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COMMUNISM IN THE PROFESSIONS:
THE ORGANISATION OF THE BRITISH COMMUNIST PARTY
AMONG PROFESSIONAL WORKERS, 1933-1956

by

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Summary

This thesis is a historical study of middle-class members of the Communist Party of Great Britain. Although it is principally concerned with the period from 1933 to 1956 some attention is given to the Party's first decade and the years immediately after the great upheaval of 1956. The thesis examines the reasons why middle-class people were attracted to the Communist Party; the various cultural and political initiatives they were involved in and their changing role in the CP. The work describes the way middle-class Communists drew upon their professional and technical skills to contribute to the life of the Party and its political campaigns. Attention is also given to the relationship of middle-class Communists both to their working-class fellow members and to the Party leadership and how these relationships developed and changed over time. The thesis revises various previously accepted characterisations of middle-class Communists which have emphasised the superficial nature of their commitment to the CP in the late 1930s or concentrated attention on those who became entangled in the world of spying. The most important aspect of the study, however, is the examination of the way in which Communists in the professions related their Communism to their work and how in turn their professional concerns and attitudes influenced their politics. To this end detailed studies have been made of the political and occupational activities of Communists in three professional groups - architects, psychologists and school teachers.

Preface

The purpose of this thesis is to historically examine the phenomenon of British middle-class Communists. This has meant not only looking at their activities and contributions within the Party and the ways this has developed and changed over time but also how their Communism has been applied to their professional work. The first part of the thesis is concerned with giving a general overview of middle-class Communists in the life of the Communist Party from its inception until the late 1950s, while the second part deals in depth with Party members in three professions. The three chosen - architects, schoolteachers and psychologists - vary in that they were Party groups of widely differing sizes, from the largest to one of the smallest. The thesis in no way pretends to be comprehensive and it is to be hoped that there are further studies which deal with how Communists in specific areas, jobs and professions have interpreted and utilised their politics to their own particular situation.

Acknowledgements

My work could not have been possible if it had not been for the large number of CP and former CP members who were willing to be interviewed and reply at length in written form to innumerable questions and to whom I am eternally grateful. Despite the fact that they now have a great range of political opinions only one condemned out of hand his political past. In fact the majority see the impact of Party membership on their lives and professional careers in a very positive light. A full list of those interviewed and corresponded with is contained in the bibliography. I would, however, like to mention here those who have been especially helpful: Douglas Hyde (above all others), Rosemary Logan, Jim Fyrth, John Kay, Brian Simon, the late Hugh Morris, Malcolm MacEwen, Andrew Saint, Colin Siddons, Jennifer Jones, Eric Porter, Nan MacMillan and Kenneth Campbell.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Although only one extensive study of middle-class British Communists exists, Neil Wood's *Communism and British Intellectuals*, a considerable body of literature has built up that touches in varying degrees upon the subject of my study. I will attempt to examine critically the various 'pictures' that have been presented of middle-class Communists and in the process clarify my own approach.

Traditional Communist History of the Party

The British Communist Party has never, until recent years, been enthusiastic about the writing of its own history, encumbered as it has been by a perceived necessity to defend and explain previous policies and actions in light of present day ones. As a current leading Party member has admitted:

Now I think it is fair to say that, not least in Britain, the development of Communist history has not had a very good record; that is Communist history emanating from within the Communist movement itself. The kind of history that has existed, by and large, including in Britain, has been of an essentially narrative, descriptive and often celebratory character.¹

What was written in the 1920s, '30s and later tended to express the 'ultra-proletarianism' that was prevalent in international Communism. Terms such as middle class and petty bourgeois were used interchangeably to denote a negative political development, feature or event which was at odds with the 'true proletarian' line of the Party. In the only CP history to be written before Klugmann's two volumes, *The British Communist Party: A Short History* by Tom Bell, there are virtually no references to 'non-working class' Communists and where there are it fits into the above

characterisation. The book emphasises the 'bona fide working class' men and women trade unionists who made up the Party on its foundation and referred to 'a number of intellectuals' who drifted out of the CP from 1921 who '... seized upon the deficiencies and weaknesses of organisation as an excuse'.² One of Bell's few, if only, uses of the term 'middle-class' is included as an expression of antipathy:

Out of the welter of confusion in the camp of the reformists, and a deep hatred of Communism, emerged *Lansbury's Weekly* grouping around it Independent Labour Party members and middle-class radicals, splitting the growing movement and unity of the Left wing around the *Sunday Worker*.³

Although Bell's book, which came out in 1937, was criticised by the CP leadership as being 'sectarian',⁴ it was followed over the years by the publication of the memoirs of several leading Communists which took similar 'workerist' attitudes, as did the anniversary 'history' of the Party, *Twenty Years*, written by Page Arnot in 1940. Pollitt, in his *Serving My Time*, also writes of the 'big names' who 'flirted' with Communism in the very early period who tried to make 'workers like myself feel that we were very small fry indeed'.⁵ Likewise, Gallacher describes, in one of his autobiographical volumes, 'manipulators' and 'so-called intellectuals' who were to be found in the Party leadership until they were thrown out by the Party Congress.⁶ Undoubtedly, Bell, Pollitt, and Gallacher are expressing an underlying distrust of 'middle-class intellectuals' that was an important feature not just of Party life but was fairly extensive throughout the British Labour movement (e.g. Frank Hodges denounced Communists for being 'intellectual followers' of 'middle class' Russians).⁷ This attitude no doubt encouraged the idea of the typical CP member as being the British equivalent of a 'Putilov worker'.

Tom Bell, in a book written after his history of the CP, *Pioneering Days*, in 1941, described those attending the Unity Convention held in 1920

to establish the Communist Party as being '... 90% proletarian, our group [the Joint Provisional Committee of the Communist Party of Britain - SRP] being entirely made up of workers'.⁹ The term 'proletarian' summons up visions of organised workers in heavy industry and undoubtedly the class make-up of the early Communist Party was largely working-class but this included a wide variety of types (e.g. those in small workshops, 'working class bohemians', etc). With regard to the Party's presentation of its own history the tendency has been to ignore those middle-class Communists, however small in numbers in the first few years, who remained in the CP where they made a not insignificant contribution. As late as 1968, the officially sanctioned history of the Party covering its foundation and early years by James Klugmann could fail to mention the Labour Research Department, a body which grouped together a number of graduates who played an important role in the emergence and subsequent development of British Communism.

In the late 1930s a number of memorial volumes were produced on middle-class Communist 'intellectuals' who died fighting in Spain: *Ralph Fox: A Writer in Arms* (1937) edited by J. Lehmann, T.A. Jackson and C. Day Lewis; *John Cornford: A Memoir* (1938) edited by Pat Sloan and David Guest; *A Memoir: A Scientist Fights for Freedom* (1939) edited by C. Haden Guest. Clearly these books were products of the Popular Front period when the Party was particularly keen to emphasise its broad class backing and pay tribute to three impressive Communists from the middle-class who had given their lives for their political beliefs. However, the books are not simply 'tributes' as they illuminate Party activity and life in the 'cultural and intellectual' sphere. The volumes on Guest and Cornford include detailed historical accounts of the development of Communism among university students while that on Fox contains excerpts from some of his historical, political and journalistic writings. All

this is of considerable value in providing material for the historian but they have perhaps encouraged a somewhat distorted view: Cornford, Guest and Fox were not typical International Brigaders, nor were they typical middle-class Communists, or even, in Cornford's case, a typical Cambridge University student Communist.

Cold War Literature on Communism

During the Cold War there was an upsurge of writing on Communism in the form of exposures and 'pseudo-scientific' explanations for why certain people joined Communist parties. Psychological studies of Communism were particularly popular and such works as Gabriel A. Almond's *The Appeal of Communism* (1954) seriously set about establishing why people become Communists and why some stop being Communists. The results of interviews with 221 former CP members, more or less equally divided between France, Italy, Britain and America, led to, among others, the following claim: 'Our findings thus far have demonstrated with cumulative impact that emotional maladjustment as a factor influencing adherence to the Communist movement seems especially characteristic of the American and British middle-class intellectuals'.⁹

A less 'academic' attempt at applying psychology to the study of Communists is included in Charlotte Haldane's book on her own experiences with the British CP, *Truth Will Out* (1949). As a book it is not without value in the details it gives of 1930s and '40s Party life from the point of view of a once active middle-class recruit to the cause of Communism. In amongst the autobiographical account though, she reproduced 'the Psychology of British Communists', an article she had written for *Tribune*. based on her own 'self-analysis', Charlotte Haldane made a series of generalisations such as: 'Most British Communist converts seem to have in their psychological make-up an element, a hard core of "Aginnishness", an

emotional complex due to perhaps, some intense frustration experienced in childhood or adolescence', or:

In his youth, perhaps at a public school, older, cruel boys may have persecuted him. So he reenacts this sequence in his maturity; he is still "different" and more than ever proud of it ... The difference is that the Communist Party offers his thwarted exhibitionism gratifying opportunities for publicity.¹⁰

Undoubtedly the spy cases and in particular the public uncovering of Fuchs in 1950s, who in his confession described himself as suffering 'controlled schizophrenia', further popularised the view that middle-class Communists were in some way psychologically disturbed individuals. Rebecca West was even led to examine '... why scientists should be especially attracted to Communism'.¹¹ It was, she claimed, because of their belief in themselves as an 'elect class' who through their scientific knowledge and abilities could solve the economic and social problems the non-scientist could not. The particular nature of scientific work which was obsessive and where scientists tended to mix only with one another encouraged this feeling of their own superiority. Scientists, because of their professional self-containment, do not frequently mix with 'men of affairs' and therefore fail to appreciate 'their special talents and virtues'. The attraction of Communism was based on the fact that 'The USSR has ... posed to the scientists of the world as the one country which gives their tribe real power'.¹²

Another interpretation, which gained much currency during this time, held that middle-class individuals who embraced Communism were searching for a substitute religion. This view was most clearly expressed in the publication of the very influential *The God That Failed* where '... six intellectuals describe the journey into Communism, and the return'.¹³ In fact of the six, four came from middle-class backgrounds (two from particularly well-off families) and of the remaining two, one was from a

very poor negro family and the other from the peasantry. Again the tendency was to view 'intellectual' as meaning someone from the middle-class, as is clear from Crossman's 'Introduction':

If despair and loneliness were the main motives for conversion to Communism, they were greatly strengthened by Christian conscience. Here again, the intellectual, though he may have abandoned orthodox Christianity, felt its prickings far more acutely than many of his unreflective Church-going neighbours. He at least was aware of the unfairness of the status and privileges which he enjoyed [my underlining -SRP], whether by reason of race or class or education. The emotional appeal of Communism lay precisely in the sacrifices - both material and spiritual - which it demanded of the convert'.¹⁴

Intermingled with these 'psychological explanations' for the attractions of Communism was the publication of a number of autobiographies by 'ex-Communists': one of these, Charlotte Haldane's, I have mentioned above. Written from an anti-Communist point of view the authors often laid particular emphasis on conspiratorial and secret Party activities they had knowledge of or been involved in. This contributed in Hobsbawm's opinion to the creation of '... a stereotype¹⁵ of the Communist Party as a sinister, compulsive, potentially omnipresent body, half religion and half plot...'.¹⁶ Hobsbawm is a little harsh in his assessment, as most of the books in question moderate their anti-Communism and do not descend to the over-dramatised level of the equivalent American writing.

The books by British ex-Communists published in the late '40s and '50s occasionally distorted facts either consciously or unconsciously, through political design or plain bitterness (this is true of Charlotte Haldane), and they all tend to follow a pattern - emerging disillusionment, conflict with a 'politically dishonest' and 'manipulative' Party leadership, resignation and opposition to Communism. Having said this, they represent an important literary source for those

studying the history of the Communist Party.¹⁷ The socio-economic and political grounds for becoming a Communist are clearly referred to in several of the works, as for example Bob Darke's explanation that he joined the CP because he could no 'longer tolerate a system which I believed was bad ... I wanted to work for the improvement of society, for freedom, justice, progress, and a full expression of Man's talent and ability'.¹⁸ Likewise Douglas Hyde's *I Believed*, despite its strong condemnation of Communism and the CP, not only mentions that the cause of social justice had drawn many into the Party but that '... there is magnificent material in the Party's ranks'¹⁹ which should be won to the cause of Christianity. These sentiments are hardly in conformity with the stereotyped view of Communists as 'psychological cripples' (nor, for that matter, do they give uncritical support to the 'Free World'). The works in question often reveal aspects of Party life that would never have been, until recently, touched upon in Party-approved history/reminiscences; disillusionment with the realities of life in the Soviet Union, Soviet influence in Party policy decisions, leadership measures taken to enforce its discipline, and undercover work.²⁰ Perhaps of greatest importance, they give a much deeper insight into the unique nature of Communist Party membership which made it distinctly different from being in, for example, the Labour Party. This comes out clearly in Bob Darke's book but is most comprehensively dealt with by Douglas Hyde who sums it up in a passage near the end of his autobiography:

The Party is so organised as to make Communism the whole life of its members. They lose all their old friends. All their present comrades and associates are in the Party; it takes the whole of their waking time, at work, in their leisure, wherever they go. It controls their whole thought life. They spend their days thinking of how best to "apply the Party line" to their own milieu.²¹

Although this describes an 'ideal' member it was an 'ideal' that was attained by a significant number of Communists, the 'cadres', and was held up in front of all members as something to be strived for. Politics was not confined to spare time but influenced all aspects of life, not least work, a fact which was to have important consequences for middle-class Communists who entered the professions. This very special character of being a member of the Communist Party does not often come out in narrative histories of the CP (the Party itself has often not been keen to emphasise its 'unique nature' as it has attempted to build up alliances and present itself in Pollitt's phrase as 'just Labour with its sleeves rolled up').

Early Post-Cold War Historiography of the Communist Party

In 1958 the first history of the CP by an academic historian was published: *The British Communist Party - A Historical Profile* by Henry Pelling. Pelling's is a generally factually correct but unsympathetic account of the Party's history from its foundation up until just after the crisis experienced by Communists in 1956-57. Given the nature of the exercise, the book inevitably concentrates on the major policy shifts and developments in the CP. Pelling does, nevertheless, deal with middle-class Communists, principally in two chapters: one covering the influx of poets, writers, scientists and engineers into the Party in the '30s (Chapter V, 'The Red Decade: Entry of the Intellectuals') and the other describing these 'Popular Front' recruits, post-war disillusionment and mass resignations in 1956-57-58 (Chapter X 'After Stalin: Exit of the Intellectuals'). 1956 showed, according to Pelling, that 'The Communist intelligentsia ... were not so much hard-hearted as hot-headed: that it was their intelligence after all that was at fault, rather than their basic good intentions'.²² In his final chapter Pelling discusses the reasons why people became Communists:

We are left with the problem of why those men and women who did join the party ... were willing to brave the hostility of their fellow-countrymen by associating themselves with its propaganda and devoting so much of their time and efforts to its maintenance.²³

This for Pelling is something of an intractable 'problem' given that he continues in Cold War style to see a Communist as someone who completely sacrifices him/herself to the '... service of a dictatorship in another country' (p.191). He therefore falls back on 'psychological factors', 'class bitterness', 'personal grievances and ambitions' etc as explanations, all of which play a part (as in any political organisation) in why some joined the CP. As for 'intellectuals' they became Communists through their naivety or feelings of bad conscience due to their own material and social advantages. However, this is treating the issue as if it existed in isolation and ignores the wider economic and social context.

At one stage Pelling makes mention of the failure of the 'older parties' to solve the very apparent social and economic ills of society, but he only refers to this as a factor in leading people to join the Communist Party in the 1920s. Surely this is an ever present factor and it provides a rational explanation for certain people drawing the conclusion that capitalism could/can never organise the production and distribution of goods in a just and efficient manner. That such people have become Communists is not surprising:

'... modern political choice is not a constant process of selecting men or measures, but a single or infrequent choice between packages, in which we buy the disagreeable part of the contents because there is no way of getting the rest, and in any case because there is no other way to be politically effective'.²⁴

The Cold War atmosphere inevitably hardened political positions. Communists, who faced widespread official and unofficial persecution in this period, repressed any doubts or criticisms they might have had

concerning the USSR or Party practice. To do otherwise would merely give succour to the enemy, an attitude which no doubt operated on the other side of the political divide as well.

Following on from Pelling, and in many ways adopting a similar approach, the American academic Neal Wood published *Communism and British Intellectuals* in 1959. To date it is the only published overall study of those university educated scientists, writers, artists and other 'non-proletarians' who have joined or associated themselves with the Communist Party. It is a solid piece of scholarship. Yet, like Pelling, Wood uses the term 'intellectual' in an uncritical manner and provides no clear definition of who does or does not fall into this category. 'Intellectual', in the way Wood uses it, seems to exclude all those who have had no formal higher education, including those self-educated Communists like T.A. Jackson. It is also clear that Wood's study concentrates on those Communists from Oxford and Cambridge who had gone on to make a name for themselves in literary circles or the world of science, or had given up everything to work fulltime for the Party. Middle-class Communists who were not part of the academic elite and who worked in less 'exotic' professional fields tend to be ignored by Wood; this helps explain the rather simplified picture he presents of the Party - 'Empirical proletarians' versus 'Intellectuals'.

Although the book covers the history of 'intellectuals' in the Party from 1920 to 1958 there is no real sense given of the different periods in the Party (Third Period, Popular Frontism, Anti-War, Pro-War etc etc) and the very real differences in how middle-class Communists were regarded in the Party or how they operated at various times. Above all else Wood's writing still bears some of the signs of Cold War thinking, as the 'intellectual' who joins the Communist Party is presented as a well meaning victim. Slowly, Wood claims, the 'intellectual' who enters the CP

is brought to the position where he/she judges the present only in terms of how it advances the future:

The main task is one of clearing the way, removing everybody and everything that may impede the inevitable march of history. Human life, feeling, sentiment, traditional values are of little consequence. Nothing possesses a value in itself, but only stands in relation to the future commonwealth.²⁵

The tendency is to see Party membership, 'Communism' and 'Marxism' in a completely negative sense, as forces which stifled or harmed people's intellectual faculties or professional endeavours. At one stage Neal Wood undermines the general tenor of his book when he admits that the duty of the 'intellectual' in the Party '*... to excel in his vocation, and by the force of example to attract other intellectuals to the standard of Communism, is in many respects the greatest service that he can render to the proletariat*'.²⁶

More Recent Historiography of British Communism

In the wake of 1956 there has been a small trickle of general histories of the Communist Party written from what can be best described as a Trotskyist perspective. The quality of work in this category varies greatly from serious contributions to an understanding of British Communism to 'hatchet jobs' - Brian Pearce's work would be a good example of the former (Pearce and Woodhouse, *Essays on the History of Communism in Britain*) while Robert Black's *Stalinism in Britain* would fall into the latter type. From amongst the various books that could be grouped together within this category I have been able to gather useful facts and insights.

Many of the authors have a clear political objective in mind when writing about the CP, as Hugo Dewar makes clear in his own book: 'What we are here concerned with is the party's political reaction to events and

the extent to which this expressed or failed to express revolutionary socialist principles; that is, the broad course taken by the party "line".²⁷ There is thus a concentration on central Party policy and directives and no concern with trying to get to grips with what it meant 'on the ground' to be a Communist and in particular how middle-class recruits to Communism attempted to put their politics into action.

The 1960s and '70s also saw the publication of a number of academic studies which deal with some aspect or area of CP history, written from various positions but not encumbered with 'Cold War ideology'. Most attention has been given to early Party history and in particular to Communist industrial activity, a field of interest that was no doubt encouraged by the upsurge in trade union militancy from the mid-'60s.²⁸ Little of this body of work concerns itself with middle-class Communists as it is primarily interested in the CP in terms of working-class politics. Details of Communist endeavour outside of the industrial field have, nevertheless, been included in an expanding literature not dealing with the history of the Party as such but looking at the broader Labour movement or Left or specific non-Party phenomena. Therefore the historian of the CP can gather a fair amount of secondary source material from such books as James Jupp's *The Radical Left in Britain 1931-1941* (1982) or for a later period Mark Jenkin's *Bevanism - Labour's High Tide* (1979). Of perhaps even more value for gaining an insight into the activities of middle-class Communists in specific periods are those studies on such subjects as the Left Book Club or anti-War campaigning, for example J. Lewis, *The Left Book Club: A Historical Record*, 1970; R. Dudley Edwards, *Victor Gollancz: A biography*, 1987; M. Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain 1914-1945: The Defining of a Faith*, 1980.

Special mention should be made for a genre of literature which began in earnest with the flight of Kim Philby to the Soviet Union in 1963 and

has gathered pace with the 'unmasking of Blunt' - 'spy literature'. The result has been an ever expanding series of 'exposures' and 'definitive accounts' of those Cambridge and Oxford students who were drawn into Soviet espionage in the 1930s. Again there is a great variance in the quality of 'spy books', some are little better than inventive journalism inspired by a Cold War approach while others are substantial works built on original (and properly documented) research. Some light is thrown on how a number of students from well off backgrounds turned to Communism in the 1930s and how they related their politics to their lives. The problem is that the amount of interest in Philby, Burgess, MacLean and now Blunt has helped create another stereotype of the middle-class Communist as coming from Eton, a student at Cambridge, usually homosexual and a spy. This characterises an extremely small percentage of those middle-class people who associated with or joined the CP from its foundation. The 'revelations' made in this literature must be put into context.

In the last ten years or so there have been important developments in the study of Communist Party history not least from CP historians themselves. The recognition that 'celebratory history' is no longer adequate and that open evaluative history was both necessary for a proper understanding of the Party's past and a 'purging of the remnants of Stalinism', has led Communist historians to concentrate anew on the history of their own party.²⁹ Another consideration which has played its part was the worry '... that if the Party neglects its own history it gets "nicked", by which I mean that it is used by other people for propagandist motives'.³⁰ This led to Noreen Branson being given responsibility for continuing the task of writing the history of the Party but without the 'obligations and limitations' imposed on Klugmann.³¹ Branson's *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain 1927-1941* which came out in 1985 marked a distinct advance on the approach previously adopted: embarrassing

and shameful episodes (The Moscow Trials and the fate of Rose Cohen) were not ignored, and realistic estimates were made of Communist policies and campaigns. The book deals with the 1930s middle-class recruitment to the Party in a chapter entitled 'Professional Workers, Students and Intellectuals' (Chapter 15, pp. 204-219) and some of the better known cultural and political initiatives they undertook are described. This chapter is expanded upon by Margot Heinemann in a collection of essays by Communists published in the same year, 'The People's Front and the Intellectuals' in *Britain, Fascism and the Popular Front* edited by Jim Fyrth.

Both Branson and Heinemann give an important corrective to those with romantic notions of a 'golden period' of cultural work during the 'Third Period'—for example, Alun Howkins 'Class Against Class: The Political Culture of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1930-35' in *Class, Culture and Social Change* edited by F. Gloversmith—by giving an indication of the artistic, literary, scientific and theatrical products of Popular Frontism.³² Inevitably their accounts are partial in that they are covering a limited period of time (i.e. principally the mid-thirties) and tend to be restricted to organisational matters and there is not the opportunity to examine the various stereotypes that have been presented of middle-class Communists. Moreover, unlike, for example, the Party volume *1939: The Communist Party of Great Britain and the War* based on statements and reminiscences, there is no use of oral history or the large number of autobiographies by Communists and ex-Communists by Branson or Heinemann. A consequence of this is that there is little real feel for Party life or insight into the motivations of the assortment of recruits to the CP,³³ a fault which could not be levelled at Raphael Samuel's three articles, 'The Lost World of British Communism' in *New Left Review* nos. 154 - November-December 1985, 156 - March-April 1986 and 161 - March-April

1987, which, by using a combination of personal recollections and a huge number of primary and secondary sources, builds up an evocative picture of what Communism meant for those who devoted themselves to its cause. In contrast with more conventional political history Samuel is not greatly concerned with describing the twists and turns in the Party 'line' or outlining campaigns and estimating their influence or importance. His objective is more, in the words of the *New Left Review*, to explore '... the moral universe of British Communism ... [to create a] moving portrait of a vanished code'.³⁴ The end product is a mine of information and essential reading for anyone who is interested in CP history and bears comparison, although with a completely different motivation, with some of the earlier literature which tried to give an idea of what being a Communist was. It does perhaps give too much weight to the London Jewish Communist milieu as representative of overall Party life. Unfortunately, the long awaited critique of 'The Lost World of British Communism' by Party historians has still not materialised.³⁵

Samuel, though, is mainly concerned with the Communist Party as an expression of militant working-class politics and therefore gives little attention to Communists in the professions. In fact at one stage he writes that 'To be a Communist was to have a complete social identity, one which transcended the limits of class, gender and nationality',³⁶ which could lead one to underestimate the social divisions that continued to operate in the Party.

A progressive development in the historiography of British Communism has been a slow accumulation of thoroughly researched studies on specific areas of Party membership or concentrated on a campaign or event in CP history.³⁷ Such studies have included articles, theses, and books on: Coventry Communists during the Second World War, the Squatters' movement in 1945-46, Women in the Communist Party, Communists and the War,

Communists in the armed services, the CP and the impact of 1956, the NUWM, and the CP Historians' Group.³⁰ Clearly Communists have never been an undifferentiated monolithic block and a real understanding of the CPGB depends, among other things, on a continuation and widening of such research (there is a great need for regional and branch histories of the CP). *The Visible College* by Gary Werskey (1978), based around a collective biography of five influential leftwing scientists, actually covers the organisation of scientists in the Communist Party from the 1930s to the 1950s. I found Werskey's book a great inspiration and help in my own study - relating, as he does, the scientists' Communist politics to their professional situation, concerns and sensibilities. He gives a historical account of the radicalisation of a segment of the scientific world showing the interplay between scientific endeavour and changing attitudes towards politics. A process, which Werskey reveals, not only led a number to adopt Marxism but for them to interpret and redefine it from their own position as scientists.

The Basis and Approach of My Thesis

In my thesis I have attempted to give a comprehensive and respectful account of middle-class Communists from the Party's foundation until the late 1950s. Due use has been made of the existing fragmentary information on the activities of middle-class Communists which is contained in secondary sources. Moreover, an attempt has been made to come to grips with and evaluate the various images of middle-class Communists that have been presented by different authors over time. As should be clear from my review of the historiography of the Communist Party I feel that there is a need for something more than a collection of conventional political histories on the course of overall Party policy (leadership decisions, national congresses, 'campaigns', Soviet developments - important though

all these elements are). Some of the 'anti-Communist' works by those leaving the Party in the Cold War period, however slanted they may have been, give something of the realities of what being a Communist was, including what it was for those from non-proletarian backgrounds to be a member of the CP. My own study is also based on the recognition that:

A unique feature of the Communist Party was the organization of groups within the professions ... something which was positive about the CP. The objective was to make a contribution to the Party's struggle through the various professions and Party members therefore attempted to work out an approach and strategy to apply their Communism to their work ... This was in contrast with the Labour Party, where members conceived of their politics as a distinct and separate activity from their professional responsibilities.³⁹

Therefore, after covering the history of middle-class Communists in general, I look in depth at Party members in three specific professional areas, to see how they related their politics to their work, the relationship they had with the Party leadership and vice versa. I also show, in the context of the professional field they were in, what contribution their Communism made to their vocational skills and attitudes.

The three groups of Communists I have chosen are: schoolteachers, because they have composed a numerically significant proportion of Party membership for a long period; architects, as a significant number of influential figures in this field had once been in the CP;⁴⁰ and psychologists because they were one of the smallest professional groupings in the Party. Party psychologists and schoolteachers had common interests in educational psychology and intelligence tests, which has allowed me to investigate the different standpoints taken over the same issue by Communists from different professions.

As well as secondary published sources, including extensive background reading on the professions of architecture, psychology and teaching, I have made great use of primary Party material of a published and unpublished nature. In addition, an important element in my work has been that of oral history, not only because through 'speaking to the historical actors' some subjective feel of Communist experience can be conveyed, but also because in many cases it is the only means to gain some knowledge of Party activities. Thus in the course of the research many CP and former CP members have been interviewed, in a number of cases more than once. In many cases I followed up the interviews with supplementary correspondence. Added to my own interviews are a small number conducted by others which I have been able to make full use of. In all a little over seventy people have been interviewed, the great bulk of whom have been taped, and a good proportion of these have been involved in the three CP professional groups looked at in depth. I have corresponded with a further twenty-two people who, for one reason or another, I have not been able to meet in person. In some cases this has resulted in the respondent sending very long and detailed replies.

Footnotes

- 1 M. Jacques, 'Why Study the History of the Communist Party', *Our History Journal*, July 1978.
- 2 *The British Communist Party*, p. 101.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 107.
- 4 A. Hutt, *The Post-War History of the British Working Class* published in the same year was much more attuned with the new line of Popular Frontism.
- 5 H. Pollitt, *Serving My Time*, p. 125.
- 6 W. Gallacher, *The Rolling of The Thunder*, pp. 33-34.
- 7 See Hutt, *op. cit.*, p. 56.
- 8 Tom Bell, *Pioneering Days*, p. 186.
- 9 G.A. Almond, *The Appeals of Communism*, p. 256.
- 10 C. Haldane, *Truth Will Out*, pp. 299, 301-302.
- 11 R. West, *The Meaning of Treason*, 2nd edn., 1952, p. 300.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 303. Similar comments are made on scientists, Haldane, Bernal and Joliot-Curie, and their attachment to Communism by Spender in his contribution to R. Crossman (ed.) *The God That Failed*.
- 13 R. Crossman, 'Introduction', *ibid.*, p. 8.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 11.
- 15 There were of course characterisations of Communists made by various writers long before the late 1940s and 1950s. Orwell made a point of giving a particularly negative depiction of middle-class people who joined the CP in the 1930s which he probably expressed most clearly in *The Road to Wigan Pier*. The blossoming of interest in Orwell by leaps and bounds after his early death has ensured that his views on Communists have also gained wide and continuing currency - I discuss the accuracy/relevance of his impressions in my chapter 'Popular Frontism'.
- 16 E.J. Hobsbawm, 'The British Communist Party', *The Political Quarterly*, 1954, Vol. 25.
- 17 Although those autobiographies written by ex-CP members before and after the late '40s and '50s are of particular interest as they are in no way 'written to formula', i.e. as part of the offensive against Communism. Included among these pre- and post-Cold War books would be: J.T. Murphy, *New Horizons* (1941), William Holt, *I Haven't Unpacked* (1939), Joe Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto* (1978), Harry McShane, *No Mean Fighter* (1978), Francis Meynell, *My Lives* (1971) etc.
- 18 B. Darke, *The Communist Technique in Britain*, p. 12.

- 19 D. Hyde, *I Believed*, p. 290.
- 20 The reminiscences by Freda Utley, *Lost Illusion* (1949), detail her and other British Communists' disillusionment with experiencing at first hand the slide to Stalinism in the Soviet Union in the early 1930s. Margaret McCarthy shows in her autobiography, *Generation in Revolt* (1953), the way in which Young Communist International and its affiliated YCLs was used to bring the world's Communist parties into line with Moscow 'Third Period' policies. An early 'Cold War work' published in 1941 by a German Communist and Comintern emissary, Jan Vatlin's (real name Richard Krebs) *Out of the Night* gives an indication of the relationship between the Comintern/Moscow and the various leaderships of indigenous CPs. The American edition of the book includes information on Vatlin's mission to England - Pollitt's resentment of 'an ignorant interloper in British affairs' and corruption in certain areas of the Party's apparatus. Pelling used it very partially as a source in his history of the Party.
- 21 D. Hyde, op. cit., p. 288.
- 22 H. Pelling, *The British Communist Party - A Historical Profile*, p. 183.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 E.J. Hobsbawm, 'Intellectuals and Communism', Chapter 4, *Revolutionaries*, p. 27.
- 25 N. Wood, *Communism and British Intellectuals*, p. 219.
- 26 Ibid., p. 175.
- 27 H. Dewar, *Communist Politics in Britain: the CPGB from its Origins to the Second World War*, p. 9.
- 28 In 1969 Kenneth Newton revised his doctoral thesis and had it published as *The Sociology of British Communism*. Among the chapters is one devoted to 'Communism and the Middle Class' which is not without some value, containing as it does a number of illuminating illustrations and comments. Despite this, Newton's work gives little historical perspective and is burdened with 'sociologese'. Its principal contribution, as acknowledged at the time of its publication, is to argue that the 'C.P. does not consist, and has never consisted to any substantial extent, of deviants or alienated minorities. In so far as its social composition can be discovered - and Mr. Newton has collated what information is available - it consists primarily of skilled and semi-skilled workers, largely engineers, builders and miners, and of school teachers who come largely from the same family background'. (E.J. Hobsbawm, 'Radicalism and Revolution in Britain', Chapter 2, review of Newton's and Walter Kendall's books in *Revolutionaries*, p. 12).
- 29 See the perceptive short article on these developments by John Newsinger, 'A Communist History?', *Socialist Review*, November-December 1979. That a new approach did not extend to all Party efforts at recording its own history is fully apparent with John Mahon's huge book, *Harry Pollitt: A Biography* (1976) which plods

along studiously avoiding controversial episodes - see Monty Johnstone's review in the *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, no. 33, Autumn 1976.

- ³⁰ Martin Jacques, op. cit. This was one of the papers given to a Party History Group conference on the matter that really 'set things in motion' .
- ³¹ See Monty Johnstone, 'What Kind of Communist Party History', *Our History Journal*, February 1979.
- ³² Branson and Heinemann followed in the tracks of a slightly earlier volume of essays, *Culture and Crisis in Britain in the '30s* edited by John Clarke et al (1979) and in fact including an essay by Heinemann on MacNeice, Cornford and Clive Branson. Klugmann's contribution ('Introduction: The Crisis in the Thirties: A View from the Left') is particularly good in giving an impression of the radicalisation among students and others in the 1930s and the appeal of the CP. In the foreword to the book it is agreed that: 'Even within the field of radical and left-wing culture much has had to be left out. A treatment of events in the visual arts, architecture and music demands a separate volume on its own'. (*Culture and Crisis in Britain in the '30s*, p. 10.) Since its publication there have been a number of studies which have helped fill some of the gaps and deal, some more comprehensively than others, with the role of Party members in the various initiatives/endeavours, e.g. B. Hogenkamp, *Deadly Parallels: Film and the Left in Britain, 1929-39* (1986), L. Morris and R. Radford, *The Story of the Artists International, 1933-1953* (1983) and V. Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties* (1989). I have attempted to utilise the information from these works to build a comprehensive picture of middle-class Communists.
- ³³ Surprisingly there is no attempt by Branson or more particularly Heinemann to discuss the rise of the 'philosophical system of Marxism' Dialectical Materialism: its attraction and the impact it had on Party life and what it meant to be a Communist. At no stage do they refer to the important work by Stuart Macintyre, *A Proletarian Science: Marxism in Britain, 1917-1933* (1980) nor that by Jonathan Rée, *Proletarian Philosophers: Problems in Socialist Culture in Britain 1900-1940* (1984). These two writers have helped 'recover' the now long dead tradition of self-educated working-class Marxists and their 'proletarian philosophy' and its displacement by Dialectical Materialism/Marxism Leninism and the Party's middle-class theoreticians. Richard Croucher has reviewed Branson's *History of the C.P.G.B., 1927-41* in the *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, Vol. 52, part 1, 1987 where, in a generally favourable estimation, he points to what he considers some of the weaknesses in the book.
- ³⁴ 'Themes', *New Left Review*, no. 156, March-April 1986.
- ³⁵ *Our History Journal*, no. 11, January 1987 promised that 'a full critique' would in due course appear.
- ³⁶ R. Samuel, 'The Lost World of British Communism', *New Left Review*, no. 154, November-December 1985.

- ³⁷ For an idea of suggested topics that have been raised for future study, including aspects of Party history, within the CP History Group see the article, 'New Directions for the History Group' by Jim Fyrth in *Our History Journal*, no. 13, December 1988.
- ³⁸ James Hinton, 'Coventry Communism', *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 10, 1980; 'Self-help and Socialism - The Squatters' Movement of 1946', *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 25, 1988; Noreen Branson (ed.), *London Squatters, 1946*, Our History Pamphlet no. 80, August 1989; 'Communists and the Labour Party, 1941-1946', unpublished MS; Susan Bruley, 'Socialism and Feminism in the C.P.G.B. 1939-1946', London Ph.D., 1980; Tricia Davis, '"What Kind of Woman Is She?" Women and Communist Party Politics, 1941-55' in R. Brunt and C. Rowan, *Feminism, Culture and Politics*, 1982; Kevin A. Morgan, 'Against Fascism and War - Ruptures and Continuities in British Communist Politics 1935-1941', Manchester Ph.D. 1988; S.R. Parsons, 'Crisis in British Communism: the Impact of the Events of 1956 on the Membership with particular reference to trade Unionists', Warwick M.A., 1981; R. Croucher, *We Refuse to Starve in Silence - A History of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement, 1920-46*, 1987; Bill Schwarz, '"The People" in History: The Communist Party Historians' Group, 1946-56' in R. Johnson, G. McLennan et al (eds.), *Making Histories*, 1982.
- ³⁹ Malcolm MacEwen, from a conversation, 4 December 1984.
- ⁴⁰ This fact was first revealed to me by Malcolm MacEwen.

CHAPTER TWO

The Dilemmas of the Left and Professionalism

The 'Professional Ideal'

In his book *The Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880* Harold Perkin devotes a sub-section of a chapter to what he describes as 'The Forgotten Middle-Class'. In addition to the three major 'class ideals' that were in existence in early nineteenth century England (namely aristocratic, entrepreneurial and working-class) Perkin stipulates the existence of a fourth class with its own ideal: the non-capitalist or professional middle-class. The determining characteristic of this class was that it was composed of those in middle-class occupations based on income distinct from wages on the one hand and rent and profit on the other. Examples of this class cited by Perkin include lawyers, doctors, public officials, journalists, professors and lecturers. Although what they earn is not completely detached from the pressures of the market forces it is 'in a sense set aside by society according to the value set by it on their services, under their persuasion'.¹ The Industrial Revolution and consequent urbanisation and eventual rise in living standards helped liberate the professions from the patronage of the rich and provided them with a larger clientele. This allowed both a growth in the number of those in the professions as well as an enhancement of their status with a primacy placed on society's 'acknowledgement of their respectability'. As part of this process the professions themselves created their own self regulatory societies and organisations - affirming their independence and the standards required of members and increasingly demanded and achieved the legal monopoly of their occupations.

Not only was there an expansion of the established professions such as doctors and lawyers but there was also an emergence of new professions

(e.g. civil engineers, architects, pharmacists) who sought to establish themselves on a similar footing to the old. Thus the development of industrial capitalism led to an increase in the size of the professional middle-class and to a strengthening of the ideal held by this group. Although the definition of professionalism varies, it has a number of commonly accepted components - specialised knowledge and skills acquired by formal training (the 'cult' of the examination begins to take hold), control of work performed, altruistic service in the interest of society, honourable and ethical action in performing the work. However, contrary to the realities of actually existing professions it is an ideal that stresses meritocratic values and worth in opposition to prestige and power solely based on birth. In describing the emergence of the middle-class social character Raymond Williams states:

the values of work and self-help, of social position by status rather than birth, of the sanctity of marriage and the emphasis on thrift, sobriety and charity, are still dominant. But punitive rehabilitation, and the attitudes to weakness and suffering on which it rests, have been, while not rejected, joined by a major ideal of public service, in which the effort towards civilisation is actively promoted by a genuine altruism and the making of positive institutions.²

Perkin claims that it was mainly from the professional middle-class (those with the intellectual skills best suited for formulating and expressing ideas) that the leading spokesmen of the other three classes were drawn. Yet as well as providing political, philosophical and economic expression for the various distinct class interests they introduced elements of their own class ideal of professionalism into the contending theories. To quote Perkin:

professional men had a separate, if sometimes subconscious, social ideal which underlay their versions of the other class ideals. Their ideal society was a functional one based on expertise and

selection by merit. For them trained and qualified expertise, rather than property, capital or labour, should be the chief determinant and justification of status and power in society.³

The 'philosophical streams' that were developed in the nineteenth century by intellectuals were initially closely linked to classes, Utilitarianism - associated with laissez-faire capitalism, 'Organicist or Idealist Stream' - an expression of the 'aristocratic ideal', and what Perkin terms as 'professional apologists of the working-class ideal'. Although these philosophical thinkers were successful in transmitting some elements of the professional ideal to each of the classes '... increasingly the professional ideal became uppermost in the minds of the professional thinkers and increasingly alienated their adopted class'.⁴ Partly as a response to this there has grown up a general distrust of middle-class intellectuals running through all the other classes.

Fabianism

The importance of middle-class professionals in the development of socialism in Britain is a generally accepted fact⁵ (although their influence on the wider labour and trade union movement is more problematic). Engels described the 'Socialist Revival' of the 1880s as a movement largely proceeding '... among "educated" elements sprung from the bourgeoisie'. Likewise there was a significant middle-class element in the ILP the presence of which hindered that party's relationship with trade union leaders (the first chairman of the LRC distrusted the ILP for this reason).⁶ Stanley Pierson sees the various intellectual strands in British Socialism (specifically Marxism) as being relatively quickly assimilated into the national tradition and in particular into the utilitarian tradition.⁷ However, it is probably Fabianism that represents the clearest link between the 'professional ideal' (to Perkin the

'apotheosis' of that ideal), socialism, and eventually after 1914, organised labour. The Fabian Society's membership was predominantly middle-class, made up of dissident figures from the traditional middle-class and self-made professionals. In many ways Fabianism represented the 'new social stratum' of the new salaried professional, administrative, technical and intellectual workers who began to emerge in large numbers from the 1880s and to differentiate themselves from the entrepreneurial, business class. To the Webbs, who soon became the dominant theoretical force in the Society, their 'entire structure of socialism pivots on such professionals. They are trained, impartial and scientific administrators and expert advisers who have created an alternative court of appeal to profit'.⁸ As the MacKenzies comment in their standard work on the early Fabians:

The Webbs concluded that superior societies could be built only by superior people. They had come increasingly to look for an 'elite' which would play this role in Britain.⁹ By the end of the century they were sure that this task would be undertaken by the new class of salaried experts - scientists, social scientists, professional people of all kinds - whose skills could be devoted disinterestedly to the service of the community. They saw themselves in this light and they assumed that other specialists would work as loyally for public as for private enterprise. The civil servant was their modern counterpart to Plato's guardians and Comte's enlightened managers. In this respect Fabianism was the ideology of the emerging salariat, and of the writers and journalists who spoke for it, providing a rationale for all those who felt that there was a 'right' way of running society and that it was their mission to discover it ...¹⁰

It was a political philosophy which, as Sidney Webb made plain in his 'historical' contribution to *Fabian Essays* in 1889 completely rejected the centrality of the class struggle. However, the evolutionary ideas of Darwin, Spencer and Huxley were assimilated and historical progress was seen in terms of the inevitable growth of the state regulation of industry

quietly replacing the anarchy of unchecked competition - the rational replacing the irrational. No need was seen for a separate working-class socialist party as the existing political parties were inevitably moving towards Collectivism. The job of the Fabians was to speed up this process by encouraging the adoption of 'socialistic' policies and attitudes by those with political power (in particular the Liberal Party leaders). It was only after the Labour Party had gained a significant parliamentary presence and could no longer be ignored following the two elections of 1910 that the Fabian Society began to drop its 'independence' and become clearly associated with 'the political party of the organised working-class'. Thus not long before the outbreak of the First World War the Webbs reluctantly decided that their political future lay, after all, with Labour. Committed to the Labour Party the Webbs strove to provide it with intellectual leadership (Sidney Webb wrote the Party's Manifesto for the post-First World War future 'Labour and the New Social Order'). Beatrice Webb declared in her *Diary* that although the propaganda in favour of collectivism was gaining in pace there was a real need for 'hard thinking' if the necessary reforms were to be brought about. She was clearly implying that it was the Fabian intellectuals who would provide this 'hard thinking'. One of her diary entries contains the following revealing comment:

It is pitiful to see the narrow sectarian view most socialists take - binding themselves hand and foot by a series of shibboleths. The working men are especially afflicted with the theological temperament - the implicit faith in a certain creed which has been revealed to them by a sort of inner light.¹¹

The Webbs were obviously fascinated by the development of British trade unions and devoted considerable time and effort in 'scientifically' investigating the phenomenon. This resulted in the path breaking work *History of Trade Unionism* in 1894 and later the influential book

Industrial Democracy.¹² They were highly suspicious if not downright hostile to large-scale industrial action by workers particularly if it had political overtones (the most quoted example being their opposition to the General Strike). Their *Industrial Democracy* advocated a highly circumspect democracy which would replace 'under expert guidance' the struggle between unions and employees with a partnership of labour and capital working in the interests of the whole community.

Of course in reality the Fabians included a heterogeneous variety of political beliefs and the Webbs' views as such went through various changes.¹³ The particular political expression of the 'professional ideal' as outlined above was an important and constant factor in the relationship of politically committed members of the middle-class with the Left. The Fabian Society in the first two or more decades of the twentieth century was to provide a training ground for a number of figures who would later achieve prominence in the Labour party. Furthermore, the Society was to provide early 'political schooling' for several of those who were to become first generation CP intellectuals; R. Palme Dutt and Ivor Montagu were both members of the Fabian Society while at university, R. Page Arnot came to the CP via the Guild Socialist revolt against Fabianism. Later, that body which grew out of Fabian Socialism in the mid-war period, the Society for Socialist Enquiry and Propaganda (SSIP) involved former Communists: William Mellor and Ellen Wilkinson (and W.H. Thompson who provided legal services for the CP).

Marxism

Classical Marxism claimed that of all existing classes only the industrial proletariat was 'really revolutionary' as its self-emancipation would finally bring to an end class society and exploitation. Marxism or Scientific Socialism (the terms being interchangeable) was 'the

theoretical expression of the proletarian movement' and had the task of bringing '... to the consciousness of the now oppressed class the conditions and nature of the act [Proletarian Revolution and the Construction of Socialism - SRP] which it is its destiny to accomplish'.¹⁴ However, as is evident from the social origins and status of Marx and Engels, individual intellectuals from the middle-class were all-important in developing this 'theoretical expression of the proletarian movement'.¹⁵ This is acknowledged in *The Communist Manifesto* where the development of capitalism is said to undermine and propel former groups from the ruling class into the ever expanding proletariat; 'These recruits to the proletariat also bring enlightenment into the ranks',¹⁶ while the ultimate stages of the revolutionary struggle will lead to small parts of the ruling class breaking away and joining the side of the proletariat. However, before this time was reached there were other members from the middle-class who would go over to the proletariat (presumably including the likes of Marx and Engels) -- 'some of the bourgeois ideologists who have achieved a theoretical understanding of the historical movement as a whole'.¹⁷

The two leading non-Fabian socialists with some claim to be theoreticians of an indigenous 'Marxist' tradition at the turn of the century, H.M. Hyndman and earlier William Morris, were both disenchanted members of the traditional middle-class. Morris was a reasonably wealthy small employer and was challenged to justify his privileged social position with his socialist principles. Replying to a newspaper article along these lines, which attacked socialists who did not forsake their wealth, Morris stated that the argument that

we should at once cast aside our position as capitalists, and take rank with the proletariat; but he must excuse my saying that he knows very well that we are not able to do so; that the most we can do is to palliate, as far as we can, the evils of the

unjust system which we are forced to sustain; that we are but minute links in the immense chain of the terrible organisation of competitive commerce, and that only the complete unrivetting of that chain will really free us. it is this very sense of the helplessness of our individual efforts which arms us against our own class, which compels us to take an active part in the agitation which, if it be successful, will deprive us of our capitalist position.¹⁸

The role of middle-class 'dissidents' in the struggle for socialism was to contribute their skills in political work and propaganda and provide much-needed finance for such efforts. However, the attitude within British Marxian Socialism was ambivalent toward middle-class converts. Hyndman, a 'City Gent', would always be dressed immaculately with top hat and embarrassed some fellow socialists by his constant reference in his speeches to 'my class'. His attitude towards the working class was often condescending and he often viewed it as raw material to be used and directed by himself and his associates. In contrast William Morris, surveying the state of British socialism in 1890 could write:

When I first joined the movement I hoped that some working-man leader, or rather leaders, would turn up, who would push aside all middle class help, and become great historical figures. I might still hope for that, if it seemed likely to happen, for indeed I long for it enough but to speak plainly it does not so seem at present.¹⁹

In his writings William Morris set himself against the Fabian or bureaucratic collectivist conception of a future Socialist society and the 'cult of the expert'.²⁰ Morris's utopian novel *News From Nowhere* was a direct response to Edward Bellamy's fictional future 'Socialist' world as described in his *Looking Backwards*. As opposed to Bellamy's technologically advanced, centralised bureaucratic socialism with its elite of 'utilitarian' experts, William Morris's utopia was characterised

by its simplicity where Communism would (as in Marx's view) mean occupations were flexible and people could swop jobs and work at will.²¹

How much Marxism can be seen as transmitting the 'professional ideal' to any of the working-class in this early period is debatable. Those parties that claimed to be Marxist were numerically insignificant and only had a small number of middle-class adherents. One of the organisations that was later to merge into the CPGB, the small Socialist Labour Party, even interpreted Marxism so that prime importance was apportioned to industrial unionism. 'Economic organisation' was given supremacy over 'political organisation' so that the 'danger of rendering ... the labour movement illusory, and a roosting place for the "intellectual" riff-raff of bourgeois society'²² is avoided.

Leninism

Leninism may be thought to strengthen the element of the 'professional ideal' in the politics of socialism but again the issue is somewhat complex. Most of the prominent Bolsheviks came from the gentry, the middle-class and the intelligentsia²³ (Lenin himself was the son of an ennobled school inspector with a university education), and their attachment to socialism could be seen in part as a 'product of moral sensitiveness and intellectual refinement'²⁴ as they saw the poverty of the mass of the population and realised the immovable obscurantism of Tsarism and the necessity for its overthrow if there ever was to be progress.

Although Bolsheviks rejected establishment ideas, as Deutscher comments, '...they also brought into the milieu of the revolution some of the values and qualities of their own milieu - not only knowledge, but also refinement of thought, speech and manners'²⁵ through their attachment to Marxism and experiences of exile in Europe they can be viewed as

transmitting 'Western influences' into the Russian revolutionary tradition. As previously mentioned, it is in the Leninist insistence on the crucial importance of intellectuals in providing conscious socialist politics for workers that a parallel with Fabianism can be drawn, yet in the circumstances of Tsarist Russia those 'intellectuals' who joined the Bolsheviks committed themselves to political action and put an end to any professional career prospects within society (by becoming professional revolutionaries).

In defending Lenin's proposal for a tight highly disciplined revolutionary Party it was Plekhanov who described its opponents as 'intellectuals saturated with bourgeois individualism'. This contrasted, Plekhanov felt, with the workers who would in no way fear such discipline. Lenin was to express similar views in his writings during the struggle within Russian Social Democracy during 1903-05. Writing on this in a popular biography of Lenin published in 1931 Mirsky stated that although this line of argument may seem to contradict '... the role ascribed to intellectuals in *What is to be done?* the contraction was only superficial. A few individual intellectuals were necessary for the creation of scientific socialism but collectively the intelligentsia is a victim of an individualism incompatible with Socialist organisation'.²⁶ The Bolsheviks were thus 'more proletarian' than the Mensheviks who were subject more to 'bourgeois individualism' (Mirsky characterises the internal 'Left' opposition in the Bolsheviks to Leninist norms in 1907-09 and the 'Trotskyist revolt of 1924-27' in similar terms).²⁷

Stalinism

As Stalin and his circle consolidated their power the aspects of the Bolshevik heritage which had pointed to the political weaknesses of those socialists from bourgeois 'intellectual' backgrounds was highlighted.

Leninism was so interpreted as to underline the need for rigid unquestioning discipline to the Party if the job of building socialism (in reality primitive capital accumulation) was to be achieved. 'Intellectuals' were seen as troublesome, disruptive, more likely to have foreign connections and dangerous to Party unity. The overall Soviet Party membership went through dramatic changes and with the 'Lenin enrolment' in 1924 there was a massive influx of new members with the most sought-after being 'workers from the bench'. The new circle of political leaders - Molotov, Kaganovitch, Voroshilov, Kuibyshev, et al. - that emerged with Stalin were of a 'new type' and (like Stalin) practical administrators, with no knowledge or experience of foreign countries and often from peasant backgrounds. Likewise, there were similar changes in the post-Lenin Comintern under Zinoviev, as professional revolutionaries were replaced by professional bureaucrats. Thus:

whereas the driving force of the Bolshevik Party and of most of the first Communist parties was essentially, in Lenin's words, "the educated representatives of the propertied classes, the intellectuals", the tendency was now to replace the intellectuals by Party militants of working-class origin wherever possible.²⁸

The 'cult of the Proletariat' ('Proletkult') became all-pervading in World Communism following the Sixth Congress of the Comintern with its inauguration of the new policy of 'class against class'. Communist parties were to prepare themselves for a new objectively revolutionary situation as capitalism moved into deep crisis. Therefore, the argument went, there was a need for even greater 'revolutionary purity' within Communist parties which required the 'taming' of bourgeois intellectual members. Speaking at this time to the 1928 Congress of the Yugoslavian Communist Party Togliatti declared:

The intellectuals are not the same as workers. They are easily influenced by petty-bourgeois and bourgeois milieus from which they come. For that reason they waver easily, especially when difficult decisions must be made. In our movement the intellectuals cannot be allowed to oppose the workers and their leaders. In the central committees of all the other parties, including the Russian, the German, and others, most of the members are workers. These central committees function very well. The intellectuals should not be cast aside, but they should understand what their role is. They should adapt themselves to the working class, they should yield to it, but they should not lead the working class and allow the influence of other classes to permeate its ranks.²⁹

Arthur Koestler, a member of a middle-class family, who became an influential journalist in Weimar Germany and joined the KPD in 1931 describes those middle-class intellectual communists like himself as being in the Movement on sufferance, not by right, 'this was rubbed into our consciousness night and day'. Although based on the 'heady atmosphere' that pervaded German Communism (and written by a now converted anti-Communist) it is of value to continue the quote as it gives an insight into the situation of the pre-Popular Front middle-class Communist:

We had to be tolerated, because Lenin had said so, and because Russia could not do without the doctors, engineers and scientists of the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia, and without the hated foreign specialists. But we were no more trusted or respected than the category of Useful Jews in the Third Reich ... The ideal proletarians were the Russian factory workers and the elite among the latter were those of the Putilov works in Leningrad and of the oilfields in Baku. In all books which we read or wrote the ideal proletarian was always broad-shouldered, with an open face and simple features, he was fully class-conscious, his sexual urge was kept well under control, he was strong and silent, warm-hearted but ruthless when necessary, had big feet, horny hands and a deep baritone voice to sing revolutionary songs with ... A member of the intelligentsia could never become a real proletarian, but his duty was to become as near one as he could. Some tried to achieve this by forsaking neckties, by wearing polo sweaters and black fingernails. This, however, was discouraged: it was imposture and snobbery. The correct way was never to write, say,

and above all never to think, anything which could not be understood by the dustman. We cast off our intellectual baggage like passengers on a ship seized by panic, until it became reduced to the strictly necessary minimum of stock-phrases, dialectical cliches and Marxist quotations which constitute the international jargon of Djughashwilese.³⁰

A noticeable change in the social composition of the leadership of the various Communist parties, outside the Soviet Union, is evident from about 1925 (although greatly accelerated after 1928). Those parties which initially had few working-class members in their executive bodies - French, American, German, Yugoslavian, Bulgarian, Czechoslovakian, Chinese, Japanese - were completely transformed in this period so that those with proletarian backgrounds predominated.³¹ Many of those working-class members who had or were chosen for leadership and cadre positions attended the Lenin School in Moscow (for 1 to 3 years). There they received both practical organisational training and a theoretical education in 'Marxism-Leninism'. In this way a layer of full-time activists throughout the world's Communist parties received the necessary 'intellectual skills' for leadership (as a development it was bound up with the greater Stalinist control and manipulation of Communist parties to the requirements of Soviet foreign policy). Later, writing as 'the former General Secretary' of the New Zealand Communist Party, Sidney Scott declared of those who had gone through the Lenin School: 'They brought back some organisational techniques which were effective within narrow limits, but the dogmatic and unreal attitudes and theories they had imbibed in Russia made them strangers in their own land'.³²

As 1917 receded and revolutions failed to materialise in Europe, Bolshevism with its Marxism and internationalism slowly succumbed to Russian reality. The adoption of the strategy of 'building socialism in one country' ensured that the regime became increasingly nationalistic and determined on a course of breakneck industrialisation. In 1929 the First

Five Year Plan was initiated setting out prodigious goals and targets to be attained in every area of the economy: 'This was a colossal plan for the equipment of industry and agriculture of the USSR with modern technique'.³³ In the early stages of the Plan there was a certain derision shown towards industrial technicians and experts as they were seen to question the pace of development/growth in their particular areas. This hostility led to the arrest of thousands of 'bourgeois' industrial experts and engineers and in a series of trials a number of them were publicly convicted of 'sabotage and wrecking'. As a historian has commented, 'Moscow wanted engineers who would attempt to do the impossible'.³⁴ In 1931 a halt was called by Stalin to the attitude of seeing every expert as a possible saboteur. At about the same time he made an attack on what he claimed was prevalent egalitarianism and called for the establishment of differentials in pay - for 'skill' to be rewarded. The earlier National Economic Plan (NEP) had also led to a growing divergence of income and wealth but then it was seen as a temporary necessary evil. The Bolsheviki had retained their strong belief in egalitarianism (even leading Party/government figures did not earn more than the wages of a skilled industrial worker). Stalinism, however, made inequality of income an article of faith and called for:

factory managers, and particularly Communists, to master the technique of every part of their factory. "In this period of reconstruction, technique decides everything". It was difficult, but "there is no fortress the Bolsheviki cannot take".³⁵

A new friendly attitude was adopted to the 'old' technicians and experts and a massive effort in technical education of those who showed 'promise' (not just those who were Party members, although they probably

subsequently became members once they became a part of the elite of administrators, experts and specialists) added greatly to their number.

To Deutscher

The highly paid and privileged managerial groups came to be the props of Stalin's regime. They had a vested interest in it. Stalin himself felt that his personal rule was the more secure the more solidly it rested on a rigid hierarchy of interest and influence.⁹⁶

At a time of capitalist crisis and Social Democratic failure (e.g. fall of the Labour government in 1931) the Soviet Union was seen to be industrialising at a rapid speed and in a planned manner. Stalinism could be seen as applying a socialist utilitarian professionalism to a primitive peasant dominated country: sweeping away established wealth and privilege, discarding the 'wild revolutionary ideas' of the first years and imposing a rational meritocracy to oversee and direct formidable economic progress. The adoption of the 'Stalin Constitution' in 1936 further officially distanced the regime from its revolutionary origins. Soviet participatory democracy (unreal in practice) was replaced by a passive parliamentary form of democracy (a sham). This new development could take place, according to Stalin, because the first stage of Communism had been reached and antagonistic classes had disappeared: 'The working-class was no longer a proletariat, the peasantry had been integrated in the socialist economy, and the new intelligentsia was rooted in the working classes'.⁹⁷

The coming to power of Hitler and the subsequent decimation of what had been the second largest Communist Party in the world, the KPD, were of profound significance for the future survival of the Soviet Union. A growing realisation that a Nazi Germany with its aggressive expansionist designs (Hitler publicly declaring that the Ukraine and Siberia belonged to the German 'Lebensraum') represented a direct threat to the USSR, led

Soviet foreign policy to alter course and give priority to constructing anti-Nazi alliances with other European states. Towards this end the Soviet Union joined the League of Nations in 1934 (reversing a policy of hostility towards a body which in Lenin's words was 'a thieves kitchen') and in the following year forming an alliance with France. The utmost effort was made not to unsettle Western 'bourgeois democratic' powers and much revolutionary rhetoric was either changed or dispensed with. This new approach was again clearly reflected in the Comintern, which more than ever was a creature of Stalin's policies.³⁸

In the middle of 1935 the Comintern's Seventh World Congress was held in Moscow and overturned the policies of the previous Congress. 'Social Fascism' was dispensed with and Social Democracy was no longer seen as the antipodean twin of fascism. Instead Communist parties were now to seek electoral agreements and alliances not only with Social Democratic parties but also with liberal, radical, 'anti-fascist'/anti-German parties and politicians ('Popular' or 'People's' Fronts). Gone was any talk about social revolution and in its place was a call for Communists to work for the defence of democracy against fascism which was defined as 'the open terrorist dictatorship of finance capital'. The emphasis on the fight against fascism led to a completely new attitude towards 'intellectuals' and the middle-class or as variously described 'middle strata' or 'segments'. Thus one of the decisions of the 7th Comintern Congress was that 'the drawing of pacifist organisations and their adherents into the united front of struggle for peace acquires great importance in mobilising the petty bourgeois masses, progressive intellectuals, women and youth against war'.³⁹

The 1930s - Fellow Travellers

It would be wrong to see the Soviet Union as devoid of support among sections of the middle-class in the West before the 1930s. The fall of Tsarism was universally greeted by those of liberal sentiments and there continued to be a pool of sympathy for the USSR's struggle for survival. In 1927 the 'Soviet Friends Congress' was held in Moscow and was an important step towards co-ordinating propaganda and the work of 'friendship societies' throughout the world.⁴⁰ The aim was to gather the support and involvement of as many of the 'sympathisers' with the Soviet Union (obviously wider than just those in Communist parties) as possible. Much 'Soviet Friendship' work was aimed at social democratic (Labour Party) workers and trade unionists (in 1925 Stalin laid great importance of the arrangements of visits to the USSR by delegations of Western workers), yet from an early date the Soviet organisation VOKS (Society for Cultural Communication with other Countries) played an important role in establishing contact with professional and middle-class 'intellectuals' in the West. Two of the earliest practical results were the formation in 1924 of the British Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR (I deal with this in the main body of the thesis) and in Denmark the Dansk-Russisk Samvirke.

However, it is from 1929 onwards that there was the emergence in significant numbers of middle class 'intellectuals', professional people and members of the petty bourgeois expressing support for the USSR. The 1930s was also a time when Marxism achieved, for the first time, a degree of intellectual respectability and recognition in some of the academic institutions in the West. Gaining from this overall trend and the reorientation of their policies and attitudes Communist parties recruited comparatively large numbers of 'non-proletarians'. The attraction of the Soviet Union in the 1930s rested largely on its anti-fascist stance and

its advocacy of a 'Popular Front of Nations Against Fascism and War' at the League of Nations; the 'planned' nature of its economy and society; and the projection of a 'constructive, scientific and rational' image. This was the society of Five Year Plans, not of revolutionary experimentation as in the early years of the Revolution. David Caute, dealing with those European and American middle-class 'progressives' who supported the Soviet Union ^{and were} collectively known as 'fellow travellers', describes them as heirs to the intellectual legacy of the Eighteenth Century Enlightenment.⁴¹

For many of the middle-class fellow travellers the Soviet Union represented the 'professional ideal' often interpreted from their own particular professional position. The scientist, for example, saw the USSR as a society that recognised the great (essential) importance of science, related scientific research to practical and immediate social problems and tasks and gave the scientist an integral part in the leadership of the state. For the teacher the Soviet Union was seen as giving massive resources to education and giving, it was felt, the teaching profession its proper prestigious position in society.

It is in this period that Sidney and Beatrice Webb, the very epitome of Fabianism, changed their attitude towards the USSR.⁴² From a long expressed hostility towards the Soviet Union (Beatrice had regarded the October Revolution as one of the worst developments to befall socialism) they became one of the foremost advocates of the Soviet State in the West. As Beatrice Webb confided to her diary in January 1932 what attracted them (speaking for Sidney as well as herself) to Soviet Russia was that its form of government corresponded to that outlined in their 'Constitution for a Socialist Commonwealth'. There was the same tripod system of '... political democracy, vocational organisation, and the consumers' co-operative movement. And the vocational organisation or Trade Union side

is placed in exactly the same position of subordination that we suggested ... There is no damned nonsense about Guild Socialism!'⁴³ They visited the USSR several times from 1932 and with Soviet assistance they produced their mammoth work, *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation?* in 1935 (later editions left out the question mark). In this book the Webbs write about 'The Persecution of the Intelligentsia' (from about 1927) and approvingly detail Stalin's reversal of this with his 'Pronouncement' of 1931 which was a 'Magna Carta for Russia's intelligentsia' providing them with new rights and privileges. However, it is the Soviet Communist Party that the Webbs see as in effect the 'Fabian elite' (unlike, in their view, CPs in the West which are made up of unconstructive rebels) providing the necessary leadership for the construction of the 'new civilisation'.⁴⁴

The definition of a fellow traveller is often held to be someone who sympathises with the cause of the Soviet Union but who is not a member of the Communist Party in their own country. Sometimes a fellow traveller can profess to being a 'Marxist' and even a non-member supporter of a Communist Party. Other fellow travellers, although supporters of the USSR, claim to have no time for Communists in the West or belief in the theoretical value of Marxism - to them what is good for the Soviet Union is good for that country but not for their own society. Fellow travellers thus covered quite a range of opinions (and political self-obligations) in Western Europe and America and in quite a few cases the division between fellow travelling and Party membership was blurred. There is thus a good deal of truth in what Cauter claims:

In so far as Communism in the Western democracies projected a democratic-reformist and anti-fascist image in the late 1930s, and in so far as this policy or image attracted into its ranks many middle-class people who neither before nor subsequently would have considered joining, then the C.P.s in these years can in a sense be said to have been packed with fellow-travellers.⁴⁵

The 'Professional Ideal' and the British Communist Party

The 'Bolshevisation' of the various Communist parties throughout the world has been described by one historian of Communism⁴⁶ as a process of 'professionalising' with its creation of a layer of fulltime Party functionaries and the centralising of decision making. Although small in number those from a middle-class background with a university education who joined the British CP and remained members after the initial period of enthusiasm for the October Revolution had died away, made an important contribution to this endeavour. Conventional careers and 'respectability' were sacrificed and intellectual skills were put at the service of creating a political party on Leninist lines in Britain. The Leninist model of the professional revolutionary who devotes him/herself to building a 'vanguard party of the working-class' remained a constant element in Party life. However, once the 'ultra-proletarian' politics of the Party began to be eased there was the entry of middle-class figures into the CP who did not cut themselves off from their class milieu or abandon their professions. Quite the reverse, in fact. The CP encouraged its new middle-class recruits to advance in their chosen fields of employment to gain prestige and influence for themselves and thus for the Party they were members of. In a way there was a similarity in this respect with the Fabian belief in the value of the 'penetration' of existing ruling structures and the influencing of the thought of those people working within them. Certainly there was a change in the Communist attitude towards the existing professions (and for that matter existing culture) which rather than being seen as instruments of class power which subjugated the working-class were seen in a positive light and as 'victims of capitalism'. Socialism became increasingly projected as a society

where those in the professions would gain in prestige and resources as full recognition was given to their essential role in 'serving the interests of society'. Within the British Party middle-class Communists exerted more influence on the drawing-up of policies, the political education of members and Party life generally. The self-educated 'worker intellectuals' who had once been the leading exponents and interpreters of Marxism were displaced by leading academic figures who had joined the Communist Party. Moreover, the theoretical foundation of the Communist Movement, Marxism-Leninism (dialectical materialism), became more closely associated with the 'cause of science and technology'. Communists in various professions also began to organise themselves into groups where they attempted to develop a 'Marxist' approach to their work. In particular during the War and subsequent period of 'reconstruction', many Communists in the professions were able to *integrate their politics and professional concerns* into a dynamic mix. However, it was not a simple issue of the increasing predominance of the 'professional ideal' in the Communist Party. For middle-class CP members their Communism also meant a recognition of 'the leading role of the working-class' and the authority of the Party centre to give leadership. Communists in the professions often found that they were being pulled in various directions - Party branch work or involvement in their Party professional group, concentration on trade union activity or professional association etc. During the Cold War, under the influence of the heightened political atmosphere, various Communists in the professions attempted to project a distinctly different 'Communist approach' to their work. These attempts often marked a break with previous attitudes and were by no means universally accepted by those involved in the professional groups. The

way politics influenced professional approaches and vice versa varied from group to group, as did the degree to which the Party leadership interested themselves with or attempted to control the activities of its members in the professions.

Footnotes

- 1 H. Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880*, p. 253.
- 2 R. Williams, *The Long Revolution*, p. 80.
- 3 H. Perkin, op. cit., p. 258.
- 4 Ibid., p. 261.
- 5 For a much deeper study of the role of the middle-class in late nineteenth and early twentieth century socialism, which does not restrict itself to Britain, see *Socialism and the Intelligentsia 1880-1914*, ed. Carl Levy, particularly Levy's Introduction.
- 6 See H. Pelling, *Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain*, Ch. 7, 'the Story of the ILP'.
- 7 See Pierson's *Marxism and the Origins of British Socialism*.
- 8 E.J. Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men*, Ch. 4, 'The Fabians Reconsidered'.
- 9 Here there is a parallel with Stalin's view that socialism would be achieved under the leadership of 'men of a special mould' - his oft quoted descriptive phrase for Communists.
- 10 N. and J. Mackenzie, *The First Fabians*, p. 250.
- 11 As quoted by Kingsley Martin, *Father Figures*, p. 153.
- 12 Significantly both these books impressed Lenin and he directly used the latter in his *What Is to Be Done?* for his argument against relying on the spontaneity of the labour movement to give rise to socialism and the resultant necessity for a 'vanguard Party' to introduce a conscious political lead.
- 13 For an indication of the more subtle complex nature of Fabianism, see Royden Harrison's review article, 'Elitist or Philistines?', *Society for the Study of Labour History Bulletin*, no. 46.
- 14 F. Engels, *Anti-Dühring*.
- 15 As Marxism took shape Anarchists attacked the concept of a 'Dictatorship of the Proletariat' which for Marx was essential in the 'transition period' to ensure an eventual abolition of classes. Bakunin, in his *Statism and Anarchy* (1873), wrote that such a dictatorship would not emancipate the working-class but would lead to the rule of a non-capitalist elite. Later the former Marxist Waclaw Machajski predicted, in a book *The Intellectual Worker* (1898), that this new ruling class would be a neo-bourgeois class of officeholders and managers - in short a non-capitalist middle-class (as recounted by Max Nomad, 'The Anarchist Tradition', p. 72 in *The Rev. Internationals 1864-1943*, ed. Drachkovitch).
- 16 K. Marx and F. Engels, *Communist Manifesto*.

- 17 Ibid. See also Neal Wood, *Communism and British Intellectuals*, p. 16.
- 18 Quoted in E.P. Thompson, *William Morris - Romantic to Revolutionary*, p. 317.
- 19 Quoted by E.P. Thompson, *ibid.*, p. 574.
- 20 Morris's *News From Nowhere* describes the attitude of the middle class towards the revolution in the chapter 'How the Change Came' in the following passage: 'Whatever the Government might do a great part of the upper and middle-classes were determined to set on foot a counter-revolution, for the Communism which now loomed ahead seemed quite unendurable to them', p. 109.
- 21 See R. Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950*, on Morris's socialism, particularly pp. 160-61.
- 22 Daniel De Leon in an SLP pamphlet as quoted by Hugo Dewar, *Communist Politics in Britain*, p. 12.
- 23 There were obviously exceptions to this, the most well-known being Stalin who was of peasant origins, although as a junior seminarian he would have been 'socially raised', while Kalinin, Tomsy and Shlyaprikov came from the working-class.
- 24 I. Deutscher, *Stalin*, p. 45.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 D.S. Mirsky, *Lenin*, p. 46.
- 27 Later the *History of the CPSU/Bolshevik - Short Course* (1939), the key educational work for the world's Communist Parties, adopted Mirsky's line of argument but in a more exaggerated form, e.g. 'workers do not fear discipline and organization, and they willingly join the organization if they have made up their minds to be party members. It is the individualistic intellectuals who fear discipline and organization', p. 47.
- 28 M.M. Drachkovitch and B. Lazitch, 'The Communist International', in *The Revolutionary Internationals, 1864-1943*, ed. M.M. Drachkovitch, p. 181.
- 29 Ibid., pp. 187 ff.
- 30 Arthur Koestler, in Richard Crossman, (ed.), *The God That Failed*, pp. 57-58.
- 31 Social composition (i.e. number of workers) of French and American Communist parties executive organs:

French Central Committee	-	4	workers	out	of	32	-	1920
		39	"	"	"	80	-	1926
		49	"	"	"	64	-	1932
USA Central Committee	-	7	workers	out	of	22	-	1919
		25	"	"	"	35	-	1935

- The General Secretary of the Comintern from 1932-1943, Georgi Dimitrov, was of solid Bulgarian working-class stock.
- 32 Sidney Scott, *Rebel in a Wrong Cause*, p. 56.
- 33 *History of the CPSU/Bolshevik - Short Course*, p. 296.
- 34 Martin McCauley, *Stalin and Stalinism*, p. 25.
- 35 Andrew Rothstein, *A History of the USSR*, p. 194, quoting Stalin from his speech to a conference of industrial managers in 1931.
- 36 I. Deutscher, *op. cit.*, p. 337.
- 37 *ibid.*, p. 378.
- 38 It would be wrong, though, to see the Comintern as completely unresponsive to the demands of its member parties, e.g. the French CP played an important role in quickening the pace of reappraisal of past policies and the adoption of the 'Popular Front' line.
- 39 *Resolutions of the 7th Comintern Congress*, p. 25.
- 40 World Committee of Friends of the Soviet Union - headed by the former General Secretary of the CPGB, Albert Inkpin.
- 41 See D. Cauter, *The Fellow Travellers - A postscript to the Enlightenment*, 1973. To quote: 'Leninism furiously rejected the anti-Enlightenment as retrograde, obscurantist and reactionary. But so long as bolshevism presented itself to hesitant Western observers in the colours of a quasi-Asiatic anarchism, the potential fellow-travellers refused to discover in Russia a new Enlightenment. Only when Stalin turned towards positivistic social engineering did they identify Soviet communism with a re-recovery of nerve with a reaffirmation of man's capacity to master his environment and his own nature. Yet their own spiritual ancestors were Condorcet, Bentham, Owen and Saint-Simon rather than Marx or Engels ... they had little difficulty in convincing themselves that what was taking shape in Russia in the '30s was not the dictatorship of the proletariat but the benevolent despotism of enlightened, disinterested pedagogues working for the common good'. (p. 251). I would, however, question the idea that fellow travellers disregarded the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat, often they had a more idealised picture of the 'proletariat' than Party members.
- 42 See Royden Harrison's 'Sidney and Beatrice Webb' in *Socialism and the Intelligentsia 1880-1914*, ed. Carl Levy. Harrison sets about explaining the Webbs' conversion to the 'new civilisation' with the aim of establishing '... that there was a correspondence between the value system of certain late-Victorian professional people and the 'strange syndrome of Soviet Marxism under Stalin', p. 37.
- 43 B. Webb as quoted by G. Himmelfarb, 'The Intellectual in Politics: The case of the Webbs', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 6, no. 3, 1971, p. 11.

- 44 In the words of the Webbs: ... in the nature of its mentality, as in the direction of its activities, the Communist Party reminds us less of a religious order than the organisation of the learned professions of Western Europe, such as those of the lawyers and doctors, engineers and public accountants. Like these and many other professional bodies, the Communist Party concerns itself exclusively with the affairs of this world. It resembles these bodies also in constituting an exclusive corporation, selecting, training, disciplining and expelling its own members, according to a code of conduct of its own invention'. S. & B. Webb, *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation?*, p. 415.
- 45 D. Cauter, op. cit., p. 166.
- 46 Keld Lund Anderson, 'Stalinismens historiske rødder', *Land og Folk*, 10 January 1990.

CHAPTER 3

The Foundation of the C.P.G.B. and the Early Years

Introduction - summary

Sympathy for the revolutionary developments in Russia led a small number of prominent middle-class figures (a national newspaper journalist and an M.P. among others) to associate themselves with the creation of a Communist Party in Britain. In addition some less prominent Bloomsbury types were initially grouped around the new Party; the majority of these people soon drifted away from the C.P. as the novelty of the Bolshevik Revolution wore off and the strong working-class character of the British Party made itself felt, their presence in the Communist Party became increasingly unwelcome. There were, however, a group of university students who had been active in anti-war agitation who joined the Party and remained steadfast members. This small group, including Dutt, Burns and Page Arnot, devoted themselves in Leninist fashion to lead lives as fulltime revolutionaries (before Lenin's *What is to be Done* was even known of). The decision of the Labour Conference in 1924 to debar Communists from individual membership of the Labour Party ended any opportunities for middle class Communists to build a career in the labour movement, a few left the C.P. at this time and later became Labour M.P.s. Bolshevisation within the Party and growing anti-Communist sentiment among officialdom meant that membership of the C.P. by those middle-class radicals who wished to pursue a professional career and remain in contact with those of a similar social status (including family) was, to say the least, highly restricted. Some disappeared from active membership to rejoin and become leading Communists a few years later. Maurice Dobb is fairly unique at this time in retaining his Party membership and holding a post at a university. Several of the foremost typographical innovators were able

for a few years to combine their membership of the C.P. with the practise and refinement of their expertise. Those graduates who remained in the Party became absorbed in political journalism, research (as with the LRD or work in Moscow for the Comintern) and interpretation of theory and translation of various Marxist works. The expansion of the Soviet diplomatic and trading presence in Britain (particularly ARCOS) provided limited employment opportunities for Communist teachers, clerical workers and researchers/statisticians. However, ARCOS was shut down the year after the defeat of the General Strike and in a Party of declining numbers a growing proportion of the membership was unemployed.

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MIDDLE-CLASS COMMUNISTS

The Formation of the Communist Party of Great Britain

Under the impact of the Bolshevik Revolution a number of very small disparate Marxist groups and parties fused to form the Communist Party of Great Britain in July 1920. This was not a straight forward process, and initially there were even three parties that laid claim to the title of Communist Party.¹ It took the authority of Lenin in person through meetings with such figures as William Gallacher and in the shape of a pamphlet, *Left-Wing Communism an infantile disorder*, to effect the emergence of a united Communist Party in January 1921. Unlike other major European countries the Communist Party in Britain was not born out of a major or even minor split from the established social democratic party (or in the case of Britain the Labour Party). Despite a claimed membership in 1921 of some 10,000 at the Third Congress of the Comintern this is acknowledged as being a massive overestimate. A more accurate estimate is that at its foundation the CPGB had between 4,000 and 5,000 members.² The

bulk of the membership was composed of those from the British Socialist Party (forerunner of the SDF), other groups that helped compose the new Party were the Socialist Labour Party (mainly based in Scotland, particularly Clydeside), the Workers Socialist Federation (East End of London), and The South Wales Socialist Society. In addition, the new Party attracted individuals from 'Hands off Russia' committees, the leftwing of the ILP, 'Guild Communists', anarcho-syndicalists such as Jack Tanner and the Shop Stewards movement etc. In discussing the nature of early CP membership Henry Pelling draws attention to the fact that there were in evidence significant numbers of political emigrés, mostly Russian Jews, Irishmen, and what he terms a dominance of the 'Celtic fringe' within the Party. However, as far as the 'Celtic fringe' is concerned there is some justification in Dutt's comment that

it might have seemed natural and obvious that since the strongholds of the organised industrial working-class, of working-class socialist consciousness and militancy, were at the time in the centres of mining and heavy industry in Scotland and South Wales, these should provide the main initial basis and leading elements of a revolutionary proletarian party.³

There exists no detailed breakdown in terms of class and occupation of membership as a whole (nor are such statistics available at this time for any period in Party history) but it is generally accepted that the Party was predominantly working-class. Studies indicate comparatively large numbers of skilled and semi-skilled workers, in particular engineers, railwaymen and miners and a not surprising concentration of members in London, Scotland, South Wales, Lancashire, the North-East and West Riding.⁴

The Communist Party's 'proletarian character' was reinforced by the dominance of those from working-class backgrounds occupying the positions of organisational and theoretical leadership in the Party (e.g. J.T.

Murphy, T. Bell, A. McManus, J.R. Campbell, T.A. Jackson et al.). This was the natural result of the CP 'inheriting' a major part of those self-taught workers who had come to Marxism and had been involved in the Labour College Movement and the Plebs League.

Middle-Class Recruits to the New Party

At its foundation the CP did attract a number of middle-class and professional people into its orbit, but they are held to constitute a smaller and less influential component than in other European Communist parties at this time. Rather patronisingly Pelling states: 'A number of people joined, of course, for no other reason than that they admired the success of the Russian Bolsheviks in accomplishing their revolution. These were for the most part young "intellectuals", who were keenly interested in foreign affairs and who were at an impressionable age'.⁵

An important ingredient in the attraction of the Russian Revolution was the abhorrence with which liberals of every hue, along with radicals and anarchists, everywhere had viewed Tsarist autocracy. Lt. Colonel L'Estrange Malone seems to fit this description except that he could not be held to be of an 'impressionable age'. He was elected to parliament at the 1918 General Election as a Coalition Liberal. It was after a visit to Soviet Russia that he was suddenly 'converted' joining, on his return, the British Socialist Party and subsequently the CP when it was formed, thus becoming that Party's first MP. In some ways the children's author Arthur Ransome would also seem to fit into this pattern with of course the important difference that although an early supporter of Soviet Russia he never joined the Communist Party. To quote Arthur Ransome from his *Six Weeks in Russia in 1919*:

I should have liked to explain what was the appeal of the Revolution to men like Colonel Robins and myself, both of us men far removed in origins and upbringing from the revolutionary and socialist movements in our own countries ... There was the feeling, from which we could never escape, of the creative effect of the Revolution ... the living, vivifying expression of something hitherto hidden in the consciousness of humanity.⁶

However, for most of those early middle-class recruits (as with the working class ones) the attraction of the Bolshevik Revolution was not something that developed 'out of the blue': many had radical and pacifist attachments and most were involved or sympathetic towards socialism and the British labour movement.⁷ To quote Neal Wood:

... before they became interested in Communism most of the intellectuals had been active politically, usually in the Labour movement. Some had been conscientious objectors during the war: R.P. Dutt, Postgate, Mellor and Ewer. Guild Socialism was probably the most influential doctrine among them.⁸

Rajani Palme Dutt who was to dominate the theoretical life of the Party for half a century was a foundation member of the Communist Party. Son of an Indian doctor practising in Cambridge and a Swedish mother he went to Balliol College, Oxford, on a scholarship in 1914 and on arrival at the University he joined the ILP. It is claimed that Dutt hesitated between devoting himself to Communism and the cause of Indian Nationalism, Fenner Brockway suggested he concentrate on the latter, advice he obviously ignored. However, it was the First World War that really radicalised him. Academia was revealed as not as impartial and dispassionate as it claimed:

Immediately, all the professors of the Oxford Faculty of History, names one had learned to revere, issued a manifesto stating that they, as professional historians accustomed to weighing historical evidence, had examined the facts and concluded that Britain was

right and Germany wrong. Next day the German big names - whom one had equally been taught to revere - came out with their manifesto to proclaim the opposite!⁹

This led, according to Dutt, to the reliance on his own judgement, and in his search for an understanding of the world he arrived at Marxism. He was soon in trouble with the University authorities as a result of his Marxist and anti-war proselytising, furthermore, he pushed the issue of his refusal to serve in the armed forces and was in 1916 sentenced to six months in prison. Following his release and return to Oxford University he was as politically active as ever, moving a resolution in June 1917 at a joint meeting of Student Societies that there was a need for a second socialist revolution in Russia. After fighting had broken out at a political meeting he was expelled from the University in October 1917 and was only allowed back to sit his examinations, which he nevertheless passed with First Class Honours in Classics with twelve alphas out of twelve. Thus in reply to Pelling, Dutt states: 'We did not become Communists because we supported the Russian Revolution. We supported the Russian Revolution because we were already communists'.¹⁰

R. Palme Dutt was one of a group of recently qualified or current University students who joined the CP on its formation: concentration on the later radicalisation amongst students in the 1930s neglects the pre-war and wartime growth of socialism in some universities. Fabian societies existed in a number of universities and it has been claimed that in 1908 there were in the region of 200 'socialists' at Cambridge, although several figures who later were to become political radicals in the 1930s were non-political while at university. For example John Middleton Murray, writing in 1932 on 'Communism and the Universities'

commenting on his own time at Oxford in 1908-1911, stated that: 'Art and Literature were my only concern, and some vague and unsatisfied hunger for a thing called life'.¹¹

In 1912 five representatives from Oxford, Cambridge, Glasgow, Manchester, and Liverpool met and initiated a conference which formed the University Socialist Federation. The war reduced the USF's membership (some voluntarily enlisting) and pushed remaining members further to the Left. The Federation was always small and discussion-orientated, Maurice Dobb, describing his experience in the post-Armistice period as a Cambridge student, states:

They [university socialist societies -SRP] bore the character of the old Fabian Societies from which most of them were descended ... Discussions tended to be abstract and theoretical. Much time was occupied in debating the merits of Guild Socialism v State Socialism, which (along with Freud) was the fashionable topic in "advanced" circles.¹²

At Cambridge¹³ there were some attempts to become involved in 'out of university' activities as with electioneering for the Labour Party and meetings with the Unemployed Workers Council Movement. These efforts, however, remained limited. Overall student socialism

remained something sectarian and abstract, divorced both from the working-class movement and from any notion of a general student movement. A few, nevertheless, were beginning to break through this limited conception, while a number of the pre-war generation who were still prominent in the USF had already done so.¹⁴

In the words of Robin Page Arnot the First World War '... transformed a few students from Fabians to Communists'.¹⁵ The group of student activists who joined the CP included, apart from Dutt and Maurice Dobb, the following from Cambridge University: Palme Dutt's brother Clemens (who graduated with first class honours in biology from Queens), Philip

Spratt (one of the defendants in the Meerut conspiracy), B. Woolf (biochemist), J.D. Bernal, A.L. Morton, Ivor Montagu and Allen Hutt. Non-Cambridge graduates included Robin Page Arnot (Glasgow University) who was Secretary of the USF from 1915 to 1919, Graham Pollard (Oxford University) where he was editor of the Labour Club's journal and graduated in 1923, and Andrew Rothstein, son of Russian political emigres who was at Balliol College, Oxford with Dutt where he graduated in history.

Outside of the universities but involving many of the 'Marxist' students a group of 'Guild Communists' became active in the National Guilds League. The League, established in 1915, was principally a middle class intellectual propaganda body largely inspired by G.D.H. Cole's attempt to formulate a non-bureaucratic decentralised Fabianism (as opposed to the 'Old Fabianism' of the Webbs). In 1920 the League adopted a report drawn up by a committee of five who were charged with the responsibility of applying the 'lessons' of the Russian Revolution to the British situation. The Report rejected the possibility of a peaceful or gradual attainment of socialism and set out a detailed plan of action which looked forward to the eventual formation of 'soviet-like' bodies and 'at some point a definite break with the old order'.¹⁶ All five authors of the Report - R. Page Arnot, W.N. Ewer, W.M. Holmes, W. Mellor, E.C. Wilkinson - subsequently joined the Communist Party. Intertwined with these developments was the Fabian Research Department (formed in 1912) which initially under the influence of Cole, within a short time became increasingly dominated by 'Guild Communists'. Page Arnot was given the job as full-time secretary during the war until the end of 1916 when he went on the run to avoid conscription (he was caught and served 18 months in prison) while Palme Dutt became International Secretary (although Dutt claims that he was opposed to Guild Socialism from the beginning as he believed the emphasis on decentralisation was '... contrary to the

requirements of the dictatorship of the proletariat'¹⁷). Significantly, the Department changed its name to Labour Research Department in 1918 and concentrated on giving research information and advice to trade unionists. An Oxford graduate (Christ Church), foundation member of the CP and close associate of Palme Dutt, Hugo Rathbone, became secretary of the LRD for a short period in its early stages. As an organisation the Department came under firm Communist Party dominance providing an opportunity for a number of middle-class communists to give research, propaganda and other assistance to organised workers, e.g. Page Arnot and later Margot Heinemann and Noreen Branson. Other areas which provided small numbers of middle-class recruits to the Party were the staff of the *Daily Herald* and a left-wing group in the ILP. Again these sources overlapped with Guild Socialism, university left politics, and anti-war agitation. Those on the *Herald* (a newspaper directly born out of the pre-war labour unrest) who joined the new party included Mellor, Postgate, Meynell, Ewer, Holmes, Torr, and Gould. Leaders of the leftwing group in the Independent Labour Party who came over to the CP in early 1921 included 'man of independent means' and former treasurer of Manchester University Fabian Society, J.T. Walton Newbold, and the Indian business manager (in charge of the London office of his uncle's cotton textile mills) Shapurji Saklatvala; both subsequently were elected as Communists standing for the Labour Party in the 1922 General Election. The most significant middle-class recruit from this group (Dutt was part of this group but he joined the CP at its first Unity Convention he did not wait until 1921) was Emile Burns. Burns's father and grandfather had both been major figures in the colonial service, the latter had been Auditor-General of the Leeward Islands, and his brother became Governor of the Gold Coast.¹⁸

Francis Meynell, one of those who came to the C.P. from the *Daily Herald* (he worked for his father's printing firm but was involved in the

Herald's business management and typographical decisions from 1912) gives a vivid description of the impact of the events in Russia on the circles he moved in, in his autobiography, *My Lives*. As he records there even grew up a '1917' club amongst the galaxy of London gentlemen's clubs that existed then.¹⁹ It was situated in Gerrard Street and was:

founded by people who today would be called "Labour Left", and its name was a tribute to the first (Menshevik) Russian Revolution. Most of its members were anti-war, but, that apart, they were almost Irish in their divisions of opinion. After the Bolshevik revolution a pro-communist group monopolised the 'long table' and made almost a club within a club, a conscious huddle within the muddle'.²⁰

According to Meynell the leader of this group was Alfred L. Bacharach, an active member of the University Socialist Federation, and shortly afterwards to be a foundation member of the Communist Party and involved with the scientists' union (he was a food technologist and was still a Party member in 1926). Bacharach's 'lieutenant' was said to be Miles Malleson (who, from dramatist, was to become an actor-manager and a major force in the theatrical world) and amongst others who met at the club were Lancelot Hogben, Hyman Levy and J.B.S. Haldane, although to give an idea of the 'broadness' of the clientele it should be noted that both Attlee and Greenwood were members.

