{156}

The unprecedented interest taken by the press was one of the most remarkable aspects of the battle for the leadership of the ETU. The Daily Worker cited The Times as it discussed the benefits of 'regulation...public powers of supervision and investigation...in respect of trade unions'.\textsuperscript{157} The Daily Worker called this 'capitalist intervention in the affairs of all unions' and called for unity as 'the interests of all unions

\textsuperscript{150} 'How Communists Run a Union', New Statesman, (7 December 1957).
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{152} Cited in Cannon and Anderson, The Road From Wigan Pier, 171.
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{154} North London Press, (24 January 1958).
\textsuperscript{155} Bernie Holland, interview with Roy Gore and Louise Brodie (November 1997), NSA, C609/85/01-04. F6013-6.
\textsuperscript{156} Ibid. John Lawrence was Chair of this branch. This expulsion may have been an opportunity to expel him and others associated with the St Pancras Council's stand on council house building.
\textsuperscript{157} The Times, (4 December 1957).
and all trade unionists are threatened.' The ETU journal, Electron, recognised that the 'press campaign must be unprecedented in the annals of newspaper journalism.' and characterised it as an attack on the trade unions, rather than on the Communist Party. The journal continued, 'it would not be too wide of the mark to suggest that this outburst is directly connected with the present policy of our movement and its insistence on increased wages and the 40-hour week'. The perceived threat to trade unionism was also articulated in the Labour supporting Daily Herald, which warned that 'such mysteries and innuendoes...leave mud sticking to the reputation of trade unionism as a whole.' New Statesman took up the theme warning that 'there are already signs, both in Parliament and the press, that “boss rule” can provide the Tories with an excuse for legislation which would gravely damage the trade union movement.'

In January, 1958, New Statesman published Wyatt's article which, ignoring the size of the CPGB, characterised Les Cannon as one of 'those who are now in revolt ...against the Communist methods of seizing and maintaining power in the trade unions that have worked so well in Czechoslovakia and other Eastern European countries'.

Raising the temperature

The next stage in Cannon's campaign was to stand for election for London Area Secretary against a Communist supported candidate, Tom Symms. Voting was to take place between March and April 1958 with counting at the June quarterly branch meetings. Another candidate, E.A. Nash, stood in this election. According to Cannon, the CPGB supported Symms, a Labour Party member, because it 'was so embarrassed by the number of Communist Officials it had, particularly in London.'

Cannon had taken a job at Kingston in Surrey. In June, he attended the election count at London Electronic Engineers Branch No. 2, a Communist led branch in Hayes Middlesex, whose entire membership worked at the EMI factory. Branch
Secretaries were supposed to post ballot papers to members unable to attend branch meetings. This was introduced because of the number of electricians, either employed in small establishments which were part of a larger union branch, or who worked on building or dock-sites and were dislocated from the branch centre. For a branch such as LEE No.2, where the entire membership existed under one roof, such a practice was unnecessary. As Cannon watched the return envelopes being brought in, he remarked 'it occurred to me that the number of ballot envelopes were very few for a branch which ordinarily had a very high ballot'.

The Branch Secretary, a Communist named James Maling, then entered with a hold-all bag full of envelopes which he emptied onto the table. Despite there being no need for postal votes, Cannon nevertheless 'observed that very few of them had a post-mark on them.' At this point Cannon made an, apparently impulsive, intervention, initiating a chain of events which further intensified the conflict. In Maling's words, Cannon alleged 'during the course of the meeting...that I had posted ballot papers to myself.' This, despite Cannon's observation that there were few post-marks. According to Cannon's recollection 'I took a decision there and then, that it was necessary to...accuse this member of rigging the ballot.' Cannon also accused Maling of contravening 'Rule 16, clause 17...because my Branch meeting night had changed from alternate Tuesdays to alternate Wednesdays.'

Maling complained to the London Area Committee, claiming that Cannon's allegation had 'caused injury to me and brought discredit upon me as a member of the Union.' The London Area Committee met at the end of June 1958 and decided to charge Cannon under Rule 38 Clause 1 (j), which went under the general heading of 'Complaints about members - major offences'. The Committee notified Cannon of the charge on 1 July 1958 and asked him to attend a hearing of the Area sub-

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165 After the branch meeting at which nominations were taken, the Branch Secretary and President would examine the Branch ledger to ascertain who was entitled to vote. They then 'indented' headquarters for the necessary number of ballot papers. Members voted at the branch meeting or if on shift or 'working out', recorded their vote in a specially prepared envelope, which they either posted or sent to the Secretary via a steward.

166 Cannon, 'Transcript', 23.

167 Ibid., 24.

168 J. Maling, 'Statement to London Area Committee ETU' (June 1958), MRC. MSS 387/6/1/1/4.


170 J. Maling, 'Statement to London Area Committee'.

171 Ibid.

172 'Rule 38', MRC MSS 387/6/1/1/3.
committee on 8 July.\textsuperscript{173} He refused to attend this hearing ‘for domestic reasons’ and drew the Committee’s attention to the fact that such matters were supposed to be in the hands of Branch Secretaries for one month in case one of them wished to make an appeal. He continued, ‘I feel sure that my own branch will make such an appeal.’\textsuperscript{174} Cannon’s Branch Secretary did launch an appeal, but Maling was supported by his Assistant Branch Secretary, Brother Treffory, his Branch President, Sister B. Williams as well as Sisters D. Mills, D. Elliker and Brother A.H. Macolive. These members sent statements to the Area sub-committee effectively corroborating Maling’s and referring to a meeting of 31 December 1957, when Macolive had acted as Chairman. This meeting had agreed that meetings should be changed to Wednesdays.\textsuperscript{175}

The sub-committee wrote to Cannon, saying they were ‘very sorry to hear of your difficulties’ and that the hearing had been postponed to 24 July.\textsuperscript{176} Cannon contacted the sub-committee on 19 July, refusing to attend on domestic grounds and insisting that, because ‘Kingston Branch have appealed against the EC decision...the complaint is therefore premature.’\textsuperscript{177} The Area Committee decided, after consultation with the Area President, to hold the meeting on 24 July and to invite Cannon to make a written submission. In the event, Maling was on holiday, but the sub-committee found Cannon guilty. The penalty was ‘that he be removed from any office he may hold in or on behalf of the Union and disqualified from holding all or any office...for five years’ and that ‘he be fined £5’.\textsuperscript{178}

The decision provoked a flurry of letters from branches. Many, like R. Townsend of Finchley Branch, said ‘We agree that charges must be dealt with – fine them yes – but deprive them of their rights as members we do not feel as correct.’\textsuperscript{179} Several members wrote, however, supporting the decision, such as H. Howell of Deptford whose branch ‘wholeheartedly endorses the...Area Committee’s decision to endorse the findings of the Sub-Committee in respect of the charge brought against Bro. L. Cannon’.\textsuperscript{180} H. Bacon, London South East Branch, also wrote to ‘endorse the action’, as did V. Elwood of Hendon and A.J. Aitkenhood who offered ‘endorsement of

\textsuperscript{173} This date appears to have been changed to 15 July, 1958
\textsuperscript{174} ‘Sub-Committee Meeting’ [London Area ETU], (15 July 1958). Extract from Cannon’s letter, dated 9 July.
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{176} Olga was on holiday and Cannon had to look after their young son.
\textsuperscript{177} ‘Sub-Committee Report’, (September 1958), MRC, MSS 387/6/1/1/6.
\textsuperscript{178} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{179} R. Townsend to London Area Committee (17 October 1958), MRC, MSS 387/6/1/1/9.
\textsuperscript{180} H. Howell to Haxell (1 October 1958), MRC, MSS 387/6/1/1/8
Apart from Townsend, Bill Sullivan again wrote supporting Cannon, as did G. Tann of London Electrical Engineers who asked for 'more detailed information regarding the charges laid against Bro L. Cannon'.

Shortly after the hearing on 9 August 1958, New Statesman received a letter from Mark Young, chairman of Finchley Branch of the ETU since 1953 and member of the CPGB. Young had already written to John Mahon, complaining about the ETU leadership and its methods. In the letter to New Statesman, he claimed that 'it is now four years since I first raised this issue within the union'. He also claimed that 'At least two executive councillors of the union – both of them Communists – have expressed complete disagreement with such practices, one before the London District Secretariat of the Party and the other at a meeting with Harry Pollitt himself.' He further claimed that the CPGB 'maintains its control...through fractions called "Advisory Committees".' The 'last advisory committee I attended', continued Young, 'in February 1958, the only topic of conversation was how to defeat our ex-comrade Cannon'. The tactic, according to Young, was to go around the branches and characterise Cannon as 'the candidate of the capitalist press'.

Young's letter dealt a powerful blow to the ETU leadership and its repercussions are dealt with in the following chapter. Even more resonant, however, was the aftermath of the London Area Committee's disciplining of Cannon. This expressed itself at the TUC Congress at Bournemouth in September 1958 when Cannon's credentials as a rank and file delegate were withdrawn under the conditions of his disciplinary. This not only had the effect of involving the TUC directly, but evoked a great deal of previously unexpressed sympathy for Cannon. As Cannon himself said, it brought a 'qualitative change in the whole of the campaign'.

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184 Ibid.
185 Ibid.
186 Ibid.
187 Cannon, 'Transcript' 29.
Chapter 8
Turning off the Power II

Wolf Wayne described the aftermath of the 1961 High Court ruling as ‘terrible ... all power that was held in the ETU was smashed almost overnight’.¹ For Morris Schaer, the victory of the anti-Communists ‘was a blow to the whole trade union movement which has never recovered.’² The consequences of the judgement for the defendants are detailed below. What, however, were the implications of Winn’s judgement for the CPGB’s leadership strategy? Wolf Wayne cited John Gollan who considered that ‘the question of the ETU was a self-inflicted wound’.³ Such a wound, whilst not disabling the Party’s industrial intervention, nevertheless undermined the confidence it had expressed in 1957 about trade unions as vehicles for ‘mass struggles’, which ‘would open up the way for the advance to socialism’.⁴

In response to the judgement, the Party’s Executive Committee issued a public statement in July 1961 on its relationship with the trade unions.⁵ Before this, the Party had rarely, if ever, addressed the question of its leadership strategy. A series of pamphlets called Marxist Study Themes, for example, was produced by the Party’s Central Education Department. One pamphlet, Socialism and the British Labour Movement, attempted to clarify ‘some of the main problems that are at present under hot discussion inside the British Labour movement’.⁶ This proposed to ‘help discussion in the factory branches of the Party.’ However, whilst the authors talked throughout about ‘right-wing’ trade-union leaders and their role within the post-war economy, they did not discuss the role of Communist trade union leaders.⁷ Similarly, Harry Pollitt in 1948 and 1953 and J.R. Campbell in 1953 did not discuss the Party’s leadership strategy.⁸ In 1961, however, the Executive Committee addressed the question directly,

¹ Wolf Wayne, interview, 10 February 1999.
² Morris Schaer, written reply to author, 26 March 2000.
³ Ibid.
⁵ Executive Committee, CPGB, The Communist Party and the Trade Unions (8 July 1961), Manchester, CP/Cent/Ind/1/5.
⁷ Ibid.
saying that 'any attempt of Communists to secure a monopoly of union posts at any level would be entirely opposed to Communist policy'.® This was not just for the consumption of a sceptical public, following the Winn judgement. As Peter Kerrigan made clear to his Party's Congress in 1963, 'we Communists reject the slanderous accusations that we try to win union positions under false pretences, and then try to manoeuvre union committees to support policies in which they do not believe.'®

**Communist trade unionists as bureaucrats**

Following the 'class against class' deviation in the late 1920s, the CPGB faithfully emphasised the role of trade unions as 'class organisations, that...must defend the interests of the working class'.® The Party frequently reinforced trade union loyalism by reference to an idealised perception of 'The "Old" Role of the Trade Unions'.® This perception contrasted 'early trade unionists', who 'understood the nature of class war' with those post-war union leaders who characterised 'increasing collaboration between the trade unions and the state' as marking 'an advance for the working class'.® Significantly, the authors had to go back to the 'Resolution of First Congress of the International Workingmen's Association', drafted by Marx, to illustrate the class-war credentials of nineteenth century trade unionists.® Most trade unions had, within their constitutions, rhetoric about socialism and although, historically, many members had identified with insurgent movements such as Chartism, as John Stevenson pointed out, 'piecemeal and sectional action had been the hallmark of trade union action almost from the beginning.'® The Party's romantic perspective reinforced its trade union loyalism. It was a perspective, however, which its own trade union leaders did little to enhance. The practice of Communist trade union leaders was more like the bureaucratic pragmatism of their post-war contemporaries than that of the idealised class warriors of the previous century.

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® Executive Committee CPGB, 'The Communist Party and the Trade Unions' (July 1961), 3, Manchester, CP/Cent/Ind/1/5.


® Socialism and the British Labour Movement, 29

® Ibid., 26

® Ibid.

® Ibid.

The ETU case highlighted this bureaucratic tendency, particularly in the way in which the Communist leadership responded to activism outside its control and especially when that activity was led and initiated by others on the left. A distinct grouping of ETU Trotskyists had emerged by 1957. Some, like Dick Reno, were prepared to collaborate with people like Cannon in order to attack the Communist leadership. In general, however, Trotskyists in the ETU pursued a political line which allied a revolutionary critique of bureaucracy with a defence of the leadership against anti-Communist attacks. The majority of this group were associated with Gerry Healy's Socialist Labour League, though some, like Dick Reno, coalesced around the Militant newspaper. Another, Sam Goldberg of Birmingham Central, had been a critic of the leadership in the early 1950s but, by 1955, had become an Executive Councillor and a supporter of Haxell. According to John Lloyd, in London in particular, the Trotskyists 'gleefully chased after the executive for lack of real militance in wage bargaining'. They also exposed Frank Foulkes who had condemned the siting of US rocket bases in Britain in line with CPGB policy, but had refused to call for strike action by electricians to stop them being built. At the ETU trial, Foulkes, under cross examination from George Gardiner, rounded upon Reno, saying that 'our members have lost a lot of money through Mr Reno's activities, and one of them is that he supports what we now popularly call "wild-cat strikes". Foulkes' moderate position was in contrast to the Party's declared objective which called for 'the building up of the movement in struggle'. It also contrasted with Lenin's view of strikes as 'schools of war' which he elevated to having 'great moral influence' bringing 'thoughts of socialism very forcibly to the worker's mind'.

Such attitudes were not confined to the leadership. Morris Schaer, an ETU shop-steward throughout the 1950s, remembered his Communist London District Secretary being 'a bit paranoid about Trotskyists'. Schaer considered this justified as 'some of the ETU members in the building industry [wanted] to strike at the slightest excuse.' Reinforcing Foulkes' conservatism, Schaer continued, saying that 'as an

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16 In 1957, Cannon attended the Socialist Forum at Wortley Hall on 27-28 April, 1957. He later claimed, however, that by 1957, he 'had come not only to reject the role of the Communist Party but the efficacy of Marxism as a system for organising society.' 'Transcript', 10.
19 F. Foulkes, cited in Rolph, *All Those in Favour?*, 200
20 The British Road to Socialism (1958), 28
active shop-steward there were some occasions when I had a struggle to discourage strike action.\textsuperscript{23} The Party's bureaucratic pragmatism was in contrast to the Leninist-sounding rhetoric of its literature. The Party stressed that trade union leaders 'could never properly defend the interests of the workers unless they participated in the political struggle against capitalism'.\textsuperscript{24} Its leadership strategy, however, favoured the trade union objectives of wages and conditions over those of politics. Jim Layzell said of the leadership strategy in the ETU, 'it wouldn't have mattered two buttons if they'd lost the General Secretaryship, not politically...if Byrne had been elected – it wouldn't have mattered.'\textsuperscript{25}

Justice Winn asserted that leaving 'room for no greater differences of opinion than are represented by degrees of emphasis...not only was the ETU managed and controlled by Communists...but it was so managed in the service of the Communist Party...and the ideas of the Party.'\textsuperscript{26} Although Winn was correct in that the Party retained bureaucratic control, however, there is little evidence that this was put into the service of the Party's programme for socialism or even progressive political reform. As discussed above, despite the concern about its influence on the trade union block vote, Communist Party leadership in both the NUM and the ETU did not necessarily equate to support for progressive policies. Woodrow Wyatt revealed the concern from the point of view of the Labour Party in January 1958, warning that 'if democratic socialists do not win in the ETU the same pattern could be repeated in other unions.'\textsuperscript{27} According to Wyatt if the CPGB could repeat its success in enough unions, 'the trade union vote at Labour Party conferences could be controlled by the Communist Party to decide Labour Party policy.'\textsuperscript{28}

The issue of the block vote had become crucial to Gaitskell between 1955 and 1961. The Gaitskellites, working under the organisation of the Campaign for Democratic Socialism (CDS), failed in their bid to remove part of the Labour Party constitution, introduced in 1918 and known as Clause 4, largely because of trade union opposition.\textsuperscript{29} It was Frank Cousins of the TGWU, however, who led the battle