Interestingly, of the professional and middle-class people who joined or formed close relations with the Party in its very earliest days there were a number of highly gifted figures in the world of typography and printing. Francis Meynell and Stanley Morison (not a member but a supporter of the CP) had both been conscientious objectors and formed friendships with Page Arnot, Dutt and Walter Holmes while they were imprisoned. Graham Pollard after finishing his time at Oxford University in 1923 (where in contrast with 1930s Communist students, he only achieved a Third in his history finals) chose bibliography as his life's

profession. MacIntyre has pointed to this concentration of 1920s Marxist intellectuals in the field of typography and bibliography and gone on to claim that in contrast to middle-class intellectuals in the Party in the 1930s, 'their Marxism was largely incidental to their engagement'.²¹

Although their Marxism may have been incidental to their work (in the case of Meynell he was a self-acknowledged illiterate as far as Marxism was concerned and Morison mixed his Marxism with Catholicism) there were links between the Left and graphic arts, which of all the arts had the widest and most continuous impact on the people as a whole. These links were most clearly expressed by William Morris in his fight against the deterioration of the quality of presswork which resulted from the introduction of machine-printing in the nineteenth century. Writing much later on this matter Allen Hutt felt there was an intimate 'living connection' between typography and Marxism:

Few, if any arts, are more profoundly dialectical than the art of printing. Throughout it presents a series of contradictions which the Marxist is, or should be, peculiarly able to grasp and resolve; the contradiction between theory and practice, of course, but also that between form and content, art and science, beauty and utility (and in the case of the newspaper or periodical, time and space).²²

However, the most important aspect of their profession was that it could be directly utilised by the Party for its publications. After his departure from the *Daily Herald* Francis Meynell was first asked to re-design the title of the CP's weekly *The Communist* and then at the beginning of 1921 to take over the editorship. Meynell gave his reasons for accepting the offer by Arthur MacManus (chairman of the CPGB) to become editor as:

my vague but fervent political convictions; my belief in myself as an unusual sort of journalist; and the chance for typographical innovation - there was not a weekly in the country that was not formal and dull in its appearance. So I agreed; and the ensuing months at the paper meant months also in the party.²³

At about the same time both Meynell and Morison cooperated in designing and printing the *Labour Monthly* in Morison's newly discovered French Rococo style. Meynell's editorship of *The Communist* only lasted a short time, and he in turn was replaced by his assistant Raymond Postgate (a graduate of St. John's College, Oxford) who had been a *Daily Herald* journalist. He, too, occupied this post for only a short period. Another former *Daily Herald* worker Dona Torr, daughter of the Canon of Chester Cathedral also played a valuable role in Communist Party journalistic efforts. She had come to London to pursue academic studies in Old Icelandic during the First World War but had been drawn into work for the *Herald* as the paper's librarian, 'married' Walter Holmes and joined the CP on its foundation. After which:

Her journalistic skill was thereafter always at the disposal of the movement. At a crucial period she stepped in as general editorial factotum of *Workers Life*, the Communist party weekly, and during 1927 was responsible for the whole exacting process of sub-editing, make-up and putting to press.²⁴

Later, when the *Daily Worker* was started Graham Pollard²⁵ (who had edited the CP's *The Distributive Worker*) after helping Morison on his redesign of *The Times* obtained from him for the Communist newspaper a title-piece in the new Gill Sans type, with superimposed hammer and sickle. However, the *Daily Worker* in its very earliest days leaned heavily on the two former *Herald* figures of Walter Holmes and Allen Hutt²⁶; who were the only people with experience of daily journalism and played an important role in training up the predominantly working class Communists who composed the

paper's staff (William Rust, a Londoner of working-class origins who had been a Party full timer from his youth was appointed editor although he had no journalistic experience whatsoever).

The Place of the Early Middle-Class Recruits in the Party

Obviously the freedom afforded to Meynell, and after him Postgate, in the running of the Party organ is an indication of the 'tolerant' atmosphere in the CP in the initial period. As Meynell says of *The Communist*:

I doubt whether there could ever have been a political party organ that showed so little awareness of its party's ideology. ... Indeed, *The Communist* was very little different in its temper and tone from the old weekly *Herald*. Like that forerunner, it was a paper by intention for working-class people but by its style addressed almost wholly to middle-class intellectuals. Even its front-page "Notes of the Day" were allusively quizzical - for instance, whenever we quoted from *The Times* we referred to "the bloody old Times", as Cobbett called it.²⁷

As a Christian Meynell even 'conscripted' Christ to 'the cause' by way of the weekly's cartoonist, who drew a series of cartoons depicting a 'revolutionary' Christ confronting capitalism.

It was in these early years that Graham Greene and Claude Cockburn became probationary members of the Communist Party while they were at Oxford University. Neither had any knowledge of Marxism and although Greene may be exaggerating, he claims that a major factor that inspired them to join was that they could perhaps win a free trip to Leningrad. A little later, on a visit to Paris, Greene used his British Party card to gain entry to the French Communist headquarters and attend a meeting of Parisian Communists (an experience he later utilised for one of his novels).

Initially in London there was even a known 'intellectuals' branch called the West Central branch which Maurice Dobb joined when he moved to London for two years in 1922. In contrast to his pre-University times in a working-class branch of the ILP in London (his parents lived in a N.W. London suburb) his return to political activity in the capital as a Communist in the first few months meant he mixed with a similar class of people to himself (in Harold Perkin's terminology members of the 'non-capitalist' or 'professional' middle-class).

Distrust of middle-class members was in evidence among certain sections of the Party from the beginning.²⁸ Harry Pollitt, admittedly writing 20 years after the events, gives an account of his own displeasure at some of those involved in the 'movement' and Party in the early years in his autobiography *Serving My Time*. He mentions a body operating in London in 1919 known as the 'Worker's, Soldier's, Sailor's and Airmen's Council' and records his dislike of most of those taking part: 'I have never cared much for the peculiar dress which I saw in such profusion there and never considered that sandals and flowing hair contribute to the popularity of our movement' [shades of Orwell - SRP].²⁹ Of the founding Convention of the Party which he attended as a visitor he notes the attendance of the 'big names', who in his opinion 'flirted' with Communism because it was in a certain way 'fashionable', some of whom did not '... hesitate to make workers like myself feel that we were very small fry indeed'.³⁰ In particular Pollitt records his experience with the editors of *The Communist*, Postgate and Meynell. After picking up some information on a ship that was to be loaded with arms for use against the Soviet Union he tried unsuccessfully to get the news into the Party journal. He found that they were more interested in a typographical discourse at that specific moment and were '... pouring [sic] over old books'.³¹ Neal Wood does mention, however, that William Mellor (a former Oxford divinity

student and *Daily Herald* journalist) was able, by use of his theatrical manner and North Country accent, to turn anti-middle-class sentiment to his advantage: 'The working-class audience would roar hilariously when he shouted that it was untrue that the only good Communist was one who had holes in his trousers'.³² In contrast though, Walton Newbold only managed to antagonise many in the Party by his claims of intellectual superiority, womanising, and his bohemian appearance on his lecture tours. Gallacher records the struggle against the 'so-called intellectuals' who he calls the 'manipulators' in the very first years of the Party's life in one of his autobiographical tomes, *The Rolling of the Thunder*.³³

Indigenous unease within the British Party in combination with the dissemination of Leninist literature and more direct pressure from the Comintern led to changes in the Party's structure and nature. The CP's fourth congress in 1922 appointed a 'Commission on Party Organisation' composed of, in opposition to the wishes of the established Central Committee, three non-Executive members: Palme Dutt, Pollitt, and Harry Inkpin (this was to be the beginning of the Pollitt-Dutt partnership). The Commission's Report was endorsed at the following Party Congress, it was a formidable closely argued document, which called for the end of the federal basis of the Party's leadership and its replacement by a smaller more powerful Executive elected by Congress, not on the basis of where they came from but on their capabilities. Further proposals included the ending of the old area branches and the creation in their stead of Local Party Committees which would determine the area of activity. Each of its members would be involved in groups in the following fields: place of work (factory group or wider-specific industry or trade union), place of living (street group or housing block) and area of special Party work (education, training, propaganda). The central principle of the Report around which everything was based was that: 'Every member would have to

be a working member, since he could not be a member of the Party at all unless he was a member of a working group'.³⁴ Turning its attention to the particular question of the Party press the *Report* was extremely critical of *The Communist*. It called for a change of approach from the existing style of intellectual, cultural, and political articles with a 'Communist slant' to an agitational paper with an emphasis on reporting workers' struggles.

In the wake of the *Report*, the West Central branch was disbanded and Postgate was replaced as editor of *The Communist* by T.A. Jackson (May, 1922). Early in the following year the journal's name was changed to *Workers' Weekly* with Palme Dutt in charge. The changing atmosphere within the Party was proving to be not to the liking of what Macintyre calls 'birds of passage'.³⁵ Many of the well know middle-class intellectuals, journalists, writers, public figures and 'professional politicians' attached to the Labour Movement, left the Party from 1922 onwards,³⁶ although an exception to this pattern is Stanley Morison who tried to join the CP in 1923 as some of the measures of reorganisation were being carried out. However, as an indication of the greater demands of ideological coherence/orthodoxy of new members, it was felt that his mixture of Catholicism and Marxism did not provide a suitable basis of membership (he thus remained a 'friend' of the Party until he began to drift away from the Left in the 1930s). In the 'Organising Report of the General Executive Committee' as presented to the 7th Party Congress in 1925 it was simply stated that '... a few intellectuals headed by J.T. Walton Newbold and Philips Price,³⁷ left the Party, and the effect of their leaving had no unsatisfactory reactions upon the Party at all'.³⁸

Some of the early middle-class members did not drop out of the Party so much for political reasons as for professional ones, the growing demands of their job. Thus Graham Pollard withdrew from political

activity following the General Strike because of the sheer amount of bibliographical and typographical work with which he was involved; others, although intellectually won over to Marxism in the period of the First World War, chose career and a peripheral political involvement to membership of the CPGB. This was true of Palme Dutt's closest friend at Oxford, Gordon V. Childe and although 'Childe's philosophical Marxism, reached along the classic royal road through Hegel, was basic to his outlook'³⁹ he did not join the Communist Party. The choice as he saw it was to become a professional revolutionary or follow an academic career, although he half regretted it all his life he chose the latter and became one of the foremost archaeologists⁴⁰ of his time.⁴¹ The dilemma of trying to maintain an active political commitment to the Left while pursuing an academic career in the post First World War world is discussed by Gary Werskey in his collective biography of leftwing scientists, *The Visible College*. To quote Werskey:

To succeed as an academic normally required an overriding commitment to the right sort of scholarship and to a range of professional values that transcended the specific requirements of doing 'good' work. Yet to behave in this manner was to constrain, reshape and ultimately deny many aspects of one's socialism.⁴²

J.D. Bernal, who had joined the Party in 1923, chose an academic life in science and in particular in crystallography and although he contributed a number of anonymous articles to CP journals in the 1920s his direct political involvement became tenuous in this period. It is reported that at this time Bernal failed even to join the scientist's trade union - NUSW.⁴³ Likewise, Ivor Montagu, after studying zoology at Cambridge and being an active Communist, found difficulty in resolving his position. His experience as one of the students' representatives on the Cambridge Trades Council convinced him that it was harmful for Marxism and Communism to be enunciated by him (and another fellow CP student, Woolf)

to trade unionists, as he felt it led them to the opinion that it was '... not properly in the working-class interest'.⁴⁴ With this in mind, on leaving university in the early 1920s he undertook a profession in zoology; in his own words:

On leaving Cambridge at 19, as a member of the Communist party I should have been without authority or income, useful to the Party therefore only as an individual, and as an individual, I feared, from my Cambridge experiences, of an academic turn of phrase, inclined rather to diminish than increase the confidence of working-class audiences in Marxist principles. As a Zoologist, in receipt of income, I was able in many ways to be useful to the party, to promote liaison between Russian and English zoologists, and U.S.S.R. research workers and English libraries generally and so forth. Accordingly I pursued zoological research, maintaining constant personal contact with members of the Party.⁴⁵

Throughout the 1920s, after he left university, Montagu did not retain formal membership of the CP, although he was a member of his local Labour Party branch until in the aftermath of the General Strike when the whole branch was disaffiliated for refusing to expel Communist members.⁴⁶

Another 'Communist intellectual', who like Montagu was to become well-known in the Party from the 1930s, was the historian A.L. Morton. An associate of Montagu's at Cambridge and one of the leftwing 'ginger group' in the Labour Club (although not a card-carrying member he was part of the group of Communists) he did not take out a Party card until January 1929. One of the main reasons for his separation from the CP (although he continued to read the Party press) was that he chose a career in teaching which led to jobs in politically 'out-of-the-way' places, but he joined the Party as soon as he moved to London.⁴⁷

The one foundation member of the Party who chose an academic life and remained a known Communist (in the CP until his death in 1976) was Maurice Dobb.⁴⁸ After graduating he carried out postgraduate research at the LSE and returned to Cambridge in 1924 as a Lecturer in Economics. Dobb,

however, was completely isolated in adopting a Marxist approach in academic circles, and he found himself in the invidious position of trying to work within an institution in which he was only marginally accepted (as a scholar) with membership of a party which was increasingly critical of 'bourgeois scholarship'.⁴⁹ Throughout the 1920s and into the early 1930s Dobb's published work was subjected to intermittent attacks in the Party press for 'opportunism', 'placating petty-bourgeois opinion', and 'vulgarising Marxism'. In reply Dobb attempted to defend himself and in one case wrote an abject apology in the CP *Workers Life*. Although Dobb did some work for the LRD his principal field of political activity seems to have been (as with his pre-Party days) in the Labour College Movement. Despite the Party's break from the Movement and attempts to undermine it as it built up its own educational/training system (and monopoly over Marxism), Dobb lectured and wrote for it and at one time even edited its journal *Plebs*. In part this was because Dobb disagreed with the CP leadership's attitude towards the Movement but also because he found it a more amenable area for political work than the Party.⁵⁰

There were a small number of graduates who joined the CPGB when it was formed or soon after and from that time dropped out of professional jobs (or planned professional careers) to devote their lives to working for the Party or Party dominated organisation.⁵¹ As Douglas Hyde comments 'Some of the middle-class types who came to the Party in that period [i.e. the period around the CP's formation - SRP] remained very true to the Party, they sort of committed themselves very early'.⁵² Obviously Palme Dutt is the best known example here, - on graduation he worked for a very short time as a schoolmaster at Leighton Park School, Reading, and from 1919 to 1922 he was employed by the LRD after which he was a functionary of the Communist Party. Clemens Dutt, after gaining first class honours in Biology at Cambridge, became a Cambridge University

Demonstrator in Biology and later was involved in government funded biological research '... until he surrendered his scientific career for the greater needs of the Communist fight'.⁵³

The founding of the journal *Labour Monthly* was important in giving Dutt and the small group of associated university graduate Communists a voice. *Labour Monthly* was set up directly on the recommendation of the 'Communist International' to act, in the words of Dutt,

as an auxiliary organ to be published, not as an official organ of the Party, but as an independent monthly of Marxism and Labour Unity, designed to reach out to broad circles of the Labour Movement and present to them our general outlook and policy in terms and language familiar to the Labour Movement, encouraging non-Party contributions ...⁵⁴

The C.I. recommendation also included the specific point that the editorship be entrusted to Palme Dutt in association with Page Arnot (they became editor and assistant editor respectively). The *Labour Monthly* became an influential journal within the Party and in particular Dutt's 'Notes of the Month', where he gave a running commentary/interpretation on current affairs, was 'religiously' followed by many in the Party.

Several of the middle-class 'old guard' became deeply involved in the Party's anti-imperialist activities. Hugo Rathbone's university research eventually appeared in a series of articles on the workings of finance capital and imperialism in the *Labour Monthly* from 1922. Among his responsibilities was membership of the CP's Colonial Committee and an important role in the 'League Against Imperialism' when it was set up in 1927.⁵⁵ A few years later Philip Spratt, the Cambridge graduate, was briefed by Clemens Dutt to carry out certain activities in aid of Indian Communists⁵⁶ (the C.I. had apportioned responsibility for the development of the Indian CP to the British Party) and trade unionists. Spratt worked in concert with several British working-class Communists and played a

prominent part in the Indian trade union movement as an executive member of the All-India Trade Union Congress; arrested in 1929 along with a number of other Communists in the Meerut Conspiracy Case, he was eventually sentenced in January 1933 to twelve years transportation.

A number of Communists in Britain were able to gain employment in various Soviet institutions in this country from an early period. The Balliol history graduate and son of Russian emigres, Andrew Rothstein, became the press officer of the first Soviet mission in Britain in December 1920, and in the following year he was appointed the London correspondent of the Russian Telegraph Agency (a post he held until 1945).⁵⁷ Rothstein thus had a secure job intimately connected with his own beliefs and politics from which he could carry out Party activities (he was a co-opted member of the 1923 Political Bureau, was elected to the Central Committee for a period, and was an important Party propagandist writing many pamphlets and articles). However, it was the Soviet joint stock company Arcos Ltd., which was established in London following the 1921 Trade Agreement, that provided employment for a significant number of mainly non-working-class Communists with clerical skills; in all Arcos employed over 200 people many of whom, it was claimed, were members of the CPGB.⁵⁸ One of the Party's earliest leading schoolteachers, David Capper, was able to get a job as the head of their language school (Russians who came over to conduct trade in furs and timber etc were required to learn fluent English in 3 months) following the loss of a grammar school teaching post through political victimisation. As recounted by his widow (Nan Macmillian), a great advantage of the Arcos job for David Capper was the hours - early mornings and a two hour period in the evenings; he was thus able to devote a considerable amount of time to Party work, and he became secretary of the Local Party Committee covering Clapham and

Wandsworth. This area of employment came to an end in 1927 when the Conservative Government raided and closed down the premises of Arcos, and diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union were severed.

From the early 1920s there was thus an established but very small group of people with university educations and with middle-class and professional backgrounds, who committed themselves to the Communist Party from that time onwards. They were grouped around Palme Dutt and the *Labour Monthly* and the LRD, were nearly all young, although they had been involved in anti-war activities and, in the case of some of the women, had been active among the suffragettes.⁵⁹ In Leninist fashion they had forsaken their own class and chosen a life as 'professional revolutionaries', writing, researching, administrating for the Party (either directly or indirectly in a CP-dominated organisation) as a full-time occupation. Knowledge of other non-working-class Communists outside of the aforementioned London based group is severely limited, unfortunately in-depth work on the early membership of the Party 'on the ground' is almost non-existent with the exception of the Frows' work on *The Communist Party in Manchester 1920-1926*. Not surprisingly the Frows' short biographies of 130 of the members in this period reveals an overwhelming number of engineering and metal workers, a few railway workers and clerks, three or four teachers, two doctors, and two chemists. Overall there is some indication that among women members there was more likelihood of finding clerical workers and teachers; however, in this early period the Party was very much a masculine body.⁶⁰ With the shedding of many of the well known middle-class recruits and the incessant demands of everyday Party life at the expense of 'distracting' theoretical discussions, the proletarian character of the British Party was further strengthened. The 1926 General Strike led to an influx of several thousand new members, and although many quickly left following the

demoralising long drawn-out defeat the Party retained a significant 'core' of miners and support in various mining communities.⁶¹ It is also the case that the British Communist Party included and retained various individuals with family connections to an indigenous radical tradition.⁶² However, the increasingly evident fact about the CP's membership was that as the 1920s progressed, a growing proportion of members were unemployed, so that by November 1930 with an all-time low in membership one third was out of work. It is probable that an even larger percentage was unemployed the following year as a more than doubling of membership to 6,000 was achieved, mainly through recruiting on the basis of the Party's work in the National Unemployed Workers Movement.⁶³ As regards the public leadership of the CP, to quote Douglas Hyde:

What strikes one about the lists of Central Committee members at the Ninth (1927) and Tenth (1929) Congresses ... is that they were by then heavily proletarian in composition - that of course is the party as I first knew it. But when one looks at the first Central Committee, called the Provisional Executive Committee, which emerged from the National Convention of July 31, 1920, there are more middle-class types.⁶⁴

Yet unlike so many of the other European CPs there was no dramatic change in the social composition of the Party's leadership (see previous chapter, 'Dilemmas etc.' p.35) - it just became even more 'proletarian' in character.⁶⁵

Footnotes

- 1 'The Communist Party (British Section of the Third International)' - formed in June 1920 and largely composed of Sylvia Pankhurst 'Workers Socialist Federation'. 'The Communist Party of Great Britain' - founded in July/August 1920 by the 'Unity Convention'. 'The Communist Labour Party' - based in Scotland.
- 2 See Klugmann, *History of the CPGB vol. 1*, p. 197. Neal Wood and Henry Pelling put it even lower to around 2,500.
- 3 R. Palme Dutt, 'Honour to Whom - some reflections on Communist Party history', *Labour Monthly*, May 1959, pp. 195-96.
- 4 Pollitt's contention that the Party directed its appeal towards 'serious-minded workers' (as quoted in R. Samuel, 'Class Politics: The Lost World of British Communism', Part Three, *New Left Review*, no. 161, March-April 1987, p. 66) is certainly the impression one gets from the photographs of assembled delegates at early Party congresses - all clothed in their 'Sunday best'.
- 5 Henry Pelling, *The British Communist Party - a historical profile*, p. 17.
- 6 As quoted by D. Cauter in *The Fellow Travellers*, p. 21.
- 7 I must take issue with Jonathan Ree's remark that the CP was joined by: '... universitarian intellectuals and writers, mostly without previous experience, who were moved by the Russian Revolution ...' (*Proletarian Philosophers*, p. 47).
- 8 Neal Wood, *Communism and British Intellectuals*, p. 77.
- 9 *Daily Worker*, 29 October 1959, Review of Neal Wood's book by Palme Dutt 'Through McCarthy Spectacles'.
- 10 *Labour Monthly*, May 1959, p. 196.
- 11 *The Oxford Outlook*, May 1932, p. 79.
- 12 M.H. Dobb, 'After Versailles' *University Forward*, vol. 6, no. 3, 1941.
- 13 See Kingsley Martin's first volume of autobiography, *Father Figures*, Chapter 5: 'Cambridge (1919-24)' for a view of Left politics at the university in the immediate post-First World War period.
- 14 M.H. Dobb, op. cit.
- 15 'The War Years', *University Forward*, vol. 6, no. 3, 1941.
- 16 *A Guild Socialist Programme of Action*, 1920.
- 17 *Daily Worker*, 29 October 1959.

- 18 Douglas Hyde recalls: '... we always rejoiced in the fact that at the time when Emile was associated with the League Against Imperialism, his brother had the appearance of being one of its servants' D. Hyde, letter 8 June 1987.
- 19 See Douglas Goldring's *Nineteen Twenties*, Part 2, Ch. III, 'The Nineteen Seventeen Club'.
- 20 Francis Meynell, *My Lives*, p.236.
- 21 S. MacIntyre, *A Proletarian Science*, p. 94.
- 22 A. Hutt, 'Morris, Marxism and Typography', *Labour Monthly*, October 1957, p. 468.
- 23 F. Meynell, op. cit., p. 127.
- 24 Obituary by A. Hutt, *Labour Monthly*, March 1957, p. 132.
- 25 Graham Pollard's 'wife' in the early 1920s (a 'communist marriage' in 1924 - see 'The Book Collector: Graham Pollard', p. 13, *Book Collector*, Spring 1977) was Kay Beauchamp. Later Beauchamp became a managing director of Utopia Press - printers of the *Daily Worker*-and served five months in Holloway prison as a result of an article in the paper being declared 'gross contempt of court'.
- 26 The 'ravages' of the 'Third Period' had depleted the CP of most of its journalistic talent and as a result workers with no previous experience were thrown into the task of producing a newspaper. Some people have commented that Rust's editorship and a 'virgin' staff ensured the production of a paper which 'religiously applied' the 'correct line'.
- 27 F. Meynell, op. cit., pp. 127-28.
- 28 See my chapter 'The Dilemmas ...' for the SLP attitude.
- 29 H. Pollitt, *Serving My Time*, p. 93. Criticism by 'proletarian' figures in the Party of non-working-class bohemian types who were members seems to have been not uncommon. To quote an example: 'My first impressions of a political meeting were certainly not good ... There were only a few people in the room ... a man with very long, unkempt hair, not quite covering a number of ugly warts. He looked a dirty bit of work. He turned out to be one of the intellectuals of the Communist Party, though he certainly didn't look it.' (Fred Copeman, *Reason in Revolt*, pp. 56-57).
- 30 H. Pollitt, op. cit., p. 125.
- 31 Pollitt continued to be uncomfortable with bourgeois bohemians but this did not extend to proletarian bohemians, or he would have never had anything to do with T.A. Jackson.
- 32 N. Wood, 'The Empirical Proletarians: a note on British Communism', *Political Science Quarterly*, June 1959, p. 270.
- 33 W. Gallacher, *The Rolling of the Thunder*, pp. 33-34.

- ³⁴ *Report on Organisation*, as quoted in Klugmann, op. cit., p. 205.
- ³⁵ An important consideration for some of them was the growing animosity between the Communist Party and the Labour Party - by 1924 it was no longer possible for CPGB members to be endorsed as Labour Party candidates.
- ³⁶ Sylvia Pankhurst was expelled from the united CP in 1921 due to her 'indiscipline', i.e. insistence on retaining control of the newspaper *Worker's Dreadnought* and her 'ultra-leftist' views - see P.W.E. Romero, *Sylvia Pankhurst: A Portrait of a Radical*, (1987). Most of Sylvia's moneyed backers from the West End deserted her when she first declared her support for Bolshevism.
- ³⁷ M. Phillips Price, a Trinity College (Cambridge) graduate and a journalist - *Manchester Guardian* Correspondent in Russia at the time of the Revolution. Stood as a Labour Party candidate for Gloucester in the 1922 General Election. He is usually spoken of as a 'well-known Communist sympathiser', and not a Party member. See his preface to his book, *My Three Revolutions*, coming from a Nonconformist family. Price describes himself as an heir to this tradition: 'There have always been people capable of looking beyond the immediate interests of their class who have lent character to this peculiar English socialism, bred out of liberal humanitarianism, glib business psychology and a tradition of public service', p. 12.
- ³⁸ *Report of the 7th National Congress*, p. 148. This Report is also interesting for the highly critical comments made on CP parliamentary representatives, particularly Saklatvala.
- ³⁹ Dutt's tribute to Childe, *Daily Worker*, 21 October 1957.
- ⁴⁰ See Biographical Appendix.
- ⁴¹ See *Our History Journal*, no. II, January 1987, 'Reminiscence of Palme Dutt', p. 4. He chose an academic path because of the accompanying comforts of life.
- ⁴² G. Werskey, *The Visible College*, p. 126.
- ⁴³ The exception to the trend of 'Left' scientists continuing to be isolated from direct political involvement was in Werskey's opinion Hyman Levy, who refused to be drawn into academic life and in particular the 'High Science' of Cambridge University. To quote Werskey on Bernal, Needham and Haldane in the 1920s: 'Indeed, apart from their failure to put their beliefs to work, their most outstanding political characteristic was a readiness to equate the causes of science and socialism. That allowed them to regard their scientific work as a special type of politics'. *The Visible College*, p. 77. Levy was an employee of the National Physical Laboratory (a civil servant) and a very active trade unionist, involved in the Minority Movement but only finally joining the CP (or becoming an official member) in 1930 following his expulsion from the Labour Party. However, it is interesting to note that in 1924 Levy was writing in an extremely scientifically elitist manner - as referred to by Rée, *Proletarian Philosophers*, p. 84 - 'Science and Labour' in

- Nature*, December 1924, where he called for the replacement of traditional politicians with 'scientific professionals' who would introduce scientific methods of government even if it required the discarding of certain 'democratic scruples'.
- ⁴⁴ Letter to Trotsky, 29 August 1929.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁶ Interestingly, he also retained his membership of the Fabians and continued to do so after he was publicly and formally a member of the CP: 'The Fabians let him continue because of his early association with them and the Party because of his useful contact with the Society' (D. Hyde, letter 8 June 1987).
- ⁴⁷ See M. Cornforth, 'A.L. Morton - Portrait of a Marxist Historian', in *Rebels and their Causes*.
- ⁴⁸ In fact Dobb joined the CP when he moved to London in 1922. First he was a member of the 'intellectuals branch' West Central and after this was disbanded an LPC in the working-class north London - Camden Town. On moving back to Cambridge he was a member of the small town Party Cell.
- ⁴⁹ In an article in the *Labour Monthly* in 1924 Dobb himself admitted that scholarship and research in the present universities (bourgeois institutions) would not benefit the working-class until after a successful socialist revolution. Later in the *Labour Monthly* in 1927 Dobb commented: 'We sorely need a real creative school of British Marxism - not a hole-in-the-corner affair, but a live body of critical, creative, first-rate minds who understand the present and are organically part of the active working-class movement'. Quoted by Macintyre, *A Proletarian Science: Marxism in Britain, 1917-1933*, pp. 233-34. As Macintyre remarks it is still an unrealised wish.
- ⁵⁰ See Macintyre, *op. cit.*, p. 170. '... only in later years were his talents more fully utilised in the party'.
- ⁵¹ Left/CP bookshops was an area a number of Party intellectuals went into in order to eke out a living.
- ⁵² Douglas Hyde, interview 2 February 1987.
- ⁵³ Dutt Papers, B.M. Cup 1262 k4.
- ⁵⁴ Dutt Papers, B.M. Cup 1262 k4. Letter to Fred Westacott 21 August 1956.
- ⁵⁵ See Branson's *History of the CPGB*, chapter 5, pp. 58-61.
- ⁵⁶ That contact was made with Indian students at Cambridge University in the early 1920s is attested to by an anti-Communist infiltrator who attended a CP meeting at Cambridge: 'I noticed that two Indian students stayed behind in earnest conversation with the Secretary of the "local". On other occasions when the "local" was honoured with the visit of a "leading comrade" from London such as Percy Glading or

Allison they always had a private session with him'. John Baker White, *It's Gone for Good*, p. 117. Via Glading they were put in touch with M.N. Roy in Berlin, the Comintern figure responsible for agitation in India.

- ⁵⁷ Another example would be J.T. Murphy, Central Committee and Political Bureau member who was the London correspondent of *Pravda*. It goes without saying that most 'full-time' Communists survived only on the most precarious of means and 'occupations'. To quote Douglas Hyde on early Party life: 'Thinking of those days of the travelling propagandists, he [T.A. Jackson -SRP] almost lived by selling his cheap pamphlets and on the pennies and halfpennies from collections. Reg Bishop ... travelled as a costermonger, setting up his market stall on market days around the country. He kept the fruity costers' voice, though the accent became modified, over the years ... Nell Collard who lived with Reg at one time, had nomadic origins: she was the child of water gypsies, spent her childhood on canal barges with her only permanent base a canal mooring in Paddington'. (D. Hyde, letter, 8 June 1987).
- ⁵⁸ See Pelling, *The British C.P. - A historical profile*, p. 43.
- ⁵⁹ e.g. Joan Beauchamp, first manager of the *Labour Monthly*, had been both a suffragette and later editor of *Tribunal* - the anti-conscription journal of conscientious objectors.
- ⁶⁰ The 1925 Party Congress reports an increase of female members from 300 to only 600 - see Susan Bruley's Ph.D., 'Socialism and Feminism in the C.P.G.B. 1920-1939', London 1980; see Chapter 3, 'Women's Sections: Progress and Retreat?'
- ⁶¹ See S. Macintyre, *Little Moscows*.
- ⁶² See Raphael Samuel's article, 'Sources of Marxist History', *New Left Review*, 120, March/April 1980, particularly p. 43 and fn. 135 on p. 52 where he draws attention to the strong Nonconformist backgrounds of many of the leading figures in the CP Historians Group. One of their number, Rodney Hilton, was brought up in Middleton where both his parents were ILP activists, and his father earned a living as general manager of the local Co-op. Rodney Hilton's grandfather had started off life as a handloom weaver and ended up as a machine minder and was actively involved in Lancashire radicalism - as a boy Rodney Hilton remembers a plaque on his grandparents' cottage which declared: 'Samuel Bamford was arrested here after the Peterloo Massacre'. Joining the CP in 1936 while at Oxford University Rodney Hilton, unlike many of those students from upper class backgrounds who joined, '... for me it was not a tearing away from family traditions, it was just ... a natural step'. Rodney Hilton, interview 14 December 1983. Several of the early CP members first became active in 'politics' by way of the National Secular Society. Pride in Chartist ancestors was not uncommon among Communists.
- ⁶³ As late as May 1937 it was reported, with much lamentation, that 40% of Glasgow Party membership were unemployed ('*It Can Be Done*', *Report of 14th Party Congress, May 29-31, 1937*, p. 165.) Interestingly, of the employed membership, Dutt in a 1932 article states that only a very small minority were employed in large-scale industry while a

'considerable proportion' were 'isolated workers in small trades and enterprises, semi-proletarian elements, etc'. R. Palme Dutt, 'Intellectuals and Communism', *Communist Review*, September 1932, p. 423.

⁶⁴ Letter 12 May 1987.

⁶⁵ Bearing in mind Dutt's comment on the 'proletarian' character of the CPGB he does, however, in the same article make clear that: '... the Party has hitherto been short of a useful proportion of professionally trained intellectual elements and the special assistance these can bring to the work, if they are able to become genuine revolutionaries, such as the other parties have been able to use'. *Intellectuals and Communism etc*, p. 423 (my emphasis).

CHAPTER 4

The 'Third Period'

Introduction - summary

With the defeat of the General Strike and the enactment of anti-trade union legislation in the shape of the Trades Union Disputes Act there set in a significant loss of confidence and strength among organised workers. The attempts by the TUC to create a more corporatist form of industrial relations through negotiations with large industrialists and the parallel moves to 'moderate' and discipline the Labour Party ensured that Communists were regarded with even greater anathema. At this time of retreat the Communist Party further isolated itself from the rest of the labour movement by following the 'left turn' taken by the Comintern. 'Social Fascism' became the official Comintern definition of social democracy and the British Party condemned Labour's leaders as being 'petty bourgeois' and betrayers of the working-class. The CP more than ever emphasised its proletarian character despite the fact that an increasing proportion of its rapidly declining membership were unemployed and there was an exceedingly small number of factory workers in the Party. As the economic slump worsened and affected black-coated workers and young people who had hoped to join the ranks of a profession a small number of them were politically radicalised. The debacle of the Labour Government, the split in the Labour Party and the growing prominence of Soviet Russia as a 'land of planning' untouched by economic crisis led a number of middle-class individuals to join the Party. CP membership began to pick up quite substantially in the latter months of 1931. It was at this time that abortive efforts were made by middle-class 'intellectuals' and professional people to form their own specialised Party sections. These developments were brought to an end by the CP leadership which maintained

that there should be no distinctions among Party members - all Communists should concentrate their political efforts at making contact with and working among workers. The first CP cells were established in universities (Cambridge) but the activities of student members were firmly directed to the outside world of industrial estates and factory gates.

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The 'Third Period' - 'Class Against Class'

The rise of Stalinism in the Soviet Union which firmly set the country on a course of autarchy with break-neck industrialisation and enforced collectivisation, inevitably had important consequences for Communists throughout the world. The Comintern, to which all Communist parties owed allegiance, reflected the changes in the USSR, and was utilised by the 'Stalinists' to discredit the 'right' Bukharinite opposition. As with the internal situation in the Soviet Union the Comintern adopted extreme confrontational 'leftist' policies. Thus the 'new line' as proclaimed from Moscow, was that the capitalist system in the advanced Western societies was entering a 'third period' of profound crises and revolutionary upheaval. Foreign Communist parties should thus strike out on a clear uncompromising revolutionary approach: this required the 'exposure' of social democracy as 'Social Fascism' and one of the chief props of capitalism. Co-operation with social democrats was to be ended and Communists were to create new 'revolutionary' trade unions to rival the existing 'reformist' ones. The essence of the 'new line' as expressed in the slogan 'class against class' was that in the Western capitalist countries there was a clear class division: a working-class facing a small capitalist class, two completely antagonistic classes - exploited and exploiters (there was no room in this schema for any of the subtleties

of class analysis or the recognition of intermediate classes or strata). Despite resistance from Bukharin and his supporters and the leaderships of various foreign CPs, much of the 'new line' was adopted by the Sixth Congress of the Communist International in 1928.

The adoption of the 'new line' by the CPGB has been covered in detail by among others, Brian Pearce, in his essay 'The Communist Party and the Labour Left 1925-1929', and more recently by Noreen Branson in her book, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain 1927-1941*. Both Page Arnot and Palme Dutt played important roles in overcoming indigenous resistance within the British Party and in particular among the established leadership. Palme Dutt kept up a constant correspondence with the Central Committee from his (sickness) convalescence in Brussels and provided Harry Pollitt with an 'alternative Thesis' to present to the CC, which argued the case for the 'new line' against the existing 'majority Thesis'. The 'alternative Thesis' claimed that the British working-class was becoming increasingly revolutionary, and it was the job of the Communist Party to fight against the official Labour Party leadership and in no way help it to attain parliamentary power. Instead, the CP had unambiguously to put itself forward as the political leadership of the working-class and this required standing the largest possible number of Communists at the next election and where there was no Communist candidate, only recommending a vote for Labour if the candidate supported the CP's 'united front' demands. Concomitant with this was the end of any CP attempt to affiliate to the Labour Party or the need to keep in existence any joint Communist/Labour Left venture (e.g. *The Sunday Worker* and the 'National Left Wing Movement') which were seen as merely encouraging illusions and acting as a barrier between the workers and the Communist Party. The 'alternative Thesis' only had minority support within the CPGB's Central Committee, and the issue was debated at the

Ninth Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist International in February 1928 in Moscow. It was Page Arnot who put the minority 'alternative Thesis' view, while Gallacher and Campbell argued the case of the majority. Given the drift of events in the Soviet Union and the World Communist Movement the minority was supported by the Comintern.¹ The situation only resolved itself with the appointment of Harry Pollitt as General Secretary of the Party in August 1929 (Comintern representations had been made that Pollitt should be brought into a full-time leadership position) and the major changes in the composition of the Central Committee wrought by the CP's 11th Congress at the end of 1929. Pollitt continued to submit to Dutt's advice and leadership on theoretical and ideological questions - a partnership which was to dominate the CPGB until 1956 (Dutt's predominance in the field of theory was strengthened by Rothstein's removal from the CC at the 11th Congress for 'right deviation'). Leading the way in applying the 'new line' in the British Party was the Young Communist League (true of the Communist Movement world wide). Commenting on this Henry Pelling has written:

The leading spirits of the YCL were for the most part ambitious young men of working-class origin who had never had any other political allegiance than that of international Communism. Among them were William Rust, Walter Tapsell and David Springhall - Londoners all, who owed their entire careers to the party and who were very different types from the Scottish artisans who had come into the party with the B.S.P. and S.L.P.²

An important aspect of the 11th Congress and the means by which a new Central Committee was constructed of 36 people (only a third being from the previous CC) was the institution of the 'panels system' of election. The 'panels system' meant that a complete Central Committee with all its members was proposed for election to be voted for or against (although there was the opportunity to make amendments; if someone different than the recommended 'list' was to be proposed it would also require the

proposer to name who was to be removed/replaced from the 'list'). A special nominations commission headed by Rust was elected by the 11th Congress for the purpose of drawing up a recommended 'list' for the CC. After this the real power for determining the proposed 'list' was the Political Bureau (the top leadership - a small group elected from the CC). The significance of this development was that it allowed the Party's leadership to maintain and increase its power over the CP as a whole - the appointment of full-time workers, and the making of policy etc (there were no major changes in the Party leadership again except for a period at the beginning of the Second World War which proved to be exceptional and short-lived).

Although the CPGB was condemned for its neglect of theory and political education by the Comintern's Agitation and Propaganda Department in 1925 and later criticised by the CI for the inadequacy of its 'training manual', belated moves were made by the Party towards a theoretical orthodoxy. This naturally was an orthodoxy that increasingly took its cues from the ruling circles of the Soviet Union which from the late 1920s was Stalin and his supporters. A central 'training school' was set up in London where those who were 'trained' in turn went out and took classes in the various Party districts. The British Party started sending selected members, those it deemed would play leading roles in the CP, to the Lenin School from 1926.³ Those who went to the School in Moscow were mainly from industrial backgrounds with an experience in militant trade unionism. There were, however, several of the Party's middle-class recruits who were enrolled at the School: the first pupil to enrol was in fact Page Arnot's wife, Olive. With a grammar school and university education and from a family of bishops, school teachers, and professional soldiers, she came to the Communist Party by route of the Fabian Research Bureau (later to be named the LRD). Allen Hutt was another of those early middle-class

Communists chosen to go to the Lenin School. He was the son of the manager of Dickenson's paper works at Apsley, Hertfordshire.⁴ On Hutt's sojourn in Moscow, the self-admittedly partisan 'founding British Trotskyist'⁵ Reg Groves wrote that from a 'lively and able critic' before he went: '... Hutt's critical faculty atrophied rapidly, and he was to serve the Stalinized party faithfully through all the policy changes, through all the Stalin-worship, party purges, imprisonments, trials and executions'.⁶ However, at the height of the 'class against class' period there was no time for any theoretical 'introspection'; instead what was required was ceaseless activity and agitation to give the workers the political leadership they were supposedly seeking. The Glasgow Communist and Central Committee member Helen Crawford writing to the Party's newspaper, *Workers Life*, in 1928 declared that what was needed was '... fewer theoretical articles and more facts regarding the wholesale robbery of the workers that is going on'.⁷ A Wigan Party member writing to the same paper in the same year saw things somewhat differently; bemoaning the drastic loss of members which he felt was directly attributable to the 'political lifelessness' of Party life he wrote:

When an attempt is made to raise a discussion on the politics of the task in hand this is discouraged on the grounds of lack of time, or that it is action we need, not talk. The "practical" chairman of the L.P.C. [Local Party Committee] is intolerant of "talkers". It smacks of intellectualism. What are needed are workers ... The test of Communist competence becomes chalking pavements and selling the party organ.⁸

A.L. Morton, describing his 're-entry' into active political life as a Party member in 1928-29 states:

In general, intellectuals had a rather hard time of it. We were a very proletarian party in those days, and as an intellectual you kept a pretty low profile for a long time until you had been accepted. I remember that myself, when I came in at the end of the '20s. I had

to spend a long time talking in the streets and carrying the platform and doing all the menial tasks - not that I minded, I expected to do this.⁹

The Soviet Union was a 'Workers State' which it was the duty of all Communists to defend (it was only after the first Five Year Plan, as initiated in 1928-29, was under way that in the title of Louis Segal's 1933 book the USSR became Modern Russia - the Land of Planning).¹¹ In Britain Labour Party leaders were described by the CP as being petty-bourgeois and a desperate attempt was made to transform the basis of Party organisation so that priority was given to Factory Cells. Local Party Committees were given instructions to register all members according to their place of work and form a factory cell where there were three or more members employed in the same establishment. For those factories with less than three members the LPC should gather them together in Concentration Cells. Members who were unemployed, housewives or professional workers should be attached to these Cells in a subsidiary role.¹² To safeguard the 'proletarian' character of the Party the LPC in Plymouth went as far as requiring those who wished to join to submit a genealogical tree to prove they were of 'good' working class stock.¹³

It was in this period that Ivor Montagu began his correspondence with Trotsky offering his help in Trotsky's attempt to seek refuge in Britain and in return hoping for some political advice from the great revolutionary as to the 'way forward'. Montagu stated that a mere ten per cent of his time was spent in direct political activity '... not because I luxuriously grudge the 90 per cent balance - but because I cannot clearly see a useful path in England of the present day' (letter 29 August 1929). Interestingly, he cites J.B.S. Haldane, a biochemist and later in the mid-thirties closely associated with the CP (officially joining in May 1942), as an example of an intellectual who would be naturally drawn towards Marxism but in the current situation played no part whatsoever in

Left politics. Montagu's despondency was not only due to the absence of Marxism, in any meaningful sense, from Britain and the shattering of the CP's influence on the working class '... for years to come by the policies and tactics imposed upon it by a majority in the Comintern quite out of touch with the real situation in England'.¹⁴ It was also due to what he saw as the anti-theoretical and empirical nature of English society and politics. As for the working-class, to Montagu revolutionary or even militant class consciousness among workers was prevented by the 'drugging' effects of: cinema, football, and horse-race betting. A similar argument was made by Freda Utley, London University graduate from a radical Manchester family, who had joined the CP in late 1927 after an inspiring visit to the Soviet Union. Reviewing a volume of Lenin's writings from the Iskra period (which included *What is to be Done* - the first time it had been made available to an English audience) in the May 1930 edition of *Communist Review*, Freda Utley used it as an occasion to attack the CPGB for neglecting theory and not giving intellectuals in the Party their due importance. To quote Utley on this incident from her autobiography:

Although my article was buttressed by quotations from Lenin, I was told by my Communist superiors that I had deviated seriously from the Party line by maintaining that theory was of primary importance and that the intellectual, accordingly, need not play at being a proletarian, since he had an important part to perform in bringing knowledge of Socialism to the working class. I was not directly accused of Trotskyism, but I was held to be slightly tainted with heresy.¹⁵

However, subsequently the Party's leadership was to go some of the way towards agreeing with Utley's criticisms: the Political Bureau agreed that the CP was guilty of the general British complaint of neglect of theory.¹⁶

Notwithstanding the virulent 'proletarianism' of the CP during the 'Class against Class' period it would be wrong to claim there were no

middle-class recruits to the Party at that time,¹⁷ and although small in number several of them were to play prominent roles in the CP in the succeeding years, e.g. Alex Tudor-Hart (medical practitioner) joined in 1929, his sister, Cambridge graduate and educationalist Beatrix Tudor-Hart, joined then or shortly before; Bill (Gabriel) Carritt, son of the Oxford philosophy don, became a CP member in 1931 (his five brothers and mother all subsequently joined); Cambridge University students David Haden-Guest and Maurice Cornforth (postgraduate) were both members of the Party from 1931. As has been detailed in an ever expanding number of books, products of the 'spy industry', a decision was made in June 1931 to start a Party cell in Cambridge University which was initially composed of four dons and six students (by 1932 the cell had 25 members). But it was not just at Cambridge that there were 'radical stirrings'. At Bristol University a 'brilliant' German who was on exchange in 1931 had a particular impact on a group of physicists. Some were already sympathetically inclined towards Marxism, but 'the German suggested it was more than a philosophic exercise or an interesting academic explanation of economic crisis'.¹⁸ A 'Left discussion group' was started, made up of members of staff, students and one or two clergy and it was through involvement in this body that CP member Angela Tuckett '... organised some of the students into a special branch, where we did do things',¹⁹ e.g. political work outside the University such as helping the NUWM. As regards the socially less exclusive group of school teachers the number of Communists rose from 103 in 1930 to 162 in 1931.²⁰

The flow of non-proletarians into the Party increased in the next few years as the 'class against class' policies were moderated in various ways (most obviously over the attitude to be taken to trade unions), and the Soviet Union's attitude towards professional and intellectual workers became more positive.²¹ Soviet leaders also became more concerned to

attain some influence in the professional circles of the outside world as is most clearly shown in the sending of a delegation headed by Bukharin to the Second International Congress of the History of Science and Technology in London in the early summer of 1931. The impact of the Soviet intervention at this Congress, with the overnight collation and publication of the papers presented by the Russians in book form, was to make a significant impression on a number of leftwing inclined scientists.²² A more placatory attitude was taken to some of the sympathetic cultural figures of the West, as for example the French writer Romain Rolland. At the start of 1932 in the *Labour Monthly* Rolland replied to criticisms from two Soviet novelists who had stated their alarm at his declaration of 'love for humanity' and description of himself as an individualist. Together with Rolland's reply was a piece by the former Commissar of Education Lunacharsky where he claimed he was nearer to Rolland's point of view than that of his two fellow Russians. Lunacharsky declared that the 'individuality of the intelligentsia' was not merely 'bourgeois individuality but also a creative property, '... an individuality that spends itself in perfecting its own being'. An intellectual who refused to serve 'bourgeois idols' may take time to realise

there exists a society that will support him in his convictions, a society in which he will have a chance to develop, namely, the revolutionary proletariat. But in the beginning he will suffer from a deep feeling of loneliness. He will come to the conclusion that outside of this society there are many other spheres, some good and some bad, in which he can spend himself, but the essential thing is that at last he is developing his true individuality. This culmination, which calls for sacrifice, brings him to the summit of his self-esteem.²³

However, wider social, economic, and political developments must be taken into account in explaining any broadening of the class make up of

the Communist Party. On the basis of the Census returns there was an increase in the proportion of middle-class people in the period 1921-1931 from 27.6% to 29.1% of the total occupied population. As a category middle-class includes factory managers, self-employed businessmen, professional people, office and clerical employees. Within this very divergent mixture there were fundamental changes taking place, the most important of which was that from the First World War there had been a massive growth in black-coated workers and employee status among the middle-class (by the early 1930s 25% of the occupied population were salary earners). There had also been a development of white-collar trade unions so that by 1925 there were over 20 TUC affiliated white-collar unions making up five per cent of the total membership. The economic crisis, that was accurately predicted by Comintern and Soviet theorists, which began with the Wall Street Crash of 1929 had a deep impact on the British economy leading to a massive rise in unemployment and subsequent poverty. The waves of the crisis spread out, affecting not only traditional manual workers but white collar workers, lower professional and even some higher professional groups. School teachers, civil servants, and those in the armed services all faced a ten per cent cut in pay in 1931, and there was a good deal of resistance and unrest among these groups. A rather good description of the predicament faced, at the end of the 1920s, by the academic intelligentsia ('a product of a sub-group of the upper middle-class') is given by Michael Carritt in his memoirs, to quote:

A public school and Oxbridge education was still important in the job queue but by 1928, when I had to start looking for a job and a career, it was becoming obvious that the long tradition of classical studies, in which my father placed all his trust, simply did not equip one for a career that satisfied our inflated expectations.

Like many of my contemporaries I felt cheated of my inheritance. The senior professions were "out" because they entailed many more expensive years of study and examination; my degree was not enough to allow me to burrow back into the womb of university teaching or research; I had no leanings towards the Church ... I shuddered at the thought of having to leap into the safety net of school-teaching ... many, if not most, of my contemporaries found their way into pedagogy.²⁴

Of course the great majority of the middle-class remained wedded to the status quo and many who suffered financial and social setbacks in this period probably adopted positions of cynicism rather than of radicalism. However, a small number of the socially aware middle-class started to become more receptive towards Communism. In particular the debacle of the second Labour government seemed to indicate the hopelessness of ever achieving socialism through the Labour Party. An example from this group would be one of the earliest architects to be a member of the Communist Party, Vivian Nash, who as a socialist (the son of a Welsh taxicab owner, he had been attracted towards pacifism and later influenced by the General Strike) had gone to work for the Co-op's architects department and joined the Labour Party. Here at the CWS architects department was probably the only architect in the Party W.L. Vinycomb:

It was when the National Government was formed and Ramsay MacDonald sold out the Labour party, I was Labour Party until then, you see. He [Vinycomb -SRP] came and said, "what do you think about it?" I said, well, I thought it was just dreadful and after a while he said, "well, would you like to join the Party?" and that was how I got into the swim.²⁵

Stirrings among the 'Intellectual Workers'

1931 saw a great deal of intellectual introspection and 'soul searching' in the wake of the debacle of the Labour government and Ramsey MacDonald's 'desertion'. Two overlapping bodies were formed, largely composed of middle-class Labour intellectuals (and for the most part initiated by G.D.H. Cole): the New Fabian Research Bureau and the Society for

Socialist Inquiry and Propaganda. Interestingly, the two Labour intellectuals G.D.H. Cole and E.N. Brailsford, both utilised Lenin's *What is to be Done?* for their argument that 'bourgeois intellectuals' had an essential role to play in the Labour Party - they provided the resolute 'socialist consciousness', and it was because they had not been accorded their due status in the Labour Party that the '1931 debacle' had taken place. Thus in this respect their views echo the previously quoted sentiments of Freda Utley and Ivor Montagu.²⁶ Cole, along with two other leading Labour Party intellectuals, Hamilton Fyfe and Frank Wise, also adopted a more positive attitude to work with the Communist Party (as evidenced by a declaration in 1932 in favour of a united front with Communists), an approach which was at this time brusquely brushed aside by the CP.

It was also in this period that John Strachey broke with the Labour Party, at first leaving the Parliamentary Labour Party with his mentor Sir Oswald Mosely to form the New Party, quickly parting company with it as its fascist tendencies began to emerge, and then moving towards the Communist Party. By August 1931 he was condemning social democracy as the worst enemy of the workers, and the following month he declared in print that the only choice that faced Britain was Communism or Fascism. Soon Strachey was both meeting and in prolonged correspondence with Palme Dutt, showing him the draft of his book *The Coming Struggle for Power* for comments and suggested revisions. Strachey's first signed article in the *Daily Worker* appeared in June 1932 and a short time afterwards he and his wife even became temporarily literary editors of the *Daily Worker*. However, Strachey was in a quandary over joining the Communist Party, for although he was in increasing theoretical agreement with Communism he felt, as he wrote to Dutt in December 1931: 'If one seeks to join the Party, there is so much valuable work which immediately becomes

impossible. On the other hand it may be that this is merely a fact which must be faced'.²⁷ Dutt's reply included the following passage (echoed later by Mirsky in his *The Intelligentsia of Great Britain*, published in 1935, pp. 231-234):

May I say one thing which may sound harsh, but it is only meant to assist your own thinking? It is one thing to reach a certain intellectual agreement with the correctness of the Communist analysis, as demonstrated by events. It is another thing to reach real revolutionary consciousness, so that the question of entering into the revolutionary movement no longer appears as a question of making sacrifices, losing valuable opportunities of work etc., but on the contrary as the only possible basis of work and realisation.²⁸

Encouraged by Pollitt he applied officially for membership of the Communist Party but was initially turned down by Dutt and other CP leaders, presumably because they were uncertain that Strachey's ideological wanderings had come to an end. Despite the fact that Strachey's attachment to Communism became even stronger he was always regarded by orthodox Party figures as retaining various 'heretical attitudes', as for example his attachment to psychoanalysis (he had his own analyst) and Freud. However, the significant thing was that Strachey remained in close contact with the CP leadership, submitting the drafts of his books to Dutt and Emile Burns for 'corrections', writing pamphlets to aid the immediate CP 'line' and sending his latest thoughts and proposals for activities to be undertaken by the CP to King Street. From the latter part of 1931 until 1940 Strachey, in the words of David Caute, '... should be regarded as a Communist who never joined',²⁹ a situation which would have been inconceivable a short time before.³⁰ Strachey's position as a non-Party 'Communist' suited the CP - his well-written Marxist expositions reached a wider audience than a self-declared CP author/book could. The reported comment on *The Coming Struggle for Power* by Dutt was that he '...

returned it with the remark that it was not really a Communist book at all, but a roughly Marxian analysis which would serve a useful purpose in Britain in the thirties'.³¹ Unlike those earlier middle-class individuals who had entered the Communist Party as self-declared members Strachey suffered no great social ostracism or great change in ^{his} circumstances. He continued to maintain his friendship with the Tory MP Boothby and

became quite conventional in some respects while he was a communist: whereas before he had settled down with Celia he had lived in a Bohemian style, he was now a householder, the earner of money and royalties, and a father. He might have welcomed the hunger marchers as they passed through Essex, but he continued to be an owner of stocks and shares, while he was writing of the decadence of capitalism, and later put his son down for Eton.³²

One of the advantages of Strachey's wealth (he received sizeable yearly returns from his shares in the *Spectator* and the family estate at Newlands Corner) was not only that he had freedom of activity in his political work but he could provide financial help to leading CP members when they were in difficult circumstances; in 1933 he gave money to Dutt when his wife was ill, likewise he helped out Pollitt when his son was ill.

In mid-1931 the CPGB's leadership was informed of a proposal to start a theoretical journal which would have a 'line', 'at first only materialist' with 'development towards Marxism'.³³ Those behind the scheme seem to have been for the main part non-Party middle-class intellectuals (the proposed editor and editorial board were all to be non-Party); however, the CP was approached to assume a degree of responsibility and control of the journal. Specifically it was suggested that questions of the 'political line' and contributors 'from the political standpoint' should be referred to Palme Dutt for resolution. Dutt refused to take on such a responsibility commenting that such an envisaged division between 'political' and 'theoretical' was completely

unMarxist, and moreover, 'the names given afford no confidence of competence to handle questions from the dialectical materialist standpoint - but very much the opposite especially in relation to the "psychological" origin of the group'.³⁴ In his memorandum to the Political Bureau Palme Dutt proposed that the Party be friendly towards the new venture but not give direct support, and drew attention to the 'danger of this type of journal' by referring to the American *Modern Quarterly* which he felt may have inspired the proposers of the new journal. To quote Dutt, the American journal openly espoused

an editorial line of "Leninism" and "dialectical materialism", and is to that extent far closer in appearance to us than this journal would be; yet in fact it has given considerable difficulties to the American Party by its ideological confusion being paraded and widely accepted among the intellectuals as the expression of the communist outlook, and has necessitated very sharp criticism of its whole tendency and character and direct disdaining from the Party.³⁵

During the first half of 1932 there was a flurry of activity among a number of middle-class Communists³⁶ aimed at organising 'intellectuals' within the Communist Party. Among those involved were the academic, Maurice Dobb, Dr. Alex Tudor Hart and the Russian language and literature lecturer at London University, Dmitri Mirsky³⁷ (a former Russian aristocrat and supporter of the 'Whites' he had come to be a defender and advocate of Soviet Russia). A series of discussions took place and a scheme was devised for the establishment of a 'Society [or Section] of Intellectual Workers' with elaborate arrangements for a '... constitution, with Sub-Sections of Marxist Biologists, Marxist Physicists, Marxist Historians, and even "Biological Press Committees" and what not, all laboriously prepared ...'.³⁸ As part of these efforts an 'Organising Committee' was elected, minutes were taken of meetings and participants were circularised with various memoranda. Those involved in these

developments were inspired by developments in the Soviet Union where Societies of Marxist Physicists, Historians and other groups had been formed (and dating back earlier the 'Institute of Red Professors'). The emergence of the philosophical construction Dialectical Materialism from the Soviet Union after 1930³⁹ also encouraged theoretical debate amongst Communists with an academic background. After several months the Secretariat of the Party (administrative body of the leadership) officially replied to moves to form a 'Section/Society of Intellectual Workers' with a firm rejection of the scheme.⁴⁰ The Secretariat declared that moves to form such a body would isolate intellectuals within the Party and encourage them to see their main sphere of work as dealing with professional ideological questions in their particular fields. In order to clarify the whole issue to the Party at large Palme Dutt was given responsibility to write an article on 'Intellectuals and Communism' in the CP's theoretical monthly *Communist Review* (September 1932). This article set out to be the definitive declaration on 'intellectuals' in the CP: 'he [the middle-class professional or 'intellectual' -SRP] should forget that he is an intellectual (except in moments of necessary self-criticism) and remember only that he is a Communist, and begin to act and work and behave as a Communist in all his activity, like any other party member'.⁴¹ Although some may claim that they had no contact with workers, according to Dutt 'good Party members' will always find opportunities to become involved with the working-class. By being an active and 'full' participant in his/her Party local the middle-class member would not only meet working-class Communists but should also via the Party local meet non-Party workers. The greater ability at self-expression and the wider knowledge of many things by CP 'intellectuals'

does not, of course, in itself fit them for leadership or make them more competent to judge the line than a Communist worker; on the contrary, it involves many dangers, and may easily lead them astray. But it means that they should be able to enrich in a hundred ways the Party propaganda and strengthen its presentation; and if they fail to do this they are not making their contribution.⁴²

Lastly, only after the 'intellectual' is a 'full member' in the real sense and is not carrying out Party work as 'conscience tasks' can they begin to carry out theoretical and ideological work. Moreover, rather than become involved in arguing around the latest 'intellectual fashion' they should concentrate on fighting non-Party Marxism (ILP, Plebs, MacMurray etc) and dealing with specific issues or problems. Jonathan Rée's comment on the Dutt article was that it represented something of a 'Bill of Rights' for intellectuals in the Party as:

It meant that joining the party need not interfere with intellectual and literary projects, nor indeed with academic or scientific careers - except that Party work might leave no time for reading and thinking. In the Communist Party's view, joining the party and being a Marxist intellectual were disparate activities, occasionally pursued by the same individual, but normally not.⁴³

This is something of an exaggeration, as published material by CP members was often open to Party criticism - this is clearly the case with Dobb whose 'academic' books in the 1920s and 1930s were subjected to harsh criticisms. An attempt by Dobb to defend his 1932 book, *Marxism Today* in the *Daily Worker* brought forth the following response from Dutt: '... his [Dobb's] defence that his book is "addressed to ... a petit-bourgeois audience". This is no defence for distorting Marxism, in order to meet a special audience, nor is it a defence for adopting the false conception of that audience'.⁴⁴ Dutt concluded his onslaught by pointing out that Dobb's failure to mention either the Communist International or the CPGB as indicative of the 'opportunist approach' of the book. The attitude to

Dobb, a full/open Party member, was much more critical and reproachful than dealings with 'intellectual fellow-travellers' like Strachey. However, as a rule those CP members who were in professional occupations were encouraged to centre their political efforts on making contact with the working-class. Thus, although a Communist cell was formed at Cambridge University in the summer of 1931, its members conducted most of their work 'in the town' throughout 1931-32 and only began to carry out sustained work within the University and among fellow students from 1933.⁴⁵ Little thought had been given to how Communists within the professions should conduct themselves⁴⁶ - middle-class Communists in the 1920s had thrown themselves into full-time jobs within or around the Party and those who could not (there was obviously a limited number of such jobs with very small remuneration) did not become Party members. This was the case with V.G. Childe, who, after failing to get paid employment with the Labour Research Department, chose the path of academic achievement. The 'non-proletarian' converts to Communism in the late 1920s and early '30s often devised their own approach to their professional situation (some while they were Labour Party or ILP members). Two early physician members of the CP chose to work in working-class areas of London: Dr. C.K. Cullen, prominent figure in the ILP Revolutionary Policy Committee, and strictly speaking an official CP member only from 1935, was an East London medical officer, while Dr. Alexander Tudor Hart worked in general practice in Brixton.⁴⁷ Among Communists who were scientists Hyman Levy⁴⁸ is unique in that early on he combined his work as a scientist with an active political role - initially as a Labour Party member and from 1930 as a CP member. To quote Werskey:

in his attempts to unionise scientific workers and popularise scientific socialism, Levy was once again well in advance of the strategies favoured not only by the C.P.G.B. but by his Cambridge allies as well.⁴⁹

After a year's fellowship at Columbia University, where he joined the CPUSA - involved with fellow Columbia students in transporting food and clothes to striking Kentucky miners - Bill (Gabriel) Carritt returned to England in 1932. He transferred his membership to the British Party and took up a post with the Workers Education Association in Yorkshire. Speaking of his time in the CP in the early 1930s Carritt gives a good example of the 'workerist' attitude that was strong at that time among recent middle-class recruits:

I was absolutely on my own, I formed a branch of railway workers in York where there was a big rail depot, there were five members. At that time I think I was anti-intellectual because the Party was anti-intellectual really then a bit ... It [CPGB] had not really thought about the fact that some of the most important Communists were intellectuals like Emile Burns, R.P. Dutt and these sort of people, but they were very much afraid of intellectuals as being unreliable, as being rather stand-offish and distant in their work. Anyway, I tried as hard as I could to be a worker and that is why I called myself Bill instead of Gabriel which is my real name as I thought it was such an impossible name for my workers and work mates to call me ...⁵⁰

Footnotes

- ¹ The adoption of 'class against class' policies was not merely due to Comintern imposition. As both Branson in her history of the CP and A.L. Morton in a review of the said book (*Our History Journal*, no. 10, November 1985, pp. 2-4) make plain there was considerable indigenous support in the Party for sweeping away the old leadership, breaking off relations with the 'discredited' Labour and TU (both of the 'Right' and 'Left') and charting an independent course of activity. J.T. Murphy in his autobiography *New Horizons* points out the strong attraction for Communists of acrimonious inner-party conflict and periodic 'purging' (i.e. expulsions) of fellow members. To quote Murphy: 'The smaller the Party became the more we consoled ourselves with the "quality" that remained'. (*New Horizons*, p. 182).
- ² H. Pelling, *The British Communist Party - A Historical Profile*, p. 50.
- ³ See my chapter 2, 'The Dilemmas of the Left and Professionalism' for the importance of the Lenin School.
- ⁴ Information from D. Hyde, letter 12 May 1987.
- ⁵ British Trotskyism as it developed as the 'British Section of the Left Opposition' within the CPGB was exceedingly small, encompassing less than a dozen Communists grouped together in London (known as the 'Balham Group'). The 'Balham Group' was thoroughly working-class. Unlike other European CPs there were no middle-class intellectuals who broke with the Party in support of Trotsky. Although, as indicated by Montagu's letter to Trotsky (part of a much greater correspondence which until recently remained unknown), at least one middle-class Communist was, for a short time, receptive and supportive towards Trotsky. Commenting in retrospect on the Montagu-Trotsky letter of 29 August 1929 Douglas Hyde points out that in 1929 Trotsky was still not 'beyond the pale' in the British Party (his book *Where is Britain Going?* was published by the CPGB in 1925 and Hyde thinks the Party was selling it as late as 1928-29).
- ⁶ R. Groves, *The Balham Group*, p. 19.
- ⁷ Quoted by Macintyre, *A Proletarian Science*, p. 97.
- ⁸ As quoted by H. Dewar, *Communist Politics in Britain; The CPGB From its Origins to the Second World War*, p. 90.
- ⁹ A.L. Morton, 'The 1930s', *Bulletin Marx Memorial Library* no. 106, Spring 1985.
- ¹⁰ See the section on Stalinism and 'Proletkult' in my chapter 2 and for a wider perspective see R. Samuel's 'Enter the Proletarian Giant' in *New Socialist*, no. 29, July/August 1985.
- ¹¹ *The Programme of the Communist International* (first published in 1929 and the basic theoretical/political document on which all CPs operated) makes no mention of any special role for Communist artists, scientists, writers or any other professional in the political struggle. In a section on 'The Period of Transition' there is a

small part which deals with the 'cultural revolution', but it makes it apparent that the scientific and cultural forces in a socialist society would be drawn solely from the proletariat: 'The role of organiser of the new human society presupposes that the proletariat itself will become culturally mature, that it will transform its own nature, that it will continually promote from its ranks increasing numbers of men and women capable of mastering science, technique and administration in order to build up socialism and a new socialist culture'. (*The Programme of the Communist International*, 1932 edition).

- ¹² The term petty bourgeois (petty, which could also mean narrow-minded and unimportant in the dictionary sense, seems to have been used much more than petit) was often used as an expression of abuse. For example as late as 1935 a CP pamphlet could declare: 'The leading part in the formation of the Labour Party was played by the I.L.P., the leadership of which was typically petty bourgeois and the Fabian Society which was completely petty bourgeois ... All the eloquence of the petty bourgeois intellectuals was directed towards persuading the unions to follow their "easy way out"'. (*The Party and the Workers*, pp. 9-10). See footnote by Branson, p. 205, *History of the CPGB 1927-1941* who points out that the term petty bourgeois was dropped (a bit of an exaggeration) by the Party in the second half of the 1930s.
- ¹³ See the Party's 1930 pamphlet, *Building the Party in the Factories*, with the catch phrase quote of Lenin on the front page: 'Every factory must be our fortress').
- ¹⁴ Source - Roy Turner, interview 7 March 1984.
- ¹⁵ I. Montagu, letter to Trotsky, 29 August 1929.
- ¹⁶ F. Utley, *Lost Illusion*, p. 34.
- ¹⁷ Middle-class figures who joined the CP in the mid-twenties prior to the 'Third Period' include: Tom Driberg (1924 - Brighton CP, last year at his public school just before he went to Oxford), A.J.P. Taylor (1925 - Oxford University, a member for only a short period), C.G.T. Giles (1926 - Etonian who went into teaching, life-long member who became a well-known figure on the Party's Executive Committee), Kay Beauchamp (1924).
- ¹⁸ See Neal Wood's *Communism and British Intellectuals*, pp. 168-171 for a full account of Utley's article and the various responses it induced.
- ¹⁹ Angela Tuckett, 'Cecil Powell' account of CP scientist done for John Saville - *Dictionary of Labour Biography*.
- ²⁰ Angela Tuckett (Gradwell), letter 12 December 1988.
- ²¹ Giles Papers. See chapter on 'Communist Schoolteachers'.
- ²² See Chapter 2.
- ²³ See G. Werskey, *The Visible College*, pp. 138-149, 'A Russian Roadshow'.

- 24 A. Lunacharsky, 'Freedom and Communism', *The Labour Monthly*, January 1932, p. 50.
- 25 M. Carritt, *A Mole in the Crown*, pp. 8-9.
- 26 Vivian Nash, interview 8 May 1985.
- 27 See Robert Dare, 'Instinct and Organisation: Intellectuals and British Labour after 1931', *Historical Journal*, 26, 3 (1983), pp. 677-97.
- 28 Quoted by Hugh Thomas, *John Strachey*, p. 114.
- 29 Dutt papers and also quoted by Thomas, *ibid.*, p. 123.
- 30 D. Caute, *The Fellow-Travelers*, p. 163.
- 31 The CP always had Labour Party 'friends', including some non-proletarian figures - even an ex-diplomat and second son of the third Earl of Bradford (Reginald F.O. Bridgeman, who although never a Party card holder was extremely important in CP anti-colonial/imperialist work - see entry for Bridgeman in *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, vol. VII). The distinction with Strachey was that the Party was prepared not only to accept but to project him as a 'non-Party Marxist'.
- 32 Kingsley Martin, *Editor*, p. 70.
- 33 H. Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 145.
- 34 It is likely that the magazine/journal referred to was *The Twentieth Century*, edited by Middleton Murry and later by Richard Rees. It claimed to be the organ of the 'Promethean Society' and it printed contributions from, among others, Dobb, A.L. Morton, Pat Sloan, and Emile Burns. See Brian Pearce's interesting comment on 'The establishment of Marx House' in *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, no. 16, Spring 1968, pp. 20-22 for a particular interpretation of these events.
- 35 Dutt papers, memo to Political Bureau 22 July 1931.
- 36 *Ibid.*
- 37 CPGB membership rose significantly from 1930:
- | | |
|----------------|-------|
| November 1930 | 2,555 |
| (all time low) | |
| June 1931 | 2,724 |
| November 1931 | 6,279 |
| January 1932 | 9,000 |
| November 1932 | 5,600 |
- The rise in recruitment to the Party was noted by the *Daily Worker* in the December of 1931 (see *Our History* no. 5, Spring 1957 - 'Labour - Communist Relations 1920-39', p. 29). The activities of the National Unemployed Workers Movement helped bring in new members into the Party but this period also saw the growing interest in the Soviet Union, 'Land of the Five Year Plan', and the initiation of the 'Anti-War Movement' with a World Conference called by 'intellectuals' (Gorki, Barbusse, Rolland etc) in August 1932.

- 38 Mirsky was influential in winning over a number of middle-class recruits to the CP in the early 1930s. To quote from the memoir *David Guest: A Scientist Fights for Freedom*, edited by Carmel Haden Guest, '... Mirsky's courageous stand - his book on Lenin was published shortly after the formation of the first student groups - and the sensation it caused among the intellectuals brought a formidable reinforcement to our struggle'. (Ch. VIII, 'The growth of the student movement', M.Y. Lang, p. 90).
- 39 R.P. Dutt, 'Intellectuals and Communism', *Communist Review*, September 1932, p. 425.
- 40 First relayed to Britain at the end of 1931 by Mirsky in an article in *Labour Monthly* - see J. Rée, *Proletarian Philosophers - Problems in Socialist Culture in Britain, 1900-1940*, pp. 71-72.
- 41 See Dutt papers - memo of 7 August 1932, signed by Dutt and B. Williams.
- 42 'Intellectuals and Communism', *Communist Review*, September 1932, p. 428.
- 43 *Ibid.*, p. 429.
- 44 J. Rée, *op. cit.*, p. 90.
- 45 Dutt papers - 3 foolscap sides sent to *Daily Worker*, 10 July 1932.
- 46 See P. Sloan (ed), *John Cornford - A Memoir*.
- 47 One 'bourgeois profession' in which the Party took an early interest for the sake of self-preservation was the legal profession. From its inception the CP was subjected to constant Special Branch harassment and a fair amount of legal repression. Numerous cases of breach of the peace, sedition, and incitement to mutiny were brought against various Communists. Oxford graduate and leading Communist journalist Tom Wintringham attempted to study for the Bar so he could provide some legal expertise to 'The Cause' but had to give it up following his conviction for incitement to mutiny with eleven leading Communists in 1925. The *Daily Worker* required a constant source of legal advice - and in fact the paper had its own lawyer/solicitor W.H. Thompson. Ingenious procedures were established in order to protect the paper: '... in those early days of the *Daily Worker's* life we, for very good reasons, followed the practice of having "prison" news editors, managers and others because we had so many libel writs and other legal proceedings taken against us. Frank Patterson went to jail as the *D.W.'s* "Publisher" and, I think, it was in that capacity that Bill Sheppard did time. We then ... took to ensuring that those given that sort of role should make over such few possessions as they had to their spouse or some other appropriate comrade'. (Douglas Hyde, letter 12 May 1987).

There has been a long tradition of radical lawyers, and in the 1920s they took to defending Communists. In 1930 the 'Haldane Society' was formed, composed of lawyers and barristers, with the aim of defending and supporting the interests of the Labour Movement. Despite informal and later more formal links with the Labour Party,

the Society included both Labour and CP members and 'fellow-travellers' (e.g. Cripps, Pritt, Collard, Bill Sedley, Jack Gaster). Society members were involved in defending Communists in court and helping with legal matters in or around the Party (as some had pre the Society's formation, e.g. Cripps, Pritt et al.) as well as dealing with more profitable cases. Pritt's practice suffered as a result of his public support of the CP's anti-war line, and his income is said to have fallen from £20,000 to £2,000 per annum. (See N. Blake and H. Rajak, *Wigs and Workers - A History of the Haldane Society of Socialist Lawyers 1930-1980*, p. 12).

- 48 Later after medical service in Spain for the Republic he set up practice in South Wales.
- 49 Of those other early CP scientists one, B. Woolf, nicknamed 'Woggy' (misspelt Wolfe by many of the 'spy books' which tend to feed off one another and as a result reproduce mistakes), of working-class origin, and one of the founding members of the CP cell at Cambridge University, moved away from scientific work in the early 1930s to concentrate on political work. In the 1920s he was at work in the Dunn Laboratory and, by the mid-thirties he was a lyricist for a period for the Unity Theatre. This has parallels with Ivor Montagu. However, another Communist of much greater scientific repute, J.D. Bernal, is said to have left (or let his Party card lapse) in 1932-33. It is not known how much this decision was planned and discussed with the CP leadership, but he certainly remained throughout his life extremely close to the Party (in fact so close that in an obituary Joseph Needham speaks of him as a 'lifetime member of the Communist Party', *Marxism Today*, March 1972, p. 71). Unfortunately, the biography of Bernal by Maurice Goldsmith, *Sage*, throws little light on this aspect of his life. The likelihood is that both the Party and Bernal recognised that as a scientist of international standing (something which was apparent from early on) he would be able to operate to greater effect as a non-Party pro-Soviet 'man of science' (see Werskey, pp. 166-67). Certainly Bernal was circumspect about his early C.P. membership - ensuring that his articles for *Labour Monthly* were anonymous, and if one book is to be believed, at Cambridge University in 1931: 'He gave his blessing to the cell but, preferring not to be actively associated with student Communism, did not become a member'. (P. Seale and M. McConville, *Philby: the long road to Moscow*, p. 52).
- 50 G. Werskey, op. cit., p. 166.

CHAPTER 5

The Years 1931-1935 - Prelude to Popular Frontism

Introduction - summary

During the first years of the 1930s there was a notable rise in the fear of war among a sizeable body of British people. Pacifist agitation was an important area of radical middle-class activity and in 1932, responding to internationally Soviet-inspired moves to create a broad anti-war movement, the British Anti-War Movement was formed. This, as with the Party led anti-imperialist work, became an arena where middle-class Communists could be politically active and help draw a wider social mix into the Party. The earliest stirrings in the universities took place around anti-war meetings and demonstrations and it was out of this that the first CP student cells took shape. The ascent of Hitler gave great impetus to the political radicalisation and those who had personal contact with Nazi Germany (visiting students) often became leading activists. It was also in this period that there was something of a recovery in trade union activity which further highlighted for many the unequal and exploitative nature of capitalism and the ability of the 'exploited' to challenge this state of affairs. Young middle-class radicals who came in contact with factory workers on strike were greatly inspired and Marxism's interpretation of the present and prognostications for the future were given an added power. The Communist Party in turn was influenced by these developments and there was a significant shift in Palme Dutt's attitude towards leftwing middle-class 'intellectuals'. Within the space of a year, realising that the 'Left movement' among, for example, younger scientists was more than a temporary phenomenon or fad, Dutt dropped his antagonism replacing it with an attitude of fatherly encouragement. Over the next few years Communists in consort with leftwing allies were

instrumental in a flurry of political activity among: scientists, artists (Artists International Association), writers and poets (*Left Review*). 'Broad' bodies and journals were started with Communists often taking the leading role but open to non-Party artists or writers who were sympathetic. Attempts by some to relate their own high social status and prospect of advancing to a high level in a chosen profession to their Communist politics led a number of Cambridge and Oxford students to adopt a clandestine approach (a route which led some into spying). At the CP's 13th Congress in February 1935 the first detailed party programme *For Soviet Britain* was adopted. The programme represented a significant move by the Party towards a more technocratic and scientific concept of politics - 'Socialist Constructionism' - which created a role for Communists in the professions (scientists, physicians/nutritionists, economists etc) in blue-printing the future. Clearly by the time the 7th Congress of the Communist International in 1935 opened the way for an all-out attempt to appeal for middle-class support, CP practice had already shifted very far from the workerist sectarianism of the Third Period.

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Although the British Party remained essentially, as an early 1930s middle-class recruit described it 'an elitist club for true revolutionaries',¹ there were indications that efforts were being made to broaden the Party's appeal. At the end of 1931 the CP organisation International Class War Prisoners Aid changed its name to the less 'charged' International Labour Defence. In the same year the Party launched the Workers' Charter Campaign - an unsuccessful but sincere attempt to build a broad movement around a number of set demands (pay/subsistence levels and conditions for those in work and the unemployed - 'defence of workers'). By late 1932

the Communist Party was calling for a united fight against the National Government, and in the following year a form of active co-operation ('United Front') was beginning to be formulated with the ILP.

Anti-war work had long been taken up by the CP, and in the 1920s Communists had been involved in the No More War Movement (NMWM).² This area of Party activity, like anti-imperialist work, presumably afforded an opportunity for non-working-class Communists to do other things than leaflet dole queues.³ In the late 1920s and early 1930s Marxist analysis of war - the First World War and the growing number of armed conflicts that took place in the thirties (the Japanese invaded N.E. China in 1931) - had greater relevance for many. An early Cambridge University student Communist (1932), describing the factors which contributed to his politicisation, mentions being *deeply disturbed as a boy* by his father's explanation for the 1914-18 War and the loss of *millions of lives*, 'that it was because an archduke had been assassinated'. Writing of the time when he was a teenager he states:

About 1930 the attitude to the "Great War" began to change. I mean the public attitude. The idea had been that it was a Great War, fought by "Heroes for a Noble Purpose". The truth that it was anything but a Great War in which young men died nobly for their country was beginning to get through. A German book (Erich Maria Remarque) *All Quiet on the Western Front* [published in book form in 1929 and serialised in the popular press - SRP] shocked many people into opening their doped eyes.⁴

Following the Comintern 'line' the British Party supported the 'Anti-War World Conference' in Amsterdam in August 1932. The Conference declared itself as called by 'intellectuals' including Romain Holland, Henri Barbusse, Maxim Gorki, Upton Sinclair, and Madame Sun Yat-sen. It represented a range of opinion on the Left from Communist to Pacifist, and was partly inspired by the Soviet Union's recognition that it was in a dangerously isolated position. The USSR needed to mobilise a broader

opposition to anti-Soviet aggression than the Comintern could supply. The British delegation to the gathering numbered nearly eighty and was a mixture of CP, ILP, and non-party people, and included trade unionists, students and schoolteachers (Strachey was one of the participants). Arising out of this event a British Anti-War Movement (BA-WM) was formed with a number of branches scattered throughout the country, but relying heavily on CP activists. Communist efforts were largely ended in the No More War Movement so as to concentrate on building up the BA-WM which managed to attract NMWM rank and file members and even absorb the bulk of the Manchester branch.⁵ In March 1933 a British Anti-War Movement conference was held in Bermondsey and had some impact on the Labour Party conference which shortly followed with the EC accepting a composite resolution to campaign against war (endorsing the use of a general strike against war) which was duly unanimously approved. However, the official Labour Party position was that members were to refrain from any participation in, or connection with, the Anti-War Movement, as it included Communists. Anti-war work was an important aspect in the growth of the Left and of CP membership in the universities: an anti-war group was formed at the LSE as early as 1930, and it was subsequently from this group that a Communist presence developed among the School's students, while one of the seminal events in the emergence of Cambridge University Communism was the anti-war procession to the town's war memorial on 11 November 1933. It was this event which brought, among others, Sam Fisher into the Party⁶ when he was asked to come and defend the marchers against a possible attack by the Tories. In this way Fisher was able to combine his general anti-war feelings with the slightly contradictory desire of using his boxing and judo skills. Likewise, another Cambridge student Peter Mauer, who read international law between 1932-1935, became

radicalised when he heard a speech by Sir John Simon justifying the Japanese invasion of Manchuria. Looking back at his politicisation Peter Mauger states:

Like so many of my generation I was drawn into politics by the international rather than the national position. Of course I saw the hunger marches ... but my involvement in politics was emotional rather than intellectual, it was not until a long time later that I started to read Marx and Engels well into the Spanish Civil War. I joined the Labour Party and I found that the Labour Party was dragging its heels and was really supporting the policy of non-intervention ... It was clear that war was coming. I think it true to say that we ... in the left of the Labour Party and the CP were the only people to realise that if there was not a joint collective security policy there would be war. I then joined the CP [1937 -SRP] because it was clear that this was a very small party but a very active one, the Daily Worker sales were going on all the time and it was pursuing a very good political line internationally.⁷

Another area where the Anti-War Movement was relatively well organised was amongst schoolteachers. An 'Organisation of the Teachers Anti-War Movement' was established, and by the beginning of 1934 it had its own journal *The Ploughshare*. Again CP teachers played a leading role in the Organisation but it also involved pacifists.⁸

Interlinked with anti-war activity was the issue of fascism and specifically the rise of Nazism in Germany. The growth of the Nazis was to have a profound effect on a number of emerging British literati, such as W.H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood, and students who utilised the opportunities afforded them - through family financial support and academic sojourns - to live for a time in the Weimar Republic with its reputation of cultural and intellectual innovation. They thus experienced at first hand the increasingly unstable and violent state of German society from its early stages and more particularly the emergence of National Socialism. One of the initiators of Cambridge University

Communism, David Guest, joined the Party after his year of study at Göttingen University where he was involved with German Communists in fights against Brown Shirts. To quote from the memorial book on Guest:

In Cambridge, the contradiction between an ideal of the disinterested pursuit of knowledge for its own sake and a society heading rapidly for war and the negation of freedom and liberty, could still, in 1929-30, be kept well out of sight. The "left-wing" undergraduates of the labour club wrangled endlessly, in an atmosphere bristling with points of order, whether adherence to a socialist programme would not destroy their "freedom of thought". But in a German university town, even as long ago as 1930, signs of decay, premonitions of impending collapse, were as real as the armed policemen in the streets.⁹

Brian Simon, an early 1930s convert to Communism at Cambridge University, was also deeply affected by his personal encounter with Nazism,¹⁰ while at the international school in Bavaria at Salem run by Kurt Hahn. After attending Gresham's public school from 1928-32 he was sent by his radical parents to Hahn's international school. His attendance at the school coincided with Hitler's assumption of the chancellorship - the school was surrounded by Brown Shirts, and Hahn, a friend of the Centre Party politician Gronning and who had made anti-Nazi speeches, was physically removed from the premises and imprisoned. After seeing his headmaster taken away, Brian Simon was naturally drawn into politics as an opponent of Nazism: 'You could not help being political after seeing something like that. Many of us were deeply affected by the rise of Nazism. We had a clear view of what it meant for science, the arts, for culture and for peace'.¹¹ Arriving at Cambridge in October 1933 Brian Simon was drawn into the anti-war activity and eventually joined the CP in his second year (recruited by James Klugmann who was also an ex-pupil from Gresham's and a friend).

Although the unfolding international situation and the appeasement policy of the National Government from the early 1930s were extremely

important in radicalising a whole number of people, the effect of the increased tempo of working-class struggles from this time should not be ignored. Unlike Peter Mauger some were primarily motivated in joining the Party by coming into contact with militant trade unionists and working-class Communists. Many students were worried about employment prospects once they had graduated, and the visit by contingents of the 1932 'hunger march' to Oxford and Cambridge universities was to make a considerable impact. At Oxford students bathed marchers' feet and gave them accommodation and food, and when the contingent set off again they were accompanied through the town by 250 students. In Cambridge the meeting of members of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement with students has been described as

a landmark in the growth of student Communism, for many the moment of political awakening ... The marchers were impressive types, tough, hand-picked trade unionists, capable of exercising self-discipline. This demonstration of proletarian solidarity in the face of a ruthless economic system brought a surge of new recruits into the Communist movement.¹²

A somewhat less robust picture of the marchers has been given by Margot Heinemann, a Cambridge undergraduate at the time, describing them as very fragile with fallen faces and ill-fitting boots: 'After seeing them it was only a matter of time before I joined the party'.¹³ Likewise, the strike at the Firestone Tyres factory in 1932-33 was an important influence on a number of Oxford students. The dispute was one of several during the early thirties that broke out in large factories where attempts were made, with Communists in the forefront, to unionise the work force. The Firestone strike was largely led by the CP member Abe Lazurus¹⁴ and Oxford students travelled to Slough where the factory was, a relatively easy journey from Oxford, to help out on the picket line. Oxford student Frank Pakenham (the present Lord Longford) was involved in solidarity work

with the Firestone strikers and came close to joining the CP - he wavered in the face of meeting and talking with workers (source - Douglas Hyde). James Klugmann, writing on the Left and the 1930s¹⁵, refers to the powerful impression made on him by seeing the poverty and speaking to the victims of unemployment in a South Wales mining village in 1933 where he had been sent by the Party shortly after joining. Douglas Hyde spoke about Shelia Lynd, an Oxford graduate who worked for Gollancz and became London Organiser of the Left Book Club:

I remember her telling me the excitement that she felt when she first got into the Party, she came into an entirely new world - there were her own type there at Victor Gollancz, but there was an entirely new and exciting world of the proletariat when she went all over France on the back of a motor bike sitting behind an engineer and met the French proletariat ...¹⁶

The Communist Party leadership increasingly realised that there were individuals among the middle-class - students, scientists, technicians, architects, civil servants, teachers, artists, and writers - who were beginning to join the CP or would join if a more positive effort at recruitment was made. Illustrative of this is the attitude adopted by Palme Dutt in his replies to two letters, arising from a review of the radical but non-Communist scientist, Lancelot Hogben, by his brother in *Labour Monthly* in 1933. Responding to a reader who objected to the placatory stance taken towards Hogben, Dutt agreed that there was much 'nonsense' in his writings:

But our task is not only a destructive one. We have to keep in mind the significance of the whole leftward movement among the younger scientists, of whom Hogben is at the moment one of the principal spokesmen. Crd. Bucharin [sic] when in England attached the greatest importance to the correct treatment of Hogben as the ablest representative of this group, some of whom come to dialectical materialism ... The task of the responsible Communist is not that of a small fox-

terrier yapping and snarling at everything outside Communism. We have to understand the whole movement of thought, and be able to help to bring into consciousness and clearness what is still half-conscious and unclear.¹⁷

The other critic, a scientist, took an opposite point of view to the review and defended Hogben and questioned the author's right to comment on scientific matters. Dutt, after referring to his brother's scientific qualifications and asking 'crds. among the scientific workers' to show more humility, ended by writing:

I hope you will not take this subjectively ... and consider also that I have taken the trouble to write to you at length, just because I have hopes of helpful contributions from you and others you mention as working with you in Manchester. I should be very glad to hear further from you about yourself and your group, your professional positions, how long in the part, any specimens of work done (articles etc) how you find the party work, and what kind of special fields of work you are interested in.¹⁸

This desire to gather information about members' professional and scientific work was obviously at odds with the tone of what Dutt had written only the previous year concerning 'Intellectuals and Communism'.¹⁹

Among radical scientists, some early members of the CP and others who were subsequently to join, the 1931 International Congress of the History of Science and Technology had a considerable influence. Hyman Levy described the Congress as 'epoch-making' as it clarified for 'left' scientists

not only the social conditioning of science and the vital need for planning, for anticipating the social effects of discovery, but the impossibility of carrying this through within the framework of a chaotic capitalism. What emerged afterwards was the necessity nevertheless for demanding that this impossible task be undertaken in order to educate the great body of scientific men in the reasons for its impossibility.²⁰

Thus according to Levy 'Left' scientists had become involved in a whole number of informal 'social study groups' in universities, in some large research institutions, and privately. The work of these groups was largely centred on internal professional matters, in particular arguing for a study of the 'social relations of science' and towards this end pushing for the British Association of Science to set up a special committee in order to begin the process. 1931 also saw the first organised tours of the Soviet Union under the auspices of the Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR,²¹ and significantly it was scientists who first responded. In fact the response was so enthusiastic that two parties, of 30 and 33 scientists respectively, toured the USSR in July-August 1931 (among those who went were Bernal, his first visit, Haldane, W. Le Gros Clarke, Julian Huxley and John Cockcroft). More directly related to CP work were the informal meetings among Cambridge researchers organised by Bernal where the prime item of discussion was the comparison between British and Soviet science and scientific practice. These meetings began from 1931-32, and out of them emerged the Cambridge Scientists Anti-War Group and a revival of the Cambridge branch of the Association of Scientific Workers. Also from 1932 the first articles on the relationship between science and Marxism began to appear in Party publications. Writing on the 'Left' scientists movement that emerged in the early 1930s Werskey states that Cambridge had something of a dominance up to the Second World War, the result of which

was to leave the movement in the hands of an elite group little different in its social composition and career interests from the scientific establishment. In fact, radical science at Cambridge was further restricted to a handful of labs, a leadership drawn from the prestige fields of biochemistry and experimental physics and a division of labour that reserved "behind the scenes" routine work to women and other less influential researchers.²²

The late 1920s and early 1930s saw the emergence of Communist artists. One of the first to join (and later become an influential figure in 'Left' artistic circles) was Cliff Rowe - designing posters in an Irish left bookshop in the late twenties he was lent a copy of *The Communist Manifesto*. 'I found the logic so compelling. It solved so many intellectual problems about advertising and my work as a commercial artist that I felt the scales fall from my eyes. It was at that time that I decided to go to Russia.'²³ After 18 months of painting and designing posters in the Soviet Union under the patronage of the Red Army, Rowe returned to Britain with ideas of forming an international organisation of leftwing artists in capitalist countries. Rowe made contact with a number of other young practising artists and designers (e.g. Misha Black, Pearl Binder - who like Rowe had also gone to the USSR, James Boswell, James Fitton et.al.) and from this developed the Artists' International Association. Initially, the AIA was to have had the title The International Organisation of Artists for Revolutionary Proletarian Art, but after discussions with more experienced Party members the more sober title, the Artists' International, was adopted along with a broader approach as expressed in its first statement of aims in 1934: 'The International Unity of Artists Against Imperialist War on the Soviet Union, Fascism and Colonial Oppression'.²⁴ AIA members were organised into various units each concentrating on working on posters, illustrations, cartoons, stage decorations etc, and as a body the Artists International organised exhibitions (e.g. the Anti-War Exhibition at Cambridge University in 1934). Anti-fascism and the 'fight for peace' were the major motivating factors in the growth of the AIA which within a few years was over 1,000 strong. However, the effects of the economic slump on artists were significant, particularly in the pre-Popular Front period. To quote an early and leading Communist artist, James Boswell:

'By 1932 the Great Depression hung over us all. I joined the Communist Party, gave up painting, took to illustration and graphic design and helped found the Artists International Association...'²⁵ According to Cliff Rowe the economic slump and the worsening employment prospects for artists led to the beginning of a break up of the snobbery of the profession - conditions were as bad for 'fine artists' as they were for commercial artists. In Rowe's words:

There was a gradual movement developing, to question if commercial artists were such a miserable lot or if the fine artists were as grand as they originally thought ... Then it was realised that the commercial artist was breaking through to a freedom of expression that the fine artists weren't achieving. Everybody began to respect the strip cartoonists and silk screen people.²⁶

The major inspirational influence behind the Artists International was a group of Communist artists largely acting on their own initiative. However, as a body it was never solely Communist, as witnessed by the inclusion of pacifists (e.g. Percy Horton) from its inception. Communist Party artists did begin to organise themselves as a group from about 1933, and at some stage adopted the name 'The Hogarth Group'. The CP leadership encouraged the formation of the Group, one of the earliest of its sort formed in the Party,

... probably because the Party could see that we could contribute directly to the activities that were going on in as much as they could see quite concretely what we were doing, I mean I can remember big oil paintings I did at the time ... and they were actually carried on demos, things I'd done depicting fascism ...²⁷

As with the AIA, in which all CP artists were active, the Group included a wide range of artists - display artists, fine artists, commercial artists and illustrators - and by 1934-35 there was a membership of about 60, mostly confined to London (source Reg Turner). The CP Artists Group was able to work directly for the Party in terms of collectively producing

posters, banners, floats, and illustrations for Party literature. Members of the Group were given Marxist educational classes,²⁸ discussions were held as to the application of Marxism to their work as artists, and there was considerable debate over Soviet artistic practice and the newly emerged concept of socialist realism. Interestingly, the CP artists chose to name themselves 'The Hogarth Group', as they considered William Hogarth a socially conscious and involved artist representative of capitalist ideas in an early and 'progressive' phase. As Reg Turner explains, though Hogarth was proselytising for the bourgeoisie,

He was a good artist and good propagandist at the same time. Most of his stuff was highly moral as for example his prints which he did in order to sell cheaply around the place and convey the message of "drink beer not gin" ... and the "good apprentice" and all those sort of things. And he seemed a very English type and we wanted to emphasize our home character, our national character.²⁹

Parallel and often interlinked with the radicalisation of a number of young artists was the emergence of a 'left literary scene' which proclaimed its sympathy with the Soviet Union and the 'cause of the proletariat'. The best known and in many ways symbolic figure of this group of leftwing writers was W.H. Auden whose overt political poetry began with 'A Communist to Others' in August 1932. Yet, to quote Spender: 'The thirties are often described as a literary movement, and Auden is supposed to have been its leader. It would be perhaps truer to say that Auden was the leading influence than that there was a literary movement of Auden, Day Lewis, Spender ...'³⁰ Auden and his immediate circle were nearly all products of public schools (Spender was an exception) and had been to either Oxford or Cambridge. Their connection with the Communist Party was tenuous in the early thirties and was mainly based, for Auden and Isherwood, on their friendship with fellow Cambridge graduate and writer Edward Upward³¹ who had joined the Communist Party in 1932. It was

the formation of the journal *Left Review* that crystallised a group of writers more closely involved with the CP.³² The *Left Review* was formed in 1934 after a group of about fifteen including Bert Lloyd, Ralph Fox, Amabel Williams-Ellis, Edgell Rickword and Tom Wintringham met to discuss the formation of two organisations, a 'Society for the Defence of Culture', a front organisation, and a more open Party body, a 'British Section of the International Union of Revolutionary Writers'. Both groups soon disappeared but a practical result of the activity was the publication of *Left Review*, a monthly magazine begun in October 1934 containing a mixture of short stories, poems, reports of conferences and exhibitions, reviews of books and illustrations and savage cartoons from AI members. The *Left Review* brought together a few CP members who had been in the Party for a number of years and whose talent³³ had generally, until that time, been underused - Tom Wintringham, a foundation member who was given responsibility for overseeing the Review by the Central Committee, Hugh Slater, Ralph Fox - with a number of figures in the literary world who had more recently been radicalised. Edgell Rickword was one of this later group who in the early thirties edited the *Calendar of Modern Letters*: 'those of us around the magazine were socially conscious and as we moved into the 1930s that consciousness grew. By 1933 we were all appalled at the collapse of the economy, the whole social set up in Britain, and by the things that were happening on the Continent'.³⁴ Another of those writers to 'discover Marxism' at this time was Jack Lindsay.

I was enjoying all the excitement of the secrets of heaven and earth laid bare. I subscribed to the *Daily Worker* and plunged into immediate politics as zealously as I had once avoided them. It was with much satisfaction I realized that Edgell, Garman, Alec Brown and others had reached the same conclusions as myself, though by less devious byroads; and that in *Left Review* there was a rally-point of the movement.³⁵

Commenting on Douglas Garman, a close friend of Rickword and associated with the *Calendar*, Lindsay claims that despite his spending a short time in Moscow as an English teacher on graduation from Cambridge, Garman was generally non-political until the mid-thirties.³⁶ Alec Brown, as mentioned above by Lindsay, was one of those students at Cambridge University who became involved in anti-war activity from his first year in 1917 and greeted the Russian Revolution with great enthusiasm (although he admits to having a very superficial grasp of Marxism due to lack of available Marxist books and lack of guidance as to what could be obtained). He has described how he moved out of active politics in the twenties:

Literature, in the form of poetry, absorbed me; a richer acquaintance, as the war ended and the special war generation came up to Cambridge, opened new modes of thought peculiar and as yet unexplored to me; the persona of an intellectual began to float before me; but, above all, I wanted desperately to knock about the world. Socialism seemed remote, and, what was more decisive, remote from my personality; and it shrank in importance.³⁷

Brown states that in his attempts to write the novel he wanted to - 'an honest' one, not a 'safe yarn' - he was eventually obliged to definitely side with the forces of progress, 'to cross over to the Communist camp'.

In his own words:

Capitalism in its old age would make a fool of me, a trained writer, devoted to studies which might aid in my work of aiding the science of human society. And eventually that search for a science of human society leads ... to the proletarian conception of society. If I do not war with capitalism I am doomed to be a Court Jester ...³⁸

In the 'student world' there was a significant Communist presence at Oxford and Cambridge universities³⁹ and the LSE by the early thirties, and in 1932 there were already small Party groups in a number of other

universities.⁴⁰ Regarding, in 1932, the existing University Labour Federation as incurably conservative, Communist students therefore formed a new national body, the Federation of Student Societies (FSS). Within a short period there were some 20 socialist student groups affiliated to the Federation, and by 1934 only two remained in the University Labour Federation. The formation of the FSS represented a determined effort by Communist students to concentrate their political work among their fellow students. Thus, as well as organising Marxist educationals, carrying out anti-war activities and aiding NUWM marchers, CP members took up student questions. In 1933, for example, the FSS campaigned against university restrictions on students' activities, and for more scholarships, better libraries, and social facilities. Some thought was being given to challenging the content of the teaching,⁴¹ although concerted work on teaching methods and content at Cambridge was not carried out until 1937.

At Oxford, the October Club is estimated to have had about 200 members in 1934 and, at Cambridge, the Socialist Society, a Marxist body, reached a membership of 1,000, including 300-400 members of the CP (Downing College had a cell of about 25, James Klugmann's college Trinity had some 50 members). Klugmann recalls that it was in 1934 that Gallacher came to speak to CP members at Cambridge University and argued against romantic or workerist conceptions of what Party membership meant for students:

Out of this meeting came the slogan, I remember, "Every Communist student, a good student". He said, "We want people who are capable, who are good scientists, historians and teachers. It doesn't follow at all you'll be good workers. We need you as you are: if you have a vocation, it's pointless to run away to factories. One or two of you may become full-time revolutionaries, but this is a thing that only a few of you will be able to do. We want you to study and become good students".⁴²

'Every Communist student, a good student' or 'Every Communist a First' became the slogans of all CP students. It was also accepted practice that Communist students would drop political responsibilities and work in their final year so they could concentrate on academic work. Jim Fyrth, a student at Exeter University, remembers that it was Johnny Campbell who came and imparted the 'line' that their first responsibility was to do well as students (although the meeting was in late 1936 and thus firmly in the Popular Front period, and Campbell cautioned them against 'running off to Spain'). A Trinity College student from 1934-37, later to gain notoriety with his involvement in the Blunt affair, has described Cambridge Communists as falling into three types: those who joined (like himself) because at the University the Communists were the most active and best organised but felt no great loyalty to the Party as such, a group who kept a very low profile as they were expected to achieve high positions in the civil service or legal profession, and a group of dedicated Party people who saw their future as working in a full-time capacity for the CP.⁴³ There were secret Communist cells at both Cambridge and Oxford to which those students who intended to go into the civil service were often directed. It was suggested to them that they would be of most use to the Party by keeping their political affiliations secret and concentrating on their own professional advancement - in time they would be able to provide the Party with information of governmental plans and actions. This source of 'inside' information could be invaluable to the CP in a time of war and social upheaval. In contrast with this a Trinity College science student, Richard Synge, (a future Nobel Prize winner in chemistry) who was recruited in the early thirties knew there were covert Communists

but preferred to work in his laboratory rather than waste time in idle talk. Few scientists then worried about their Communism being made public, though many

were more reticent after they had left university when they could have been blacklisted from sensitive jobs if their party membership had been known.⁴⁴

Of course the whole issue of 'covert Communists' and those who were members of secret Student cells has been associated with spies, the Apostles and homosexuality. However, it would be wrong to see all those Communist students who were not open Party members as being recruits to Soviet intelligence (and it should be noted that all those that became involved in espionage were recruited to work, they were told, not for Soviet intelligence as such, but for the Comintern in the cause of anti-fascism). In fact, in the case of Burgess and Maclean, elaborate charades had to be gone through in order to mask or undo their previous open activities as Communists (Burgess is said to have been recruited in 1934). That a number of those who became spies, particularly those from Cambridge, were homosexuals is probably partly explained by the fact that the homosexual sub-culture was a tightly knit subterranean group (an area Burgess, Blunt et al could recruit from and rely on) which was already outside of the law. There was also a strong homosexual element in the Apostles - the self-electing secret society of those who considered themselves the intellectual cream of the University.⁴⁵ It may be that some of the Party members who were homosexuals at Cambridge and Oxford became spies following the wholesale expulsion of homosexuals from the Communist movement after the Reichstag fire. To quote Hyde:

The consequences of what he did [it was initially believed that van der Lubbe, a Dutch Communist and homosexual, was blackmailed through his homosexuality by the Nazis into setting the Reichstag on fire -SRP] were appalling from the Party's own point of view ... destruction of the German CP ... what van der Lubbe did psychologically hit Communists everywhere and there was always this tendency to have a massive over reaction within the Party, it was a feature of Party life ... I think it was at that time that these characters really began to work for the Soviet Union. Now I don't have detailed evidence to prove this - I know it of one

person ... the Party then went to them or someone from the Party's underground went to them and said, "look alright you've been expelled, but it does not mean the end of what you can do for the Party, in fact you can do work for the Soviet Union" ... This helps explain why a whole number of homosexuals turned up in this role throughout Europe.⁴⁶

Sam Fisher, who was one of the three-man organising committee of the Party at Cambridge University (the other two were James Klugmann and Jake Ewer - W.N. Ewer's son who had also been in the CP during his student days), has stated that he knew nothing of the Apostles and spying:

It was really, I think, that obviously somebody wanted to recruit or bring into their sphere of influence people whose background, public school etc, was such that they were really going to have important jobs in the establishment of the future and would therefore be of use. Ordinary working class chaps with scholarships like me didn't seem to have much prospects ... I knew all these people - Burgess and Maclean - they seemed to me chaps who were fringe dilettantes, which of course was that they were deliberately trying to convey ...⁴⁷

Likewise, Brian Simon who came up to Trinity College, Cambridge in 1933 and joined the CP in his second year, knew nothing about recruitment of spies (and he was at school together with Klugmann and Maclean - Gresham's - in the same college and very close friends with Klugmann).⁴⁸ Speaking of those who became spies, although it could also apply to many of those secret Party members who entered the professions 'unhindered' by an open declaration of their Communism (although their 'contribution' took a different form), Bill (Gabriel) Carritt has stated: 'I think perhaps the people who did not want to join an organisation and did not want to make that particular transformation of themselves that joining the Party to some extent required felt they could make that contribution by spying for the Soviet Union'.⁴⁹ As to the nature of their 'Communism' many writers have subsequently pointed out how essentially elitist it was - from membership of the self-electing elites of 'Pop' at Eton and the Apostles

at Cambridge to special secret work for world Communism. Eventually it became clearly apparent that their intelligence work was for the NKVD, and writing in retrospect on his entry into the world of espionage Philby talks in terms of not having to think twice about the chance of enrolling into 'an elite force' (i.e. NKVD, KGB). Putting the rhetorical question, how could Blunt ever have supposed that he was a Communist,⁵⁰ Raymond Williams realised that he was

taking "Communism" as the revolutionary wing of the working-class movement but, while it was always that, it was also, in the period of the Comintern, a form of political organisation based on highly centralised and disciplined leadership, itself nominated rather than elected: a vanguard of the international class struggle. It is then easier to see the appeal of such an organisation to dissident members of an upper class.⁵¹

Although the attraction of a whole number of students from well-off and 'respected' families towards Communism in the early thirties is a unique occurrence (far surpassing the period 1917-20) there is a tendency to see all Communist students as fitting into this pattern. However, some of the most active Party members, even at Oxford and Cambridge, were those on scholarships and from working-class and lower middle-class backgrounds.⁵² As to Cambridge student politics, in the summer of 1934 a group of right wing Labour students broke away from the Socialist Society in protest at its domination by Communists and formed a Labour Club which affiliated to the University Labour Federation. Although some of the Cambridge Communists greeted this development - it discredited those who split away - after 'fierce' discussion among them, Party students at the University

became fully convinced that their aim must be to heal the split, both in Cambridge and nationally, before it crippled the whole anti-Fascist student movement. This was a turning-point for the movement in Cambridge. It was before the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International had clarified the need for the broadest unity as the first aim of all Communists.⁵³

A few months prior to the Seventh World Congress of the Comintern the British Communist Party held its national congress in Manchester - the Thirteenth Party Congress, February 1935. The Congress credentials of the 294 delegates give some indication of the changing nature of the overall Party membership. Of the delegates 205 were employed workers, and 234 were trade unionists, the great majority of whom held official positions.⁵⁴ The time when the bulk of the CP's membership was unemployed was past, although the total number of members still remained small (6,500 at this time). In order to build the Party a resolution was proposed which aimed to lay down conditions for creating a 'Mass Communist Party'. Emphasis was placed on organising within the factories, particularly the large and 'important' ones, and isolated factory members would in future join the nearest factory cell in the same industry. Among other points made there was an appeal for Communists to show less sectarianism in their dealings with local Labour Party and Trade union officials. The resolution also proposed that Party units throughout the country make a determined effort to arrange social activities (concerts, excursions etc) and lessen the intensity of political work required of those most 'hard-pressed' members. However, the demands of Party membership remained high, as can be illustrated by quoting from the resolution in question: 'Better methods of organising Party work must be initiated in order to enable the Party members to avoid reaching a point at which every evening is fully occupied. At least one or two evenings per week should be kept free for self-education, social life, etc, etc'.⁵⁵ However, it was the adoption of a detailed Communist programme for the socialist revolution in Britain with the title *For Soviet Britain* that was the major business of the Congress. This was the first such programme of its kind produced by the Party and is very much a product of its times (the transition period

between the 'Third Period' and full-blown 'Popular Frontism'). It attempts to apply the slogan of the Communist International, as adopted in 1934 by its Executive Committee, 'Soviet Power' to Britain. Labour and trade union leaders are condemned in strong terms, and the American New Deal is characterised as creeping fascism by the strengthening of monopoly and lowering of wages. Yet, as Noreen Branson makes plain, *For Soviet Britain* did not envisage a revolution as a sudden spontaneous act, but rather saw it developing out of a long running united struggle of workers for the necessities of life in which every victory would lead to greater strength and the widening of the struggle to include issues of war, fascism and colonialism. Eventually a point would be reached when things could only be resolved by the crushing of the workers by the capitalists or the forcible overthrow of capitalism. The Communist Party, the programme claims, grows out of the ranks of the working-class during its struggle and provides daily leadership and would provide the lead for the whole class in the 'final struggle'. *For Soviet Britain* was soon pushed into the background, as it was somewhat at odds with the 'new line' as proclaimed at the Comintern 7th World Congress.⁵⁶ Nevertheless the programme is important in the way it reflects the growing appreciation by the CP of class forces other than manual workers who would play an important role in the fight against capitalism. To quote from the document in question:

To-day the technical and professional workers, the scientists and the administrators are beginning to realise that they are working in the interests of a small class within the limitations of a decaying economic system. The inventor cannot fail to see that the chief effect of his inventions is to-day to throw thousands of workers out of work. In the last five years thousands of trained scientists, engineers and technicians have themselves been thrown out of employment. Capitalism cannot make use of them.⁵⁷

Particular emphasis was placed on the growing fetters capitalism was putting upon science. This was leading many scientists and technicians to '... begin to see that the expansion and development of Science is only possible under socialism'.⁵⁸ Another important aspect of this new programme was that it laid out some of the measures that would be immediately inaugurated after Workers' Councils had taken power. Policies were outlined for: finance, mining, industry, iron and steel, engineering, railways, textiles, other manufacturing industries, agriculture, fishing, trade, housing, health, a labour code, religion, and education. There was thus an area of work various professional and academic figures in or close to the Party could carry out - devising blueprints for a post-revolutionary Britain. In the wake of the 13th CP Congress Maurice Dobb organised a group of about twelve to fifteen scientists, technicians, economists and students (CP and non-Party sympathisers) with the aim of producing a collective 'Marxist' analysis of the main British industries and the state of science and education and putting forward suggestions and proposals as to how this would be altered under socialism. This work was eventually published under anonymous authorship in 1936 by Lawrence and Wishart with the title, *Britain Without Capitalists: A Study of what Industry in a Soviet Britain Could Achieve*. Commenting on it Maurice Goldsmith has written, 'The book was an important statement, the first of its kind ...'.⁵⁹ In all the book was some 470 odd pages long and contained an impressive amount of factual detail and some closely argued predictions as to future developments (the future automatically being taken in the book to be a Soviet Britain constructing socialism).⁶⁰

Footnotes

¹ Alan Winnington, *Breakfast with Mao*, p. 33. At first the CP regarded him and his brother with a great deal of suspicion and as possible police spies.

² See D. Hyde, *I Believed*, pp. 30-32.

³ In 1934 the *Labour Monthly* sent out a 'war questionnaire' to 391 individuals - subscribers and various people who had shown an interest in the Anti-War Movement. There were 79 replies of which 45 were from non-working-class individuals, e.g. scientists, lecturers, artists, writers, teachers, students, etc., and these were classified into 'workers' or 'intellectuals' and the answers given as expressing revolutionary, pacifist, labourist, or open imperialist positions. The breakdown of replies was given as follows:

	<u>Workers</u>	<u>Intellectuals</u>
Revolutionary	62%	42%
Pacifist	35%	36%
Labourist	3%	11%
Open Imperialist	0%	11%

(Source: *Labour Monthly*, July 1934).

⁴ Colin Siddons, 'Autobiographical Account', 1 October 1987.

⁵ For the intricacies of Communist and others' peace work - rivalries and changes in approach-see M. Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain 1914-1945*.

⁶ Another contributory factor to his joining was the discussions on history with CP members where he felt '... they're more correct than I am and unlike me they weren't even historians'. S. Fisher, interview 16 May 1985.

⁷ P. Mauger, interview 30 September 1985.

⁸ e.g. Winifred Holtby wrote a short story on war propaganda in the first number of *The Ploughshare*. The editor of *The Ploughshare* was a Communist NAS teacher by the name of Saunders and included on the editorial board Edward Upward. However, there were at least two non-CP teachers on the board. Apart from Holtby contributions were obtained (presumably through Edward Upward) from W.H. Auden - his satirical ballad 'James Honeyman' about a young scientist who invents a poison gas which in time causes the death of his wife and son after being used by an enemy country - and Christopher Isherwood. The TAWM and *The Ploughshare* faded away at the beginning of the Second World War (source for information Edward Upward - two letters 10 November 1987 and 8 December 1987).

⁹ Max Black, Ch. VI, 'Göttingen 1930-31', p. 61 in C. Haden Guest (ed.), *David Guest*.

¹⁰ Another key Cambridge Communist deeply influenced by experiencing Germany was Roy Pascal who spent two years working on a doctoral thesis in Berlin and Munich in the late 1920s.

- ¹¹ B. Simon, as quoted in B. Penrose and S. Freeman, *Conspiracy of Silence*, pp. 95-96.
- ¹² P. Seale and M. McConville, *Philby*, pp. 69-70.
- ¹³ As quoted in *Conspiracy of Silence*, p. 98.
- ¹⁴ Abe Lazurus, for a period, adopted the pseudonym Jack Firestone. The taking of other names was a not uncommon practice among CP cadres, particularly with those of Jewish origin.
- ¹⁵ Included in J. Clarke, M. Heinemann, et al., *Culture and Crisis in Britain in the Thirties*.
- ¹⁶ Interview 2 February 1987.
- ¹⁷ Dutt Papers, B.M., letter to T.A. Hill, 15 November 1933.
- ¹⁸ Dutt Papers, B.M., letter to M.A. Graubard, 15 November 1933.
- ¹⁹ *Communist Review*, September 1932 - as previously referred to p.91.
- ²⁰ H. Levy, 'A Chapter in Modern Scientific History', *The Modern Quarterly*, October 1938, vol. 1, No. 4, pp. 320-21.
- ²¹ The Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR's membership rose from 407 in 1927-28 (4th Annual Report) to 1,500 in 1932-33 (9th Annual Report), although there was a slight fall-off in subsequent years to 1,200-1,300. As a body the SCR was formed in order to establish contact between professional people in Britain with their counterparts in the Soviet Union and to spread knowledge of Soviet cultural matters (interpreted in the widest sense) in Britain. This is done on the understanding that 'Cultural relations are a means of mutual understanding between peoples, in which the private citizen has a part to play no less important than that of governments, diplomats, and official bodies. But the efforts of the individual are the more effective when they are reinforced by organisation and by the contacts and facilities that organisation can provide'. (Rules of SCR). The SCR had always been an arena of activity for Communist 'intellectuals' such as Dobb, Andrew Rothstein, Ivor Montagu et al. However, CP members were (and are) only a minority of the membership, and as an organisation the SCR has included an impressive number of 'leading figures of the day' including G.B. Shaw, H.G. Wells, Keynes, J.A. Hobson, Virginia Woolf, Laski, E.M. Forster, Aldous Huxley. What is probably true is that from 1932-35 a somewhat larger number of SCR members were also Party members, and this includes a few long-standing Society people such as Rutland Boughton and Alan Bush who subsequently joined the Party.
- ²² G. Werskey, 'Making Socialists of Scientists: Whose Side Is History On', *Radical Science Journal*, no. 2/3, 1975, p. 34.
- ²³ Cliff Rowe, quoted in L. Morris & R. Radford, *The Story of the Artists' International Association 1933-1953*, p.8.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.
- ²⁵ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 9.

- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Reg Turner, Chairman of 'The Hogarth Group', Interview 7 March 1984. Reg Turner attended Plymouth College of Art and with one of his teachers - Jim Lucas - joined the CP in 1932. He went to the Royal College of Art in London in September 1932, became a member of the Party's Chelsea cell and carried out organisational work for the CP at the Royal College. From 1933 to 1936 he estimates that he recruited in the order of 30 artists to the Party. Along with Jim Lucas and Jim Boswell he was given responsibility for forming the Hogarth Group of which he became the chairman (for a period he was secretary of the Chelsea branch and on the AIA executive).
- 28 e.g. Lectures on The Communist Manifesto by Marjorie Pollitt are remembered by one member - see 'A Communist Front?' in *The Story of the Artists' International Association 1933-1953*, p. 23.
- 29 Interview 7 March 1984.
- 30 S. Spender, *The Thirties and After*, pp. 18-19.
- 31 See Isherwood's account of Upward's visit to him in Berlin 1930 - Isherwood had always regarded him as a literary mentor, now he was becoming a political mentor - *Christopher and His Kind*, pp. 42-43.
- 32 The CP leadership's attitude towards the *Left Review* is illustrated by a letter from Palme Dutt to Alick West dated 6 February 1935 in which he sets out 'Suggested lines of critique of *Left Review*' (West was to review the journal for *Labour Monthly*). The *Review* was to be welcomed for drawing together such a wide range of writers: 'At the same time revolutionary working-class needs to scrutinise closely the work and expression, and more particularly the theories put out, by these writers. We welcome these fellow-travellers. But danger of their bringing (often unconsciously) bourgeois baggage with them' (Dutt Papers). Dutt goes on to single out Strachey's sister Amabel Williams-Ellis for attack - as she represents that particular group amongst those who are involved with the *Review* who take a condescending attitude towards 'worker writers'.
- 33 A CP Writers Group was formed either shortly before or after the Comintern's Seventh World Congress (a London based group involving Alick West, Garman, et al). Unlike America there was nothing like the John Reed clubs which were formed in 1929 and encouraged the development of a Communist literary movement of young writers, many of whom were of proletarian origin, American 'proletarian novels', a number of which were published in Britain, were held up as an example of what could be done in the English-speaking world - in a review of one of them Reg Bishop commented, 'We are still awaiting the first English proletarian novel dealing with a modern industrial theme', *Daily Worker*, 18 September 1935. Scotland had of course produced Grassie Gibbon's *Scots Quair* trilogy (1932-34).
- 34 E. Rickword, interviewed in J. Lucas (ed.), *The 1930s: A Challenge to Orthodoxy*, p. 4.
- 35 J. Lindsay, *Life Rarely Tells*, p. 762.

- 36 Douglas Garman was involved with his Cambridge friend Wishart in setting up a publishing firm - it published the *Calendar of Modern Letters*, one or two of Alec Brown's early novels etc. It was this firm 'Wishart' that was later 'brought over to the Party' and amalgamated with 'Martin Lawrence' in 1936. For more details on Garman see the biography of Peggy Guggenheim (Jacqueline Bograd Weld's *Peggy: The Wayward Guggenheim*) with whom Garman lived for a period. His mother was the illegitimate daughter of Earl Grey and Garman is described as a 'country gentleman and a Communist'.
- 37 Alec Brown, *The Fate of the Middle Classes*, p. 260.
- 38 Ibid, p. 271. Alec Brown translated Dmitri Mirsky's book *The Intelligentsia of Great Britain*, published by Gollancz in 1935.
- 39 In the late 1920s, Dobb, Burns, Pat Sloan (in 1929 a final year undergraduate at Cambridge) and Montagu were involved in arranging the showing of Soviet films - see B. Hogen Kamp, *Deadly Parallels: Film and the Left in Britain 1929-39*. As part of their efforts a Cambridge Film Society was set up, a development closely followed by the Special Branch particularly after the 1929 Meerut Conspiracy and the arrest of Spratt. In fact as a result of Meerut '... throughout the thirties MI5 sent the Indian police the Special Branch dossiers on Oxford and Cambridge graduates with Communist associations who went out to the Far East'. John Costello, *Mask of Treachery*, p. 170.
- 40 See N. Branson, *History of the C.P.G.B.*, p. 208.
- 41 See John Cornford's piece on Cambridge history teaching in P. Sloan (ed.), *John Cornford: A Memoir*.
- 42 Klugmann included. J. Clark, M. Heinemann et al., op. cit., p. 32.
- 43 See Michael Straight, *After Long Silence*.
- 44 B. Penrose and S. Freeman, op. cit., p. 129.
- 45 See among others, Andrew Sinclair, *The Red and The Blue - Intelligence, Treason and the Universities*.
- 46 D. Hyde, interview 2 February 1987. See also B. Penrose and S. Freeman, op. cit., p. 112. In a letter to CP member David Michaelson by an ex-Oxford graduate 'Jack' (he could be Jack Winocour who joined the Trotskyist body the Marxist League in 1936 - source of information John Archer, letter 18 October 1984) in which he gives his reasons for not being able to remain in the CPGB, despite Michaelson's and Hyman Levy's arguments in favour of the Party, he states: '... I am afraid that my secession will be the first of many. And now what will be the story: "Oh! He never was any good anyway. He never did anything. He is a petty-bourgeois, a homosexual and all the rest of the racket". Buggery I should imagine has increased by leaps and bounds since the CP was founded here, judging by the stories'. (Michaelson Papers MRC, Warwick).
- 47 Sam Fisher, ^{interview} 16 May 1985.
- 48 Source: B. Simon, interview 2 July 1985.

- 49 Carritt, interview 4 February 1987. How much the British Party leadership knew or co-ordinated with Soviet Intelligence the recruitment of 'covert Communists' or specifically spies at Cambridge and Oxford is never likely to be fully known. There seems little doubt though that Dave Springhall (full-time London District Secretary, member of the Central Committee from 1932, and Party National Organiser after his return from 'service' in Spain; in 1939 he was in Moscow where he acted as the GB Party representative at the Comintern) was deeply involved with Russian espionage activities - see Pelling, *The British Communist Party*, pp. 125-26. The official Party statement on Springhall was made in the *Daily Worker*, 31 July 1943, p. 4. Boyle in his bestseller, *The Climate of Treason*, states that the CP leadership looked on at Burgess's scheming with little pleasure: 'The Cambridge experiment was not, however, theirs to command, except in the broadest outline. The Comintern and the Soviet NKVD had ordained that this Pandora's box should be opened ...' (p.89). However, there is no evidence presented to back up this contention and as a book - notwithstanding its claim to have 'unmasked the fourth man' - it is riddled with elementary mistakes (e.g. Dutt spelt Dutte, Klugmann spelt Klugman, Springhall said to be National Organiser in 1932, Strachey's *The Coming Struggle for Power* is said to have been published in 1931 when it was 1932, he also misdates another of Strachey's books etc). Outside of the 'spy industry' genre former CP member Harry McShane refers to Springhall, Glading and the attitude towards spying for the Soviet Union by Party members in his autobiography, *No Mean Fighter*, p. 211.
- 50 In Blunt's case one particular writer suggests that his spying was done for a bit of excitement: 'It was risky, it was fun, and the future academic could see himself as a daredevil, as a tough'. (J. Brodsky review of *Conspiracy of Silence*, *T.L.S.*, 30 January 1987). He speculates that Marxism was really only taken up by Blunt in order to provide a new terminology in his efforts at 'carving out an academic niche' in the study of visual art.
- 51 R. Williams, *Of Elites and Loyalties*, review of Sinclair's book, *The Guardian*, 19 June 1986.
- 52 e.g. Of those I have interviewed or communicated with - Sam Fisher 'open exhibition' from Battersea Grammar School to Cambridge 1933-36; Colin Siddons, Bradford Grammar School and scholarship to Cambridge 1932-35; Arnold Kettle - interview with wife - lower middle class background as opposed to the working-class origins of the others, won scholarship to Cambridge 1934-37; Rodney Hilton, Manchester Grammar School, won a scholarship to Oxford 1935-38; Bill Moore, grammar school and scholarship to Oxford 1930-33. V.G. Kiernan makes this point in his account of 1930s Cambridge Communism, 'Herbert Norman's Cambridge' in *Poets, Politics and the People*.
- 53 'Cambridge Socialism, 1933-1936' by a group of contemporaries in P. Sloan (ed.) op. cit., p. 108.
- 54 See A. Hutt, *The Post-War History of the British Working Class*, p. 269 and Branson, op. cit., p. 98.
- 55 Draft Resolution, *Building a Mass Communist Party*, p. 7.

- ⁵⁶ The CP took a rather ambiguous attitude towards their programme - Allen Hutt in his 1937 *The Post-War History of the British Working Class* pays tribute to it on page 269, while the 14th National Party Congress in 1937 ignored it.
- ⁵⁷ *For Soviet Britain*, p. 30.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 31.
- ⁵⁹ M. Goldsmith, *Sage - A Life of J.D. Bernal*, p. 71.
- ⁶⁰ *Britain Without Capitalists* has a strong technocratic slant. The chapter on 'Science and Education' interestingly claims that those young scientists involved in the most rapidly developing sciences - physics, biochemistry, genetics - were the most radical and positive towards a 'Soviet system', as they were experiencing in their work the clearest obstruction from capitalism.

CHAPTER 6

Popular Frontism

Introduction - summary

The Seventh Congress of the Comintern in 1935 cemented the new orientation of the world Communist movement. Anti-fascism and the defence of existing democratic rights were given the highest priority and communist parties were to strive towards a unity of working-class political and trade union forces to encourage the broadest of class alliances among the 'people' to lead the way to the formation of popular front or anti-fascist democratic governments. The championing of the proletariat was down-played and the interests of other non-capitalist groups such as farmers, the petty bourgeoisie, salaried workers, and the intelligentsia were highlighted. In the fight for a popular front against fascism it was declared to be the duty of Communists to associate themselves with 'the people's revolutionary democratic traditions' and show themselves as 'true fighters' for real national freedom and independence. The British Communist Party in the wake of the Seventh Congress renewed its approaches to the Labour Party with added vigour. Many of the CP front organisations were quietly killed off so that 'sectarian obstacles' of the past would not hinder the Party's attempt to gain an anti-fascist following which was as broad as possible. Existing culture was no longer to be condemned as 'bourgeois' or challenged with the creation of 'proletarian' cultural/artistic alternatives, it was now something to be defended in the face of fascist barbarism and irrationality. 1935-36 saw the first 'Marxist' efforts by CP members to theoretically examine the position and nature of the middle-class writings by Fox, Rickword, Klingender and Brown. The size and importance of those non-capitalist groups who stood outside of the working-class was recognised (20.1% of the population)

although it was denied that they constituted a unified class; hence the use of the term 'middle classes' or 'middle strata'. It was agreed, however, that there was a necessity for the working-class to appeal to the 'middle classes', if resistance to fascism or, in the longer term, the struggle for socialism was to be successful; there was talk on forming an alliance between the 'middle classes' and the working-class, although the latter would provide the leadership, something stressed more by some Communists than others. Socialism, it was claimed, offered a secure future for the 'middle classes' by opening up massive new resources - power and prestige - to the professions, enabling them full opportunity to serve the community. In this period the Party built up its membership significantly among students, scientists, artists, musicians, and writers, and through the most visible product/expression of British popular frontism, the 'Left Book Club', it was able to reach areas of suburbia with which it had never previously been in contact. Some contemporary writers have helped create a certain image of Communists from this time: the 'Popular Front middle-class Communist', while offering some insights about a number of those who joined the Party, the image, nevertheless, gives a very distorted view of why many became members and how they acted/worked as Communists.

* * * * *

The Soviet Union and the world's Communist parties were slow to acknowledge the real state of affairs in Germany following Hitler's accession to power. As fascism was seen by Marxism-Leninism as a final stage in an irretrievably crisis-ridden capitalism, Nazi rule was initially declared to be a temporary phenomenon which would soon give way to proletarian revolution. As previously detailed, there were changes in

the nature and style of the British Party's work in the early thirties following the excesses of the 'Third Period',^{notably} a widening of the social/occupational basis of its membership. Of more significance so far as changes in Communist practice were concerned, were the developments in France where a pact was signed by the Communist and Socialist parties in July 1934 committing them to united action against French fascism. It was the re-appraisal of the situation by the Soviet leadership, however, that led in turn to a new approach in foreign affairs and the dramatic adoption of 'Popular Front' policies by the Comintern and thus all Communist parties which were 'national sections' of that body.¹ In its foreign policy the Soviet Union strove to 'normalise' its relations with 'democratic' capitalist countries and form alliances which could off-set the threat posed by Nazi Germany. At the end of 1933 normal diplomatic relations were established between the USSR and America, and about the same time the decision was made by Stalin that the Soviet Union seek membership of the League of Nations. Many historians see the *Pravda* article of 23 May 1934 which stated that it was perfectly admissable for Communists and Socialists in France to carry out joint action (and importantly that agreement could be made with the Socialist Party's leaders) as the first concrete sign of the 'turn' - it was this article which in effect gave the 'green light' to the June 1934 pact between the two French parties. On 2 May 1935 the Soviet Union and France formed a military alliance which was a short time afterwards extended to include Czechoslovakia.

During the summer of 1935 the Seventh Congress of the Comintern took place, and the concept of a popular or people's front was explicitly mapped out as the 'new line' to be followed by the world's Communists. The central slogan for all CPs, as defined by the Congress was: 'The fight for peace and for the defence of the U.S.S.R.'. Communist parties

were required to work for the broadest alliances of anti-fascist forces extending beyond the labour movement to include bourgeois political groups who accepted 'the programme of anti-fascism'. It was no longer claimed that the only means to defeat fascism was to end capitalism: in fact, 'As part of its conception of a gigantic world-wide struggle between the forces of peace and the forces of war, the Comintern abandoned its hitherto wholly negative view of the institutions of the bourgeois world'.² Fascism was defined, not as previously stated, as an open dictatorial system of bourgeois class rule intrinsically no different from bourgeois democracy (which was merely as masked form of bourgeois dictatorial rule) but as '... the open terroristic dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic and most imperialist elements of finance capital'.³ There was also a growing recognition within the Comintern of the ability of fascism to achieve a significant degree of popular support from those outside of organised labour (and in the case of Italy and Germany the creation of fascist mass movements). This was broached by some at the Comintern's executive committee plenum in December 1933, although others emphasised the traditional approach of condemning social democracy as fascism's twin. At the 7th Congress Dimitrov in his key report drew attention to fascism's mass appeal and the consequent necessity for Communists to fight for popular support - appeal to the non-proletarian social classes and in particular the middle classes of town and countryside. A popular front government as envisaged by the Comintern would not replace capitalism by socialism but would purge capitalism of any fascist tendencies and create a 'democracy of a new type' - occupying a middle ground between bourgeois democracy and a soviet society. In the longer run the preservation of peace and the successful defence of the USSR would facilitate the final emancipation of the proletariat. Communists were required to be more open and co-operative with liberal or

radical middle-class political parties ensuring that no political demands were raised that might frighten them off and Communist parties were encouraged to identify themselves with democratic and radical traditions in their own countries - Communists could now declare that they too were patriots. The role accorded to the Soviet Union 'under the leadership of Stalin' in the Comintern's (and its member parties) propaganda was in no way diminished, although now the emphasis was put more on the 'construction of socialism' than on the insurrectionary inspiration of the October Revolution. To quote one historian of the Comintern:

besides reaffirming in familiar fashion the continuing universal value of Bolshevik-Soviet experience, the Comintern concentrated upon Soviet economic achievements and the Soviet Constitution of 1936 as the most important contribution of the period. The further construction of socialism in the USSR demonstrated, according to the Comintern, how practical problems could be solved.⁴

As a result of the Seventh Congress and the specific discussion that took place on Britain the CPGB adopted a policy which added greater emphasis to the call for a 'united fightback' against the National Government and for the need to elect a Labour government.⁵ A plan by the Party to stand 20 candidates in the forthcoming general election was dropped and only two candidates were put forward.

With the exception of the two constituencies where the CP stood candidates, Communists backed the Labour election campaign throughout the country; then following the election the Party made what it described as the 'next step in the fight for unity' and applied for affiliation to the Labour party. The CP organised a campaign in favour of its affiliation to Labour and was successful in achieving a not insignificant degree of support from leftwing constituency Labour branches, Co-op societies and trade union bodies at national and local level (The *Daily Worker* claimed that over 1,200 Labour Movement affiliates supported Communist

affiliation). Although the affiliation resolution was voted down at the Labour Party Conference, it had 592,000 votes cast for it as opposed to 1,728,000 against.⁶ This gives some indication that the Communist Party had broken out of its political isolation - an isolation which was largely self-imposed as far as the Labour Left was concerned. At first there was some resistance to the idea of stretching the British popular front (or more accurately, as it was called in Britain, people's front) to include the Liberal Party, but by August 1936 William Rust was writing of the desirability of including Liberals in a people's front.⁷ In order to 'broaden' the Party's appeal and influence a number of CP-led organisations were formally closed down or allowed to die quietly, e.g. the British Workers' Sports Federation (which adopted a low profile in 1936), the Workers' Theatre Movement (died away by 1934-35), the British Anti-War Council,⁸ and the League Against Imperialism (closed down in 1937).⁹ The demise of the Workers' Theatre Movement and Workers' Sports Federation marked the end of Communist attempts to create a separate and oppositional proletarian culture within capitalism (as part of the working-class struggle). Instead the British CP, in common with its fellow Western European parties, took a more positive attitude to the existing culture and those middle-class people who were involved in the cultural professions. 'Anti-War' was replaced by 'Peace' because the need for '... the drawing of pacifist organisations and their adherents into the united front of struggle for peace acquires great importance in mobilising the petty bourgeois masses, progressive intellectuals, women and youth against war'.¹⁰ In order to adapt itself to the new 'popular front approach' further changes were made in the internal Party structure leading to the replacement of the term 'cell', with its seemingly conspiratorial associations, by the name 'group'. The changes inaugurated the local 'Branch Committee' which took over from the Local Party Committee and co-

ordinated all the factory, street and ward groups in a given area. Writing on this reorganisation into branches, which dates from 1936 as it applied to Bromley it has been stated:

New members were then expected to take part in all activities from the day of joining, and sympathisers who did not wish to join the party were encouraged to attend meetings. The party was emerging into the open from its rather conspiratorial past. In the street cell we all used assumed names.¹¹

The Party's 'new approach' towards members of the middle-class (in CP terminology 'middle sections', 'intellectuals', 'middle classes', 'cultural workers') was set out in a keynote article by one of the CP's graduate 'old guard', Ralph Fox¹², in the *Daily Worker*. The article entitled 'The Fight of Communism on the Front of Culture' appeared on 11 September 1935, and in it Fox recounted to readers that Dimitrov at the 7th World Congress had laid stress on an important element in the 'mass struggle' against fascism - the fight to break the capitalist monopoly of culture and win over the 'best' intellectuals. According to Fox, scientists, doctors, teachers, writers and similar occupational groups were now rarely from the upper classes and could be best seen as 'middle sections' often close to the working-class and frequently experiencing severe hardship in their youth. In contrast to capitalism a socialist society '... not only means that the best in the heritage of past achievement of humanity is preserved (whereas capitalism endangers it) but that a vast new prospect for its development is opened up by the freeing of the forces of production'.¹³ There was thus the basis for a 'united front' between the working-class, who would provide the leadership, and 'intellectuals' and 'cultural workers'. These 'middle sections' would be won over, because the demand '... for schools, laboratories, clinics, new modes of travel, art, literature, and music, means a new splendid future of creative work for scientists, artists, doctors and teachers'.¹⁴ Fox's

article was expanded upon in a CP pamphlet, number six in an important series significantly called 'The Peace Library', entitled *War and Culture* and written by Edgell Rickword. As Rickword declared in his opening lines, 'Culture is not only music and science and philosophy, it is games and dancing and popular songs, everything that raises our existence above the level of the struggle to keep alive'.¹⁵ Although capitalism historically had raised people's living standards it had led to a decline in the 'cultural level of the masses', as culture was inextricably linked to the profit system - the great majority of people are reduced to consumers of culture while those involved in its production were increasingly isolated from the rest of society with the consequence that their works of art were 'steadily more and more unreal'. Moreover, Rickword stated, the general decline in culture was being speeded up as war preparations gathered pace. Science was more than ever centred on research into the means of mass destruction while in the realm of ideas 'humanitarianism' was being discarded and replaced by the glorification of militarism. Nazism had taken these developments furthest and had destroyed the most advanced cultural movement in Europe, as Rickword's sub-heading declared, 'Germany the Warmakers Dream of Home'.¹⁶ As with Fox, Rickword saw the only real resolution of the 'crisis in culture' and the problems of the 'cultural workers' in the attainment of a socialist society. This of course had already been achieved in the Soviet Union:

where this problem of giving a meaning to art has ceased to exist. By their understanding of the work of Socialist construction, the writers, musicians, painters and poets have found all the inspiration they need for works which satisfy their highest ambitions and appeal to the masses of people.¹⁷

Like Fox, he wrote that it was essential to struggle against the further deterioration of culture in the 'here and now' - this was 'a phase in the fight against capitalism' - through a united campaign for peace. In order

to give the 'intellectuals' confidence in the ability of political action to alter matters they needed a united and militant working-class to inspire them as in France and Spain, hence, according to Rickword, the necessity of achieving working-class unity in Britain (CP affiliation to the Labour Party) as a step towards forming a Peoples Front. The pamphlet proposes that the major contribution that artistic, scientific and technical 'intellectuals' could make was 'immediate active work in the Peace Councils'. In a final comment Edgell Rickword states: 'whilst it falls to the lot of the working-class, in its advance to power, to preserve all that is best in the earlier forms of culture, it is simultaneously building up the basis for the richer and deeper culture of proletarian society'.¹⁸ He appeals for a greater use to be made of the growing artistic forces of 'the movement': 'Let us use our theatre, our films, our poems and novels against the infectious influence of the war-makers, expressing confidence and hope ...'.¹⁹ Presumably Rickword was appealing for those middle-class 'artistic intellectuals' who became involved in Peace Councils to join the Party and contribute towards the creation of a 'worker's culture' (the pamphlet did not go into the problem of how recently radicalised middle-class individuals from the 'cultural world' could create a 'worker's' or 'proletarian' culture).

The years 1935 and 1936 also saw the publication of two books by Party members which attempted to analyse the British middle-class and form some conclusions as to what a 'Marxist' approach should be towards them. The first, *The Condition of Clerical Labour in Britain* by Francis Klingender was published by Martin Lawrence in 1935. Klingender had come over to England from Germany with his parents in 1925-26, taken a job in the market research unit of an advertising agency and enrolled as an evening student at the LSE where he gained a first class honours B.Sc degree (sociology); he then worked for a short time for Arcos followed

by a spell of sociological fieldwork gathering material for an official survey updating the Booth study of social conditions in London. Klingender returned to the LSE where he completed a Ph.D using much of the data he had collected for the social survey of London. It was this Ph.D that largely formed the basis of the book issued by Martin Lawrence. As can be imagined given its origins the work is of an empirical nature - detailing the occupational and group composition of the 'middle-class' and going into some detail over the changes in salaries and conditions of clerical employees in banking and insurance, and local government. The book concentrated its study on clerical workers, the largest part of the British lower middle-class, and 'although much of the argument is detailed and statistical, the purpose of the book is by no means academic; the facts are intended to form the necessary basis for the political argument which constitutes its main concern'.²⁰ Klingender attempts to demonstrate the 'economic proletarianization' of the clerical sector of the 'middle strata', a process which he suggests was spreading to the university-trained and professional groups. As a consequence of this the lower middle-class was increasingly dissatisfied with the existing society - they are part of a social strata which is not a class in the full sense of the term:

In spite of their lacking a specific economic purpose, their position is one of great significance. Marx has described the vacillating role of the petty bourgeoisie alternately siding with the capitalists and the workers; clinging to the mentality and habits of life of the former while driven more and more down to the economic standards of the latter.²¹

A previous period of unrest amongst the 'middle strata', in particular clerical workers, was in the immediate post-First World War years. According to Klingender the British Labour Movement failed to establish a firm alliance with clerical workers and although some were drawn into the

clerical sections of industrial unions this was often accompanied by 'sabotaging' the work of the clerks' own union; thus clerks returned to supporting the capitalist status quo. In the existing situation of 'crisis in capitalism' the 'middle strata' were particularly prey to the appeal of fascism with its demagogic attacks on big financiers coupled with encouragement of 'anti-working-class' prejudices and fears. In reality fascism had led to economic decay and savage repression for workers and the 'middle classes' alike:

The number of posts for the university trained has nowhere increased under fascism; on the contrary, even the possibility of studying has been drastically curtailed by decrees reducing the number of students admitted to the universities.²²

An alliance between 'the forces of the working-class' and those from the 'middle strata' was the only means to prevent the advent of power by fascism. Klingender claimed that 'with or without fascism the solid support of the working-class is a powerful means for the achievement of any partial demands of the middle strata'.²³ Socialism opened up a massive expansion both in the demand for clerical and professional labour and also in the possibilities for them to use their skills and abilities. This was amply illustrated by the situation in the Soviet Union: in the case of clerical labour, it had both grown in numbers (in contrast with the capitalist world where it was tending to fall) and had registered a rapid improvement in wage levels.

The other book, which I have previously referred to, was *The Fate of the Middle Classes* by Alec Brown and published by Gollancz in 1936. It is a polemical and much more personal work than Klingender's book and presumably not as well thought of in Party circles, for it was not published by the 'CP book firm' Martin Lawrence or reviewed in the *Daily Worker* or *Labour Monthly*.²⁴ Brown devotes a good portion of his book to

examining and countering the arguments of H.G. Wells 'the outstanding spokesman of the middle classes'. Wells above all else proclaimed that the detached intellectuals with no political ties were capable by reason of their intelligence of improving the world (hence Wells advocated rule by a scientific and technical elite). The ideas of Wells and their popularity among the 'middle classes' was due, Brown argued, to the particular course of capitalist development in the period of imperialist expansion. There had been a preservation of a remnant of the 'old middle class' and the creation of a 'new middle class' of teachers, technical and administrative workers, and this had encouraged Wells in his 'delusions' as to the superiority of intellect and had blinded the 'middle classes' 'to the fact that the majority of their kind had been thrust down into the ranks of wage-earners'.²⁵ Capitalist development had now reached its monopoly stage and required constant rationalisation of its labour costs; this not only affected the working-class but was 'materially destructive' of both the 'old' and 'new' 'middle classes'. There was also an increasingly apparent decline in the quality of the work required of clerical and technical employees as mechanisation was reducing work in these areas (as with factory labour) to more repetitive activities. Alec Brown drew a distinction between the main body of the 'middle classes' and those who were part of the 'upper bureaucracy' involved in the administration of finance capital, who were irredeemably linked to capitalist society: 'There is still some future for this upper administrative class'.²⁶ The 'upper administrative class' made up only a very small number of the 'middle classes'. As a whole the 'middle classes' could only prevent their destruction (the heading for chapter V is: 'The Commencement of the Destruction of the Whole Middle-Class') and achieve their desires/dreams for a 'new world' which was more rational,

planned, and efficient by supporting the working-class fight against capitalism. The 'proletarian leadership' in the struggle was reiterated by Brown:

We, the middle classes, cannot evolve the new form of society - that is to say, the actual way we are to meet together and, by organising the new social life, destroy and supplant the old apparatus. This can only be done by the proletariat. Members of other classes may take part - middle-class persons coming over, even members of the bourgeoisie - but they take part in so far as they adopt the proletarian standpoint.²⁷

Probably the first officially organised meeting of middle-class Communists to take place in Britain was a report-back meeting of the 7th World Congress of the Comintern in London at the end of September 1935 (a weekend) and called 'Professional Workers and the World Congress'.²⁸ The meeting was said to be 'representative of the varied sections of the middle-class and professional workers' and among those who attended were teachers, technicians, scientists, students, artists and writers. Harry Pollitt gave the main address, detailing the decisions of the World Congress and relating them to the need to organise middle-class discontent into revolutionary channels. Pollitt pointed to the great advances in France in this area, (France was considered to be the 'model' to emulate; even before the Front Populaire, in 1932 the inspirational 'front-organisation' Association des Ecrivains et Artistes Révolutionnaires had been formed). He then listed those aspects of 'mass working-class activity' where members of the middle-class had already been involved and made valuable contributions: the fight against Part II of the 1934 Unemployment Act, the campaign against the Government's ARP measures, and the struggle for peace. Pollitt drew attention to the need to counter Mosley's appeal, and he concluded by stating that there were a large variety of ways to win support from professional people and intellectuals:

He instanced how doctors can expose in a most trenchant way the shortcomings of the Government's provisions for health, referred to the tremendous value of working class novels and plays at the present time, and emphasised in conclusion the importance of winning the middle-class as the main ally of the working-class in the fight for progress.

Arising out of this meeting a group was set up composed of Communists from various professions with the job of examining the problems encountered by the Party in relating towards the middle-class and '... giving guidance to the development of all possible forms of activity.'³⁰

In line with the 'new mood' the Party organised public processions in which it attempted to lay claim to an 'indigenous national tradition of radicalism'. This concern shown by the Party was not a one-off gimmick but in fact reflected a real reorientation in the CP's whole approach and was given best literary expression in Jack Lindsay's declamatory poem *Who are the English?*, which was produced as a wide selling *Left Review* pamphlet. The new approach, according to Douglas Hyde, made British Communists, in practical terms, '... much more sensitive to British sensitivities whilst at the same time trying to get across the idea that we were better patriots than they, though our loyalty was to a different, very authentic, tradition'.³¹ The first procession organised by the London District Committee took place on 20 September 1936 and was described as a 'Pageant of History'. Party artists were particularly active in preparing for the Pageant as marchers carried a whole series of large portraits of 'Great' Englishmen who had been involved in the struggle for freedom throughout the ages, e.g. Thomas More, Cobden, and Bright *et al.* Similar pageants (using many of the same banners/portraits) were held in Sheffield, while the CP was holding its National Conference there, and in the Rhondda.³² Utilising the services of the 'Party run' Kino Films the London District had the Pageant filmed,^{and} the resultant film *We are the English* was available for showing from October 1936.³³

By 1937 the Communist Party's membership stood at 12,250, only a small proportion of whom were unemployed, a virtual doubling in the number of members since the congress of 1935. The Party leadership could with some justification claim that:

The Party can now number among its active members men and women from all walks of life - men and women whose sterling work in the factory and branch, in the street, in professional organisations, whose talent in writing, film production, the theatre, have considerably strengthened every aspect of Party work and propaganda, and drawn to the Party either new members or close sympathisers in a way never experienced before.³⁴

The Congress credentials of the 501 delegates attending the 14th Party Congress in 1937 recorded that some 152 were employed in clerical and professional occupations (a further 13 were students) - 30% of the delegates.

The Communist Party recruited a significant number of middle-class members (professional people, shopkeepers, and small businessmen) from among the British Jewish community as part of a general recruitment among Jews (it goes without saying that working-class Jews joined the Party). A lively radical tradition among Russian-Jewish immigrants in the East End of London at the turn of the century has been recorded.³⁵ Various Jewish figures played a prominent role in the CP from its foundation (e.g. Andrew Rothstein, Zelda Kahan - later Coates, David Capper - leading Party teacher et al) and from early on Jews were apparent in the Party not only in London but in Leeds and Manchester.³⁶ It was with the rise to power of the Nazis and the emergence of a British Fascism, however, that a whole number of Jews, particularly from the younger generation, joined the Communist Party. Alec Brown in his *The Fate of the Middle Classes* specifically included an appendix on 'The Jewish Problem as a Middle-Class Problem'. Modern anti-Semitism, Brown argued, was a product of capitalist development in its ultimate stage of

imperialism - capitalism had led to the commencement of the destruction of the 'old middle-class', but this was initially off-set by the parallel growth of a 'new middle-class' (administrative workers and 'technical intelligentsia') which recruited members of the 'old middle-class'. The onset of economic crisis and rationalisation had dried up employment opportunities in the 'new middle-class', leading to an intensification of anti-Semitism as the middle-class attempted to prevent Jewish middle-class competition over the increasingly scarce jobs. Brown claims: 'As the polarisation of the middle-class proceeds, the Jews are pushed out. Already in Britain a number of large concerns bar their vacancies to Jews'.³⁷ He saw Zionism as the political reaction of the Jewish middle-class to anti-Semitism, a 'Jewish intellectual dream'.³⁸ There was common agreement within the Party that Zionism had to be challenged, as at best it was a 'diversion' from the ending of anti-Semitism and at worst it was an accomplice of imperialism. In the Popular Front period, however, the Party ended its policy of emphasising the class divisions within Jewry above all else (i.e. Jewish workers have nothing in common with Jewish owners and businessmen). Instead, as Gallacher put it, 'The Jews therefore, as Jews, can become a strong contributory factor in the development of the revolutionary struggle ...'.³⁹ The tendency for Jewish members to renounce their 'Jewishness' was discouraged and an emphasis was put on Jewish Communists working and winning influence in their own Jewish community - this included both working-class and middle-class Jews in the Party.⁴⁰

'Popular Frontism' and students, cultural, technical and scientific workers'

The number of students in the Communist Party continued to grow throughout the 1930s⁴¹ and a CP presence developed in most universities and many institutions of further education. The Communists were the overwhelmingly

dominant force in the national University Labour Federation which by the late 1930s had 35 affiliated clubs with a total membership of 3,500.⁴² A contributory factor in the spread of CP membership amongst students were the activities of a number of Party members from Cambridge and Oxford who went on to other educational establishments in continuance of academic study, and proceeded to recruit new members there. Richard Llewelyn-Davies, a CP member at Cambridge, went on to the Architectural Association School and was important in initiating the growth of the Party there. Sam Fisher helped build up a CP group of some 25 in a college where there had previously been just one Communist when he took his teacher training. The demand placed on Communist students that they take their academic studies seriously has already been referred to, and many CP students seem to have achieved 'Firsts'. A number of CP students and others began examining the content and methods of the education they received. Detailed reports were produced by students in several institutions, often with Communists playing a leading role (at the Cambridge University Education Society, led by Brian Simon, but also at Manchester, Liverpool and the A.A. School), and specific reforms were proposed. There were calls for education to be less abstract and academic and more related to social conditions and circumstances; and in order to do this university courses should also include 'a historical dimension' - the code for Marxism. There were also demands for student representation on the boards of faculties and governing bodies and proposals for a greater emphasis to be placed on group or seminar work rather than interminable lectures. To quote Brian Simon on this new 'positive' approach:

The slogan we had was one used by Roosevelt at that time - 'universities should be made into the fortresses of democracy'. This was partly to do with what was happening in China where ... they [Chinese Communists - SRP] set up universities right in the hinterland of

China. And partly the fact that the Nazis always attacked universities ... so the defence of universities was very much our line, but also the transformation of them ...⁴³

A new importance was given to working in the NUS, and CP students soon took a dominant role in the Union, so that in 1937 the NUS Annual Congress for the first time discussed graduate unemployment, and in 1940, by a 2 - 1 majority, the union came out against the war declaring it an 'imperialist war'.⁴⁴ Communist Party member Brian Simon was NUS President in 1939 and was followed by another Party member when he joined the army in 1940. George Matthews was Vice-President of both the NUS and the ULF in 1940. From mid-1940 to the end of 1944 an Edinburgh University student Communist was full-time NUS National Secretary, although, sensing the possibility that the Union would be closed down by the Government, a less controversial stance was taken by the NUS after June, 1940. The next NUS Congress in 1941, which was held at Cambridge and was attended by over 1,000 people, was titled 'The Student, his Subject and Society' and most of those who spoke discussed faculty work and '... the social implications of studying science or geography or the arts'.⁴⁵ A number of active student Communists after their graduation became full-time functionaries in various 'Popular Front' campaigning bodies. Sam Fisher and Dick Freeman, the Oxford Communist who had moved the 'King and Country' resolution of February 1933, both worked for the International Peace Campaign. Bill Carritt became National Secretary of the League of Nations Youth Movement.

Developments within the Artists International Association and the 'broadening' of its appeal and approach in accordance with 'unity in the fight against fascism' have been recorded and discussed by L. Morris and R. Radford in *The Story of the A.I.A.* (pp. 28-29). The 'new line' was heralded with the Association's exhibition 'Artists Against Fascism and

War' held in November 1935. Over 600 artists submitted work but owing to a shortage of space only 200 were represented. Those exhibited represented an extremely wide variety of different styles and traditions, including a whole number of prominent artists: Augustus John, Eric Gill, Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, etal. Writing of the occasion in the *Daily Worker* of 27 November 1935 A.L. Lloyd declared that the political significance of the exhibition '... cannot be over-estimated ... it is a sign that our intellectuals are no longer burying their heads in the sand of social disregard' and he contrasted it with last year's A.I. exhibition which was '... scruffily honest, but heavily sectarian'. The CP artists remained the active core of the AIA; however, as a group (Hogarth Group) they attempted to discuss and clarify what a Communist approach to art should be and although 'unity' was the order of the day a position of 'ideological opposition' was maintained with regard to abstract and surrealist art. Francis Klingender was an influential figure among Party artists (and others involved in the cultural field) in expounding 'a Marxist view of Art'. Describing the pre-War Hogarth Group Reg Turner remarks:

Quite specifically we had a socialist realist outlook, that is one of the reasons for forming a Party artists group - to try and get art which was related to the needs of the masses but at the same time was good art, that was what we thought was socialist realism.⁴⁶

Amongst writers the requirement for an ever widening 'anti-fascist front' seems to have led to the decision to cease publication of the *Left Review* in 1938. Although, as Rickword has later claimed, a number of those involved in the journal were under the impression that it would be succeeded by a new militant publication, it is highly likely that a 'green light' for ending the *Review* was given by the CP leadership. Initially at any rate, support was given to John Lehmann's *New Writing* which, for a

short period, was transferred from the publishers John Lane to Lawrence and Wishart (it quickly reverted back in 1937-38 with Lawrence and Wishart's loss of interest in the whole enterprise). Lehmann wrote in 1936 of the need to move on to a 'wider anti-fascist kind of writing' capable of reaching many more people.⁴⁷ In his first volume of autobiography he describes the motivations behind the launch of *New Writing*:

Like so many of my contemporaries, I was haunted by the feeling that time was running out before a new world war ... I was inexplicably bewitched by the idea that writers and artists had a large role to play in the struggle to prevent it. The literary side of Barbusse's anti-war movement fascinated me; *Monde* and *Vendredi*, where the politics were interspersed with stories and reportage by a group of clever young writers ... seemed to reach a far higher literary level than *Left Review* ... Why should there not be a magazine in England round which people who held the same ideas about fascism and war could assemble without having to prove their doctrinaire Marxist purity? Why not a magazine to which the writers of *New Signatures* and *New Country* could contribute, side by side with writers like Chamson and Guilloux, and other 'anti-fascist' writers from other countries? In *Left Review* the politics came, fatally, first; I wanted a magazine in which literature came first, with politics only as an undertone.⁴⁸

As with the Party artists, there was a CP Writers Group which held regular meetings of Communist novelists and poets (Douglas Garman, and Alick West were involved, although it was not inclusive of all members in this field, e.g. Edward Upward was not in the Group). The Writers' Group was in existence from at least as early as 1935, although little is known of its activities outside of the comment that its '... purpose was to clarify what we must do as writers for the victory of the Party and the revolution'.⁴⁹ It seems probable that some sort of collective discussion was held on the application of Marxist theory to literature;⁵⁰ also in common with other Communists in cultural occupations there would have been debate over the question of socialist realism and how to apply it to their

own work. 'Worker/Proletarian Writers' as a concept and aim seems to have been pushed into the background. The writer and Party member Valentine Ackland called, in 1936, for an end to the 'absurd distinction' between 'writers' and 'worker-writers'.⁵¹

Interestingly, and somewhat at odds with the prevailing emphasis on 'The People', Party members played an important role in the formation of the 'Workers' Music Association' (WMA) in 1936. Despite the word 'Workers' in the title the WMA was not antagonistic to the 'Popular Front' mood as its *raison d'être* was to communicate the 'rich musical inheritance' to people and encourage its continuity in the belief that '... art can move people to the betterment of society'.⁵² There had been a growing appreciation of the need for 'music for the movement' for a number of months prior to the creation of the WMA. A Soviet-supported International Music Bureau had been active for a number of years and from 1934 it ran a worldwide competition for the 'best revolutionary choral work'. 1935 saw the first 'Workers Music Olympiad' (Workers' International Music Festival) held in Strasbourg after plans to hold it in Vienna naturally had to be abandoned with the triumph of fascism in Austria. At this 'Olympiad' a series of contests were held between various countries 'workers' choirs, orchestras and bands of both Communist and Social Democratic persuasion. In Britain a *Daily Worker* choir was formed in 1934 under the conductorship of A. Corum, and an 'ancillary' organisation of the Party, the Workers' Music League, was in existence from the early 1930s. By 1935 there even came into being a Middlesex United Front Band made up of mainly NUWM members and under instruction of a 'comrade Huckle' as bandmaster. The WMA principally grew out of those involved with the London Labour Choral Union, a body dating back to 1924 when it had been set up largely on the initiative of the composer Rutland Boughton and Herbert Morrison. The Musical Director of the Union, Alan

Bush, in common with a number of other 'committed' musicians, felt there was a need to widen activity to involve not just choirs but brass bands and ensembles. This desire was intertwined with the radicalisation of a number of the professional musicians involved in the LLCU and outside, including a number who joined the CP - A Bush (1935), Rutland Boughton, Bernard Stevens, Michael Tippett, Thomas Russell, et. al.⁵³ In March 1936 eight musical organisations met and formed the WMA; in addition to the London Labour Choral Union they were the Southend Choir, the Young Workers' Ballet, the Jewish Male Voice Choir, the Peckham Co-op Musical Society, the Unity Theatre Club, the Morely Professional Brass Band, and the RACS Speech Choir. The Association's foundation was accompanied by the appeal that the '... support of similar organisations and of members of the musical profession is required to assist in the building up of a movement similar to the 'Federation Musicale Populaire in France'.⁵⁴ The WMA had the job of co-ordinating the activities of its affiliates and ensuring professional advice, and tuition was provided for the choirs and bands. In this task the Association was helped by a number of German Communist refugees who were able to give the benefit of their musical expertise e.g. Georg Knebler (who ran a Communist choir in the East End), Ernst Herman Meyer, and for a short period Hans Eisler. By 1938 mention was made in a *Left Review* article of the significant invigoration of the Left musical scene that had taken place over the last year. There had been the emergence of new groups of singers and musicians, and new songs had been written and old ones refurbished and made available in printed song sheets, and in one instance, in book form, *The Left Song Book*, a collaborative effort by Alan Bush and the writer Randall Swingler, both Party members, and published by Gollancz. The comment was made that '... meetings nowadays seem incomplete without a choir and a well-selected repertoire';⁵⁵ moreover, the WMA was able to attract the public support of a number of very

prominent musicians, in a true 'Popular Front style', including Benjamin Britten, John Ireland, Copland, Casals, and, of course, Rutland Boughton.⁵⁶ Party musicians, apart from involvement in the WMA, attempted as individuals to apply Marxism to the development of music throughout history and its relationship to the 'working-class struggle'.⁵⁷ These theoretical efforts, however, remained extremely limited in the written form.

On 23 February 1936 the Unity Theatre was opened, London's first permanent theatre of the 'Left', a visible product, as the name Unity implies, of the 'Popular Frontism' of the Party.⁵⁸ The sole concentration on agit-prop and street theatre work of the 'Third Period' was ended and some of the key practitioners of the Workers' Theatre Movement (WTM) were dispensed with,⁵⁹ although many of those who had been involved in the WTM went on to provide the bulk of Unity's performers and workers in co-operation with a significant group of Leftwing/Communist professional theatrical people who contributed their expertise to the enterprise. Already in 1934 a group of professional actors, actresses, and playwrights had come together to form a body which could provide its services free or at a minimal cost to working-class and Leftwing groups. This body was called Left Theatre and consisted of some long-standing socialists and more recently radicalised members of the profession. To quote Andre van Gyseghem, the moving figure in the creation of the Left Theatre,

I had become so interested in what was being done by the Rebel Players by totally untrained, non-professional actors, that I became convinced that there were people in the professional theatre who would also be glad to have something more important to say in their work than the plays which were being done at the time. And so we formed Left Theatre. It consisted entirely of professional actors, all of whom either gave their services free of charge or for a minimum remuneration, giving performances of plays with a social conscience and a wide appeal.

The fusing of professional with amateur was not restricted to Unity in London and its touring productions but was duplicated in several other cities with the establishment of their own 'Unities'.

The mid-1930s also saw significant changes among leftwing scientists, as Werskey has noted of the new approach taken towards politics by Haldane, Bernal and Needham:

They became far more politically active. They tried much harder to relate their thoughts and actions to wider, more collective efforts to bring about socialism. Still more remarkably, they began to apply their socialist convictions to their own circumstances as scientists.⁶¹

On a practical level CP scientists became involved, along with sympathetic non-Party colleagues, in campaigns utilising their scientific skills, e.g. ARP (estimates of bomb blast and the effects of gas attacks), discrediting Nazi racial theories (V.G. Childe took an active role in this), involvement in co-operation with medical Party and non-Party people in dietary work (Committee Against Malnutrition - Hon. Sec.: Communist F. Le Gros Clark). Another arena of activity was the Association of Scientific Workers; writing in the late thirties with approval of the rise in activity in the union Bernal summed up the new 'Left' two-fold stance of the Association:

one, professional and individual concern with preserving and improving the conditions of employment of its members, and establishing the status of "scientific worker" as in some way similar to that of the doctor or the lawyer; the other concern is with the whole position of science in society.⁶²

The Left Book Club

The best known product and symbol of the 'Popular Front mood' was the Left Book Club (although Jim Fyrth's work on the 'Aid Spain Movement' has gone a long way towards revealing that it was this Movement that represented the largest expression of 'Popular Frontism' in Britain) launched in March 1936 by the established publisher, Victor Gollancz. The idea of the enterprise was based on the American book clubs, namely the publication of books for members at a specially reduced price because of the guaranteed market represented by the membership. A triumvirate of Gollancz, John Strachey and Harold Laski selected the books to be published, and to accompany them a journal was started in which members were given reviews of the various 'monthly choices' intermingled with more topical political commentary and reports of the activities of Left Book Club groups which sprang up throughout the country. The Club was a rapid success and a year after its inception it had 44,800 members (it reached a peak in 1939 with 57,000) and a burgeoning number of local Left Book Club groups where members in towns and even villages came together to discuss the various books they were sent.⁶³ There were 1,200 such groups by 1939, a full-time organiser, John Lewis, and a department was set up in order to encourage and work with the Left Book Club groups which increasingly acted as political bodies extending their activities into raising money for Spain etc. As a body the Left Book Club was firmly wedded to the creation of a 'Peoples Front', as Gollancz put it: 'It [the LBC -SRP] is aiming at the creation of an educated public opinion ... thus the Club is one of the most important factors in creating that mass basis without which a true popular front is impossible ...'.⁶⁴ The CP orientation of the Club was strong, not just because of Strachey but also (as is apparent from the recent biography by R. Dudley Edwards) more importantly, because of Gollancz's political attitude. Although the Club published a wide range

of books covering current affairs, science, history, and political theory, the number which could be termed as representing a 'critical leftwing position' with regard to the Soviet Union or Communist Party was extremely small. Dutt, writing to Strachey in the early stages of the Club's life, declared:

The Left Book Club is a brilliant piece of organizing work all through; and its success and scope, so far from being injured, is probably the greater because it is recognized by the general public as an independent commercial enterprise on its own feet, and not the propaganda of a particular political organization.⁶⁵

There are no detailed statistics as to the social or occupational make-up of the Left Book Club's membership, although its size would mean that the majority had not been involved in much political activity before. A wide social class range was represented among the Club's members; however, the middle-class seems to have predominated, according to an estimate at the time by John Lewis: 75 per cent of the membership were white collar workers, professional people, and leftwing intellectuals. The make-up of a Left Book Club group in Essex was held to be fairly typical: 'A draughtsman, a doctor of physics, a printer, a bank clerk, a dental mechanic, a road mender, a schoolteacher, a painter, and several clerks'.⁶⁶ A writer to a Party journal in 1937 suggested that the Party had made no specific effort to recruit the growing numbers of 'awakening' black-coated workers; instead the organising of such people had come from 'an outside source - that of the Left Book Club'. He recommended Party members become involved in their own local LBC as from his own experiences he knew '... what a large body there is of potential recruits for Communist Party ranks among these outwardly 'non-party' men and women'.⁶⁷ The Left Book Club certainly became a source of further recruits to the Party, many of whom, if not the majority, would have been middle-class. Douglas Hyde started an LBC group in Woking when he moved to Surrey in

1937; it soon flourished with a membership largely composed of civil servants and 'City gents' and just one or two workers. Hyde recalls that he brought the whole of the group into the CP:

it [Woking LBC] had long discussions on John Strachey's *The Theory and Practice of Socialism* and with the crisis atmosphere building up and building up it was asked, "what can we do, what can we do?" and then Strachey had a Left Book Club book, *What Are We to Do?* and he had the answer and literally it was to join the Party ... and the whole group came over to the Party.⁶⁸

An aspect of the Club's development which has a specific relevance for my study was the emergence of vocational or specialist groups, and although there were LBC groups of taxi-drivers and busmen the great majority of them were based on middle-class professions. There were poetry circles (a London Poetry group), a Left Book Club Theatre Guild, and the following LBC groups: scientists, architects, musicians, writers, actors, lawyers, journalists, students, actors and teachers (this list does not pretend to be definitive). Unfortunately, little is known of the activities of such groups as papers relating to them that were sent to the Club's Groups' Department were not kept. A few details can be gleaned on some of the groups from various sources, including biographies and the few written works on or around the Left Book Club. In many of the groups Communists from the parallel Party groups played leading roles: for example, Alick West, a member of the CP Writers' Group, was an organiser of the Writers' and Readers' Group of the Left Book Club during 1937 and 1938, and his close friend and CP member Jack Lindsay became chairman of the Left Book Club 'Poetry Section' and co-editor of their monthly. West describes the aim of the Writers' and Readers' Group as an attempt at breaking down the division between writers and readers '... by uniting them in the fight against fascism, so that literature would be enriched by a new content of political struggle and the content of our political aims

would be given definition through artistic form'.⁶⁹ The Musicians' group contained many WMA members, both CP and non-CP, and concentrated on providing musical contributions to Club events. The LBC Theatre Guild, established in April/May 1937, has been described as 'a joint project' between Gollancz and the London Unity Theatre with the stated objective of encouraging the formation of more 'Unities' throughout the country and giving advice '... on the organization and running of such theatres, issue recommendations and scripts of suitable plays and so on'.⁷⁰ Apart from the Guild there was in addition a Professional Actors LBC Group with over 300 members which, in line with the London Unity Theatre, presumably attempted to organise professional help to the various initiatives throughout the country.⁷¹ In practical results there is some justification in claiming the LBC's Theatre Guild the 'most successful of the special groups'.⁷² However, the largest was the Scientists' Group, which attracted in excess of 300 people to its meetings and in turn gave birth to regional LBC Scientists groups in Birmingham, Cambridge, Derby, Bristol, Leeds and Leicester. The Scientists' Group enabled a wide range of the 'committed' and previously inactive to come together: A.Sc.W. activists, Cambridge Scientists' Anti-War Group, CP, Labour/Socialist League and non-party scientists et al. Levy played an active role as he did in the Left Book Club at large by being a regular national speaker sent out to Clubs throughout the country. As to be expected Bernal's influence was greatly felt within the Group and in his 1939 masterpiece *The Social Function of Science* he concluded by setting out the role of the scientist in the Popular Front:

The scientist individually and through his organizations can best help by making no exclusive commitments and assisting all progressive parties without favour. The kind of help the scientist can

bring is in exact surveys of social and economic conditions, in preparing plans on technical questions, and in criticizing current civil and military programmes.⁷³

Bernal also approvingly referred to the French Popular Front Government where scientists were involved in the spread of scientific knowledge through the Workers' University and in this way ^{were} helping to break down working-class prejudice and misconceptions as regards science. The Left Book Club would obviously fit into Bernal's desire for a non-party progressive/leftwing educative body, and the Scientists' Group organized a series of lectures on 'Science and Society' and produced a touring exhibition on 'The Frustration of Science', and among the various publications produced by the Club were a number of straightforward accounts of scientific subjects or fields.⁷⁴ Moreover, one of the LBC major propaganda campaigns was the demand for adequate protection for the civil population from aerial bombardment as based around the 1938 Left Book Club monthly choice *A.R.P.* by, as he was advertised in publicity about the book, Professor J.B.S. Haldane, F.R.S. Although the Scientists' Group may well have discussed and commented on Haldane's book, the bulk of further research on ARP and shelters was carried on outside of the Club as such (see my chapter on Communist Architects). The advantage of the Left Book Club and its specialist groups was that it brought together many of those who were already involved in one or several of the myriad 'Popular Front-type' bodies and thus provided an arena for the interchange of experiences and information.

The 'Popular Front' Middle-Class Communist

The years from the early to the mid 1930s to the outbreak of the War saw substantial numbers (in comparison with previous years) of middle-class people come into the Party or form a close relationship with it as a term

that came into common parlance from this time, 'fellow-travellers'.⁷⁵ G.D.H. Cole, writing in 1937, admitted that 'many of the most intelligent' young people were joining the Communist Party and not the Labour Party which had

... become respectable. Merely to join it is no longer to embark upon a new way of living, or to experience a sense of conversion that changes the entire meaning of life. Communism, on the other hand, has that magic. It is a gospel as well as a programme: it gives to its votaries the sense of added power that comes only from dedication to a cause.⁷⁶

Cole's view has to be contrasted to another contemporaneous characterisation of middle-class Communists of the 'Popular Front' period provided by Orwell in his *The Road to Wigan Pier*, also published in 1937. To quote some of what Orwell wrote:

A middle-class person embraces socialism and perhaps even joins the Communist Party. How much real difference does it make. Obviously, living within the framework of capitalist society, he has got to go on earning his living, and one cannot blame him if he clings to his bourgeois economic status. But is there any change in his tastes, his habits, his manners, his imaginative background - his 'ideology', in Communist jargon? ... It is noticeable that he still habitually associates with his own class ... most significant of all, he invariably marries into his own class ... Look at Crd X, member of the C.P.G.B. and author of 'Marxism for Infants'. Crd X, it so happens, is an old Etonian. He would be ready to die on the barricades, in theory anyway, but you notice that he still leaves his bottom waistcoat button undone. He idealizes the proletariat, but it is remarkable how little his habits resemble theirs ... because in his heart he feels that proletarian manners are disgusting. So you see he is still responding to the training of his childhood ...⁷⁷

John Strachey would in many ways fit into Orwell's depiction of a 1930s middle-class Communist. A member of that London coterie of 'left wing intellectuals' of which Strachey was a part, although never a Party member, Naomi Mitchison (sister of J.B.S. Haldane) remarks in a book of memoirs how little their 'socialist politics' altered their way of life:

'We did alter it to some extent but we still took holidays, still had a big house with a staff to run it as we expected them to do, still gave parties, were still recognisably ourselves'.⁷⁸ One of those who had a brief affair with Naomi Mitchison was a leftwing science lecturer from Bristol University, John Pilley, who was married to CP member Angela Tuckett, a middle-class convert to the Party in 1930-31. Tuckett contrasts her own approach to politics, which she describes as being 'an activist',⁷⁹ to her husband's and the circle with which he associated:

He would complain that it was impossible to have any intelligent conversation in Bristol; and whenever he could he would be off for the day, or two to London to meet with the "real intellectuals" in Soho and various places. These included various people like Naomi Mitchison etc etc, Strachey, Gaitskell (occasionally); but there was only one really GREAT [sic] one there, which was "Sage" Bernal. He would expect me to come too but I found them all unreal and boring, except when sometimes after the Soho lunches we would go on to some houses where there might be people I could get on with. One of these was "a fellow-lawyer", who talked about activity which he knew well: this was D.N. Pritt with whom I became a very close friend.⁸⁰

She recounts one occasion when she excused herself from one of the Soho lunches in order to meet up with the Hunger Marchers,^{and} Bernal also said he must leave as he had a 'prior engagement'. Later, to Angela Tuckett's surprise, she met Bernal at the demonstration. 'The deplorable thing about Sage, it seems, was that he himself on occasion was an activist too!'⁸¹ After the event was over they shared a taxi,^{and} her husband John Pilley was rather shocked to see them arrive back together. It is not difficult to find evidence of a mistrust of the new influx of 'intellectuals' into the Party by some rank and file Communists. Responding to two contributions in *Discussion* asking Party members to realise the essential importance of 'intellectuals' in the CP, one member replied that there was no British equivalent to Gide: 'Let the intellectuals realise that their activities are necessary to the Party by

MAKING THEM NECESSARY [sic] i.e., by being in the forefront in understanding and interpreting the social needs and struggles of their own time'.⁸² Another reply fell in line with a frequently expressed opinion within the Party, before and after, that there was a basis for the mistrust and hostility by workers towards 'intellectuals': namely, that they had 'come over to the Revolution' through 'theoretical comprehension' and not as a result of the experiences of every day existence. 'Intellectuals' can only gain the trust of their fellow comrades by '... proving [sic] themselves to be of practical worth and to be depended upon'.⁸³ A recent account of Bromley Communists during the thirties draws attention to a particularly acrimonious conflict which broke out in the branch between working-class members and the new middle-class recruits. A Yorkshire Communist had come to Bromley in search of work and gained employment as a domestic servant; as a Party member he threw a good deal of his spare time into recruiting and working for a new union for domestic workers. He attacked the CP branch for the inadequacy of its 'industrial work' and

particularly criticised the members whom he considered to be middle-class, leading comfortable lives and never having been exposed to unemployment and poverty. And above all he was critical of the work that they did, which was mainly in peace organisations and the Left Book Club. He considered that they should take a greater part in such activities as canvassing, selling the *Daily Worker* and union recruitment.⁸⁴

The conflict within the branch became so serious that it was only finally resolved by the establishment of a special commission appointed by the London District Committee of the Party. Likewise, it is clear than an element in Joe Jacobs's unease with the Party was not just over the dissolution of pre-Popular Front campaigning bodies but specifically that

the body with which he was deeply involved, International Labour Defence, was displaced by the much more middle-class National Council of Civil Liberties.⁸⁵

It would be wrong to see all the CP middle-class professionals and students as completely involved in the LBC, peace work, and Party specialist/professional groups. There was a requirement of members that they work within their Party branch, i.e. the branch which covered the area where they lived. Despite the sentiments expressed in the Bromley branch many middle-class Communists threw themselves into the more mundane and practical activities of Party work. This was done by some, initially, with great trepidation and a good example is Alick West's description of his experiences and feelings of branch life on his joining the CP in 1935, his tension at being a look-out while other members were 'chalking', his involvement in a poster parade and his first attempt at public speaking. West also describes his mental struggles over his Party membership as for instance while selling the *Daily Worker* outside Stockwell underground station:

'I stood there, the life going on around me. I am a support for a poster, I thought, a stand for a newspaper, and behind this show for others I can safely go on being myself. I thus dissociate what I feel to be 'I' from my appearance as Party member. As Ananias withheld his money, so I withhold myself. 'I' is for me a bourgeois concept, a secret escape from Communist being. Yet in this recognition I also want to make myself a Communist.

Being thus concerned with what happened inside my head, and afraid to lose the emotional assurance gained through Party membership, I was not free to face my doubts whether the Party itself was in the right.⁸⁶

Party membership as opposed to 'fellow-travelling', although it was blurred in some instances with 'closed members' and was not as strict and demanding as it had been, was still distinctly different from membership of other parties.⁸⁷ The declaration by Stalin on the death of Lenin that

We Communists are people of a special mould. We are made of a special stuff. We are those who form the army of the great proletarian strategist, the army of Lenin. There is nothing higher than the honour of belonging to this army

remained one of the most used quotations inside the Party. The CP leadership attempted to infuse new members with a recognition of the special nature of Party membership. Dutt made this clear in a contribution to a Communist students' conference at the end of 1934 in which he set out the 'political conversion' required of members in order to end the perennial weakness of student Communism, namely, the dropping off after student years. According to Dutt:

Communism is a complete world conception covering every aspect of life, and transforming all our thinking and activity; the Communist is the responsible builder of the future society; the comradeship of Communism draws us into a great collective movement, in which all can find their realisation, and in which the old distinctions of politics and life, disappear and lose their meaning. But in order to realise this we need to re-think all questions, to go through a transformation of ourselves, to learn, to study, discuss, correct our notions, deepen our understanding, and so reach a really grounded Communist basis and unity of theory and practice, which alone gives complete clearness and certainty in all life-outlook and activity.⁸⁸

For many middle-class Communists the Party introduced them to working-class political activists for the first time in their lives, with varying results and impressions left on both sides. In fact, people like Dutt went out of their way to encourage middle-class recruits to make contact and work with working-class Communists, seeing it as a necessary step in their replacement of 'a bourgeois consciousness' by 'a revolutionary consciousness' (Dutt encouraged middle-class members to join working-class branches, e.g. Alick West and wife joined Brixton branch

because of Dutt's advice). One middle-class couple who joined the CP in 1937, becoming members of the Barnes branch, were Jean and James MacGibbon. In her autobiography Jean writes of their Party membership that

... the Spanish Civil War cracked our shell at a crucial point in our encapsulated life, and laid us open to the poverty of the '30s, the state of near-starvation in which lower-paid workers existed ... We knew about poverty in theory. Belonging to the Communist Party brought it home to us in a way which we could never otherwise have experienced.⁸⁹

Jean MacGibbon became highly involved in the everyday activities of branch life, the Party in Barnes acting as a substitute family for her: '... it provided a day-to-day structure with the monotony, the simple corporate duties attached to a family routine'.⁹⁰ Unlike what she supposed the branches at Oxford and Cambridge to be like, there were no involved debates with consequent recantations in the Barnes branch, members just 'acted' (similarities with Angela Tuckett's attitude). Although James MacGibbon fits into that type of middle-class Communist who was involved in 'politics' more outside of the Party structure (he avoided Barnes branch educationals which were not his idea of 'instructive entertainment'), his 'Communism' was of an equally activist nature. He was completely taken up with '... organizing various "Peace" committees, from the Peace Publicity Bureau, a small unit set up by the Artists' International Association, to the more official Arts Peace Campaign, comprising people of all views from Liberal leftwards'.⁹¹ It would be wrong to see the various professional and interest/specialist groups of middle-class Communists as completely separated from workers, although in some cases it would be less of a two way process than in others. For instance the development of Unity Theatre was something that involved professional and amateur actors, actresses and playwrights, stretching across occupational and class backgrounds. In his memoirs a Communist

bricklayer, Arthur Bernhard Meyer, records that Unity was popular with the many London building workers who spent, himself included, many voluntary hours helping out in the theatre together with students, writers, and actors. 'I would never have dreamed to carry around scenery or timber backgrounds together in fellowship with that type of people, yet they were just as enthusiastic for the Unity Theatre as we were ourselves'.⁹² The WMA clearly brought professional musicians and amateur working-class ones together, but here the relationship was more one way, i.e. the professionals gave the choirs and brass bands the benefit of their musical expertise. The campaign around Air Raid Precautions and over housing issues was based on a fruitful co-operation between various professionals (architects, civil engineers, scientists *et al.*) and building workers and tenants' organisations (see my chapter on Communist Architects).

The Party never ceased to declare its 'proletarian character' that it was '... the political party of the working-class';⁹³ middle-class Communists thus saw their joining the Party as a contribution towards the 'working-class' fight for emancipation, which could of course be interpreted in many different ways. Writing of his own entry into the Party (Huddersfield 1938) after graduation Colin Siddons, despite his working-class origins, comments:

From my reading of Communist literature I had formed a most unrealistic picture of an average Communist: all Harry Pollitts, all heroic, all rather super-human. In fact apart from their membership of the CP they were very normal working-class people. They took to me: my ability to speak fluently, my knowledge of Marxism, resulted in my being "promoted" too rapidly, chairman in no time.⁹⁴

Colin Siddons' sudden 'promotion' into the ranks of Party educator is not unusual of those 1930s middle-class recruits who concentrated their political work within the CP structures (see my chapter on Communist

Schoolteachers). A significant number took up responsibility for 'education' in their branch.