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{24} Socialism and the British Labour Movement, 29.
\textsuperscript{25} Jim Layzell interview with Louise Brodie.
\textsuperscript{27} W. Wyatt, 'The Case Against the ETU Leaders', New Statesman, (18 January 1958), 63.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{29} Brivati, Hugh Gaitskell, 330-348.
against Gaitskell on unilateral nuclear disarmament at Labour’s 1960 Conference. Communist policy on disarmament was ambiguous. Pollitt, in 1956, called for ‘the banning of all nuclear weapons, no further tests of such weapons, and an agreed scheme of disarmament’. In 1958, The British Road to Socialism demanded an ‘end to nuclear tests’, called for a ban under the terms of ‘an agreed settlement’ but stopped short of demanding unilateral disarmament. Wolf Wayne remembered that the Party leadership was critical of CND, but soon learned they would have to support it. At the ETU Conference on 17 July 1961, when Frank Haxell was exiled to the public gallery, Tommy Searle referred to him as being on the CND marches to Aldermaston ‘with us, in the forefront of the ETU.’ In spite of this and despite the strategic potential for the Party of a clear position on nuclear weapons in opposition to Gaitskell, it was 1960 before such influence ‘swung the Electrical Trades Union’s 140,000 votes against the official policy.’ The miners’ union, despite having Communist Will Paynter as Secretary, voted against supporting unilateralism by 470,000 votes to 201,000.

Communist leadership in many trade unions went back to the late 1930s and the war, when the Party’s anti-Fascist position flowed with, rather than against, the tide of general political opinion. In the ETU, for example, following Operation Barbarossa, the London District Committee which, since the 1937 elections, had been left-wing and Communist dominated, began to urge ‘a tremendous increase in the production of equipment’ to bring about ‘the collapse of the Nazi regime.’ Communist Walter Stevens, later elected General Secretary in 1948, called for ‘unsparing effort’ in support of ‘our gallant allies.’ Frank Foulkes criticised ETU strikers in Barrow-in-Furness, complaining that ‘in the throes of a mighty conflict with Fascism’ such action...

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30 H. Pollitt, ‘Political Report to 24th Congress of the CPGB’ (March 1956), Manchester, CP/Cent/09/02.
31 British Road to Socialism (1958), 15.
32 Wolf Wayne, interview, 10 February 1999.
33 Cited in Lloyd, Light and Liberty, 462.
34 Brivati, Hugh Gaitskell, 354.
35 Brivati, Hugh Gaitskell, 356.
36 Cited in Lloyd, Light and Liberty, 256.
37 Ibid.
'had to be the subject of the reverse of approbation.' Frank Haxell was elected on to the Executive Council in 1944 and Foulkes became General President in 1945. As it entered the Cold War and Conservative-dominated 1950s, this apparent power gave the Party a credibility beyond the appearance of a Marxist-Leninist sect. For those individuals who, under the conditions of anti-Fascism and war, had gained such positions, it may have been, as Jim Layzell, suggested, that 'they were so eager for power...they just didn’t want to give it up.'

An example of the Communist leadership in action arose during a disciplinary hearing for C.A.N. Walker, an ETU member and Conservative Councillor in Porthcawl, who had written to the local Western Mail about ballot irregularities and Communist connections. Walker's case was heard in 1959 and illustrates a bureaucratic tendency within the ETU Communist leadership. Foulkes addressed Walker, saying 'we asked for an undertaking that you wouldn’t commit what we consider to be a breach and you refused to give it [of] Rule 38, Clause (1) (b)...or acted contrary to Rule 10, Clause (4) and Rule 10, Clause (7) (a).' Walker responded, 'You've laid the charge as stated haven't you?' to which Foulkes replied 'yes we’ve made the charge'. Walker then asked, 'why are the statements...that I wrote contrary to the rules?' to which Foulkes responded, 'well if you would continue.' After repeating this exchange several times, Foulkes stated, 'Yes well we say that you violated the rule. If you can prove that you're not guilty...that will be part of your case. You see, we're not here to answer questions...if you can prove to us you're not guilty under either of those two rules, well alright.' Although Walker protested that he had not 'divulged union business', the Executive Council found him guilty as charged by unanimous vote. The punishment was not recorded.

The Party's emphasis in 1957 'to lead the workers...from the immediate struggles under capitalism right up to...the building of socialism', had shifted by 1963 when the word 'leadership' did not feature and instead, members were exhorted 'to support progressive policies' and to 'actively co-operate with all progressive trade

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38 Ibid., 257.
39 Jim Layzell interview with Louise Brodie.
40 'ETU Executive Council Meeting, Minutes No.1.' (7 and 8 February 1959), 42, MRC, MSS.387/1/1/1.
41 Ibid., 43.
42 Ibid., 46 and 63.
Following the Winn judgement, the CPGB modified its ambitions with regard to the way in which it sought to influence the unions. In July 1961, for example, the Executive Committee released a statement on the ETU. The Party retained the idea that ‘the Communist Party...endeavours to influence the policy of the trade unions’ and declared that this was one of its ‘functions as a working class political party, which it will never renounce.’ By December, however, the Executive Committee released a Press Statement which omitted any mention of political influence.

The Executive Committee asserted at this time, that the ‘election of Communists to positions of responsibility in a trade union does not mean that that union is controlled by the Communist Party. It is controlled by the official bodies of the union concerned.’ Frank Haxell also pointed out to the TUC that ‘the affairs of my Union are not controlled by the Communist Party’, adding that ‘delegates and representatives are elected by ballot vote and known members of political parties – Labour, Liberal, Communist, Conservative...are elected’. Both statements, however, ignored the question as to whether this remained the case when such official bodies were constituted by a Communist majority. Haxell’s denials to the TUC about Communist control reflected a dilemma which the Party never resolved. British Communism had the necessary machinery to elevate its members into leadership positions at this time. Despite the perceived credibility this offered, however, the very bureaucratic methods needed to obtain it, militated against it translating to political influence. As the Party sought and fought for bureaucratic influence, it was forced to deny that such influence was for political ends, simply in order to retain it.

The Party attempted to resolve this dilemma in two ways. Firstly, it declared that ‘Communists and non-Communists in the Union...are workers with a common interest’. Publicly, the Party declared that its policy was ‘to build the unions so that they can win the best possible wages, conditions and supplementary benefits from the

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44 'Draft Statement adopted by the Executive Committee of the Communist Party' (July 1961), 4, Manchester, CP/Ind/Math/05/02.
45 'Press Statement from the Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain' (December 1961), Manchester, CP/Cent/EC/08/04
47 TUC, 'Affairs of the Electrical Trades Union' (23 January 1959), 262, MRC, MSS 292/91/91.
48 Ibid., 10.
employers.' Justice Winn identified this as 'Double Talk', dismissing the idea that the CPGB served 'the ETU by aiming to achieve for its members the aims and objects regarded as optima by Communists.' Secondly, the Party blurred the distinction between rank and file and bureaucratic influence, saying that 'the aim of Communist members is to win union members for Communist Policy...This is primary.'

The claim that Communist interests were synonymous with those of the trade unions relied upon the Party accepting one of two things. It either had to accept the truth of the trade union movement's traditional socialist rhetoric or it had to accept that, like the unions, it was limited to achieving progress only on the basis of wages and conditions. Again, the Party's imperative to protect its trade union credibility necessitated a discursive sleight of hand. It ignored the distinction between socialism which required the overthrow of capitalism, and the still acceptable idea within mainstream trade unionism of socialism being akin to corporate economic planning and welfare reform. As well as this, the Party stressed that members were 'hard working' union officials who were the best at achieving trade union objectives. It is not clear whether Justice Winn had read The British Road to Socialism, but he decided that the Communist Party's interest in building the unions must have amounted to more than just improving wages and conditions. These political ambitions, suspected by Winn and insisted upon by Lenin, however, were not always clearly stated and were often confused within trade union loyalist rhetoric about wages and conditions or, more commonly, added as an afterthought.

The consequences of bureaucratic leadership

Following the High Court judgement and the unsuccessful appeals against it, the Party leadership attempted to distance itself from the ETU, suggesting that ballot rigging was 'primarily a question for the trade union concerned'. The Executive Committee adopted a judicial tone as it referred to the Party having 'completed its study of the case', stating that 'the Communist Party will never condone such

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49 Ibid., 16.
50 Winn, 'Judgement', 6.
51 Executive Committee CPGB, 'Did Communists Control the ETU?' (1 September 1961), 16, Manchester, CP/Cent/Ind/1/5.
52 Ibid., 4.
53 'Press Statement From the Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain' (4 December 1961), Manchester, CP/Cent/EC/08/04.
practices'. In the same document, the Party accepted the resignation of Frank Haxell. Two years later, Peter Kerrigan declared that 'ballot rigging...was a complete violation of the principles on which Communists have worked for over forty years.' Kerrigan again attempted to distance the Party from the ETU leadership, saying that ballot rigging 'took place without our Party leadership being aware of it.'