Orwell's claim that the adoption of Communism by middle-class people did not alter 'bourgeois habits' of dressing (an indication of the superficial nature of their political commitment) may well be true, but many working-class Party members criticised certain middle-class Communists for adopting a slovenly and bohemian manner of dress. Thus C. Day Lewis was attacked in a Party journal for deprecating the Party instruction to members to turn out in their best clothes for the 1936 'Pageant of History' in London. To quote from the reply to Day Lewis:

Unfortunately, there are certain non-proletarian members of our Party who still regard a slovenly and unkempt appearance as one of the essential attributes of a true revolutionary. These people turn out regularly on demos, collarless and unshaven - in many instances wearing sandals and looking thoroughly "arty" in every way.⁹⁵

The Party leadership and working-class members did their best to ensure that their middle-class comrades continued to dress in a conventional way. Jean MacGibbon records that on a 1937 May Day demonstration a Barnes CP member, master plasterer Alf Cork, 'glanced behind us at a contingent of Oxford students in their gowns. "It's good to see the lady comrades out, but it's a pity one of them has egg down her front". The Party was very hot on our being well turned out'.⁹⁶ Orwell's further point that middle-class Communists tended to marry one another or someone else from their own class is most probably true; however, there were many exceptions to this, and it is almost certainly the case that the CP led to much higher mixed class marriages ⁹⁷ than the national average or that of Labour Party members. Douglas Hyde speaking on this theme mentions becoming particularly aware of mixed class partnerships when working on *Daily Worker* distribution in early 1940. In his words:

I was keeping in touch with the Party all over the place and organizing their *Daily Worker* sales ... One thing that struck me was that the people who kept coming in at lunch-time, now it is true that they'd probably be working in the City or nearby because we were near City Road, but almost all those that came ... were middle-class women. Very frequently if a chap did turn up with them it was a working-class chap, a 'real live proletarian', it was something I'd seen over the years but became more aware of at that particular moment.⁹⁸

In an attempt to explain the psychology of these partnerships, Douglas Hyde felt that it flowed from the belief of many middle-class Communists that the workers were the 'real makers of history': the middle-class Communist's personal life was an affirmation of his or her politics, while the working-class Communist 'enjoyed' the cultural and academic knowledge of his or her more conventionally educated partner.

To sum up, it is undoubtedly the case that with the new 'Popular Front' line, the influx of new members and the consequent setting of the goal of a 'mass party' led to a much wider degree and type of commitment involved in becoming a CP member. There was still a flow of middle-class Communists into the Party who fit into the 'pre-Popular Front period', i.e. 'professional revolutionaries', yet the vast majority of middle-class recruits did not break with their 'class milieu': in fact the Party encouraged them to advance within their professions, be politically active among their colleagues, and work within their representative professional bodies. The 'cultural isolation' as encouraged by the Party with its 'proletarian cultural organizations' of the 1920s and early 1930s was a thing of the past, increasingly CP artists, musicians and writers worked with professional colleagues on the basis of anti-fascism; other questions of political and aesthetic differences receded into the background, e.g. CP artists' hostility towards both conventional orthodox and Surrealist artists was no longer publicly expressed. The Party became much more lax with some of its cultural and professional members, not

putting undue pressure on them to abide by membership norms in order that they could be claimed as members for propaganda purposes. This was obviously the case with Pollitt's recruitment of Stephen Spender, although in this case Pollitt's 'pushing of the boundaries' may have caused a negative response from certain areas in the Party as Spender's membership lasted only a matter of weeks.⁹⁹ It would be difficult to imagine the following commentary on the 'intellectual-bourgeois revolt' as being acceptable (published) in Party circles prior to 'Popular Frontism':

The development of this specifically intellectual-bourgeois revolt in the future will probably depend on the power of the leaders of it to move beyond their present positions ... though no one would wish them to swamp writing in political activity which many who cannot write may be able to carry through as well - or induce them to undertake a temporary migration to colonial or other regions outside England where the class struggle is more vivid and more advanced.¹⁰⁰

The CP's publications also began to record the full academic and professional qualifications of various figures among its new recruits. e.g. Perhaps the best example of this, as we have seen, was the scientist Haldane, who was often described as 'Professor J.B.S. Haldane F.R.S.'; the longer standing member Hyman levy also began to be prefixed by 'Professor'.

Footnotes

- 1 For a discussion of Popular Frontism see the excellent collection of essays edited by Jim Fyrth, *Britain, Fascism and the Popular Front*. The Italian Communist historian, Paolo Spriano, has recently clearly identified Stalin as the 'real architect' of the policy inaugurated by the Comintern's 7th Congress. In particular, as he makes plain, the apparatus of the Comintern was, by 1935, firmly in the hands of the NKVD (P. Spriano, *Stalin and the European Communists*, p. 4). He refers to an incident where Tom Bell carried a message from Elena Stassova (Lenin's former secretary) warning the former commissar of the '5th Regiment' in Spain, Vittorio Vidali, not to return to the USSR. Bell reinforced Stassova's advice by telling him the international apparatus in Moscow had been cleared out 'one or two times already'. (Ibid, p. 50).
- 2 K.E. McKenzie, *Comintern and World Revolution 1928-1943*, p. 145.
- 3 Thirteenth Plenum of the ECCI, December 1933 and endorsed by Dimitrov, *7th Congress of the Communist International*, p. 126.
- 4 K.E. McKenzie, op. cit., p. 148.
- 5 See Hutt, *The Post-War History of the British Working Class*, p. 270 for Dimitrov's comments re Britain.
- 6 Endorsement of the 'Black Circular' at the 1935 Trades Union Congress was passed by 1,869,000 votes, but there were 1,274,000 votes against.
- 7 See B. Pearce, 'From "Social-Fascism" to "People's Front"' in M. Woodhouse and B. Pearce (eds.) *Essays on the History of Communism in Britain*, p. 217.
- 8 According to J. Jupp, *The Radical Left in Britain 1931-1941*, p. 167 it was replaced in 1936 by the British Peace Assembly.
- 9 See R. Samuel, 'Staying Power: The Lost World of British Communism, Part Two', *New Left Review*, no. 156 March/April 1986, pp. 77-78, and (as referred to by Samuel) Joe Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, pp. 152-54 where he deals with his own experiences concerning the demise of International Labour Defence (ILD). The dissolution of the Educational Workers League at this time is part of the same process.
- 10 *Resolutions of the 7th Comintern Congress*, 1936, p. 25.
- 11 H.J.B., *Bromley Communists in the Thirties - A Personal Reminiscence*, p. 2.
- 12 Ralph Fox - see Biographical Appendix.
- 13 R. Fox, *Daily Worker*, 11 September 1935.
- 14 *Daily Worker*, 11 September 1935.
- 15 E. Rickword, *War and Culture*, p. 1.

- ¹⁶ The Comintern (Münzenberg) was principally responsible for the organisation of two international Congresses of Writers for the Defence of Culture (Paris 1935, Spain/Paris 1937) as part of the 'anti-nazi/fascist' fight. The 'cultural front' was obviously pushed into the forefront given the reality of Nazism with its repression of artists and writers as most graphically expressed in the book burning and the arrival of refugees (including some of the greatest names in the fields of culture and science). To quote Bill (Gabriel) Carritt: 'The Party sort of tumbled into this because of its basically fundamental anti-fascist stand ... if fascism happens to destroy intellectuals and culture, the intellectuals go to the help of other intellectuals in Germany and wherever they were being persecuted. The intellectuals became anti-fascist and the Party became aware of the significance of the intellectuals because of anti-fascism ... intellectuals moved towards the Party and the Party moved towards the intellectuals around about 1933 onwards'. (Interview 4 February 1987). Despite his own university education Bill Carritt admits that he personally took no interest in cultural matters until the rise of fascism (eventually in the early 1960s he was Secretary of the Party's National Cultural Committee).
- ¹⁷ E. Rickword, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 14.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*
- ²⁰ F.D. Klingender, *The Condition of Clerical Labour in Britain*, p. xi.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, p. xii.
- ²² *Ibid.*, p. 101.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, p. 102.
- ²⁴ Brown's book may have been ignored because it was considered to be 'out of tune' in places with Popular Frontism, e.g. proletarian power seen as synonymous with soviets - see p. 247.
- ²⁵ A. Brown, *The Fate of the Middle Classes*, p. 59.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 118-19.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 245.
- ²⁸ Unlike the American Communists who produced a 38 page pamphlet entitled *Professions in a Soviet America* as early as November 1935, it took the British Party until 1945-46 to come out with anything addressed to members of the 'Professions': J.B.S. Haldane, *Why Professional Workers should be Communists*, 3 pages, 1945, and H. Pollitt, *Professional Workers*, 12 pages, 1946.
- ²⁹ *Daily Worker*, 2 October 1935, p. 3.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*
- ³¹ D. Hyde, letter 21 April 1988.

- ³² See E. Trory, *Between the Wars*, pp. 112-14 for an account of the slightly later 'Sussex People's March of History'.
- ³³ See B. Hogenkamp, *Deadly Parallels - Film and the Left in Britain 1929-1939*, particularly ch. 6 for the changes in this area following the 7th World Congress.
- ³⁴ *Report of the Central Committee to 14th National Congress of the C.P.G.B.*, p. 16.
- ³⁵ e.g. Bill Fishman, *East End Jewish Radicals*.
- ³⁶ For evidence of the early presence of Jews in the CPGB see the early chapters of Joe Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, and the Frows' *The Communist Party in Manchester 1920-1926*, biographies of members. In the 1920s Yiddish articles were regularly published in the *Sunday Worker* - see W. Gallacher, *The Rolling of the Thunder*, p. 97.
- ³⁷ A. Brown, op. cit., p. 287.
- ³⁸ See Alec Brown's article 'Zionism' in the CP journal, *Discussion*, no. 4, May 1936, one of a whole series of contributions by members on 'The Jewish Question' and what attitude Communists should adopt towards it.
- ³⁹ W. Gallacher, 'Reply to F.S.', *Discussion*, no. 3, April 1936, p. 11.
- ⁴⁰ Jews who were members of professions as 'ideal Party people' would thus be required to be good in their profession and also be active in their representative professional body, take up Party work (involving themselves in working-class struggles), and become involved in the Jewish community - Hyman Levy and Jack Gaster would be two of the few examples of Jewish Communists who managed to follow this 'ideal'.
- ⁴¹ By 1939 there were about 100 Party members at Oxford University alone and there were sufficient resources to be able to employ one of their number, Peter Shinny (after he had graduated), as full-time organiser of the branch - source of information Rodney Hilton who was joint secretary of the branch 1939-40. Rodney Hilton mentions the important role played by the Party man responsible for student work, Jack Cohen - he knew German and 'his German Marxist texts', he was unsectarian and did not attempt to put on 'any act' of superiority vis-à-vis Students.
- ⁴² See B. Barefoot and T. Cottrell, *Two Politicians in Search of a Party* for details and a particular interpretation of 1930s and '40s Student Communism.
- ⁴³ B. Simon, interview 2 July 1985.
- ⁴⁴ See the article by George Matthews, 'British Students on the Move' in *Labour Monthly*, May 1940 for an account of the Congress.
- ⁴⁵ Margot Kettle, interview 12 February 1987.
- ⁴⁶ Reg Turner, interview 7 March 1984.

- 47 See his article 'Some Revolutionary Trends in English Poetry: 1930-1935' in *International Literature*, no. 4, 1936, p. 82.
- 48 J. Lehmann, *The Whispering Gallery*, p. 232. John Lehmann's autobiography gives an account of his 'attraction to Moscow and Marxism' in the years 1933-34. Like many who were politically active at that time he clouds over the real extent of his involvement with the CP. Lehmann did in fact contribute to the Communist journal of revolutionary literature *Storm* during its brief life in 1932-33 which would suggest he was at least close to the Party at that time, particularly given that *Storm* could not be termed a 'Popular Front' type publication. The article of his I refer to from the Soviet based *International Literature* in 1936 is '... written from the standpoint of his being a Party member discussing those who were already in, those who were coming along and might be expected to soon be in and those who were on the fringe'. (Douglas Hyde, letter 19 February 1988.) The significance of Lehmann's early (in comparison with other literati) 'closeness' to the CP helps to explain why *New Writing* was seen in a favourable light in Communist circles (leadership?).
- 49 Alick West, *One Man in His Time*, p. 166.
- 50 The 1930s saw the publication of a few such works by Communists: R. Fox, *The Novel and the People*; A West, *Crisis and Criticism*; C. Caudwell, *Illusion and Reality*.
- 51 *Discussion*, no. 3, March 1936, p. 32.
- 52 H.G. Sear, 'Music, Music, Music', *Labour Monthly*, June 1950, p. 285 - article includes a short historical account of the WMA amongst a review of Association pamphlets.
- 53 For Rutland Boughton, Alan Bush and Michael Tippett - see Biographical Appendix.
- 54 *Daily Worker*, 30 March 1936, p. 7.
- 55 J. Lipton, '25 Workers songs', *Left Review*, April 1938.
- 56 WMA Vice-Presidents in 1943 were as follows: Granville Bantock, Lennox Berkeley, Benjamin Britten, Rutland Boughton, Erik Chisholm, Christian Darnton, Edward J. Dent, Hanns Eisler, Alois Haba, John Ireland, Alexander Jemnitz, Joseph Lewis, Elizabeth Maconchy, Alan Rawsthorne, Vladimir Vogel. List taken from WMA pamphlet *Music and Society* by Elie Siegmeister.
- 57 Two of the first such efforts were: Alan Bush, 'Music and the Working Class Struggle', *Left Review*, September 1936 and Thomas Russell, 'Music Betrayed', *Left Review*, October 1937.
- 58 There is now a published history by Colin Chambers, *The Story of Unity Theatre*, which takes a somewhat different position to that of R. Samuel in his piece 'Theatre and Socialism in Britain' in R. Samuel et al, op. cit.

- 59 R. Samuel quotes Tom Thomas, founder of the WTM,^{wh} was encouraged to move into ordinary branch work in order to clear away any obstacles to the 'new line' in the theatrical world, see 'Staying Power ... The Lost World of British Communism, Part 2', *New Left Review*, no. 156, March/April 1986, pp. 76-77.
- 60 A. Van Gysegem, 'British Theatre in the Thirties', in Clarke, Heinemann, et al (eds.), *Culture and Crisis in Britain in the Thirties*.
- 61 G Werskey, *The Visible College*, p. 135.
- 62 J.D. Bernal, *The Social Function of Science*, pp. 401-02.
- 63 LBC clubs in various towns actually established offices with a staff, for example Sheffield LBC '... became a thriving institution with large premises, frequent meetings and workshops, theatre group, rambling club etc'. (Stuart Bell letter, 6 May 1985.)
- 64 Quoted by Betty Reid, 'The LBC in the Thirties', in Clark, Heinemann et al (eds), op. cit., p. 197.
- 65 Dutt to Strachey, 1 June 1936, quoted by H. Thomas, *John Strachey*, p. 155.
- 66 John Lewis, 'Typical Groups', unpublished, quoted by S. Samuels, 'The Left Book Club', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1966.
- 67 M.H. Holmes, 'My first 6 months in the C.P.', *Discussion*, no. 14, April 1937.
- 68 D. Hyde, interview 2 February 1987; see also *I Believed*, pp. 57-58 for an account of his work with the LBC in North Wales, where nearly all of those he recruited were non-Conformist clergymen .
- 69 Alick West, op. cit., p. 173.
- 70 J. Clark, 'Agitprop and Unity Theatre: Socialist Theatre in the Thirties' in Clark, Heinemann et al (eds) op. cit., p. 225.
- 71 There were over 250 amateur Theatre Guild groups in existence by September 1938 - see S. Samuels, 'The Left Book Club', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1966, pp. 74-75.
- 72 Ibid., p. 74.
- 73 J.D. Bernal, *The Social Function of Science*, p. 405.
- 74 e.g. the LBC 'The New People's Library' includes: J. Rowland, B.Sc., *Understanding the Atom*, J. Gillespie, B.Sc., *An Introduction to Econ. Botany*, H. Collier, *An Interpretation of Biology*.
- 75 The term 'fellow-traveller' existed before the 1930s and was certainly in use in Marxist circles in Tsarist Russia, to classify close allies outside of the Party (Social Democrats at that time). It was not used in a pejorative way until the Cold War period (Orwell used 'pinks' to describe non-Party but pro-Soviet left wingers).

- 76 LBC, *The People's Front*, p. 45.
- 77 G. Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, pp. 118-19. Orwell's view of 'Popular Front Communists' finds an echo in later writers on the CP, e.g. Alasdair MacIntyre's review of N. Wood, *Communism and British Intellectuals* in *The Listener*, 7 January 1960 - although he concentrates on pointing out the lack of political change required in joining the Party: '... during the Spanish war, Communist intellectuals formed the link between middle-class liberalism on the one hand and the forces of the Comintern on the other ... What Dr. Wood suggests is that party members in the thirties were merely slightly extremer versions of fellow-travellers' (p. 21).
- 78 N. Mitchison, *You May Well Ask - A Memoir 1920-40*, p. 182.
- 79 Angela Tuckett - see Biographical Appendix.
- 80 Angela Tuckett, letter 12 December 1987.
- 81 *ibid.*
- 82 R. Kay, 'Intellectuals', *Discussion*, no. 3, April 1936, p. 24.
- 83 H.B., 'The Position of INTELLECTUALS', *Discussion*, no. 3, April 1936, p. 25.
- 84 H.J.B. Bromley, *op. cit.*, p. 13.
- 85 See J. Jacobs, *op. cit.*, p. 141.
- 86 A. West, *op. cit.*, pp. 169-70.
- 87 However, the Lenin School training of selected Party members had come to an end and this clearly separates many early middle-class recruits from later ones.
- 88 Dutt Papers, British Library.
- 89 J. MacGibbon, *I Meant to Marry Him: A Personal Memoir*, p. 142.
- 90 *Ibid.*
- 91 *Ibid.*, p. 140.
- 92 Arvid Rundberg, *En Engelsk Arbejders Erindringer*, p. 72, translated by me.
- 93 *For Peace and Plenty! Report of the 15th Congress of the C.P.G.B.*, p. 74.
- 94 Colin Siddons, 19 page autobiographical document, October 1987.
- 95 *Discussion*, no. 30, December 1936, p. 31.
- 96 J. MacGibbon, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

- ⁹⁷ Garman left Peggy Guggenheim in 1937 and 'had found a proletarian woman who he felt was better suited than Peggy to share his dedicated life'. Yet, added Peggy, 'he was awful to her, because he was always bringing up the fact that she was working class and he was, what d'you call it, gentle-folk'. *Peggy: The Wayward Guggenheim*, p. 103.
- ⁹⁸ D. Hyde, Interview 2 February 1987.
- ⁹⁹ For Spender's account see his contribution in *The God That Failed* and his more recent book *The Thirties and After*, although both need to be treated with some caution.
- ¹⁰⁰ John Lehmann, 'Some Revolutionary Trends in English Poetry: 1930-1935', *International Literature*, no. 4, 1936, pp. 82-83.

CHAPTER 7

Dialectical Materialism - Implications for Communist Scientists, Artists, Writers and other Professionals

Introduction - summary

From the early to mid-thirties 'dialectical materialism' emerged as the theoretical and philosophical core of 'Marxism' throughout the world Communist movement. It took on its formation in the Soviet Union as Stalinism consolidated its power and Marxism was emptied of much of its revolutionary and interpretive vigour. Room for discourse became increasingly limited and dialectical materialism and its 'laws' took on the form of a received orthodoxy handed down in the Soviet Union and to be passed on to all Communist parties. Dialectical materialism, however, had its own very real appeal, an indication of this is given in a later article by Dutt (1946) on 'The Power of Marxism'.

Marxism is a scientific world theory, the first completely critical, completely scientific world theory, without dogma, not static, embodying the sum of human knowledge and living and growing with the growth of human knowledge. That is the theory philosophically known as Dialectical Materialism, to which the most famous modern scientists like Joliot-Curie, Bernal, Haldane and a host of others increasingly turn for light on their theoretical problems.¹

The link between 'Marxism' and the natural sciences was strengthened and the prominence/visibility of scientists within and close to the Party rose correspondingly. How many people, and in particular how many from the middle-class, joined the Party because of a theory that revealed the 'pattern of life and its future development' is a question impossible to answer. Despite this it can be confidently asserted that dialectical materialism gave Communists a high degree of self confidence (working as a conscious and willing instrument of the laws of the universe) and an 'all-

embracing' character to their politics - one was a Communist at all times in its ideal form. Middle-class Communists were often well suited to carrying out the educational sessions in the Party in order to inaugurate members into the basics of dialectical materialism, while many made attempts at relating their profession to the philosophical 'world outlook' and vice versa.

* * * * *

The emergence of a theoretical and philosophical 'world outlook' within the Communist movement termed 'dialectical materialism' has been discussed by a number of writers over recent years (e.g. Ree, Macintyre, Werskey). Emanating from the Soviet Union under the consolidation of Stalin's grip on power, dialectical materialism became the new orthodoxy for all Communists. Basing itself largely on a number of Engels' works (principally *Dialectics of Nature* and *Anti-Dühring*)² dialectical materialism, it was claimed, was the scientific kernel of Marxism-Leninism, the method of studying and apprehending reality by revealing the laws of motion of all natural phenomena. Historical materialism, Marx's methodology for studying human society, was '... an application of the principles of dialectical materialism ... to the study of society and of its history'.³ The argument and diversity of interpretation of Marxism previously found among Communists was brought to an end. As Stephen Cohen remarked, the extinguishing of those Soviet Marxists who conceived of Marxism '... as a system of living ideas competitive with and alert to the accomplishments of contemporary Western thought ...' ensured that '... the tension between ideology and social science that had characterised Marxism from the outset was resolved in Russia in favour of the former, and the questing spirit went out of Soviet Marxism for many years to come'.⁴ The

new orthodoxy of dialectical materialism had set laws in which it interpreted history and nature: the transformation of quantity into quality, the identity of opposites and the negation of the negation (at its worst these 'laws' were taught to Communists in the form of semi-religious articles of faith).⁵ A theory or ideology that integrated natural sciences with the 'science' of Marxism, and which tended to replace class struggle as the 'determining' factor in social development with technological determinism, was particularly suited to Soviet economic growth and the primacy it accorded to science. The link between science and Communist theory was increasingly declared in Marxist-Leninist texts thus:

the science of the history of society, despite all the complexity of the phenomena of social life, can become as precise a science as, let us say, biology, and capable of making use of the laws of development of society for practical purposes.⁶

Science embodied the principles of dialectical materialism and the very history of the natural sciences was seen as bearing this out without practising scientists even being conscious of it as with the move away from '... the mechanical views of Newton into a set of irreducible dialectical opposites such as - wave and particle, matter and energy'.⁷ Although it was emphasised that a scientist who was conscious of the principles of dialectical materialism would be at an advantage, as dialectical materialism

can ... do two things: suggest the directions of thought which are likely to be particularly fruitful in results, and integrate and organize different branches of scientific research in relation to one another and to the social processes of which they form a part.⁸

Scientific practice in a Communist society would be superior to that carried out under capitalism because dialectical materialism '... sees the

parts of the world in their real inseparability ...'⁹ which would mean that science would not be divided up into separate non-integrated subjects, e.g. mathematics, physics etc and theory would not be separated from practice. Soviet science was held to be displaying signs of this superiority in the Communist literature of the 1930s. The Soviet state certainly gave massive resources to science given the means at its disposal, and whatever its theoretical pronouncements, it recognised the fact that one of the leading centres of world science was Cambridge University sending many of its best brains to study science there.

Dialectical materialism as the new received orthodoxy was first imparted to a British audience through the *Labour Monthly* in a series of articles in 1933¹⁰, and most importantly in a special *Labour Monthly* pamphlet issued in 1934, which reprinted and expanded upon an article in the journal by Laszlo Rudas, which gave the official Soviet account: *Dialectical Materialism and Communism*. The Rudas pamphlet was followed up by a number of other works setting out the contours of the all-embracing philosophy and 'science'.¹¹ However much in retrospect dialectical materialism might be seen as a distortion of Marxism it did not altogether fall on barren soil in Britain. The Rudas pamphlet was printed in a number of editions and sold 13,000 copies in its first year, while at Oxford University the philosophy don E.F. Carritt attempted to throw some academic scrutiny on the subject in a series of lectures at the University in 1933 entitled 'Dialectical Materialism'. Carritt's lectures brought the highest attendances he had ever had,¹² in the words of his son:

It was the first time ever, I believe, there had been queues to get into a lecture at Oxford. I mean there were 100 yard long queues when my father lectured on dialectical materialism, which was interesting because they did not come there to support it, they came there because it was in the air ...¹³

Carritt subsequently took part in a public debate (symposium) over dialectical materialism with Bernal as organised by the Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR in 1934 (his contribution along with Bernal's critical response being published in *Aspects of Dialectical Materialism*).¹⁴ The degree to which dialectical materialism attracted theoretically minded converts to 'Marxism' and persuaded them to join the CP (the Party whose policies, in common with all Communist Parties, were 'guided by the understanding of the scientific theories of Marxism') is open to debate.¹⁵

The rise to prominence of dialectical materialism in Communist theory gave a greater emphasis to the 'connection' between science and Communism. It is no coincidence that those who extolled dialectical materialism in Britain were scientists in or close to the Party; Levy, Haldane, Bernal, Guest, Crowther; Clemens Dutt, the Party man said to be responsible for 'philosophical correctness' in the CP, was a science graduate. Engels's *Anti-Dühring* had been available in British translation from an early date and the *Marx-Engels Selected Correspondence* translated by Dona Torr and published in 1934 laid the basis for the determinism and 'scientism' of Party theory.¹⁶ The strong preponderance of Engels was continued, if not strengthened, with the formation of the CP publishing firm Lawrence and Wishart and their launching in 1936 of 'The Marxist-Leninist Library'.¹⁷ In 1940 *Dialectics of Nature* was issued for the first time in English with a foreword by Haldane. For Douglas Hyde it

... made a tremendous impact ... and it would have been known in the original already to many. It was when we were discussing this book that J.B.S. Haldane told me that he was "really more of an Engelsist than a Marxist". Bernal said much the same on another occasion.¹⁸

Raphael Samuel also sees the importance of the publication of *Dialectics of Nature* as it helped 'Marxism' reinvigorate its longstanding association

with natural history; he does, however, misdate its English translation to 1935. Bernal was forced to use a German collected works of Marx and Engels so he could refer to *Dialectik der Natur* in his *The Social Function ...*.¹⁹ The new prestigious 'Party-inspired' theoretical journal *The Modern Quarterly* which was launched at the beginning of 1938 reflected this heavy 'scientific bias' both in the membership of the 'Editorial Council' (it included five F.R.S.s) and in the nature of many of its articles. In the journal's 'statement of aims' it was declared that despite the great advances in the natural and social sciences achieved over recent years, modern society seemed incapable of putting these achievements into practice. The statement concluded in the following way:

We hold that the great advances in science and learning are not only contributions to our knowledge of truth, but should be put to the service of society as a whole. We wish, therefore, to contribute to a system of thought which will correspond to the real world which science analyses and in which we live. In this connection we recognise the arts and sciences as an integral part of the social progress of mankind.²⁰

The degree of real substance behind the espousal of dialectical materialism by various scientists is, to say the least, open to question and was regarded with scepticism in various instances by the Party centre. It is interesting to note the critical review of the first issue of *The Modern Quarterly* in Dutt's *Labour Monthly* and the patronising response to Hyman Levy's own particular exposition of dialectical materialism: *A Philosophy for A Modern Man*.²¹ Werskey's view is that:

the leading ideologues of the scientific Left had in no way made their science and politics dependent upon their belief in dialectical materialism. The bulk of their Marxist studies were still concerned with the historical and, more particularly, the contemporary aspects of "social relations" of science. It was apparent that, aside from occasional ventures on the part of Bernal, Haldane and Needham into theoretical biology, their excursions into dialectics remained external to their mainline scientific researches.²²

Although in the latter part of the 1930s Haldane mentioned that dialectical materialism had directly influenced his scientific work,²³ his weekly science column in the *Daily Worker* showed no obvious signs of 'Marxism-Leninism'. The articles were extremely stimulating, popular expositions of various scientific matters and the *Daily Worker* was rightly proud of them, its editor declaring that they had 'shown the educational role that a paper can fulfil and it is a sad reflection on the state of the Press that no other newspaper, not even *The Times*, makes it a regular policy to publish articles of this character'.²⁴ In a review of one of his books, largely composed of *Daily Worker* pieces, it was remarked that 99% could have been written by a Tory.²⁵ Scientists inspired, as Party members or fellow-travellers, by dialectical materialism (despite the implication that it opened the way to a 'new kind' of science - see previous quote by Bernal) were subsumed in the general, what has been termed, 'social relations of science' movement: the advocacy of scientific thought, the unfettered application of science for the benefit of people and for solving social problems and distress, and science and the scientist to be accorded a prime position in society. The Soviet Union was to be admired as it had started on the road to 'thoroughly permeating society by science'. Thus to a leading scientific journalist, friend of Bernal's, and figure close to the Party:

From the aspect of physical, chemical and biological technique there are no primary differences between these sciences in the Soviet Union and in other countries. But there is a fundamental difference in Soviet social philosophy and that of Western countries in the conception of the role of science in the organisation of society.²⁶

The deterministic way in which Marxism could be interpreted emphasising the link between science and the working-class is given in an LBC book from 1937:

Dialectical materialism gives an account of the general laws of change and development within the universe. Applied to society, it indicates the inevitable trend of things, and the scientist, conscious of the relation of science to social needs, with the background that dialectical materialism gives his work, sees his particular problems as expressive of one general problem - the transformation of society. And he sees the role of a progressive class, as the deliverer of this new society from the womb of the old. He puts his talents at the disposal of that class, conscious that in so doing he is furthering the interests of science.²⁷

Levy goes into great detail in his *A Philosophy for A Modern Man* as to what scientists and, more particularly, mathematicians can contribute in the immediate situation in the struggle for the 'New Order'; a comprehensive 'statistical onslaught' on what is happening in the various parts of society^{and} comparing it with what might happen in a socialist society. Work had already been done on nutrition and malnutrition but Levy suggested that this could be extended to include a chart showing variations of physical fitness throughout the country. However, in Levy's suggested plan of analysis this would only be a tiny fraction of the statistical work required in order to provide a 'fairly complete resumé' of the technological level of the community.²⁸

In his own particular interpretation of dialectical materialism, avoiding the standard 'Marxist' vocabulary, Levy compares the artist (under capitalism) with the scientist. Here he makes plain his belief that the scientist is more open to a recognition or consciousness of the social circumstances of his position and work than the artist (and thus, it would follow, more open to a dialectical materialist point of view). In Levy's words:

While the scientist can easily verify the fact that many of the problems with which he has to deal are thrown up by society, that the solutions to these problems might equally well be discovered by other scientific men, and that the results, when used, change and direct the way of life and thoughts of masses of

people, the artist may not so easily appreciate the social conditioning of his work, its influence on other human beings, or the extent to which the ideas and valuations of the period, the energy of the society in which he lives, are being poured out through his own creations.²⁹

Later in his book Levy writes that 'only' artists whose work is in tune with technology and technological possibilities will survive historically or make a positive contribution in the fight for socialism.³⁰ As a term dialectical materialism could be and was used in such a way as to confirm the identity of Communism and science - 'In its endeavour, science is communism'.³¹ Of course the abuses of and limitations put on science in capitalist society were frequently raised in CP literature-yet when all is said and done 'science was science' a precondition for economic/technological progress (the base which determined the superstructure). The issue of art, for those Party members involved in the artistic professions, as interpreted in/by Communist theory was more problematic. The technicalities of scientific practice were mostly taken for granted until the post-war period; this could not be said for various kinds of artistic endeavour.³² Although Proletkult, with its demand for a 'Workers Literature' based on 'factual material' (by means of reportage, interviews,^{ar.t} documentaries) in place of traditional 'bourgeois' literature, was going into abeyance by the 1930s, the period did see the formulation of 'Socialist Realism'. As Guest's text book of *Dialectical Materialism* puts it: 'Soviet literature is developing under the slogan of "Socialist Realism" which is simply the dialectical materialist world outlook, developed and applied in literature' (p. 97). In fact as a concept socialist realism was soon used in connection with artistic disciplines and activities as a whole. Developing out of Soviet literary debates socialist realism adopted a more 'constructive' attitude towards 'bourgeois' literature of the past than the 'Proletkult-organisations' had

done in the 1920s.³³ The style of such 'classical realists' as Balzac, Tolstoy, and Stendal was held to be the pinnacle of bourgeois literary achievement representing as they did the 'progressive' features of the bourgeoisie at that particular junction of historical development. There was much, according to socialist realism, that could be learned by Communist writers from these earlier 'Realists' (in Soviet pronouncements modern bourgeois writers and painters indulged in escapism in their work). However, socialist realism meant not only showing things as they were - realism - but showing the dialectic of life:

the understanding of whither it is moving and why. It is moving towards socialism, it is moving towards the victory of the international proletariat. And a work of art created by a socialist realist is one which shows to what that conflict of contradictions is leading which the artist has seen in life and reflects in his work.³⁴

However, the impact of socialist realism on the Left artistic world in Britain in the pre-War period was extremely partial, it became more of an issue among CP writers, artists, and architects in the years after the War. In an article on the British Leftwing literary scene it has been pointed out that the British delegate³⁵ to the 1934 Soviet Writers Congress, which set out the new policy of socialist realism, did not even refer to the term socialist realism in her report-back article in *Left Review*. Emphasis was put on creating the widest possible unity amongst artists against the threat posed by fascism, a unity that was based around 'the defence of culture' (e.g. Rickword's pamphlet *War and Culture*, although its subtitle should not be altogether ignored: 'The Decline of Culture Under Capitalism'). The issue of interpreting and responding to Soviet artistic theoretical orthodoxy was considered to be of lesser importance than the main task of 'Popular Front' activity. It was only after anti-fascist work had been established among the professions that

any thought at all was given to developing a Marxist approach to a particular profession—a Marxist interpretation and programme for the profession—by members of that profession (this is also Bill/Gabriel Carritt's opinion). Having said that, the issue of reconciling aesthetic preconceptions with the expression of political belief was to be a constant conflict for socialist and Communist artists leading to much personal 'beating of chests'. In *The Auden Generation* Samuel Hynes details various attempts at resolving the dilemma - notably Spender's argument that a bourgeois artist cannot 'join the proletariat as an artist', but if he is a 'true artist' his art will help reveal the reality of things and thus make a contribution towards the revolution. A recent book on the writers and lovers Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland, both of whom joined the Party in 1934 or 1935, throws some light on their own particular approach to combining their politics with their work. In a letter written in 1935 to another Party member, Valentine Ackland showed her uncertainty as to what constituted revolutionary poetry: 'Whether to carry on along the lines that poetry has gone ... trusting that ... the difficulty of reading a "new" style will wear off ... Or whether to make a partial return to the old simpler forms ...'.³⁶ Again from the same book it is apparent that Sylvia Townsend Warner was more at ease than Valentine at reconciling her Communism with her writing. She admitted in 1936 that she was a 'bourgeois stylist'. A new class - 'worker writers' - could not be formed until the old ones had been abolished, a comment she made in *Left Review* implying that a 'new' literature would only come after the revolution. Sylvia, it seems, never '... set out to write a political novel, as her interest in social and political reality began to predominate in her life it surfaced in her work to shape two major and very different novels of the '30s'.³⁷ The light witty prose style which had attracted a loyal readership remained

unaltered throughout her literary career. An example of a writer of some repute in the thirties who could not adjust his writing to the new requirements he imposed on himself by joining the Communist Party was Edward Upward. He concluded that his 'modernist style' of writing (*The Railway Accident* and *Journey to the Border*) was no longer something he could continue; the result, he claimed, of being influenced by the Soviet theory of socialist realism and his own awareness that his 'modernist style' would only be accessible to a limited number of people and would be difficult for an intelligent worker to understand. Upward attempted to develop an 'objective style as opposed to his former 'subjective' style and write '... primarily about the external world, and about the part played by the workers' movement in that world'³⁸ and about the necessity for the Communist Party. Edward Upward's attempts in this direction came to very little as his unease with the political course followed by the Party grew as the years progressed. From 1938 for the next 16 years his writing came to a virtual halt.

Charting the actual impact dialectical materialism had on the various professional people who joined the Communist Party in the 1930s is not an easy task. There was obviously a huge diversity of responses, from those who put great importance on the 'scientific' character of the Party to those who paid little attention to it. With a number of notable exceptions (Caudwell and to a lesser extent Fox and West) the great bulk of what was written by Communists and Left Wingers were immediate factual accounts of various social/political subjects and popular political economy and history as typified in the output of the Left Book Club. In many ways they fitted into Levy's suggested plan of empirical recording (as previously mentioned) without being drawn together in an organised and statistical manner as he stipulated. For example the LBC *Justice in England* by A. Barrister (in point of fact Pritt) gives a description of

the legal system, as it was in operation at that moment, detailing its anti-working-class bias and its fundamental injustice. Within the 288 pages there is no real theoretical discussion as to what the nature of law and the legal profession would be in a socialist society; there is simply the closing sentence of the book that: 'The lesson of course is that only in a socialist state can there be justice'.³⁹ A history of the Haldane Society of Socialist Lawyers, discussing the situation in the thirties, proclaims

that the leading elements in the Society were Communists or Socialists first and lawyers secondly. The status of the law within the state remains virtually unchallenged and uncriticised; the distinction is just that the state can now be supported rather than opposed. The writings of Pashukanis are unheard of, and even Lenin's "withering away of the state" can be accepted as an ideal without consideration of the implications for a machinery of law.⁴⁰

Much of what was published was aimed to advance the Party's line of anti-fascist unity and a People's Front; to encourage

the radical sections of the middle-class, professions and intellectuals, to take an active part in the various forms of the peace movement, in the defence of civil liberties, in the strengthening of their own professional organisations, in the fight against malnutrition and other disastrous results of the policy of the National Government.⁴¹

A National Conference of delegates from the Party's professional sections in the winter of 1937 with similar District Conferences, reinforced the emphasis put on middle-class Communists working within their professional organisations 'on the basis of their own professional interests'.⁴² They were also to encourage feelings of unity with the working-class within their professional bodies as well as directing colleagues into such practical activity as Aid for Spain, China, and help for refugees. These responsibilities in addition to often mundane CP branch work would have

left little time for theoretical introspection for many. There was, however, an emphasis put on political education by the Party for all of its members and an aspect of this would have been instruction in the principles of dialectical materialism. Priority was given to distributing and holding classes around *The Short Course of the History of the CPSU(B)* which within five months of its publication in Britain had sold 31,000 copies, filling a need by giving some sort of justification for the suppression of Kulaks, elimination of leading Bolsheviks, etc. The key chapter in the book, said to have been written by Stalin, was Chapter 4 which included a sub-section on 'Dialectical and Historical Materialism' and for many Party members this formed the basis of their 'grounding' in the principles of Marxism-Leninism. How much stimulation could be gained from educational classes based on *The Short Course* from 1939, when it was released, would again have varied greatly depending on factors such as who was the tutor. Rodney Hilton's impressions might well be true for many: 'We'd all read that of course [i.e. 'Dialectical and Historical Materialism' from *The Short Course* -SRP] I think one tended to regard it as a sort of not totally useless shorthand statement of historical materialism but that was about as far as one went'.⁴³ This is an interesting comment coming, as it does, from the future chairman of the CP Historian's Group which was launched at the end of the War. As is clearly apparent from A.L. Morton's *A People's History of England* (1938) and the later works by Communist historians, their writing appropriated more from the past radical democratic 'people's history' tradition in England than any theory supplied by *The Short Course*. The motivating forces behind much of the CP historians' work were Maurice Dobb, particularly his *Studies in the Development of Capitalism*, and Dona Torr. It was in Torr's work that:

the distancing from scientism ... was first formulated within the historiography. This did not preclude a belief in Marxism as the science of history, but rather than reaching out to the proto-positivism of Engels's later investigations of historical laws, the distinctive inflection was on history as creative process, "the record of man's creative struggle for freedom" - Torr 1940.⁴⁴

Given the technical nature and new, often mystifying, vocabulary of dialectical materialism it is hardly surprising that many of the middle-class recruits were brought into the job of Party education. Often after only a short time in the CP a new member with a background of formal education at the level of grammar school and college or university would be appointed as Education Secretary by a branch.⁴⁵ It would be wrong to reduce or caricature Party education as solely the teaching of a dogma, dialectical materialism, by middle-class Communists who were able to 'mug up' on the required texts. A great deal of branch education was related to discussions of recent political developments and trends always referring to the current Party 'line' (i.e. political reports, Dutt's monthly notes in the *Labour Monthly*). One of the main national Party lecturers on 'Communism' was that 'proletarian Marxist intellectual' T.A. Jackson, who was employed by the CP Education Department from 1943 and for a number of years travelled to very many branches. A Party member who acted as a tutor, holding a number of classes and weekend schools over a period of several years, was Douglas Hyde; a longstanding Communist and ^{also} not the product of a university. In 1940 he was given an award for the best tutor in London by Tamara Rust on behalf of the District Committee. Hyde's method of taking classes was held up by the Education Department as a model to be emulated throughout the Party, they were crowded out with participants and were felt to have contributed to the growth of factory branches/activity in the areas in which they had been held (Southall food factories, EMI etc). Explaining the success of his tutoring he has

written: 'My lectures differed from those of many of our Marxist tutors only in this (and it was this that made them popular): always I tried to combine the purely "scientific" Marxist reasoning with an emotional appeal. I wanted both to instruct and inspire'.⁴⁶ 'Ideal' Party education would aim to motivate members, give them the feeling that they were part of a world movement directed by an all-embracing world philosophy. Theory would be related to practice:

We Communists are people of action. Ours is the problem of practical struggle against the offensive of capital, against fascism and the threat of imperialist war, the struggle for the overthrow of capitalism. It is precisely this practical task that obliges Communist cadres to equip themselves with revolutionary theory. For, as Stalin, that greatest master of revolutionary action, has taught us, theory gives those engaged in practical work the power of orientation, clarity of vision, assurance in work, belief in the triumph of our cause.⁴⁷

An 'ideal' CP member would be a Communist all of his or her time and would look for every opportunity for advancing the interests of the Party at their place of work among their colleagues and in their leisure (the most motivated would become cadres and given responsibility for overseeing and inspiring a particular area of Party organisation). At work 'the ideal' was for members to be as good at their job as possible so they could gain the respect of their colleagues and make them more responsive to any political overtures that were made (see Chapter 5 re students). This 'rule', said to be a practical application of Marxism-Leninism/dialectical materialism, was to apply to members in every conceivable occupation from bricklayers to civil servants; so there was a tendency even in the 1930s for Communists who were professional people to strive for professional

expertise and, it was hoped, therefore be more efficient and successful Communists. Political work would be centred around concrete campaigns as outlined in the 14th Congress (extract quoted previously) and would not encourage a critical approach/questioning of the particular profession they were in.

Footnotes

- ¹ R.P. Dutt, 'The Power of Marxism', *The Modern Quarterly*, Summer, 1946.
- ² Raymond Williams has given an account of the political education he received as a new member of Cambridge University Socialist Club in 1939 (he joined the student Party branch three months afterwards in December 1939): 'The central points of reference were Engels' *Socialism - Utopian and Scientific* and *Anti-Dühring*. These were taken more or less as the defining texts, especially the former [in fact the former was a chapter taken out of *Anti-Dühring* and released as a pamphlet in many different editions and not just by CPs - SRP]. Marx was much less discussed, although one was told to read *Capital* and I bought a copy. I studied it during that year, but with the usual difficulties over the first chapter. It was not till much later that I knew Marx as much more than the author of *Capital*. I have some reason to think that this was a fairly normal introduction to Marxism'. (R. Williams, *Politics and Letters*, pp. 40-41).
- ³ *The Short Course History of the C.P.S.U.*, p. 105.
- ⁴ S. Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, p. 122 .
- ⁵ A.L. Morton, discussing the Party and Marxism in the 1930s, agrees '... that "The Dialectic" rather went to our heads, and we tended to reduce it to a lot of complicated formulae about "the unity and interpenetration of opposites" and "the transformation of quantity into quality" and all the rest of it. If we had stuck to Lenin's definition - the all-sided consideration of relationships in their concrete development - we would have done better'. (A.L. Morton, 'The 1930s', *Bulletin of the Marx Memorial Library*, no. 106, Spring, 1985, p. 22). In the same article Morton confirms the importance of the English translation of Lenin's *Materialism and Empiri-Criticism* in starting the 'cult' of 'the Dialectic' from the early 1930s. He also draws attention to T.A. Jackson's huge work *Dialectics* which, despite criticisms that can be made of it, did represent '... a tremendous breakthrough in us thinking for ourselves ...', i.e. a theoretical work produced by a British Communist.
- ⁶ *The Short Course History of the C.P.S.U.*, pp. 114-15.
- ⁷ Bernal as quoted by D. Guest, *A Text Book of Dialectical Materialism*, p. 43.
- ⁸ J.D. Bernal, *The Social Function of Science*, p. 231.
- ⁹ D. Guest, op. cit., p. 95.
- ¹⁰ The term dialectical materialism had of course been in use before this date although, for example, Laski in his popular Home University Library book *Communism* of 1927 makes no mention of it, restricting himself to perfunctory remarks on Marx's use of Hegelian dialectics. Mirsky claims that it was from the autumn of 1931, following the English translation of Lenin's *Materialism and Empiri-Criticism* and the Soviet contribution to the International Congress of the History of Science and Technology held in London in 1931, that dialectical

materialism was discussed for the first time in British universities and amongst the 'left intelligentsia'. However, there was at that point no rigid orthodoxy: the paper on 'Theory and Practice from the standpoint of Dialectical Materialism' at the 1931 Congress was Bukharin's, and amongst other offerings was the brilliant paper by Hessen.

- ¹¹ See Rée's *Proletarian Philosophers* for the most comprehensive and thoughtful discussion of the rise of D.M. in the British context to date.
- ¹² See Rée, *ibid*, p. 115.
- ¹³ Gabriel/Bill Carritt, interview 4 February 1987.
- ¹⁴ This book figured in Collets top best-sellers for 1935. The list of the 12 highest selling books makes interesting reading giving, as it does, an insight into the nature of the 'Marxist' literature consumed in Britain in the mid-1930s. It is therefore worth reproducing in full: 1. Dutt, *Fascism and Social Revolution*; 2. J. Reed, *Ten Days That Shook the World*; 3. Levy et al, *Aspects of Dialectical Materialism*; 4. Sholokhov, *Quiet Flows the Don*; 5. Engels, *Anti-Dühring*; 6. J. Beauchamp, *British Imperialism in India*; 7. Emile Burns (ed), *Handbook of Marxism*; 8. R. Fox (translator) *Marxism and Modern Thought*; 9. Strachey, *The Nature of Capitalist Crisis*; 10. Greenwood, *Love on the Dole*; 11. Sholokhov, *Virgin Soil Upturned*; 12. Webb's *Soviet Communism*.
- ¹⁵ The issue of which came first: closeness to the Party leading to preaching of the virtues of dialectical materialism or D.M. attracting one to the Party is unreasonable. Probably on balance most middle-class Communists first joined the CP and were then introduced to D.M.; however, D.M. would have solidified their Communism.
- ¹⁶ I am grateful to Douglas Hyde for pointing this out to me, e.g. the extensive footnote by Dona Torr on pp. 114-15, *Selected Correspondence 1846-1895 by Marx and Engels*: '... they constantly studied with equal thoroughness the results of research into natural sciences, which provided them with the richest material for the confirmation of their conception of the world', p. 114. The footnote/commentary is concluded with the following sentence: 'The enormous growth of technique and of the natural sciences in the Soviet Union, the decay of technique and of the natural sciences in capitalist countries, have revealed the conditions in which a full and consistent application of dialectical materialism to research in the natural sciences is possible and can be carried out on the widest scale', p. 115.
- ¹⁷ Of the 18 volumes issued by 'The Marxist-Leninist Library': 5 were by Engels (884 pages in total), 5 by Marx (726 pages), 1 joint work, one volume is Plekhanov's *Fundamental Problems of Marxism* which is significant, given that he was the inventor of the term dialectical materialism.
- ¹⁸ D. Hyde, letter 3 March 1988.

- 19 ^{See} R. Samuel, 'British Marxist Historians', *New Left Review* no. 120 March/April 1980, p. 78.
- 20 *Modern Quarterly*, No. 1, Vol. 1, January 1938, p. 3.
- 21 Clemens Dutt's dismissive comments in *Labour Monthly* as detailed by Rée, *Proletarian Philosophy*, fn. no. 57, p. 163.
- 22 G. Werskey, *The Visible College*, p. 184.
- 23 Described as amounting to little more than 'lame anecdotes from personal experience' - see Rée, *op. cit.*, p. 103 and note no. 77, p. 164.
- 24 W. Rust, *The Story of the Daily Worker*, p. 44.
- 25 See *The Times Literary Supplement*, 10 February 1950, p. 93. This was made at the time of the Cold War by a publication which was not renowned for its liberalism.
- 26 J.G. Crowther, *Soviet Science*, p. 17 (Pelican edn.). J.G. Crowther graduated from Trinity College, Cambridge University in 1922 and was involved in the Labour College Movement from an early date. As a British scientist he probably visited and formed greater contacts with Soviet scientists than anyone else during the early 1930s. From 1929 to 1935 he visited the USSR no fewer than seven times. In 1930 he was an adviser on Technical Education for the Soviet authorities, for a time he was the scientific correspondent on the *Sunday Worker* and eventually got the same job on *The Manchester Guardian*. He was not, however, immune from attacks by Party members: calling for his removal from the *Sunday Worker*, and as late as 1935 is a review of his *British Scientists of the 19th Century* perceptibly pointing out that 'class struggle had been pushed well into the background' (this review by Arthur Pooley, *Daily Worker*, 28 August 1935 was later condemned in the Paper as sectarian - not in line with the 'Popular Frontism' that was being taken up, by this time Crowther was also an occasional book reviewer for the Paper). See Cauter's *The Fellow-Travellers* pp. 257-59 for his comments on Crowther amongst others (Waddington, French scientists *et al.*) - '... the fellow-travelling scientists were no more inclined to integrate Marxism with their own creative work than were their colleagues the philosophers', p. 257.
- 27 R. Osborn, *Freud and Marx*, p. 222. Osborn's book is a spirited argument that psycho-analysis is based on a dialectical view (mental processes work in a dialectical way) and this needed to be recognised by Marxists/Communists and that the tools of psycho-analysis should be used as a guide to action. He uses the example of the German Communists to show the disaster that could have been avoided through psycho-analysis (above all else a recognition of the necessity of a heroic leader!). Presumably Osborn was in some way trained in psycho-analysis and was arguing for the 'revolutionary potential' of his profession to be accepted and used by the Communist movement. Although lauded by Strachey in an introduction to the book it was given a very critical review by Bernal in *Labour Monthly* carrying, as it did, 'official' imprimatur, i.e. disapproval of Osborn's *Freud and Marx*.
- 28 See H. Levy, *A Philosophy for A Modern Man*, Ch. V, pp. 243-64.

- 29 H. Levy, *ibid.*, pp. 20-21.
- 30 *Ibid.*, p. 242.
- 31 J.D. Bernal, *op. cit.*, p. 415.
- 32 An exception to this would be Caudwell who claimed that the tendency of bourgeois fellow-travellers, and even those who formally joined the Party, to claim an independence/autonomy from 'Proletarian' theory and leadership for their own particular field of interest, applied not just to artists but scientists and all professions. Thus the artist who visited Russia was above all else concerned to see that artists were not 'interfered with'; '... this is not peculiar to the artist. Scientists ... will make an alliance with the proletariat in the same way; they make reservations only in the field of science. They go to Russia prepared to "sacrifice" everything, provided scientific theory is not interfered with. They develop a typically bourgeois conception of the scientist as a "lone wolf". And this extends to everyone - teachers, peasants, administrators, historians, actors, economists ...' (C. Caudwell, *Illusion and Reality*, p. 316).
- 33 For example, VAPP - All-Russian Association of Proletarian Writers which came into prominence in 1924 displaced the more adventurous 'Left Cultural Front'.
- 34 D. Guest, *op. cit.*, pp. 97-98.
- 35 The delegate was Amabel Williams-Ellis as recounted by H. Gustav Klaus in 'Socialist Fiction in the '30s...', *The 1930s: A Challenge to Orthodoxy*.
- 36 Quoted in W. Mulford, *This Narrow Place*, p. 83.
- 37 W. Mulford, *ibid.*, p. 105.
- 38 From a statement made by Edward Upward to the Literature and Sociology Conference on '1936' at Essex University, July 1978.
- 39 *Justice in England*, p. 288.
- 40 N. Blake and H. Rajak, *Wigs and Workers - A History of the Haldane Society of Socialist Lawyers 1930-80*, p. 18.
- 41 *It Can Be Done - 14th C.P. Congress, 1937*, p. 272.
- 42 *Report of the Central Committee to the 15th Party Congress*, p. 43.
- 43 R. Hilton, interview, 14 December 1983.
- 44 Bill Schwarz, 'The People in History: the Communist Party Historians Group, 1946-56' in R. Johnson, G. McLennan et al (eds), *Making Histories*, p. 68.
- 45 e.g. C. Day Lewis, *The Buried Day*, p. 215 for an account of being given responsibility for political education.

- ⁴⁶ D. Hyde, *I Believed*, p. 78, see pp. 76-77 for an outline of a particular course of lectures he gave.
- ⁴⁷ Dimitrov, 1935, Appendix Two in *On Organization - Little Stalin Library no. 6*, p. 30.

CHAPTER 8

The War - from 'Imperialist War' to a 'Just War'

Introduction - summary

The change of line over the War resulted in a good deal of dislocation in the Party. Some members welcomed the Party's opposition to an 'Imperialist War' while others were extremely disturbed by the Comintern-inspired change seeing it as flying in the face of the Party's anti-fascist struggle. There was a loss of members although of greater importance was that Communists were much more isolated within the population at large. Known Communists, working-class and middle-class, faced a good deal of hostility in this period and a number lost their jobs; yet a certain continuity in CP activities was maintained by the continuing ARP campaign, i.e. the fight for adequate air raid shelters which had been started in the 1930s and involved a whole number of the Party's leading scientists, architects, and civil engineers. The People's Convention also maintained the Popular Front type approach to politics (shying away from a full-blooded expression of 'revolutionary defeatism') and showed that the Party could continue to attract a wide variety of non-proletarians. It was with the Soviet Union's entry into the War however, and with the CP's championing of what had become an 'anti-fascist' crusade, ^{that} there was an impressive rise in the Party's fortunes; membership grew dramatically and the Party-run call for the 'opening of the second front' achieved mass support. The new situation released an enormous amount of stored up talent as people threw their ingenuity and efforts into advancing the War effort. One of the clearest examples of this was the proliferation of Joint Production Committees throughout the country, a process in which CP trade unionists (including some 'industrialised' middle-class Communists) played the leading role. Communists in the

professions found their work accorded a new relevance if only it was directed in the 'right' way - their skills could help directly in the 'people's anti-fascist' War. Likewise, Party members who were artists or musicians found unequalled opportunities for their work in the 'Cultural Upsurge' that took place in wartime Britain.

* * * * *

The initial support given by the Communist Party to the war effort in September 1939 was quickly reversed to opposition the following month; the War was now characterised by the Party as a conflict between imperialist powers '... to which no worker in any country can give support'.¹ It is obvious that the major factor in the change of 'line' over the War was the shifting course of Soviet foreign policy and its reconciliation with Nazi Germany. Reflecting the Soviet Union's new position (in reality guided by the same underlying principle of avoiding being isolated and subjected to military attack) the Comintern sent a message to the CPGB Central Committee that the War could not be seen as anti-fascist and should not be supported. In reality the acceptance of the 'anti-War' stand by the Party was not simply 'obeying orders from Moscow'. There was a tendency for those members who had been heavily involved in peace and anti-imperialist work to be unhappy with the initial 'pro-War line', in contrast with those Communists who had been in the International Brigade or very active in other anti-fascist campaigns, a number of whom subsequently severed their links with the CP when it declared its opposition to the War. Therefore at the outbreak of War in Britain, 'far from possessing a single will, the reaction of Communists to the Nazi-Soviet Pact and Chamberlain's declaration of war was confused and heterogeneous, for the war shattered the Party's whole conception of

international politics'.² For some members opposition to the War seemed natural given that the Chamberlain government remained in power; an administration that had been responsible for appeasement of fascism abroad and instituting 'fascist measures' at home. Other Communists regarded the Party's anti-War stance with great unease, though the combination of loyalty to the Party, Soviet Union and the Comintern ensured that they submitted to the new 'line'.³ Moreover, in the practice and involvement of Party members in the trade unions and campaigning organisations there seemed to be little apparent change or pressure for change from the Party leadership following the acceptance of the new 'line'.

Although the CP made much of its supposedly 'Leninist' position with regard to the War, referring time and again to Lenin's stand with respect to the First World War, it rarely adopted a clear 'revolutionary defeatist' attitude. To quote again from what must now be taken as the authoritative work on the Communist Party and the War:

Inasmuch as it opposed the war at all, the Communist Party's politics were characterised by economism - the failure to relate immediate struggles to the question of ending the war - and pacifism - the failure to relate the question of ending the war to the question of ending capitalism.⁴

An important element in the Party's campaigning which remained constant in the pre-War and immediate post-War period was the call for 'effective ARP' and in particular for the construction of deep air raid shelters. Furthermore, the major initiative of the CP during the 'Imperialist' and 'Transitional' phases of the War⁵ the People's Convention, was in many ways a continuation of the 'Popular Front approach'.⁶ The People's Convention based itself around a programme of six, expanded a little later to eight, points including demands for higher living standards, greater democratic and trade union rights, adequate ARP, nationalisation of key areas of the economy, friendship with the Soviet Union, the formation of a

'People's Government' and the striving for a 'People's Peace'. The stated position of the War remained ambiguous and the words socialism or revolution were not mentioned.⁷

Discussing this time in the Party's history Pelling writes that 'Crypto-Communists' and 'fellow-travellers' lapsed in 'some numbers' and estimates that the overall CP membership fell by a third.⁸ Other sources have also emphasised the large scale haemorrhaging of members experienced by the Party, e.g. Charlotte Haldane claimed that 'Many hitherto ardent Communists ... not dependent on Party funds for their livelihood ... seceded at this point'.⁹ There has also been a tendency to draw attention to the fact that many of those who left the Party were 'intellectuals' and members of the middle-class while the more working-class Communists remained steadfast;¹⁰ for example Alan Winnington mentions his own worry at Pollitt's policy of 'a fight on two fronts' remarking that: 'I worried in plenty of company. Most Communist Party members and their close allies - skilled workers and shop-stewards - were very unhappy about the idea of being led into war by an extreme, indeed the arch-Munichite in person ...'.¹¹ Douglas Hyde, writing on the impact of the Soviet-German Pact, gives further support to this interpretation:

Many of the intellectuals who had joined us in our popular front campaigns, admittedly, quickly left in disgust, but this was what we had expected them to do. Their attitude was summed up in a letter I received from a well-known poet¹² who, after being drawn to the Party because of its anti-fascist propaganda, wrote: "A plague on both your uncles, Uncle Joe and Uncle Adolf ...".¹³

As an American Communist pamphlet, copies of which found their way to Britain, characterised it in the form of a question: 'Why do many intellectuals retreat at sharp turns in history?'¹⁴ which it then proceeded to answer; petty bourgeois in origin, not a class but a 'unique station' etc. The disillusionment of the Auden circle of poets and

writers with Communism is well documented, and although the Nazi-Soviet Pact and the CP's opposition to the War were important contributory factors in their turning away from the Party the beginning of their political disengagement predates these events. Describing three literary works from 1938, Spender's *Trial of a Judge*, Auden's and Isherwood's *On the Frontier*, and Warner's *The Professor*, Samuel Hynes declares: '... Communism is no longer seen as the inevitable power, with history on its side, that it was in writings of a few years earlier. And because it is weaker as a cause, its representative figures are not the active, positive heroes they once were'.¹⁵ The succession of defeats suffered by workers throughout the world, the seemingly inextricable rise of Nazism and fascism and the ugly rumours emanating from Spain concerning the repressive behaviour of Communists against other forces on the left, encouraged some to see political activity as pointless and concentrate instead on a resolution of their 'personal problems'.

One of the CP's most prominent poets, C. Day Lewis, had already quietly slipped out of the Party by 1938 after three active years in the Cheltenham branch, as he found the time and effort required of his political work was having a retrograde effect on his poetry. Jean MacGibbon gives an account of the War being greeted, in a strange way, with a sense of relief by her, her husband, and their London middle-class CP friends. Finally, the hectic campaigning over each expansionist move by the Nazis had, for them, come to an end as now it had been resolved with the declaration of War. The CP's switch from supporting to opposing the War was simply ignored and James MacGibbon joined up:

Our fruitless, crushing responsibility was over. We didn't need to write "Save the Czechs" on the pavement any more. The posters, the leaflets, the "literature" were gone, hastily crated with our furniture for storage. It was, though this I might not openly have admitted, a relief not to have to belong to the Communist Party any longer. Not because our political

beliefs were altered: as Jessica Mitford has said, being in the Party changes your way of looking at things. But there was something unnatural about my friendships with the comrades, a political slant on all I felt and did, from which I felt released.¹⁷

A further instance of 'a retreat from politics' by Communists at this time, again not expressing itself in stated opposition to the Party stand on the War, was that ^{cf. a} group of Communist students at Cambridge associated with Raymond Williams. Given the name 'the Aesthetes' by more orthodox members they increasingly concentrated on 'cultural considerations of the movement', bringing out a succession of literary magazines (*Outlook*, *Now* etc) which were not felt to be 'in the spirit of Party work'. A participant in these developments has described it as an effort in 'escaping from the political half truths surrounding us'.¹⁸ It was, however, ^{with} the loss of such figures as John Strachey,¹⁹ and the acrimonious break with Gollancz which effectively brought an end to the Left Book Club, that the CP suffered its greatest damage.

The loss of support and goodwill of non-Party LBC members and fellow-travellers was probably more significant to the CP than the actual loss of members, which on available evidence would seem to have been exaggerated.²⁰ In order to mobilise some of this LBC force behind the Party the *Labour Monthly* was again 'broadened' in scope²¹ and *Labour Monthly* Discussion Groups were formed throughout the country. The People's Convention and the call for a 'People's Government' were directly concerned with appealing to social groups in addition to the industrial working class, as a notice given for the People's Convention in Manchester in January 1941 puts it, it was:

A CALL to all working men and women; Socialists, trade unionists and Co-operators; professional and intellectual workers, small shop-keepers, small business-men and farmers; democrats and anti-fascists; in short, to all workers by hand and brain.

The list of sponsoring individuals for the Convention naturally included many trade union stalwarts of the Party, CP and Labour Party, but also professional people;²² some who were Communists and others who were of a leftwing persuasion. Michael Redgrave who put his name to the Convention after receiving a 'manifesto' through the post described himself as '... a socialist, though an inactive one'.²³ A quarter of the 371 sponsoring names to the Convention could be termed as non-working-class; it included: 2 NFU members, actors, a film director, writers, 7 professors, 17 Reverends, 5 band leaders,²⁴ 8 medical practitioners including two surgeons and one obstetrician.

Interestingly, speaking of this time Douglas Hyde suggests that the various repressive measures brought in by the government and in particular the suppression of the *Daily Worker* and *The Week* led to a new flow of middle-class people into the CP.²⁵ The 'Freedom of the Press' conference in June 1941, jointly organised by the NCCL and National Union of Journalists, was attended by over 1,000 delegates. In Hyde's words:

When the popularity of the Party began to increase was first when we pulled in a new type of contact ... at the time of the *Daily Worker* ban when the Party's fortunes went very low ... we started a great campaign in the name of the freedom of the press ... people like Wendy Hiller and all sorts of people from 'the stage' ... Beatrix Lehmann ... signing things calling publicly for the lifting of the ban. So that type of person was brought in on the basis of opposition to the attack on the freedom of the press and civil liberties and remained contacts so that, for example, Beatrix Lehmann later became a member of the *Daily Worker* Editorial board.²⁶

During the 'Imperialist' stage of the War the monthly journal *Our Time* was launched with the obvious intention of giving some public expression to the Party's cultural and professional forces thus giving further evidence that the CP was not as completely decimated in this area as some might claim. Again, as with the changes with *Labour Monthly*, the new

publication was aimed at appealing to those people who had been attracted to the LBC. Its size was that of the *Penguin New Writing* and as with *Left Review* it interspersed articles and poems with sketches and drawings. As with so much of the CP's literature at this time the new journal was unclear over what stand should be taken over the War; a negative attitude was projected in several of the contributions but not what could be termed revolutionary defeatism. Significantly the aim of the journal, as declared in its first number, was not anti-fascism or anti-war but almost Fabian in its expression: '... to show that the power and the plan exist, to restore to human living those arts: music, architecture, literature, graphic art, the theatre, which are as essential as food and sleep, and of which, like the latter, there is now too little'.²⁷

The German attack on the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941 completely altered the CP's attitude towards the War, and after Churchill made it clear that there would be no accommodation with the Nazis the Party declared that it would give every support to the Government in its prosecution of the War. The War was now '... definitely anti-fascist and we could fully support it',²⁸ and as another Communist describes this time:

For me, as for Communists everywhere, it was a huge relief that the War had changed beyond a doubt and we were all anti-fascists again. Although I had believed in the doctrine of the imperialist war, I was glad to turn the page on the moral and political tangles, not to speak of the isolation and unpopularity, in which it had landed us.²⁹

The Communist Party did not simply return to the 'Popular Frontism' of the period before the War was opposed. In the new situation all political issues were secondary to that of facilitating the advance of the War effort: defeating Nazi Germany and defending the Soviet Union or as the Central Committee's statement of July 1941 was entitled, 'The Common

Defence of British and Soviet People'. The most authoritative and comprehensive expression of the CP's new position was given by Palme Dutt in his book *Britain in the World Front*. Here he made plain that: 'The speediest victory of Britain and Britain's allies over Hitler is not the special interest of one class or section of the nation, but the common interest of all classes and sections of the nation ... This national unity is indispensable for victory over Hitler'.³⁰ The 'abandonment of Marxism' and 'adoption of class collaborationist' politics by the Communist Party in the wake of the USSR's entry into the War has naturally been emphasised by various Trotskyist historians.³¹ Also, from what could be termed a more impartial academic approach, K.A. Morgan draws attention to what he sees as a distinct departure from its previous politics by the Party in this period. As he points out, the interpretation of fascism as a product of capitalism in crisis was jettisoned and in its place the Party tended to concentrate on describing the unique moral degeneracy, perversion and evil of 'Hitlerism'. Following from this: '... the C.P. was now ready to admit of the possibility and desirability of democratic progress and social reform within the framework of a stabilised capitalist economy'.³²

On 12 July 1941 an Anglo-Soviet Agreement was signed committing both countries to a war-time alliance against Germany, and the following year this was built upon in what has been called the 20 years Alliance. For the first and only time official encouragement was given to 'friendship with the Soviet people': 'Tanks for Russia' weeks were organised in the factories and 'Aid to Russia' events were held throughout Britain. Despite Government attempts to restrict Communist participation in 'friendship' events (the ban on the *Daily Worker* remained in force until 7 September 1942) the Party could not help but benefit in the new situation. The CP attracted thousands of new members many of whom had been inspired to join by the Soviet Union's resistance to the Nazis. Ken Coates's

conversion to Communism at this time would be fairly typical of quite a few of the influx into the Party:

I was a war-time Communist. I was at school during the Second World War and the background to us learning politics was the war on the Eastern front, which for a long time was the only war. So that I was one of those people, one of those children, who was intensely patriotic who came to admire things Russian in the course of following backwards and forwards the Russian war. When I was 14 I formed a young Communist group in the school, that would be 1944, it was nothing to do with the national YCL; we made it up ourselves, and then it connected up with the C.P. in 1945 during the General Election.³³

The most public campaign with which Communists became associated which brought new members in to the Party, was the call for a 'Second Front', i.e. the invasion of Europe - which would present the Germans with two fronts to fight on. In the space of only a few months, two demonstrations were held in Trafalgar Square calling for the opening of the Second Front and organised by the CP. The first in March 1942 was attended by 35,000 and at the second in May 1942 some 50,000 participated. Not surprisingly, full-time CP workers in London called each other: '... 'meat packers' because we aimed to pack people into Trafalgar Square and other centres of demonstration'.³⁴ As early as June 1942 a Gallup poll indicated that 60% of the people favoured the opening of a Second Front that year.³⁵

In contrast to the Labour Party, which as a result of the electoral truce remained relatively organisationally inactive with a falling membership during the War. until 1943, the Communist Party carried out major recruitment drives. Target figures for new members were set for CP Districts and a 'Unity for Victory' campaign was held in London at the end of 1941 with Pollitt in the Stoll Theatre, simultaneously addressing ten meetings in other theatres, by means of loudspeakers. Other speakers included Michael Foot, who normally kept the CP at arm's length, and the event resulted in the raising of £1,174 and 683 new members. By the

autumn of 1942 Party membership peaked at 64,000, although this quickly levelled off to some 55,000 in the subsequent 2 - 3 years.³⁶ Again, as with all CP membership totals, there is no detailed breakdown as to the social, occupational or age make-up of the new recruits. Some have gone as far as characterising them as 'middle-class, right wing and patriotic elements' whose pro-Red Army feelings were combined with an enthusiasm for ignoring traditional labour practices and encouraging 'speed-ups' in production.³⁷ It is more likely that, as the CP proclaimed at the time, people from 'all walks of life' joined the Party during the War, engineering workers, scientists, housewives and others. There were ordinary rank and file Labour Party people that came over to the CP after becoming disenchanted with Labour's quiescence, and in comparison with the past, large numbers of women joined raising the estimated percentage of females in the overall membership from in the region of 10-15% to 25-33%.³⁸

There was also a formidable growth of CP presence in industry as various Communist activists gained employment in engineering and munitions factories and played a key role in building up trade unions on a shopfloor basis. Over a third of the 1,196 delegates at the CP's 1942 Conference were classified as engineers and the number of Party factory branches/groups rose to new heights, e.g. there were 300 in London by the end of 1941 and a target was set to increase it by a further 200.³⁹ Of course many of those who flocked into the factories would have been new to factory work and some of these would have been of middle-class origin; there are certainly examples of middle-class Communist women getting factory jobs where they could work for the War effort and recruit to the Party, though the suggestion that the overwhelming mass of those who joined the CP throughout the War were middle-class is plainly ridiculous. Although there are numerous examples of the Party and *Daily Worker*

condemning worker resistance to industrial innovations and using Communism's worst invective for those who went on strike - Trotskyists were variously described as 'agents of the Gestapo in the labour movement' and 'Hess men of Trotsky' - the Party at factory level gained support because it filled a very real need for workers.

Party members were largely responsible for the setting up of Joint Production Committees in factories which brought together representatives of management and workers with the aim of improving efficiency; this fitted in with the popular desire for improving the War effort and, although it involved sacrifices on the part of labour, it was also used in a manner to strengthen shopfloor power and control. As a leading Communist at Smiths Industry's Cricklewood factory (MA 1 - approx. 2,000 employees) comments on the establishment of a JPC there:

We [CP factory branch - SRP] did play a very important part in the development of Production Committees with the view that this was going to be the foretaste of being able to know how we were going to take over industry in peacetime ... we saw it as a combination of two things, we saw it as a form of education ... here was a chance for the ordinary worker to be educated in the "know how" of what went on in terms of the productive forces ... and of course the second factor was to assist the War effort.⁴⁰

Although elements in the Party leadership wanted to give the employers a 'blank cheque' in the interests of greater productivity (the promoting of 'the line' to extremes is a recurrent feature in Communist practice) the demand that this be the approach of factory Communists was another matter.⁴¹ At its most extreme there was even an attempt by the Yorkshire District Committee of the CP to expel four members who were engineering workers and found to have been making cigarette lighters in worktime. According to the District Committee, this was sabotage. The episode is an indication of how divorced some of the local Party leaders were from their industrial members; as it turned out a member of the District Committee,

an electrician, objected to the decision and it was referred up to Harry Pollitt who ruled it out of order.⁴²

Communist professional workers threw themselves into the War effort with great unambiguous enthusiasm and were in the forefront of stating the case for the indispensable role of their profession in the fight against Hitler. A conference called by the Association of Scientific Workers for the start of 1942 was devoted to 'Science and the War' with the objective of advancing the cause of science in the War effort. There were 600 participants and as is apparent from the list of speakers, a strong CP presence. Those who spoke included Haldane, Levy, Kuczynski, Miss Blanco White, and Bernal who gave a summation speech at the end of the event. According to a report in *World News and Views*, 24 January 1942: 'Professor Levy emphasised the power of a planned economy and the need to get scientists in touch with the front line, so that the new scientific weapons could be used to the greatest effect'. In fact the demand that the government recognise that the resources of science were not being fully used and that the adoption of a general scientific approach to the running of the country were essential for national survival, had been made since War had been declared. These efforts had involved Communist scientists and figures such as Haldane and Bernal were already involved in significant War work prior to the invasion of the Soviet Union (Levy was, of the 'big names', an exception). The difference was that once the War was no longer deemed to be imperialist Communist scientists could as Party members be completely associated with this 'advocacy of Science' with the result that the prestige of Party scientists increased yet further in the CP.⁴³ In the new situation a 'Science Faculty' was established at Marx House so that relevant scientific expertise could be provided to workers who were struggling to increase production. It was this body that held a symposium on 'Science and Technology in the Soviet Union' during Easter

1942 which was attended by 250 scientists, technologists and science teachers. As with all aspects of Soviet life there was a growing interest in Soviet science and Communist and Left scientists referred to the prestigious position of science and the scientist in the 'planned economy and society' of the Soviet Union. The symposium in question covered both technical details of various branches of Soviet science and technology and organisational questions as with 'The Scientist in Soviet Society'. Papers that were presented were later published as a pamphlet by Marx House with a preface by Page Arnot, and what is significant is the number of qualified scientists who were prepared to be publicly associated with the endeavour (seven in all).⁴⁴ This period also saw a dramatic growth in the membership of the Association of Scientific Workers: 513 in 1935 to 1,319 in July 1939 to 11,000 by mid-1943, and its re-registration as a trade union. The Left and in particular CP members were the dominating force in the Association. The Marx House Science Faculty was run in conjunction with the union and in 1943 the gifted Communist of long standing, Ted Ainley, became A.Sc.W. Assistant General Secretary, eventually becoming General Secretary in 1949.⁴⁵

Following on from the previously mentioned 1942 conference, where numerous speakers drew attention to what they felt was an inadequate use of their scientific and technical skills, the A.Sc.W. agitated for scientists and technicians to be given the right of representation on Joint Production Committees. In the meantime, while the demand that JPCs be extended to include other than manual employees, a Communist scientist recommended that 'technical staff' approach JPCs and shop steward committees with suggestions for increasing production, as, in his words, 'only by closest co-operation between the manual and staff workers, including the scientific and technical staff, and by a fuller use of science through the whole war effort, can we get the maximum pressure to

open the Second Front and the maximum industrial effort to maintain it.'⁴⁶ The A.Sc.W. called for the setting up of a Central Scientific and Technical Board with executive powers and direct contact with the War Cabinet so it could co-ordinate the scientific work of government departments and industrial firms. This proposal, championed by Communist scientists but with considerable support from others, was aimed at increasing the power and influence of scientists and technicians over the conduct of the War. Sectional interests would be eliminated and scientific and technical information would be pooled. An important element in this approach, something stressed by Communists, was that scientific workers be engaged in vital War work and not be 'wasted' in 'post-war work' (in many ways the developments in the A.Sc.W. and the role of Communist scientists is paralleled in the architectural world - see my Chapter on Communist architects).

The heightened prominence of science and scientists in war-time Britain and the public awareness of the importance of 'the boffins' and 'backroom boys' to the national fight for survival meant that the Left and Communist scientists were working in an increasingly favourable climate. There was a general acceptance within the scientific community of the need for scientific planning and the planning of the country's resources. Seemingly esoteric areas of scientific work were given importance in the War effort and Communists in these areas were enthusiastic in applying their particular expertise in the interests of 'an anti-fascist people's War'. The Party education which had, from the 1930s, laid emphasis on the special nature of CP membership and that one was a Communist at all times, including at work, was given added significance by the War. Although

not everyone on the face of it would be in a job where he could do anything for Communism. But a good example of the way it could be done would be in the case of ... [Howard Hinton] ... a scientist, a naturalist - an entomologist whose particular speciality was

coleoptera. So he spent much of his time as an employed civil servant at the British Museum identifying beetles sent from all over the country and elsewhere by people who, for one reason or another, needed to have them identified. He got the idea early on in the "battle of the Atlantic" that his work was becoming more and more relevant because more and more requests were being made for him to identify insect pests. And then the Ministry of Food got in touch with him and through his employers at the British Museum asked if it was possible for him to produce a handbook, a sort of standard work for the identification of insect pests. And he took this job on and worked at it and produced a two volume work ... the definitive work for all time, so good in fact that before very long there were copies of it produced (translated) in both Germany and Japan ...⁴⁷

The finished work included a short introduction where Dr. Hinton attempted to draw readers' attention to the historical and social background to the emergence of 'a problem' with insect pests, i.e. small-scale society of the pre-industrial era was not geared to or capable of storing food in large amounts for long periods, the 'problem' arises with large-scale industry and large-scale society. However, under capitalism (although he does not use the word as such) with its destruction of food in order to maintain prices there was no real attempt to combat the losses inflicted by insect pests. This had been changed by the War where damage caused by insect pests could not be afforded in a situation where the State needed to ensure all available resources were thrown into 'the fight for national survival'. No longer wedded to the interests of private enterprise the State, Dr. Hinton implies, is a 'central authority' which views and attempts to deal with problems from 'a social point of view' and he is optimistic that this new situation will continue after the War. In the words of Dr. Hinton:

It may be confidently expected that many of the lessons learnt during the war in controlling stored product pests will not be forgotten and that organizations set up to exercise control will remain. The continued increase in the division of labour and the scope and efficiency of mass production methods probably means

that many classes of commodities will be stored longer and in greater quantities than in the pre-war period. The problems connected with reducing or altogether avoiding insect attack in the field, in transit, and in storage should therefore receive greater attention than in the past.⁴⁸

Similar developments can be pointed to among Communists who were medical practitioners. The Party had built up a presence in a number of London hospitals where there were organised 'cells' encompassing all CP members from auxiliaries and orderlies up to senior doctors and specialists. There were also a significant number of local practitioners, a few from the pre-Popular Front days, who although involved in some branch work had always spent a great deal of their time medically serving their mainly working-class communities (e.g. Dr. Alastair Wilson, member since 1932 and Medical Practitioner in Aberdare, South Wales). As Jim Fyrth has recorded in his book on the 'Aid to Spain Movement' doctors and nurses, a good proportion of whom were Party members, went to Spain and worked as medical volunteers for the Republic and from their experiences were instrumental in encouraging a number of medical advances in Britain on their return. The Communist surgeon Dr. Alexander Tudor Hart, for instance, spoke to a BMA meeting on the treatment of gunshot fractures detailing the important lessons he had learnt from 'battle-ground surgery' in Spain. However, probably the most significant medical advance to come out of the Spanish conflict was the whole system of blood transfusion and the building up of blood banks. Again it was another CP member, Dr. Janet Vaughan, who was instrumental in introducing this innovation, originating from Spain, to Britain.⁴⁹ This work on establishing a blood bank went on during the early 'Imperialist Phase' of the War. After the new situation following the attack on the Soviet Union Joan MacMichael⁵⁰ was involved in

another innovative medical development, one that was geared to the major priority of the Party of improving the War effort and publicised in ^{the} CP journal *World News and Views*:

Joan my wife went into Hoovers which was then making electronic equipment for Hanley Page bombers and developed there a quite outstanding health service inside the factory so the workers never need be absent for health reasons ... a special service was laid on inside the factory and absenteeism was reduced and got the bosses to really serve the interests of the country, ensuring the workers received good health care and good food. She laid on special diets ... everybody had digestive problems. And so when Aneurin Bevan was planning the N.H.S. he invited her to submit her ideas for an industrial health service.⁵¹

More generally Communists played an important role in the Socialist Medical Association, as they had done from the Association's inception in 1930, despite the body's affiliation to the Labour Party, and contributed to its campaigning for a national health service.

Communists in the cultural professions became intimately involved in the 'Cultural Upsurge' that materialised in Wartime Britain. *Our Time* reflected the change in approach following the entry of the USSR into the War. The journal's editors felt they had a new job to do; to attempt to understand the tremendous rise in the interest of all arts that had taken place and '... why art and entertainment are so obviously necessary in War-time living, and finally to find ways and means of bringing all artists even further into the nations' fight in their own particular spheres'.⁵² In many cases Communists on their own initiative, and with official approval or resigned acceptance, utilised the new circumstances of War to 'bring Culture to the people' often containing 'a political message' which was deemed to be a contribution to the War effort. For example Alan Bush was called up at the end of 1941 into the RAMC, he spent his first three months training at Boyce Barracks where he organised a choir among the men, he then moved on to Millbank Barracks (London)

where he was for the remainder of the War and he built up a choir here as well. It was while he was at Millbank Barracks that Alan Bush was invited to take part in the Red Army Day extravaganza in the Albert Hall on 23 February 1943 - an officially approved celebration of the 25th anniversary of the foundation of the Red Army which brought together a host of representatives from the armed and civilian services and various figures from the musical and theatrical worlds. While he was in the army Alan Bush had very little contact with the Party but as he understood CP policy: 'What was propagated, and it happened in my case, was that if I had a chance to organise cultural activity I should do so ...'.⁵³

The War saw the first planned and financed utilisation of art, music and theatre by the British government for the purposes of building up morale - initially, with respect to the civil population (evacuees at first) in the shape of the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA) and later to cover the servicemen with the establishment of the Entertainments National Service Association (ENSA). These developments were welcomed by the Party and particularly^{by} those Communists in the cultural professions. Official encouragement was given to the 'Popular Front desire' of bringing 'art back to the people'⁵⁴ with cultural events and exhibitions held in factories, barrack rooms, British restaurants and tube stations. Unity Theatre fitted into this general 'cultural drive' of 'going to the people' with its formation of a mobile unit, while the Artists International Association⁵⁵ organised exhibitions, one of which - 'Hogarth and English Caricature' - had an extensive provincial tour through the CEMA. Communists were active in this 'Cultural Upsurge' both through voluntary organisations such as Unity or the Clarion Singers in Birmingham and on a paid basis through the Old Vic theatrical company led by Sybil Thorndike and Lewis Casson which toured South Wales and County Durham, and the London Philharmonic Orchestra

(LPO). One writer has commented that the War transformed the Philharmonic Orchestra from a conventional, staid London orchestra into '... Musical Culture Ltd. Its base was a decrepit old music hall in Golders Green and it concentrated on taking the works of composers like Beethoven and Mozart to entirely new audiences in unusual settings, stimulating enormous enthusiasm'.⁵⁶ The chief administrator and driving spirit of the LPO was Thomas Russell, an active member of the Workers Music Association, contributor to *Left Review* and *Communist*.⁵⁷ An interview with a Bristol poet and novelist in *Our Time*, November 1943 gives an indication of how some of the literary left regarded the new situation War had placed them in:

Factory life has been a great experience for me (said Hubert). It is not merely the impact of new sights and sounds and my friendships with my workmates, but being part of the normal life of a small town community instead of a middle-class bohemian and a professional journalistic spectator ... He has no time for the opinion that poets should stand aloof from politics and war.⁵⁸

The official position with respect to the suitability of Communists working in various areas of the state and armed services was, to say the least, idiosyncratic.⁵⁹ In some cases Party members were employed in War work where their education and knowledge of the Soviet Union and the Russian language was utilised to some extent. Christopher Hill, for example, was seconded to the Foreign Office presumably because of his firsthand knowledge of the Soviet Union. A.L. Lloyd worked in the Soviet Relations Branch of the Ministry of Information. The Communist presence in the Army Education Corps and the Army Bureau of Current Affairs (ABCA) has also been pointed to and again it is easy enough to give examples of educated, mostly middle-class, Communists who were active in this area. Jack Lindsay was a script-writer for ABCA Army Theatre Unit, and E.J. Hobsbawm became an officer in the Education Corps (many such cases could

be cited). On the other hand there are numerous examples of Communists who were diverted to 'harmless' or 'unimportant' posts and denied promotion.⁶⁰ Alan Bush, although he could speak fluent German, was turned down by the Army Education Corps, while two scientists from Cambridge who were Party members, Colin Siddons, who had been involved in work on splitting the atom at the Cavendish laboratories, and Jim Jeffery, remained in the lower ranks of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force throughout most of the War.

Despite the obstacles encountered by Communists in the armed services a not inconsiderable number achieved officer rank.⁶¹ This was something that was positively encouraged by the Party leadership as it was argued that a Communist in a position of some authority would be able to have a greater influence in what was seen as a 'people's army'.⁶² Writing an introduction to a posthumous book of letters by a Communist who spent much of the War in India, Pollitt holds him up as an ideal.

After he joined the Royal Armoured Corps, he proved himself a model of efficiency in mastering every aspect of armoured warfare. He was repeatedly recommended for promotion, which might have been quicker in coming had it not been for the political prejudices which die so hard at the War Office. As it was, he held the rank of troop sergeant at the time of his death.⁶³

Speaking of his War service the Communist Reg Turner,⁶⁴ like Clive Branson a painter, has commented that both American and British Intelligence were aware of his politics and kept him under observation, yet '... I still got promoted to squadron leader and later wing commander and so on ... when I got enough rank I could look at my own records. they still gave me a medal the Americans ... full of anomalies'.⁶⁵

Footnotes

- 1 P. Dutt, *Why This War?*, November 1939, p. 12.
- 2 K.A. Morgan, 'Against Fascism and War - Ruptures and Continuities in British Communist Politics 1935-1941', Ph.D. Manchester University, p. 149.
- 3 In his autobiography *One Man in His Time* Alick West records his own feeling of unease at the initial CP statement supporting the War and his subsequent relief when it was changed to opposition - see p. 175. In contrast, for the working-class Communist Fred Copeman the reversal of policy over the War confirmed for him his break with the Party giving it political credence - see his autobiography *Reason in Revolt*, pp. 180-81.
- 4 K.A. Morgan, op. cit., pp. 175-76.
- 5 The 'Imperialist phase' being from September 1939 - June 1940 and the 'Transitional phase' from June 1940 - June 1941, this was the interpretation given post the attack on the USSR. See D. Torr, *Marxism and War*.
- 6 Of course one of the major distinctions in the Party was between the way the small group of London cadres and the Centre viewed matters and how the great bulk of the membership viewed and interpreted policies - this was particularly the case with the early stages of the War and the attitude towards revolutionary defeatism. The plans that were worked out for the CP press throw a good deal of light on the early War position of the Party leadership (and probably a select number of them). From early May 1940 the Party's underground press was: 'in reserve and ready to go into action ... with the personnel and equipment to 1) produce illegal papers and leaflets in the event of the Party itself being driven underground which included 2) a large unit for the purpose of producing a paper specifically for the armed forces and which would take up their grievances and demands only in the event of a crisis in the War situation and would only go into production in such a situation. One might reasonably argue that revolutionary defeatism remained part of the Party's thinking - or a bottom-line policy - for as long as this was actively maintained in existence ... the political bureau urgently requested that a trial run should be made early in May 1941 on our second largest unit which would produce a paper for civilian use. This was done, but very soon afterwards all expansion of the organisation was brought to a stop and it remained inactive until the year's end. One may speculate that events in Greece and Cyprus had some bearing upon the sudden virtual ending of this practical manifestation of revolutionary defeatism'. (D. Hyde - who was responsible for the Party's underground press - letter 12 October 1988). These activities and the ebb and flow of the plans and thinking re. distributing an underground paper would have been unbeknown to most Communists. I have referred to this matter at some length as Morgan in his thesis leaves it out of account.

- 7 See S. Bornstein and A. Richardson, *War and the Revolution - A History of the Trotskyist Movement in Britain 1937-49*, p. 16 for an account of a failed attempt to amend the programme to include the call for 'Socialist Revolution'.
- 8 See H. Pelling, *The British Communist Party*, pp. 116 and 120. The dislocation of life brought about by war allowed various Communists to disengage themselves quietly from the Party and intense political activity, in some case this was without any great change or reversal in political beliefs (one of the architects I have interviewed, Vivian Nash, would seem to fit into this pattern).
- 9 C. Haldane, *Truth Will Out*, p. 181.
- 10 As an interesting contrary piece of evidence with regard to claim of 'intellectual/middle-class' desertion from 'the cause' following the Nazi-Soviet Pact the Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR had only 41 members resigning because of 'disapproval' in 1939-40 as opposed to 153 new people who joined. Overall membership and level of activities remained remarkably constant (1,200-1,300 members between 1936-40) - although there was a sizeable influx of new members following the German attack on the Soviet Union, e.g. 480 new members between June 1941-October 1941 (SCR AGM minutes).
- 11 A. Winnington, *Breakfast With Mao*, p. 46.
- 12 Rex Warner, the 'well known poet' was not an 'open Communist' but part of a "ginger group" in the Farnham Divisional Labour Party which ensured it was a CP "creature", information from D. Hyde, letter 19 February 1988.
- 13 D. Hyde, *I Believed*, p. 68.
- 14 V.J. Jerome, *Intellectuals and the War*, p. 16.
- 15 S. Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, p. 300.
- 16 See C. Day Lewis, *The Buried Day*, pp. 222-25.
- 17 J. MacGibbon, *I Meant to Marry Him*, p. 170.
- 18 Michael Orrom, 'A Fragment of Memory' TV programme C4, 8 October 1984 - he mentioned that maintaining political motivation had become increasingly difficult.
- 19 See W. Mulford, *This Narrow Place*, p. 98 for further confirmation of his closeness to the Party.
- 20 Although the Party's membership almost certainly fell from the recorded 19,000 for September 1939 (*World News and Views* 27 July 1940, '20th Anniversary of the CPGB') Communist journals sales rose: *Labour Monthly* (Morgan, 'Against Fascism and War', Vol. 2, p. 508 - LM circulation trebled over 15 months), *World News and Views* reported 'steadily increasing circulation' 24 August 1940, unfortunately I have no figures for *Daily Worker* sales in the period leading up to the ban. The Party undoubtedly benefited from the general dispersal,

both geographically and occupationally, of many of its members into areas where new recruits could be made, e.g. the armed services (see *Daily Worker* for 1940 which carried a 'Weekly Page for Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen'), Auxiliary Fire Service, factories etc.