This attempt to portray the Party leadership as ignorant of the practices of some of its leading trade union members was contradicted by others, however. Mark Young, for example, Secretary of Finchley Branch of the ETU, in his letter to New Statesman, claimed that he had 'raised [the issue of ballot-rigging] at all levels in the Communist Party, and at a personal interview with Peter Kerrigan...three years ago.' Similarly, Jim Layzell remembered that, having discovered evidence of ballot rigging in the East Ham Branch, 'I went to see Peter Kerrigan...and told him what was happening...I didn't think the national Communist Party, if they knew of it would tolerate it. Anyway, I went to see Kerrigan and told him what was happening and in my innocence at that time, I said to him...you'd better tell them to put a stop to it.' Layzell then went to see London District Industrial Organiser, Dennis Goodwin. He continued, 'this was the first time it got into my brain box that they did know about it...because I would normally go to [King Street]...but on that occasion Goodwin said I'll meet you in a little Café in Whitechapel...anyway I got the same story from him that both sides are doing it, it was difficult to stop.' Wolf Wayne also suggested that Party leaders knew more than they had implied. Wayne remarked, 'whatever the Party leadership tried to say to these people in the ETU cut no ice. Peter Kerrigan was the industrial organiser at that time...whatever he tried to do, they told him to bugger off...and he was talking to national officials.' Whether the Party condoned the practices of the ETU Communists or whether, as Wayne implied, it attempted to control them, any claim to have been ignorant of them was clearly disingenuous.

54 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
57 M. Young, 'Communists and the ETU' New Statesman (9 August 1958), 170. See above, Chapter 7, 211.
58 Jim Layzell interview with Louise Brodie
59 Ibid.
60 Wolf Wayne, interview, 10 February 1999.
The crucial corner leading to the High Court was turned in September 1958 at the TUC Congress in Bournemouth. Following his accusation that Communist James Maling had rigged the ballot at Hayes No 2 Branch during the election for London District Secretary, the London Area Committee, under Rule 38, suspended Cannon from holding office for five years and fined him five pounds. Cannon had travelled to Bournemouth early 'in order to spend a week's holiday before the...Congress began'. On the Thursday preceding the Congress he heard the news that the London Area Committee had ratified the decision of its sub-committee and that he would not be allowed to attend the Congress. The level of public interest in the ETU was demonstrated by the fact that Cannon was able to call an immediate press conference following this news. This 'was attended by nearly every British Industrial Correspondent as well as Industrial Correspondents and Political Correspondents from other countries'. The following day the story appeared on the front pages of most of the national press. The Manchester Guardian theorized that Cannon's treatment had come about as the result of 'personal rivalry...between Mr Haxell and Mr Cannon when Mr Cannon was still a member of the Communist Party.' Walter Padley, President of USDAW, objected to the ban, saying 'it is not a question of death or sickness...the case of Brother Cannon arises from a row in the ETU.' The Chairman at the Congress, however, ruled this objection out of order as it related to an internal matter within the ETU.

Throughout the period between late 1958 and early 1959, the TUC and the ETU exchanged a series of letters. This was, in part, a response by the TUC to pressure from Woodrow Wyatt and the press to take action. Wyatt, during this period, was working closely with Cannon and Frank Chapple and had flung much of his evidence about ballot rigging in the direction of the TUC. Vincent Tewson, claimed Wyatt, 'brushed me off', but he also spoke to George Woodcock, Assistant General Secretary of the TUC who, because he pronounced the case insubstantial, was branded 'supercilious and weak'. Incomprehensibly, Wyatt diagnosed Woodcock's 'character' as having been 'enfeebled by his being under the influence of Dick

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61 Cannon, 'Transcript', 25.
62 Ibid., 28.
64 F and GPC, 'History of Case' (?1960), 1, MRC MSS 292/91/91.
65 Ibid.
66 Wyatt, Confessions of an Optimist, 253.
Wyatt did feel that he had the support of Vic Feather, Assistant Secretary, however. ‘Stalwart, sturdy Vic’ suggested that Wyatt should contact TUC General Council members individually, but even they ‘shrank away with excuses’. One possible reason for this, something which Wyatt, Cannon and Chappie could, apparently not contemplate, was summed up by Feather himself in a note to Woodcock in November 1958. Having studied Wyatt’s figures, Feather wrote, ‘I have gone through all this, and I do not think there is anything here at all.’

In the light of Feather’s comment and the claims of Wyatt, one aspect of Justice Winn’s judgement about the period before the 1959 General Secretary election, is significant. Addressing himself to ‘matters...which are earlier in point of time than the December 1959 election’, Winn declared, ‘in general my considered judgement on all these topics is that, when fully examined...they do not amount to or establish any fraudulent practice by any of the Defendants.’ The implications of this statement for Wyatt, Cannon, Chappie and much of the British press during the 1950s are interesting. Although the Plaintiffs limited their action to the Byrne versus Haxell election of 1959, the attacks which sustained the anti-Communists up until 1959 referred to alleged improprieties going back to 1948 and of which, according to Winn, the Communists were innocent. The judge did go on to say, however, that ‘some at least of the matters are...discreditable and...should not have occurred in a properly conducted Union; indeed some of them imply misconduct.’

The TUC attempted to persuade the ETU to take legal action against press allegations. The union’s refusal to do this caused the TUC to draw the conclusion that it must, therefore, be guilty or have something to hide. The TUC’s Finance and General Purposes Committee (F and GPC) discussed the possibility of legal action in December 1958, saying ‘some allegations against the ETU of malpractices seem actionable on grounds of libel or defamation.’ The TUC wrote to the union two days later, agreeing that the allegations were ‘inspired by a desire to discredit trade unionism.’ The letter emphasised the ‘possible effect...on the prestige and public
reputation of the Trade Union Movement'. Haxell replied, avoiding the question of legal action but pointing out that 'in the last ten years my organisation has grown from 156,000 to 240,000', accounting 'for over 15 per cent of the total increase in affiliated [TUC] membership.' The TUC made explicit reference to litigation in February 1959, when it asked 'if your Executive Council or the officers concerned have given consideration to the possibility of instituting legal proceedings.' The letter suggested that the ETU should institute an investigation of the issues raised by 'the charges publicly made by members of your Union'. Haxell replied, saying that 'we have given serious consideration to instituting legal proceedings...and have come to the conclusion that such a course is not in the interest of the Trade Union Movement.' In support, Haxell quoted a letter by Walter Citrine to The Times in which he observed that the trade union movement had little faith either in the competence or the impartiality of the courts in matters affecting organised labour. Haxell also referred to the cost of such action.

By December, the TUC had located several precedents for unions taking individuals or publications to court, either for defamation or libel. In its correspondence with the ETU, it continued to stress that such action would be 'in the best interests of the Trade Union Movement.' Tewson and the TUC General Council were clearly under pressure at this stage, both from the press and from people like Wyatt and Walter Padley, to intervene on the side of the anti-Communists. Vic Feather's role summed up the General Council's vacillation over the ETU. Feather drifted from the 'Stalwart, sturdy Vic', of Wyatt's memory to the man who did 'not think there is anything here at all' and back again to being 'anonymously, a good friend of the reformers', according to John Lloyd. The General Council were keen that something should be seen to be done, however, and requested the ETU to ensure that the allegations were 'thoroughly investigated'. Haxell, in a further letter, agreed, saying that the Executive Council had decided 'to request the members referred to provide

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75 Ibid.
76 ETU to TUC (23 January 1959), 264, MRC, MSS 292/91/91.
77 TUC to the ETU (25 February 1959), 265, MRC, MSS 292/91/91.
78 Ibid.
79 ETU to TUC (20 March 1959), 266, MRC, MSS 292/91/91.
80 Ibid.
81 TUC to ETU (26 March 1959), 267, MRC, MSS 292/91/91.
82 Lloyd, Light and Liberty, 422.
them with evidence in support of the allegations and charges made in order that the matter can be investigated.\(^8\)

**The ETU Committee of Inquiry**

The Executive Council appointed its Committee of Inquiry on 29 April 1959 and it reported on 9 June. It was composed of two Executive Councillors, Harry West (Manchester and Lancashire) and Thomas Vincent (Wales) with National Officer, George Scott in the chair. All three were Labour Party members who regularly voted with the Communists. The non-Communist composition of the committee was deliberate, taking 'account of the political character of some of the accusations.'\(^8\)

Scott, who had twice stood as a Labour candidate in General Elections and had been a Fife County Councillor, was accused at the trial, of being a Communist Party 'plant' within the Labour Party 'so that he could go to Labour Party Conferences as ETU representative'.\(^8\) He had written an article for the *Daily Worker* on 14 December 1957, claiming that the number of branches disqualified following the Cannon-Frazer election of that year, would not have affected the result.\(^8\) This was later found to be untrue but, after 'careful consideration', the judge exonerated him of conspiracy.\(^8\) Despite John Lloyd's typically jaundiced remark that Justice Winn had been excessively generous in letting George Scott off', however, Winn himself observed that Scott 'was plainly horrified when his error was demonstrated to him in the witness box...I unhesitatingly infer that Mr Haxell gave him only partial facts and misled him'.\(^8\)

Gerald Gardiner described Harry West as one of several 'stooges' within the leadership of the ETU. Gardiner continued 'one doesn't want to be offensive, but your Lordship may have wondered whether Mr West could really be as stupid as he seemed to be.'\(^8\) West, who had also been cited as a defendant, was also exonerated. Tom Vincent was not among the defendants but Cannon suggested that he had used Communist Party influence in order to get himself elected as a delegate to TUC

\(^8\) ETU to TUC (16 April 1959), 268, MRC, MSS 292/91/91.
\(^8\) 'Electrical Trades' Unions Committee of Inquiry Report' (Bridlington, 9 June 1959), MRC, MSS 292/91/91.
\(^8\) Rolph, *All Those in Favour?*, 174.
\(^8\) G. Scott, 'The Press and the ETU - What are the Facts?', *Daily Worker* (14 December 1957).
\(^8\) Ibid., 239.
\(^8\) Ibid., 217.
Congress. Gardiner cited an example from 1955 when Vincent's vote for TUC delegate shot up from 5,000 to 18,000 votes, though no evidence was offered to support the suggestion that this was because of his support for the Communists.  

Mark Young's account of how Scott and West gained their respective posts in the ETU gives some insight into how the CPGB operated within the trade unions. Young cited a London ETU Advisory Committee meeting at which a report from the Scottish Communist Party was discussed which 'spoke in glowing terms of brother Scott's cooperation with Communist Party councillors.' The advisory committee decided to support Scott and so, according to Young, he moved from being an 'also-ran' to being 'elected on the first ballot over several other candidates.'

The case of Harry West was more interesting. Manchester ETU Communists had agreed to support a comrade, 'brother Turner', for the post of Executive Councillor in 1958. Following the Soviet invasion of Hungary, the National Advisory Committee decided to support West, a Labour party member who supported the executive. According to Young, ‘Haxell, Frazer and Hendy accompanied by Mr Peter Kerrigan... journeyed to Manchester on two occasions.’ This second visit, maintained Young, 'was on the direct instigation of the political sub-committee of the Communist Party, who had endorsed the view that Brother West should be the candidate.' Following this second visit, the Manchester Communists agreed to adopt West.

On 4 April 1959, the Executive Council had censured Les Cannon and Mark Young for making revelations and allegations in the press about the ETU. As far as Cannon was concerned these related to statements he had made following the withdrawal of his credentials at the 1958 TUC Congress. Cannon said, 'I have made no allegations against the Union as such. All my allegations have been made against communist party members inside the union, individually and as members of the advisory committees. It is not possible to equate these allegations with criticisms of the union.' Mark Young's infraction concerned his letters to New Statesman. Cannon and Young were summoned before the Committee on 11 and 12 May and again on 26 and 27 May. Their first objection was that the committee was not chaired by Frank

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90 Ibid., 130-1.
91 M. Young to V. Tewson (5 September 1959), MRC, MSS 137/39.
92 Cited in Lloyd, Light and Liberty, 425.
93 Ibid.
94 L. Cannon to F. Haxell (May 1959), MRC, MSS 137/22.
Foulkes. This was strange, given that the Executive had explicitly not included Communists because of the political implications involved. Cannon and Young insisted, however, that 'it was unconstitutional for Brother Scott, National Officer, to be a member of the Committee.' John Lloyd claimed that, although the officials on the committee were not Communists 'the secretarial staff servicing the committee were!' A circular argument developed between the committee and Cannon and Young who refused to supply evidence until they were satisfied that 'the committee was genuinely objective' and that 'no legal action was contemplated against them by the Executive Council'. George Gardiner raised the issue of this inquiry at the trial whilst questioning Tom Vincent. Gardiner quoted Cannon as saying 'at one point: "If I'm making an allegation against you, Brother Vincent, somebody else should decide whether it is true or not; not you"?' Although Cannon and Young stood accused of bringing the union into disrepute in breach of rule 10 clause 4, both refused to supply evidence to the inquiry to support their allegations about ballot rigging.

The Committee of Inquiry reported to the ETU Conference at Bridlington in June 1959 saying 'we do not feel...it is necessary for us to make specific recommendations' but admonished the Executive Council for having been 'excessively lenient in connection with the continued activities of these members who...have abused their democratic rights.' The Report was given to the F and GPC, who wrote to the ETU on 29 October 1959, inviting the Executive Council to meet with them on 24 November. Five days before this meeting was due to take place, Haxell replied saying, effectively, that the Executive Council was too busy and, according to the TUC, 'questioned the competence of the General Council'. The TUC announced in a circular to affiliated unions that it had 'decided to bring to an end a phase in the proceedings made completely abortive by the attitude of the union' and concluded that this attitude suggested 'that there is so much substance in these charges that they are

95 'ETU Committee of Inquiry', 1, MRC, MSS 292/91/91.
96 Ibid.
97 Lloyd, Light and Liberty, 424.
98 'ETU Committee of Inquiry', 2.
99 Rolph, All Those in Favour?, 130.
100 'ETU Committee of Inquiry', 5.
101 'TUC to Secretaries of all affiliated organisations' (30 November 1959), MRC, MSS 292/91/91.
102 Ibid.
unwilling to have them thoroughly investigated and unable specifically and unequivocally to deny them.\textsuperscript{103}

**Further bureaucratic iniquities**

At the ETU Conference in June 1959, meanwhile, only seven delegates out of 380 voted in favour of a resolution criticising the Executive. There was criticism of at least one specific Communist policy, when, at the 1958 Labour Party Conference, the ETU had voted against British membership of NATO.\textsuperscript{104} The most crucial and damning series of accusations at the Bridlington Conference, however, were levelled by Dick Reno. Despite their political differences, Reno had worked alongside Cannon throughout the preceding year on the question of ETU finances. He and Cannon discovered in the accounts several excessive claims, either by individuals or by the Executive Council collectively. Among these were £535 13s 5d for 'catering' at the Grand Hotel in Folkstone, two weeks later £259 3s 6d at the Waldorf Hotel in London 'for Executive Council members and fraternal delegates' and £104 0s 0d for 'catering' at the Cliff Hotel in Blackpool during the 1957 TUC Congress.\textsuperscript{105} Reno also claimed that the union had lent £1,147 to Communist Colin Whittone and that Haxell had received expenses of £1,800 in excess of his salary of £1,158.\textsuperscript{106} Cannon had also discovered that Head Office manager, Communist Jim Humphrey, and Communist John Frazer had claimed, respectively, £7 13s 0d to visit the Isle of Thanet Branch and £7 15s 0d to visit Southampton Branch.\textsuperscript{107} According to Cannon, the allowance for such travelling expenses was normally 7s 6d.\textsuperscript{108} The worst example of impropriety, however, was the use by Haxell of employees from the union's estates department for his own house improvements. According to Reno, these improvements allowed Haxell to sell his property at a profit of £3,000.\textsuperscript{109} At the conference, Haxell denied this, but at a hearing in the High Court in 1964 through which Reno attempted to overturn a ten year ban on his holding office, Haxell declared it 'necessary to correct' his previous assertion and admitted that 'funds and labour of the union had been involved in a

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{104} Lloyd, *Light and Liberty*, 427.
\textsuperscript{105} L. Cannon to Bill [?Blairford] (29 March 1959), MRC, MSS 137/38.
\textsuperscript{106} Lloyd, *Light and Liberty*, 428.
\textsuperscript{107} Cannon to Bill (29 March 1959).
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{109} Lloyd, *Light and Liberty*, 428.
substantial extent in the repair and improvement of No. 57 Clarence Road, Bromley.¹¹⁰

The fraud with which the ETU Communists were charged in 1961 was composed of several elements. All of these, as far as the judge was concerned, had, on the balance of probability, taken place, though to what extent and with whose knowledge, was unclear. These various elements have been detailed both in Lloyd’s *Light and Liberty* and in Rolph’s account of the trial. These works, it should be stressed, manifested journalistic partiality and were explicitly unsympathetic to the ETU Communists.