- ²¹ See Morgan's Ph.D., p. 505.
- ²² The *Daily Worker* gave prominent coverage of those artistic and professional people and bodies who supported the People's Convention, e.g. 6 December 1940 - report of Glasgow Orpheus Choir protesting against the BBC ban placed on their conductor Sir Hugh Robertson, 16 December 1940 - account of meeting where 'reps of the world of art and entertainment spoke out on the People's Convention', etc. Attached to the People's Convention was a Committee of Arts and Entertainment Professions including: Beatrix Lehmann, Walter Hudd, some 'well-known people in the swing music profession', etc. They were fighting for a People's Government, according to the *Daily Worker*, as they realised the corrupting influence on culture of private enterprise and that a national plan for the provision of art and entertainment was the only means of reviving the 'cultural professions' and giving the people 'what they want' (see *Daily Worker*, 9 December 1940).
- ²³ M. Redgrave, extract from autobiography in the *Observer*, 25 September 1983.
- ²⁴ Douglas Hyde commenting on his work among the 'central' musicians' group (he ran a course on dialectical materialism in late 1947 for the group's members) remembers: '... discussing with Van Phillips [film music composer - SRP] and Ivor Mairants [guitarist in Geraldo's band -SRP] how it came about that there were relatively so many Party members and sympathisers in the West End dance bands. The reason they gave me was that anyone with a social conscience who played night after night in a big West End hotel, entertaining the very rich and seeing how they behaved and the decadent types they often were was in a good position to contrast their life style with that of the masses and was likely to become a rebel against the system'. (D. Hyde, letter 20 October 1986).
- ²⁵ A committee was set up to fight for press freedom in response to the 'ban' and its composition shows a broad 'Popular Front' make-up: CPers prof. H. Levy and Walter Hudd (leading Shakespearean actor), Hewlitt Johnson, but also figures such as H.G. Wells, Lord Faringdon, R.R. Stokes MP, L.T. Horrabin MP, Mrs. Cecil Chesterton OBE, etc.
- ²⁶ D. Hyde, interview 14 September 1987.
- ²⁷ *Our Time*, Vol. 1 No. 1 February 1941.
- ²⁸ Bill Moore, interview 27 April 1983.
- ²⁹ Mervyn Jones, *Chances - an autobiography*, pp. 56-57.
- ³⁰ P. Dutt, op. cit., p. 197.
- ³¹ Two examples being: Hugo Dewar, *Communist Politics in Britain: the CPGP from its origins to the Second World War*, S. Bornstein and A. Richardson, *Two Steps Back*.

- ³² K.A. Morgan, op. cit., p. 548.
- ³³ K. Coates, interview 10 April 1981.
- ³⁴ J. Fyrth, letter 7 September 1986.
- ³⁵ See W.P. and Z.K. Coates, *A History of Anglo-Soviet Relations*, pp. 720-26.
- ³⁶ See James Hinton's articles: 'Coventry Communism: A Study of Factory Politics in the Second World War', *History Workshop Journal*, no. 10, Autumn 1980 and the presently unpublished 'Communism and the Labour Party'.
- ³⁷ This argument is made in Bornstein and Richardson, *War and the International*, pp. 52-53.
- ³⁸ See S. Bruley, 'Socialism and Feminism in the CPGB', Ph.D. University of London, 1980.
- ³⁹ See *World News and Views*, 27 December 1941.
- ⁴⁰ Ray Hawkins, interview 6 October 1982 - he was chairman of the CP factory branch during the War which at its height had 50-60 members.
- ⁴¹ It is interesting to note that in two trade unions, the Electricians' and the Building Workers', where the CP was strong, there was resistance to piecework and bonus systems. At the 1942 ETU conference only 9 votes were cast to accept piecework, much to Peter Kerrigan's (CP industrial organiser) displeasure - see *World News and Views*, 1 August 1942.
- ⁴² Information from A.A. Wallis, interview 24 June 1983.
- ⁴³ Werskey refers to the Party leadership's efforts to increasingly identify the Party with 'the glory of the backroom boys' and the 'cause of Science' and quotes Dutt's declaration at the CP's 16th Congress in July 1943: 'The Communist Party stands with modern science ...' etc - see *The Visible College*, p. 269.
- ⁴⁴ By 1944 a party District meeting on Science after the War could attract 200 representatives of scientific societies, students and labour organisations (most 35 years old or under). A professor of anatomy, prof. Wood-Jones, opened the proceedings and Levy gave the key speech in which he expressed, in line with the Party leadership at this time, the optimistic belief that the 20 years agreement with the Soviet Union had opened up a 'unique opportunity' for the country. In Levy's words: '... we must be prepared to learn the lessons of this War, and carry them forward to the days of peace. We must get the right kind of organisation to apply the brains and capacity of our people for the benefit of the country'. (Report of Lancashire and Cheshire District Science Conference in Manchester *Daily Worker*, 24 July 1944.
- ⁴⁵ See the article 'The Professor takes a Union Card', *The Tribune*, 21 November 1941 and Werskey, op. cit., p. 268.

- 46 'Scientific Workers and the War' by 'an industrial scientist', *World News and Views*, 10 October 1942.
- 47 Douglas Hyde, interview 2 February 1987.
- 48 H. Hinton, *A Monograph of the Beetles Associated with Stored Products*, Vol. 1, p. 1.
- 49 See J. Fyrth, *The Signal was Spain*, Ch. 10, 'Medical Advances', pp. 140-57.
- 50 Joan McMichael, a doctor and CP member from 1937, in the early period of the War worked with Dr. Janet Vaughan in the blood transfusion service based at Slough. See obituary of Dr. Joan McMichael-Askins in *The Guardian*, 16 August 1989 by Dorothy Hodgkin.
- 51 Carritt, interview 4 February 1987.
- 52 *World News and Views*, 5 December 1942.
- 53 Alan Bush, interview 6 March 1983.
- 54 F.D. Klingender, *Marxism and Modern Art* preface.
- 55 A whole number of artists managed to join up the Camouflage Directorate unit, proving that even artistic skills had a direct military application. The unit was based in Leamington Spa and a strong AIA branch was established in the town. See L. Morris and R. Radford, *A.I.A. - The Story of Artists International Association*, p. 65.
- 56 Andrew Davies, *Where did the Forties Go?*, p. 35.
- 57 *Left Review*, October 1937, pp. 520-23, 'Music Betrayed' by T. Russell gives an interesting thumb-nail historical materialist sketch of the development of music.
- 58 J. Grey, 'Men in Our Time - No. 1, Hubert Nicholson', *Our Time*, November 1943. Calls were made in the CP for the Party to become more closely associated with the popular cultural 'renaissance' and to build upon 'Our National Traditions' (title to a whole number of contributions in the *World News and Views* in 1944); in part it was taking up and advancing upon the 'Popular Frontism' but it was also a response to the disbandment of the Communist International. Contributions that were made treated culture per se as a positive and good thing.
- 59 During the War Party member Stephen Bodington moved from the Labour Research Department to the Admiralty where he pioneered the concept of linear programming: plotting the most economic routes for merchant vessels. Despite this considerable contribution he was not granted permanent status as a civil servant because, the suspicion is, of his political record and with the end of the War his services were dispensed with - see Obituary, 'Polymath for the future', by M. Barratt Brown, *The Guardian*, 1 January 1990.

- ⁶⁰ See Richard Kisch, *The Days of the Good Soldier - Communists in the Armed Forces, W.W.II* p. 64, and an apolitical source, Douglas Jones, *Duration Man 1939-1946 - My War*. To quote Jones: 'One of our engineer-clerks in Baghdad ... was a dedicated member of the Communist Party, whose mother always sent him the *Daily Worker*. He was intelligent, articulate and a good linguist ... he applied for a commission and was duly accepted for an O.C.T.U. (Officer Cadet Training Unit) in Palestine. Before setting out he left word with his best friend that under no circumstances were his copies of the *Daily Worker* to be forwarded to him. He returned to Baghdad after a few weeks with his tail between his legs, having been turned down due to a 'personality defect'. The conclusion was drawn that 'military intelligence' had got wind of his political affiliations', p. 89.
- ⁶¹ Of a meeting of demobilised members in London at the beginning of 1946 attended by 160: 8 had officer rank and 'a considerable number' had achieved NCO rank. Another interesting fact is that nearly a third of those attending had '... joined the C.P. in their period of service' (*World News and Views*, 16 February 1946, p. 55 letter from Dennis Goodwin, Organiser London District Committee).
- ⁶² John Saville rejected the line that a Communist should seek promotion and personally remained in the ranks 'among the men' so that in a crisis he would not be on the wrong side among the officers - see Martin and Rubinstein (eds) *Ideology and the Labour Move*, Chapter 2 by R. Miliband, 'John Saville: A Presentation', p. 21.
- ⁶³ C. Branson, *British Soldier in India - the letters of Clive Branson*, Introduction, p. 5.
- ⁶⁴ Unfortunately as of yet there is no written work giving an overall account of Communists in the Armed Services. A detailed account of the part played by Communists in the SOE and 'Jewish sabotage groups' still remains to be written, as does the whole story of the links made between Communist soldiers and indigenous resistance fighters (something which would also reveal the unease of the CPGB leadership with actions of Communist servicemen, e.g. Dutt instructed Communist 'squaddies' to desist in sending delegates to Burmese CP Congresses as it was 'undermining the Party's international relations' - Eric Porter, interview 11 July 1984).
- ⁶⁵ Reg Turner, interview 7 March 1984.

CHAPTER 9

The years 1944-1947 - 'Britain for the People'

Introduction - summary

The greatly expanded number of middle-class Communists greeted with enthusiasm the opportunities of contributing through their professions to the building of a 'New Britain'. The fight against fascism now became the fight to raise production and increase efficiency. 'Communism's' identification with science and the CP's demand of its Party members that they excel in their occupations fitted in well with the mood of optimism. As the Party adopted a more reformist 'constructive' and electoral political outlook and strategy middle-class Communists became more involved in drawing on their own professional knowledge and experience in order to produce Party policy documents and statements. Furthermore, organisational changes in the Party and the attempt to project a broad appeal ensured that professional people in the Party branches took on a greater prominence. From 1946 Communists in professions, partly on their own initiative and partly encouraged from the Party Centre, began to form organised professional and 'specialist' groups as part of a National Cultural Committee. Although there were exceptional individuals the great demands put on Party members often led individuals to choose where they would concentrate their efforts - Party Branch/District or professional/specialist group. For many the latter would seem to be more directly related to the job of applying 'Communism' to their profession and ipso facto being 'good' in their work and contributing a greater service to 'the people'.

* * * * *

During the War years the Party virtually tripled in size and a new campaign for building 'a mass party', with a further weakening of the 'Leninist' norms and requirements of the members (i.e. a lowering of the minimal time and activity required of members), was inaugurated by the leadership. Significant advances were made by Communists in the trade union world,¹ and in certain professions and their representative bodies. The Party also achieved what was to be its largest ever vote in favour of affiliation at the Labour Party Conference in 1943; 712,000 votes to 1,951,000, moreover, at the Labour Conference in 1945 the CP came even closer to achieving an electoral pact with the Labour Party when the issue of 'Progressive Unity' was only rejected for consideration by 1,314,000 votes to 1,219,000.²

The War had, in the words of the CP Executive Committee in 1944, given rise to '... new ways of co-operation. It has revealed the deep springs of service and selfless endeavour which men and women are ready to give in a common cause. It has shown the giant power of modern science and technique, once these are harnessed for a common objective'.³ For many Communists, particularly those in the professions, the War gave them the opportunity of giving full expression to the stated prerequisite of being a good Communist; being good in their work;⁴ there was a great sense of optimism in the CP about developments within Britain and internationally. There was optimism as the S.U. rolled back the forces of Germany, progressive popular anti-fascist groups gained in influence, and a seemingly firm alliance was struck between Britain, America and the USSR which promised to open up the prospect of peaceful post-war co-operation. Malcolm MacEwen who was full-time CP District Secretary for the North East from 1941 to 1943 describes the mood in the Party at that time:

The C.P. was booming, we had an immense number of recruits ... we could fill any hall in the country to the doors. When I had Harry Pollitt to come to speak in Newcastle we hired the City Hall and we packed it out, there wasn't an empty seat. These were quite extraordinary times, one really had the feeling ... that the Party was going places and that it was going to be quite a major force in British politics at the end of the war⁵ ... politically we took up a distinctive stance because we were unquestionably more enthusiastic for the War than any other Party.⁶

Optimism was also expressed, with some justification, as regards the *Daily Worker* which was relaunched with a great deal of jubilation after the lifting of the ban in September 1942. The opportunity presented itself, as perceived by those who worked on the paper, of developing the *Daily Worker* into '... a first-class national newspaper with a mass circulation'.⁷ There was talk of aiming for a circulation of 250,000⁸ and a print run of 101,000 was achieved by the end of 1944, it was only the official rationing of newsprint which limited the paper's expansion. The launching of a co-operative society to own the paper seemed to give further encouragement to the belief that the *Daily Worker* could become a wide selling radical newspaper which could challenge the dominance of the *Daily Herald*. Certainly at the end of the War when the paper's co-operative society (PPPS) was formed there was an impressive number of trade unionists and professional people who wished to associate themselves with the venture. J.B. Priestley sent an encouraging message to the *Daily Worker* conference which launched the scheme and some of the earliest shareholders included George Bernard Shaw, Sybil Thorndike and Sir Lewis Casson. The paper also began to carry advertisements, as the advertisers' boycott broke down, and revenue from this source reached £1,500 a week.

Although Communists played a significant part in the multifarious popular initiatives during the War the Party was officially resistant to the 'early' efforts at drawing up post-war plans for reconstruction. Dutt expressed the CP's priorities as follows: first and foremost the

execution of the War, secondly the unity of the Labour Movement, and thirdly the promotion of immediate measures on the home front in order to strengthen morale and speed the war effort. This Dutt made clear in his introduction to the leadership's discussion document on proposals for post-war policies where he also criticized Herbert Morrison's reported comment to Labour Party propagandists that they should devote 75% of their time to post-war issues. To this Dutt remarked: 'If the nation were to spend three quarters of its time on post-war issues there would be no hope for the future of the war'.⁹ In some ways Dutt was expressing justified scepticism over the virtual 'universal talk of planning' which often ignored the question of ownership and instead embraced 'Technocracy'. However, it also revealed what was a growing tendency of the Party leadership to underestimate the degree of popular radicalism and in some cases act as a break on such developments. Despite this 'official' Communist Party disapproval for post-war planning various individual Communists were involved, in a professional way, early on in the War in such work. Kenneth Campbell, for example, was part of the team working on the County of London Plan from 1941.

Finally at the end of 1942 responding to the growing number of government reports and projected legislation, and the pronouncements of political parties, trade unions and employers, the Central Committee of the CP appointed committees to examine the post-war reforms proposed by Beveridge, Barlow, Scott, and Uthwatt. The Party was still loathe to come out with a general CP post-war policy programme,¹¹ but in the succeeding months the approach was broadened and a 'Post-War Planning Commission' was formed with Palme Dutt as chairman. It was this body that drew up the draft policy document, *Britain for The People* that was issued 'for discussion' in May 1944, and represented, according to Dutt '... a basis for a broad common programme which can be supported by a united labour

movement and all progressive sections at the next elections...'.¹² Accompanying this discussion document were a whole number of policy statements, memoranda, and pamphlets dealing with specific areas and the post-war future including education, housing and building, the health service, Beveridge Report, nurseries, equal pay, agriculture, and the chemical industry. All this work required the Party to fully utilize the various organized CP members there were in the professions in providing information, analysis, and policy suggestions and plans.

The overall Party programme for Britain's immediate future obviously envisaged an important, if not determining, role for technicians, scientists, 'planners', administrators and other professionals.¹³ What the Party proposed was that the achievements of the 'Total War Economy' should not be cast aside but instead should be directed towards the tasks of peace. State control and planning of industry and production should be maintained and the social initiatives during the War such as factory canteens, communal restaurants, and day nurseries which had helped improve productivity must be continued and extended. The whole concept of planning in a capitalist society was now embraced with enthusiasm. A call was made for the nationalisation of the key industries of coal, electricity, gas, steel, the railways and banks and the specific proposal was made for the creation of a 'National Planning Authority'. This, the CP accepted, would not be socialism but it would, in combination with various democratic reforms such as the introduction of proportional representation, lead to the creation of 'a New Britain' which would be in the interests of the vast majority of the people. This 'New Britain' would provide evidence of the power of ordinary people to bring about change and if it continued to be successfully harnessed by the CP, the same power could bring Britain further along the road to socialism. In order to affect these changes the CP gave overwhelming importance to the

general election at the end of the War, '... the most fateful in the political history of this country',¹⁴ and the preservation as far as possible of the 'National Unity' which had been created during the War. It was felt that only a broad electoral front encompassing Labour, Liberal, Communist, 'progressives', and those Tories who supported international agreements between the Allies (USSR, Britain and USA) could prevent the return of a majority Tory government.

Some Party members recorded their disquiet at the leadership's euphoric greeting of the Teheran and Yalta conferences and the implicit acceptance in the CP's political programme that this gave the opportunity for the 'peaceful co-existence' and 'collaboration' between capitalism and socialism (as openly expressed by the American CP leader Browder). Others felt that the Party had not gone far enough and there was still ambiguity over the achievement of socialism and in the final analysis a revolution and conquest of state power by force would be required. A Communist scientist writing in 1944 on the post-war policy proposals agreed with the document's argument that there was the possibility of future co-operation between the Soviet Union and democratic capitalist states but 'once you accept this formulation ... then you must admit that it is part of our post-war task to make capitalism work in a progressive fashion, and admit that socialism is not a first priority in the post-war world'.¹⁵ Accompanying the greater emphasis placed on electoral politics the Party reorganized the Party structure from August 1943 by downgrading the factory branches and giving greater importance to the establishment of branches on a residential basis. The movement away from a 'Leninist' organisational structure was continued when the manner of electing the Executive Committee at the 18th CP Congress in 1945 was changed from the 'panels' system and 'recommended list' to a 'free' vote.¹⁶

In the 1945 General Election the Party entered 21 candidates, after withdrawing at least as many prospective candidates as a gesture to the Labour Party despite the latter's refusal to agree to any electoral arrangement; the CP was thus in the invidious position of campaigning for Labour but working with great determination to beat Labour in other constituencies where a Communist was standing (some of these were natural Labour strongholds). Only two Communists were elected: Gallacher was re-elected for Fife, and Phil Piratin for Mile End in London's East End, although Pollitt came close to being elected for East Rhondda and in all 102,780 votes were cast for Communist candidates (11% of the electorate where Communists stood), an impressive degree of support if compared with previous and future efforts, the result was undoubtedly greeted with disappointment within the Party. The following local government elections in 1946 were more encouraging but hardly matched up to the claim that they constituted a 'breakthrough' as 206 Communist councillors paled into insignificance in comparison with Labour, Tory or even Liberal. However, a Labour government with an overwhelming majority was elected, a visible indication of the radicalisation that had taken place amongst the British population and Communists were enthusiastic and optimistic for the future. Party members had been active in working for Labour candidates throughout the country where no Communists were standing, even acting in some cases as unofficial Election agents as in the case of one of those I have interviewed - A.A. Wallis in Bradford. A number of Labour candidates had once been CP members, some from the 1920s like Ellen Wilkinson and others from the 1930s and later, as with the candidate for Colchester, Charles Smith.¹⁸

In many areas throughout Britain Communists had a good relationship with their fellow local members of the Labour Party, and at the Communist Party Congress just a few months after the election the leadership

admitted its error in calling for a Coalition Government and underestimating 'the Left swing in the Labour Movement'.¹⁹ The Party's policy was now openly declared as working to 'thoroughly consolidate' the Labour Government and ensure its mandate is 'effectively operated', i.e. its legislative programme of reforms and nationalisation fully carried out. As Communists saw it their job was to organise mass campaigns and actions outside of parliament to give support to the Labour Government although this did not preclude the necessity on occasion of being critical of the Labour leaders and their concept of socialism. Above all what was stressed was that no transformation of society would be achieved if it relied upon the existing State machine alone to enact legislation. In Pollitt's words:

The people as a whole, must understand what the plans are, what the difficulties are, and must be given the chance to use their skill and initiative to overcome them. The Labour Government must continually consult the people who elected it so that criticism and suggestions can be made and heeded in good time.²⁰

The Party's post-war strategy ensured that members who were in the professions could, as was the case in the War, directly relate their work to their 'Communist' politics. In their professional positions they would be able to contribute directly to building the 'New Britain' by utilising their expertise and skills in the interests of 'the people' even in the sphere of the Civil Service.²¹ Many found themselves in the middle of the Labour Government's reforming efforts and a few were even involved in the drawing up of the legislative measures which covered their professional area of work. This was most clearly the case with the Communist president of the NUT (see my section on Communist schoolteachers) but also on a minor level involved figures like Dr. Joan McMichael. Communist doctors

were heavily involved in the Socialist Medical Association and through the Association helped to influence the shape of the NHS.²² Party doctors also involved themselves in the BMA which

was particularly useful during the period when Nye Bevan was selling the National Health Service to the medical profession, meeting opposition from it, especially from top-flight specialists. One of the latter, a consultant at St. George's, had direct contact with a colleague involved in the negotiations and so was able to keep the Party doctors up to date with the course of events and informed them of the tactical needs of the moment.²³

It was no doubt these various 'inside' sources that explain the *Daily Worker's* detailed coverage of the BMA's opposition to the Health Bill, e.g. Sam Russell's articles of 6 March 1946 and 22 March 1946.

Those Communists involved in the cultural professions were also taken up with the optimistic spirit of the times welcoming the opportunities provided by greater State support for the arts. Jack Lindsay gives an idea of these developments:

Our [left and CP figures in the London "arts scene" - SRP] activities were now for some years [after his demob in 1945 -SRP] centred on the hopes of developing further what we called, with jesting seriousness, the Cultural Upsurge, the release of cultural energies and interests by the war, which we felt could be encouraged, expanded, powerfully linked together as a necessary part of the large-scale social advance signalled by the 1945 elections.²⁴

Lindsay goes on to mention the role of the journal *Our Time* and its 'sister publication' *Theatre Today*, edited by Montagu Slater, a Party member from 1932, in 'recording' and 'stimulating' the post-war 'Cultural Upsurge'. *Theatre Today* was apparently partly instrumental in the calling of a 'Theatre Conference, which did much to lay down the guiding lines for national and regional drama'.²⁵ The entertainment business continued to

be buoyant in the immediate post-war years and those Unity Theatre actors who had become professional during the War formed something of an 'old boys club' and were able to facilitate the entry of more Unity people into the profession.²⁶ At the end of the War the Glasgow Unity Theatre became a professional company and established itself in London; '... it was run by Oscar Lewenstein and he used to give Unity [London - SRP] people often their first professional jobs'.²⁷ The founding of the Arts Council in June 1945 was looked upon hopefully by those in the cultural professions, particularly those of a leftwing and Communist persuasion, as it seemed to confirm that the State's responsibility for 'bringing Art to the People' was an established fact and Party branches helped set up regional Arts Councils, e.g. 'A Suffolk Arts Council'.²⁸ It can be claimed that Artists International Association was an important precursor of the CEMA, and many of its ideas also found their way into the Arts Council.

The increased opportunities for working in the service professions and in some form of State or local government employment were optimistically taken up by Communists (see my sections on schoolteachers, architects, and psychologists). Employment for 'open' Communists in academic positions was still not out of the question and a number of later well-known Party academics gained their first posts in the early post-war years. The following demobbed Communists entered the world of academia at this time: Rodney Hilton - Birmingham University 1946, Arnold Kettle - returned to Cambridge in 1946 to help supervise servicemen who came back to finish their degrees, he was then accepted for a lectureship in English at Leeds University, John Saville - assistant lecturer in economic history University College of Hull 1947, E.J. Hobsbawm - history lecturer Birkbeck College 1946, E.P. Thompson - after completing his degree at Cambridge he was accepted for a job as an extra-mural lecturer at Leeds University in 1948. Again there was a tendency for 'an old boys network' to operate to

a certain extent where a Party member had a position of some seniority, thus Jim Jeffery (husband of Nora Jeffery, Executive Committee member of the CP), a physicist would have taken up a job with Bernal had the War not intervened. When he was eventually demobbed Jeffery managed to move into a research post at Birkbeck and after a long period of time, on Bernal's death, he became head of the Department of Crystallography. A recent work on post-war adult education makes mention of a number of Communists who became involved in WEA work and specifically refers to the accusation that CP members were directed by the Party headquarters to Oxford Extramural Delegacy where a number of Communists were employed, it is however, effectively argued, that there is little evidence to support a conspiracy theory. In the case of Oxford the Secretary of the Extramural Delegacy T.L. Hodgkin, who was a Party member, used his Party contacts as just another possible source for recruiting lecturers. More generally, as a CP figure who was a tutor in 1945-47 puts it:

It was widely assumed that the leftward momentum would be maintained, that left-wing and progressive policies would be the order of the day and that British society would continue to move leftward. In this move, left-wing intellectuals had an obvious part to play and communists "a fortiori". It was, therefore, no more than natural that left-wingers coming out of the forces, where many had been involved in education, should get jobs in the expanding field of adult education.²⁹

The 'Organizing' of the Party Middle-Class and Professions

At the CP's 18th Congress in 1945 Harry Pollitt acknowledged the rise in prominence of middle-class and professional people in the ranks of the Party membership. They were, according to Pollitt, responsible for introducing a new 'vigour' and 'critical' spirit into Party life and had been the main initiators in establishing many of the '... new Branches in towns cut off from the great industrial centres'.³⁰ At another point in

the Congress Pollitt mentioned that the Party had miscalculated the degree of support achieved by the Labour Party as expressed in the 1945 Election by underestimating the process of wartime radicalisation of not just workers but of the 'professional and middle classes'. It followed from this analysis that there was a great opportunity for the Party to win support and recruit members from among both the working-class and the middle-class. In one of the main resolutions of the 18th National Congress proposed by the Executive Committee on 'Marxist Education' a specific call was made for Party members working in the fields of science, philosophy, art, history and social sciences to begin to produce Marxist studies of their specialities for publication. They were encouraged to engage in debate within their professions and specifically '... carry on polemics ... against all current idealistic presentations'.³¹ To give some life to the resolution the CP leadership attempted to form a number of groups of concerned Party members with the object of planning new publications around the following areas: history, current developments in other countries, philosophy and sociology, culture, and science - it was suggested that this would be divided into two groups, those considering the writing of popular science books and those who would work on the history and philosophy of science.

During August and October 1945 the Organisation Committee of the Party, chaired by Kerrigan and including the heads of all departments at the CP Centre, discussed in detail how the talents of those Communists in the professions could be fully utilised (considered to be 'a necessity' for the CP's progress). It was agreed that the principle that all Communists must be members of their local appropriate branch should be maintained '... but the proposal to afford facilities for professional comrades to meet and discuss with other similar comrades was welcomed ...'.³² Measures had already been taken to strengthen Party organisation

amongst students (student branches were afforded full branch status with a 'public face' thus tending to end the clandestine quality of student work) and a Jewish National Committee of the CP was formed around 1942 '... as a direct response to the Soviet formation of a Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee'.³³

Many of those Communists who had been active in the 1930s Party groups such as architects and artists were being released from the armed services by late 1945 and early 1946 which led to renewed life in these established groups.³⁴ Although the overall total membership dropped from the mid-War high point, as Germany's defeat became just a matter of time and other forces than the Red Army fought against the Nazis on the ground, the Party undoubtedly recruited new members from the General Election campaign around CP candidates. Membership is recorded as standing at 45,435 in March 1945,³⁵ but by December of that year it had risen to 52,366.³⁶ In January 1946 an important step was taken to organise Communists who were in the professions in a co-ordinated manner with the arrangement of a meeting of CP 'professional workers' in London at Beaver Hall. The event, which was attended by several hundred members,³⁷ and included teachers, architects, scientists, actors, doctors, musicians and academics was addressed by Harry Pollitt. Pollitt's speech was hurriedly published as a 3d Party pamphlet, *Professional Workers* (March 1946) and became the 'official' approach giving an 'ideal' of how a Communist who was in a profession should act as a Party member. As a passage of the pamphlet proclaimed:

We have to be the best writers, actors, singers, doctors, teachers, research workers, mathematicians, playwrights and so on. We have to reach and set the highest standards, so that our work reflects the nobility of Communism and tries to express, even though the limitations may be strict and severe, something of the inspiration it gives to those who embrace it.³⁸

Pollitt quoted from a recent French Communist Congress where a speaker had declared that the Party demanded of its 'intellectuals' that they not only be involved in Branch meetings and activities but that they be 'good' and 'great' in their 'intellectual' and 'professional' work. In fact the quoted extract talks in terms of it being: 'The first duty of a Communist mathematician is to be a good mathematician' etc.³⁹ Membership of the Party '... should help develop a spirit of construction, and a sense of national urgency and of the service we can render in helping to solve the problems of the nation in the interest of the people'.⁴⁰ While progressing as far as possible in their own occupational field a Communist who was a member of a profession would be expected at the same time to work with working-class Communists. Pollitt goes as far as to claim at one point that in his opinion Communist 'intellectuals' had more to learn from working-class Communists than vice versa. In particular, mixing with trade unionists (manual workers) would help to impart class consciousness to them.⁴¹ Membership of the Party and active participation in 'specialist' and branch life would, in Pollitt's words, lead to an improvement of 'professional workers' work: 'The closer you are to the party, the more you are prepared to listen to the type of problems that the comrades in the docks, railways and factories bring up for discussion, the closer you yourself will get to actual life, and your own work will improve as a result of that'.⁴²

In the optimism of the times there was presumably seen to be no difficulty in reconciling being good in one's profession i.e. being more socially aware and committed in one's work, and achieving professional advancement. The one concession made with regard to the tremendous pressure on the time of these Communists in the professions, was that they would not be pressurised into the menial CP work. Bill (Gabriel) Carritt, who was a full-time Party worker after the War and from 1945-48 was an

organiser in London, remembers advising 'intellectuals' not to do the 'donkey work' such as selling *Daily Workers* but instead concentrate on doing '... what they knew they could do best'.⁴³ This view was also expressed by the academic historian George Thomson who called upon Party 'intellectuals' (a term constantly interchanged with professions) to 'grapple' with their subject and think out new ways in which it can be used at a branch and district level. Party life, Thomson remarked, '... is pitifully narrow and unimaginative: it is for us to broaden it and make it more attractive. We must place at the disposal of the Party the whole of our professional and cultural experience'.⁴⁴ An obvious area where professional members could be expected to be well-suited was Party education but Thomson cautioned against the idea that a school or university teacher would simply be able to transfer their methods to conducting Communist education. The CP had developed its own special system of tuition, varied in approach depending on the numbers involved and the time available, which required a great deal of preparation from the tutor and aimed at bringing about the full participation of those in the class in the 'lecture/discussion'.⁴⁵ Again, to quote Thomson: 'All professional comrades should take Party classes, but they should do so on the understanding that they learn at least as much as they teach. If they do that, they will make good Party tutors and improve their professional teaching'.⁴⁶

To sum up, the 'ideal' middle-class Communist who was in a profession was expected to be an open Communist at work and be involved in the Party group covering their field; they were also required to be active in their local branch. As members of their appropriate branch they were ^{not only} expected to pass on the benefits of their skills to the rest of the branch but also learn from their fellow working-class Communists (they were expected to avoid the extremes of adopting an air of superiority or hero-worshipping

of workers). The experience of branch membership and a 'deeper understanding' of Marxism/Dialectical Materialism should have a direct 'improving' influence on how a Communist in a profession carried out their work. In their profession they were expected to win the respect of their colleagues and they were encouraged to seek promotion and more responsibility when they could. This of course was the 'ideal' and reality often fell far short as is apparent from Pollitt's and Thomson's pieces which were aimed at countering an already visible trend among Party members from the professions. Just as there was the increasing emergence of what were known as 'Trade Union Communists'⁴⁷ in the Party, members who concentrated on progressing in their trade union and taking official positions, so there were professional people who began to concentrate on their work to the exclusion of branch activities. Thomson's article identifies two types of 'problem' with 'professional comrades'; there were those who saw their professional work as of no use in the political struggle and voluntarily threw themselves into 'hum-drum' Party tasks, but 'More often it happens that a professional worker plays little or no part in the ordinary life of the Party because he is completely preoccupied with his professional work'.⁴⁸

Communist Scientists

Of all the various professional groups of the Party the scientists' was the one most clearly involved with the CP's effort to project itself in the immediate post-war years as the Party of progress.⁴⁹ The tremendous optimism of CP and leftwing scientists as a result of the changes brought about by the War in science and the role of the scientist (industrial technologist, research worker, science teacher and student, etc) is given good expression in the University Labour Federation pamphlet *Science and Socialism*. This was first published in 1940 and it is instructive to

compare the first edition with the one in 1944. The 1940 edition made mention of the special services scientists could give workers (ARP), while four years later Joint Production Committees were hailed as representing a considerable scientific advance, and Operational Research Establishments are described as '... effecting the complete collaboration between producers and users'.⁵⁰ The War had brought about 'a qualitative change' in the relationship between scientific development and social advance:

Whereas in the past science, in its fight for control over nature, did not consciously promote and encourage social progress, at the present time the possibilities of the conscious application of science to influence social change, that is of the political power of science, have come to be recognised by the scientists themselves as well as by the people. In this conscious, planned progress of science lies the key to the future.⁵¹

As previously pointed out the Party programme *Britain for the People* strongly expressed this championing of science, technique and planning. Moreover the CP's most prominent public persona of the War and the immediate years of peace was the scientist Professor J.B.S. Haldane. Haldane was one of the Party's chief speakers during the 1945 Election and he conducted meetings for many of the Communist candidates including Palme Dutt in Sparkbrook. Although Dutt had previously warned of the dangers of adopting a supra-class technocratic approach to politics, in his main election speech and with Haldane on the same platform, he gave full vent to underlining the link between science and Communism. After paying tribute to Professor Haldane as one of the world's 'foremost' scientists Dutt went on to explain why such a man should give up his 'precious' time to speak for Communist candidates. It was, claimed Dutt, because Haldane realised that science could not be separated from politics and society at large:

Science in social affairs - that means socialism, that means Communism. The fight of modern science and the fight of the Communist Party is a common fight: to make man the master of nature ... That is why so many of the world's great scientists, engineers, thinkers, writers, doctors and teachers are to-day turning to Communism ... The Communist Party stands for the fullest endowment of science and scientific research, for the development of the broadest democratic education, and for the most favourable conditions and fullest opportunity for all professional people to use their talents in the common service of society.⁵²

It is no surprise that the short 'recruiting' pamphlet issued after the 18th Party Congress entitled *Why Professional Workers Should Be Communists* was written by Professor Haldane. An appeal was made for those professionals who were already 'convinced socialists' and involved in such bodies as the Haldane Society or Socialist Medical Association to come over to the Party. The appeal was made not on the basis of revolutionary class politics but rather on the basis of emphasising the unique character of the CP in the British Labour Movement. As a result of basing itself on Marxism and with its international links the Party was able to apply the 'scientific method' to human affairs and thus act as a 'spearhead' for the whole of the working-class movement, or in Haldane's analogy act as '... the Commando which clears a beach-head for the main army'.⁵³ Professional and middle-class people of the Left would be able to make the best of their talents in the fight for socialism through a 'Marxist' Party which does not compete with the Labour Party but rather offers expert advice and guidance (in fact the place of the CP was in the Labour Party and, Haldane believed, professional people could help the 'affiliation campaign' to succeed). Concluding the pamphlet Haldane puts the rhetorical question - 'what would professional workers get out of Communism?' and he gives the following reply:

that if you are good at your job you would have more power and responsibility than you have now. The leading commissars in the Soviet Union, who direct

great socialised industries, compared to which I.C.I. or any of the British railways are small fry, are business executives, mostly trained as engineers. The leading scientists, writers, and artists are very important people.⁵⁴

In a fascinating report of the CP National Science Committee meeting that took place in the first half of 1946, the role of Communist scientists was enunciated as ^{that of} giving unstinted professional aid to the Labour government in its job of reconstruction - a job in which science was of the greatest importance. There was not only the task of providing the technical know-how for raising production and clearing any obstacles to reconstruction but it was also necessary to counter 'technical' attacks and sabotage against Labour policies. Communist scientists would also need, according to the Report, to take on the role of 'educators' of the working-class movement replacing the negative view of technical changes as threatening workers' jobs with the situation of 'today' where they were '... the main driving force of progress, the movement needs a sense of technical mastery and a new approach to technical questions so that it may participate in government, play its part in the industrial drive and help to increase the technical skill and output of the workers'.⁵⁵ The 'importance' of science in the production drive' was again underlined in the subsequent discussion of Committee members (19 were said to have taken part) in a 'free-for-all' debate after the Report was given. Apart from the work done in this respect through the A.Sc.W., professional societies, and the TUC Science Advisory Committee, science work in the Party had become more extensive. The CP leadership had been convinced of the importance of science in the present situation '... and the Science Advisory Committee has been called on to advise the Executive Committee on numerous matters through the Industrial Department'.⁵⁶ Although the importance of the branch as the basic unit of the Party was acknowledged

the Science Advisory Committee made a request that they be consulted with respect to scientist members and where their efforts should be concentrated: branch or 'science work'.

A few Party Districts established their own Science Advisory Committees to help ensure 'science work' was given its proper importance in Party activity at a local as well as at a national level (e.g. Lancashire and Merseyside had SACs). District and Area committees of Party scientists would be able to develop practical plans for raising production and efficiency in local industry and government, which could often be achieved by introducing changes and reorganisations in the 'flow of work involving little new equipment'. Proposals could be raised through Joint Production Committees and of course, if one did not exist, it was the duty of Party scientists to help in its formation as soon as possible.

The CP Merseyside Area Committee's organised 'science work' in the beginning of 1947 included the launching of a comprehensive survey of the region's chemical industry. This was done with a view to making practical proposals and drawing scientists in Merseyside, at Levers, Shell, ICI, and the University, into Party activity. Nationally the Party's Science Advisory Committee produced a 32 page memorandum *A Plan for Science* which after a prolonged period of debate and revision was published in 1947. This memorandum set out to 'show how science can help to solve manpower and production problems' and in particular called for a massive expansion of scientific research geared to industry: 'What is wanted is a policy, a general strategic plan to determine the main points of attack, where advances in knowledge can be made in line with the national policy of economic development'.⁵⁷ The group was also involved in the drawing-up of

a three year economic plan for the country from 1948-50 which was released in November 1947 under the auspices of the Economic Committee of the Party.⁵⁸

Cultural Committee

Organised 'cultural work' at the Party centre, as with various 'specialist groups' (architects, artists, etc), was disrupted by the War and the pre-War 'cultural group or committee' said to have been in existence under the leadership of Ivor Montagu (oral sources as communicated to Colin Chambers) disappeared. It was not until the closing stages of the War that a 'National Arts Advisory Committee' was formed by the 'Propaganda and Education Department' of the Party. The Committee brought together Communists from a variety of 'cultural professions' which enabled '... more organised collective discussion to take place',⁵⁹ and the production of a pamphlet on the BBC. It was through these developments that the initiative was taken to hold the Beaver Hall meeting of professional workers previously referred to and reported as a 'Cultural Conference' in *World News and Views*. There was a delay however when the Party full-timer responsible for 'Education' and 'Cultural activities' R.W. Robson, a former Congregationalist of working-class origins, fell ill in early 1946. Robson's replacement was the Cambridge graduate and one-time editor of *The Calendar of Modern Letters*, Douglas Garman, who could perhaps be expected to be more in tune with the middle-class Party 'intellectuals' and professionals. 'Cultural work' was again taken up in earnest by the Centre and in particular a young CPer, Sam Aaronovitch, who joined the Education Department and acted as an assistant to Garman, became central in the formation of what became known as the National Cultural Committee.

Aaronovitch had previously been in charge of propaganda for the Scottish District of the CP and this had given him an interest

specifically in Scottish 'national feelings and culture' and more generally a conviction that 'cultural work' was an important yet neglected area of work for the Party. From his position in the Education Department:

Some way or another I either created or recreated this National Cultural Committee and set myself certain objectives ... The idea was that Communists had to be involved in a very wide ranging ideological offensive, we had positions or needed to have positions ... and that we had to bring together the people to work on them and to help the Party fight for these ideas in all the different spheres of cultural and ideological work. So the notion was to have a cultural committee to which would be linked a whole series of groupings involving the main professions and areas of activity. So there was a very conscious idea on my part of building up the whole structure - artists, writers, psychologists, lawyers ... historians of course who were the jewel almost, architects and so on. And in all these areas we had, it seemed to me, very talented people, people who already had or were going to establish quite big reputations in the fields in which they worked. Marxism quite clearly had an attraction to these sorts of people but not everybody had thought-out what it meant in terms of the fields in which they were engaged.⁶⁰

At the Party's 19th National Congress in February 1947, Pollitt and others proclaimed the need to lay greater stress on cultural and ideological matters in the Party's work. A motion 'Music and the Arts' was passed in line with these sentiments, i.e. bourgeois artists were increasingly expressing cynicism and mysticism in their work and therefore a 'great responsibility' fell to Communist cultural workers to combat this.⁶¹ Moreover, as a member of the Artists' Group made clear, 'Cultural workers' could and should help improve the economic state of the country - artists should produce propaganda for raising productivity and a planned drive to export art products could obtain currency, 'improve national cultural prestige', and create better foreign relations.⁶²

Following the Congress a 'new' Cultural Committee was 'set up by the Executive Committee' with one of its members, Emile Burns, as chairman.

Sam Aaronovitch was secretary of the Committee, a job which soon occupied all his time and he was forced to drop his other responsibilities in the Education Department. By 1947 the Committee was said to be coordinating the work of eleven 'specialist' and professional groups: Historians, Economists, Scientists, Doctors, Psychologists, Philosophers, Writers, Musicians, Film Workers, and Actors.⁶³ In addition to these groups there was of course the Artists (Hogarth Group) and in 1948 an Architects' Group was reactivated, while representatives of the National Students Committee and Unity Theatre (Ted Willis) regularly attended National Cultural Committee meetings. There were other Party groups, as for example a CP Adult Education Tutors Group, which had an unclear relationship with the Cultural Committee.⁶⁴ Still further groups that were organised in various professions or around Communists in certain professional staff associations or trade unions were not strictly linked to the National Cultural Committee, e.g. schoolteachers, University Staffs Group - over 100 members in the early '50s, Oxford and Cambridge Dons Groups etc. Most of those in the 'Cultural Committee' groups tended to be professionally engaged in the field or subject in question and even a group such as the 'Historians', formed in 1946, was largely composed of Communists from the academic/educational world. As early as 1940 Dutt was complaining about the 'professional academic specialisation' of the Group's predecessor the 'Bureau of Marxist Historians'.⁶⁵ Although the musicians were divided up into two groups: the Musicians' Branch, composed solely of those employed in the profession, and the Amateur Musicians' Group, those in the latter Group often tended to be middle-class Communists with a musical interest, e.g. the teacher Peter Cadogan.

Footnotes

- 1 14 Full time Trade Union officials stood for election to the 1945 CP Executive.
- 2 See J. Hinton's essay, 'Communism and the Labour Party, 1941-1946'.
- 3 *Britain for The People*, discussion document on post-war policy issued by the CP Executive Committee, p. 3.
- 4 The call for Communists to be good in their work was not restricted to those professional people who were in the Party but extended throughout the Party. In many ways it fitted into the existing attitude of the skilled metal workers who made up an important element in the membership - thus when Wal Hannington returned to industry in the early stages of the War he was 'coached' intensively by other Party engineers in the trade so he could as a 'respected craftsman' gain the political allegiance of his fellow workers.
- 5 An opinion poll carried by the *Daily Express* in early 1944 found that 22.71% of the general public expected that a strong CP would arise, while 51% of Labour supporters believed a strong CP would come into existence (only 13% of whom, it was claimed, were fearful of such a development).
- 6 M. MacEwen, interview 30 November 1983.
- 7 W. Rust and A.G. Hutt, *The Story of the Daily Worker*, p. 114.
- 8 Source - Malcolm MacEwen, interview 30 November 1983.
- 9 Dutt Papers, 'Main points from report on *Britain Today and Tomorrow* 2 July 1943'.
- 10 See Dutt Papers, 'Conference on "Steps to Common Ownership"; summary of contribution C.C.M.C.O. conf. 10 February 1943'.
- 11 See Dutt Papers, 'Guiding lines on questions of Post-War Reconstruction, 14 December 1942'.
- 12 Dutt Papers, 'Draft opening statement on *Britain for The People*, 20 October 1944.
- 13 As Gallacher stated in introducing the document to the 17th National Congress: 'It appeals to the worker who wants steady employment ... It appeals to the technician who wants to use his talents without being hampered by restrictive monopolists. It appeals to the scientist who wants to see the great discoveries of his profession used to increase the sum of human welfare. It appeals to the educationalist who wants to help develop all the latent talent of our people. It appeals to the doctor who wants to create an environment in which our children will grow up healthy and strong'. (*Victory, Peace, Security - Report of the 17th National Congress of the C.P., October 28 - 30, 1944*, pp. 5-6.

There was a Party Businessmen's Group, largely composed of East End Jews. The Group's existence was never widely publicised. Although the Group may have been consulted over various economic policy issues by the CP leadership, its major raison d'être was providing money for the Party.

- 14 *Britain for The People*, p. 21.
- 15 B.M. Letsky, M.C., *Daily Worker*, 5 September 1944.
- 16 That these developments were not looked upon favourably by all the leading CP members is evidenced by a recollection of Douglas Hyde. He was with Johnnie Campbell on a bus just after the decision had been made to end the 'panels' system: 'To Johnnie this was an absolute disaster (which was rectified the following year) and just how great a disaster was expressed when he told me "just anything could happen now: we could finish up with Ivor Montagu on the Executive Committee" - which is precisely what happened'. (D. Hyde, letter 12 May 1987). This also throws an interesting light on how an early Communist 'free-wheeling' intellectual was regarded by a top Party man. Of the 122 individuals who stood for election to the Executive in 1945 including architects, doctors, scientists/chemists, teachers, university people, nearly half were full-time Party officials or on the *Daily Worker*.
- 17 See *Daily Worker*, 23 April 1946, 'Big Communist Poll - First Real Breakthrough'.
- 18 Charles Smith was later leader of the Post Office Workers Union and eventually made a lord - source Bill Hampton, interview 28 June 1982.
- 19 See *Report of the 18th National Congress*, p. 31.
- 20 *Report of the 18th National Congress of the C.P., November 1945*, p. 22.
- 21 e.g. R.W. Rawlings, *The Civil Service and the People*, 1945.
- 22 See S. Watkins, *Medicine and Labour - The Politics of a Profession*, pp. 62-63.
- 23 D. Hyde, letter 20 October 1986.
- 24 J. Lindsay, *Life Rarely Tells*, p. 799.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Alfie Bass was a Unity product who became a professional actor during the War, while Warren Mitchell is an example of a post-war Unity player who moved into the profession.
- 27 Glasgow Unity '... was not as closely associated with the C.P. as London, coming as it did out of five groups. Its driving force, Robert Mitchell, was not a "Party man", even if he was in the Party ... Oscar Lewenstein was their manager and went on to become a leading theatrical entrepreneur (putting Theatre Workshop shows into the West End) and briefly artistic director of the English Stage Company at the Royal Court. He was a Party member and is still a

supporter'. (Colin Chambers, letter 9 November 1988.) Some resented what they saw as the use made of 'progressive cultural organisation' by certain '... people who wish to break into the artistic world and whose ambitions may exceed their talent' (Peggy MacIver, *World News and Views*, 1 February 1947: Congress Discussion).

28 *World News and Views*, 31 May 1947.

29 Quoted in R.T. Fieldhouse, *Adult Education and the Cold War*, p. 11.

30 *Report of the 18th National Congress*, Pollitt's 'Closing Speech to Congress', p. 46.

31 *Report of the 18th National Congress*, p. 57. The most successful example of the Party's 'intellectual intervention' on a wide scale was the lectures given by Party members and Marxists in the 1946 BBC series of 15-minute talks entitled 'The Challenge of Our Time'. The Communist contributions were published as *The Communist Answer to the Challenge of Our Time*, of the 7 authors: 4 were professors - Bernal, Farrington, Levy, Thomson and one a Doctor of Philosophy - Lewis. Taken as a whole the booklet argued that Communism was the rightful heir to the progressive ideas of bourgeois humanism and rationalism, it laid the way for the abolition of class society with a new creative freedom for people and would supply the one '... aspect of science that has been neglected and ignored by capitalism ... [the] intelligent application of science to social welfare'. (H. Levy, 'Is Communism the Answer?' *The Communist Answer to the Challenge of Our Time*, p. 77). 'The Communist Answer' contrasted itself with the irrational, cynical, pessimistic 'opposing doctrines of our time'.

32 *Our Letter* issued by Pollitt for the Executive Committee, 5 October 1945.

33 C. Abramsky, interview 27 January 1984.

34 For example, CP Artists Hogarth Group was down to about 30-20 during the War but by 1946 had been built up to 300 odd - source Reg Turner, interview 7 March 1984.

35 See *Report of the Executive Committee to the 18th Congress*, p. 17.

36 Taken from a detailed breakdown of membership on a District basis giving sales of *Daily Worker* and copies per member for each District - figures produced for the Party Centre. This evidence suggests that membership fell drastically a little time after the War was finally over and demobilisation had taken place.

37 Over 350 - *World News and Views*, 26 January 1946.

38 Pollitt, *Professional Workers*, p. 6.

39 Quoted by Pollitt, *ibid.*, p. 7, my emphasis.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

41 This point is made clearer in a 1946 article in *Communist Review* for July by George Thomson, 'On the work of Party intellectuals'.

- 42 Pollitt, *Professional Workers*, p. 12.
- 43 Carritt, interview 4 February 1988.
- 44 G. Thomson, 'On the work of Party intellectuals', *Communist Review*, July 1946, p. 13.
- 45 George Thomson in his *Communist Review*, July 1946 article mentions the feeling of 'intellectual exhilaration' which came from a successful Party class and that the Party's method of tuition was superior at its best to anything he had experienced in the university world. A 1957 document issued by the CP Central Education Department written by James Klugmann, *Some Hints for Party Tutors* gives a lively account of the various approaches that can be adopted by tutors when taking classes. Probably the most unique of the methods, particularly in the 1940s, were the 'Controlled Discussion Method' (pp. 6-9), and the 'Question and Answer Method' (pp. 9-12). The degree to which CP teaching methods were brought into adult education and universities by Communists employed in these areas would be an interesting line of research.
- 46 G. Thomson, *ibid.*, p. 13.
- 47 Speaking of the clear developing division between two types of Party member from the 1940s Smiths' worker Ray Hawkins claims there were: 'the people who felt that their main role was in the trade union movement and other people who felt their main role was in the Party ... I think that it was one of the obvious mistakes that was being made by the Party. We developed what became known as the professional trade unionist ... encouraging Party people to see their main functions as working in trade unions and achieving high positions'. (Ray Hawkins, interview 6 October 1982.)
- 48 G. Thomson, *op. cit.*, p. 12.
- 49 The projection of 'scientific' basis of Communism, 'scientific rationalism' is also said to have been the 'fundamental influence' in the formation and orientation of the CP Historians' Group - see R. Samuel 'British Marxist Historians, 1880-1980', *New Left Review*, no. 120, March-April 1980. Of course the issue of SCIENCE was all-important and a major item among politically involved people particularly in the wake of the Atom Bomb.
- 50 *Science and Socialism*, 1944, p. 34.
- 51 *Ibid.*, p. 36.
- 52 Dutt Papers, 'Points from Speech, July 1st 1945'.
- 53 J.B.S. Haldane, *Why Professional Workers Should Be Communists*.
- 54 *Ibid.*
- 55 *Our Letter*, 6 June 1946, Report of the National Science Committee.
- 56 *Ibid.*
- 57 *A Plan for Science*, p. 7.

- 58 *A Plan for Science* came to 112 pages and made a whole series of suggestions to forward Labour's *Let Us Face the Future* and on the basis that 80% of the economy would be in private hands.
- 59 *Report of the Executive Committee, 18th Congress of the C.P.G.B.*, p. 15.
- 60 S. Aaronovitch, interview 12 February 1986.
- 61 *19th National Congress, Resolutions and Proceedings*, p. 24.
- 62 George Downs, Artists Group, *World News and Views*, 27 September 1947.
- 63 *Report of the Executive Committee to the 20th National Congress*, p. 12.
- 64 'The Group's contact was always myself and Tony Mclean to Douglas Garman. We may through him have been under the aegis of the Cultural Committee, but none of us ever attended meetings of the Cultural Committee', Adult Education tutor Jim Fyrth, letter 27 October 1986.
- 65 Dutt Papers, 'Memo on the *Labour Monthly*, December 1940'.

CHAPTER 10

The Years 1947-1950 - The Cold War and 'The Battle of Ideas'

Introduction - summary

The rejection/opposition to Marshall Aid marked a key change in the CP's overall approach to Post-War reconstruction. Support and involvement in production committees came to an end and an increasingly critical attitude was taken towards the Labour Government's foreign policy of 'anti-Sovietism and pro-Americanism'. Criticism was also voiced at the failure of the Government to implement fully its planned reforms as a consequence in part, according to the Party, of a reactionary and warlike foreign policy. The 'hardening' attitude of the CP was ensured by the external pressures exerted on the 'world Communist Movement' by the Soviet Union. For Communists in the professions the seemingly unproblematic link between their work and 'progress' - as an essential part of the reforming, constructive, and 'planning' efforts of the post-war state - came to an end. What was required of middle-class Communists by the Party was that they should more fully apply 'Marxism' to their particular fields of work and contribute their own particular skills to the 'Battle of Ideas'. The specialist/professional Party groups as co-ordinated by the National Cultural Committee became very active in this 'class struggle in the realm of ideas'. 1948 saw the first of the well attended 'Cultural conferences'. At the same time there were the first signs of criticisms by the Party leadership of 'ideological short-comings' among certain groups. However, the 'anti-Red' scare which got under way from 1948 drastically reduced the opportunities for Communists in the professions to

be openly politically active at their work - one exception to this, in a limited way, was the 'Peace Campaign' where a certain success was achieved in setting up 'professional peace groups'.

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The dramatic worsening in international relations between Washington and Moscow during 1947 shattered any idea of a continuation of the War-time 'Grand Alliance'. The Marshall Plan, the 'Truman Doctrine' as proclaimed in March 1947, and the American monopoly of nuclear weapons were ample illustrations of the new power of the USA and its wish to use it in the international arena. The Soviet Union responded by tightening its hold over its own sphere of influence in Eastern Europe and imposing Soviet orthodoxy and leadership over Communists throughout the world. In late 1947 the USSR established the Cominform to act as a new centre of leadership for the Communist movement and strengthen Soviet authority and direction over other Communist parties. Stalin's main policy aim at this time '... was to strengthen the position it had won in Central and Eastern Europe and in the Far East, while trying at the same time to prevent the consolidation of anti-Soviet blocs'.¹

The Cominform characterised the world as being divided into two 'Camps': an 'imperialist and anti-democratic camp' based around America and an 'anti-imperialist and democratic camp' whose leading force was the USSR. Within this perspective the main role of Communist parties in the Capitalist countries was to fight against American influence in their own country and thus help undermine the 'imperialist camp'. Communists in Western Europe became self-declared 'defenders of their land's national independence and prestige' and 'fighters for peace' as they struggled

against 'U.S. imperialism's drive towards war' against the 'base' of the opposing 'camp' the Soviet Union.

With the passing months the British Communist Party had become more critical of the Labour Government over the shape of some of its home reforms such as the Composition of the Coal Board, its conservative attitude to colonial matters, and above all the direction foreign policy was taking under Bevin. However, the Party leadership remained basically committed to the same line as that adopted at the CP's 18th National Congress (November 1945) summed up in the slogan, 'drive the Labour Government forward to a policy in keeping with the needs of the people'. Full support for the production drive and the advocacy of production committees continued to be central to Party policy,² moreover, the Political Committee of the Party voted in favour of the American (Marshall) loan to Britain when it was first proposed on the basis that it would help finance the re-equipment and reconstruction of British industry.³ There was just one member of the Committee who opposed this decision and that was Palme Dutt, who again showed his remarkable knack for foreshadowing the new Soviet attitude. It was not until the Executive Committee meeting of December 1947, and the 20th Party Congress in February 1948 that a sharp change in policy was put into practice with an accompanying self-criticism of past 'policy errors'. Dutt described the change of line as follows:

When, with the deepening of the crisis in 1947, the Labour Government turned to the policy of economy cuts, increased taxation, the wage freeze and participation in the Marshall Plan, the C.P. carried through a sharp turn in its line, to combat and expose the entire policy of the Labour Government, both at home, and abroad, withdrew from participation in the drive for increased production, and set the aim to develop the mass movement of struggle against the policy of the Labour Government.⁴

Of course Dutt is being disingenuous by making no reference to the formation of the Cominform and the new Soviet line of 'two opposing Camps'.

As with the change of line over the War there were enough seemingly reactionary developments in the British context to justify the new policies and attitude towards the Labour Party. There is plenty of evidence to suggest unease amongst various CP members over the Party's backing of the production drive as, for example, expressed at the Kent District Congress in October 1947 in an amendment to the political resolution: '... we should support production only for socialism and not for the purposes of Mr. Bevin'.⁵ It is likely that most of those Communists who were at odds with the direction of Party policy were industrial members. In the words of a building worker in 1947, 'The biggest pill I have ever been asked to swallow was, after coming out of the Army, to find the *Leader* and the *Daily Worker* advocating "piece work" in the building trade'.⁶ Although anything but working-class himself, Edward Upward, a 'Left' critic of the direction of post-war Party policy, found support for his opposition to the CP leadership from among working-class members of his Branch. In contrast: 'All the middle-class members of the Branch were opposed to the criticisms my wife and I made of *Looking Ahead*'.⁷

For some Party members the line on production held a particular appeal and they were disheartened by its reversal. This was the case with Douglas Hyde who in the face of increasing internal political doubts latched onto the Party's '... "constructive" attitude to the post-war world' and as news editor of the *Daily Worker* sent his '... industrial correspondents out to look for examples of good production efforts in the pits, the shipyards and the factories'.⁸ These correspondents not only exposed any blocks they found to efficient and speedy production but under

Hyde's guidance 'solutions' were proposed in the paper. Once this 'constructive line' was ended any commitment he had to the Party was broken and he left the *Daily Worker* and CP in early 1948. It is not possible to say how far Douglas Hyde's attitude on this question was shared among 'de-classed' Party fulltimers and middle-class Communists.

During this period there was also a noticeable change in orientation of the various committees the Party had established to develop CP policies on social services, education, economic planning, and local government (many of these committees had utilised the knowledge and expertise of various members in the professions). A 1948 plan for 'future work' of one of these committees, the Health Advisory Committee, clearly illustrates the change of approach. Describing the Committee as taking on '... the characteristics of a sort of government departmental body ...' immediately following Labour's election and the introduction of the Health Bill, the paper goes on to describe the Committee's work as developing '... detailed administrative schemes for the development of the health services'. As the Government's 'turning away from socialism' became more apparent the Committee had begun to 'look outwards more' and 'appeal for a progressive policy for social services', although even at this stage the Committee's memoranda were directed to, according to the paper, local authorities. The time had come for 'a definite alteration' in the Committee's work:

Recognising that the trend of the present Labour Party policy will result in cuts in the social service programme, the Health Act like the Education Act remaining largely a paper one, it must be our policy to fight for the implementation of the health programme on which the Labour Government was elected ... This can be obtained only by the demands of the people - demands which fall into place along with the demands for a new left labour government.⁹

The Committee's work in the future needed to be more directed to campaigning around 'the full implementation of the Health Act'; '... we

do not want a complex and detailed policy covering every aspect of the health services, but we need to pinpoint a few concrete examples which can be easily understood by everyone'.

In the radically altered political climate of the 'Cold War' the leading British Communist John Gollan outlined the essentials of the situation as faced at the beginning of 1948: 'At this moment American big business, the British ruling class, and British and French social democracy are waging a fierce ideological campaign. The sharpening of the struggle politically and economically is accompanied by the sharpening of the battle of ideas'.¹⁰ An added importance was given to Party education and a 'proper' understanding of Communist theory by all members. In reality this meant a tightening of the theoretical orthodoxy as determined by Soviet leadership. Pollitt sent a letter to all branches to underline the '... very great importance of organising a systematic study of *The History of the C.P.S.U.* throughout the Party membership'.¹¹ A new reprint of Stalin's *The Foundations of Leninism* was issued in 1949 by Lawrence and Wishart, Zhdanov's pronouncements on culture were translated and published with the aid of the Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR,¹² and the journal of the Cominform, *For a Lasting Peace, For a People's Democracy* became recommended reading for Party cadres. The new line of the Party was to call for the establishment of a new government 'based on the forces of the Left in the Labour Movement' although at the same time there was a distancing of the CP from the Labour Left and advocates of 'a middle way'.¹³

Growing political antagonism between the Communists and figures on the Labour Left were not solely the result of the CP's new aggressive position as is clearly revealed in the developing anti-Communism of *Tribune* under Michael Foot's editorship. A particularly virulent example of this was Charlotte Haldane's series of three articles in 1948 which set

out to explain the commitment of certain 'intellectual' types to Communism in 'psychological' terms. According to her, Communism provided a 'soothing syrup' for emotionally damaged or inadequate individuals. These musings were later partially incorporated into her book, *Truth Will Out*, published by 'The Right Book Club'. A further move into political isolation by the Party resulted from its unquestioning support for the 'excommunication' of Yugoslavia from the Communist Movement and its zealous mouthing of the Cominform's characterisation of Titoism as 'bourgeois nationalism' which had passed over into a 'Fascist-Trotskyist agency of imperialism'.¹⁴ It was the CP's initiative to break the former close relationship it had had with such Labour figures as Konni Zilliacus because they expressed pro-Yugoslavian sentiments, and Party members with links with Yugoslavia who refused to break them were expelled.¹⁵ 'Cadre Commissions' were formed at this time to investigate the attitude of leading Communists in the Branches towards the 'break with Tito' so as to ensure that any emerging 'pro-Titoism' could be challenged as soon as it became evident. In the opinion of one of my interviewees speaking of the Party in this period:

One of the reasons why Area Committees were introduced was in order to give greater control over the membership. Prior to this you had local branches, Factory branches, and the District Committees. You had a certain number of fulltime officials but after the War the membership dropped off so they could not afford a lot of them, but there became a need or perceived need by leading cadres, at least at District level and I suspect National level, of establishing greater influence over the membership [hence the creation of Area Committees - SRP].¹⁶

In February the centenary of the *Communist Manifesto* was marked by a series of speeches at an adjunct meeting to the Party's 20th National Congress. These speeches were later published as a pamphlet with the title *The Battle of Ideas* and included a contribution by Professor George Thomson, a pre-1930 Cambridge University leftwing student who had become a

professor of Greek at Birmingham University in 1937.¹⁷ Thomson made a specific appeal: 'Our Party looks to its intellectuals for leadership in the battle of ideas'.¹⁸ Following this and the Congress endorsement of the key resolution 'Communist Manifesto Centenary',¹⁹ the Party's National Cultural Committee²⁰ called the first of its Cultural conferences. Inevitably called the 'National Battle of Ideas Conference' and held over a weekend in April, it was attended by over 600 members of whom 180 were delegates from 17 Party Districts and 28 specialist groups.

The opening report to the Conference was made by Sam Aaronovitch, the outline of which had been agreed beforehand by the National Cultural Committee where it was established that it should be directed at the '... whole Party, but especially (a) intellectual and professional workers; (b) our District and Borough cadres'.²¹ Aaronovitch first detailed the 'groups of ideas' that represented the major ideological props of capitalism that needed to be combatted: 1) Those ideas that 'glorified' capitalism and imperialism and used such descriptive terms as 'Christian' or 'Western' civilisation, while describing socialism as aggressive and 'totalitarian' - leading exponents of this 'school' included Jewkes, Hayek and Gilbert Murray. 2) Social democratic theories of the 'third force', 'middle way' - examples given of purveyors of such ideas included Crossman, Douglas Jay, Morrison, and Leon Blum. 3) Ideas which spread feelings of pessimism, cynicism, and sadism among people - as examples of this group Aaronovitch referred to Orwell, Koestler, Bertrand Russell, and Sartre and the 'school of Existentialism'. The Report then detailed the corruption of science through the increasing requirement that research be geared to military purposes, the strict limitations placed on publishing, and the shortage of educational books and 'classics'. However, most significant was the 'penetration of the U.S. "way of life"' as evidenced, according to the Report, in 80% of magazine fiction being of American

origin and a predominance of US film in the cinemas. In order to fight the 'corrupting American ideas' and the philistine treatment of science and culture it was necessary for the people to get to know the 'magnificent cultural and scientific heritage of our country'. The aim of the Party must be '... to assist the professional and intellectual workers to have the tools for the job - to help the labour movement to fight for increased opportunities for study and enrichment of leisure'.²² After mentioning the specific CP proposals that had been made on education, science, social sciences, and in the cultural field (e.g. expansion and reorganisation of the Arts Council, and proposals for the theatre), a brief account was made of 'Party work in the ideological sphere'. In all, Aaronovitch claimed, over 600 members were involved in theoretical and polemical work through the various specialist and professional Party groups. Despite this it was necessary to recognize the 'weaknesses' and 'shortcomings' that still existed:

To those comrades who are, one might say, professionally engaged in the battle of ideas, i.e. our historians, writers, scientists, students, and others, I would say this: there are still too many among you who are not making serious study of Marxism as a science. Because of that, there are tendencies to compromise on basic principles, tendencies which lightly reconcile for instance, materialism and idealism ... [and that] are deceived by trends which conceal reaction under so-called revolutionary forms. To engage more actively in the ideological struggle, our ideological workers must become Communists.²³

A subsequent discussion of the Conference by the Political Committee of the Party indicates that the leadership was generally surprised at the large number of members who took part in the event. Yet, while greeting 'a splendid development of the ideological offensive', Aaronovitch's criticisms were added to; there was '... a lack of understanding in some

of the professions of the efforts of the Soviet Union to improve the work on the cultural front'.²⁴ The Political Committee took a number of steps aimed at tightening the reins of theoretical orthodoxy and an immediate result of the Conference was that a series of District 'Battle of Ideas' conferences were held and some Districts even attempted to form their own Cultural committees. There was also an even greater call for 'more Marxist training' to be organised throughout the Party and a heightening of '... the ideological and political life of the whole Party...'.²⁵ In Aaronovitch's Report to the Conference (relayed in the Letter to District Secretary ...) it was stated that: 'The members of our specialist groups should see how they can best participate in the schools at all levels of the Party, more Marxist training would improve their theoretical and polemical work'.²⁶ Of the 405 members who attended the 'National Summer Schools' at Hastings that year 38% (150) were people who worked in the professions. After participants had completed their residential courses they would be expected to take on various 'educational' responsibilities within the Party.

The 'Peace Campaign'

Interwoven with the whole 'Battle of Ideas' was the 'fight for peace'²⁷ which by the November of 1949 was declared by the Cominform to be the central task of the Communist movement. The Berlin Crisis that emerged in June 1948 and continued until May 1949 was said by the Cominform to foreshadow a possible direct military attack by imperialism on the Soviet Union. Thus in 1948 a 'world peace movement' was launched in order to mobilise 'progressive opinion' against any moves towards war. This reproduced in many ways the approach adopted in the mid-1930s and the new campaign laid great emphasis on organising the forces of culture and science against the threat of war and imperialism.

The event marking the beginning of this 'international peace offensive' was the 'World Congress of Intellectuals in Defence of Peace' held in Wroclaw, Poland, 25 - 28 August 1948, a Congress attended by nearly 500 delegates from 45 countries and including some notable literary, artistic, and scientific figures from both the Soviet and the Western blocs. Despite this array of people, the Congress was very firmly attached to a Soviet interpretation of foreign affairs and the 'question of peace'. The Manifesto that came out of the meeting and, with the exception of just a few people from the British and American delegations, was unanimously agreed upon gives a clear picture of the politics of the body:

... contrary to the will and aspirations of the peoples of all countries, a handful of selfish men in America and Europe, who inherited from Fascism its ideas of racial superiority and the negation of progress, who took over its tendency to settle all problems by force of arms, are again making an attempt against the spiritual wealth of the nations of the world.²⁸

In the concluding sentences of the Manifesto a call was made for 'brain workers' throughout the world to hold their own national peace congresses and establish national committees in defence of peace. Writing of the Congress as one of the returned British participants, Professor Hyman Levy commented that the struggle for peace must be waged in all areas:

One sector, not the least important, is held by so-called cultural workers whose appeal is to the emotions and to the intellect - writers, artists, musicians, scientists. They also, in their own way, make the munitions of war as they make the munitions of peace. In a world that has been kept for years on tenterhooks of war, the co-operation of all men and women of goodwill in these fields is of the greatest significance for the preservation of peace.²⁹

To continue the work of the Wroclaw Congress and provide international coordination an 'International Liaison Committee for Intellectuals for

Peace' was formed which by 1950 had adopted the more straight forward name of 'World Peace Council'.³⁰

Predating the Wroclaw Congress by just a month two conferences 'for World Peace', arranged under the auspices of the *Daily Worker*, had already been held in London and Glasgow. This initiative had been taken as an immediate response to the worsening international climate and the 'talk of war'; 'Labour movement militants and middle-class pacifists united ...'³¹ with 1,054 delegates attending the London conference and 379 delegates at the Scottish conference. The bulk of the delegates came from trade unions with a strong CP presence (ETU, FBU, AUFW, and CSCA), the Socialist Medical Association, International Brigade Association, and established peace/pacifist organisations (Peace Pledge Union, National Peace Council). Following Wroclaw steps were taken to set up a peace organisation that was firmly linked to the world movement, i.e. the World Peace Council (WPC). The scientific journalist and Secretary-General of the World Federation of Scientific Workers, J.G. Crowther,³² is said to have played a key role in establishing a British body affiliated to the WPC, initially with the name the 'British Cultural Committee for Peace' but it soon adopted the title 'British Peace Committee' (BPC).

A leading figure in the National Union of Students in the late 1940s, who opposed the Communists in the Union, writes with disdain at what he saw as the 'Communist-front' nature of the BPC. He was the NUS observer at the National Congress of the BPC in October 1949 and remarks of the experience:

As far as I can remember, during the two days of its duration, only three people spoke who did not exactly follow the Party line ... [one of these was Zilliacus who - SRP] ... was in strong disagreement with the Yugoslavia from the World Peace Council. Mr. Zilliacus however, used his disagreement with the rest of the Executive to show that there was room for everybody in

the Peace Movement, and that disagreement within it was perfectly possible, but he made no attempt to win the meeting over to his side in his dispute with the rest of the Executive.³³

Pelling, in his *The British Communist Party - A Historical Profile*, writes of the BPC as one of the Party's many 'satellite' organisations (see pp. 145-46) while D. Cate in his *The Fellow-Travelers* declares: '... far and away the most notable success scored by international Communism in the field of propaganda [in the period of the Cold War - SRP] was its virtual expropriation of the word 'peace' as interpreted by the World Peace Movement' (p.289). An insight into this Communist 'expropriation' of the 'peace cause' is given by the NUS anti-Communist activist I have previously quoted, who speaks of Communist students and Party members in various professions making some headway with the 'peace campaign'. British Peace Committee inspired resolutions were approved by many bodies because, writing as an opponent:

Even people who did know the real aims of the resolutions found it difficult to make a frontal attack on them. They would usually argue that an organisation of - say - teachers existed to discuss education, and not political matters that were of no direct concern to teachers. To this, the Communists would reply that peace concerned everybody, since rearmament for war would mean fewer schools, and war itself the destruction of everything that education stood for.³⁴

The CP dominance in the BPC is undoubtedly true as is clearly shown in the Dutt Papers which include a number of its policy statements that were drawn up by Palme Dutt. The 'peace campaign' was well suited to middle-class Communists to publicly campaign (housewives seem much in evidence in collecting signatures for various petitions) and politically work amongst their professional colleagues on the basis of the 'cause of peace and the best interests of the profession'. Moreover, it was not difficult to establish that there was a link between British foreign

policy commitments and high military spending,³⁵ and the postponement or non-fulfilment of domestic reforms, e.g. only half a dozen health centres had been built by 1951.³⁶ As an integral part of the 'Battle of Ideas' the fight for peace was also necessarily an exercise in 'educating' the populace as to the nature of America as illustrated by the title of a 1950 CP pamphlet, *Wall Street's Drive to War*.³⁷ However, a high point in the BPC's activities was the Stockholm Peace Petition organised by the World Peace Committee and which called upon the United Nations to outlaw atomic weapons. The success came to a quick end:

Quite without warning, in the middle of the campaign for signatures to the Stockholm Peace Appeal, the Labour Party suddenly denounced it. For me this is still a vivid memory. We were canvassing the streets, "on the knocker" daily, and signatures were flooding in. Then overnight they dropped to a trickle and a world of cold suspicion surrounded us.³⁸

Labour Party members who were in any way associated with the petition were threatened with expulsion by the Labour leadership, which further increased the Communist dominance in the BPC.

In June 1950 the Korean War broke out intensifying the anti-Communist political atmosphere. Communist speakers were subjected to physical attacks when they held street meetings and figures such as Herbert Morrison called for the exclusion of CP members from the trade unions, while Deakin demanded that the Party be banned. An attempt to hold a world-wide Peace Congress (WPC) in Sheffield, fronted by Bernal, Pritt, and Ivor Montagu, had to be abandoned and transferred to Warsaw as the Labour government refused entry visas to many of the overseas delegates, stopped others from countries not requiring visas at the port of entry (e.g. Joliot-Curie who was to be president of the Congress), and without explanation cancelled consent for aeroplane flights which had been arranged to bring delegates. The effect of the transfer, according to a

non-Communist participant in the Congress, '... led to the views of the Soviet Union and its close allies becoming more prominent'.³⁹ Surveying the situation in the 'peace campaign' in mid-1951 Dutt acknowledged that: 'At present the BPC is a head without a body. Only Party drive and *Daily Worker* publicity makes the campaign a political reality. There is practically no non-Party mass support'.⁴⁰ Dutt also lamented the fact that the 310 Peace Councils that had been set up throughout the country, largely by the efforts of the Party, were nearly all unaffiliated to the BPC so they could proclaim their 'broadness' and avoid the Labour Party ban. This, Dutt claimed, merely encouraged witch-hunting and undercut the financial support of the BPC which had to survive from the subscriptions of just 16 Peace Councils and 192 individual members.

One of the few bright spots was the 'successful development of broader support in special spheres especially cultural: Musicians for Peace, and Artists for Peace exhibition and sale'.⁴¹ Peace groups organised on a professional basis included Architects for Peace, Artists for Peace, Science for Peace, Teachers for Peace, Authors' World Peace Appeal, Musicians' Organisation for Peace, and the Medical Association for the Prevention of War.⁴² With the possible exception of the last named body the organisational core of these peace groups was made up of Communists in the particular professions. As with the local Peace Groups the link with the BPC was blurred: 'all the special organisations built up by our efforts, are also kept separate from the BPC as labelled, e.g. musicians, scientists, ex-servicemen etc'.⁴³ Some prestigious names were associated with the various groups, as for example with the musicians, which embraced as figureheads not just Sir Adrian Boult as president but a whole number of vice-presidents (as with the WMA): Sir Arnold Bax, Benjamin Britten, Peter Pears, Prof. E.J. Dent and Sir Hugh Robertson. The anti-Communist body IRIS (Industrial Research and Information Services

Ltd.) described the Authors' World Peace Appeal as one of the most successful 'Communist fronts' as it was signed not just by non-Communists but by well-known authors who were fervently opposed to Communism.⁴⁴ The Architects for Peace involved Douglas Bailey and the Principal of the A.A. Robert Furneaux Jordan (as non-Party leading members of the profession) and the Artists for Peace, which came into being as the AIA split over the question of involvement with the BPC,⁴⁵ arranged three well-stocked exhibitions.

The group with the largest number of participants and the most extensive organisation was the Teachers for Peace. Of the 350 British delegates who attended the 1949 World Congress for Peace in Paris, 40 were teachers, and at a subsequent meeting that was held to establish a British teachers' peace group and addressed by Bernal, about 400 were present.⁴⁶ By 1952 there were 12 local groups of the Teachers for Peace, the largest in London but also including ones in Newcastle, Leicester, Sheffield, Manchester, Nottingham and Brighton.⁴⁷ These professional peace bodies even organised joint meetings and work. The Authors' World Peace Appeal and Teachers for Peace carried out a survey of current history and geography textbooks and their treatment of war and national groups, and the Science and Teacher groups held a joint conference. The secretary of the Architects for Peace, a CP architect, Christian Hamp, remembers that a large meeting was held at Friends House in 1953 or 1954 where all the professional peace groups took part: '... I helped write out the banner of "Professions for Peace" ... the meeting was packed'.⁴⁸ Success in this area may have been a contributory factor to an upturn in the overall fortunes of the BPC which saw a virtual doubling in the number of delegates at its annual conference - from 351 in 1951 to 627 in 1952.⁴⁹ A unanimously endorsed 'declaration' at the joint conference of Teachers for Peace and Science for Peace sums up the basic argument and approach of

this 'peace campaigning' amongst the professions: 'By the very nature of their professions, scientists and teachers are deeply concerned in the preservation and increase of human achievement, and therefore, as the essential condition of the latter's survival, in the establishment of a lasting peace'.⁵⁰

At a time when Communism was becoming increasingly unpopular and the Party was more than ever politically isolated, the 'peace campaign' was an important area for Party members to engage in public activity that was not CP as such but of a 'broader' Popular Front type. 'Peace work' was particularly well-suited to those Communists in the professions who could maintain good relations with '1930's allies' and links with other colleagues.

'British McCarthyism'

Various writers have disparaged the notion that there was any such thing as 'British McCarthyism' during the Cold War.⁵¹ Pelling in his history of the CP writes of '... a few isolated cases of what might be regarded as political discrimination',⁵² while David Cate remarks that '... at worst, a commitment to the Party was regarded as eccentric, as rather odd'.⁵³ Although anti-Communism in Britain never reached the ferocious levels attained in the United States or even Canada, South Africa or Australia (in the latter two countries their CPs were outlawed, although in Australia the decision was subsequently revoked by the High Court) it did reach a significant level. Many British Communists directly or indirectly experienced a much greater level of political discrimination at this time. Working-class Communists who were trade union activists had always faced the possibility of summary dismissal from their jobs and being placed on an employers' blacklist. During the 'phoney war' middle-class figures associated with the People's Convention found themselves banned from

broadcasting by the BBC and a number of CP schoolteachers lost their posts. It was with the Cold War, however, that many Party members in the professions (of which in contrast to earlier times there were relatively large numbers) began to experience not just unpopularity and disapproval but in some cases barriers to their professional progress and even loss of employment.⁵⁴

On 15 March 1948 Attlee made a statement in Parliament with regard to employment in the Civil Service which declared that no member of the CP or person closely associated with the Party would be employed in work connected to the 'security of the state'.⁵⁵ One of a group of Communists purged from the government armaments research establishment, Woolwich Arsenal, describes what happened to him:

The purge was announced by Attlee about March 1948, so many people afterwards wondered what would happen. Well in my case one Friday afternoon about a quarter of an hour before finishing time I got a phone call to say I was wanted in the Administrative Building, which was away from the laboratories. One of the administrative bosses from Headquarters (not in Woolwich Arsenal) said to me that he had been instructed to hand me a letter saying I had been investigated and found to be a member of the C.P. and I was to go on special paid leave and not to enter Woolwich Arsenal again, which was a restricted secret walled area needing a pass to enter. When I got back to the laboratory, after about half an hour, everyone had finished work and gone home, so I never had the chance to say farewell to colleagues I had been working with for up to 7 years ... After being purged I spent 5 months on paid leave, not knowing whether I would have a job at the end (my father was unemployed most of the 1930s in Swansea, so it was a real fear, really) ... Eventually I was transferred to the Department of the Government Chemist ...⁵⁶

Not all of those who were removed from Woolwich Arsenal at this time were Communists. One was a Christian who used to read the *Daily Worker* 'because guilt by association was part of the purge'.⁵⁷ There were few outright dismissals, a number resigned but most were transferred to 'non-sensitive' administrative and clerical work.

Caute gives the figure of just 163 civil servants involved in cases between 1948-1961 and the Lord Chancellor gives the number of cases from 1948-1950 as 74,⁵⁸ this had risen to 149 by 1954: 69 transferred, 23 dismissed and 19 resigned.⁵⁹ Taken at face value these numbers are small, yet as an immediate consequence it helped undermine the CP presence in the Civil Service Clerical Association. The Government waited until the Communist Ernest Hicks ceased to be President of the Association to act against him and remove him from the Air Ministry where he was a Higher Clerical Officer, he thus lost his position as Departmental Staff Side Secretary and 'power base'. The Government Ban ensured that civil servants would, if they did not want to endanger their careers, shy away from involvement in all leftwing politics, and that any known Communist would have the greatest of difficulties in entering the Civil Service as a new recruit. Of much greater importance, however, were the general effects of the Ban which seeped into other areas. The Government came under renewed pressure from Conservative MPs for the Ban to be extended, and in the Lords Vansittart played a particularly active role against 'Communists in the Public Service'.⁶⁰ When asked to extend the 'purge' to the BBC Attlee could reply that he was 'dealing merely with Government servants',⁶¹ but it is now known that MI5 vetted employees for the BBC management and there was in effect a secret BBC blacklist operating probably from the War but becoming more pervasive following the Attlee Statement.

By 1950-51 the London County Council had adopted what was euphemistically called 'security recommendations' which really acted as a ban on employing members of the CP (those Communists already employed were safe - although there may have been redeployment). This ban was in operation until 1952 when it was finally revoked partly as the result of a campaign by LCC staff.⁶² In 1950-51 attempts were made to impose 'political tests' on schoolteachers applying for positions in Essex,

Surrey, LCC and Middlesex with the objective of preventing any Communist being appointed. It was, however, only Middlesex County Council who, ignoring the protests of the teachers' organisations, in the end adopted 'political tests'⁶⁴ and as an immediate consequence rejected the appointment of a headmaster on the grounds that he was a Communist. The 'Middlesex Ban' remained in operation until 1958.

The most well-known case of the removal of a Communist from the world of higher education during the Cold War was the non-renewal of Andrew Rothstein's appointment as a lecturer by the Directors of the School of Slavonic Studies, University of London, in 1950. Although the grounds given for Rothstein's dismissal was his supposed 'inadequate scholarship' there is little doubt that he was removed because of his Communist politics; nevertheless it is significant that strenuous efforts were made to present the issue as one of academic competence or lack of it. In a joint letter of protest occasioned by Rothstein's removal, five academics (CP and non-CP) gave their opinion that it was not

an isolated act of political discrimination. We have good reason to believe that during the last two or three years political tests have been unofficially applied with increasing frequency in the making of appointments to university teaching posts. In a number of cases known to us, candidates have been asked by members of interviewing boards whether or not they are members of the Communist Party.⁶⁵

Already in 1947 Sir William Moberly, the chairman of the University Grants Committee advocated the dismissal of teachers whose 'world outlook' did not conform to his ideal 'Christian University' as described in his book, *The Crisis in the Universities*. In a recent interview Eric Hobsbawm has touched upon the effects of the Cold War on the Academic world:⁶⁶

The test was when you got in. If you made it before the Berlin Crisis of May 1948, well, you didn't get promotion for ten years, but nobody threw you out. I got in within a year of getting out of the army - on my

undergraduate record. So consequently I was OK. But if I had waited, say until after my Ph.D, I might never have managed to get in. During the Cold War there were some tough moments, and even relations with one's colleagues could be very tense.⁶⁷

Brian Simon applied for a job at Bristol University in 1949, was interviewed and assumed that he had been given the post, yet to his surprise the job was given to someone else. He was later told by one of his referees, who had met one of those who had interviewed him, that the reason he was not appointed was that they had found out he was a member of the CP; in fact the referee was reprimanded for not telling them Brian Simon was a Communist.⁶⁸ Matters came more out into the open when there was a sudden worsening in the international relations between the two 'blocs'. At the time of the bombardment of the British warship 'Amethyst' by Chinese Communists in July 1949, the Party member Peter Mauger was forced to leave his lectureship at the Nautical College at Pangbourne. The Admiralty had found out that he was a Communist, even though he had kept quiet about his politics at work, and told the College authorities that they should get rid of him. According to Mauger another Party member who was 'purged' from an educational position at the same time was George Rudé, whereupon he left for the Sorbonne.⁶⁹

An interesting example of the official paranoia towards Communists in this period is the experience of a young Party member who worked for Hampshire County Council town planning department at Fareham. After being told one day in June 1950 by her landlady that plain-clothes policemen had been asking questions about her - who her friends were, details of her movements and political activities - she was called in a few days after for a meeting with her boss:

... the Area Planning Officer regarding my political activities. I should say, that a week or so prior to this, a small naval vessel had blown up in Portsmouth Harbour (Fareham is situated at the N.W. end of the

Harbour, and Gosport was in our Planning Area) ... Anyway next to the County Planning Officer was, one, Major T.F. Thomson - all tweeds and pipe-smoking - at "The Castle", Winchester, for interrogation ... the gist of it all was, that "they" suspected C.P. members being involved in the ship explosion, they questioned my patriotism, and quote "Wouldn't it be convenient for the Soviet Union to have a spy in every port"! Upshot - "leave the C.P. or lose your job".⁷⁰

In fact although relatively inexperienced, she had only joined the CP in December 1949; she refused to be intimidated into leaving the Party. Again emphasizing the difference with America, she was not sacked. She was, however, transferred to extremely dull and unrewarding work in an 'out of the way' office in another town.

The official persecution of Communists in Britain was definitely of a lesser magnitude than what took place in America, where in New York alone 321 teachers and 58 college lecturers were sacked from the educational system.⁷¹ Nevertheless, the Cold War atmosphere in Britain had a real enough effect on Party members, among whom middle-class Communists became, as a whole, much more isolated in their occupations and professions. The threat of straight forward dismissal because of Communist beliefs was rare but failure to gain professional advance because of it was not. The overall impact of the 'bans' and 'purge' was to heighten the Party's 'bunker mentality' and give credence to the view that 'The capitalist Trojan horses in Britain at the present time are the Right-Wing Social Democrats'⁷² and that the 'Americanization' of Britain was taking place. On the other hand, there was also a tendency for those Communists in the professions to 'keep their heads down' and concentrate political activity outside their jobs. Obviously people left the Party through disillusionment or disagreement with the conduct of the Soviet Union but there were also those who dropped out because of the fear of what continued Party membership could mean for their own personal well-being.⁷³

There had long existed the practice in the Party of giving permission to some 'outstanding intellectuals' to be '... in the Party but to be without membership cards,⁷⁴ and other Communists were allowed to be secret Card carrying Communists for the sake of political expediency (e.g. remain members of the Labour Party) or because it was acknowledged that open membership would represent a threat to their employment (nearly always someone in a senior position in a profession). Following Attlee's 1948 pronouncement on Communists in the civil service the Party accepted that for a number of 'vulnerable' members in government employ (ministry and local government) it was necessary for them to become 'closed' or undercover Party members, with their membership card held at the CP Centre and to which they directly paid their subs. This was an unsatisfactory procedure and the experience of CP architect Kenneth Campbell of those who became undercover members in the Cold War period was that they completely severed their links with the Party after two or three years and often became politically quiescent.

The atmosphere of 'purging' may partly explain a general decline in the leftwing Science 'movement' loosely grouped around Bernal. As the unofficial *Daily Worker* link with CP and 'friendly' scientists puts it: 'I would say that the "disappearance" of C.P. scientists was because of secrecy, they were being chased underground ... Indeed they had good cause to worry as soon as the dropping of the H-Bomb...'.⁷⁵ Alan Nunn May, Cambridge graduate and physicist, was sentenced to ten years imprisonment for communicating to the Russians 'nuclear secrets' that he gleaned through his involvement in the Anglo-Canadian research effort towards building the A-Bomb. This and the subsequent cases with Klaus Fuchs in 1950 and Bruno Pontecorvo's disappearance shortly afterwards (in popular journalistic parlance they were grouped together as the 'Atom Spies') ensured that MI5 spent a good deal of time examining the political records

of scientists who worked in any areas remotely 'sensitive'.⁷⁶ As early as June 1945 the British Government had forbidden eight very eminent scientists, all Fellows of the Royal Society, from joining the British party who had been invited to celebrate the 220th anniversary of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow. This was a good indication of the official worry even at this time that the Russians might learn too much about the 'atomic secrets'. As late as 1951 Dr. E.H. Burhop, a leftwing scientist, had his passport taken away from him by the Foreign Office so he could not join an SCR delegation to the USSR. The reason given was his involvement in atomic matters although he had not worked in the area since 1945.