The first part of the plaintiff’s accusation was that James Humphrey, a Communist since 1950 and ETU Head Office manager, had ordered and despatched inflated numbers of ballot-papers and that Haxell and his supporters had used them to record extra votes. The Express Printing Company which printed the papers, was supposed to print just enough to correspond with current ETU membership in order to minimise the possibility of fraud. In the past, however, membership figures had often arrived at Head Office too close to elections and, because of increased recruitment, there were often less ballot papers than members. Humphrey came to an arrangement with Norman Swift of the printing company in order to solve this problem. This involved Humphrey estimating the number of papers required. As Union membership during this period was consistently on the increase, these estimates would, of necessity, be higher than the last recorded membership figures.¹¹¹ Papers were sent directly to Branch Secretaries from the printer. Excess papers, however, were held at St Pancras Railway Station because Humphrey felt it ‘more discreet...I did not want more people than necessary to know they were at Head Office.’¹¹² Outside of the context of a conspiracy charge, this might appear reasonable. Justice Winn, however, interpreted Humphrey’s interest in security wholly within the context of the allegations, saying ‘in my judgement this secrecy is a badge of fraud.’¹¹³ In all, 25,000 extra papers were printed. Humphrey brought these from St Pancras and locked them in a room at Head Office where they were left, either to be despatched to branches as required, or to be

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¹¹⁰ Cited in ibid., 429. Also see ‘Reno (aka Odiin) vs. ETU’, MRC MSS. 387/6/4/12, 16, 2/1, 2, 7-10.


¹¹³ Ibid.
destroyed. Papers were distributed to members, then returned to the Branch Secretary under sealed envelope, either by post or at a branch meeting. The plaintiffs alleged that papers had been sent from this surplus store at Head Office to various sympathisers, who then used them to record extra votes for Haxell.

Several Branch Secretaries gave evidence at the trial that excessive numbers of ballot papers had been returned. Edgar Dew of Hythe Branch, claimed to have received six papers before he had even despatched them to his membership. It was unclear, however, how many votes had been forged in this way or what difference it made to the outcome. Two branches for which Winn gave figures, Woolston and Hythe, contained, respectively, four and six extra votes for Haxell, obtained in this way. The judgement on this particular charge was one example where the judge’s interpretation of the balance of probability owed more to the overall context of the charge of conspiracy than it did to a requirement of proof. Humphrey, for no other reason than that he could not provide a satisfactory calculation as to how he had arrived at the totals for ballot papers, was considered by the judge to have been fraudulent. Because Haxell had not previously denied knowledge of the ballot papers ending up at Head Office, Winn concluded that, ‘I am wholly convinced that Mr Haxell not only knew that extra ballot papers had been brought to Head Office but caused them to be there intending that fraudulent use be made of them.’ Later, Winn admitted that ‘such evidence...would plainly not be admitted, ordinarily at least, in a criminal trial.’ Extra ballot papers also facilitated the ‘individual rigging’, done by Communist branch officials, which, as Jim Layzell claimed, certainly took place. John Lloyd said of this practice, that it ‘is a matter of informed suspicion, rather than obvious proof.’

The other allegations concerned frauds which took place after the voting had finished. One of these was first ‘identified’ by Woodrow Wyatt in his 1958 article in New Statesman. Wyatt had speculated in this article that ‘it is simple to convert the 63 into 363 before posting the return’, whilst producing little beyond circumstantial evidence to reinforce this. One such allegation in the 1959 General Secretary

Rolph, All Those in Favour?, 88.
Ibid., 48.
Ibid., 49.
Lloyd, Light and Liberty, 438.
Ibid., 62.
election, concerned Francis Fraser, Communist Branch Secretary of Preston branch of the ETU. An allegation was made by Branch Committee member and Cannon supporter, Tom Breakell, that the voting figures had changed from the branch meeting on 30 December 1959, when Francis Clarkson acting as Branch Chairman, announced that the result was 101 to 52 in favour of Haxell. Six months later, the Executive Council published the figures as 191 to 52 in favour of Haxell.\textsuperscript{121} At the trial, Clarkson admitted that he had not seen the figure before reading them out, nor when he signed the minutes afterwards.\textsuperscript{122} Following Breakell's intervention at the branch meeting, Fraser said that members 'decided that no action be taken and a vote of confidence was placed on myself as not being responsible for any alterations.'\textsuperscript{123} Fraser, nevertheless, said he would inform ETU Head Office and would forward the Branch Minute Book for inspection. Whether this book was actually sent and received remains unclear. Fraser swore that he had sent the book but had never sought a receipt, either from Head Office or the Post Office. George Gardiner insisted that Fraser had never sent the book but, in response to questions from the judge, Fraser offered to supply proof that he had enquired at Preston Post Office. His offer was never taken up which left the incident unresolved. An interesting item in a letter from Les Cannon to Breakell, however, indicated that Fraser was lying. Cannon wrote in 1961, 'I have been having a further word with the solicitor. He would be happier if it was not indicated that you had been informed in any way that Fraser has not yet sent in minute book.'\textsuperscript{124} John Lloyd said of this incident that 'the branch books were sent for by the head office, only to completely disappear', implying involvement of the Communist leadership.\textsuperscript{125} Cannon's letter to Breakell, however, shows that the plaintiffs were aware that Head Office had not received the minute book and that, therefore, it was Fraser at local level and not the Communist leadership who, in this case, were responsible for fraud. Breakell was Cannon's favoured candidate for the Executive Committee in North Lancashire and Merseyside. In 1962 he became personal assistant to Frank Chapple. He took over the role of National Officer,
although 'no nominations have been requested for this vacancy' along with an 'area official's salary and Union car'.

Another element in the alleged fraud concerned, as in 1957, the disqualification of certain branches for the late posting of returns. In 1959, most of the disqualified branches had majorities for Byrne, and most swore that they had posted their returns well within the time when they should have reached Head Office before the deadline. The situation was complicated by the fact that Christmas intervened between the posting dates and the deadline. The plaintiffs alleged that the Executive Council had, in fact, received returns reflecting a Byrne majority. At the end of December, they had stuffed these returns into new envelopes, got into cars, driven to the appropriate districts and re-posted them so that they arrived after the deadline. Of the elements which constituted the alleged fraud, this was the most convincingly substantiated. According to John Lloyd, 'supporters of the Haxell regime' had since told him that the plan was conceived on Christmas Eve, after it became obvious that Haxell was going to lose. The judge found that of 40 branches alleged to have been disqualified in this way, 27 could be said to have done so with any degree of certainty. The defendant's case was not helped by evidence that John Frazer had drawn sufficient petrol for 400 miles worth of travel between Christmas and the New Year and could not satisfactorily account for it.

The reaction

The trial, as Wolf Wayne suggested, damaged the Party's leadership strategy. Within the ETU, in an unprecedented move, Justice Winn pronounced John Byrne General Secretary. Byrne took up the post on 4 July 1961, although the defendants had announced their intention to appeal. Bob McLennan remained in post as Assistant General Secretary because the case had only concerned the Byrne-Maxell election. The former Executive Council with its Communist majority, was also in post at this stage. Byrne immediately created Cannon and Chappie 'special assistants', despite Cannon still being banned from holding office, a ban he had unsuccessfully challenged in the courts in late 1960. He also suspended James Humphrey, the Office Manager. Once the anti-Communist corner had been fought by media and judiciary, a

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126 Industrial Department, CPGB, 'Jobs for the "Right" Boys', Manchester, CP/Cent/Math/04/12.
127 See 'Cannon vs ETU', MRC MSS. 387/6/1/1/1-387/6/1/3/15
'Reform Group' within the union, finally felt confident enough to reveal and declare itself the anti-Communist opposition.

This Reform Group convened meetings at the 1961 ETU Conference at Portsmouth in July with Mark Young as secretary. At this conference about half the delegates were Communists or fellow travellers. It was Socialist Labour League Trotskyist, Alan Courtenay of Camden Town, however, who most coherently attacked the 'reformists', analysing their political position as one in which 'whether they are conscious of it or not...[they]...are, in fact, representatives of the employing class.' Following the Conference, which expressed confidence in the Communist Executive Council by a majority of 216 to 145, George Woodcock, now TUC General Secretary, called a meeting of the union's Executive Council with the F and G PC at Congress House. As with the 'reformists', following the anti-Communist victory, the TUC found the courage to get tough. Despite the Executive Council obtaining a mandate from its National Conference, Woodcock nevertheless insisted on changes. The Executive Council refused, on the grounds that it constituted 'wholly unacceptable and unwarranted interference' and the ETU was expelled from the TUC in September 1961. For no apparent reason, John Lloyd praised Jock Byrne's 'typical courage' as he 'took the rostrum' at this congress.