The most well known 'victim' of the Attlee pronouncement was Professor J.B.S. Haldane who was named in the House of Commons by the Conservative MP Sir W. Smithers as a Communist working on two Government scientific committees and asked Attlee what action was going to be taken.⁷⁷ Attlee side-stepped the issue by claiming that the two committees Haldane was involved in were Medical Research Council ones. By 1950 he had, however, been quietly removed from Government work⁷⁸ and while Bernal retained his link with the Government Science Advisory Committee he was in 1949 refused re-election to the Council of the British Association for Advancement of Science because of a speech he had made in Moscow. In response to Bernal's very public 'removal' from the Council, covered as it was in detail by the press, a protest statement was sent to the BAAS by 244 scientists - ominously a senior member of the Association wrote to the War Office pointing out that in the interests of national security MI5 should be cognisant of the full list of signatories.⁷⁹

Footnotes

- 1 F. Claudin, *The Communist Movement*, p. 474.
- 2 See Pollitt's booklet, *Looking Ahead* - the major CP work on the overall approach/attitude towards post-war Britain published in 1947 and later withdrawn despite having sold over 75,000 copies.
- 3 See Dutt's letter to the *Daily Telegraph* 30 March 1948 for an account of the changing 'line' of the Political Committee over the issue of Marshall Aid. According to Douglas Hyde, Johnny Campbell was one of the Party leaders who felt that Marshall Aid might be able to be used in a positive way in Britain; '... I remember him saying just the opposite later on ... But it was something which was worrying Party members very much; indeed, it was a very real test in a way. And so a new syllabus came out putting the Party's policy into perspective and so immediately classes had to be held at every level ... right the way down through the Party'. (D. Hyde, interview 2 February 1987).
- 4 Dutt Papers, 'Notes on the Situation in Britain - no. 3. C.P. Policy 1945-49', May 1950).
- 5 This amendment came just before the switch in policy was defeated - Dutt Papers, 'Report of Kent District Congress'.
- 6 *New Builders Leader*, January 1947, letter.
- 7 Upward - letter to J. Hinton as quoted in the latter's essay, 'A Novel of Fact' on the Upward trilogy.
- 8 D. Hyde, *I Believed*, p. 214.
- 9 'Future Work of the H.A.C. 19 March 1948' CP archive - all quotes in this paragraph taken from this paper.
- 10 J. Gollan, 'The Battle of Ideas', *Communist Review*, February 1948.
- 11 This took on the nature of a campaign - 'Letter to all branches from Pollitt, October 1948'.
- 12 E.g. Zhdanov, *On Literature, Music and Philosophy*, 1951.
- 13 See Klugmann's two articles 'From Social Democracy to "Democratic Socialism"' in *Communist Review*, December 1948 and January 1949.
- 14 The 'excommunication' of Yugoslavia was a major crisis for the Party which led to a number of resignations from the CP ('public resignations' over this question include the former Thatcher 'adviser' Alfred Sherman, see *New Statesman and Nation*, 15 October 1949, correspondence). Writing of his own experiences Colin Siddons states: 'You mustn't think that the faithful were simply sheep: it was a painful decision for us in general and myself in particular. In Egypt [as a soldier during the War - SRP] we knew of the struggle that the Partisans had had to make to get recognised'. (Siddons, letter 10 January 1988). Those Communists who had been involved in UNRRA work in Yugoslavia (railway construction) or in other ways had

visited Yugoslavia were obviously some of the 'hardest hit' by the 'anti-Tito line'. However, the 'duty' to support the 'World Movement' and Soviet Union overrode doubts and unease in most cases and past experiences could be reinterpreted to fit into the new 'line'. Malcolm MacEwen who had been to Yugoslavia for the *Daily Worker* in 1946 and after (as a guest of the government along with Bill Rust and his wife) was tremendously impressed with the popular enthusiasm he encountered for constructing a new society. He was, however, a little puzzled by the very low profile adopted by the Yugoslavian CP: 'At the time we didn't attach much importance to it ... but then when the Cominform denounced Tito ... this experience we had had of being unable to find the CP and believing very firmly, as we did in those days, of the dogma of the leading role of the Communist Party I think we were at least half convinced ... at any rate we went along with the view expressed by the Cominform and by the British C.P. that the regime in Yugoslavia was pursuing a dangerous course by muffling the Communist Party'. (MacEwen, interview 30 November 1983).

- ¹⁵ This was the case with a CP member who worked in an advertising agency which did work for Yugoslavia in Britain. He was given the choice of leaving his job or being expelled - he chose the latter. Source Reg Turner, interview 7 March 1984 - Turner challenged the decision bringing it to the attention of the Executive Committee, but with no success.
- ¹⁶ Tom Hill, interview 28 October 1982 - see *C.P. 20th Congress Resolutions and Proceedings*, pp. 9-10, 'Amendments to Rules'.
- ¹⁷ Professor George Thomson became the public 'Party man' on intellectuals/professionals in the CP. He was a member of the Executive Committee from the 19th National Congress, February 1947, until the 22nd National Congress, April 1952; by the 23rd Congress in 1954 he was no longer on the Committee. In some ways Arnold Kettle can be seen as his replacement. One of the latest 'spy'/Blunt books, *Mask of Treachery* by John Costello, is of interest in that he has utilised American archives to gain access to British Secret Service reports (although he treats them as unimpeachable sources of truth), makes mention of Thomson (spelt Thompson - p. 191). Costello points to Thomson's joining of the Apostles in 1924 as evidence of the 'Marxist' influence in that body pre-Burgess and Blunt. However, the significant fact for my study is that despite being of a radical persuasion Thomson did not join the CP until 1935. As an aside Thomson was not a 'Party yes-man' - in 1948 he was proposing that other than Political Committee members present the main political report to the EC and that EC members be allowed to raise questions re Political Committee minutes (*Our Letter*, 13 August 1948), and he was a major 'defender' of Caudwell. He later became attracted to Maoism as did a number of 1930s 'intellectual Communists', e.g. Alick West, Colin Penn, Upward, et. al.
- ¹⁸ *The Battle of Ideas*, p. 4.
- ¹⁹ 'The battle of class ideas is an essential part of the class struggle', *CP 20th Congress Resolutions and Proceedings*, p. 5.

- 20 Those who were on the National Cultural Committee in May 1948 were as follows: E. Burns, A. West, J. Lindsay, R. Hilton, J. Grahl, H. Lee, T. Russell, S. Lynd, S. Cole, P. Carpenter, G. Thomson, J. Lewis, S. Aaronovitch, S. Lilley, A. Bush, D. Garman, J. Cardner, T. Willis.
- 21 'Lines for Report to National Conference, April 11th', CP Archive.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 S. Aaronovitch, 'The Battle of Ideas Conference', *World News and Views*, 24 April 1948.
- 24 *Our Letter*, No. 15, April 15, 1948.
- 25 'Letter to the District Secretary and Education Organiser, April 28th, 1948 - from the Party Centre', CP Archive.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 At the meeting of the National Cultural Committee for 11 June 1948 the 'Peace Campaign' completely dominated the agenda with 17 recorded points. Each group was to consider in what ways the peace campaign concerned them and report back to the Committee with details of 'what could be done' in their area - cultural arena or professional/specialist field. A whole number of 'contributions' were already mapped out, to quote a few of them: '4. Writers to consider preparations of plays, scripts, short stories etc Perhaps consider suggestions of Actors to organise Trial of Warmongers. 5. Artists - already active in preparing material for D.W. Peace Conference - but also consider possibility of exhibition etc'. Other items were: the preparation of a booklet by doctors and scientists on the effects of an A-bomb explosion, a pamphlet on US 'penetration' of philosophic, cultural and scientific fields, etc.' (Minutes of National Cultural Committee, 11 June 1948).
- 28 'Manifesto of Wroclaw Congress', *Labour Monthly*, October 1948.
- 29 Prof. H. Levy, 'Intellectuals for Peace', *Labour Monthly*, October 1948.
- 30 After Wroclaw the next meeting was held in Paris in April 1949 (some of it took place in Prague because of visa difficulties) and this was called the First World Peace Congress. It was followed by congresses at Warsaw in 1950, Vienna in 1952 and Helsinki in 1955.
- 31 W. Rust, *The Story of the Daily Worker*, p. 125.
- 32 The World Federation of Scientific Workers (WFSW), of which Crowther was secretary-general, played an important role in the establishment of the WPC. The leading French physicist and Communist Frédéric Joliot-Curie was a key figure in the creation of both bodies as was Bernal; 'In practice, there was much overlapping between these two bodies in ideological framework, and in the personalities'. (M. Goldsmith, *F. Joliot-Curie*, p. 174).
- 33 Ralph Blumenau, 'The Fringe of Politics', unpublished manuscript, February 1953, p. 167.

- ³⁴ A non-Party person associated with the 'peace campaign' was Dora Russell who has this to say on the question: 'I could not accept that the World Peace Council and Peace Petitions were insincere and so much propaganda. Call these efforts propaganda if you like - they still stood there as efforts for peace, open for anyone in the world to take part'. (D. Russell, *The Tamarisk Tree, Vol. 3, Challenge to the Cold War*, p. 124).
- ³⁵ See K.O. Morgan, *Labour in Power 1945-1951*, p. 279.
- ³⁶ *World News and Views*, 14 April 1951, 'Health and Rearmament', Robbie Wilson [pathologist - info from 18th National Congress Executive nominations].
- ³⁷ Written by Klugmann as part of a revitalised series from the 1930s, 'The Peace Library'.
- ³⁸ P. Cadogan, schoolteacher in Cambridge at the time, 'The British C.P. in the Light of 1956', *The Review*, October 1961, p. 38.
- ³⁹ D. Russell, op. cit., p. 132.
- ⁴⁰ Dutt Papers, 'Notes on Peace Movements 22 June 1951'.
- ⁴¹ Ibid.
- ⁴² See S. Watkins, *Medicine and Labour - Politics of a Profession*, pp. 181-82.
- ⁴³ Dutt Papers, 'Notes on Peace Movements 22 June 1951'.
- ⁴⁴ See *The Communist Solar System*, IRIS 1957 edition.
- ⁴⁵ See L. Morris and R. Radford, *The Story of the A.I.A.*, p. 84.
- ⁴⁶ B. Evans, 'Peace Must Be Won', *The Educational Bulletin*, January 1950.
- ⁴⁷ *The Educational Bulletin*, June-July 1952.
- ⁴⁸ C. Hamp, interview 8 May 1985.
- ⁴⁹ Figures for 1952 given in *Our Letter* no. 22, 30 May 1952.
- ⁵⁰ Report in *Education Today and Tomorrow*, May-June, 1955.
- ⁵¹ There has been very little work done on the Cold War influences on British society. Mention has been made by various historians of the creation of a secret Foreign Office department which distributed anti-Communist stories for external and internal use (e.g. R. Eatwell, *The 1945-1951 Labour Governments*, p. 104). Yet a recent book on Labour's period of office at this time does not even refer to Attlee's 1948 statement, see K.O. Morgan, *Labour in Power*. However, Noreen Branson, in the soon to be published *Volume 4 of the History of the C.P., 1941-1951*, devotes a chapter to 'The Civil Service Purge'.
- ⁵² H. Pelling, *The British Communist Party*, p. 162.

- ⁵³ D. Caute, *The Fellow-Travelers*, p. 342.
- ⁵⁴ In the following few pages I will deal principally with the ban on Communists in State employment. There are of course many examples of Communists (and non-C.P. leftwingers) being sacked or forced to resign from their jobs because of their politics e.g. the John Lewis Partnership demanded that all its employees sign an anti-Communist declaration in April 1949 and those who refused would be dismissed. The best known case in the world of journalism was that of *Picture Post* where the non-Communist editor was fired by the owner (Hulton) for publishing 'critical' reports on South Korea. He was accused of being a 'crypto-Communist' (the one Party *Post* Journalist A.A. Lloyd was finally forced to leave at this point). Someone who lost their job because of their connection with the Party is the Socialist Health Association chairman, Dr. Cyril Taylor - he was fired by the Shipping Federation in Liverpool in 1950: 'His offence had been to canvass and speak on platforms for Communist Party candidates in the general election' (*New Socialist* no. 17, May/June 1984, 'Left to the End'). I will explore further aspects of 'anti-Communism' in the sections on CP architects, schoolteachers and psychologists.
- ⁵⁵ There were of course parallel moves to impose bans and proscriptions in the trade unions with the TUC General Council in October 1948 urging the Executives of affiliated unions to counteract Communist influence among their members. In May 1948 Chuter Ede, Home Secretary, imposed a ban on political processions in London, a move which would seem to be aimed against the CP. The ban kept on being reimposed and in 1949 the traditional May Day march, called by the London Trades Council, was banned.
- ⁵⁶ Bill Turner, letter 12 February 1985.
- ⁵⁷ *ibid.*
- ⁵⁸ *Hansard, House of Lords*, 29 March 1950, p. 654.
- ⁵⁹ Sir Hartley Shawcross, *The Times*, 16 January 1954.
- ⁶⁰ *Hansard, House of Lords*, 29 March 1950, pp. 607-31.
- ⁶¹ *Hansard, House of Commons*, 24 January 1949, p. 557.
- ⁶² See *The Observer*, 18 August 1985, 'The Blacklist in Room 105' and 25 August 1985, 'How I Got Padlocked by MI5 in Auntie's Bosom' by Alaric Jacob.
- ⁶³ In 1951 the LCC withdrew its £25,000 a year grant to the London Philharmonic Orchestra. The underlying reason for the Council's action was that the LPO's chairman, Thomas Russell, was a member of the CP and things were brought to a head when Russell decided to take his summer holidays in Moscow. The proposed visit to the Soviet Union had, according to Alderman Boys, a member of the LCC South Bank sub-committee, '... upset all future plans of the LCC relative to the LPO. He himself, concerned with his political future, would never recognise Mr. Russell's existence again. Mr. Russell, he added, was

now persona non grata with the L.C.C.'. (*Daily Worker*, 6 June 1951, 'Orchestra was "Murdered"', P. Fryer). Russell moved out of musical administration to build up Collets bookshop. See *Daily Worker* 17 March 1951, and 20 March 1951 for details of LCC General Purposes Committee proposals for 'a loyalty test' etc. At the beginning of 1951 Liverpool City Council's Establishment Committee was considering a resolution which called for the 'registration' of every Communist or 'associate' of the Party in the employ of the corporation (source *Daily Worker*, 2 January 1951).

- 64 The Middlesex Ban as such applied to the heads of County primary and secondary schools, the principals of technical institutes, the heads of special schools and to all the staff of training colleges.
- 65 J.H.C. Whitehead, H.S. Davies, Joan Robinson, Beryl Smalley, M.H. Dobb, *The New Statesman and Nation*, 13 May 1950.
- 66 According to John Saville, G.D.H. Cole used to write on references if candidates were CP members.
- 67 *The Guardian*, 26 February 1988, 'The History Man'. See the excellent booklet *Adult Education and the Cold War* by R.T. Fieldhouse for an account of what happened in the WEA and extramural sector and the pressures experienced by CP tutors (including the dismissal of some). This work is one of the few (apart from Werskey's book) to my knowledge, to examine the impact of the Cold War on a specific area of professional life - the effects on individuals, their work, and the values/mores of the profession.
- 68 Source, B. Simon, interview 2 July 1985.
- 69 He was 'sacked' from St. Paul's London. Source Peter Mauger, interview 30 September 1985.
- 70 Doris H. Deering, letter 8 September 1985.
- 71 Source - S. Sohn, *Korstog For Demokratiet - Træk af USA's Historie Under Den Kolde Krig*.
- 72 Arthur Horner, *Communist Policy to Meet the Crisis - Report of the 21st National Congress C.P.G.B.*, p. 4.
- 73 Joining the Party for middle-class people was often a matter of weighing their political beliefs with the possible harm it could mean for their careers and family life.
- 74 'There has always been a possible situation where people could say, "I don't want to be known as a Communist" and their card might be kept for them. That was always possible if someone felt really threatened by the situation they were in'. (Sam Aaronovitch, interview 12 February 1986.
- 75 Angela Gradwell, née Tuckett, letter 31 January 1989.
- 76 See R. Jungk, *Brighter Than a Thousand Suns - A Personal History of the Atomic Scientists*, particularly pp. 232-33.
- 77 *Hansard, House of Commons*, 26 April 1948, p. 45.

- 78 See R. Clark, *J.B.S. - The Life and Work of J.B.S. Haldane*, pp. 187-88.
- 79 See M. Goldsmith, *Sage: A Life of J.D. Bernal*, pp. 182-89.

CHAPTER 11

'The American Threat' and the 'Cultural Heritage'

Introduction - summary

The succession of conferences and initiatives organised by the National Cultural Committee were probably the most successful events held by the Party - in terms of people attending and in the level of active participation - in the bleak Cold War years. 'Cultural conferences' and the specialist and interest groups that were formally and informally linked to the National Cultural Committee represented important arenas for the activity of middle-class Communists. It perhaps gave them an opportunity to engage in purposeful political activity at a time when their professional engagements were no longer deemed to be necessarily (unproblematically) progressive. While the anti-Americanism and the 'defence of the cultural heritage' fed upon and encouraged a particularly conservative attitude towards nation and culture, it also led to renewed efforts to spread an appreciation of the classics of past civilisation amongst the membership at large. Various middle-class Communists, at national and branch level, used their knowledge and skill to try and improve the cultural and intellectual life of the Party (usually in very 'safe' and conventional ways). This was not unimportant at a time when Communists were more isolated than they had been for many years. Furthermore, directly and indirectly, various members were inspired to search out indigenous sources of popular culture; hence the important role played by Communist 'specialists' in the folk music revival. There were also moves by the Communists involved in 'cultural work' to search

out and encourage non-professional/working class CP artistic talent as evidenced in the launching of *Daylight* and the 'National Print Competition'.

* * * * *

Following the 'great success' of the 'Battle of Ideas' conference the National Cultural Committee proceeded to hold further national conferences over the next few years. In contrast to a perceptible decline in overall Party activity' these conferences were characterised by a great deal of enthusiasm with impressively large attendances. Just a short time after the 'Battle of Ideas' conference a meeting was arranged by the Cultural Committee around the theme of 'Communism and Liberty'; it was very much a response to the heightened Cold War anti-Communist propaganda and the introduction of the 'purges' and 'bans', Rodney Hilton was asked to make the main contribution and his speech was later published and distributed by the Party. Hilton, bringing his 'historical eye' to bear on the subject, sought to show that liberty was not a static phenomenon but could only be really understood as a developing process - the winning of 'positive rights and privileges' in successive class struggles. Looking at matters through this perspective Communism was not antagonistic towards liberty but instead represented the means by which a new and advanced form of liberty could be attained. At this occasion alone over 400 people attended.

The next really important national conference organised by the National Cultural Committee was held in the last weekend of April 1951 and devoted to 'The American Threat to British Culture' (as the conference was entitled). The reactionary nature of American culture had been emphasised in Communist post-War literature for some time, e.g. a 1947 Party booklet

on America claimed its culture was '... far more appalling than the machine culture of other countries',² and the 'Battle of Ideas' conference had already drawn attention to what it termed was the 'penetration of the American way of life' into all areas of British society.³ The 1951 'cultural conference' represented a further intensification in this 'anti-Americanism' encouraged by a renewed Soviet effort to divide the 'West' during the Korean War. In excess of 2,000 people came to the event and the contributions that were made by the 10-12 speakers were published by the literary journal *Arena* in a 'special issue' for June/July 1951.

Sam Aaronovitch gave the customary opening report, and although he made the proviso that he was not condemning the progressive tradition in American culture, there is a good deal of truth in the observation made in a recent book: '... that for all the necessity of making such a distinction, no indication was given as to how it was to be made. And in practice, apart from a narrow band of "good guys", all American culture got condemned'.⁴ The American culture, which was being spread over the 'non-socialist' world not just for the purposes of making profit but as part of the American trusts' strategy for world domination, had, according to Aaronovitch, three major characteristics: 1) The complete dominance of monetary values, 2) Racialism, 3) A 'cult of violence'. A major part of his report was taken up with detailing where 'American penetration' had occurred (films, books, magazines, dance music and the social sciences) and the complicity in this process of a 'British fifth column' (G. Greene, Orwell, Huxley & al). Echoing the slogans of 1930s 'Popular Frontism' it was declared that 'COMMUNISTS ARE PATRIOTS AND INTERNATIONALISTS' (sub-heading p. 21). The threat to British Culture now came not from Nazism and the German war machine but from American imperialism: 'We ask our

comrades to take part in spreading the truth about the American 'way of life' and its influence in Britain'.⁵

Those who spoke after Aaronovitch were nearly all active or at least connected with a Party specialist/professional group, most dealt with a specific area of society describing the extent of American influence and its harmful effects; films - one of the most clear cases of American penetration; 'children's reading' - import of US 'horror comics', newspapers etc. Others, such as the London teacher and school librarian Diana Sinnot, called upon Party members to utilise local history and publicize the past militant struggles and in this way bring out the 'patriotic tradition' to which the CP was the heir.⁶ A contribution by E.P. Thompson, drawing upon the tradition of William Morris, proclaimed that 'To-day is the time when we must at last take the moral offensive firmly into our own hands'.⁷

These developments in the 'cultural work' of the Party coincided with and complemented the release of *The British Road to Socialism* in 1951, the first Party programme mapping out a long term strategy for the attainment of 'socialism' since the 1935 document, *For a Soviet Britain*. There was no mention of the aim of establishing 'the dictatorship of the proletariat' but instead a clear acknowledgement of the 'diversity of roads to socialism'. The 'Soviet road' was not the only one as was clearly apparent from what had taken place in Eastern Europe and China. Britain would reach socialism by her own road: '... the British Communists declare that the people of Britain can transform capitalist democracy into a real People's Democracy, transforming Parliament, the product of Britain's historic struggle for democracy, into the democratic instrument of the will of the vast majority of her people'.⁸

The end of the Comintern had represented a real change in the relationship between the world's Communist parties and the Soviet Union

and despite the rise in Cold War tensions and the creation of the Cominform the situation never returned to that of pre-1943 (the date of the Comintern's dissolution). Already in 1946 Thorez, the leader of the French Communists, was giving expression to the idea of a 'legal road' to 'people's democracy' in France.⁹ Although both the French and Italian CPs were soon criticised by the Cominform for their 'concessions' and 'compromises' the idea of a 'peaceful parliamentary' evolution to 'socialism' was not rejected.¹⁰ It was within this context that the British Party released *The British Road to Socialism*, giving open expression to a 'peaceful road' but clearly with Soviet approval¹¹ as 'it was printed in full in the journal of the Communist Information Bureau and in *Pravda*. The main ideas in the programme, particularly that of the peaceful transition in Britain, were discussed in detail in conversations Harry Pollitt had with Stalin at the time, who approved of our approach'.¹² The new British programme was very much a product of its time and gave prominence of place to the issue of national independence and the fight against American imperialism.

The Communist Party would break with the policy of sell-out to America. It would restore to the British Parliament its exclusive sovereign right to control the country's financial, economic and military policy, close the country to foreign capitalist penetration and restore the command of the British Armed Forces to British commanders.¹³

The central role of the working-class remained a key tenet of the CP's politics but more than ever attention was drawn to the crucial part other 'sections' would play in establishing 'people's power' as part of a 'popular alliance'; namely professional people and technicians, lower and middle 'sections' and farmers. 'Cultural work' was integral to the programme as the 'defence of the national cultural heritage' was part of the 'fight for peace', representing as it did the resistance to the

imposition of American culture which was violent and warlike, as well as being part of the 'fight for national independence'. Events had revealed that: '... as the forces of peace and Socialism grow stronger all over the world, so the ideological struggle, which includes our cultural work, becomes increasingly important'.¹⁴

As far as the nature of 'Socialist Nationalisation' was concerned, to which the *British Road to Socialism* devoted one of its sections, it would encompass the means of recreation as well as means of production. As George Thomson lamented, the great promise of vastly expanded cultural and education facilities that had been opened up during the War had been thrown away:

So long as our cinemas, theatres, holiday camps, and other places of recreation are run for private profit, they will never be used to raise the cultural standards of the people. That can only be done when, under a people's democratic government, they have been brought under public ownership and control.¹⁵

Responding to the National Cultural Committee's growing visibility the Executive Committee passed a resolution on the 'Cultural Work of the Party' in January 1952 welcoming the work done by the Cultural Committee and the related Party groups. The resolution set down a number of points which it stated required greater development: further 'systematic efforts' by Communists in the professions to develop a 'Marxist outlook' in their own fields while at the same time 'bring their work closer to the Party organisations', a deeper study of *The British Road to Socialism* and bringing it to the attention of professional colleagues, and more public activity around both general political issues and professional questions. If this was not enough the resolution called on the Cultural Committee and the groups to carry out 'continuous study and popularisation' of the 'cultural advances' taking place in the USSR and the People's Democracies

and for Party artists, writers, and musicians to produce work based on Socialist Realism.

The CP 22nd National Congress that took place in April 1952, occupied a large portion of its time with discussing and endorsing *The British Road to Socialism*, which was significantly presented by John Gollan with a speech entitled 'People's Democracy For Britain'. However, part of Pollitt's report to Congress touched on the 'Cultural Question' and the whole issue of 'Britain's Cultural Heritage'. A welcome was given by delegates to the January resolution of the Executives and the Congress passed a further motion calling for 'ideological struggles' to be more closely linked to 'mass political struggles'. As the resolution made plain (*Resolutions and Proceedings, 22nd Nat. Cong*, pp. 5-6) this meant a call for films, exhibitions and posters, and musical events directed at working-class audiences, further popular campaigning against the American 'cultural threat' and proselytizing for 'our national cultural heritage'. Following on from this, in May 1952 several working-class trade unionist Communists were added to the National Cultural Committee to try and strengthen the link between the 'Cultural struggle' and the Party as organised in industry.

By 1949 the breadth and scale of the 'Cultural work',¹⁶ led to the creation of two sub-committees of the Cultural Committee. One was to deal with cultural-ideological questions while the other was concerned with more practical matters such as dealing with Government and municipal sponsoring of the Arts, Party organisation and the 'use of our forces'.¹⁷ Explaining this development Sam Aaronovitch has commented that:

to try and mix up Cultural Committee meetings which so to speak could jump from Intelligence Testing to, say, exhibitions of art just didn't work ... So in fact we divided the Committee ... into a body that became concerned with art and literature and its presentation and stuff like that and a committee which concerned itself primarily with ideological questions.¹⁸

On 24 and 25 May 1952, the third large keynote national 'Cultural' conference was held under the title 'Britain's Cultural Heritage in the Service of Peace and National Independence'. The event was welcomed by one Party member, a journalist,¹⁹ with the observation that at last after raising the issue of defending the 'British Cultural Heritage' a start had been made on defining what it precisely was. Attendance over the two days was in the region of 900, made up of 500 delegates from the various groups and Party Districts and 400 visitors. Again, a special edition of *Arena* was devoted solely to printing the speeches that were made at the Conference.²⁰ Professor George Thomson this time made the opening speech and gave the 'reply to the discussion' at the end of the Conference as Sam Aaronovitch had given more of an 'organisational progress report' to the delegates the evening before (24 May). Thomson reiterated the point that had been made for some time by leading Party figures such as Emile Burns²¹ that '... just as the proletariat, the class which leads the people on the road to socialism, was born out of the womb of capitalist society, so the new socialist culture will be drawn from all that is best in the cultural history ...'.²² Such 'greats' from the literary world as Burns, Bunyan, Shakespeare, Chaucer and Fielding were mentioned and quoted from. Their writings were 'classics' which were 'universal' in their appeal and value while at the same time displaying an 'essential Englishness' in their expression of English life, language and countryside. This was the 'cultural heritage' Thomson had in mind that should be defended and regarded with pride, while contemporary 'bourgeois culture' tended to be dismissed wholesale as 'decadent, reactionary, and cosmopolitan', although Thomson admitted there could be exceptions. Part of his contribution was devoted to describing how the Birmingham Clarion Singers, a 'workers' choir with a strong Party presence, had initially refused to perform any of the classics as they meant nothing to them, but over recent years had

changed their attitude. After producing Mozart's opera 'The Marriage of Figaro', they had gone on to perform six more operas, all but one, Thomson favourably recorded, were English. Among their number was 'The Beggar's Opera' and its satirical content attacking the abuses of power and calling for the reform of the state were as relevant as ever as was made apparent in the Clarion Singers' performance.²³ From this example Thomson drew the following lesson:

The truth is that all the greatest bourgeois masterpieces of music and drama had, in their own day, a revolutionary content. The contemporary bourgeoisie, ashamed of its own past, wants to empty them of content. Our task is to restore it in the light of Marxism-Leninism combined with our revolutionary experience.²⁴

Following contributions outlined some of the positive aspects of British 'tradition' or 'heritage' in science, (where Bernal spoke of British predominance in this area as expressed in 'three great periods'- 17th Century, late 18th and early 19th, late 19th and early 20th), architecture, art, films, and universities. Although at the Conference it was declared that the patriotism that was felt and expressed was 'Communist Patriotism' and was therefore inherently 'internationalist' a lot of what was stated, read in the present day, reeks of 'Little England' triumphantism.²⁵

At a District level there was a Tees-side Conference on Britain's Cultural Heritage held a few weeks after the national event, and in the early months of 1953 a 'Yorkshire Cultural Conference' took place in Leeds with just under 100 people taking part. One of the Party's summer schools for 1953 was jointly organised by the National Cultural Committee and the Education Department on 'Socialist Realism and the British Tradition'. The week long school²⁶ brought together Party members engaged in 'cultural fields' and leading industrial workers who were nominated by the District

Committees. Recommended reading was exclusively British Party material or Soviet or Chinese (Mao) writings, while 'essential reading' was made up of six titles: Stalin, *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*, Zhdanov, *On Literature, Music and Philosophy*, Mao Tse-Tung, *Problems of Arts and Literature*, Plekhanov, *Art and Social Life*, and the Report of the last national 'Cultural' conference, *Britain's Cultural Heritage*. There was no mention of reading matter which might give a 'bourgeois' approach and allow some first hand knowledge of some of the arguments that needed to be countered, which is perhaps another indication of the degree of political isolation, self-imposed in this case, the Party was in.

After papers were read on the various session topics by notable Party intellectuals, 'group discussions' were held around set questions like, for example, 'discuss the characteristics of socialist realism and describe in what ways it differs from bourgeois realism'. One 'group discussion' was held on an extended quotation of Malenkov's on Soviet art and literature; how it should bring out the 'typical' in life although 'Typicalness corresponds to the essence of the given social-historical phenomenon and is not simply what is most widespread ...'.²⁷ The group was asked to discuss how this could be applied to their own work in the British context.

In the evenings time was set aside for improving 'personal study', musical recitals, poetry and prose readings and film shows. Writing to Pollitt about the School Jack Cohen, a long-time Party fulltimer who had been responsible for 1930s student work, described the great inspiration participants had gained from the event:

Pride in the great British people, in our Party, the product of the British people, pride in the rich talent our Party possesses and uses on behalf of the struggle of the British people; above all, pride in

our Party's programme ... Figures famous nationally and internationally, like Alan Bush and Jack Lindsay, sat together with up-and-coming writers, musicians, actors, painters, architects and critics'.²⁸

He also expressed his delight that there were at least four genuine working-class writers and poets present (Dave Michaelson - ex-engineer, Les Green - transport worker, Norman Walsh - miner,^{and} Fred Ball - gardener who became the authority on Tressell. He had his preliminary study published in 1951 and the definitive biography, *One of the Damned* came out in 1973).

Attempts to 'raise' the prominence of the 'cultural struggle' within the Party as a whole were clearly apparent with the 1948 Centenary Pageant in celebration of the *Communist Manifesto*, which involved Communist musicians and artists among others. The following year, Tercentenary celebrations were held in order to mark the seventeenth century English Revolution as part of a Communist 'reclaiming' of the national past. An issue of the Party journal, *The Modern Quarterly* was given over to the 'English Revolution', but on a more popular level the National Cultural Committee organised a pageant. Communists from the theatre world, historians, artists and musicians collaborated in order to produce what was a large colourful set piece with two narrators, one to present the revolution and emphasise its progressive tendencies and another one to make occasional interjections to 'put the point of view of the exploited masses'.²⁹

The 22nd National Party Congress, apart from adding an amendment to *The British Road to Socialism*, which drew attention to the indispensable nature of science, art, music, and drama (p. 18), had been inaugurated the evening before its opening with a specially arranged concert. Alan Bush welcomed this with the commentary that it showed that the British Party was at long last catching up with the Italian, French and Dutch CPs who

had long given importance to the role of art as a part of their work (which included invitations to create special artistic works for Party congresses or special events). As Bush argued:

The expression in artistic form of our ideas will enable us to reach very many more people. Apart from that, it will help us to approach the people working in these fields ... They cannot deny that in the Soviet Union and in the New Democracies enormous sums of money are spent and tremendous developments in the artistic field are taking place, but now we can tell them that our Party in Britain will do the same.³⁰

Outside of London, Communists in Scotland and Wales began to associate themselves more with the indigenous culture of those regions,³¹ in particular Scottish Communists were active in establishing the Edinburgh People's Festival which, it is claimed, later developed into the Edinburgh Festival Fringe.³² The first People's Festival was held to coincide with the 1951 International Festival (26 August - 1 September) under the auspices of the 'Edinburgh Labour Festival Committee', a body which had come into existence on the initiative of the Edinburgh branches of the Workers' Music Association and the Musicians' Union together with a number of individuals. To launch the affair a one-day conference called 'Towards a People's Culture' took place, 'Perhaps the first conference of its kind in the history of the British Labour movement, other than the recent cultural conferences of the Communist Party'.³³ The conference was opened by Tom Driberg and a significant number of Labour Party members and trade union representatives were present so that Communists were distinctly in the minority, but they were well represented among the 'distinguished cultural workers' on the platform, e.g. Alex McCrindle (actor), Ralph Bond (film technician and director), and Ewan MacColl (folk singer and playwright). Events that followed over the week as part of the People's Festival included a performance by Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop of the anti-bomb play, 'Uranium 235' written by Ewan MacColl,

lectures by Hugh MacDiarmid and others, a 'Ceilidh' with Scottish and Gaelic folk-song, and a Hungarian film. Norman Buchan, who was involved in the People's Festival and was a CP student at Glasgow University at the time, leaving the Party in the wake of the 1956 'uproar' he joined Labour and until he recently resigned was Opposition spokesman for the arts, has recorded the feeling of revelation he experienced on hearing Scottish folk music. In his words: 'I genuinely wasn't aware of that kind of music's existence. Here was a popular form of art - direct and full of social content. From that moment I got very much involved in the whole folk revival'.³⁴

Communist involvement in the folk music revival was of course not restricted to Scotland. A.L. Lloyd had already produced the basis of his ground-breaking interpretive history of English folk song, *The Singing Englishman*,³⁵ as a WMA booklet by 1950. Folk music also figures prominently at the 1954 Association Summer School, lecturers and tutors included Lloyd, described as a 'folklorist and BBC singer', and A.L. Jeffery, a guitarist and folk singer. Sam Aaronovitch was also an active folk song enthusiast in the early 1950s: '... there was Alan Bush, there was Topic Records, Jerry Sharpe, people like Dallas, and of course Ewan MacColl ... we saw the folk-song revival as a big part of what we were trying to do in terms of our heritage and cultural development and the working-class contribution'.³⁶

After gaining the approval of the Party's Political Committee in May 1952 for the production of an 'occasional supplement' to *World News and Views*, the National Cultural Committee went ahead with its plans to issue a 'popular cultural magazine'. Again, the underlying idea behind the venture was to extend the party's 'cultural work' to working-class Communists:

We launched a journal called *Daylight* ... it was connected to *World News*. The first editor was Margot Heinemann and then I took over the editing of the last three or four issues ... it contained art work and stories, it was a cultural thing, not an intellectual thing ... people who had had Wartime experiences and wanted to say something about them or just express something about their lives on the factory bench, there were also poems ... I think there were only about seven or eight issues ... we were looking for working-class writers.³⁷

Established Party artists like Cliff Rowe, Reg Turner, and Paul Hogarth illustrated the journal while 'professional' advice was proffered to those who made contributions, of which there were more than 700 by *Daylight's* second year, many of whom were first time writers.

Coinciding with the publication of *Daylight* were determined efforts to produce a 'proletarian novel' which could be compared to the work of French ex-docker and Communist André Stil, whose book *The Water Tower* was much praised in the British Party press. Writing on behalf of 'People's Books' of 28-29 Southampton Street, London, WC2, Levy wished to convey to those participating in the 1953 Party Summer School the problems they had encountered after receiving many manuscripts: '... genuine working-class stuff in which the authors have had something valuable to say, but they have all fallen down on the same issues, and we have had to reject them all'.³⁸ The fundamental problem was:

It may irritate, annoy, it may be too blatantly expressed. I am finding that it is very rare to come across a worker who knows how to write - that is not surprising - but one who believes that there is such a thing as craftsmanship in writing as in any other job. This seems to be an extraordinary thing considering their own experience in their own work.³⁹

Levy then listed some of the major failings - characters speaking like political pamphlets, bosses presented as 'black as possible', use of clichés in words, characters and situations - in the hope that aspirant worker writers could avoid them. There were several 'worker writers' at

the School but otherwise Levy wanted these thoughts passed on to those professional and cultural workers present so they would be better prepared in encouraging any budding working-class Communist author.

Not dissimilar criticisms were made by Margot Heinemann of the contributions to *Daylight* which often, she claimed, presented the negative aspects of life with little expression of any hope or resistance. Yet the first issue of *Daylight* sold a not inconsiderable 9,000 copies and the average sale of the subsequent numbers was 8,500. One member, writing of the new venture, gave his opinion '... that factory workers overwhelmingly welcome it. The sharply critical note comes from some comrades, particularly of a literary persuasion themselves'.⁴⁰ At the same time there was a call for the extension of 'The Battle of Ideas' to the factories, and the National Cultural Committee initiated a campaign for the creation of factory libraries⁴¹ drawing up a list of suggested book categories with specific book titles.

The CP Artists' Group also attempted to bring their work more directly into the Party's political struggle and form a part of the 'revolutionary programme' - *The British Road to Socialism* - with the commencement of their 'People's Prints'; these were coloured prints, lino-cuts, and lithographs produced by the Group in largish numbers for sale through leftwing bookshops. Reg Turner, chairman of the Artists' Group, wrote that this initiative marked '... the first fruits of our artists' effort to face fully the reality of present-day struggles, and the first truly collective attempt to produce an art of immediate significance and lasting value, readily available to wide masses of our people'.⁴² Again, in order to try and search out artistic talent in the membership at large a 'National Print Competition' was held to which members of the Artists Group acted as a judging committee. The winner's entry, a lino-cut 'Old Age Pensioners', was selected for 'mass production'

as a 'People's Print' as the prize. A negative overall assessment of the quality of the entries was, however, given by the National Cultural Committee: 'the drawings were drab and colourless, the working-class struggles appeared as unhappy affairs, as a struggle with misery, rather than a fight for better conditions'.⁴³

The next large scale National Cultural Committee conference took place in October 1953 with 750 delegates from the Groups, Party Districts, and the YCL, and 300-400 visitors.⁴⁴ John Gollan's delivery of a long opening speech 'Communism and Mankind' indicated the Party leadership's interest in the occasion and the continuing importance they attached to the 'Cultural fight', but in comparison with the previous 'Cultural Conferences' the event did not receive the same degree of publicity. The novelty had worn off along with the clear-cut ideological positions of the 'high' Cold War period (1952 Stalin announcement that the threat of war had diminished, Stalin's death March 1953, and the end of the Korean War on 27 July 1953 marked a new uncertain phase for world Communism). These large set-piece conferences eventually came to an end with the one in January 1955: 'Culture and the British People'. It was left to Tom Russell and Arnold Kettle to give the opening reports, and over the two days there were only about 750 people in attendance (delegates and visitors) which is something of a decrease on past numbers. Significantly, despite reassuringly quoting an Arts Council phrase, 'few but roses', only three new Party members were made out of the event.⁴⁵

- 8 Anti-Americanism was by no means uncommon in more conventional cultural circles at this time.
- 4 M. Barker, *A Haunt of Fears - The Strange History of the British Horror Comics Campaign*, p. 21.
- 5 S. Aaronovitch, *Arena*, June/July 1951, 'The U.S.A. Threat to British Culture', p. 17.
- 6 This popularisation of local history could be best carried out, in Sinnott's opinion, in a dramatic form involving Party members who were historians, artists and actors.
- 7 E.P. Thompson, 'William Morris and the Moral Issues To-day', *Arena*, June/July 1951, 'The U.S.A. Threat to British Culture', p. 26.
- 8 *The British Road to Socialism*, January 1951, p. 14.
- 9 See *The Times*, 18 November 1946.
- 10 The Soviet leadership did not show '... the slightest interest in a deeper analysis of French and Italian opportunism'. F. Claudin, *The Communist Movement*, p. 385.
- 11 British Communists have always laid great weight on the 'pathbreaking' nature of *The British Road to Socialism* and often claimed it as foreshadowing the later development of Eurocommunism. However, although it may be the first such programme similar developments took place at more or less the same time in other Western European Communist parties, e.g. Swedish CP Central Committee's pronouncement in October 1950 that the rejection of the line in 1944-48 (that there was a possibility for a peaceful transition to Socialism) had been wrong and its endorsement of a new programme in 1953 endorsing the 'peaceful road'. The Danish Party's *Det Danske Folks Vej* (The Danish People's Way), a 60 page programme which in essentials was the same as *The British Road to Socialism* was adopted in early 1952 at their 17th Congress (the *Det Danske Folks Vej* is discussed in *Kommunisterne og arbejderklassen 1945-1975* by Steen Bille Larsen, pp. 78-81). These developments were the result of national forces and the much greater representation of professional and middle-class people in the ranks of European CPs, and the international strategy of the Soviet Union. It is one of the recurring contradictions of world Communism that while the trials in Eastern Europe were taking place and irradicating 'independent/national' Communists the sanction was given for 'national roads to Socialism' to be adopted by West European CPs.
- 12 J. Gollan, *Reformism and Revolution*, p. 54.
- 13 *The British Road to Socialism*, January 1951, p. 10.
- 14 G. Thomson, 'Our Cultural Work in the Light of Our Party Programme', *Communist Review*, September 1951, p. 274.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 275.

- 16 Excluding students and those in groups not directly under the National Cultural Committee there were 600-700 members actively involved in this area.
- 17 See *Our Weekly Letter*, No. 20, 16 May 1952.
- 18 S. Aaronovitch, interview 12 February 1986.
- 19 See Derek Kartun, 'The Conference on "Britain's Cultural Heritage"', *World News and Views*, 14 June 1952.
- 20 *The British Cultural Heritage - Arena Publication*, 1952.
- 21 An example is Burns's article responding to 'the controversy on culture' in the pages of the *Daily Worker* in the early weeks of 1951.
- 22 G. Thomson, op. cit., p. 9.
- 23 The man largely responsible for the formation of the Clarion Singers was a general practitioner in Birmingham, Dr. Colin Bradsworth, who joined the CP in 1935 and served as a surgeon in Spain with the Republican forces. On his return to Birmingham he founded a choir to popularise Republican and I.B. songs and from this developed the Clarion Singers - see article on the choir, 'Singers sound Clarion call for progressive movement' by J. Saunders, *The Morning Star*, 14 August 1984.
- 24 G. Thomson, op. cit., p. 16.
- 25 Theoretically little was added to what had been written in the 1930s by such as Fox's *The Novel and the People*.
- 26 Sessions were held on historical materialism, the basis and superstructure, the realist and progressive tradition in the British arts up to imperialism, monopoly capitalist ideology and revolutionary ideology in the arts, some problems of the struggle for socialist realism, and the *British Road to Socialism* and the role of the arts and of Communist workers in the arts.
- 27 Malenkov as quoted in the 'Outline Syllabus for the School on Socialist Realism "' 25 March 1953'.
- 28 *Our Letter*, 26 June 1953, no. 24.
- 29 'Sketch for a Pageant on 1649' - discussion document for National Cultural Committee, 22 April 1948.
- 30 *World News and Views*, 3 May 1952, pp. 198-99.
- 31 The 1952 revised draft of *The British Road to Socialism* included a new call for 'full recognition of the national claims of the Scottish and Welsh peoples ...', p. 8.
- 32 Some trace the origins of the 'Fringe' back to 1947 when eight theatre groups turned up who were not on the official Festival's programme. It seems likely that the Edinburgh People's Festival helped give a permanence to the unofficial phenomenon.

- 33 Martin Milligan, 'Edinburgh People's Festival', *Communist Review*, March 1952.
- 34 N. Buchan as quoted in a profile of him, 'A Scottish Campaigner of Worth', *The Guardian*, 28 November 1983.
- 35 A number of WMA booklets, e.g. *Talking of Music*, by H.G. Sear, published in 1946, were pathbreaking in that they attempted to write about music throughout the ages, explaining its form and nature by placing it in its socio-historical context. However, probably the foremost work of this type was *Chamber Music in England* (1946) by the German Communist exile Dr. Ernst Meyer; the first work in English on the great age of church music from the Middle Ages to Purcell.

The 1951 Festival of Britain concert was also titled 'The Singing Englishman' (by Sir George Dyson) and involved brass band music, something which was favourably viewed in the *Daily Worker*, 12 June 1951: '"The Singing Englishman" is true proletarian music. The brass band is a proletarian institution'. As an aside the Festival of Britain was given positive coverage by the Party; it showed British skill at its best, 'Something the Yanks Can't Buy', subheading *Daily Worker*, 19 April 1951.

- 36 S. Aaronovitch, interview 12 February 1986.
- 37 *ibid.*
- 38 Letter 11 June 1953, Michaelson Papers, MRC.
- 39 *Ibid.*
- 40 *World News and Views*, 25 April 1953.
- 41 See 'Factory Libraries', *World News and Views*, 31 January 1953, p. 58.
- 42 R. Turner, 'People's Prints', *World News and Views*, 30 August 1952.
- 43 S. Aaronovitch, 'The C.P. - Cultural Work as Mass Work', *World News and Views*, 3 January 1953.
- 44 About 60 people took part in discussions after the set speeches raising such things as: factory libraries, the 'magnificent work in the field of folk music', and the production of a play on George Lansbury, 'Guilty and Proud of it', by the Popular CP branch.
- 45 Source - *Our Letter*, 4 February 1955.

CHAPTER 12

The 'Ideological Struggle' and the Emerging 'Orthodoxy'

Introduction - summary

The period of the 'Battle of Ideas' saw a tightening of 'Marxist' orthodoxy and the criticism of theoretical work by Party 'intellectuals' that was felt to make too many concessions to modern bourgeois thought. International pressures and influences from Australian, French but above all else the Soviet Communists encouraged some of the British Party leadership to try and exercise a greater control over its intellectual and professional members. This attempt at greater Party orthodoxy coincided with the general Cold War build up and a decline in the Wartime artistic and cultural enthusiasm which had provided such a fertile area for initiatives by Communists, such as the journal *Our Time* (or the expansion of Unity Theatre leading to the momentary creation of a professional troupe in 1946, lasting 14 months). Again in another of the seeming contradictions of the Communist movement, while West European CPs attempted to bind themselves more closely to their own national traditions, Soviet theoretical and cultural debates and practices took on a greater power. The Party leadership called upon its professional members to study and learn from their opposite numbers in the Soviet Union and to a lesser degree in the People's Democracies. Of course it had always been the case that the 'motherland of socialism' exercised enormous influence over Communists throughout the world but during and after the War it was possible to question whether it was necessary or a good idea to emulate Soviet ideas in every respect. The changing atmosphere in the British Party was evidenced in the increasingly staid nature of *The Modern Quarterly* and the sudden emergence of a controversy over Caudwell and his

theoretical worth; as is clear from this debate there continued to be a variety of opinion in the Party with a lively element which did not submit to everything propounded with the authority of the Party centre.

* * * * *

The 'ideological struggle' and the emerging 'orthodoxy'

Criticism of the British Party's past policies during the last stages of the War and immediate Post-War period was made by the Australian Communist Party, in particular in a speech given by Richard Dixon (National President of the ACP) to his Party's Political Committee on 10-11 January 1948. The British CP leadership defended itself vigorously from this attack but a more deferential attitude was adopted towards its much larger and more successful fellow Party across the Channel, the French Communist Party. With its membership of the Cominform the French Party was given added authority and the British Party leaders looked to it for guidance on political and ideological questions.

Early on in its existence the National Cultural Committee gave an importance to developing links with French Party 'intellectuals'. Meetings were arranged in Oxford, Cambridge, London, Edinburgh and Manchester to be addressed by French Communist 'intellectuals' and the establishment of regular contacts between the British 'Cultural groups' and corresponding French groups was encouraged.¹ The French connection tended to encourage the movement towards a greater theoretical and ideological orthodoxy among the British Party 'cultural workers', scientists, academics and other professionals - conveying the increasingly hardline position of the Soviet leadership to the British Party. Thus *The Modern Quarterly* was reprimanded by its equivalent number in France, *La Pensée* in May-June 1950:

By his statement on questions of philosophy, Zhdanov has equipped us and led us on to more advanced positions than we have previously held. But to speak sharply, the Marxism of *The Modern Quarterly* seems to us sometimes somewhat insular. It admits Marx and Engels, who lived for so long there. Does it understand sufficiently the real role, the leading role of the USSR?²

A short editorial made no attempt to contradict the critique of the journal but instead asked readers to acknowledge that efforts had been made in the issues that had been published since the *La Pensée* 'attack' to correct the various 'weaknesses' that had been pointed out.

The call for Party members in the professions to look across to their Soviet counterparts for both inspiration and theoretical insight was a growing refrain in the Party. National Cultural Committee 'extended meetings' were called to discuss the 'significance' of the Soviet discussions and decisions on art, philosophy and economics.³ Virtually the whole of the National Cultural Committee meeting on 9 December 1951 was taken up with discussing the 'significance' of Stalin's statement on linguistics. Still, there was a great deal of divergence in the Party as how to regard Stalin's, Zhdanov's, or Soviet theoretical, scientific, and cultural proclamations. Some Party members saw it as their duty to be self-appointed guardians of Communist 'purity', something which was measured in how far British CP theory and practice emulated that of Soviet Communism.⁴ A fairly typical example of this trend would be the following pre-congress contribution:

Unfortunately there are still too many of our comrades who regard the Soviet Union's decided opinion in many cultural and scientific matters as being a misfortune, mainly because a Soviet restatement may require a re-evaluation and some hard thinking on their part in their professional work.⁵

Rodney Hilton, because of his prominent position in the Historians' Group, was both on the editorial board of *The Modern Quarterly* and a member of the National Cultural Committee and remembers ideological clashes among various Communists, particularly at Committee meetings. In his words: 'There were some quite sharp conflicts there [i.e. National Cultural Committee - SRP] over Zhdanovism and that sort of thing'. One figure on the Committee Hilton remembers, who came in for a good deal of criticism for his ideological failings was Jack Lindsay. One meeting remains memorable for Hilton because Lindsay faced a very harsh verbal assault from Maurice Cornforth, a leading 'hard-line' Party theoretician, which he just quietly accepted with resignation. This surprised Hilton as Lindsay had already published and translated a considerable mass of work revealing an extremely wide range of knowledge and interest.⁷ 'I think he just thought "bugger it" and kept quiet'.⁸ It was at this time that Lindsay's attempt to, as he has explained, 'work out a unitary dialectic' in his book, *Marxism and Contemporary Science*, published in 1949 came in for a very critical review in *Labour Monthly*. Lindsay had committed a whole number of 'cardinal sins', including an endeavour to reconcile and utilise certain psychological theories with Marxism (Gestalt Psychology) which encouraged the expression of such 'idealistic' sentiments as: 'We cannot define Shakespeare in class terms'. The book was declared, as the review heading put it, 'No Guide to Marxism' and although Lindsay meant well like so many other writers, who had announced over the years that they were Marxists, he remained strongly under 'bourgeois influences'. Lindsay had seriously blurred the class struggle, it was claimed, in his exposition of Marxism and he would be best advised:

to ponder over the latest discussions in the Soviet Union on philosophy and literature, and fight against cosmopolitanism, the situation in the

biological sciences, to see that the blurring of the class struggle by some Soviet writers has led them to basic errors and a distortion of Marxism.⁹

The two cultural magazines which Lindsay, among others, was associated with, *Our Time* and *Arena*, also suffered indifference if not downright hostility from the CP leaders at this juncture. *Our Time* had successfully 'broadened' its nature during the War after the Soviet Union had become an ally, with interesting and entertaining articles from a wide range of 'cultural figures'.¹⁰ The journal suffered in the Cold War situation, finding it impossible to maintain the 'progressive alliance' that had been brought together around the fervour of War-time artistic endeavour and optimism. On the one hand people like Spender and Orwell were becoming increasingly antagonistic about having anything to do with Communists,¹¹ and on the other the CP leadership was becoming suspicious of 'joint ventures' between Communists and such literati. Lindsay describes the situation faced by *Our Time* and its publishing firm Fore Publications around 1948:

paper was getting more plentiful; commercial interests were getting the means in the publishing and entertainment worlds to "give the people what they wanted", and so on. I almost brought off a linkage of Fore Publications with a sympathetic firm that would have given us a new lease of life, but was defeated by some political sectarians on the board.¹²

Arena was an ambitious project of Lindsay's, started in 1949 with the objective of bringing together some of the foremost international Wartime writers, or, as Lindsay puts it, 'resistance writers': Sitwell, Malcolm Lowry, Pasternak, Camus et al. A short dismissive review of the new undertaking in the *Daily Worker* complained that it was very difficult to understand and full of jargon.¹³ This evaluation took two years and was the only comment forthcoming in the Party press apart from advertising the

three special editions that were taken up with National Cultural Committee conferences/school. A run of the journal in the CP library gives an indication of how some Party members at the Centre regarded the ideas behind it, as the editorial note in the first number is heavily annotated with underlinings, and question and exclamation marks:

... a give-and-take between Marxism in its critical aspects and the free play of the creative?? elements in our culture; [the underlining and question marks reproduced as made in pen in the CP library's copy - SRP] it aims at separating-out and strengthening all that genuinely reveals the artist's prophetic function, his capacity to reach ahead into various aspects of the integration that his world!! [exclamation marks added to the CP's copy - SRP] lacks but needs for its advance. And that means also showing how this function worked out in the past.¹⁴

The Caudwell Controversy

One of the best known illustrations of the tightening grip of orthodoxy in the CP is the dispute which took place over the philosophical and political legacy of Christopher Caudwell. Caudwell, whose real name was Christopher St. John Sprigg, after following the family tradition of leaving school early and embarking upon a career in journalism became radicalised in the mid-thirties and joined the Communist Party in 1935. A reticent and very hard working member of the Party's Poplar Branch, he nevertheless devoted much of his spare time, while not involved in everyday Party work and writing novels to earn a living, to developing Marxist theory in the field of culture. He went to Spain to join the International Brigade and died helping to defend the Spanish Republic at the battle of Jarama on 12 February 1937, still only 29 years old. It was only after his death that the manuscripts he had been working on went for publication and leading Party figures began to appreciate the impressive and innovative nature of his work. S. Weintraub's *The Last Great Cause*

(pp. 39-40) claims that Caudwell's brother attempted to get the Party to recall Caudwell from Spain by convincing them that it was putting under great danger a theorist of major stature. He showed a set of galley proofs of one of Caudwell's excursions into Marxist aesthetics to a leading Party functionary who immediately realised its importance. Instructions were sent out that Caudwell was to return but by that time it was too late, he had been killed.

In 1937 Caudwell's *Illusion and Reality: A Study of the Sources of Poetry* was published, followed by *Studies in a Dying Culture* in 1938, and *The Crisis in Physics* in 1939. The sophistication of much of Caudwell's Marxism, which used and referred to a remarkable range of literature (as is apparent from the bibliographies in his books), ensured that Caudwell's work made a significant impression on a whole number of Communist 'intellectuals'. His work was again reissued fairly soon after the end of the War and in the 1946 edition of *Illusion and Reality* an introduction by George Thomson claimed him as an archetypal Communist intellectual: 'a man of genius' who wrote books destined to be 'classics', while at the same time 'a man of action' involved with working-class life and struggle. The complexity and scale of Caudwell's undertakings meant that his books were veritable 'gold mines' for discussions and debates. In 1947 the Party held a conference on Caudwell in London and in 1948 the National Cultural Committee had produced a 'Syllabus on the origins and characteristics of poetry based on Christopher Caudwell's *Illusion and Reality*'. The CP theoretical journal *Communist Review* carried an article, presumably based on a paper delivered at the aforementioned Caudwell conference, by Alick West on *Illusion and Reality* (January 1948). For West the ideas in the book were not just of interest to those concerned with poetry and literature but were of importance to all Communists:

'Caudwell's ideas about poetry concern every comrade because the lifeblood of these ideas is that the history of man is the advance to freedom'.¹⁵

Then suddenly the Caudwell reputation in Marxist theory was thrown into doubt with the publication of an authoritative critique of Caudwell's works in *The Modern Quarterly* by Maurice Cornforth at the end of 1950. Cornforth's article bears all the hallmarks of a '... small purgative exercise in the Zhdanov mode'.¹⁶ Cornforth declared the view that Caudwell's '... thought is nebulous, shifting, eclectic and inconsistent; because he clothes simple things in a veil of obscure phrases, and drags with him the confusions of bourgeois ideology'.¹⁷ Zhdanov's ideological offensive in the Soviet Union represented the further ossification of Marxism-Leninism into a closed ideology. It was now an irrevocable law that all art was partisan and there was nothing to be learnt from today's 'bourgeois' cultural figures, 'however fine may be the external appearance of the work of the fashionable modern bourgeois writers ... film directors and theatrical producers ... its moral basis is rotten and decaying'.¹⁸ It therefore followed that Caudwell's Marxism, with its references and citings of numerous works of conventional Western scholarship and attempts to integrate aspects of Freudian psychology and Weismann genetics into the body of its arguments, ran very much counter to Zhdanovism.

Maurice Cornforth, a Cambridge philosophy graduate (M.A.) as was his wife, had already recounted the gist of Zhdanov's speech to Soviet philosophers to a British audience ¹⁹ and had used the authority of Zhdanov to criticise failings in a book by John Lewis, *Marxism and Modern Idealism*.²⁰ An argument had blown up among editorial members of *The Modern Quarterly* over the merits of Caudwell and an article contributed to the journal by Thomson: 'Notes on Caudwell's *Illusion and Reality*' became the subject of a dispute. There was opposition to publishing it, even though Thomson was on the editorial board, and in September-October 1949

Dutt was asked for his opinion over the article and whether it should be printed. Dutt, of course, was firmly opposed to Thomson's laudatory opinions of Caudwell's writings, believing them to be fundamentally flawed, but he had '... the greatest respect for Comrade Thomson's opinion, and for this reason consider that he has the right for his viewpoint to be published without interference by those who may disagree'.²¹ The reply from Dutt also gives an indication of the dissension over the issue within the editorial board:

If the Editorial Board desires that any article should be an expression of a common viewpoint, then it is evident that further prior discussion would be necessary, as is already clear from the views expressed by the majority of the members of the Board in the preliminary discussion held at an earlier meeting;²²

However, before anything by Thomson on Caudwell was published in the journal Maurice Cornforth's article came out. How much this was planned as a one-off 'ex-cathedra statement', as E.P. Thompson maintains, is open to question (although there is a strong suspicion that it was). Whatever may have been planned there were strong demands that other points of view regarding Caudwell be published and the next issue of *The Modern Quarterly* carried a reply to Cornforth by Thomson.²³ A note from the Editor at the end of Thomson's article mentioned that as a result of a 'regrettable oversight' it had not been made clear before that Cornforth's piece was the start of a discussion series on Caudwell. Following this in *The Modern Quarterly*, Summer 1951, there were invited contributions from three leading cultural figures in the Party: Alan Bush, Alick West, and Montagu Slater, and a further three abridged offerings from the unsolicited ones that had been sent in. Force of opinion may have led to an extension of the discussion and the expression of contrary ideas to those of

Cornforth's; nevertheless the 'Discussion Series' was brought to a swift conclusion.

This display of ideological indiscipline resulted, according to Peter Cadogan, in the winding up of the journal and its replacement by *The Marxist Quarterly* by decision of the Executive Committee in 1953.

In this way were the people who supposed themselves to be the governing body of the journal summarily dismissed. Thomson and West were invited to join the Advisory Council of the new journal but the change of name in itself indicates what had happened. No Editorial Board, that might have ideas different to those of the EC, was to be allowed to exist.²⁴

Cadogan has also disclosed that Maurice Dobb asked him, in his role as a member of the 'Commission on Inner Party Democracy' in 1956, to submit a letter of protest over the arbitrary closure of *The Modern Quarterly*.²⁵ There may be some truth in this that the reigning in of rebellious Party 'intellectuals' and academics was one of the motivations behind the ending of *The Modern Quarterly*, although this hardly fits into E.P. Thompson's view of *The Modern Quarterly* as the leading intellectual exponent of 'Jungle Marxism'.²⁶ Furthermore, the officially stated reasons, that both *The Modern Quarterly* and *Communist Review* were replaced by the creation of *The Marxist Quarterly* on the recommendation of an E.C. Commission on Party periodicals, should not be dismissed out of hand. The grounds given for the changes were that to halt falling sales a new journal '... that can be understood by all readers, and not only by experts'²⁷ needed to be produced; *The Modern Quarterly* had long been accused of being the province of 'experts' to the exclusion of all others.²⁸ Of course to some Party members 'experts' like the term 'intellectuals' would be seen as implying non-working-class or Communists of bourgeois origins in

professional occupations, an area always likely to give rise to 'anti-Party' theories (it was by no means necessary for those holding this view to be workers themselves; in fact leading advocates of this view in 1956-57 were middle-class).

Footnotes

- 1 Source - *Our Letter*, 1 October 1948.
- 2 André Lentin, 'Fraternal Criticism of the Modern Quarterly', *The Modern Quarterly*, Winter, 1950-51.
- 3 National Cultural Committee meeting 7 May 1948, Minutes.
- 4 Several of those I have communicated with felt from their own experience that there was a change in the London District after the War and that the more open style of Ted Bramley's leadership was replaced by a much less tolerant one under John Mahon. For example, Jim Fyrth has written: 'After the War I thought that the London District had become (under Mahon) very narrow and authoritarian' (J. Fyrth, letter 11 May 1983). One of those active in the Writers' Group has also referred to conflicts between King Street and the LDC over the various professional groups and under whose aegis they fell: 'After the War the LDC was phenomenally sectarian. It also insisted upon the priority of area branch membership' (A. Rattenbury, letter 2 April 1989).

As far as the Party is concerned as a whole the Political Committee released a resolution on 'Political Vigilance' - warning all members to be on their guard against efforts to penetrate the Party and calling for a 'strengthening' of the political line.
- 5 Jane Barbour, *World News and Views*, 16 February 1952.
- 6 Rodney Hilton, interview 14 December 1983.
- 7 See 'Handlist of Publications' with 168 works itemised in Jack Lindsay, *Life Rarely Tells*, pp. 811-16.
- 8 R. Hilton, interview 14 December 1983.
- 9 C. Allen, 'No to Marxism' - review of Lindsay's book, *Labour Monthly*, November 1949.
- 10 *Our Time* was not owned by the Party but by the Swingler family, with Randall acting as their representative: 'Randall and all his nominees (either while absent at war, or while preferring not to edit on demobilisation) were Communists. But it is precisely wrong to think of it as a "party journal" and deduce "party policies" from it. Its policies were self-determined ... and frequently at loggerheads with King Street' (Arnold Rattenbury, 'Notes for Steve Parsons: *Our Time* and Professional Groups', 2 April 1989). Rattenbury, one of those closely concerned with the journal, becoming for a time assistant editor, puts the date of a real 'broadening' of *Our Time*'s content as the summer of 1944. The journal had been taken over in 1943 by a number of CP members involved with the WMA and Unity Theatre (and some Equity and MU people) who had been on the lookout for their own cultural mouthpiece. Vernon Beste, a leading Unity actor and organiser of the CP 'Cultural Groups Committee' (see letter by him in *World News and Views*, 10 July 1943), became editor. To legitimise the 'takeover' those involved '... sought and gained the support of King Street for an approximately proletkultish policy; and Vernon tied the paper closely to King Street by means of weekly meetings. This was the position when

I returned at the end of 1943 ... From then until the summer of 1944 occurred a lengthy struggle to re-secure the journal for the committed artists, writers, and musicians for whom Randall had founded it - although it was not in fact until the November 44 issue that Edgell Rickword was installed as editor'. (A Rattenbury, 'Notes for Steve Parsons ...', 2 April 1989).

- 11 An account of Orwell's enmity towards a young Communist associated with *Our Time* who visited him is included in Stephen Wadhams' *Remembering Orwell*, pp. 178-82.
- 12 J. Lindsay, *Life Rarely Tells*, p. 801.
- 13 *Daily Worker*, 22 March 1951.
- 14 *Arena*, no. 1, 1949, Editorial Note - undoubtedly the work of Lindsay although for the first issue the journal is credited with three editors: Lindsay, John Davenport and Randall Swingler.
- 15 A. West, 'On *Illusion and Reality*', *Communist Review*, January 1948, p. 8.
- 16 E.P. Thompson, 'Caudwell', *The Socialist Register*, 1977, p. 232.
- 17 M. Cornforth, 'Caudwell and Marxism', *The Modern Quarterly*, Winter 1950-51, pp. 17-18.
- 18 A.A. Zhdanov, 'Report on the journals *Zvezda* and *Leningrad*, 1947', in *On Literature, Music and Philosophy*, pp. 47-48.
- 19 *The Modern Quarterly*, Winter 1947-48, 'The Recent Discussion of Philosophy'.
- 20 'On Partisanship in Philosophy', *Communist Review*, January 1949.
- 21 Opinion on George Thomson's 'Notes on Caudwell's *Illusion and Reality*', *The Modern Quarterly*, 4 October 1949, Dutt Papers.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 I do not know how close it - 'In Defence of Poetry', *The Modern Quarterly*, Spring 1951 - was to his previously submitted 'Notes on Caudwell's *Illusion and Reality*'.
- 24 Peter Cadogan, 'The British Communist Party in the Light of 1956', *The Review*, Vol. 3, No. 4, 1961.
- 25 Source - ^{Peter Cadogan,} letter 21 January 1984.
- 26 For E.P. Thompson's view of *The Modern Quarterly* and its editor John Lewis see his essay on 'Caudwell' in *The Socialist Register*, 1977; by 'Jungle Marxism' it was meant an unbending exposition of the orthodox Stalinist/Zhdanovian 'line' and an exposé of all signs of 'bourgeois deviationism' within Marxism. However, the obituary of John Lewis in the *Morning Star*, 13 February 1976, claims that he '... staunchly supported a scientific stand' in the biological sciences (which he had taught) at the time of the "Lysenko controversy".

²⁷ Statement of Aims, *The Marxist Quarterly*, January 1954, p. 2.

²⁸ Source - Monty Johnstone, letter 14 April 1983.

CHAPTER 13

The Engels Society, Socialist Realism and Ideological Conformity

Introduction - summary

Among the Party's organised professional/specialist groups the Scientists were among the first to face the problems of coming to terms with a hardening of the ideological nature of Marxism-Leninism. This took place at a time of significantly heightened Cold War tensions. Science and certain Party scientists had occupied a prominent place in the Communist Party public image, thus leading Party ideologists felt it was all the more necessary to correct 'mistakes' in this area in light of developments in the Soviet Union. The National Science Committee of the CP was disbanded and the more ideological Engels Society took its place. Despite the enthusiasm of leading exponents of the 'Battle of Ideas' and Bernal's involvement in the exercise, the Engels Society had petered out before the mid-fifties. The Party Scientists' Group was thus the first of such professional or Cultural Committee groups to disappear, in marked contrast, the Historians' Group went from strength to strength in the same period. Historiography was never a major public issue in the Zhdanovian campaign of 'rectification' in the Soviet Union, and Communist historians could continue their work with little overt intervention by leading Party figures from outside the Group. Party artists, musicians and writers faced varying degrees of 'Zhdanovian pressure' and they had to respond to those aspects of Soviet reality that corresponded to their own fields at various times. There were obviously a whole number of different attitudes as to how socialist realism, a concept that gained even more weight during this period, could be applied to their work and help to make it relevant to the struggle of the working-class. For Party musicians and

artists the 'attitude of ideas' encouraged them in their search for national/folk traditions (this applied mostly to music) and in their pedagogical efforts to search out and train working-class talent.

* * * * *

Communist Scientists and the formation of the Engels Society

Signs of difficulties in the Party's science work seem to be indicated by the time and trouble that was spent on releasing a CP memorandum on science. The Science Advisory Committee of the Party drew up a detailed policy document on the use and development of science for the immediate task of post-war reconstruction. This document was finished at the end of 1945 and submitted for approval by the Communist Party Executive Committee, however, the Executive referred the memorandum back to the Scientists' group for revision and delegated three of their number (Dutt, Burns and Horner) to help in the task.¹ Unfortunately there are no details about what needed revising, but it was 1947 before the memorandum was eventually published as *A Plan for Science*. By the following year the underlying politics of the Party's approach to reconstruction and the Government had completely altered, and the organisation of science could only be realistically 'considered' within the context of an overall economic plan: '... But the Government has abandoned economic planning because of the hostility of capitalist interests ... to consider increasing productivity without reference to the political and class aspects of production means at the present juncture to co-operate in the aims of monopoly capital to maintain profits by intensifying the exploitation of workers'.² It is within this context that in mid-1948 the Party leadership took the decision to liquidate the Science Advisory Committee.³ Writing on the disbanding of the Committee a retired Electrical

Engineering Professor, who at the time was a young Party scientist, remarks: 'I knew some of the members and the reason was the early growth of scepticism and consequential disagreement, which in a body committed to "democratic centralism" could not be tolerated'.⁴

Ideological questions concerning the question of Marxism and science would now be the concern of 'The Engels Society', while specific questions and points of policy in the scientific field would be dealt with by prominent Party scientists and/or trade unionists (A.Sc.W) in consultation with the Political Committee.⁵ 'The Engels Society' had been formed in London sometime after the War (Werskey puts the date as 1946) as a discussion forum for debating the problems of science and the philosophy of science on the basis of Marxism-Leninism, but it was not until 1948 that the Society really began to change into a more formal and outward-going body. Not until the middle of 1948 did the Society even have an executive committee and then it was initially 'provisional', while the first printed bulletin issued under its name came out as late as July 1948. 'The Engels Society' became the centre of the efforts for 'improving' the Party's science work and rectifying the ideological weakness there had been in this area of CP organisation. Two of the key figures in the Society were Bernal - another indication of just how close he was to the Party - and Cornforth. Together they wrote a book, *Science for Peace and Socialism*, that crystallised the new approach to science. Bernal, in the first part of the book, gave an account of the ways science had been affected (Americanised and militarised) by the rise of American imperialism and its by-product, the Marshall Plan. Gone was the attitude he had struck in 1946 where he had raised the possibility of all human beings having 'a chance of full development' without the necessity for a Socialist revolution.

The second half of the book (written by Cornforth)⁷ was of a more philosophical character, subtitled 'The Battle of Ideas in Science'. The main characteristics of 'bourgeois science' were outlined and contrasted with the emerging 'new science' of the Soviet Union, namely 'Socialist science'. In what was a clear admonition of past errors afflicting Party scientists Cornforth drew attention to what he said were two general misconceptions: that dialectics is simply the generalisation of the results of science and interlinked with this:

that dialectics is the same as scientific method, and that therefore all scientists are, as it were, natural dialecticians. To say this is to overlook the fact that dialectics refutes the limited and rigid ideas of "scientific method" which are taught by bourgeois specialists and expresses new and advanced ideas of scientific method.⁸

Anti-war work and the popularisation of scientific knowledge so as to spread popular enlightenment and counter reactionary mystical beliefs still remained constant elements of the duties of Party scientists. Yet now 'Such genuine popular science can only be achieved by scientists who have broken with the reactionary trends of bourgeois science'.⁹ There were, however, varying degrees of emphasis laid on what actually constituted 'Socialist science', and leading Party figures, such as Klugmann, were keener to describe Soviet science as more 'completely scientific' than as a new science. It was more scientific because Soviet scientists were not encumbered by a philosophical attitude which hindered them in their scientific discoveries. Quite the reverse: they worked in a context where a 'world scientific outlook' (Marxism-Leninism) was predominant within the society. As Klugmann concluded: '... natural science is a product of many epochs. It has a content of objective truth, which is independent of man or mankind, a content which does not change and is not eliminated with the ending of a given mode of production'.¹⁰

As well as this difference in interpretation there were conflicting arguments as to whether or not it was inevitable for scientists in capitalist societies to be carrying out 'capitalist science'; or, what if any, differences in scientific methodology there were between Western and Soviet scientists.¹¹

It was over actual developments in particular areas of Soviet science and specifically the controversy surrounding Lysenko that there were the most damaging conflicts among Party scientists, and between some of their number and the Party leadership. Lysenko had come to completely dominate the field of agricultural and biological theoretical and practical research in the USSR following the War. His reputation rested upon the rejection of conventional genetics and evolutionary theory in favour of what was known as the Michurin school of biology, which was, simply put, the theory of the inheritance of acquired characteristics. In 1948 Lysenko gave a report to the Lenin Academy of Agricultural Sciences which, with the approval of the CPSU Central Committee, finally spelt the death knell to Mendelian genetics in the Soviet Union. By decision of the Soviet government, Michurin-Lysenko theories would form the only basis for the teaching of biological evolution in universities and institutions. Lysenkoism became a major international issue and was used as evidence of the totalitarian nature of Soviet society, where even the freedom of science was destroyed in the interests of ideological correctness. For Cornforth it was '... the sharpest struggle of all between new progressive trends in science and bourgeois idealist distortions of science'.¹² It followed from this interpretation that support for Lysenko/Michurin ideas in biology should be given by all Communists. The state intervened in scientific matters in capitalist societies to protect or advance capitalist aims, while in the Soviet Union it intervened to ensure that science was carried out in the best interests of the people. Lysenkoism

was promoted in the USSR because a party and Government guided by dialectical materialism '... can appreciate new scientific advances and see how the new facts, and new results obtained, if properly interpreted, can remove the blinkers of the old outlook ...'.¹³

Obviously the Lysenko issue had extremely important consequences for Party scientists and most of all those directly involved in the field of genetics, which included the CP's foremost scientist, J.B.S. Haldane. Party scientists came under pressure from within their profession and from outside in the media to condemn the developments taking place in Soviet science. Haldane in particular faced growing calls to publicly reject Lysenko's theories since, as one correspondent put it, '... his reputation - as a geneticist and as an expert on Russian science - is at stake'.¹⁴ With some justification Haldane publicly refused to condemn or support Lysenko and instead suggested caution and patience until more information and experimental evidence was available from the Soviet Union.¹⁵ However, there was growing tension in the Party as a *Daily Worker* account of Haldane's contribution to a BBC symposium on the controversy falsely gave the impression to readers that he unreservedly supported Lysenko. In addition to this, Party geneticists were infuriated when, with no warning, the *Daily Worker* issued an 'educational supplement' on the subject by Clemens Dutt which attacked orthodox genetics. A meeting was called of Party geneticists, who numbered in the region of 12 or 13, which was addressed by Cornforth and another Party leader:

Haldane's particular line and the line the group supported was that here was a great opportunity for the British party to take an independent and critical, but sympathetic, attitude, and so make it clear that we did not follow Moscow slavishly. Cornforth didn't say very much, but he implied that all this was going to be steam-rollered.¹⁶

Meetings and discussions were arranged to argue the case for Lysenko by The Engels Society and the Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR. There was usually, however, such a division of opinion among those scientists who took part that no resolutions of support for the Lysenko position were put to the gatherings. The situation was such that 'The geneticists were all hostile to the party line. Most of the other scientists were confused, though one or two had climbed on the bandwagon, including Bernal and some biologists'.¹⁷ The Biology Group of The Engels Society held a meeting on 15 July 1949 where the opening paper was presented by Dr. D.M. Ross, a biologist at the University College, London, which drew attention to the earlier lively debate of 20 years and more before between Neo-Darwinists and Neo-Lamarckists. Neo-Lamarckists had presented experimental evidence of cases of the inheritance of acquired characteristics which had been further added to by Michurinist data: 'These facts have in effect been suppressed, since any alternative explanation, any possible experimental loophole, any failure to confirm the observations, has been regarded as sufficient justification for rejection of them altogether'.¹⁸ Haldane, who was present, replied that he did not dispute that in certain instances it was possible to reduce inherited changes in an organism by altering the external conditions. What he would argue with would be what significance this had; it in no way invalidated the theory that by and large inheritance was determined by genetics. As he was to write in the celebrated article in *The Modern Quarterly* of Autumn 1949, 'In Defence of Genetics',¹⁹ he was a 'Mendelist-Morganist'.

Haldane's major criticism of the way the Lysenko affair had been handled in the Party was the way some of the advocates of the Soviet position had misrepresented and distorted the work and ideas of British geneticists: 'I believe that wholly unjustified attacks have been made on

my profession, and one of the most important lessons which I have learned as a Marxist is the duty of supporting my fellow workers'.²⁰ For Haldane and the other Party geneticists the controversy led to their break with the Party. Haldane's last written contribution to the *Daily Worker* appeared on 9 August 1950 and it can be taken that his Party membership came to an end at that time, if not before. How many Party members and particularly scientists left over the Lysenko issue is unclear, but losing Haldane, even though Bernal and Levy remained steadfast²¹, must have seriously weakened the Party forces in this area.

A 'Marxist biological group' at Hull University which included some CP scientists even tried to '... substantiate Lysenko's claims using both his claimed techniques and their own, less-flawed routines'. Their efforts failed and for some, Lysenko certainly '... disabused all claims to a superior "Soviet science"'.²² Although in the final analysis '... scientific research depends upon trusting what others say about their experiments, rarely by close repetition of them. Consequently discussion like that over Lysenko's ideas came down eventually to arguments over how much one believed or disbelieved what was being printed in the controversy'.²³

Moreover, one of the arguments in favour of Lysenko was that he was a practical man of proletarian origin who had gained experience through his tireless work 'in the field'; he was not a hidebound laboratory academic. Some of his grafting and simple laboratory work might be open to repeating in an uncomplicated manner, 'but on the other hand it looks as if the Michurin trend has itself grown out of the ideas of large scale agronomy'.²⁴ The validity of Lysenko's scientific work would only be shown in the longer term results achieved by Soviet agriculture. It also seems the case that some Party biologists were not unreceptive to a Lamarckian/neo-Lamarckian tradition. In 1956 when Lysenko's credibility

was irrevocably undermined as the terror and political corruption of Stalin's reign began to be revealed by Khrushchev, a Party biologist and specialist in insects replied to a letter from a fellow CP biologist, which expressed disillusionment over the past support they had given to Lysenko/Michurin biology, by stating that his views remained unchanged. To quote from the letter:

Your letter almost asks the question, "What if Lysenko is denounced tomorrow, where do you stand?" My answer is that I do not think he will be on any material point, but if he is my attitude is based on his exposure of the Mendal-Morgan line, not on the results he claims from his experiments. Consequently I am immune. But I stand pat on the proposition that given the right kind of material and the time we can make species inherit acquired characteristics. That he did so I have to accept on trust, and in fact I do accept it although it is just conceivable to me that he may have faked results.²⁵

Generally speaking, the Lysenko affair put Communist scientists onto the defensive; already in 1946 Haldane was complaining that too many CP scientists were not coming out 'openly as Communists' through 'unjustified fear of victimisation'.²⁶ The affair must have had the effect of sowing the seeds of doubt in many Party scientists' minds and encouraging the general depoliticisation of the profession which can be seen in the stagnation and decline of the Association of Scientific Workers - membership dropped from 15,600 in December 1945 to 11,318 by 1954. At some stage a group of the Engels Society was formed in Manchester, a leading initiator being the educationalist Brian Simon who describes the Zhdanovian feelings that were prevalent among those involved:

The idea was a strong intervention in all the fields of culture, a Marxist sort of Stalinist type of intervention ... and therefore Stalin coming into the field of linguistics and Lysenko and genetics fell into the picture and we were just ready for it.²⁷

The Manchester group, although it managed to bring together a number of Party scientists with keen Party 'ideologists'²⁸, had a very short life. Nationally, despite the fact that two Party biologists, an agricultural plant breeder, J.L. Fyfe, and a fellow botanist Alan G. Morton,²⁹ brought out works defending Lysenko, there was a general fall-off in Party science work. An ambitious project 'for a book about the Scientific Materialist Picture of the World' which had been commenced by the Engels Society never saw the light of day. Despite a great deal of preparatory work, at some stage the project was abandoned, as one Party scientist ruefully remarked: 'Why had the CPGB with its very limited resources to do it - it's a job for the comrades in the CPSU surely?'³⁰ The ideological fervour of 'high-Stalinism' was coming to an end, something that was at first apparent in that area where it had been the most problematic to apply; the natural sciences. Speaking to a meeting of Group and District Committee representatives on 24 May 1952, Sam Aaronovitch expressed his disappointment at the fact that while Party scientists and doctors had carried out valuable work in the past, '... undoubtedly in the past year their work has fallen away, and ceased to have a clear direction. We have had little success in organising our biologists, bio-chemists, physicists, mathematicians and others to carry out their special tasks'.³¹ The last of the Engels Society's 'Transactions' held in the Marx Memorial Library is dated July 1952, and there is no mention of the Society in Congress Reports, *Our Letter* and other Party material (I have seen) post-1952.

Scientists who remained in the Party concentrated their political work in their branches and Districts or in 'peace work',³² and for a period in the Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR where science could be dealt with in the context of 'great' construction schemes.³³ An example of the latter was the large SCR meeting held on 13 January 1952 at Battersea Town Hall, where a number of academics and others spoke on areas

and aspects of the construction schemes: afforestation of sands, irrigation and aquation projects, hydroelectric stations, the building of massive reservoirs, and the construction of canals. The speeches were collected together and published as a pamphlet, *Man Conquers Nature*, with a distinguished list of contributors.³⁴ This emphasis on the 'changing the face of nature' schemes in the Soviet Union also seems to be the major item of interest and concern of the Architecture and Planning Group of the SCR.³⁵ A Party scientist of many years standing, John S.D. Bacon, MA, Ph.D, Fellow of the Royal Society, and a respected biochemist, summed up the attitude of many of the remaining Party scientists in the wake of the Lysenko affair. He rejected a move to hold a meeting of CP scientists following the Czechoslovakian events, remarking that the last time he had attended a national scientists' meeting was in 1949 in connection with Lysenko. He believed that

the episode showed the uselessness of what was then thought to be a Marxist analysis of a particular branch of science. The fact is that science is rarely advanced by generalisations based on little or no experience of the phenomena in question. It was always my view that Engels's ideas on heredity, slight though they were, could easily be used to oppose Lysenko's views as to support them.³⁶

The Historians' Group

In contrast with the conflict surrounding the Party's science work and the subsequent disappearance of the Engels Society, the CP Historians' Group went from strength to strength becoming, to use an expression of Sam Aaronovitch's, 'the jewel in the Cultural Committee's crown'. By 1949 there were nearly 200 members of the Group and there were even specialised period sections within the overall body with their own secretary/organiser: Ancient Historians (John Morris), Medieval Historians (J. Holt), 16th and 17th Centuries (Edmund Bell), 18th and 19th Centuries (J.T. White). In addition there were Students Historians and

History Teachers' sections. The number of articles and books emanating from members of the Group rose impressively³⁷ and the input into Party life of the Historians became more pronounced. Already in 1945 there had been criticism of what was seen as an over-emphasis of the similarity and link between Marxism and the natural sciences, as Benjamin Farrington had it, 'Marxism is a development of the historical sciences' not 'a deduction from the natural sciences'.³⁸ Bill Schwarz in his piece on the Group has also pointed to this phenomenon: '... it can be argued that there began in the 1940s a realignment within intellectual Marxism from the dominance of a scientific or literary discourse to one which was historiographical ...'.³⁹ In part there were generational grounds for this development, as many of those in the Group had joined the Party as students in the mid-thirties or after and were therefore, in the 1940s and 1950s, reaching early middle age where they could be expected to exert more 'intellectual clout', those who had gained secure posts in universities and colleges were beginning to establish their academic reputations. In contrast some of the older middle-class literati who had come into the Party in the early and mid-thirties were beginning to slowly withdraw from active politics, e.g. Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Acland would seem to fit into this category.⁴⁰

Hobsbawm and others have drawn attention to the main reasons for the flourishing of the Group and how Communist historians avoided the worst excesses of the tightening orthodoxy. The Caudwell controversy, the Lysenko affair, and the Zhdanov campaign in the Arts, did not directly concern CP historians and the craft of historiography. While '... the received orthodoxy both of historical materialism and of historical interpretation, was not - except for specific topics mainly concerning the 20th century - incompatible with genuine historical work'.⁴¹ Most of the Group work and its participants concentrated on areas other than the

contentious 20th century and in particular Soviet history, and in this respect it is illuminating that there was no special period section for the present century or labour movement history. Party historians saw themselves very much in the 'Liberal-Radical' tradition of British history writing and it was on this they attempted to build and improve; this dovetailed with the Communist Party 'Battle of Ideas' and the 'Defence of Britain's Heritage' and encouragement was given to the uncovering and presenting aspects of the 'Common People's' fight for liberty and against oppression.⁴² The free and stimulating atmosphere of the Historians' Group, where papers and ideas were put forward and debated and criticised, has been described by various people (e.g. Hobsbawm, Raphael Samuel et al.). There was little factional strife within the Group over developments in post-War Communism and convinced Stalinists seemed to have 'put this behind them' when it came to historical work. Rodney Hilton, on this period of his Party membership has said: 'I think it was almost certain that I was a bit of a hardliner but I never let it get me down particularly, because my principal focus of interest was the Historians' Group ...'.⁴³ Likewise Peter Cadogan, a religious subscriber to *For a Lasting Peace* from the very first number, has commented that he

was an orthodox Stalinist although part of my mind was also quite independent. The work I was doing as a historian, writing the history of Newcastle, was quite free of my Stalinism. I had a split personality in effect because I was working from the newspaper records in the British Museum and in the Newcastle library and from original material and I never imposed any Marxist pattern ... it didn't need it, I mean in those days, the days of the Reform Bill there was a tremendous class struggle atmosphere around the Chartist movement.⁴⁴ It rather fits into the Marxist pattern as a matter of fact ... I read fairly widely, things like Machiavelli as well as Marx, so part of me was always independent but I was nevertheless a convinced Stalinist, I really believed Stalin was a great guy ...⁴⁵

It goes without saying that there were a few Group members who resigned from the Party during the Cold War years, one was J.C. Holt, the person responsible for co-ordinating the Medieval Historians (later to become Professor of Medieval History at Cambridge University), though there was no major loss of active Group members until 1956-57. In fact, at the height of the Cold War members were responsible for launching the historical journal *Past and Present*, with the stated aim of bringing together a wide range of historians, both Marxist and non-Marxist. Despite some of those who showed an interest being frightened off from a 'Red venture', the journal managed to attract a number of distinguished scholars, so Communist historians were not completely isolated in this period, and furthermore the Party leadership did not attempt either to interfere or to dissuade members from being involved in such initiatives.

Socialist Realism and Artists, Musicians and Writers

Socialist realism as the officially sanctioned form that culture should take in the Soviet Union had been a fact from the 1930s with the 1934 Soviet Writers' Congress⁴⁶ being a significant event in the crystallization of the whole concept. An important figure in Britain for extolling the relevance of the Soviet attitude towards art to the Left from just before the War was Francis Klingender in, for example, his pamphlet, *Marxism and Modern Art - An Approach* (1943 and no. 3 in the 'Marxism Today Series' of LW pamphlets), although it is by no means a crude or dogmatic work and the actual term socialist realism is not used. From the mid-thirties there was a fairly clear Party line which condemned surrealism as a bourgeois revolt which was basically not serious and something of an indulgence — although artists and middle-class intelligentsia who associated with Surrealism, Expressionism, Futurism and Abstraction found no problems with attaching themselves to Leftwing

campaigns or even being active Communists. At the end of 1944 Pablo Picasso himself publicly joined the French Communist Party, and his declaration 'Why I became a Communist' was reproduced in a number of Communist journals throughout the world, including *World News and Views* of 16 December 1944. In early 1946 the first large scale exhibition of Soviet graphic art was staged at the Royal Academy, which presented something of a shock for leftwing and CP artists.⁴⁷ Even Klingender in an article in the first number of the resumed *The Modern Quarterly* was forced to admit that 'to our Western eyes at least the form seems inadequate to this marvellous new content of socialism'.⁴⁸ Klingender drew an analogy between Victorian and Soviet art, with its staid academicism and all-pervading Naturalism. Both were products of societies which with great national enthusiasm believed in and strove for progress and artists attempted to express this mood in a way that the great bulk of the people could understand. Judging by the response in the next issue of *The Modern Quarterly* this attempt to explain away or justify the Soviet art on display by no means satisfied all the cultural figures in the Party. Jack Lindsay was particularly scathing:

It is because I love and honour the Soviet Union for its great release of the human spirit that I feel impelled to attack statements which apologise uncritically for its shortcomings. Such apologies are impeding the emergence and consolidation of new energies inside the Soviet Union, which are struggling to deepen and enrich cultural life there.⁴⁹

There was, however, a perceptible hardening of attitudes over the succeeding months and again ideological debates in the French Party, in particular the debate between Garaudy and Aarogon over Communism and art, played a part.⁵⁰ Developments in the Soviet Union were of course paramount as to the direction the debate took in the British Party. The Party leadership's position was clearly summed up in an article by Emile

Burns in *The Modern Quarterly* of Autumn 1948, with the title 'The Soviet Discussions'. According to Burns, the new Soviet post-war Five Year Plan had required an ideological 'overhaul' in every field not only '... to speed up the fulfilment of the material tasks of the ... Plan' but also to contribute directly towards the changing of man. Socialist realism was an essential element in this process:

It implies the conscious use of cultural activity to express and inspire the actual movement now going on in the Soviet Union, stressing the forward movement, stressing man's power to create, while also stressing the fact that what he creates is only soundly built if it rests on the achievements of the past.⁵¹

These 'Soviet discussions' gave more than just 'insights' for the British Party's cultural work, they '... help us to a new understanding and a new approach' in this area and though '... our task in the cultural field must perhaps be in greater measure the fight against bourgeois ideas ... Nevertheless, this fight can only be fought successfully to the extent that we too overhaul our intellectual equipment, rid our minds of the ideas against which we fight'.⁵²

Speaking of the Party's Artists' Group, Reg Turner stressed that socialist realism, although very much a live concept amongst Communist artists before the War, took on a much greater force after the War:

I think we were less sharp on the theory to begin with but theory emerged later because of the nature of the struggle which was taking a much more powerful ideological hue ... one had to establish very sharply the meaning and content of socialist realism and to put it forward as a basically sound artistic and ideological viewpoint. It wasn't easy for the simple reason that it seemed to turn out on the main such academic work.⁵³

The whole matter of the Soviet attitude towards art and in particular the Zhdanov declarations caused a good deal of division in that 'Popular Front' body of artists the AIA. Already in early 1948 there was the

beginning of an acrimonious debate in the Association's news sheet,⁵⁴ which in the growing Cold War atmosphere, was eventually to culminate in the dropping of the AIA's Political Clause in 1953 and the organisation's descent into obscurity. Party artists had widely differing styles although 'The more adventurous type of work I must confess wasn't, well it wasn't frowned upon, but it wasn't sort of encouraged by the political leadership of the Party'.⁵⁵ Sam Aaronovitch sums up the position as follows:

In the case of the Artists what they had to confront was the characteristics of Soviet art as it was. Well that takes some swallowing so I suppose that the enthusiasm for Soviet art was not all that fantastic but the notion nevertheless that somehow it was an art [i.e. art a Party artist should be practising/producing - SRP] that had to serve the working-class and the cause of Communism ...⁵⁶

It was that aspect of Socialist realism, as interpreted by British Communists, that led to the spread of artistic works on aspects of working class life and political struggles as was attempted with 'The People's Prints'. There was also an emphasis placed on the accessibility of art and that it could be appreciated by British working people. This, it was felt, would be the case if the art was realist. Yet, as the introduction to *A.I.A. - The Story* ... makes clear, the most active in the Association (mostly the CP artists) '... unlike the organisation they created, shared a basic programme for the development of a New Realism. We do not find a long lost tradition of British socialist realism but simply a widespread use of subjects from ordinary life amongst a large portion of British artists of the period'.⁵⁷

The one group of painters who could be said to have made an impact with a form of realism were those British artists who were given the name 'kitchen sink' school of art or Social Realists. Their work concerned itself with the matters of everyday life of ordinary working people - the

fish and chips shop, the act of washing the dishes, the jumble of the kitchen table - but with the force of hindsight it is clear that they had no common thematic or ideological creed. Really only one of their number, Peter de Francia, could be said to have been motivated by a social concern as a committed socialist. It was the CP art critic John Berger who helped create the impression that 'the school' was leftwing,⁵⁸ but '... when they found that the lucrative American market rejected their work in favour of abstract works, they changed their styles accordingly, and split up as a group'.⁵⁹ Amongst CP artists there were continuing debates over socialist realism and what actually constituted socialist realist art in Britain which would express the Zhdanovian instruction 'socialist in content, national in form'. Weekend schools were held by the Group and meetings were organised where they were addressed by various Communist artists from abroad such as the Italian Renato Guttuso, and members of the Group became actively involved in the fight against the American comics. Communist artists also interested themselves as a group in such internal professional matters as the 'position of the student on leaving art school' (the title of a talk given to the Group). The fervour and unity established among leftwing artists in the anti-fascist period was now long past, and the 1945 Labour Government's 'modification' of the Arts Council (which brought to an end such things as factory canteen art exhibitions) meant that the situation Communist artists operated in was much less favourable. Those like Cliff Rowe with his painting of murals for the ETU or Paul Hogarth with his drawings of life in Eastern Europe, China, and the Soviet Union, were just a tiny minority of Party artists who could earn a living combining their artistic skills with their politics or Party membership. At the same time the attacks made on Picasso by some Party artists and in the *Daily Worker*, antagonised many in the Artists' Group⁶⁰ and ensured that the Party did not attract the left leaning younger

artists who tended to be modernist or abstract in their orientation. As one writer to the *Daily Worker* put it:

I find the persistently reactionary attitude of the *Daily Worker* on the visual arts something of an embarrassment. Derek Kartun comments on the work at the South Bank are old-womanish. His ruminatory mystification at the spectacle of a piece of abstract sculpture is pathetic. After all "modern" abstract art has been going about 50 years. Perhaps he would have preferred the art on show at the 1851 Exhibition, with its pious sentiments and sexy nudes. Much of the drab, sentimental stuff that passes nowadays for social realism is just as bad.⁶¹

In *The Modern Quarterly* article 'The Soviet Discussions' Emile Burns admitted that at first sight it might seem that socialist realism could not be applied to music; nevertheless a Soviet Central Committee resolution on music had, in Burns's words, cleared '... the ground for the positive working out of socialist realism in this field'.⁶² As with literature, painting, architecture, etc., there was a danger of formalism in music, used in this context as being equivalent to 'art for art's sake', a concern limited to aesthetics as opposed to 'Marxism' which was concerned with social content and ideology. Formalism was said to pervade modern present day Western music which was 'decadent' and reflected the 'decay of bourgeois culture'. Formalist perversions in music were held to be the 'Rejection of the fundamental principles of classical music, advocacy of atonality, dissonance and disharmony ... renunciation of such highly important foundations of musical creation as melody...'.⁶³ As opposed to this, 'healthy' music which served the best interests of the people was 'realist'; music which was based on the traditional classical heritage, and that, although performed with the utmost professional skill, it should be easily accessible and not over-complex.

The Soviet Decree on Music and Zhdanov's attacks on some of the USSR's most famous composers, Prokofiev, Shostakovitch and Khachaturian,

for displaying the signs of 'bourgeois formalism' in their musical works, ensured that the issue figured prominently in the 'ideological Cold War', second only to the Lysenko controversy. Among other areas there was a heated exchange of letters over the matter in *The New Statesman and Nation*, which included a contribution by Alan Bush, where, using the authority of his 'friendship' with Shostakovitch and Khatchaturian, he rejected the claim that the composers had in any way been forced to lie to 'save their necks'.⁶⁴ It was the best-selling 'exposure' and attack on the new Soviet attitude towards its leading musicians, *Musical Uproar in Moscow* by Alexander Werth, a journalist not unsympathetic towards the USSR in the past, which did more than anything else to stir up public unease about the situation. Party musicians in Britain were obviously put under pressure to justify or defend the Soviet actions at this time. Douglas Hyde, who had run a course on dialectical materialism for the 'central musicians' group in late 1947 and early 1948, was glad that he didn't have any dealings with them at the time of the Werth book, by which time he had himself left the Party. The issue '... must have faced musicians with a crisis of conscience of the sort scientists were faced with, with Lysenko ...'.⁶⁵ It was at about this point, Douglas Hyde feels fairly certain, that the band leader Ben Frankel, who had been his stand-in for tutoring the 'central musicians', publicly resigned from the Party.⁶⁶ Reg Turner recalls that a number of composers dropped out of the CP as they were fundamentally opposed to the construction of any formulations as to how they should write their music, they wanted the freedom to be able to experiment. One of their number was John Horricks, a musician who had been instrumental in organising musical training centres so that working choirs could be created and 'the movement' graced with good singing. Speaking of the Party artists, Reg Turner mentions that they discussed Zhdanov's views/proclamations on music '... but we didn't care for it very

much because we liked the stuff that Shostakovitch and Prokofiev were doing'.⁶⁷ Soviet attitudes towards jazz also caused problems, for although there was a 'State Jazz Orchestra' it restricted itself to playing 'Paul Whiteman type jazz', with *Izvestia* in 1948 denouncing an attempt by one Soviet musician to introduce 'St. Louis Blues' into their repertoire. A particularly extreme Zhdanovian-inspired article in the *Daily Worker* during 1951 condemned per se American music, dance, and even gaberdine suits. They were, claimed the writer, part of the 'mental softening up' of Western Europe by U.S. monopolies bent on world domination. One of those who wrote a letter in response remarked that: 'Being one of those "uncultured" human beings, a dance-band musician, I have to play a great deal of American music, and there is a certain section of it that I admire and enjoy playing'.⁶⁸

It would be wrong to see socialist realism as just presenting difficulties for Communist musicians, there were elements within it which were enthusiastically embraced and fitted into already existing concerns and attitudes. This was clearly the case with socialist realism's call for the greatest possible spreading of musical involvement and participation throughout the people, and the importance attached to folk music and the drawing on national traditions in the composition of any music. The WMA and the whole folk music revival were in tune with these sentiments, as were the efforts to educate other Party members and the working class as a whole in an appreciation of the 'greats' of classical music.⁶⁹ As late as 1958 Alan Bush found no incongruity in drawing parallels between what Ralph Vaughan Williams wrote on music and what Zhdanov had to say.⁷⁰ Although Vaughan Williams was not committed to the working class fight for socialism, his own position being that of a pacifist humanitarian with a 'vague' musical philosophy, he nevertheless laid 'the foundations of a truly national school of composers' and

'contributed immeasurably to the development of music coming from the people and created for them'.⁷¹

The degree that socialist realism and the pronouncements of Zhdanov actually led Party musicians to alter their approach to their work is highly debatable.⁷² Alan Bush's avant-garde musical compositions, such as 'Dialectic for String Quartet' in 1929, had long given way to a more orthodox style or as one article put it: 'Bush's interest in a new music that was intrinsically related to its time and place and that was free of intellectual vanguardism led him back to the folk-song and choral tradition of the British working-class'.⁷³ His music became harmonically more simple with the aim that it would be more accessible; in his interview with me he said that it became his convinced opinion around 1949 that '... national character should enter into music'.⁷⁴ As he went on to acknowledge he had been a pupil of the composer John Ireland (politically Left leaning and a close friend of Bush's) while at the Royal Academy of Music, Ireland had in turn been a pupil of John Stanford at the Royal Academy of Music; both Stanford and Ireland shared the belief in the importance of music containing national character and both encouraged the study of English folk music. The genesis of his opera 'Wat Tyler', eventually written in 1948,⁷⁵ were discussions he had with historian and Party member Hyman Fagan in 1938 when Fagan suggested the peasant uprising of 1381 would make a good subject for an opera.

Interest in the history of music and developing some sort of Marxist account of musical development had already been evident among a number of leftwing musicians in the 1930s.⁷⁶ Writing in 1951 Bush confidently pointed out to Party cultural workers that in the history of music there 'are not a few examples of musical developments starting modestly, stimulated by a social demand not at first of a powerful kind, but which grew into musical periods of immense importance'.⁷⁷ Party musicians could

draw comfort from this, although the musical demands of the movement varied - there was music which needed to serve an 'educational' role and that could be quickly understood by the 'broad masses' and music of a higher standard for the cadres.⁷⁸ Some of those in the Party were not averse to criticising the CP's professional musicians:

How embarrassing it is to speak of "so-and-so, the famous Communist composer" and to be asked: "Well, what has he composed?" It is high time some of our musical intellectuals left off resting on their coterie reputations and did something.⁷⁹

The same correspondent also felt there was a problem of 'formalism' with Party composers; that they failed to appreciate that traditional music and composition had been built up over centuries as the best way of expressing content in a comprehensible manner. Similar views were expressed at a meeting of the Amateur Musicians' Group where a member of the Communist Choir Movement made an appeal (indirectly made to the separately organised Professional Musicians' Group⁸⁰) for the production of more 'Mass Songs' to be sung by Party choirs for working-class audiences. Communist composers and lyricists should bear in mind that these 'Mass Songs' needed to have a simple melodic line and

have harmonies which are familiar to the great majority of working people. It is not one bit of good trying to educate working-class taste from above. The so-called "advanced" or "modern" harmonies are viewed askance by the average man in the street.⁸¹

The application of socialist realism to literature was the first area where it had been raised with theoretical authority in the Soviet Union. It was, after all, the Soviet Writers' Congress of 1934 that established that for Soviet Writers (RAPP had been ended in 1932), 'our guiding line is that of socialist realism'.⁸² It was only in the early and mid-thirties that there emerged any sort of organised literary CP presence,

and what was meant by socialist realist literature was debated among those involved but with highly nebulous results.⁸³ During the War a Writers' Group⁸⁴ was active in London which, in common with a number of other professional groups, came under the London District Committee. There was also, briefly, a Bristol Writers' Group in existence between 1944 and 1946. The secretary of the Writers' Group during the years 1943, 1944, and 1945, recalls that: 'Membership was strictly professional. Only published writers, SOA members and PEN members attended except at invitation meetings - though there was a loose understanding about cross-membership. Historian Group comrades were always welcome to the Writers ...'.⁸⁵ Despite the requirement of professional credentials there were a number of writers involved who were of working-class origin:

Ted Willis, Alec Bernstein (Alexander Baron), George Downs (painter), - all cockneys ... Maurice Carpenter (working in munitions and also working-class). In fact during the war itself, it was probably true that there were more working-class comrades attending than middle-class, simply because skilled people tended to be in reserved occupations and middle-class people unskilled⁸⁶

It was also during this period that the Group had good relations with a number of non-CP writers of varying degrees of notability and again including some of working-class origin: Idris Davies, Roy Fuller, Nancy Cunard, B.L. Coombes, Bill Naiyliton, all of whom regularly attended open meetings of the Group.⁸⁷

Writers' Group members were involved in the journal *Our Time*, and those who took control in 1944 around the editor Edgell Rickword were keen to continue a Popular Front/Wartime unity approach among 'cultural workers'. A deliberate effort was made to ensure that a sizeable contingent of non-CP people were on the editorial board. Arnold Rattenbury, who was assistant editor until April 1946 (a non-Communist Siriol Hugh Jones succeeded him), attended weekly meetings with Emile

Burns, in order to placate the Party leadership after Edgell Rickword refused to have any King Street interference with his editorship. As Rattenbury characterises the meetings: '... issue after issue was attacked by Emile Burns, defended by me, and ignored by Edgell'.⁸⁸ Contributions by Welsh and Scottish nationalist writers were welcomed, satire was increasingly used in written work and drawings, and an open, often self-critical, line was apparent in many of the articles, there was also an unwritten right of reply to anyone attacked. To quote Rattenbury once more, those involved with *Our Time* '... refused to have anything to do with Zhdanov'.⁸⁹

A young writer at the time, and member of the Writers' Group, refers to the particular unease he felt at Zhdanov's cultural campaign:

As a writer, I didn't concede that any political authority, even the Party to which I belonged, was entitled to dictate to me what to write about or how to write. The high priests of Socialist Realism frowned inexorably on everything that could be seen as innovative or imaginative. I was reviewing novels for the *Daily Worker*; when I was sent a Soviet best-seller (printed in English in Moscow) which was proclaimed as a masterpiece by the Zhdanovite propaganda machine, I was embarrassed by its banality, its simplistic goodie-and-baddie characterisation, and its blatant lack of credibility. What kind of régime, one was forced to ask, promoted and extolled this stuff?⁹⁰

CP writers were put on the defensive, like Communist scientists and musicians, in attempts to explain Zhdanov's bullying attacks on various Soviet authors like Zoshchenko and Akhmatova and the unapologetic intervention of the Soviet Party leadership in the field of literature.⁹¹ In fact, a 'controversy' over Soviet literary practice and the imposition of the state predates the other 'controversies' surrounding Soviet music and science. The issue was sparked off by Zhdanov's 1947 Report on two Leningrad literary journals, which marked the beginning of an 'offensive of the cultural front' and was taken up by the Western media as evidence of

the attack on freedom represented by Communism. A delegation of leading Soviet writers, who visited Britain during 1947, were involved in a discussion with members of the SCR Writers' Group and attempted to assuage sympathetic British writers' unease about the position of their Russian colleagues.⁹² The results of the meeting with Russian replies to the various questions that were asked were published as a SCR pamphlet, *Soviet Writers Reply*. John Lewis made mention of the pamphlet in an editorial in *The Modern Quarterly*, it helped destroy the myth, he claimed, that Soviet writers or for that matter musicians or artists were intimidated victims of totalitarian repression. According to Lewis: 'Many who had been sceptical of freedom of expression in Soviet Russia, were very much impressed with the openness and sincerity of their Russian colleagues when they actually met them'.⁹³ If the scepticism had been pushed aside it was only for a short period as various 'established' writers soon began to distance themselves from the SCR, and Priestley (who had been President of the SCR Writers' Group) by 1950 was publicly refusing to be associated with the Stockholm Peace Appeal and coming into increasing conflict with the CP.

As Rattenbury describes it, those Party writers grouped around *Our Time* largely ignored the Zhdanovian cultural onslaught and the attempts by the Party centre to give a lead in this area. There was something of a division among those who worked on the journal but it was an internal affair which concerned itself with style and presentation, not the issue of socialist realism or the attitude to be adopted over a particular Soviet pronouncement on art. Triggered off by the awareness that *Our Time's* fall in circulation was not a temporary matter but had become a trend, a division emerged in the spring of 1947:

There was a sort of "young turks" group around me -
E.P. Thompson, David Holbrook, Charles Hobday -
wanting a far more aggressive policy than Edgell's

"broad front", and a sort of "old guard" group around him. It's dangerous to see this as an age-group matter however. Randall, Montagu Slater were more or less on "my" side; and indeed there was no conflict at all in aim. The division was about how best to influence most people: Edgell thought, by attending to ever-widening groups; we thought, by asserting our own positions plainly, deliberately inviting controversy within the journal. (This last was in effect what happened).⁹⁴

Owing to this division of opinion it was one of the very few occasions when the Party centre became involved in the running of *Our Time*, and this was only after they were asked by all those concerned to act as a referee in the conflict. The matter was resolved by Edgell Rickword leaving the journal (something he had long wanted to do) and '... Emile Burns was removed from his position of cultural oversight at King Street'.⁹⁵ The slide in circulation continued and *Our Time* ceased publication in July 1949, while those associated with it left London in search of jobs/furtherance of careers, e.g. Rattenbury to Bristol, Hobday to Keynsham, Thompson to Halifax, Holbrook to Scotland, etc. The Writers' Group had a somewhat different composition therefore when it was reconstituted as a body linked to the National Cultural Committee (still inevitably London-dominated but not organically linked to the London District Committee).

It was from the very late 1940s and early 1950s that more attention began to be focused on Communist literary efforts. The debate in Hungary over socialist realist literature and the criticism of Lukács were relayed to British readers with 'Fore Publications' release in 1950, of Jozsef Révai's *Lukács and Socialist Realism*. Significantly the introduction to the booklet was not by one of the major writers associated with the British Party but by Eric Hobsbawm, a historian. Révai, a member of the Hungarian CP Political Bureau, was only one of a number to criticise Lukács and his book *Literature and Democracy*: 'The Marxist statesman intervenes

in the debate, not because he wants to impose his private taste, or claims to have specialised knowledge of writing, but because Hungarian Communist writers have not so far tackled their jobs as Marxists properly'.⁹⁶ These sentiments found some expression within the British Party; the work of Ted Willis and Alexander Bernstein (Baron) was mildly criticised for not containing enough humanism with its realism, i.e. being too pessimistic,^{and} not high-lighting the inexorable march of the working-class/socialism. Sam Aaronovitch, lamented the Party's weakness in the field of 'creative writing', particularly when compared with Australia, France and America with such Communist writers as Frank Hardy and André Stil. There was a necessity for writers in the Party to identify themselves

with the struggle of the working-class. This does not mean writing only about the working-class, since as Communists we are concerned with the future of the whole nation. But it means writing from the standpoint of the working-class, and seeing in the working-class our primary (though not our only) public. Our writers need above all political clarity; they must themselves be participants in the struggle for peace and the needs of the people, and their work must be regarded as a weapon in this struggle'.⁹⁷

A post-*Our Time* author who was a Party member from 1953-56 has in retrospect described the 'harmful' effects of trying to apply socialist realism to her own writing. In particular she claims that one of her short stories, *Hunger*⁹⁸, was 'an artistic fiasco' written as it was in the aftermath of taking part in a Writers' Congress in Moscow in 1952, as she describes it: 'In the many debates on realism and literature the British writers maintained that literature should come out of the individual consciousness or soul, while the Russians demanded a greater simplicity and a clearer division between good and bad'.⁹⁹ Clearly Lessing felt she had been influenced too strongly by the Soviet approach and attempted to write too much in a Dickensian style with characters clearly divided into good or bad. It is also the case that the Party's key literary spokesman,

Arnold Kettle, was taking a much stronger line against 'modern bourgeois' literature, denouncing Penguin's decision to publish ten volumes of Evelyn Waugh and stating of *Brideshead Revisited* that it was '... artistically beneath contempt and intellectually degrading ...'.¹⁰⁰

Some time between late 1950 and early 1951 the Writers' Group was replaced or reconstituted as the Literature Group of the Communist Party and officially designated as one of the National Cultural Committee groups. Membership of the Group was extended so that in addition to professional writers those who studied or taught literature could also become involved. Alick West, chairman of the Group, wrote in the CP's weekly paper that the initiative to start the Group had been taken in order to 'fight the Battle of Ideas' more vigorously in the field of literature. Among the aims he set down for the 'new body' was: 'To study and to further the advance of literature from bourgeois realism to socialist realism; and to study and make known Soviet literature'.¹⁰¹ Intertwined with these developments was the search for new working-class literary talent through the launching of *Daylight* and Levy's efforts in this direction. Although it was often stated that the political/class content of a literary or artistic work could not be judged on the basis of the class position of the person who had produced it, there still seemed to be a strong belief in the Party that socialist realist literature was more likely to come from worker writers. The Communist writer who was held up as an example of someone who produced socialist realist novels in a capitalist society was the Frenchman André Stil. Stil, who had been awarded a Stalin prize for his literary efforts, was a former docker who had become the editor of *Humanité*. His writings gave a positive picture of the working-class:

He does not disguise that there are weaklings, police informers and wife-beaters. But his emphasis is on the fine qualities - the toughness and devotion, the endless care and sacrifice for the children, the ability of ordinary workers to read and study and master the most complicated ideas, the unconquerable humour and initiative. And is not this essentially the true picture of the class that is going to change the world?¹⁰²

As previously mentioned, it was this very lack of a positive and optimistic account of workers and labour struggles in the contributions to *Daylight* that was criticised by leading Party members. The closest work by a British Party member to that of Stil's was Jack Lindsay's trilogy *The British Way*.¹⁰³ Praised by many in the Party, Lindsay's novels were still felt to fall short of the prerequisites of socialist realism,¹⁰⁴ e.g. a tendency to switch from a personal to a political theme and back again, personal and political life not fully integrated as with Stil (referring to *Rising Tide*), and John Mahon felt there was a weakness with the political aspect of *Betrayed Spring*¹⁰⁵ (first of the trilogy), i.e. none of the characters were Marxist.

A Postscript on the Degree of Ideological Conformity

As should be apparent, socialist realism could be interpreted in a variety of ways by Party members and each professional/cultural group had its own particular problems with explaining or defending the Zhdanovian approach as applied to their areas of concern. In some cases the 'ideological offensive' could be easily accepted as fitting in with the desire to oppose various 'modernist' trends in the arts or in other areas (e.g. education) or in attempts to uncover 'neglected' popular culture etc. Clearly middle-class intellectuals and professional people left the Party at this time in reaction against Soviet developments in the arts and sciences as well as for the more general reasons: overall Soviet foreign policy, Yugoslavia, Eastern European show trials, fear of losing one's

job, political exhaustion and depression. There are clear cases, as over the Lysenko affair, of groups of professional people (such as geneticists) leaving the Party, yet there is no real evidence to suggest that they made up a disproportionately large number of those leaving¹⁰⁶ in the general decline in membership, before 1954. In fact, at the beginning of 1953 John Gollan came close to complaining of the imbalance in Party membership - too many middle-class members not enough workers - at an extended meeting of the Executive Committee. Gollan was reported as declaring:

But what hasn't been hammered home enough is the deadly contrast between the number of members in mining and textiles compared with clerical, teachers and so on. Now we don't want less clerical workers, teachers, middle-class and professional people in the Party. But we have got to solve this question of textiles, and we have got to have many more members in the minefields.¹⁰⁷

The degree of pressure put on Party members to follow a particular line of policy or activity varied depending on the Party District (London was well-known to demand greater discipline)¹⁰⁸ or Branch officials or period. Speaking of himself and other professionals grouped around *Our Time*, Arnold Rattenbury has some justification in his observation that:

The notion that [we] ... were presented with "a Line" which it was [our] ... duty to both follow and promulgate is, by and large, an invention after-the-event by ex-Communists who had come not only to disown but to despise their past, or at least to wish to be seen despising it, and who were after self-exculpation therefore. "Yes we were there ... No we were not responsible ..." ...¹⁰⁹

Emile Burns, Palme Dutt or Maurice Cornforth often made demands of professional/cultural groups which were listened to and then ignored, as increasingly was the case with the Party industrial organiser and Communists in positions of power in the trade unions.¹¹⁰ Despite all the abuse heaped upon him, Jack Lindsay remained a Party member and for that

matter on the National Cultural Committee.¹¹¹ Jim Fyrth, who took a leading part in the group of Party members who worked in adult education, remembers that Dutt and to a lesser degree Garman, were fairly 'critical of our group and seemed to think we were not delivering dividends to the Party in the way of votes at TU conferences and resolutions from branches and workplaces where we had influence'.¹¹² The attitude of those in the group could be summarised as falling into two basic approaches but with a whole range of shades of opinion in between. There was the extreme opinion, which probably gained succour from some at the Party centre, that Communist adult education lecturers should be directly engaged in the 'Battle of Ideas' propagating 'progressive' ideas in their teaching and getting more leftwing teachers employed. The other attitude would not deny that it was necessary to introduce an element of 'progressive' material in what was taught but held that their main area of Party work was selling the *Daily Worker* and campaigning in their local branches. As it was, the Cold War pressures largely resolved the matter for Communists working in adult education, open Party work in adult education became an extremely risky business and Communists employed in this area were especially circumspect in how they acted. They were both conscientious in their work, something always encouraged by the Party, and loyal to the body (WEA, Extra-Mural dept. etc) which employed them. The circumstances of the time also meant that Communists found themselves defending what there was, rather than striving towards the creation of a new more class combative form of adult education. The ideals of liberal adult education needed to be defended, not only from the Tories but also ^{from} the TUC which perceived adult education for its members as limited to training for carrying out trade union functions.¹¹³

Footnotes

- 1 Source - Minutes of Executive Committee, 20 January 1946, D. Hyde's copy.
- 2 Dr. A.G. Morton, 'Scientific Sidestepping', *World News and Views*, 27 November 1948.
- 3 The liquidation of the Science Advisory Committee may also be connected to Douglas Hyde's resignation from the Party in March 1948. Douglas Hyde was in contact with the scientists through one of his reporting team, Angela Tuckett (who had extensive contacts with Party and sympathetic scientists); it is possible this area of Party work came under suspicion because of this connection.
- 4 Prof. Colin Adamson-Macedo, letter 10 December 1987.
- 5 Source - *Our Weekly Letter*, 10 June 1948.
- 6 See Bernal, 'Belief in Action', *The Modern Quarterly*, Winter 1945-46.
- 7 In 1949 Cornforth wrote for the 'Marxism Today Series', *Dialectical Materialism and Science*, which presented his views most clearly about the former 'illusions' that had been held in connection with science. These 'illusions' were: a) Capitalism frustrated science, therefore the interests of scientists were opposed to capitalism; b) Good bourgeois scientists were unconscious dialectical materialists; c) Only idealist scientists were on the philosophical/theoretical side of reaction. All these 'illusions' resulted from the fact that there was a failure to recognise that capitalism was not just something which frustrated science from the outside but afflicted science from the inside. Interestingly, Cornforth's earlier booklet from 1946, as the title would indicate - *Science versus Idealism* - helped encourage the former attitude.
- 8 *Science for Peace and Socialism*, p. 81.
- 9 Cornforth in *Science for Peace and Socialism*, p. 85.
- 10 Klugmann, 'Basis and Superstructure' in *Essays on Socialist Realism and the British Cultural Tradition*, p. 27.
- 11 See J.B. Hasted's article 'The Value of Marxism to the Modern Natural Scientist', *Modern Quarterly*, Autumn 1949, reply by Campbell et al, *Modern Quarterly*, Spring 1950 and reply by P.J. and S.M. Hilton, *Modern Quarterly*, Spring 1951.
- 12 *Science for Peace and Socialism*, p. 70.
- 13 Emile Burns, 'Soviet Biology', *Communist Review*, January 1949.
- 14 William Dick, letter in *The New Statesman and Nation*, 23 October 1948.
- 15 One of the first articles by Lysenko to appear in Britain was in the *Anglo-Soviet Journal*, Spring 1951.

- 16 CP geneticist as quoted G.A. Almond, *The Appeals of Communism*, p. 315.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 D.M. Ross, 'Michurin Biology and the inheritance of Acquired Characters', Engels Society Biology Group meeting 15 July 1949 - Ross-Hinton Papers made available by James Hinton.
- 19 It is interesting that Thomson's response to Cornforth was titled 'In Defence of Poetry' - was he in some way associating himself with Haldane's previous resistance to the 'orthodoxy'?
- 20 Haldane's *Modern Quarterly* article quoted in R. Clark, *J.B.S. - The Life and Work of J.B.S. Haldane*, p. 183.
- 21 For Levy's support for Lysenko see his article 'Soviet Controversy', *Labour Monthly*, April 1949.
- 22 Prof. Adamson-Macedo letter, op. cit.
- 23 J.S.D. Bacon, SCD, FRSE, letter to National Cultural Committee 8 September 1969 - CP scientist.
- 24 H. Levy, op. cit.
- 25 Dr. H.E. Hinton, letter to Dr. D.M. Ross 25 April 1956 - Hinton-Ross Papers.
- 26 *Our Letter*, 6 June 1946, 'Report of National Science Committee'.
- 27 B. Simon, interview 18 February 1986.
- 28 B. Simon was not the only educationalist. Ted Edwards, later to become Vice-Chancellor of Bradford University, was also a leading light - source: B. Simon, interview 18 February 1986.
- 29 Morton's book *Soviet Genetics* was published in 1952 and followed on from J. Fyfe's booklet, *Lysenko is Right*. However, there were still some in the Party who felt that despite his defence of Lysenko, Morton still made too many concessions to Morganism. In particular, as a reviewer in a Party journal complained, he had conceded that 'graft hybrids could be formally explained by the gene theory', this Lysenko had proved was an 'absolute contradiction' with that theory. (N. Xeros, review of Morton, *Soviet Genetics* in *Communist Review*, March 1952.)
- 30 C. Siddons, letter 3 September 1987 - recalling his response at the time.
- 31 S. Aaronovitch, 'The Party's Cultural Work', *Communist Review*, July 1952, p. 221.
- 32 See Werskey, *The Visible College*, chapter 9, 'Coming in From the Cold' for a description of what he claims as a 'regroupment' of the scientific Left's depleted forces.

- 33 The Hinton-Ross correspondence previously quoted from gives an indication of some CP scientists' areas of political work in the 1950s: involvement in AUT/salaries issue, collecting signatures of fellow professionals/scientists for a petition in support of China (it was reported that the names of 25 FRS's and about 100 professors had so far been added to the petition), and a lecture with slide show on Soviet biology including the mention of an earlier SCR meeting on Soviet biology attended by 250 people!
- 34 Two were Fellows of the Royal Society, Bernal and the zoologist Dr. S.M. Manton, an MA, F. Le Gros Clark and a BA, Brian Pearce.
- 35 Source - CP and SCR member and architect John Kay document 'Architects and the Communist Party', March 1985.
- 36 J.S.D. Bacon, letter to National Cultural Committee, 8 September 1969.
- 37 See E.J. Hobsbawm, 'The Historians' Group of the Communist Party' in M. Cornforth (ed.), *Rebels and their Causes*, p. 35.
- 38 *World News and Views*, 3 November 1945, 'Congress Discussion.
- 39 B. Schwarz, 'The Communist Party Historians' Group, 1946-56', in Johnson, McLennan, et al (eds), *Making Histories*, pp. 59-60.
- 40 See Wendy Mulford's biography of the two, *This Narrow Place*.
- 41 E.J. Hobsbawm, op. cit., pp. 31-32.
- 42 The high point for articles by Group members in the *Communist Review* was in 1948 and 1949, there was nothing to speak of in 1950 and a slight pick up in 1951 and 1952. Of the *Communist Review* articles by Group members there is a whole number on various aspects of the English Revolution, Chartism, Ireland, 1381 Rising etc.; a few were directly related to the immediate Party concern, e.g. E.J. Hobsbawm, 'The Fight Against War in Britain's History', R. Hilton, 'The Idea of Liberty', November 1949. *The Modern Quarterly*, Spring 1949, was completely devoted to the English Revolution.
- 43 R. Hilton, interview 14 December 1983.
- 44 Peter Cadogan's book was eventually published in 1975 under the title *Early Radical Newcastle*.
- 45 P. Cadogan, interview February 1983.
- 46 Subtitled in the report of the Congress: 'The Debate on Socialist Realism and Modernism'.
- 47 1949 Soviet painting probably reached its nadir with the very many pictures of Stalin to commemorate his 70th birthday - see 'A Double Life - A Double Art', *Moscow News*, 21 February 1989.
- 48 F. Klingender, 'Russian Art at the Academy', *Modern Quarterly - new series*, Winter 1945-46.
- 49 J. Lindsay, 'Communications', *The Modern Quarterly*, Spring 1946.

- 50 Klingender gave a resumé of the debate in *Communist Review*, January 1947, entitled 'Communism and Art - A Controversy'.
- 51 Emile Burns, 'The Soviet Discussions', *Modern Quarterly*, Autumn 1948, p. 21.
- 52 Ibid.
- 53 Reg Turner, interview 7 March 1984.
- 54 See L. Morris and R. Radford, *A.I.A. - The Story of the Artists International Association*, p. 79.
- 55 Reg Turner, interview 7 March 1984.
- 56 S. Aaronovitch, interview 12 February 1986.
- 57 L. Morris and R. Radford, op. cit., p. 3.
- 58 William Hogarth in his particularly hardline article (condemning out of hand abstract art as late as 1955), 'British Art Today', *The Marxist Quarterly*, January 1955, was very positive towards the Social Realist painters/Euston Road Group: '... the most significant tendency in British art'.
- 59 Cliff Rowe, letter, *Morning Star*, 24 September 1984.
- 60 See L. Morris and R. Radford, op. cit., p. 90 for the year 1952 which describes Rowe's attraction towards Picasso's politics and art as his disillusionment with Soviet practice grew.
- 61 David Maccoby, letter, *Daily Worker*, 30 April 1951.
- 62 E. Burns, op. cit., p. 18.
- 63 CPSU Central Committee Resolution on Music quoted by Burns, *Modern Quarterly*, Autumn 1948, p. 18.
- 64 See *The New Statesman and Nation*, 27 March 1948.
- 65 D. Hyde, interview 2 February 1987.
- 66 Source, D. Hyde, letter 3 March 1988.
- 67 R. Turner, interview 7 March 1984.
- 68 *Daily Worker*, 24 April 1951.
- 69 The concern with 'improving' the musical tastes of the working class is evident in WMA publications, e.g. *Music and Society*, WMA booklet, published 1943.

Many working-class Communists were eternally grateful for being introduced to classical music and the great novels of the past. Ray Hawkins, London engineering worker, probably expresses the attitude of many when he says the Party threw him in contact with middle-class 'intellectuals': 'If I had my life again I would still do it because

it meant so much for my development. I would never have been interested in subjects like I am now, from cultural subjects like Music - Mahler, Wagner, Beethoven - ... but it would never have happened if I hadn't been in the Party'. (R. Hawkins, interview 6 October 1982.) In Yorkshire the CP took groups of working-class comrades to Howarth and gave them lectures on Wuthering Heights (see *World News and Views*, 10 January 1953). Rutland Boughton reported to an SCR meeting in 1927 that from his visit he found two trends of music in Moscow: 1) 'a chaotic and 'experimental music' sharing kinship with the rest of European music, 2) 'a crude forceful expression' arising from folk art. He clearly supported and looked with hope to the second trend.

- 70 As Bush remarked to me, it wasn't the Soviet Union which invented the term formalism but the art critic Cecil Fry. The rejection of the view that the content of art was of no significance, it was the way that it was presented that was important, was something with which Bush was in unison. It was not his opinion, he implied, just because it was something Zhdanov had said it (formalism) was a bad thing (source Alan Bush, interview 6 March 1983).
- 71 Alan Bush, obituary of Vaughan Williams, *Labour Monthly*, October 1958.
- 72 Bernard Stevens - see Biographical Appendix.
- 73 Brian Morton, 'The Great Unheard', *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 3 January 1986.
- 74 Alan Bush, interview 6 March 1983.
- 75 Alan Bush was awarded four prizes in the Festival of Britain opera competition including a prize for his 'Wat Tyler' opera. None of his operas have been staged in Britain although very successful performances of his work have taken place in Eastern Europe. Apart from very occasional broadcasts of his music on the radio he is virtually unknown in this country despite the high regard he is held in international musical circles; yet another indication of the 'behind the scenes' discrimination against professional people in the CP.
- 76 Alan Bush was the first person to lecture in musical history at the Royal Academy of Music, the year was 1936-37.
- 77 A. Bush, 'Tasks of Cultural Workers', *Communist Review*, February 1951.
- 78 See Bush and Hasted, 'Music and the Fight for Peace and Socialism', *World News and Views*, 5 May 1951.
- 79 Eric Edney, 'Songs for the People', *World News and Views*, 3 March 1951.
- 80 Communist musicians were unique in the Party in that their separately organised branch, the 'Professional Musicians' Branch', created in the 1930s along with a number of other professional groups (e.g. architects - under the LDC), continued to exist well after the War. A professional musician in the Professional Musician Branch was not required to be in his geographically relevant branch.

- 81 Peter Matravers, 'Songs for the People', *World News and Views*, 17 February 1951.
- 82 A.I. Stetsky, end speech in *Soviet Writers' Congress, 1934*, p. 264.
- 83 An article on developments in Soviet literature in the SCR journal in 1937 made great play of the defeat of 'leftwing sectarianism' as evidenced by the dissolution of the Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP). The new concept of socialist realism, it was assured, 'allows for experimentation in style and form' (Stephen Garry, 'Within Two Decades', *Anglo-Soviet Journal*, Vol. 1, no. 10, 1937).
- 84 I do not know if this CP Writers' Group was a continuation of the 1930s one in which Alick West was active.
- 85 Arnold Rattenbury, 'Notes for Steve Parsons: *Our Time* and Professional Groups', 2 April 1989.
- 86 Ibid.
- 87 Ibid.
- 88 Ibid.
- 89 Ibid.
- 90 Mervyn Jones, *Chances*, pp. 115-16.
- 91 To quote Zhdanov: '... our literature, our journals, should not hold aloof from the tasks of the day but should help the Party ...'. *On Literature, Music and Philosophy*, p. 50.
- 92 Those taking part from the British side give an indication of the breadth of literary goodwill towards the Soviet Union: J.B. Priestley, Rose Macaulay, Mrs. Cecil Chesterton, Alan Moray Williams, Agatha Christie, Phillis Bentley, Marjorie Bowen and CP members Jack Lindsay, Sylvia Townsend-Warner and Montague Slater.
- 93 Editorial, *The Modern Quarterly*, Summer 1948.
- 94 A. Rattenbury, op. cit.
- 95 Ibid.
- 96 Eric Hobsbawm, Introduction to Révai, *Lukács and Socialist Realism*.
- 97 S. Aaronovitch, 'The Party's Cultural Work', op. cit.
- 98 Included in her book *Five*, published in 1953.
- 99 Lessing translated by me from Jette Lundbo Levy, *Lessing - Perspektiver. Om Doris Lessings Forfatterskab*, p. 29.
- 100 A. Kettle, 'Homage to Evelyn Waugh', *World News and Views*, 18 August 1951.
- 101 Alick West, 'Literature Group', *World News and Views*, 3 March 1951.

- 102 Margot Heinemann, 'André Stil and the Novel of Socialist Realism', *The Marxist Quarterly*, April 1954.
- 103 Stil's was also a trilogy, 'The First Clash', and both his and Lindsay's work were concerned with post-Second World War working-class struggles.
- 104 The *Daily Worker* journalist and a particularly strong advocate of 'all things Russian', Derek Kartun, attacked Party writers for not producing anything that could be compared with the Party literature emanating from the French CP (Aragon, Stil, Vailland, Courtade) - see *World News and Views*, 14 June 1952. Replying for the Literature Group, Norman Arnold took issue with Kartun but could only mention Tressell and Gwyn Thomas's *The Alone to the Alone* as British books that could be used in the 'Battle of the Books' in the factories - *World News and Views*, 28 June 1952. However, by this time there did exist a number of novels produced by British Party members: Lewis Jones, Sylvia Townsend Warner, Alexander Barron, Montagu Slater.
- 105 See Mahon's review of Lindsay's novel in *Labour Monthly*, May 1953.
- 106 SCR membership total remained fairly constant over this period, standing at 1,800 in 1952. The chairman at the AGM of the Society at the end of 1948 referred to the many successes despite the 'unfavourable' atmosphere.
- 107 *World News and Views*, 28 February 1953.
- 108 An interesting light is cast on Mahon in Edward Upward's novel, *The Rotten Elements* part of the trilogy, *The Spiral Ascent*. Although a novel it is very much based upon Upward's (and his wife's) experiences in the Party with many of the episodes in the book taken from real life experiences. Sammy Hollingworth in the novel is based on Mahon and the meeting described on pp. 161-80 took place very much as described - information from letters by Upward to Dr. James Hinton, in particular one dated 23 April 1979.
- 109 A. Rattenbury, letter 17 November 1988.
- 110 Re. the increasing autonomy from the CP centre of Party members who controlled the ETU and FBU see my MA, 'Crisis in the British Communist Party: The impact of the events of 1956 on the membership with particular reference to Trade Unionists', Warwick, 1981.
- 111 Whereas in other West European parties he would no doubt have been publicly expelled for spreading 'bourgeois thoughts'.
- 112 J. Fyrth, letter 27 October 1986.
- 113 It would be wrong to see this period as completely barren, as Communists in combination with others, managed to start a number of educational schemes for miners, engineers, transport workers and steel workers in Manchester, Leeds, London and Liverpool. Also, probably more in concert with the Party leadership, a good deal of effort was put into pushing trade unions to run their own educational schemes. A CP drafted resolution put by the NUM calling upon the TUC to take over

the work of the NCLC and establish its own educational scheme was passed in 1947. While those unions with a strong Party presence began to run their own schemes - FBU, ETU (a college set up in Esher with John Vickers CP as principal), Foundry Workers' Union started their own scheme in 1951, and TGWU (their scheme was also started by a CP member - Tony Corfield) - source J. Fyrth, letter 4 March 1987.

CHAPTER 14

The Decline

Introduction - summary

With the exception of the Historians' Group there were clear signs of decline in the other specialist and professional groups. The post-Stalin thaw in the Soviet Union gave further encouragement to the questioning and reassessment of the Zhdanovian approach to philosophy, art and science. As the ideological certainties of the world Communist Movement were somewhat modified and an improving international climate spelt an end to the 'Battle of Ideas', the British CP's National Cultural Committee declined in importance. In 1955 the full-time post of Secretary of the Cultural Committee was ended as part of a 'cost-cutting exercise'. It was in this context that the explosive mix of events of 1956 took place. Many of the Party's leading professional and middle-class figures left along with the exodus of thousands of members (a third of the membership leaving from 1956-59). That unique feature of the Communist Party, the organisation of its various professional and cultural people into separate groups, largely came to an end at this time. Communist schoolteachers remained well organised after this date and middle-class members as a whole continued to play an active role in the life of branches throughout the country, but the attempts by Communists in the professions to adopt a 'Marxist approach' to their work died away.

* * * * *

The Decline of the National Cultural Committee

With the end of the war in Korea and the overtures made by Stalin towards the new American President Eisenhower for the commencement of talks between the two superpowers, a new international mood was coming into

being. Stalin's death in 1953 ended the emergence of a new ideological offensive against cosmopolitanism and Zionism (of which there were signs, i.e. the Doctors' Plot) and allowed the Soviet leaders to speed up and deepen the 'normalisation' of relations with the West. The era of the 'Battle of Ideas' was coming to an end and that of 'peaceful co-existence' was taking its place.

In 1955 Sam Aaronovitch's position as full-time Secretary of the National Cultural Committee fell victim to an economy drive at the Party Centre, as a falling membership reduced the Party's financial resources. Aaronovitch went on to join Lawrence and Wishart for six months and then take up the post of Organiser for the London District of the CP. From 1955 Aaronovitch no longer had any connections or involvement with the Cultural Committee and the position of Secretary became very much a part-time one.¹ The economising at the expense of 'cultural work' had something to do with the general changes in the orientation of world Communism and the realisation by Party leaders that there were diminishing returns for the CP from the tremendous amount of time and effort put into the large set-piece conferences. Sam Aaronovitch's own view, as expressed in retrospect, is that the Party leadership had never been convinced of the value of the 'cultural work', seeing it as a diversion from the CP's more important activity in industry, therefore when it came to a question of saving money, Aaronovitch feels, the Party centre naturally chose to do away with his job. There may well have been other considerations taken in arriving at the decision: '... I have a memory that there was some feeling in the Party that Sam had really created a rather excessively massive empire ...'.²

In the few years following Stalin's death leading up to the crisis that broke out in 1956, there were a few signs in the Party's periodicals of members questioning or attempting to modify some of the tenets of the

Stalin/Zhdanov approach as affecting their particular interest or area of professional engagement. In a contribution to *World News and Views* Arnold Kettle pointed out the dangers inherent in the slogan, 'the weapon of culture'; it gave the impression that the Party was only interested in those aspects of culture that could be quoted and used in a propaganda sense in political campaigning. In some respects Communists had been guilty of this in the past; however, as Kettle now argued: 'What makes good art is the intensity and profundity of the vision of the artist. All good art is progressive because it enriches our understanding of some sphere of experience'.³ Likewise, in the new CP theoretical journal, the Communist musician Thomas Russell made the same sort of point. Discussing recent criticisms within the Soviet Union over aspects of cultural activity, Russell still sought to defend Zhdanov - what was being criticised was not Zhdanov but those who had distorted his statements and ideas. Zhdanov had been misused and there had developed a certain 'glorification of the orthodox' and while there had been massive strides forward in the conquest of illiteracy and the provision of cultural facilities for the population as a whole, the work of 'creative artists had lagged behind'. They had complacently adopted '... what they conceived to be the "official" line, ceasing to fight against the weaknesses it was designed to defeat, they have carried it into its opposite and are nourishing those very weaknesses'.⁴ Writing on what lessons there were to be drawn for British Communists, Russell was able to quote from what Emile Burns had declared at the Party Congress (23rd National Congress, April 1954) of that year:

We must always remember that the Soviet discussions on scientific and cultural problems are continuous, and that the correct application of general conclusions reached is also under discussion ... It is wrong ... for any comrade in discussing such scientific and cultural questions to take a rigid line of trying to impose some particular views on his colleagues.⁵

There must be no laying down of an 'infallible line' on cultural matters by the Party or, in Russell's words: '... complacently presuming that the artist has no right to his personal variations. All forms of art are means of communication, and must therefore be the personal product of the artist himself.'⁶ In the same journal the following year Jack Lindsay wrote on the new mood of self-criticism expressed by Soviet writers at their 1954 Congress, only the second to be held, twenty years after the famous one of 1934. At the Congress it was admitted that post-war literature in the USSR 'had lagged behind life' and, as interpreted by Lindsay, the major reason for this was the failure to reformulate the principles of socialist realism so they kept pace with the changing reality. The major theoretical fault was most clearly evident in the 'No-Conflict theory'; this theory held that there was no significant conflict in a socialist society, only differences between those striving towards the same aim of socialist construction. Soviet literature was required to fit into this approach with the result that:

Its practitioners could only pace a narrowing round of schemes in plot and character, in styles increasingly grey, dull, thin. And so one aspect of the theory was the denial of innovation, of the new in literature. Critics attacked any signs of originality as formalism, any signs of real conflict as untypical.⁷

Efforts by the British Party at creating an indigenous body of socialist realist culture seemed to have been largely dissipated by the end of 1954 with the ending of the magazine *Daylight* and the fading away of 'People's Books'.⁸ After interminable discussions as to what socialist realist art was or was not, the CP Artists' Group formed a working committee in order to produce a memorandum for the Central Committee giving the Group's views on the question/problem. As Reg Turner recalls:

In fact just as things developed ... the Hungary business in 1956 when a real crisis hit the Party, we had just laid down [delivered - SRP] various notes and propositions to the Party to the effect that the solution to the problem of socialist realism probably was not possible in this country ... we didn't really quite know what was meant by socialist/realism.⁹

These conclusions differ somewhat from the tone of Hogarth's article, 'British Art Today', which was published as late as January 1955 (see footnote 58, Chapter 13) which was something of a last lurch in the direction of setting down a line on the sort of art that should be produced by Communist and progressive artists (he makes a categorical attack on abstract art). John Berger's 'contribution to discussion' in the Party's theoretical journal for July 1956 gives a more accurate indication of the way many CP artists were beginning to reassess the relationship of their politics to their art. The problem for socialist painters in Britain, unlike musicians and writers, was that there was no radical popular tradition of participation in the visual arts on which to build. Berger felt that it was no coincidence that the most successful Party artist, Paul Hogarth, was a graphic artist, as this art form unlike painting and sculpture did have something of a popular tradition. As a whole, the 'Art World', Berger remarked, was 'bourgeois in spirit' and the working class had failed as of yet to break:

through the commercial culture imposed upon it, to discover its own needs and desires in the visual arts. This inevitably leaves the question open to the artist's own prophetic imagination. We do not know, except in the most general terms, what British Socialist art will be like two generations after Socialism has been established here. We do not even know - which is the easiest and most superficial thing to guess at - what its predominant subjects will be.¹⁰

Berger called for Party artists to be given time to paint and to be no longer burdened with organisational political work. This is completely in tune with the feelings of two of the leading figures in the Group, Reg

Turner and Jim Lucas, who had over a number of years become more and more frustrated at the amount of their time which was occupied with Party Artists' work. In Turner's words, both he and Lucas:

were seriously considering leaving the Party ... we were both looked upon as fine organisers, as fine tutors, editors of various magazines and so on, and we felt that if we go on like this we would never be able to concentrate on producing our art work at all ... we felt we couldn't spare the time any longer and then of course came the big blow and people just fled and I think we both said (we both took the same attitude) "we are not going to fly like rats from a sinking ship". I think if there hadn't been the crisis we would have asked to be relieved of our responsibilities.¹¹

It goes without saying that there was a growing feeling of unease in many Communists in the early 1950s over various Soviet actions, these Communists had weathered the worst years of the Cold War and had felt it imperative to give the Soviet Union unswerving support and suppress any inner feelings of doubt. Furthermore, the very intensity of political activity at this time gave little opportunity for deep theoretical introspection. In a letter to a friend, a CP member of many years' standing (since 1929), the educationalist Beatrix Tudor-Hart gives an impression of the whirlwind of Party and 'peace' work in this period:

As the world situation (and of course ours) deteriorates so my out of school activities increase. For weeks now I have not had one evening in at home, not one weekend. I am able to write to you because I have run away to the country for a weekend! Peace meetings, peace conferences, peace committee meetings, endless ones.¹²

With the slight easing in international tension and the very limited first steps towards a 'thaw' in the Soviet Union doubts and criticisms of British Party members slowly began to be expressed.¹³ The Political Committee's statement that the release of the 15 Jewish doctors shortly after Stalin's death proved how a 'tiny insignificant group in key

positions' who misused their power could not get away with it for long in a country where the Party and Government were firmly rooted among the people,¹⁴ did not satisfy all CP members. In fact, the increasingly visible signs of anti-Semitism as expressed in both Soviet and Eastern European propaganda caused a great deal of heart-searching among various members. Although the Party's National Jewish Committee could proclaim their special 'responsibility' of exposing the role of Jewish capitalists in the West (it would be interesting to know how the Commercial Branch reacted to this) in the light of the Prague Trial¹⁵, there were growing misgivings among Jewish Communists. The disappearance of prominent Soviet Jews, in particular the leaders of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee which had been formed during the War (it was in response to this that the C.P.G.B.'s National Jewish Committee was started), and the closing down of Yiddish journals, became more and more difficult to explain away. Jews made up an important segment of the Party's membership; trade unionists, small businessmen, teachers, and CP full-timers, although how they each related to their Jewishness and how much they worried over the state of Soviet Jewry varied greatly. It is impossible to quantify these matters or estimate how much these worries were spread throughout the Party to non-Jews but certainly many of the key figures in the CP's professional and Cultural Committee groups were Jews and a number of those on the National Jewish Committee were also very actively involved in other groups, e.g. Hyman Levy, Ray Waterman (also Writers' Group), George Rudé, Chimen Abramsky, Hyman Fagan (all involved in the Historians' Group) et al.

For Rodney Hilton it was his experiences in Prague, where he stopped over as a member of a returning SCR delegation which had just been in the Soviet Union after Stalin's death, that first opened his eyes to anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe. One of the delegation, which also included Bernal and Dorothy Hodgkin, took the opportunity of visiting a friend who

lived in Prague and was told that the rumours circulating to the effect that the Communist authorities were encouraging anti-Semitism were indeed true. This was recounted to other members of the delegation, causing a fair amount of consternation, and on his return to Britain Hilton told fellow Historians' Group members of these facts.¹⁶ Whether the Historians' Group made any official or unofficial representations over this or similar matters is not recorded by Hilton.¹⁷ However, he does mention that before 1956, at the beginning of the post-Stalin 'loosening-up', '... there were indications that *Novosti Istorri* [Soviet historical journal - SRP] was going to have a much more open editorial management policy and I remember that it was a great disappointment that this did not happen and I wrote to the *Novosti Istorri* together with some others'.¹⁸ Thus, even in what was the most active National Cultural Committee group of the 1950s and one of those least riven by dissension, there were signs of an increasing willingness to question Soviet actions and Party orthodoxy. A figure like Malcolm MacEwen, who had been a CP member since 1940 and was a journalist on the *Daily Worker*, gives a good description of the way a great many Communists must have reacted to the rumours of anti-Semitism, and slave prison camps:

I suppose one would require a very high standard of proof before you would believe that such things could be possible. A Communist didn't do such things. Knowing Communists as I did, not only here but in other countries - Greece, France - they didn't seem to me the sort of people who would do that kind of thing. They were my kind of people ... it was all these sorts of things that led one to suspend one's critical faculties.¹⁹

It was to be with the particular sequence of dramatic events in 1956 and the way the British Party leadership attempted to manage the crisis as it unfolded among the membership that led MacEwen and thousands of others to leave the CP.

The Party Commission on the 'Middle Classes'

It was not until mid-1954 that the Party Executive Committee finally decided that it was necessary to 'examine the question of how to bring about the alliance between the working-class and the middle sections of the population envisaged in *The British Road to Socialism*' (preamble to the *Report*). The Commission, composed as it was of Emile Burns (chairman), Sam Aaronovitch and Arnold Kettle among others, was the first serious attempt by the British Party to carry out some sort of basic empirical study of the 'middle classes' and outline a CP approach/policies in this area, since the mid-thirties. Unlike some of the 1930s writing on the 'middle classes' (e.g. Brown's *The Fate of the Middle Classes*) a stronger emphasis was placed on their alliance with the working-class, rather than their submission to the leadership of workers for self-preservation.²⁰ In the words of the *Report*: 'The working-class needs the support of the middle-class in its struggle, and the middle classes cannot defend their standards and ensure their future advancement without the aid of the working-class' (p.2). Apart from composing about one-sixth of the population, included within their number were groups that had an overwhelming importance in the technological and cultural advancement of society (scientists, engineers, artists, teachers, architects etc). Moreover, they are people '... who contribute out of all proportion to their numbers towards creating the climate of opinion on the social and ethical questions of our time'.²¹

The problems faced by the different sections of the 'middle classes' were detailed in sub-sections on: the retail trader, farmers and market gardeners and, the largest sub-section, the professions. Specific policies were proposed to improve the position of the main groups that composed the 'middle classes', e.g. reduction of rates for shopkeepers, abolition of purchase tax, increased grants and subsidies for small

farmers, and restoration of guaranteed prices and markets under the 1947 Act. Above all, for the professions a list of general policies were suggested, e.g. increased salaries and fees, an expansion of the social services, and an advocacy of 'improved status for many professional sections'. As was reiterated in the *Report's* concluding comments, the Party programme *The British Road to Socialism* took the interests of the 'middle classes' fully into account and pointed the way forward for them:

'That way leads to peace and prosperity for Britain and guarantees to the middle classes their livelihood and their professional status. It also ensures that there will be full recognition of the reward for their skills and their commercial or technical abilities'.²²

The Commission's work therefore took an extremely positive position towards the 'middle classes' and in particular the professions. The CP stood as a defender and advocate of professional status:

I don't think we ever had a real discussion on how to allocate national resources to the different areas of activity. I don't think we even knew (I don't think we know now) how to even go about setting up a criteria for resource allocations, so it was more a matter of working from where you were and building up activities.²³

There is no sign in the *Report* of a long term perspective involving a radical alteration of the class system other than an end to large monopolists and landowners.

In some ways the work of the Commission can be seen as an attempt (consciously or more likely unconsciously) to form a coherent approach to the middle-class around which the Party's own middle-class members could relate at a time when the 'Battle of Ideas' as an organising concept had been discarded. The final part of the *Report* gave some consideration to the matter of 'Party Organisation' as it stood with regard to middle-class Communists. It was noted that 'comrades in the professions' were fairly

well organised into 'effective groupings' and there was the Commercial Branch. With the exception of Teachers, Historians and University Staffs, however, nearly all of those involved on a regular active basis in the various groups worked and lived in the London area: 'As a result, outside London (where also work needs considerable attention) there is very little organised work among the middle classes, and many of our comrades find it difficult to see what they can do in the local work'.²⁴ The Commission argued that it was necessary to rectify this situation as soon as possible and as a first step, each District should begin to list those members who were in the professional and commercial fields (this had never been done before). Once this had been achieved it would be possible to decide how best to organise the members concerned:

In London we can have separate groups and committees to direct the work, because we have so many members in each field. But where the number in any trade or profession is small, it may be useful to have one or more joint groupings and a Committee for the District working directly under the District Committee. The general aims of the work will be to help comrades to work among their colleagues in trade or profession; to make contacts; make known our policy (including our policy for that section); to participate in trade or professional organisations; and to recruit to the Party.²⁵

Copies of the *Report* were sent out to all Party Districts, after various amendments were made by the Executive Committee, and immediate action was called for, although, with the exception of some articles in the CP press concerned with various professional issues and the publication by Lawrence and Wishart of a book which was essentially based on the work of the Commission, *Socialism and the Middle Classes* by Andrew Grant (eventually coming out in 1958), the proposals contained in the *Report* were stillborn. With the onset of the 1956 'crisis' the Communist Party was thrown into internal chaos and completely absorbed with a battle between the supporters and the critics of the Party leadership (and Soviet

actions). Moreover, the characterisation of those Communists who formed the opposition to their own Party leadership and the Soviet intervention into Hungary (not just by CPGB leaders but throughout world Communism) as being petty-bourgeois, effectively put an end to any plans of organising middle-class Communists as such.

1956 and after

The prominence of figures from the Historians' Group among the critics of the Party leadership has been well attested to, most recently by Hobsbawm:

If there was any group which actually formulated it [a critique of Stalinism - SRP] it was the historians' group ... after the British congress in April [24th Party Congress April 1956 -SRP], the historians' group began to say, this is simply an inadequate analysis of what has been happening in the Soviet Union. Our party, moreover, has to look at this too, because this affects us as well as the Soviet Union. We must do something about it.²⁶

Probably the one group which first demanded a more probing and critical approach by the British Party leadership towards past events in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe was the National Jewish Committee. The revelations about the execution of Yiddish writers in Stalin's Russia by a Polish newspaper shortly after the 1956 20th Congress of the CPSU, made a great impact on Jewish Committee members.²⁷ One of the first CP branches to call for a re-examination of Democratic Centralism in the light of the 20th Congress was the largely Jewish Golders Green and Childs Hill branch.²⁸ The CP Writers' Group also entered the fray; Arnold Rattenbury found it to be 'more or less dead' when he returned to London in 1954 after several years of living in Bristol, but it was resuscitated in 1956. Rattenbury claims that he and Montagu Slater attempted to revive the Group so as to give backing to *The Reasoner* and keep it as a minority journal. In a resolution (supported by the names of 13)²⁹ the Group condemned the

Executive Committee's resort to a formalistic interpretation of Party rules in order to demand the winding-up of the 'critical Communist' journal, *The Reasoner*. It indicated, the Group asserted, that the Executive Committee resisted in all ways the uprooting of the 'last vestiges of Zhdanovism and Stalinism' and in response the Writers' Group affirmed that '... free discussion and the right of free publication are essential to Party life. This means not the prevention ... but the active encouragement of unofficial as well as official discussion and publication'.³⁰ According to Rattenbury these attempts at 'rescuing' *the Reasoner* were '... frustrated by Edward and John [Thompson and Saville respectively - SRP] themselves, for Edward at least had by then determined upon resignation/expulsion'.³¹

The events of 1956 also led to an outburst of self-criticism in various groups where it had been some time in maturing. A good illustration of this is the Artists' Group which for the first time decided to produce a magazine, *Realism*, so that Group members could begin to discuss matters relating to art or craft and their *Communism* in a new period of theoretical turmoil. Public expression was given by some Communist artists to their doubts and criticisms of the whole approach of the Artists' Group, as one contributor mournfully remarked: '... our theoretical approach has stifled the creativity of many of our own artists rather than encouraged it'.³² The question was raised as to whether Party artists had not slavishly followed the artistic developments in the Soviet Union and over-praised Russian art.

There were a great many different attitudes and responses among Party members as the developments in 1956 unfolded.³³ The CPSU 20th Congress and the later release of the Secret Speech were greeted by some with relief but by others with horror or disbelief. Rodney Hilton describes the atmosphere among Communists in the first half of 1956 as follows:

There was a sort of euphoria in the Party after the Khrushchev revelations, this feeling that everything was opening up and that 'line-toeing' was no longer necessary ... Even old Stalinists like Andrew Rothstein, I remember him at a party at the Soviet embassy ... absolutely bubbling over with pleasure at the way Khrushchev had broken the mould as it were.³⁴

On the other hand to many other ordinary Party members the revelations came as a searing shock throwing into doubt their long-held picture of what Soviet society was like and their belief in Stalin as the 'Architect of Socialism' and 'the world's greatest working-class leader'.³⁵ The manner in which the Speech was publicised (released by the American State Department) was extremely embarrassing for the leaders of the Western Communist parties, while Khrushchev's analysis of 'the cult of the individual' raised many further questions. Questions were not only asked about the adequacy of the explanations for the rise of Stalinism and exactly what role the present Soviet leaders had played in the past 'errors' and crimes, but queries began to be raised as to how much the British Party leadership had known of what had taken place.

Pressure from the membership forced the CP to open up to an unprecedented degree of internal debate³⁶, and although there may have been attempts to manipulate or control the direction of the debate by the leadership, the Party press printed a large amount of correspondence from the membership, including a not inconsiderable number of highly critical contributions. A strong current emerged calling for a much more thorough overhaul of Party practices and policies and a change in the nature of the leadership. As time passed conflicting views within the CP became more acrimonious and Party critics became increasingly frustrated in the face of what they saw as the use of administrative measures by the Party Centre to discipline opponents and prevent change. The Hungarian uprising, which broke out in the last months of 1956, and the subsequent Soviet military intervention proved to be the 'final straw' for many Communists who left

the CP in immediate response or who resigned after the Party officially supported the Soviet actions in crushing the popular unrest. Further members quietly dropped out by just not re-registering as Party members for 1957, while others resigned after the Special CP Congress in April 1957, when it was clear that the established leadership had defeated all opposition and decisively strengthened its own position.

From an early stage in the emerging conflict within the Communist Party the leadership attempted to portray the critics as middle-class 'intellectuals' in contrast to the working-class members who were supposedly loyal. In early 1956 Childs Hill and Golders Green Branch called upon the Executive Committee to '... make it clear that they condemn attempts to stifle criticism by drawing meaningless distinctions between 'workers' and 'intellectuals' on this issue. This is a dangerous path to start on'.³⁷ However, there is a strong tradition in Leninism that designates theoretical deviations from the 'Party line' as being 'petty bourgeois'; the Party stands for the fullest expression of 'proletarian class policy' therefore any opposition to this must be 'non-proletarian'. It was feasible for mistaken working-class Communists to advocate harmful anti-Party (i.e. anti-leadership) 'petty-bourgeois' views or middle-class Communists to have a 'proletarian outlook'³⁸ and remain loyal. This tradition resurfaced to a certain extent at this time but also the most apparent signs of opposition to the Party Centre would give some credence to the idea that it was middle-class Communists who were 'making trouble', e.g. of the 160 'critical' letters published by the *Daily Worker* in 1956 at least 42 were written by 26 academics (16 being written by 7 historians). The professional and specialist groups were also regarded at this time by Party leaders with unease, not only because of the increasing challenges they made to Party orthodoxy, but also because they brought together members from different branches. It was

felt that this would encourage the spread of 'factionalism' as it would enable the spread of 'non-approved' ideas and proposals between branches.³⁹ Reg Turner feels that Dutt, Pollitt and Gollan were in addition influenced by the prominence of the 'Petofi' circle of poets, authors and students in the lead up to the Hungarian uprising with the consequence that they '... cracked down on things a bit, in fact they closed down the National Cultural Committee for a bit ... I found out that they suspected us of trying to set up an alternative leadership.'⁴⁰

In reality the degree of 'opposition', disillusionment and 'rethinking' was much broader and more widespread than the CP leadership's portrayal of it:

From June 1956 to March 1959 approximately 10,900 people left the Communist Party, which is a 32% loss of the 1956 membership ... The scale of unrest in the Party and the number of resignations undermines the notion that it was just "an exodus of middle-class intellectuals".⁴¹

A 'critic' who has remained in the Communist Party is of the opinion that:

There were differences between those who had joined for reasons connected with conditions and experiences in Britain and those who looked more to the USSR. Those hardest hit were those who had what I would call a 'religious' attitude to the USSR and to Communism'.⁴²

It is true that some of those who had been the most rigid and hardline Stalinists became the most determined of Party 'critics' (and on leaving the CP moved to the political right - Abramsky and Kartun would seem to fit into this pattern). It is difficult, though, to make any definite generalisations about the sort of Party members who left the CP and those who remained steadfast, and by no means all 'critics' resigned or dropped out of the Party.

The 1956-58 crisis severely weakened the Communist Party and despite the bravado of some who claimed that after the 'blood-letting' the Party stood purified and stronger a relatively large number of active Communists and many 'sleeping members' had left. The situation was so desperate on the *Daily Worker* that Bill (Gabriel) Carritt was transferred from his position as a District Organiser in Middlesex to work on the newspaper as Foreign Editor; he had absolutely no journalistic experience. There were no longer the ideological certainties of the past, as Maurice Cornforth himself made plain in his contribution to the discussion that followed Pollitt's report on the CPSU 20th Congress at the 'closed session' of the British Party's April 1956 Congress. He felt that a 'whole period' had come to an end and what was required was 'self-criticism' and a 'critical review of the Party and ideological work', he also called for a real explanation for the 'crimes that had taken place in the USSR as the 'cult of the personality' was completely inadequate to this task.⁴³

The cultural and professional groups virtually went into abeyance in the aftermath of '1956'⁴⁴ and the Executive Committee Report to the CP's 26th Congress in March 1959 makes no mention of the National Cultural Committee or related groups. By the time of the 27th Congress in 1961 the EC Report noted that the Historians' Group had changed its name to the History Group, the Artists' Group was meeting monthly and the Music Group was 'very active'. It is really only from the early 1960s that there was a determined effort to reactivate the various groups (a Science sub-Committee was set up in May 1964) and what was achieved was usually very temporary and paled into insignificance in comparison with the level of activity engendered during the 'Battle of Ideas'. In the new situation it was emphasised that '... it should be clearly understood that the Communist Party does not regard it as its function to issue directives to

our artists and scientists for their artistic or scientific work'.⁴⁵ This was later expanded in a long statement by the Executive Committee on 11 March 1967, which was released as a pamphlet *Questions of Ideology and Culture*, with the aim of encouraging discussion around the issues among the membership. Mentioning the 'harmful' effects of Lysenko on science the statement affirmed that the CP'... does not and will not attempt to 'lay down a line' on science, to forecast the results of scientific research, or decide questions still under investigations. It considers that this is a field of scientists themselves ...'.⁴⁶ Likewise, with art the Party did not seek to direct in any way the style or content of literary or artistic creations, and it was also recognised that political struggles of the past or present did not have to be the only subject of art for it to be of value. The statement also expressed a more positive attitude towards religion and in particular welcomed the 'developing dialogue' between Marxism and Christianity which was in the process of finding issues of common agreement.

Throughout the Party, middle-class Communists continued/continue to feature prominently in organisational and administrative roles at national, district and branch level. Of the 85 personnel of the 1957 Congress committees (election preparations, Congress arrangements etc) a third could be classified as middle-class. The 1956-58 events had certainly led to the loss of some of the CP's foremost professional people and they may well have made up a proportionally higher percentage of those who left the Party (in relation to their overall number in the party). In a generally reduced CP, however, there is no evidence that there was a drastic reduction in the proportion of middle-class Communists, while the recovery in membership numbers in the following years involved recruitment

of workers and non-workers. In the period after 1956 middle-class Communist activity as such (outside branch work and responsibilities) continued in those groups which took on a more trade union type orientation like the schoolteachers and University Staffs groups.⁴⁷

Footnotes

- 1 Brian Simon and Ted Ainley took on a lot of the work over subsequent years - Nora Jeffery acted as chairman for a time, followed by Simon, while Ainley was Secretary.
- 2 Brian Simon, interview 18 February 1986.
- 3 A. Kettle, 'Politics and Culture', *World News and Views*, 26 June 1954.
- 4 T. Russell, 'Soviet Culture and Criticism', *The Marxist Quarterly*, July 1954.
- 5 Burns quoted by Russell.
- 6 T. Russell, op. cit.
- 7 Jack Lindsay, 'Problems of Soviet Writers', *The Marxist Quarterly*, April 1955.
- 8 At least one valuable book came out of the exercise, Max Cohen, *What Nobody Told the Foreman*, 1953, which dealt with the woodworking trades. It would be wrong to see a complete end to 'worker literature'. In 1956 Lawrence and Wishart published two novels by working-class Communists, one a former miner, Len Doherty, *A Miner's Son* and the other by the Assistant General Secretary of the Foundry Workers Union, Dave Lambert, *He Must So Live*. Doherty left the Party over 1956 and Lambert took up a critical attitude towards the official Party line. The 1956 crisis seems to have finally put an end to the Party's efforts '... to build up a working-class literature' which '... must look above all to writers who are themselves workers' (A. Kettle, 'Two Working-Class Novels', *The Marxist Quarterly*, October 1956). Doherty apparently committed suicide later, cf. Clancy Segals' *Guardian Review*, 17 June 1989.
- 9 R. Turner, interview 7 March 1984.
- 10 J. Berger, 'the Necessity for Uncertainty', *The Marxist Quarterly*, January 1956.
- 11 R. Turner, interview 7 March 1984.
- 12 Beatrix Tudor-Hart, letter to Ellen, Sweden 9 June 1951.
- 13 Raymond Williams, although no longer a Party member, has recorded that the June 1953 riots in East Germany was a key event for him, leading to a reassessment of his attitude towards the USSR. To quote him: 'Before that all the really brazen aggressions had been from the imperialist camp. Even today, when I talk to E.P. Thompson or John Saville, I notice this difference: for them Hungary in '56 was the decisive event, while for me it was East Germany in '53.' (R. Williams, *Politics and Letters*, p. 88).
- 14 Source - *Our Weekly Letter*, 10 April 1953.
- 15 *Our Weekly Letter*, 5 December 1952.

16 Source - R. Hilton, interview 14 December 1983.

17 See the interview Hobsbawm gave on 1956 in *Marxism Today*, November 1986, in which he mentions that the Rajk trial 'stuck in his gullet' as Basil Davidson, someone he knew, was accused of being involved in the 'plot' as a British intelligence officer. This he found implausible. Hobsbawm goes on to emphasise the particular impact made by the Czech trials as many of those 'targeted' were known to British Communists from their time in exile in Britain, this and the doctors' plot worried people, 'But they didn't talk much about it'. (above *M.T.* article). One Czech, Ludwig Freund (Freicher), a minister responsible for the economy, who was executed, had worked on the *Daily Worker* for a good few years before returning to Czechoslovakia at the end of the War. Roy Medvedev's book *On Stalin and Stalinism* refers to the more subtle manner that purging was carried out in the post-war years when Stalin knew the eyes of the world were on him. Jews like Ehrenburg were required to deny the rumours of repression when on visits to the West, e.g. Abramsky was present at a press conference he gave in London. 'He said that some of his friends were Yiddish writers and they were alright and he saw them regularly' (Chimen Abramsky, notes from interview 27 January 1984). Medvedev gives an account of how Paul Robeson's worries over the treatment of Jews were put at ease by subterfuge during one of his visits to Moscow (see p. 148).

A leading figure among CP Adult Education people, who had set up the Party Group of Party members in the field with Jim Fyrth on the suggestion of Garman, Tony McLean, left the Party in 1949-50 because of disillusionment with the Eastern European show trials. McLean's resignation and the sacking of John Vickers from Barlaston '... led some others to leave the Party for self preservation reasons (plus doubts about the USSR) and others to "go to ground" as it were'. (Jim Fyrth, letter 27 October 1986). The Group which had always been fairly loosely organised with no regular committee decided it was best to call no further meetings and thus by 1951-52 it had faded out of existence.

18 R. Hilton, interview 14 December 1983.

19 M. MacEwen, interview 30 November 1983.

20 However, in essentials the theoretical interpretation remained unaltered as is apparent in the use of the term 'middle classes', i.e. a collection of various professional, clerical, and commercial people who do not constitute a single coherent class - there is no third class'.

21 *Report*, p. 4.

22 *Ibid*, p. 17.

23 Sam Aaronovitch, interview 12 February 1986.

24 *Report*, p. 17.

25 *Ibid*.

- 26 E.J. Hobsbawm, '1956 - An Interview', *Marxism Today*, November 1986.
- 27 Source - C. Abramsky, notes from interview 27 January 1984.
- 28 Two resolutions, one as above, the other asking for the 'setting-up of facilities in the USSR for news collecting and dissemination which are normal in most countries' were discussed by the branch as early as March 1956 - source Michaelson Papers, MRC, Warwick.
- 29 Those who were party to the Writers' Group resolution on *The Reasoner* were as follows:
- | | | |
|-----------------|----------------|-------------------|
| Dave Michaelson | Stella Jackson | Patrick Galvin |
| Rueben Kisch | Jean Ure | Cedric Dover |
| Ray Waterman | Monty Slater | Margaret Poulton |
| Derek Kartun | Tony Adams | Geoffrey Richmond |
| Angela Cully | | |
- Significantly, at least five are Jews.
- 30 Writers' Group resolution on *The Reasoner*, Michaelson Papers MRC.
- 31 A. Rattenbury, letter 27 April 1989.
- 32 Patrick Carpenter, *Realism*, no. 3, April 1956.
- 33 For a fuller account of how the 1956 crisis developed in the British Party see my M.A. dissertation, 'Crisis in the British Communist Party: The impact of the events of 1956 on the Membership with particular reference to Trade Unionists', University of Warwick, October 1981.
- 34 R. Hilton, interview 14 December 1983.

This feeling of elation over the Secret Speech is recorded by a number of those in the CP at this time and many can remember exactly when and where they first read it. To quote just one example: 'It was the day of the District Committee in Luton and Lionel Munby, the Cambridge historian, drove me down, I always went down with him ... we all had copies of *The Observer* [which printed the Speech in full - SRP] and we met in an atmosphere of sort of glee because we were interested. Life had been incredibly boring for the past two years, nothing had happened, and then suddenly here was this Speech ... we could start thinking and talking seriously again'. (Peter Cadogan, interview February 1983).

There was a tremendous divergence in the Party over how much the Speech came as a 'bolt out of the blue', those who were delegates at the CP April 1956 Congress, heard Pollitt give a précised account of the Speech in the 'closed session' (this was probably the same account that was passed on the CPUSA leaders). Some delegates gave a report back of the 'closed session' to their branches (Michaelson gave a detailed report - Michaelson Papers, MRC, Warwick) but many of those I have spoken to claim no knowledge whatsoever of the Speech's contents prior to its publication in the capitalist press.

- 35 Last description used by Klugmann, in *Labour Monthly*, April 1953.

- 36 The Artists' Group launched a discussion journal *Realism* but Districts did as well, e.g. the East Anglia District *Discussion* which ran to three substantial issues - no. 1 February 1957, no. 2 April 1957 and no. 3 October 1957.
- 37 'Statement to EC from Childs ...', Michaelson Papers, MRC, Warwick.
- 38 Which indeed was the case with some of the most extreme 'anti-intellectual' statements and letters coming from thoroughly middle-class members, see my M.A. op. cit.
- 39 Hence also the disciplining of members who spoke at other branches than their own without EC approval.
- 40 Reg Turner, interview 7 March 1984.
- 41 S.R. Parsons, '1956 and the CPGB', Conference Report, *Bulletin, Society for the Study of Labour History*, no. 47, Autumn 1983.
- 42 Jim Fyrth, letter 16 March 1983.
- 43 Source - Michaelson Papers, MRC, Warwick - notes he made of the proceedings of the 'closed session'.
- 44 The National Jewish Committee of the CP came to an end in 1956 as did the *Jewish Clarion* (their journal) which ceased publication.

Interestingly, at the same time the organised professional sections (writers, architects, education, etc) of the Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR also 'faded away' around 1956 - communication from SCR General Secretary Jean Turner, 21 December 1987. Overall membership was down to about 1,200 by 1958 although the more 'populist' British-Soviet Friendship Society was reported to have '... suffered seriously from the crisis at the end of 1956' (from 'Confidential discussion paper 30 January 1958 - SCR archive) with membership standing at 3,700 in 1957.

- 45 Taken from Party statement in *Marxism Today*, March 1963 and reprinted in *Cultural Work*, no. 2, March 1963 - issued by the National Cultural Committee.
- 46 *Questions of Ideology and Culture*, p. 6.
- 47 The level of activity was on the increase in the University Staffs Committee and its associated branches in 1954, significant progress was reported to have been achieved from 1952. This contrasted with most of the straightforward Cultural Committee groups. Party musicians remained active although the two separate groups - professional and amateur - were joined together in one overall group.

CHAPTER 15

Communist Psychologists

Introduction - Summary

The CP Psychologists' Group was one of the smallest professional/interest groups (20 - 30 people) in the Party. It was in existence from 1947-48 to 1956 and was composed mainly of clinical psychologists who were enthused by a determination to relate their profession to social ends, as it seemingly had been during the War. Members of the Group were nearly all young and at the beginning of their careers, and to them their Party membership meant a commitment to social justice and creating a society in which their professional skills could be fully utilized. There was a natural link between their Communism and improving their expertise in psychology. Marxism as applied to psychology was interpreted through the perspective of Bernalism (pre-Lysenko) to mean that they should strive for their profession to be as 'scientifically' based as possible. The Psychologists' Group was clearly separated from earlier attempts in the 1920s and '30s to integrate aspects of Freudianism with Marxism. Freud was rejected as non-scientific and Group members sought to distance psychology from psychoanalysis. They did not produce any philosophical or theoretical work on psychology, concentrating instead on advancing and improving upon the means of measurement, statistical analysis, chemical examination of brain matter etc., which arose in their specific areas of research. Where their professional enthusiasm for intelligence tests was challenged by the much larger Party group of teachers they accepted the 'Party line'. CP opposition to intelligence testing led some psychologists to recognise the limits of their 'scientific value' (although still using them as a tool of research) but it was left to Party educationalists to write a Marxist critique of this area of Western

psychology. The Psychologists were not only one of the smallest of the National Cultural Committee groups but also the most introverted. Their contribution to wider Party campaigns was negligible but the help, collective inspiration and professional education, the Group gave to its members has been attested to by a number of those involved who went on to achieve distinction in the fields of clinical psychology, child psychology, and psychiatry.

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The Freudian Tradition - the 1920s and early 1930s

Many of the students and assorted literati who greeted the Bolshevik Revolution and gravitated towards Communist politics were also positively drawn towards the various psychological theories which became more prominent at this time. The slaughter of the First World War led to the emergence of 'challenging' new forms of literature, art and social and political theories. Kingsley Martin, who had gone up to Cambridge University at the beginning of 1919, writes of the all-night discussions between students mostly revolving around, in his experience, God, Freud, and Marx. It was also during this period that the sexual psychology of Havelock Ellis and the work of Marie Stopes began to make an impact, and by his second year Martin '... started to read and discuss sex, Freudian theories, and Socialism'.¹ He goes on to record the particular importance of Freud who had engendered a 'new type of thinking':

The discovery of the unconscious made Victorian thought seem childish. If people were driven by their unconscious it was foolish to blame them, and the world was much less easy to reform by reason than our fathers had imagined. Scolding would not produce results. On the other hand, you ought to be able to get rid of guilt.²

Mervyn Jones, the son of Ernest Jones - pioneer of British psychoanalysis and biographer and proselytiser of Freud - who was drawn to Communism in the mid-thirties emphasises that however Freud and psychoanalysis were later to be viewed by some on the left:

In the early days ... Freud's teachings came as a message of liberation from outdated ignorance and prejudice. Libido was a creative force, repression was wrong, inhibition should be cast aside, sex wasn't shameful but interesting, guilt feelings were an unnecessary burden ...³

Psychoanalysis, psychology, Freud and Jung were all part of the intellectual and cultural avant-garde of the early twentieth century. One of the Party's early middle-class members, Beatrix Tudor-Hart,⁴ took psychology at Cambridge University graduating with a first class degree in 1925. By 1922 she had already attended, along with her brother, a socialist summerschool arranged by the Labour Research Department '... then run jointly by the Coles and the CP and attended by Bernard Shaw'.⁵ Her decision to study psychology was inspired by her search for a deeper understanding of human life and was intertwined with her political radicalism. Beatrix focussed her psychological training on the behaviour and development of babies and young children, embarking on a life-long career in 'progressive' education outside of the state system. In his book, *The Fellow-Travelers*, Cate asserts that it was in the early 1930s when socialist realism was accorded the status of an official dogma in the Soviet Union, with the accompanying condemnation of all cultural 'modernisms', that 'the political and artistic avant-gardes of Europe finally parted company'.⁶ In reality there was no clean break at this time and advocates and practitioners of various artistic and intellectual 'modernisms' continued to feel no conflict of interests in remaining Communists.⁷ Beatrix Tudor-Hart was a case in point; she remained an active member of the Party until the events of 1956, finally resigning in

early 1957, was a member of the CP's Psychologists' Group and continued to hold the views of her student days. A leading Communist psychologist described her as part of the Wellsian 'old type progressive' - 'free love', Bloomsbury, and Freudian.⁸

It would be wrong to see this interest in psychology as being restricted to those among the middle-class 'intellectual' Left as the study of psychology was included among the courses provided by the National Council of Labour Colleges who published a book, *The Outline of Psychology*, to be used by classes. As the CP developed its own educational system and became increasingly hostile to the Labour College Movement the openness of the Party towards theories other than the 'Marxism' prescribed by the Soviet Union declined.

The onset of the 'class against class' politics of the 'Third Period' meant that the British Party retreated even further into its own politically pure world. Theories and ideas emanating from other than 'Marxist' sources were rejected wholesale. As the first sentence of an article written by a Party member, categorically entitled 'Medicine in the Service of the Bourgeoisie', put it: 'Doctors, like all other scientific experts, are compelled to work fundamentally in the interests of the dominant power in society - the capitalist class'.⁹ With regard to Freud, even at the beginning of the Popular Front period, Party writers were still making 'clear their belief that the question of the relationship between Marx and Freud can be raised only by those who wish to dilute, or rather pollute, Marxism with phantasy and verbiage'.¹⁰ The rise of dialectical materialism as the recognised theoretical basis of the world Communist movement from the early 1930s, encouraged this attitude of rejecting all other theories and methods of interpreting reality (including Freud and psychoanalysis in general). Yet, with the growing trickle of new members after 1929-30, who included in their number middle-

class intellectuals, the first attempts were made at 'integrating Marxism with psychology'. The phenomenon of fascism led a few to turn towards psychoanalytical means of understanding the reasons for its appeal. In Germany Wilhelm Reich's efforts at combining his own psychoanalytic theories, particularly the determining role he assigned to the sexual libido, with Marxism led to his expulsion from the KPD in 1932. No such controversial or original 'Communist psychology' was forthcoming in Britain and British Party leaders were somewhat more accommodating towards those members who indulged in what might be seen as 'theoretical eccentricities'. However, the most important factor which allowed for a certain 'ideological loosening-up' were the post-1933 developments, after the KPD's destruction as a mass Party, when Popular Front politics came to the fore.

The Popular Front - Freudianism and Bernalism

Christopher Caudwell's *Illusion and Reality* makes copious references to the various interpretations and theories of psychoanalysis and psychology. The book's bibliography contains alone seven works by Freud and four by Jung. Caudwell, writing in 1936, recognised the 'important discoveries' made by psychotherapy and the insights that had been made into the questions of consciousness, instinct, and reality, but then went on to show the weaknesses and inadequacies of this approach. At the beginning of his chapter 'The Psyche and Phantasy' he makes clear his overall view that:

Probably in no other field has the weakness of modern science been more clearly shown than in the subsequent development of the important data gained by Freud in his early researches. This weakness is the lack of any synthetic world-view in which to fit the empirical discoveries made. The researches of a brilliant investigator such as Freud increase instead of clarifying the hopeless confusion of modern ideology'.¹¹

'Bourgeois psychology' is incapable, Caudwell goes on to argue, of going beyond the concept of an 'individual in civil society' and of comprehending the material/biological and social basis from which consciousness arises. However, the significant thing is (from the point of view of my study) that Caudwell felt it necessary to address the ideas of Freud and Jung. Furthermore, as the above quotation makes clear, he characterised this field of study as 'modern science'.

It was the Left Book Club that issued the clearest attempt to integrate Marxism and psychoanalytic theory in 1937 with Reuben Osborn's book *Freud and Marx - A Dialectical Study*, a book, concerned '... in presenting a case for the closer study of psycho-analysis by Marxists, of Marxism by psycho-analysts, and of both by the general public'.¹² The publication of *Freud and Marx* and a further work by Osborn the following year, *The Psychology of Reaction*, a psychological study of fascism, owed a great deal to John Strachey's enthusiasm for psychoanalytic theory. Strachey, as one of the triumvirate who selected the books for the Left Book Club, was responsible for the selection¹³ of *Freud and Marx* and wrote an enthusiastic introduction to the book. Among other things he gave his opinion that 'Engels would no more have neglected Freud's discoveries in the field of psychology than he neglected the discoveries of Darwin or of Morgan in the fields of biology or anthropology'.¹⁴ Already in 1932 at the beginning of his developing relationship with the British Communist Party, it is reported that Strachey was engaged in long discussions with Palme Dutt about Freud and Marx.¹⁵ Undoubtedly, Dutt would have attempted to convince him of the incompatibility of Freudianism and Marxism, and this may well have been one of the reasons Strachey was not immediately and publicly brought into the CP. Later, when Strachey's separation from the Party was largely cosmetic for the purposes of forwarding a Popular Front strategy, advocacy of Freud (and going to regular sessions of

psychoanalysis as Strachey did) would not have been seen as grounds for precluding someone from membership of the Communist Party. A more critical book, *Sigmund Freud* by Francis Bartlett, was brought out by the Left Book Club in 1938. Yet, although rejecting Osborn's attempt at reconciling Freud with Marx, Bartlett felt it was important that there should be serious study of Freud's work: '... Freud does not merit the same contempt from Marxists that he endured for so many years from Victorian philistines'.¹⁶ Quoting the 'experimental psychoanalysis' carried out by the Soviet psychologist A. Luria, Bartlett claimed that 'Marxist experimentation' had in fact confirmed the three basic assumptions upon which psychoanalytic observations rested. The confirmation that:

unconscious and active mental processes do exist; that these processes remain unconscious due to an economic mechanism of repression which manifests itself as resistance in the conflicting nature of the cure; and finally, that the free flow of associations is determined and in part derived from the subject's secret complexes.¹⁷

Having made this plain, Bartlett spends the remainder of his book showing the limitations of Freud, in particular maintaining the impossibility of postulating '... any urges within the human being which are not contingent upon the social environment. The individual can no longer be separated from his social context'.¹⁸

Despite the latitude afforded by the Left Book Club to discuss the relevance of Freud there was no specialist group of Club members formed to continue and advance the discussion (there was no LBC Psychology Group). Although Charles Rycroft,¹⁹ now regarded as Britain's most distinguished psychoanalyst, had joined the Party while at Cambridge, by the time he had taken up the study of psychology his membership had lapsed. The only authoritative Communist Party commentary on Freud and psychology came from

the ostensibly non-member Bernal. On reviewing Osborn's book in *Labour Monthly*, July 1937, Bernal went to some length to reject the author's attempt at reconciling Freud with Marx, declaring that Freudianism was '... just one more form of subjective philosophy and must be understood and rejected as such' and going further he gave his opinion that '... politically, it is a profoundly dangerous influence, paralysing action and leading to fascism'. In his influential work *The Social Function of Science* (1939) he asserted that: 'Psychology is still very much of a pseudo-science; it contains embedded in it many metaphysical and religious ideas which the history of science shows must be removed before an effective objectivity can be reached'.²⁰ At a time when the linkage between science and Marxism (Dialectical Materialism) was becoming commonplace among Communists psychology (and especially Freud) was attacked not so much for being 'bourgeois' as for being insufficiently scientific, its theories inadequately rooted in experimental evidence.

The Second World War - Psychologists and Psychiatrists in the War Effort

The War inspired leftwing professional people more than ever before to relate their own fields of work and expertise to social ends - the struggle for survival. Scientists campaigned for the government to begin a real and effective use of the forces of science. The Penguin Special of 1940, *Science in War*, written by among others Bernal and Zuckerman, included a call for the use of applied psychology in the armed forces.