Unsurprisingly, following the public interest in the trial and the propaganda it generated, the Communists were defeated in the Executive Council elections, whose results were announced on 12 November 1961. Out of 11 seats on the Executive, the Communists lost six. In 1962, Haxell, McLennan, Frazer and Humphrey were expelled from the union. Both Sam Goldberg and John Hendy were banned from holding office for seven years. Guilt or otherwise by the court, however, was not the determining factor in the cleansing process which followed. Harry West, who had been exonerated by Winn, was nevertheless made to answer for his part in the ETU Committee of Inquiry. Despite the fact that this inquiry had been demanded by the TUC, the new Executive Council, nevertheless, severely reprimanded West for his role. National Officer, George Scott, who had chaired the inquiry, fared even worse. Although, like West, Scott was judged not guilty by the court, the Executive Council banned him from

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129 Ibid., 463.
130 Ibid., 464.
holding office indefinitely. Frank Foulkes, having refused the offer of early retirement, was expelled.

The political landscape upon which the union had operated was effectively ploughed up by the ‘reformers’, so that affiliation to CND, the Haldane Society and the Labour Research Department, was ended. The attitude towards strike action took on an entirely new complexion. As the leadership felt it imperative to demonstrate a new moderate image, it was now decreed that, for the EC to support strike action, ‘the cause must be just’.

Protestations against Communist Advisory Committees notwithstanding, at the 1963 conference of the ETU, the reformers spent a whole night discussing who should run for General President. In the event, Les Cannon, though not unanimously approved by his fellow reformers, won with 63 per cent of the vote. In September 1964, Cannon won his final victory over his old comrades when Communists were banned from holding any office in the union. The 1963 Conference was the first to be held biennially rather than annually. They were now ‘advisory’ rather than binding upon the Executive Council. Union contributions were increased and the Executive Council was turned into a full-time body to be elected every five years by secret ballot. The 1965 Conference on the Isle of Man, at which most of these policies were enacted, also abolished Area Committees. These were considered a Communist bastion by the reformers, but were, nevertheless, a crucial part of the union’s democratic structure. The ETU reached the end of this trajectory in 1988. As EETPU, it was again expelled from the TUC following a decision by, and on behalf of, electricians in the newspaper industry, not to support fellow trade unionists in the print unions, who were on strike against Rupert Murdoch’s News International Corporation.

Jim Layzell said ‘if you really analyse the whole thing, the depth of understanding of the Communists who were in the leadership of the ETU wasn’t very great...if [it] had been, they would never have got involved in it in the first place.’ Layzell continued, talking of people like Cannon and Chappie, ‘so it was very easy to go from being a Communist to an anti-Communist...they didn’t have to tear their consciences to bits because they didn’t have one in the first place.’ Morris Schaer felt that Cannon and Chappie were ‘regarded as renegades who had sold out their

131 Ibid., 477.
132 Ibid.
133 Jim Layzell interview with Louise Brodie.
134 Ibid.
comrades in the Party and the ETU', not just by Communists, but by many rank and file trade unionists. Cannon and Chapple's efforts were later recognised in different ways. Cannon obtained a posthumous knighthood following his death in 1971 and Chapple was given a job on The Daily Mail, where he lent his trade union credibility to an erroneously entitled column; 'Frankly Speaking'. John Byrne received an OBE, Mark Young, having accused the Communist Party of 'patronage' was 'allocated an office' at union headquarters 'complete with staff to prepare documents and briefs for the...rules revision conference in October' 1962.\(^\text{136}\)

**Political leadership and bureaucratic power**

Summarising the stated aims of the CPGB with regard to the working class, the Political Committee said that it needed 'to give the Labour movement a Socialist consciousness, a scientific Socialist theory, a perspective of advance to Socialism'.\(^\text{137}\) Perhaps the most serious charge against the Communists in the ETU was not whether or not they utilised underhand tactics to gain and retain power, but that they rarely appeared to consider either the political possibilities or, more crucially, the political limitations of such power. The bureaucratic manoeuvring of the ETU leadership may not have been qualitatively different from what had always gone on within such organisations, but it was damaging for socialists as it reinforced an unsavoury aura of Stalinist practice which the Party was never able to shrug off.

CPGB literature continued to outline its task as leading workers' struggle 'from the immediate struggles under capitalism right up to the struggles for political power and the building of Socialism.'\(^\text{138}\) The Communists in the ETU had enjoyed more bureaucratic success than any of their comrades had previously managed. The fact that the most successful example of the Party's leadership strategy was the one which came under the judicial spotlight can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, it could be said that it was this very success which made the ETU a target for anti-Communism in the first place. Secondly, it could be argued that the ballot rigging and bureaucratic manoeuvring which brought success for the ETU Communists but which brought the weight of the judiciary down upon them was a direct result of attempting to operate

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\(^{135}\) Morris Schaer, interview, 26 March 2000.

\(^{136}\) Jobs for the "Right" Boys (1962), Manchester, CP/Ind/Math/04/12.

\(^{137}\) 'Political Resolution to 25th Congress CPGB' (April 1957), 71, Manchester, CP/Cent/Cong/10/05.

\(^{138}\) Ibid.
such a strategy with no real political base. The ETU debacle was the result of a strategy which was followed routinely without regard for its negative or positive political implications.

Under the political conditions which existed during the 1950s, a party whose total membership equated to only 0.29 per cent of the organised workforce would inevitably find it difficult to build support for such positions on the basis of political opposition to the prevailing corporate consensus. By retreating from such political opposition and by utilising the apparatus of their own organisation, the Communists managed to gain and retain power in the ETU. Whilst the CPGB retained a strong rank and file presence within the trade union movement until the late 1970s, it continued to stress the importance of its trade union leaders. The Party's leadership strategy was the industrial equivalent of its parliamentary strategy and sprang from the same flawed analysis which viewed office-holding as synonymous with socialist leadership. It is tempting, of course, to draw a direct parallel between this strategy and Stalin's utilisation of the Bolshevik secretariat. Electoralism and the Party's leadership strategy had begun in the belief that such forums could be utilised as platforms from which to engage with the working class; 'action as means of revolutionary propaganda and agitation'.

Over time, this transformed into a belief that such institutions could be converted into vehicles for bringing about socialism. In the case of Parliament, the Party's continuing poor performance made such a possibility increasingly remote. Under the particular conditions of British trade unionism, the Communist Party 'machine' combined with the credibility of its rank and file trade unionists to make election to high office a continuing possibility. The bureaucratic imperatives involved in holding onto power, however, made political leadership impossible.

\[139\] Communist Unity Convention Official Report, (July 31 and Aug 1 1920), 59, MML.
Conclusion

In 1938, two years before his death, Trotsky attempted to build an organisation of revolutionary artists from his home in Mexico. These included people such as Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo and French modernist poet, André Breton.\(^1\) It was a conscious attempt 'to counterbalance the "cultural" activities of the Stalinists' to allow, in the words of the resulting manifesto, 'mankind to raise itself to those heights which only geniuses have achieved in the past'.\(^2\) In contrast, in 1953, Polish writer Czeslaw Milosz wrote of artists who worked 'in accordance with "socialist realism" [that] they are automatically and inescapably enrolled among the followers of Stalin'.\(^3\) Milosz recalled a conversation with a Polish poet who 'admitted to me "My own stream of thought has so many tributaries...I get halfway through a phrase and already I submit it to Marxist criticism. I imagine what X or Y will say about it, and I change the ending"'.\(^4\)

The attitude to culture implied within these examples reflects a conservatism within Stalinist Communism which meant that it was ill-equipped to respond to the shift in cultural gear of the 1960s. Michael Rosen characterised a party failing to come to terms with what appeared to be profound cultural changes, as he described one of his parent's friends 'who led a constant battle with her kids and people in the Woodcraft Folk against rock music, dope, sex, drugs and rock and roll;...she regarded this with an absolute puritan fervour – all this was a betrayal of the working class'.\(^5\) As the Party moved into the 1960s, it was forced to confront, not only these shifting cultural patterns, but also new and avowedly revolutionary political formations. Daniel and Gabriel Cohn-Bendit described Communism's response to 1968 France, saying, 'try as they might, the Communist students were unable to isolate the Leftists' and, as a result, 'they themselves became completely isolated in the universities'.\(^6\) This summed up the degree to which the Communist Party's traditional sectarianism and illusions about its left wing hegemony had caused it to lose touch at this crucial stage. As Ralph Russell said of student activity in Britain at the time, 'the attitude of the Communists

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\(^2\) Cited in ibid.


\(^4\) Ibid., 14-15.


was, "you buggers aren't under our leadership, therefore it's not a revolutionary movement".7

The events of 1968 demonstrated to what extent the CPGB had drifted from its revolutionary traditions. Formally, the schism within the Party at the end of the 1960s was over the invasion of Czechoslovakia. There is no doubt, however, that it was also symptomatic of the fact that a new generation 'were involved culturally in a world that wasn't anything to do with the CP or the Soviet Union but to do with the other events of May 1968'.8 Jude Bloomfield detected a three-way split within Communism at this time between 'tankies', who supported the Soviet Union, Euro-Communists, who self-styled themselves as modernisers and a more explicitly trade union oriented faction 'who I called economistic rather than Stalinist'.9 The Euro-Communist leadership, she continued, remained 'incapable of giving up power and following through the implications of democratisation in their own organisation'.10

The failure of the Communist Party to adapt to the emerging culture and revolutionary politics of the 1960s reflected conservatism within the Party. This had been expressed in a number of ways during the 1950s. Anne Palmer, for example, writing in 1953, dismissed as 'the very height of absurdity...the various "new", "progressive" methods for the teaching of reading'.11 Communist teachers at this time, also ran a campaign against children's comics, expressing 'great concern at the decline in moral values associated with the spread of children's reading matter...we ask all public bodies to stigmatise such publications.'12 Such conservatism sprang both from an association with Stalinism and from an attitude which idealised as 'superior', even some of the most non-progressive ideas of workers.13

This thesis has been postulated upon the premise that by 1929, revolutionary Bolshevism had been superseded by a different political form called Stalinism. In common with other western Communist Parties, the CPGB did not recognise that the Soviet Union, by the end of the 1920s, was ruled by a regime which, whilst revolutionary in its drive for industrialisation, dispensed with all aspects of socialism in order to achieve it. A form of industrialisation based upon such intense exploitation of

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8 Jude Bloomfield, interview with Cohen, Children of the Revolution, 74.
9 Ibid., 73.
10 Ibid.
12 'Teachers for Peace', Educational Bulletin, (January to February 1953), 3.
13 T. Jackson, 'Speech to 25th Congress' (21 April 1957), Manchester, CP/Cent/Cong/10/06.
labour power could never indulge its workers in the freedoms to which a revolution in
the social, political and cultural superstructure aspired. The very intensity of Stalinist
exploitation of labour power demanded a profoundly conservative society. A society
which demanded obedience rather than dissent, and conformity rather than difference.
The Communist Parties of the West, if not explicitly, implicitly accepted that the
inconvenient social, political and democratic aspects of socialism had to be jettisoned
in favour of this project and, despite the self-evident negation of socialism, the Soviet
Union's industrial advance was nevertheless perceived as being synonymous with it.

At the beginning of the Cold War, Andrei Zhdanov had offered a view of the
world separated into 'the socialist and the capitalist'. As preposterous as the first of
these labels appears in retrospect, at the time, most socialists and non-socialists
accepted such a characterisation and chose sides. The CPGB accepted 'the socialist'
characterisation, partly because it reflected universal received wisdom, partly because
the British Party habitually accepted such pronouncements uncritically but also,
crucially, because most Communists believed it to be true. Zhdanov's formula
reinforced the Party's traditional uncritical support for the USSR. The Party did not just
uncritically support the Soviet Union, however, it also colluded in that state's utilisation
of an ideological tradition which was in direct opposition to the sort of intense
exploitation and political oppression with which it was associated. The very principles
which had motivated Marx to write, the revolutionary Bolsheviks to act and British
socialists to join a party, were the principles which Stalinism referred to again and
again as the regime bludgeoned its way to modernity. Many members questioned
uncritical support for the practices of the Stalinist regime. Those, like Eric Hobsbawm
and John Hostettler, who, following 1956, remained in the Party in the hope of
reforming it, did not, at the time, appear to appreciate the depth of the problem. The
British Party was not only Stalinist because it supported the Soviet Union in opposition
to western capitalism, it was Stalinist because it had accepted the idea that the
principles embodied within the philosophy of Marxism somehow equated to what the
Soviet Union had become under Stalin.

The Party accepted a Stalinist programme which looked to construct a socialist
state in Britain along the lines of the Eastern European 'People's Democracies'. It was
never clear whether or not the Party saw itself, realistically, as leading and eventually

dominating a parliamentary coalition, or whether it continued with such a strategy, despairing of any alternative. What is clear, however, is that whilst British socialists looked to the CPGB as the hegemonic socialist organisation, they quickly had to come to terms with the realities of electoral practice and of defending the Soviet Union. The unquantifiable question was asked at the beginning of this thesis; did the British Party help to advance the cause of socialism within Britain during the 1950s or, like Stalin himself, did it turn the movement backwards? The question can, perhaps, best be answered, both in terms of the conservative aspects of Communism referred to above, and in terms of the Party's role in co-opting British revolutionary aspirations for support for an oppressive regime on the one hand and electoral practice on the other. Whilst 1956 brought home to many, the realities of 'defending the indefensible' for so many years, almost none made the connection between the Party's association with, and justification of, Stalinism and its primary focus on elections. Although many repudiated Soviet and Eastern European Stalinism for its use of force and terror, few referred to the fact that the British programme was based upon that of the Eastern European Stalinist parties.

It would be convenient to attempt to break down the British Party into separate perspectives and to judge each of these on their merits, in order to answer the question posed by this thesis. Much Communist Party history has stressed the socialist credentials of the Party's membership and has focussed, in Doris Lessing's words, on these people's 'powerful sense of service'. Such service within communities is undeniable. Similarly, 'the assiduity' of Communists within trade unions described by Justice Winn is a section of Communist activity which meant that many 'honest Labour men...respect individual Communists' even whilst they continued to 'mistrust the CP as an organisation.' The intellectual contribution of people like E.P. Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm or A.L. Morton, for example, was also a significant factor within British life. Breaking down and judging the actions of these various groups or individual members, however, has obscured more about the political impact of the CPGB than it has revealed. There is no doubt that the work of many such individuals and groups represented a significant contribution to what might broadly be termed progressive life within Britain. By themselves, however, such contributions could only

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be said to have advanced the cause of socialism in Britain in a piecemeal way. In order to for them to have had a significant impact in this regard, such activities needed to be coordinated into a political whole, within an organisation which provided those moved or inspired by such contributions with a vision and a strategy for a new kind of society. It was here that the Party’s limitations rendered it a negative, rather than a positive force for change. The Party, in other words, constituted a great deal less than the sum of its parts.

Trade unionists, inspired to change society through collective activity, once in the Party, discovered that their main task was a combination of trade union activity over wages and conditions or working towards the election of Communist leaders. Alison Macleod recalled how her initial association with the Party was with a branch ‘bedevilled by elections’, her main job ‘to speak at street corners, with nobody listening’.

17 E.P. Thompson focussed upon the Party leadership as being the problem, and in typically colourful terms, described them as ‘a superior priesthood who can suppress facts or distort them so long as they think it is “in the interests of the Party”’. Thompson answered the problem by leaving the Party and attempting to build an alternative. Doris Lessing was even more blunt, saying ‘the leadership of the British CP consists of men and women totally corrupted by years of work in the Stalinist atmosphere...they suppress resolutions, rig ballots, pack meetings, lie and twist, there is no way of getting them out of office by democratic means’. Whether this leadership can be blamed; whether it was they who constituted the Stalinism in the Party making, as Thompson and Lessing implied, the membership victims of British Stalinism, is impossible to say with any certainty. What seems to be the case, however, is that these leaders were, in fact, rarely challenged by members on anything other than minor points of strategy. When they were, they were able to muster considerable forces to their side who were prepared to reiterate ‘the Party line’ in the interests of Party unity. Even during 1956, a majority of Communists continued to support their Stalinist leadership. Again, it was the appeal to Party loyalty unity which ensured such support. The continued support that British socialists gave both to Soviet and British Stalinism can now be seen to have been a surrender of their own revolutionary ideals and aspirations. The ability of the leadership to sustain the illusion that there was no

alternative to the barbarity of Soviet Stalinism and that there was no alternative despairing politics of British Stalinism, successfully disabled a whole generation of socialists from meaningful political organisation. There is no counterfactual method through which to calculate how this might have been different had the CPGB either not existed or had not been Stalinist. What is clear, however, is that the illusion that Stalinism represented ‘the best of all possible worlds’, in opposition to international capitalism, has made a significant contribution to the successful and continued marginalising of socialism as a political ideology.
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