The writer added:

If psychology had developed as it should have been in the twenty years since the last War, something more positive could have been offered. One can only hope that psychologists will take the opportunity offered by the conditions of modern warfare to find out now how and why people behave in times of stress.²¹

Figures like the head of the psychology department at Glasgow University became the 'Psychological Adviser to the Admiralty and War Office'. One of the earliest practising psychiatrists in the Party, Dr. Brian Kirman (in practice from 1936), became an honorary major RAMC, and served throughout the War as a specialist psychiatrist. The problem of dealing with a huge influx of recruits and deciding where best to deploy them, gave a great impetus to the mental testing movement (as was the case with the First World War, in particular in the USA). A Party psychologist writing in 1948 remarked that this process and its successes helped give 'a greater prestige to the psychologist, both in education and industry'.²²

Outside of the armed forces there were other significant ventures in bringing psychiatry into the service of the War effort, including the establishment of the Roffey Park Rehabilitation Centre at the start of 1945. This Centre, the first of its kind, was devoted to treating cases of nervous disorder among the working population, something which had been on the increase as a result of the stressful wartime circumstances and conditions. One of the Centre's two resident psychiatrists was the Communist Dr. Richard Doll, who saw the Centre as '... a site of research and study for industrial medicine and psychotherapy; as a sign of the continually increasing sense of responsibility industry must bear for the health of its workers. Roffey Park is an advance post, and its staff and patients are in a sense pioneers'.²³ Later Doll was to move out of the field of psychiatry²⁴ and eventually gain a knighthood for his research work at Oxford, where he established the link between smoking and cancer.

Post-War and the Emergence of the Psychologists' Group

The War led to a renewal and strengthening of the ties between psychiatry and the general body of medicine, and a rise in clinical psychology.²⁵ It

was against this background that a Communist Party Psychologists' Group was formed, made up of predominantly young psychologists and psychiatrists, the core of whom were employed at the Maudsley Hospital, a Medical School of the University of London. The School was renamed the Institute of Psychiatry in 1949-50 and within the Institute there was a Department of Psychology. One of those who joined the Maudsley at this time was the Communist Monte Shapiro. Originally from Southern Rhodesia with a degree in psychology, he came to Britain in 1936 and was given a research scholarship at the University of London. However, his studies suffered because of his active involvement in work for Spanish Relief and Party duties, after he joined the CP in 1937-38. He also became disillusioned with what he felt were inadequate scientific standards where he worked; he walked out of two academic institutions. When war broke out he volunteered for the RAF, was wounded and repatriated back to Britain through a Red Cross Exchange and after spending a long time in hospital he finally began to look for a job in 1946. 'The idea of clinical psychology interested me because at least it was useful - a useful way of being a psychologist'.²⁶ Shapiro attended a psychology conference to find out '... where the hell people were going in psychology' and it was here he met Eysenck and a few others from the Maudsley and was advised to apply there for a job. Although Eysenck was decidedly not a Communist, 'he picked me out ... because he had found a radical scientist and they had a problem with finding clinical psychologists who were also scientists'.²⁷ Shapiro in turn was instrumental in bringing other Party members into the field of psychology and specifically taking up study and research posts at the Maudsley. One of these was Neil O'Connor who had graduated from Perth University with psychology, came to Oxford University on a scholarship, and had then been called up and spent the majority of the War in India. He had joined the

Party in Australia in the mid-thirties and had transferred his membership to the British CP when he came to Oxford. His membership lapsed while in the army but was renewed immediately after demobilisation. In 1946 O'Connor intended to go into teaching as he felt there was little chance of being able to utilise his psychology or philosophy qualifications. However, Shapiro helped to convince him that he really should not drop out of psychology and in the developing situation of that time there was a need for progressive and 'scientifically' orientated people to come into the profession. As a result, O'Connor finally accepted a job offered to him by the Medical Research Council at the Maudsley and like Shapiro he has spent the whole of his professional career there.

Another Party member at the Maudsley was Max Hamilton. He had joined the CP at the end of 1945 on his return to civilian life after War-time service in the RAF. He had already qualified as a doctor from University College Hospital, London, and it was while he was a Medical Officer in the RAF that his experiences in treating patients withdrawn from front-line service, on the grounds of neurosis, led him to take an interest in psychiatry. Max Hamilton met Monte Shapiro at a meeting of the British Psychological Society some time in 1946, and this probably encouraged Hamilton to train in psychiatry at the Maudsley. His stay at the Maudsley, however, was only brief as he decided to return to the University College Hospital for postgraduate education. While at the Maudsley and UCH, he was a member of the Psychologists' Group. Shapiro also brought Alan D.B. Clarke, into the field of psychology:

After demobilisation, I found that my sister was already in the CP and my new brother-in-law [Monte Shapiro - SRP] also. He was a clinical psychologist and persuaded me that psychology was right for me. So I went to university and after graduation moved to the Maudsley Hospital under Eysenck for a Ph.D., as did my wife.²⁸

Both Alan Clarke and his wife Ann were members of the Communist Party and were involved in the Psychologists' Group.

The decision to start the Group came from those Communists in London who were professionally engaged in the psychological and psychiatric world and was taken with very little reference to the Party leadership, although clearly Party approval was required for the formation of the Group. Already in 1947 CP doctors had formed their own group, in addition to the broader Socialist Medical Association. The Sigerist Society²⁹ had the stated aim of providing '... an opportunity to discuss the theoretical and social aspects of Medicine from a Marxist point of view'.³⁰ The person who it is claimed made the initial steps at forming a Psychologists' Group later the same year (1947) was a London psychiatrist George Morgan (his wife Betty was also both a Communist and psychiatrist). The Group came under the auspices of the National Cultural Committee at the end of 1947 or early 1948 as responsibility for the various professional and specialist groups was transferred from the London District Committee to Sam Aaronovitch. Membership was in the region of 20 to 25 people: '... largely based on the Maudsley, and clinical psychologists but it included a couple of teachers and a couple of non-Maudsley psychiatrists plus a few other psychologists from London and elsewhere. Some of the latter attended rarely'.³¹ In addition there were one or two medical figures, professionally involved in areas other than psychiatry or psychology, who attended meetings of the Group. The pathologist and CP member Dr. Leonard Crome³² was one of those who fitted into this category, while Dr. Angus McPherson, who worked in neurology and for a time acted as Secretary of the Sigerist Society, was also peripherally involved with the Psychologists' Group.

The Motivation and Orientation of the Psychologists' Group

With the exception of one or two of those involved in the Group, such as the educationalist and teacher Beatrix Tudor-Hart and Dr. Morgan (who, according to Neil O'Connor, was of 'Freudian orientation'), there was little enthusiasm for Freud³³ and psychoanalysis. There is thus a clear difference between the pre-War efforts by Osborn and Strachey to introduce Freud to Communists and those Party members who chose a career in psychology and psychiatry in the heady atmosphere at the beginning of 'Post-War Reconstruction'. The 'radical psycho-analyst' operating a private practice was largely a thing of the past. Wartime experiences had led psychologists and psychiatrists to see their rightful place as being in public employment. Private work was regarded as being beyond the pale, not just by those psychologists who were Communists but by the majority of those qualified in the field. Communists entering the field of psychology were particularly concerned with establishing the scientific credentials of their work. They felt it was a necessity to distance themselves and psychology as a whole from non-scientific methods and the metaphysical and religious ideas which had led Bernal to characterise psychology as a 'pseudo-science'. Alan Clarke wrote: 'The motivation from Maudsley people arose, I think, both from the attractions of a new scientific approach which was being hammered out by others than Eysenck, and a human desire to put psychology to the service of real needs - mental illness and mental subnormality'.³⁴

The Psychologists' Group tended to act as a study circle meeting regularly at first at the Morgan's house and later at the house of Jack³⁵ and Barbara Tizard (both Group members) at Clapham. Freud was criticised and a good deal of time was spent going through Pavlov's *Collected Works* and trying to find out '... exactly what he might mean from our point of view'.³⁶ The Group also studied in some depth a book by the Soviet author

G.V. Anrep, *Conditioned Reflexes* (1927), one of the earliest efforts at making Pavlovian psychology known to English readers. Yet, as Group members recall their meetings, most of the time was spent taking it in turns to discuss their own research. Those in the Group were nearly all young and at the beginning of their professional life and none were self-assured enough to start publishing works giving 'A Marxist approach to psychology', hence there is no book as such that was produced by the Group³⁷ (as for example with the Economists or Historians). Instead, they strove to improve their proficiency and as part and parcel of this contribute to the process of advancing psychology along scientific, practical and socially related ends. Shapiro, 'working everyday and reading and studying late into every night'³⁸, had no time to attend his local Party branch in Dulwich, for which he was greatly criticised. On one occasion he was visited by a deputation who came to protest over his absence. However, as he puts it, 'the Psychologists' Group was the one concession I made'.³⁹ Here was an area of Party activity which directly related to his professional work. Other Party psychologists were not quite as divorced from mundane Party branch work as Shapiro.

Although, as was demanded by the CP of all its members, Party psychologists were members of their respective trade unions, with all the Group's clinical psychologists in the A.Sc.W, trade union matters were not raised at Group meetings. A small amount of 'peace work' was carried out by the Group, as for example assisting 'Scientists for Peace' to set up a meeting at the Maudsley. Generally speaking, though, the Psychologists' Group was very introverted,⁴⁰ members were of value to each other '... in providing detailed discussion of psychological issues but we must have been something of a disappointment to the Party'.⁴¹

The 'Battle of Ideas' and Intelligence Testing

The CP's theoretical journal *Communist Review* for January 1948 included an article by Monte Shapiro, 'Some Notes on Mental Testing'. Shapiro gave an overall account of the developments that had taken place in the field of intelligence testing including the rudiments of a Marxist interpretation for why it had arisen simultaneously in a number of countries at the beginning of the twentieth century. Although pointing out the inadequacies and limitations of current tests and the fact that many psychologists failed to understand that to some extent an individual's abilities were related to their social circumstances, Shapiro was at pains to declare the real value of mental testing to mankind. Not only, according to Shapiro, had tests proved to be of great use in the selection of recruits for the armed services but '... the mental test movement has laid the basis for the scientific study of the nature of individual differences and their relation to social and biological factors'.⁴² The next month a second member of the Psychologists' Group, Mary Flanders, published an article on 'Intelligence Tests in Schools' in the *Communist Review*. Flanders was extremely positive over intelligence tests in schools, arguing that they gave a more accurate assessment of a child's ability than teachers' estimates. She also stressed that intelligence tests were '... valuable in dealing with scholastic backwardness as they throw useful light on cases where there is a discrepancy between ability and achievement'.⁴³ A point stressed by both Flanders and Shapiro was that for testing to be successful it was necessary to provide adequate finance for the 'large-scale research' that was required for the devising of 'good tests' and that these should only be administered (and the results interpreted) by fully trained people, i.e. psychologists.

It is instructive that the first published contributions from Communist psychologists to the Party's theoretical journal should have

been positive expositions of intelligence tests. In this they were reflecting the general rise in prominence of testing that had taken place during the War and in the evolution of educational policy (Burt's work was a particularly important factor in the emergence of the tripartite secondary educational system - in 1946 he became the first British psychologist to be knighted). Intelligence testing and psychometrics were widely used by some members of the Group in their own professional work and were considered important 'scientific tools of the trade'. Shapiro and Flanders must have been in some way motivated by a desire not just to 'educate' their fellow Communists about intelligence tests and the positive contribution they could make but to also indicate the 'scientific credentials' of their profession. The first steps had been made, Shapiro claimed, in the classification of some aspects of 'ability' (general, verbal, numerical, etc). It now remained to continue the long and difficult task of fully charting '... the social and biological nature of human ability within a capitalist society, and how it will change under Socialism'.⁴⁴ Through developing and improving the 'science' of measuring and predicting the 'intelligence' of individuals, measures and policies could be devised that would make the most of everyone's particular abilities. In this way under socialism individuals would be content and fulfilled and society would gain the most in efficiency and productivity from its citizens.

The articles on intelligence tests were over the subsequent months subjected to much debate and criticism. A combination of the Party's espousal of the 'Battle of Ideas' and the growing realisation of the part played by intelligence tests in the consolidation of a selective secondary school system, led to the adoption of a strong anti-intelligence testing 'line' by the Party.⁴⁵ Shortly after his article had been published, Monte Shapiro reported to the Group that Emile Burns had passed on to him two

critical responses to what he had written. One, by Dorothy M. Collar, attacked Shapiro for implicitly accepting the bourgeois definition of 'intelligence' as '... something static, which can be isolated from behaviour or action in concrete social situations'.⁴⁶ Marxists took a completely different view of intelligence - it was inseparable from consciousness and effort: 'Man makes himself. New situations call forth new abilities. Where these abilities will be found cannot be determined by any mechanical "mental tests"'.⁴⁷ The other critical response came from John Daniels who felt Shapiro's article was basically presenting a 'bourgeois sociological approach' to the question and provided ammunition to the opponents of the Party's call for multilateral schools, as they could now quote from the Party's own journal in their arguments against CP teachers.

It was Brian and Joan Simon who effectively developed and expounded what became the new Party position on the whole question in a number of key articles. Brian Simon, a lecturer on education at the University of Leicester, had come into contact with the selective system (streaming and selection) as a teacher in Salford during the period 1947-50. It was an experience which horrified him and just as he was beginning to consider the role of intelligence testing as the theoretical basis and legitimation of the whole selective system Shapiro's article appeared. Writing in the *Communist Review* for October 1949 Brian Simon set out in some detail a critique of what Shapiro and Flanders had argued and for the first time raised the issue of the Soviet attitude towards the practice of intelligence testing. As long ago as 1936 the Central Committee of the CPSU had issued a decree that condemned 'pedology' (mental measurement) and put an end to intelligence testing in the schools. A report of these developments, including a reproduction of the decree in full, had been included in *Moscow in Making* (1937)⁴⁸, a book that had resulted from a

visit by Brian Simon's parents.⁴⁹ Recalling this decree, Brian Simon argued that it had opened the way for a new psychology, one that '...emphasises the essential "educability" of the human being, whatever his age and development.'⁵⁰ Joan Simon, an educational journalist on the *Times Educational Supplement*, entered the fray with a long reply to Dr. Angus McPherson in the pages of *The Modern Quarterly*. McPherson concerned himself with critically exposing the fallacies in the claims of psychologists (he concentrated on Burt) who saw intelligence as determined by heredity:⁵¹ 'There are differences between the average intelligence of the professional classes and the average intelligence of the working classes, but ... there is no evidence whatsoever that this difference is due to innate characteristics rather than environmental influences'.⁵² Furthermore, by accepting the concept that each individual has a measurable 'intelligence' he was, according to Joan Simon, still arguing '... within the limits set by bourgeois theory and practice'.⁵³ Instead of attempting to understand the

unified process whereby the impact of reality on the human individual gives rise to a process of conscious activity and thought ... bourgeois psychology is narrowly limited to investigating the mechanisms set in motion by the impact of the mind on the given environment and vice versa ... [it] has forsaken objective enquiry and experiment and seeks a justification.⁵⁴

In a rejoinder McPherson admitted that he had made mistakes in his article and like Flanders and Shapiro he had failed to elucidate the class purpose of intelligence testing. Nevertheless, he was not completely convinced of Joan Simon's approach which he described as 'over-simplified' and dismissive towards the great body of psychologists and neurologists. Whatever misinterpretations were made of '... the known facts about intellectual functions, they are a manifestation of material activity and therefore require examination and explanation'.⁵⁵ Replying to the

rejoinder Joan Simon tellingly remarked that it was no accident that in his original article McPherson had omitted a 'class analysis' of intelligence testing, it was symptomatic of a 'retreat from Marxism and a failure to engage in the battle of ideas'.

The question of intelligence tests was relatively quickly settled with the Psychologists' Group going along with the view expressed by Brian and Joan Simon. Brian Simon remembers very little resistance to his arguments when he attended Psychologists' Group meetings, in fact he recalls much more of a 'battle' in an extended correspondence with J.B.S. Haldane.⁵⁶ As regards Party psychologists, Neil O'Connor claims that the pressure from the much larger body of schoolteachers, who were taking the brunt of the battle against selection, ensured that the Group 'fell into line'. O'Connor goes on to say: 'We dragged our feet and were lacking in enthusiasm rather than directly opposing it ... people like Jack Tizard and myself ... working in the field of subnormality ... were using intelligence tests every day'.⁵⁷ Some members of the Group needed no convincing of the reactionary nature of intelligence testing. For example Beatrix Tudor-Hart who in a letter to a friend wrote: '"Psychometrics" is the study of "measurements" of mental processes - the applications of statistics to psychology: mental tests, personality tests, group tests etc. It is all in my opinion, bunk, because they don't really know what they are measuring!!'⁵⁸ Monte Shapiro has commented that he was a 'sort of ally of the Stalinist approach to intelligence' (he describes Brian Simon's *Communist Review* article, in my opinion unfairly, as 'doctrinaire Stalinism') because he could see that it was a 'pseudo-science' and the metrics were 'pseudo-metrics'. However, this interpretation hardly accords with Shapiro's initial position as expressed in his 1948 article 'Mental Tests' in *The Communist Review*.⁵⁹

As part of the 'Battle of Ideas' the National Cultural Committee in collaboration with Party teachers held an open meeting on the question of intelligence tests, 'Intelligence Testing and the Class System of Education', in October 1950 which was attended by 300 people. In a CP 'lead-up' article to the Conference the central role played by Communist teachers in the re-evaluation and subsequent rejection of intelligence tests was reiterated. The decision of the Party after the War to fight for the extension and democratisation of education, as an essential element in the struggle against capitalism, had led to a major battle against the imposition of a tripartite structure on secondary education. This in turn had led, the article argued, to Party teachers taking a leading role in questioning the eleven-plus exam. At this point '... the campaign was hindered by founding its activities upon basically anti-Marxist theses'.⁶⁰ It was only after the 1936 CPSU decree was 'rediscovered' that the hindrance was cleared and instead of attempting to 'liberalise' the testers, the whole basis of psychometry and testing was condemned. The intellectual growth of those working-class youngsters who joined the Communist Party was proof enough that humans '... are creatures actively making themselves as they change the world'.⁶¹ There was, nevertheless, still the possibility of making common cause with a number of those psychologists of the 'environmentalist school'⁶² in the struggle for fairer, more democratic schools (the psychologists - Blackburn, Gray, Stoddard, Fleming were mentioned).

Interestingly, given the general condemnation of all things American by the Party, a group of psychologists at the University of Iowa were responsible for initiating a critique of intelligence tests from an environmentalist position.⁶³ The results of this research and approach were reproduced and expanded upon by Katherine Fletcher in a book released in the late 1940s. Brian Simon drew inspiration and some of the arguments

and evidence amassed against intelligence tests from these sources for his book, which was finally published by Lawrence and Wishart in 1953, *Intelligence Testing and the Secondary School*. It was Simon's book along with the separate work of a Cambridge psychologist, Alice Heim, who wrote criticising some aspects of the 'theory of intelligence' in *The Appraisal of Intelligence*, that led Burt to defend his theories (the eleven-plus, intelligence testing). Burt returned to his 'twin studies', research which underlay the claim that intelligence was largely determined by a person's genes, and released a whole series of fraudulent results which were said to further reinforce the thesis.

Although as a body the Psychologists' Group accepted the Party line over intelligence tests no member produced any 'Marxist critique' of intelligence and the way it was used as a concept by various psychologists. Nor did any of the Group undertake any study or investigation into Burt's published research, which they, in common with the whole of the psychological profession, took at face value. It was not until the 1970s that the American psychologist Leon Kamin began to reveal the falsity of Burt's 'twin studies',⁶⁴ that former Communist psychologists began to query Burt's methods. In 1976 Jack Tizard attempted to trace the various alleged assistants who had been involved in Burt research work, and on 25 and 26 October 1976 *The Times* reported Professor Tizard as saying 'Burt's intelligence theory is completely discredited'. During the 1940s and '50s, while the Group was in existence, Communist psychologists did enter into public print over the matter of intelligence tests in education and specifically the eleven-plus exam but they did not take a 'Marxist/Simon' line.⁶⁵ Writing at length in the journal of the Socialist Educational Association, *Modern Education* in 1950, Jack Tizard explained, as a practitioner of intelligence tests, the limitations of predicting on the basis of tests people's future

development. Psychological tests for job selection (e.g. aircraft pilots) could predict the subsequent performance of individuals with an accuracy about 40 per cent better than chance but in education, Tizard warned, it worked out at only between 8 and 20 per cent better than chance. Up until that point in time,

tests have rarely failed to cut down the percentage of misclassification over what would have been by chance, by less than about one quarter, even though psychologists for the last half century have devoted much energy to test construction. As a method of selection in a democratic community testing leaves very much to be desired.⁶⁶

Tizard concluded by attacking selection for secondary education at eleven years old on the basis that little could be done to change a child's intelligence; this was, he claimed, a very reactionary view of human abilities and which could not even be supported by intelligence testing. Of perhaps greater impact the CP pair Alan and Anne Clarke were led through the accumulation of their own data,

to examine the whole question of IQ constancy over lengthy periods for individuals. We found massive data, mainly from the USA, which showed that variability was fairly common, and this started off a line of work which has continued ever since and has been commonly accepted. Our first paper in *The Lancet* (1953) was accompanied by an editorial and had a wide impact.⁶⁷

Soviet Psychology and the Psychologists' Group

As is evident from the campaign against intelligence tests, in this case the rediscovery of the 1936 decree on psychometrics, the Soviet position was very influential in the formation of Party theory and policy. During the 'Battle of Ideas', Party members in the professions were encouraged more than ever before by the CP leadership to study and draw lessons from the activities of their Soviet counterparts. In the field of psychology,

as with other professional areas, the Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR was an important means by which a limited amount of Soviet work in this field was translated and made available for English readers. Brian Simon remembers being particularly impressed with the SCR translation of a lecture by the Leningrad psychologist B.G. Ananiev, *The Progress of Soviet Psychology*, as it '... revealed a completely new and different approach to understanding human development'⁶⁸— an approach that was in stark contrast with what Simon found prevalent in Britain, which was summed up in the underlying attitude that '... you cannot really do anything very much because of this innate genetic make-up of the child'.⁶⁹

It was, however, the work of Pavlov that was given overwhelming importance. In the Soviet Union in the late 1940s Pavlovian theory was given official endorsement much in the same way Lysenkoism/Michurinism monopolised the biological sciences (although not with such damaging results). Pavlov's view that the brain had control over all physiological and biochemical processes in the human being was adopted as an article of faith by a special session of the Academy of Medical Sciences of the USSR in 1949. It was claimed that Pavlov had not only laid the basis for the further development of physiology but also the science of medicine and psychology. In particular, as the CP doctor Leonard Crome put it:

'Pavlov's discovery of the role played by conditioned reflexes and by the first and second signalling systems enabled us to approach the study of the mind in a really objective and scientific way. All knowledge ... is seen as accumulation and interplay of conditioned reflexes of varying complexity, acquired in the course of the individual's experience. No aspect of the mind remains therefore unknowable, even if its full understanding is still immensely difficult.'⁷⁰

Plainly, Pavlovian theory was well suited to the great stress educationalists in the Party put on the fact that all people, with the

exception of the mentally sick, could be educated. In developing a criticism of the scientific basis of intelligence tests, those like Brian Simon and John Daniels drew upon Pavlov's writings the essence of which was seen as that of 'the infinite plasticity of human beings'. All this would have been 'taken on board' by the CP Psychologists' Group, however, for Group members it would have been the practical implications of Pavlov's work for behaviour therapy and the treatment of neuroses that would have been of most importance. According to Alan Clarke one of the Group actually managed, quite successfully, to apply Pavlovian principles to treatment but the rest of them '... were sufficiently happy with the existing methodology to do little more than tip their hats to Pavlov's and Luria's approaches. But there was no doubt that we focussed on learning, in its broadest sense, as being a central issue'.⁷¹ Neil O'Connor believes that it was Shapiro who introduced Eysenck to Pavlov and helped encourage the adoption of behaviour therapy by some in the Clinical Section of the Psychology Department at the Maudsley.⁷² There were, however, no organised attempts at propagating the ideas of Pavlov that bear comparison with the efforts of French Communists in this period. In Lyons alone a 'Pavlov Group', formed by the city's CP, managed to attract 400 doctors, psychologists, psychiatrists and others to a conference on 'Pavlov and Dialectical Materialism'. Despite the best efforts of Sam Aaronovitch the Psychologists' Group continued to be somewhat circumspect with regard to Pavlov. At the height of the 'Battle of Ideas', Neil O'Connor recalls that the 'cult of Pavlov' was even interpreted by some Party leaders as rendering psychology redundant:

Maurice Cornforth ... used to lecture us on the necessity of giving up psychology and becoming either philosophers or perhaps physiologists at the best but not psychologists. Psychology was really pretty much a waste of time because it was all either physiology or sociology, in itself it was nothing.⁷³

The first large-scale account and analysis of Pavlov to be published by the Party publishers was not written by a Briton but by an American, Dr. Harry K. Wells, with the title *Ivan P. Pavlov* (1956). Wells followed this up with a second volume in 1960, *Pavlov and Freud, vol. 2, Freud, A Pavlovian Critique*. Moreover, it is not insignificant that those who first brought out books on Soviet psychology were educationalists with tenuous links with the Psychologists' Group.⁷⁴

The loosening of the 'ideological constraints' with the demise of Stalin and the increasing emergence of long repressed worries and doubts within the world Communist movement had its repercussions among members of the Group. The Clarkes resigned from the Party in 1955, even before they had experienced the shattering events of 1956:⁷⁵ 'We became increasingly uneasy about the CP especially for imposing theory on practice, rather than modifying theory in the light of evidence in our own subject. Moreover, in the early 1950s evidence from the USSR began to leak out following Stalin's death in 1953'.⁷⁶ In particular the growing doubts about Lysenko's scientific honesty led many to further question the accepted theoretical positions of the Zhdanov years: questioning of the position on genetics, encouraged a questioning of what had been written on linguistics, and the Pavlovian approach to medicine and psychology, etc. A jolt was given to the whole notion that intellectuals and professional people should try to apply the tenets of dialectical materialism to their own areas/fields of concern. In psychology '... the Soviet Union began to go through Western psychology and see what was good about it,⁷⁷ and they, in O'Connor's opinion, 'caved in' and started imitating Western psychologists. It was a process by which Communists were disabused of the idea that science in the Soviet Union was different and new, and superior to that in operation elsewhere, it was '... gradually seen to be no better than it should have been'.⁷⁸

The Work of Communist Psychologists

Those in the CP Psychologists' Group were not given to extensive theorising about 'Marxist psychology'. They immersed themselves in their professional work, directing their efforts at applying psychology to social needs, as Neil O'Connor has described the atmosphere/spirit that was pervasive at that time: 'Almost everything one did anyway at that time, in the post-war period, was progressive because the very nature of the country was progressive'.⁷⁹ Important work was undertaken by CP psychologists in critically examining those who had been termed ineducable. Neil O'Connor and Jack Tizard were funded by the MRC to investigate⁸⁰ the problem of the mentally retarded, and this study was influential in beginning the process of replacing the old notion of custodial care with one of rehabilitation:

The work that I and Tizard did in relation to the employment of the subnormal was inevitably progressive because it got them out of hospital and into the community. The whole of the current services that are available to such people are to a very large extent due to work like that Tizard and I did at that time which established the fact that these people could live and work in the community.⁸¹

On the completion of his Ph.D. (under Eysenck) Alan Clarke and his wife were appointed to a mental retardation hospital, Manor Hospital at Epsom, where they carried out studies of the patients. In many respects the hospital acted, in Clarke's words, as a 'social dustbin' drawing its intake from young people from poor families:

I suppose that with our notions of optimism about the human condition, we were alerted to the fact of improvement, whether spontaneous or induced, in our 'patients'. Empirical studies yielded entirely new findings which played a part in both clinical and developmental psychology.⁸²

Brian Kirman was also concerned with this area and in a joint effort with a fellow psychiatrist Dr. L.T. Hilliard he wrote a standard text on Mental Deficiency (in addition Kirman took a special interest in child development). Neil Hamilton also shied away from academic psychology and after completing his postgraduate education at the Maudsley he worked in two London hospitals, Tooting Bec and Kings College Hospital. As a psychiatrist who concentrated on the field of mental health he took up a position at Leeds University in 1953 where he developed a rating scale, the 'Hamilton Scale', for depression which is now known and used throughout the world as an aid to assessing the response of different forms of mental illness to anti-depressants, tranquilisers and neuroleptics drugs. Monte Shapiro was appointed by Eysenck as head of the Clinical Section and has been praised by Eysenck for resisting the various psychiatric pressures to introduce psychotherapy and thus helping to maintain the professional and 'scientific' integrity and independence of clinical psychology. His own particular work has been concerned with investigating levels in psychiatric disorder, motivated, in his own words, by the desire to '... use of the scientific method as a liberatory means to help the individual person'.⁸³ It is apparent, even from this sketchy account of the work of those who had been members of the Psychologists' Group, that for such a small group of people, Communist psychologists have made important contributions to their profession.

Footnotes

- 1 K. Martin, *Father Figures*, p. 110.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 M. Jones, *Chances - An Autobiography*, p. 11.
- 4 Her brother Alexander joined in 1929, Beatrix joined then a year or two before.
- 5 Alex. T. Hart - a Cambridge undergraduate at the time - letter 24 May 1985.
- 6 D. Cauter, *The Fellow-Travelers*, p. 231.
- 7 See Chapter 13, 'A Postscript on the degree of Ideological Conformity'.
- 8 Source - Dr. N. O'Connor, interview 13 September 1985.
- 9 David Frost, 'Medicine in the Service of the Bourgeoisie' *Labour Monthly*, March 1932.
- 10 Bartlett, *Sigmund Freud*, p. 9, reference to T.A. Jackson's *Dialectics* and M. Graubard, *Biology and Human Behaviour*.
- 11 C. Caudwell, *Illusion and Reality*, p. 178.
- 12 R. Osborn, *Freud and Marx*, p. 25.
- 13 See Hugh Thomas, *John Strachey*, p. 164.
- 14 J. Strachey, 'Introduction' in R. Osborn, op. cit., p. 6.
- 15 See H. Thomas, op. cit., p. 123.
- 16 F.H. Bartlett, *Sigmund Freud*, p. 10.
- 17 Ibid., p. 26.
- 18 Ibid., p. 137.
- 19 One of Brian Simon's three close college friends, the other two were John Madge and Martin Pollock.
- 20 J.D. Bernal, *The Social Function of Science*, p. 342.
- 21 *Science in War*, p. 50.
- 22 M. Shapiro, 'Some Notes on Mental Testing', *Communist Review*, January 1948.
- 23 '"We Build New Lives"', interview by Alison Boodson, a medical student, with Dr. Richard Doll, *Student Forward*, Spring 1945.
- 24 He was never active in the Psychologists' Group while in the Party.

- 25 The Socialist Medical Association in its proposals for planning post-war social services called for an extension of treatment facilities for the mentally disordered and defective, in addition to the undertaking of medical research in this area. This would involve '... an extension of training facilities for staff, and public funds should be made freely available for this. A contribution to the solution of those problems could be made by way of a drive to educate the public in mental health'. *The Social Services - The Immediate Problem and the Way Forward*, SMA memorandum 1944-45, p. 19.
- 26 M. Shapiro interview, 11 February 1986.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Prof. A.D.B. Clarke, letter 25 April 1986.
- 29 Communist Party physicians took the name of their group/Society from the socialist American doctor, Harry L. Sigerist, who visited the USSR in the 1930s and wrote what was to be an influential book, *Socialised Medicine in the Soviet Union*, (1937).
- 30 1948 information leaflet issued by The Sigerist Society, Membership Secretary, CP member, Dr. Hugh Faulkner.
- 31 Prof. A.D.B. Clarke, letter 6 June 1986.
- 32 Crome had been a pediatrician at Queen Mary's Hospital, London, for a time after the War.
- 33 In contrast with the British Party, Freud was highly regarded within the Italian Communist Party in the early 1950s as he was regarded as being anti-clerical - an observation Dr. Neil O'Connor made at the time.
- 34 Prof. A.D.B. Clarke, letter 6 June 1986.
- 35 Interestingly, Jack Tizard was originally from New Zealand which means that three of the leading figures in the Group, all of whom were to become professionally known and important, were immigrants from the Empire: New Zealand, Australia, and South Africa.
- 36 Dr. Neil O'Connor, interview 12 September 1985.
- 37 This is the explanation given to me by those Group members I have been in touch with, several of them did publish material from the early 1950s but what they produced was specifically based on their own research and was aimed at fellow professionals, e.g. M.B. Shapiro, 'Experimental method in the psychological description of the individual patient', *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 1957.
- 38 M. Shapiro, interview 11 February 1986.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Some of its members were 'open Communists', as was very much the case with Shapiro, and others were 'closed'.

- 41 Prof. A.D.B. Clarke, letter 2 September 1986.
- 42 M. Shapiro, 'Some Notes on Mental Testing', *Communist Review*, January 1948.
- 43 Mary Flanders, 'Intelligence Tests in Schools', *Communist Review*, February 1948.
- 44 M. Shapiro, 'Some Notes on Mental Testing', op. cit.
- 45 Before 1948-49 the Party had been in favour of intelligence tests, as, like Burt himself argued, they gave a chance to the 'bright' working-class child. During the upsurge of correspondence in the Party in 1956-57, when so much of previous CP activity and policy was put under a spotlight, Beatrix Tudor-Hart wrote in the Communist teachers' journal: 'Whether or not the Party knew in 1936 that the Soviet Union had abolished the test I do not know. I only know that Party teachers in the '30s supported intelligence tests and when I stated that in my opinion they were a very great danger as they postulated a false scientific theory, I was called among other things, a social fascist, defending my class (middle-class) interests when threatened by working-class children being given a real equal opportunity', *Education Today and Tomorrow*, November/December 1956.
- 46 Dorothy M. Collar's criticism - Psychologists' Group internal document.
- 47 Ibid.
- 48 The full title of the decree was: 'On Pedological Perversions in the System of the Peoples' Commissariat of Education'. Intelligence testing was officially banned on 4 July 1936 as it was said to encourage a feeling of despondency among those who 'failed' and help mandarinize society.
- 49 Brian Simon's mother had in fact been responsible for looking into education.
- 50 B. Simon, 'The Theory and Practice of Intelligence Testing', *Communist Review*, October 1949.
- 51 Burt even went so far as giving the ridiculous estimate that someone's intelligence was determined 25% by environment and 75% by heredity (something which can never be proved one way or the other).
- 52 A. McPherson, 'The Philosophical Aspects of Intelligence', *The Modern Quarterly*, Summer 1949.
- 53 J. Simon, 'Mental Testing', *The Modern Quarterly*, Winter 1949-50.
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 A. McPherson, 'Mental Testing', *The Modern Quarterly*, Spring 1950.

- 56 Haldane they remember as a strong advocate of intelligence testing, he no doubt would have seen the Party line in this area as connected to the rejection of 'sound genetics'. See Haldane's essay, 'The Inequality of Man', in a Pelican book of the same name (first published 1932, republished 1937). To quote from the essay: '...If psychologists are allowed anything like a free hand, and co-operate with geneticists, it should be possible by the time a child is about seven to arrive at a fair idea of its capacities, and children will be sorted out accordingly' (p. 31).
- 57 N. O'Connor, interview 12 September 1985.
- 58 B. Tudor-Hart, letter to Ellen Kalvesten-Elmer, 13 March 1949.
- 59 The Simons were undoubtedly right in seeing the whole use of intelligence tests as part of an ideological effort to give selection in education some 'scientific' justification. Yet Haldane and some of the psychologists could see some of the positive and progressive ways testing could be used, e.g. Tizard and O'Connor used tests to show that many of those in mental deficiency hospitals should not be there because their IQs were too high. Nowadays there are few people who would make such wide scientific claims for intelligence tests as was made in the 1940-s and '50s - see Fancher's *The Intelligence Men: Makers of the IQ Controversy* for a dispassionate account of the matter. In his concluding remarks he talks of the real but limited value of intelligence tests. Those like Shapiro, whatever way they might interpret it now, clearly altered their position over tests at this time (1949-50), no longer crediting them with such scientific importance.
- 60 'Marxism and Intelligence Tests', *World News and Views*, 24 June 1950.
- 61 Ibid.
- 62 Brian Simon did not attack intelligence tests on an environmentalist basis or declare that with a few exceptions all humans had roughly the same scholastic potential (as the *Times Educational Supplement* review claimed or as former Party psychologists have said in my interviews with them). What he was concerned to argue '... was that all children are educable, not that all are 'equal' (whatever that may mean)'. And 'the decisive factor is the adaptive power of the organism, through the activity of the higher nervous system Pavlov showed that it is this process of adaptation, the constant interpenetration of organism and environment, that constitutes learning. This implies that it is the control of this process through the provision of the right kind of environment, activity, stimulus, opportunity, that is the key to education. It follows that every child develops different characteristics, since the conditions of life of every child differ'. (B. Simon, 'Are Children Equal?', *Education Today*, July 1954.
- 63 See R.E. Fancher, op. cit., pp. 131-32.
- 64 Leslie Hearnshaw's 1979 biography *Cyril Burt* gave final irrevocable proof that Burt had systematically invented findings, etc.
- 65 See Chapter 13, 'A Postscript on the Degree of Ideological Conformity'.

- 66 Jack Tizard, 'Objectivity in Education', *Modern Education*, March 1950.
- 67 Prof. A.D.B. Clarke, letter 6 June 1986.
- 68 B. Simon, interview 18 February 1986.
- 69 Ibid.
- 70 Dr. L. Crome, 'Some Elements in the Thought of Pavlov', *Education Today and Tomorrow*, November/December 1955 - part of a series of articles on Pavlov in the CP teachers' journal.
- 71 Prof. A.D.B. Clarke, letter 6 June 1986.
- 72 Shapiro was in charge of the Clinical Section and for nearly 30 years he was, strictly speaking, working under Eysenck who was head of the Department; the two undoubtedly influenced each other - see Gibson's *Hans Eysenck - The Man and His Work*, p. 145 for one account of these matters.
- 73 N. O'Connor, interview 12 September 1985.
- 74 John McLeish, an academic, was responsible for the *S.C.R. Psychology Bulletin*, Vol. 2, No. 3, in 1955, *Materials on Soviet Psychology*, while in 1957 it was Brian Simon who brought out the ground-breaking collection of translated contributions, *Psychology in the Soviet Union*. Later Neil O'Connor brought out two important compilations of essays by current Soviet psychologists, *Recent Soviet Psychology* in 1961, and *Present-day Russian Psychology* in 1966. Earlier, in 1953, the launching of a journal of 'progressive psychology', *Psychological Transactions* was the initiative of Party educationalists in Nottingham, not CP psychologists.
- 75 Monte Shapiro and his wife left in 1956 after the printing of the 'Secret Speech' in the press, resisting the efforts of a Czech Communist (who had once worked at the Maudsley) to bring them 'back into the fold'. Jack and Barbara Tizard left in 1956 if not before. Brian Kirman and Neil O'Connor remained Party members and were involved in the various short lived efforts at organising psychologists and psychiatrists in the 1960s and '70s. In a report of 'efforts' made in 1973 mention was made of the besetting problems which could apply to the Group proper (1948-56): 'The individual comrades ... tend to be very reluctant to make any contribution outside the specific field in which they are particularly qualified'. (Report of National Cultural Committee Secretary, January 1973).
- 76 Prof. C.D.B. Clarke, letter 25 April 1986.
- 77 N. O'Connor, interview 12 September 1985.
- 78 Ibid.
- 79 Ibid.

- ⁸⁰ Tizard and O'Connor were two of four psychologists attached to a special unit, Occupational Psychiatry Unit, which operated mainly at the Maudsley and began life in 1948.
A CP member who was involved in the Psychologists' Group was a Dr. Oliver Pratt who worked with O'Connor carrying out laboratory research on the brains of the mentally retarded/subnormal. He resigned from the Party sometime around 1952 and became a Catholic - source Douglas Hyde, letter 6 June 1989. Later Professor Jack Tizard was to become Director of the Thomas Coram Research Unit, a very important centre for the research of early childhood - the investigation of the relationship of children with their parents, surrounding environment etc., and the influence of these things on a child's development. The Clarkes, Barbara Tizard and Neil O'Connor are now all on the editorial board of the *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*.
- ⁸¹ N. O'Connor, interview 12 September 1985.
- ⁸² Prof. A.D.B. Clarke, letter 25 April 1986.
- ⁸³ On his retirement Dr. Monte Shapiro was given a special tribute by the British Psychological Society in order to mark the 'scientific contribution' he had made to the profession.

CHAPTER 16

Communist Architects

Introduction- Summary

The radicalisation of a significant number of architects from the early 1930s was intimately connected with the rise of Modern Architecture and the emergence of such bodies as MARS (Modern Architectural Research Group). Party architects were largely responsible for forming the ATO (Architects' and Technicians' Organisation) in 1935, a group of committed professional people concerned with becoming practically involved in political campaigning and advancing the cause of socially orientated architecture. Giving technical aid and advice to tenants and campaigning for the construction of adequate bomb shelters became major concerns of Party architects. At first this was done through the ATO but after a short time the CP architects moved into a small trade union for salaried architects, 'The Association of Architects, Surveyors, and Technical Assistants' (AASTA), transforming it into an extremely vibrant organisation. The War had a drastic impact on the architectural profession, at first with the vital construction work that needed to be carried out and later with the 'planning for a New Britain'. In these favourable circumstances the AASTA was able to increase its membership. Its change of name to the Association of Building Technicians (ABT) symbolised the new mood engendered by the 'fight against fascism' - an end to craft divisions and possibility of carrying out social architecture. Initially, CP architects were politically at odds with the enthusiasm for post-war planning, in line with overall Party opposition to any diversion from the War effort, despite the fact that many were professionally engaged in such work, but, by the latter part of the War the CP no longer opposed such planning and Communist architects' professional and political

engagement was brought into harmony. Architect members directly contributed to the drawing up of extensive Party memoranda and policy documents on housing policy, while gaining employment in the public sector was considered to be the best course to take for architects so they could give their full efforts to the service of the people. The ABT championed the cause of the Architectural Departments of Local Authorities. CP architects were thus fully engaged in the work carried out by the LCC and they played a not insignificant role in the evolution of the Abercrombie London Plan and the Scandinavian influenced architecture that emerged after 1949. The onset of the 'Battle of Ideas' led to the constitution of a Party Architects' Group in 1948 under the auspices of the National Cultural Committee. With the formation of this Group and the greater attention given to Soviet architecture, for which an Architecture Section of the Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR was greatly responsible, efforts were made in developing an English 'Socialist Realist' architecture. Generally speaking the talk of Socialist realism encouraged Party architects at the LCC to favour what has been called a 'picturesque' style; however, in designs that were entered by various members to architectural competitions, a Gothic type style was adopted very much at odds with Modern Architecture and which could be seen as a precursor to the current 'Post-Modernism'. Some Party members concentrated on developing this distinctive Communist approach to architecture (and a critique of Modern Architecture) while others put most of their efforts into ABT activities and, increasingly with the passing years, the RIBA. The discrediting of past Soviet architecture by

Khrushchev followed by the events of 1956, brought an end to the CP Architects' Group and the conscious endeavours by some to develop an 'English Socialist Realist Architecture.'

* * * * *

The 1930s

In the 1930s, and in particular from the second half of the decade, there was a significant radicalisation of a section of the architectural profession, and a number of architects, architectural assistants, surveyors and civil engineers joined the Communist Party. Briefly, the causes of this development were: 1) An increasing recognition of the deficiencies of much inter-war building - cheap and shoddy houses; the persistence of slums; archaic building methods, organisation and architectural styles; and the planless sprawl of much new housing development; 2) Frustration engendered by the unchanging nature of the RIBA (dominated by middle-size private practitioners) in the face of the impact of the slump on architects and the increasing employment of architects in local government and in large public and private institutions; 3) General international and national political developments. This radicalisation in the 1930s is clearly expressed in three architectural organisations: MARS, ATO, ^{and} AASTA.

The Modern Architectural Research Group (MARS)

During the 1920s and '30s the modern architectural approaches adopted on the continent slowly began to penetrate the conservative British profession. In particular, in the 1930s a number of younger architects who had survived the slump and gained some professional security became increasingly interested in the new forms of architecture as practised in

Weimar Germany, Austria, Scandinavia, and early Soviet society. Les Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM) was formed in 1930 and three years later MARS was established as its British section.

Modern Architecture was generally associated with a politically progressive standpoint - a new architecture attuned to the requirements and potential of modern industrial life. A young CP architect in the thirties describes the circumstances which led to his espousal of Modern Architecture:

I can remember ... that when we had had a commission for a private house the first thing was to decide whether the client wanted a Spanish hacienda, or whether he saw himself as a French count or ... a Tory squire or Tudor magnate. Once we had decided which of these he thought of himself as or which he admired we then designed a house to suit. It was murder, you felt you were playing games.¹

MARS called for an architecture that would serve the needs of society. Architects working for a 'new order'

are not so much concerned with the formal elements of "style" as with the architectural solution of the social and economic problems of today. As creative architects we are concerned with a future which must be planned, rather than a past which must be patched up.²

Communist architects were naturally drawn to the MARS Group, and one, Arthur Ling, became secretary of the Group's Town Planning Committee. There were also a number of joint ventures between MARS and the more political and CP influenced ATO, although the enthusiasm of Party architects for MARS was qualified by the view that its leading advocates were rather naive politically. MARS was commended for advocating well-designed buildings - sun, air and space - but criticised for not suggesting how the preconditions for such buildings might be achieved.³ A *Left Review* article on a well-publicised display by MARS in 1938, credited

the Group for its efforts in expounding 'modern architecture' agreeing that the event itself was proof of the growing influence of the new approach to style and design. Yet the very fact that the affair was staged in the West End revealed that whatever MARS's professed claims might be with regard to the social requirements of architecture, they were appealing for support among the upper and middle classes. Moreover, though many MARS members '... are perfectly willing to attack the political restrictions which modern architecture and planning is up against, ... as a group they fail to drive the lesson home'.⁴ Several of the more politically motivated architects began to lose interest in MARS, including one of the foremost of their number, Berthold Lubetkin.⁵ Lubetkin, one of the founders of the architectural firm Tecton, a Georgian who retained close links with the Soviet authorities, and as associate/'friend' of CP architects condemned the MARS Group for being more concerned with style than with the creation of functional buildings.

The Architects' and Technicians' Organisation (ATO)

The ATO was started in 1935 essentially on the initiative of several Communist Party architects. Among their number the moving spirit was another Tecton partner, Frederick (Francis) Skinner, who was a CP member and also in MARS: 'It became clear that it [MARS - SRP] was really a self admiration society and not vitally interested in social matters and we wanted to tie architecture most closely to social conditions'.⁶ One of the principal aims of the new organisation was to '... offer support and expert technical advice to all organisations working for better housing conditions'.⁷ Approximately a hundred people were involved in the ATO, most of whom were or became Party members.⁸ Architects comprised the majority grouping within the Association there were also surveyors, civil engineers, scientists, and solicitors who were active in one of the three

groups the ATO was divided into: the Tenants' Defence Group, the House Purchasers' Defence Group and the Housing Group, which was primarily concerned with research and organising exhibitions. A CP architect active in the ATO during 1936-37 gives an impression of some of the work undertaken:

We used to go and do surveys for tenants who said that they thought their house was in a pretty terrible state and why was it? We would go and do surveys, provide them with a report and occasionally act as expert witnesses [in legal cases brought against landlords - SRP].⁹

Although individual architects had given such assistance prior to 1935, the ATO organised this on a national basis working in close co-operation with the emerging tenants' movement. As well as providing technical assessments of building weaknesses, advice was also given to tenants as to the best way to proceed through legal and official channels to remedy faults.

The ATO did not restrict itself to helping only those in rented accommodation but also those buying houses through Building Societies (a sign of Popular Front politics in action) and the House Purchasers' Group of the ATO was specifically set up for this purpose. Many house purchasers felt let down by the Building Societies which loaned them money to buy houses they had surveyed but which turned out to have structural defects. With some justification, Building Societies were seen as encouraging the widespread jerry building which took place between the wars. A case was brought against a Mrs. Elsie Borders (CP member) by a Building Society because she had withheld instalment payments on the mortgage to her house. In what was a deliberately planned action (3,000 people suspended their mortgage payments), Elsie Borders and her husband defended themselves on the grounds that the Building Society had given them a false picture/assurance as to the construction of their house, which had turned

out to have been jerry built. The case gained a great deal of publicity and involved the ATO with two Party architects, Frederick Skinner and John Pinckheard, acting as star witnesses in the high court, and the Communist solicitor and Organisation member William Sedley providing legal help.

Another major area of Organisation endeavour was researching housing conditions and questions of town planning '... to arouse all sections of public opinion in support of demands for better, healthier, conveniently situated houses and lower rents for the working-class'.¹⁰ Information was collected throughout the country,¹¹ and popular well-designed travelling exhibitions were arranged. One of these, entitled 'Working-Class Housing', was initially shown at the London Housing Centre in 1936 and officially opened by the Chairman of the LCC Housing Committee and the editor of the *News Chronicle*. After its stay at the Housing Centre the exhibition went on a fairly extensive tour, in contrast to MARS, of mainly working-class areas of London and the provinces. The Exhibition's main theme was that in general housing conditions remained as bad as they had been since the end of the Great War and although one million houses had been built under the National Government only 12% of these were within the reach of working-class families. A section of the Exhibition was given over to showing, with extensive figures from Stockton-on-Tees, that where tenants were rehoused from slum areas to new housing with higher rents (above 10 shillings a week) there was an increase in mortality from diseases and want. In this and other activities the ATO worked with another campaigning body that grew up in the same period with a similarly strong Communist participation, the Committee Against Malnutrition. The cause of bad housing was that the private profit of builders, landowners, and industrialists rather than the needs of people, was the first consideration in building developments. As a remedy to the 'housing problem' the Exhibition called for housing to be designated a national

service with a ten year plan to construct two million houses with rents below ten shillings a week. What they had in mind was apparent in the proposal that: 'Centralised laundries, crèches, nursery schools, playgrounds, etc., should all be provided in large housing schemes, as they were in Vienna, and as they are now provided in all new housing estates in Soviet Russia'.¹² To finance this formidable construction drive, taxation on incomes over £1,000 a year would need to be raised and taxes imposed on land and property values and on empty property. Demands were also made for stricter rent control and for town planning legislation to be much more powerful and comprehensive.

The emergence of the ATO was due to the desire of architects, particularly younger ones, to use their skills to fight against the social ills of bad housing conditions. In this way they wished to clearly associate themselves with the cause of the working-class and work towards the attainment of a socialist society¹³, where the architectural profession would be given enhanced power and prestige to work in the real interests of society as a whole. In a widely circulated letter announcing the formation of the ATO, Skinner gives expression to this underlying motivation:

Many architects and assistants today feel that, while their professional activities are restricted and their economic position is insecure, vast arrears of work in the fields of housing and planning are demanding skilled attention. For ourselves, we hold that we are obstructed and prevented from assuming our proper social responsibilities by reactionary, economic and political forces (symptomised and but feebly countered by the Architects' Registration Act), which are tending unmistakably in one direction. That direction, in our opinion, is towards Fascism and its concomitant, war.¹⁴

The ATO efforts at arousing a wide public recognition of and demand for the social services of architects and technicians naturally brought it

into conflict with the established professional bodies. RIBA, in particular, considered it:

unprofessional directly to enlist public support in favour of, or public hostility against, governmental measures ... [and dominated as it was by private practitioners was - SRP] ... opposed to the extension of public knowledge of their shortcomings in the social field, and are also opposed to the economic betterment of their own salaried assistants.¹⁵

RIBA responded to the new body by trying to undercut its support by establishing its own 'Junior Council' to appeal to students and young men in the profession. These efforts were probably counter-productive and hardened the close relationship between the ATO and the small trade union of salaried workers in the profession, the Association of Architects, Surveyors and Technical Assistants (AASTA; a representative of which was included on the ATO's executive committee). Both the ATO and AASTA were incensed by a RIBA circular sent in 1935 to all local government authorities which questioned the ability and honesty of their architectural staffs and suggested that it would be better if work was placed with private architects. The ATO gave its full active support to the open meeting that was organised by the AASTA to protest against the Circular and Skinner was thanked for helping to make the event a great success.

As international tension rose the ATO turned its attention to the techniques of air raid precaution. Scientists, such as Haldane and Bernal, were able to cooperate with engineers such as W. Laithwaite and architect members of the ATO in devising designs for air raid shelters. The Tecton practice played a particularly important role in the researching, planning and designing of shelters. However, after a couple of years the ATO gradually wound up as its members joined the AASTA.¹⁶ As the AASTA journal was to record a little later: 'When it became clear that the

purpose of the ATO could be fulfilled more efficiently by the AASTA Skinner gave us his full support'.¹⁷ At the beginning of 1939 the AASTA bestowed honorary membership on a number of 'progressive' architects (most of whom were not eligible for ordinary membership as they were not salaried) including both Skinner and Lubetkin. The winding-up of the ATO was, in Colin Penn's opinion, the result of a conscious decision by CP architects to concentrate on building up the AASTA.¹⁸

The Association of Architects, Surveyors, and Technical Assistants (AASTA)

The most visible expression of the emergence and sustained growth of the Left and specifically the Communist Party among architects was in the AASTA. The Association began life in 1919¹⁹ as the Architects and Surveyors Assistants Professional Union. It was part of that general rise in blackcoated trade unionism that took place from the end of the First World War. A peak of a little over 2,000 members was reached in 1921²⁰ after which there was a continual decline, except for a brief period around 1926, so that by 1930 there were only some 900 members. There was a slight pick up in 1932-32 as some sought collective protection out of fear of unemployment but this could not be maintained, and by 1937 there was an all-time low in the membership total of under 500.

Significant socio-economic changes were, however, leading to changes within the architectural profession. At the time of the Slump both the RIBA and the Architects' Benevolent Society ran relief programmes for unemployed architects, while many qualified architects changed occupations or sought work abroad. The Slump critically undermined the natural belief of those who entered the profession that they would with time become partners in a private practice. There was also a considerable growth of state involvement in housing and town planning from the early 1930s (slum clearance commenced with the 1930 Greenwood Housing Act). Some local

authorities, such as the new Labour administration in Leeds, began to use some of their powers to carry out municipal housing construction. The security of employment in the local authorities also began to outweigh the low status traditionally accorded to architects in this area, and the work of 'socially orientated' bodies like the Miners' Welfare Commission (pithead baths), and the creative team work approach of their architects' department, began to make a favourable impression on young architects. As well as a rise in the prestige of 'official architecture' and a concomitant stress on the social responsibilities of 'modern architecture', there was a growth of architectural offices in the large firms and shopping chains. By 1935:

salaried employment as an alternative to private practice demanded to be taken seriously. And it was. Between that year and the beginning of the war there was a rapid swing-round from the complacent, deprecatory view ... to lively interest and, positively, enthusiasm.²¹

The basis was therefore in existence for the AASTA to become a more significant organisation, particularly since the RIBA concentrated its efforts on promoting the interests of private architectural practices to the exclusion of the rest of the profession (already by 1930 40% of the Institute's membership was salaried). The 1935 RIBA Circular (as previously referred to) further intensified Association enmity towards what they saw as an employers' organisation and strengthened their advocacy of 'official architecture'. There had been socialists active in the union for some years but the first overtly political articles to appear in the AASTA journal date from 1935.²² Matters came to a head within the Association's leadership in early 1936 as a bitter conflict developed between the 'old guard' grouped around the secretary and the younger radical members, most of whom were in or very close to the CP. The failure to stop the slide in membership, coupled with a severe

financial loss in a libel case, led the Association Council at a meeting on 12 February 1936 to pass a resolution by 10 votes to 7, with one abstention to call for the secretary's resignation. At the subsequent Council meeting, those supporting the secretary resigned and on 18 March 1936 A.W. Cleeve Barr was appointed the Association's new secretary.

Cleeve Barr, a young architect who had been to Liverpool School of Architecture, had been politicised by a Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR students trip to the Soviet Union in 1934-35, became involved in the ATO, had briefly been a member of the New Party and then become a Communist. It was on the suggestion of Richard Llewelyn Davies, a leading Communist student at the Architectural Association school of architecture in London, that Cleeve Barr applied for the secretaryship with the aim of 'livening-up' and 'restarting' the Association. Three CP members who were to become leading spirits in the Association all joined it in the period 1936-37: Colin Penn, Dick Toms, and Kenneth Campbell. Campbell remarks:

we soon became, so to speak the ruling group, partly because the existing membership were on the whole a pretty humdrum type of technical assistant, they were quite happy if people got elected to the Council or to the local committee, they were quite happy to let them [us] go ahead and do it.²³

There had been a Party branch at the Co-operative Wholesale Society architects' department from the late 1920s and early 1930s based around V.L. Nash and another early Left AASTA figure, W.L. Vinycomb. A little later there were small meetings of Communist and socialist architects, designers, scientists and others at the Tecton designed Highpoint One block of flats (in Lubetkin's own flat) after it was finished in 1935.²⁴ Here Nash, Lubetkin,²⁵ Skinner, Misha Black, and Erno Goldfinger met and discussed matters, often with someone from the CP centre, usually Michael Shapiro (known as Michael Best). These meetings, in addition to the

claimed 'loose association' the ATO had with the *Daily Worker*, ensured that the Party was kept informed of developments and approval was forthcoming for the concentration of efforts on transforming the AASTA.

The new course the AASTA set out on had already been charted by the Chairman of the Association's Council, Vivian L. Nash, in a 'Confidential Report' delivered in April 1935, and in particular an 'Addendum' that he added to it shortly afterwards. Nash declared that it was necessary for the Association to end its feeling of 'inferiority' with regards the RIBA:

We must concentrate far more on our own policy and activity, and make the Association emerge as a first-class professional organisation uniting all salaried architects and performing as great, or greater economic service for them as the RIBA performs for the private practising architect. We have to go in heavily for publicity and "prestige" and prestige can only come by demonstrating that no organisation other than ourselves fights effectively and wins concessions for all salaried architects.²⁶

The AASTA also needed to take a position, and project it, on the technical and organisational aspects of housing, slum clearance, and town planning. Nash went on to propose that on the question of architectural design the Association should, in contrast to the 'largely reactionary' attitude of the RIBA, identify itself with the 'advanced' approach favoured by younger architects and 'nearly all of the students'. In pursuit of this new course a Public Relations Committee was formed, chaired by Colin Penn, and three working/research groups came into being concerned with: planning - in particular the siting and zoning of industry (in the context of overall economic planning); architectural/technical education; and air raid precautions. In addition a 'technical panel' was established through which members could give professional and technical advice to members of the public, e.g. the tenants' movement. Subsuming the role of the ATO the working/research groups attracted Association members, 'who wished to undertake work more interesting or more advanced than that by which they

earned their living, and at the same time it drew into collaboration with us some of the most progressive men in the building industry'.²⁷

The Association became a strong advocate of comprehensive economic planning. By 1937 it was calling for a 'National Plan of Peaceful Development' as a solution to the problems of unemployment and distressed areas, which would lead to speed up in slum clearance, and exercise control over the location and planning of industry. Fear of an economic slump, like that in 1931, once the Government's rearmament programme and the period of trade expansion had come to an end, led the Association to campaign for an expansion of public works and an extension of the five year building programmes of local authorities. It was in the field of ARP, however, that an increasing amount of the union's efforts were devoted. Although reiterating their commitment to the cause of peace - architects had a special interest in opposing war given that aerial bombardment would destroy the products of their profession - the danger of war justified making preparations to ensure the safety of the civil population.

Air Raid Precautions (ARP)

As a result of the substantial work undertaken by leftwing and CP scientists on the question of ARP and the particular prominence of Professor J.B.S. Haldane in the campaign for air raid shelters, the important contribution made by architects has been overlooked. As early as 1935 the ATO was discussing the possibility or desirability of bomb-proofing buildings and constructing bomb-and-gas proof shelters.²⁸ A special government department was set up at this time to co-ordinate ARP work throughout the country and the Home Office was in the process of preparing a number of pamphlets on protection against gas attacks. These government moves came under growing criticism as not just half-hearted but

as Haldane put it in his widely acclaimed LBC book, *ARP*: 'I think it probable ... that if as I believe high explosive bombs are the principal danger, the entire air raid precaution schemes so far adopted are rather worse than useless'.²⁹ By concentrating on the danger of poison gas and instructing people to stay at home in the event of hostilities the government was in effect making people more vulnerable to bombing. The ATO interest in ARP was taken over by the AASTA which formed an ARP Committee, as one of its working groups, under the chairmanship of the young Party architect John Pinckheard. After considering individual shelters the Committee turned its attention to communal shelters in a report titled *On the Design, Equipment and Cost of Air Raid Shelters* released in 1938. The report came out in favour of large deep tunnel shelters:

Its importance was at once recognised in lay and professional circles and it may fairly be called the starting point of the campaign for deep shelters which so impressed itself on the minds of the population.³⁰

Haldane pays full tribute to the Association report in his book, *ARP*, describing it as 'the most important document on ARP yet published' (p.283) and in essentials the Haldane proposal for the immediate construction of deep tunnel concrete shelters was the same as that of the Association. Although Haldane accepted that the AASTA's plan for the tunnel shelters to be steel-lined was superior, more elastic, than his proposal that they be bricklined, he felt his suggested depth of 60-70 ft was more desirable than the Association's 50-60 ft. Skinner was an important figure in the ARP work, visiting Barcelona for the AASTA at his own expense to investigate at first hand the effects of high explosives on built-up areas. He also acted as a link between the union's ARP Committee and the work and research Tecton carried out for Finsbury's Labour Council from the autumn of 1938. Tecton had been commissioned to produce a

comprehensive air raid protection plan for the borough's population and in conjunction with the construction engineer Ove Arrup they planned, designed and sited 15 deep shelters to be constructed of reinforced concrete providing shelter for 132,000 Finsbury residents. Despite the scheme being abandoned with the outbreak of the War, Tecton's work represented '... detailed design and costings for the alternative communal shelters'³¹ and the architectural models were used at rallies and demonstrations. It would be wrong, though, to see the campaign over ARP restricted to the battle for deep shelters, as from an early time the AASTA ARP Committee was divided into two: one concerned with researching 'structural precautions' and the other with 'evacuation'. Dick Toms chaired the ARP Evacuation Committee and considerable work was carried out on detailing the measures necessary for 'planned evacuation'. Plans were presented for the full utilisation of existing accommodation through the requisitioning of large country houses and a building programme, requiring the maximum mobilisation of the building industry and architects, for the building of residential schools and crèches.

Parallel to the AASTA's two ARP committees there came into existence in early 1938 a National ARP Co-ordinating Committee under the chairmanship of Haldane and with a dynamic Communist, Frank J. Sander as secretary. This body allowed a whole range of people from the professions, architects, scientists, engineers, doctors and others and non-professionals to pool their skills, knowledge and different approaches to the issue of ARP. From its inception the Co-ordinating Committee had three AASTA members appointed to its leadership, as with Tecton, the ARP Co-ordinating Committee and AASTA were complimentary to one another in their work on communal shelters. The Co-ordinating Committee began to advocate the construction of what became known as the 'Haldane Shelter', a reinforced concrete compartmentalised (units of 50-70 people) shelter

which could be built above or below the surface depending on conditions. By 1940 the Architects' trade union was proposing the construction of Haldane Shelters in its wide selling pamphlet, *Better Shelters*, which had sold 14,000 copies by November 1940 and 20,000 by January 1941.³² One of the campaigns the ARP Co-ordinating Committee undertook was the public exposure of the 'scandal' surrounding the non-use of blast furnace cement. Recalling his memories of this, Dick Toms, one of the AASTA representatives on the Committee, has written:

People at the Building Research Station had been working on this for some years. Surplus blastfurnace slag was available in virtually unlimited amounts and could be used to make cement and this would cheapen cement, but this was resisted by the "ring" (Cement Makers Federation) who wanted production left low and prices high. This came to a head over the shortage of cement for shelters and the ARP Co-ordinating Committee exposed this, brought out the facts, campaigned, produced a pamphlet etc.³³

From late 1940 the ARP Co-ordinating Committee and the AASTA were formally co-operating in research and on 2 February 1941, they jointly arranged a conference on ARP for those in local government in the London area. Councillors and officials from 30 councils attended and endorsed, among other things, a resolution calling for the construction of Haldane Shelters in heavily populated areas.

The demand for adequate ARP measures for the British people and the call for the construction of deep shelters, or Haldane Shelters (the term commonly used after 1938), was one the Communist Party closely identified itself with. The CP even had its own ARP Bureau involving a number of the Party people from the AASTA, the ARP Co-ordinating Committee and Party Branches and Districts. By utilising all this technical aid, they were able to formulate and publish ARP plans for particular areas and towns. Undoubtedly the CP was in this way able to raise its own prominence as a serious political force, although the degree of interest and involvement

in this issue stretched well beyond the CP, Left Book Club, or even Labour party activists:

The campaign for protection certainly had wide support. There was very large scale reporting from the local papers - on the ARP Co-ordinating Committee we had some feeling of this from the reports sent in ... quite often independent of the CP I am sure.³⁴

Indications of popular support are not restricted to the local newspapers; national papers like the *Daily Express* and *Evening Standard* included calls for the building of deep shelters.³⁵ The campaign was, outside of 'Aid to Spain', probably the most sustained and extensive example of 'Popular Front work' in action; and of particular importance for the Party in that it was maintained through the change of line over the War - from a 'just war' to an 'imperialist war'. The campaign over ARP helped the CP retain an element of continuity in its politics and some of the support and sympathy it had attracted in the Popular Front period as is indicated in the Party run People's Convention, which included the demand for 'adequate ARP' and deep shelters among its six-point programme.

As for CP and leftwing architects, the issue of ARP underlined the important social nature of their profession; their skills if positively used could literally save people's lives, it was also a practical affirmation of the productive link between architecture and science, something which was an article of faith of the Modern Movement among architects. It was also seen as the practical task of the moment, taking precedence over questions of style and aesthetics. Communist architects were in the forefront of the campaign for 'adequate' ARP not only in formulating plans and schemes but in giving technical advice to groups of tenants and residents, mainly through the AASTA Technical Panel. In addition Party architects in local government, in common with many of their colleagues, attempted to advance ARP measures as far as they could.

Sometimes this led them into trouble as with the suspension of two CP architects, Colin Penn and R.D. Manning, from their employment at Middlesex County Council for describing in the journal *Keystone* (October 1939) the 'chaos' in ARP in a typical unnamed public office. On the other hand some borough engineers even officially consulted the Party-led union for technical advice over shelter construction and siting etc. As *Keystone* triumphantly announced: 'After working so hard and so long for improvements in ARP, the AASTA is being recognised as a leading authority on the subject' (February 1941).

The War - from support to opposition

With the outbreak of War the AASTA declared through its journal: 'The nation has taken up a position of resistance to force and aggression and if civilization is to survive we must see that the democratic powers are victorious ... In modern wars a technician is even more important than a soldier'.³⁶ However, with the CP's change of line over the War and the Communist architects' endorsement, at a Group meeting, of the Central Committee Manifesto of 7 October 1939, opposition to the War was in turn reflected by the AASTA. The call for the construction of deep shelters and the construction of special buildings in evacuation 'reception areas' was no longer couched in terms which suggested these moves would improve the country's fighting efficiency. There was the adoption of a more aggressive trade union stance by the Association; condemning Government measures to restrict union rights and demanding there be an immediate reversal of the official stop that had been put on civil building. The RIBA also came in for renewed criticism for its 'blind support' and submission to Government policies and on suspending its annual elections so ensuring its leadership 'old guard' remained firmly entrenched in power. At the AASTA AGM in 1940 V.L. Nash made the following observation:

'The action of the RIBA in virtually shutting up shop when the need for a lead was most pressing, had thrown on the AASTA an enormous responsibility, if the credit of the profession was to be saved'.³⁷ The Association condemned the calling-up of architects and the internment as 'enemy aliens' of anti-fascist refugee architects and designers.

In December 1940 Kenneth Campbell urged ABT members to give their full support to the People's Convention. Yet there were clear signs of unease amongst the Association's rank and file membership at the identification of the union with the cause of the People's Convention,³⁸ already at the beginning of 1941 the AASTA leadership had backed away from open support for the Convention leaving it up to branches to discuss the matter and elect delegates to it if they so wished.

The War Effort

In the rush to put Britain on a war footing a programme of camp and ordnance factory construction was set in motion from 1939. While some Communist architects were called up early on in the War, particularly those who had made a name in ARP agitation, many CP and leftwing architects became involved in this building work, particularly those recruited by Professor William Holford to work in teams on the rapid construction of munition factories and accompanying hostels. So despite the 'anti-war' line of the Party, Communist architects were actively contributing to the War effort through their professional work. It was an area of endeavour which was to have important consequences for architectural thinking. As an architectural historian has put it:

Group working, scientific method, research, social idealism, prefabrication, the concept of the programme rather than one-off design: all these ideas were conscious and present by 1939. What architects lacked was intimacy with the shape, methods and problems of industry, of a kind which would allow them to conceive

of researchers, designers, makers and users putting their heads together regularly to arrange an evolving, improving programme of work. All this was first revealed by the wartime practice of "operational research".³⁹

The new situation of large scale building of munition factories, hostels, airports and army camps with architectural and technical work concentrated in big offices, created a conducive atmosphere for the growth of the AASTA. As two Party architects declared in a joint article:

On many war-time jobs the various technicians associated with the building industry have been thrown into closer contact with each other than ever before, and artificial barriers are being broken down by the course of events. Through the AASTA this experience can be used for greater things - to eliminate, ultimately, the muddle and waste which characterize the building industry over private enterprise. Such technicians must be won for our organisation.⁴⁰

Predating the entry of the Soviet Union into the War there were clear indications that Association activists, many of whom were Party members, were beginning to recruit new members.⁴¹

'Planning' and 'Reconstruction'

From early on during the War there was a growing plethora of committees and groups discussing and drawing up plans for post-war reconstruction, already in March 1941 Lord Reith, Minister-designate of Works, had asked both the LCC and the City of London Corporation to prepare their own plans for post-war reconstruction. In line with the official CP approach, the AASTA condemned such talk as illusory, 'utopian', and reminiscent of the 'planners and reformers' during the First World War whose plans and promises remained unfulfilled. The Association published in its journal a considered statement on the question at the end of 1940 with the title 'What of the Future'. In the words of the statement:

It is useless for architects and planners to theorise or even to practice within their limited spheres if the related social problems are neglected. Work of immediate importance such as this gives all professional workers the chance of making close contact with the people and thus securing the only basis for sound future planning.⁴²

The statement is also instructive as it gives a good idea of the way Communists in the professions interpreted the War. There was no clear unequivocal condemnation of the War, rather an expression of scepticism of the motives of those running it and a demand that the fight against social ills be maintained. Party architects even endorsed the immediate construction work carried out, involving many of them under Holford, as something preferable to 'utopian talk' of reconstruction:

The capacity of any group of men to plan the future can be judged by the evidence under our noses of their ability to plan the present. That's why we take the line, so exasperating to Utopians, of concentration on such problems as shelters, evacuation, and the planning of wartime factories and housing. We relate all long-term ideas to these immediate problems and their solution will provide the groundwork for progress later. Clearly we can have no faith in any scheme which does not tackle the problems of the present.⁴³

This brought forth a furious reply by Professor Abercrombie, a major figure in town planning of progressive opinions, who accused the union of '... flirting about the political trees of cloud-cuckooland and preaching unpreparedness'.⁴⁵ By adopting an 'absolutist' approach, refusing to have anything to do with planning which was not comprehensive full-scale planning, the union was obstructing those efforts that were being made in laying the basis for 'planned reconstruction'. Abercrombie used the example of the development of a Plan for Coventry to show the valuable work that could be done, which was being undermined by the AASTA (and by implication CP architects) - however, just as support for the People's Convention did not stop Party architects being professionally engaged in

the construction of munitions factories etc., so the criticism of planning for the post-war did not stop Communists being involved in this as well. Responding to Abercrombie, the Party architect, R.D. Manning, pointed out that in fact the Coventry branch of the AASTA had played a leading role in the genesis of the Coventry Plan. The staff and chief architect, Gibson, of the City's new architects department were Association members, and work on the Plan was initially done as a union branch so as not to antagonise the City Engineer. Manning stated that the Association supported these efforts, though only on the rather depressing grounds that the inevitable failure of the Plan's full implementation would help to educate people as to the real nature of the social system and '... bring nearer the achievement of conditions under which they will be carried out'.⁴⁵ There were Communist architects working in the team gathered together by J.H. Forshaw and Abercrombie himself in early 1941 to prepare a post-war plan for London (e.g. Kenneth Campbell and Arthur Ling).

The 'Anti-Fascist War'

Following the invasion of the Soviet Union the AASTA gave full support to the War effort. *Keystone's* editorial for September 1941 set the new mood by declaring: 'In fighting for the technician to be given a chance we are fighting for efficient war building ... There is no time for shilly-shallying. We must ourselves cut out the bottle-necks and inefficiencies and get on with the job'. The Association's full-time officials, all Party members, became preoccupied with two major efforts: 'One was productivity, you know architects were involved with others in production committees ... and the other thing was getting people [members - SRP] into technical jobs ... making sure they were best used in the army'.⁴⁶ There was a gradual withdrawal from campaigning over ARP and already by October 1941 *Keystone* declared that it was no longer 'the main activity' for the

Association. In August 1941 the Association's Technical Committee began to research, collecting information from members and branches throughout the country, the 'use of technicians in the War building programme'. By December 1941 a memorandum had been drawn up with extensive proposals for the most effective and economical use of the 'resources of the building industry'. The contents of the memorandum were imparted by union officials to officials of the Ministry of Works and Buildings in a specially arranged meeting. A request was made to the Ministry that it follow the example of the LCC and ask building firms to consult their staffs and ensure there was joint site consultation with technicians and operatives. Later, in April 1942, the Technical Committee of the union called for the greater central co-ordination of all sections of the industry through the establishment of a 'Central Council of Works', which would act in effect as a gigantic overall production committee.

The enthusiasm for production committees went hand-in-hand with the policy, which had been set in train before the War was 'anti-fascist', of building the Association into a 'mass union'. Recruitment quickened considerably:

<u>Membership</u>		<u>Number of Branches</u>	
1,568	- November 1941	17	- December 1941
2,105	- September 1942	30	- December 1942
2,630	- February 1943		
2,883	- October 1943		

In order to open the union out to a wider membership its name was changed to the Association of Building Technicians in 1942. Party architect Kenneth Campbell describes the motivation behind the name change:

It didn't bring in a great many building technicians but it brought in a whole lot of surveyors, one or two engineers but the thing was not so much to bring in building technicians it was the general movement

towards an egalitarian socialist way of thinking and so we took the line that - architects and architectural assistants and surveyors' assistants etc - we were all building technicians together, it was the building industry we had in common. Therefore it was the right name. It was an indication of the whole strong leftward movement.⁴⁷

The union and CP architects still remained somewhat at odds with other 'progressive' people in their field by retaining their 'public opposition' to planning for the post-war. However, the opposition was no longer based on the grounds that such planning was 'utopian' as it could never be carried out under the existing social system; rather on the grounds that it would be a diversion from the War effort. In contradiction to his own deep involvement in working on The County of London Plan, Arthur Ling wrote in November 1942: 'We cannot allow our plans for the future to divert attention from the more urgent necessity of planning for the present or to obscure the first condition for reconstruction that we win the War'.⁴⁸ It was not until 1943 that the union officially altered its position (as did the CP at a national level) with regard to this question. An editorial in the Association's journal agreed that they had '... taken an attitude of reserve to the "reconstruction talk" ...'⁴⁹ but the situation had changed and a new positive approach towards such planning was required. The stage of mere 'talk' was passing and there now existed a number of concrete Government reports, the Scott Report on the use of land for building and Uthwatt on compensation for town planning, which provided a basis on which to plan. A 'Conference on Housing Problems' was organised by the ABT in mid-1943, the first of its kind held in the country, with 287 delegates from trade unions, co-ops, Labour Party, Communist Party and others (and in addition 152 visitors). This very lively event marked a new phase in ABT activity. The Conference concluded by endorsing an Association resolution which included demands for: the nationalisation of land, freezing of rents,

maintenance of wartime controls over materials and prices, etc. Some non-CPers like Elizabeth Denby would have liked to have gone further with a call for the nationalisation of building materials.

An Association Technical Research Department was put into action, again under a Party architect, in September 1943 to devote itself to researching and advancing new techniques for reconstruction. The ABT began to promote itself as an organisation that by its very nature was in favour of increasing the number of technicians and advancing new techniques, necessary preconditions for creating a 'new Britain':

There is evidence that the professional institutions dislike any conception of expanding the number of technicians. There is an unmistakable tendency on the part of operative unions to resist the development of new technique because of the upsetting effect it would have on wage agreements. But the duty of the building industry, during the reconstruction period no less than now, is to the people of the country as a whole.⁵⁰

Crusading Technicians

The major concerns and attitudes adopted by the ABT and CP architects in the latter half of the War fell into line with the general 'progressive line' that was emerging and on the ascendancy in the profession. Colin Penn describes it as:

An effort to awaken people to the possibilities of architecture and to get them to help bring some pressure for it. I don't think it was specifically orientated towards Modern architecture but it was saying, "look you can have houses like this and it is up to you to do something to get them". Really trying, probably not very effectively, to rouse people to demand some benefit from the possibilities of modern technique.⁵¹

An account of the campaign issues taken up at this time is given by Kenneth Campbell: 'We campaigned for ... more democracy in RIBA, more

democracy in the big public offices, and the concentration of architectural work on building for public use - housing, hospitals, clinics, health service buildings, schools'.⁵² Reconstruction and the building of a 'New Britain' was seen as the responsibility of Local Authorities under overall Government support and direction. The ABT's post-war policy called for the formation of official Architects Departments in every Local Authority. As well as calling for the expansion in the production of building materials under State control and ownership, the union wanted to see an increase in the powers of Local Authorities to acquire land and building resources. Increasingly the War administration under Churchill was criticised for failing to give effect to the recommendations of the Barlow, the Scott, and the Uthwatt reports. The various Bills and White Papers that the Government presented were declared woefully inadequate, and the official target set of 300,000 houses to be built or under construction by the first two years of peace was felt to be well under the number that should be strived for. As a means of rehousing people as quickly as possible and applying the technical advances that had been refined during the War, prefabrication was seen as opening up great possibilities.⁵³ In 1943 the Communist President of the ABT, D. Percival, attempted to allay the fears of building workers over prefabrication⁵⁴ in two BBC programmes on the 'Housing Question'. In that period of enthusiasm and hope prefabrication seemed to epitomise the struggle to apply science and the benefits of mass production to what was an archaic industry. These hopes were soon dampened by reality although there was considerable success achieved in school building, an area which professionally involved a number of Party and Leftwing architects and was encouraged in its initial stages by the ABT.⁵⁵ Overall CP policy advocated the building of 'temporary prefabricated homes' (1 - 1.5 million) in order to cope with the sheer size of the problem, and in some

Party City plans these new forms of construction were even said to be superior to the old methods of bricks and mortar.⁵⁶ The sober advice of Kenneth Campbell, made at a joint conference of *The Country Standard* and *New Builders Leader*, that although the 'prefab' should be fully used, it should not be made a 'war cry', and was not always heeded.⁵⁷

Following its presentation in 1943 the LCC London Plan was held up as an ideal example of post-war reconstruction. The Plan was publicised in a Penguin brought out in 1945 by E.J. Carter and Erno Goldfinger, both ABT members. As they made plain, an important aspect of the work was the recognition of established local communities and basing the Plan on their existence - they were termed 'neighbourhood units' and had a population from 6,000 to 10,000. There was no idea of creating a completely new Corbusian future but of closely relating the reconstruction and building to what had grown up throughout the centuries.⁵⁸ Housing would not be a succession of huge tower blocks but:

In the new housing areas there will be variety in the layout and appearance of the houses so that the monotony of so much small house development will be avoided. Some roads will be lined with paved or grass forecourts to terraces ... In other areas there will be twentieth century re-creations of the characteristic London squares with small gardens behind the houses or groups of three- and four-storeyed flats, and with communal gardens in the middle of the squares.⁵⁹

Flats, where not envisaged as blocks of three or four storeys, were seen/planned as being contained in 'tall blocks' of eight to ten storeys widely spaced apart.

The London Plan came in for a fair amount of criticism from the Town and Country Planning Association for proposing 'much too high population densities' and (part and parcel of this) the construction of blocks of flats. This approach was rejected by the ABT (and CP) as being hopelessly utopian and based on the outdated idea that everyone should have a 'house

with garden'.⁶⁰ Furthermore, it was in part due to a prejudice against flats largely based upon the experience of the ugly pre-war tenements. With modern techniques and designing blocks of flats could be attractive places to live in, constructed in a variety of ways to suit different groups of people. Probably the most determined advocate of flats in the union was Dr. H.S. Phillips, a leading figure in the Bristol University Reconstruction Group, who estimated that flats should provide accommodation for 20-30% of the population.⁶¹ An important consideration helping to explain CP and leftwing architects' sympathy for flats was that they saw urban sprawl (the spread of the suburbs) as a great danger. To counter this, well constructed blocks of flats would rehouse the working-class and renew and improve urban life. The primary task was, it was felt, setting about the reconstruction of the established urban areas and this led some of the Left to be sceptical of the value of New Towns which they believed was a diversion from this.

The election of a Labour Government and the appointment of Aneurin Bevan as Minister of Health with responsibility for housing was naturally greeted with a fair amount of enthusiasm. Bevan spoke at length at an ABT conference, 'The Technician's Part in Housing',⁶² held on 3 November 1945 and Colin Penn replied by expressing the union's welcome of the '... Government's decision to attack the problems of the lower-income groups first and rely on the Local Authorities as the main agents for doing so'.⁶³ Following on from this event Bevan wrote the foreword to the Association's book, *Homes for the People*, the product of a working group and edited by the two CP architects Colin Penn and Andrew Boyd. This book is one of the best examples of the enthusiasm and optimism that developed among socially conscious architects at the end of the War. It was concerned to present in a popular form an account of how modern building techniques could be used to build dwellings of a high standard. A number

of prerequisites for 'getting good housing' were listed including: public education about building and public criticism of designs, more Government research on building, land nationalisation, and the employment of qualified architects. Before any programme for the mass construction of good housing could be launched, it was necessary for there to be a strong and determined public demand for it: 'Once such a demand comes into being it will be irresistible and will force the utilisation of the necessary technical measures'.⁶⁴ The book, by presenting to the public 'expert opinion', had the underlying motive of helping to encourage a 'housing conscience' throughout the populace. *Homes for the People* is also revealing in its comments on Modern Architecture, giving further evidence that a significant element of leftwing architects could not be termed uncritical 'Modernists', e.g. '... Modern Architecture' as a compact and conscious movement, as a sort of cult, has largely spent its force...', 'A whole Modern city would have been wearisome, inhuman',⁶⁵ 'The aesthetic of an architecture must correspond to its real tools and materials, not imagined ones' (pp. 134-35) etc.

In the first few years after the War the CP maintained its call for the establishment of Joint Production Committees throughout industry. A Party memorandum (*Post-War Housing Problems*, 1945) proposed the compulsory establishment of a JPC on every building site consisting of representatives of the operatives, employees, and technical staff. This was also ABT policy from 1944 with the adoption of 'The Building Technician's Charter' which declared JPCs just as important during the period of reconstruction as they had been during the War: 'The representation of technicians on them must be continued and extended'.⁶⁶ How many such JPCs were operating in the early post-war years and how soon the 'whole movement' dissipated are questions open to further research. The ABT and Party architects were keen to spread technical knowledge of

building developments down to building workers⁶⁷ in the desire to help modernise the industry, while the construction of the new *Daily Worker* building, in a suitable modern style and in concrete, was held up as a model of how all those on a building job could jointly discuss matters and ensure that efficiency and progress were maximised. There were fortnightly progress meetings attended by the architect (Erno Goldfinger, on the fringes of the Party), his technical assistant, someone from the building contractors, the foreman, Federation steward, and a representative of the carpenters and labourers. The *New Builders Leader* went on to cite particular criticisms and suggestions that had been made by the Federation Steward which had led to improvements in practice (and designs). In conclusion it was advocated that: 'This is the type of thing that should occur on all important jobs, so that production generally can be speeded up and thereby help in one way to solve the present crisis'.⁶⁸ However, the Government's economic problems and the financial crisis in the summer of 1947 severely limited any progress on the housing front. Already in the autumn of 1946 a 'squatters' movement had spontaneously broken out, which was soon encouraged and co-ordinated by CP members, because of the desperate shortage of accommodation. A resolution in favour of the 'squatters' was passed by the ABT leaders, who saw it as the inevitable result of the fact that: '... the Government and Local Authorities have not used requisitioning powers with the vigour demanded by the people's desperate need for homes'.⁶⁹ By late 1947 proposed cuts amounting to £200 million in capital expenditure fell mainly on building construction, forcing Bevan to slow down the building drive and put a stop to various Local Authorities over-building. The following year the programme of constructing health centres, regarded by Communist and others on the Left as the 'jewel' in the new health system, was indefinitely postponed. The target set of completing 400,000 new homes

annually was drastically reduced and for 1949 the Government had set a figure for no more than half that number to be built over the year. These facts combined with the wider changing political background in the shape of the developing Cold War ensured that the CP became increasingly critical over Labour's housing record.⁷⁰ Cuts in building programmes were seen as a direct consequence of the Government's 'disastrous foreign policy' which was sacrificing social services and reforms to build up military expenditure in accordance with the interests of American Imperialism. The housing and planning situation in Britain was unfavourably compared to that in the Soviet Union and People's Democracies where massive schemes of construction were being carried out unencumbered by the restrictions of private enterprise and ownership.

Where to work - Local Authority or 'radical' Partnership?

Despite the 'Left' turn in the CP's politics the emphasis was still placed, for Party members in the professions, on gaining employment in the public/state sector if at all possible. Although a number of 'socially aware' architects still interested themselves in tenants' work,⁷¹ it no longer had the prominence it once had. In part this was due to the extension of the Rent Acts at the beginning of the War so it covered the majority of the country which helped undermine any tenants' organisation. The other factor was that professional people of the Left, including architects, were greatly optimistic about the opportunities of creating a 'New Britain' through state employment, something which naturally absorbed a great deal of their effort and concentration.

In 1947 the ABT reiterated its call for an extension of building work by public authorities and in particular for Local Authorities to be given responsibility for the 'housing drive', all architects should therefore be working in Local Authorities. This was something Skinner, as one of the

pre-War CP architects, took exception to and in an article in *Keystone* in March 1948, he made a vigorous argument in favour of the existence of independent architectural firms. Replying in the next issue, a union member declared:

Mr. Skinner is a partner in one of the few experimental and progressive private offices ... A striking exception often proves a general rule. One might well ask how many private offices had Messrs. Tecton's social conscience, idealism, aesthetic zeal, and financial resources.⁷²

The 'radical' architectural partnership, The Architects' Co-operative Partnership (ACP) which was started just before the outbreak of War by eleven graduating AA students, was another 'exception to the general rule'. Committed to social building, rather than commercial business, those involved were nevertheless resistant to sacrificing their 'freedom' by working in a public office. They reasoned, as one of their number recalls:

that there would be so much work that public offices would have to put out work to private offices and that we were just the sort of chaps they'd put it out to because we were interested in that sector of social building rather than what we regarded as capitalist.⁷³

After the War ACP was restarted and managed to gain a commission from Enfield Cables to design/plan a factory to be built in South Wales (seen as helping a 'distressed area'). Slowly, enough work was gained to absorb all the partners, and in 1948 Anthony Cox left his job at Hertfordshire County Council. Through Cox the firm was given some work by the Council and were responsible for building nine schools in the county. However, the overt political nature of the firm became watered down in the post-war years. Anthony Cox, one of those involved, had left the Party during the early stages of the War, John Wheeler, a CP member and another of the original initiators of the enterprise, died in 1945, and although Leo de

Syllas, one of the longstanding partners, remained a Communist until at least 1956, the firm's 'links' with the CP became increasingly distant.⁷⁴ There were other Party architects who were not in the public sphere (e.g. Colin Penn, Dick Toms) but often this was through necessity rather than choice, and in the succeeding years they moved, or tried to move, to employment in a Local Authority.

By 1948 40% of architects worked in national and local government and the 1949 Housing Act further extended the power of Local Authorities by making them responsible for the housing needs of all their residents (not just 'working-class' ones). A great many of the students who graduated as architects after the end of the War took it for granted that they would work in the public sector. At the AA School there was a thriving CP presence (an estimated 25 students out of 500 in 1950 were Party members⁷⁵) and John Kay recalls:

We preferred working for a 'social' client and developed techniques of working in which Local Authorities through the purchasing power their building programmes gave them were able to have produced and built the sort of buildings they needed, and in which user needs were as important as technical and aesthetic considerations.⁷⁶

Although Local Authority building work had the stigma of being unadventurous and their architectural offices/departments were often seen as being organised in an authoritarian manner with an all-powerful Principal, the task of architects was to go in and change this. There was a feeling of optimism that 'things were going our way and we would see a socialist Britain in our life time',⁷⁷ and as Kenneth Campbell expressed himself in a 1949 BBC broadcast, 'The private office is dying, along with other social forms which are also dying'.⁷⁸

One of the major ABT post-war campaigns was to encourage the establishment of 'group working' in public offices; the subdivision of

those in an office into small groups, working in a co-operative manner on a specific job. As Arthur Ling summed up the task of leftwing and progressive architects, it was to '... introduce the freedom of the private architect's office into the large Local Authority',⁷⁹ a measure, he claimed, that would also help speed up output. Over the next few years 'group working' was introduced in various public offices including at the LCC where CP architect Kenneth Campbell played an important initiating role.⁸⁰

In fact, given the expansion of the LCC Architects' Department after the War and the massive planning and construction tasks that were to be undertaken by this Labour-led Authority, it is hardly surprising that 'socially committed' architects were attracted to go and work there. The Department became even more 'attractive' in 1949 when it was again given responsibility for housing, which was taken out of the hands of the Valuers Office, and a new Housing Division was formed. The Department in County Hall was thus one of the largest architectural offices in Europe with a staff of 2,500 of whom 500 were trained architects, half of whom were employed in the Housing Division. Those like Cleeve Barr and Oliver Cox (never a formal CP member) who faced a political hostility at Hertford moved to the LCC in 1950; others like Dick Toms were encouraged to seek employment there by Graeme Shankland.⁸¹ A body of 15-20 Party architects were employed at the LCC and they joined other Communists there in a Party branch covering all those employed at County Hall. There was also a subsequent rise in the membership of the LCC Staff Branch of the ABT which recorded an increase from 60 to 100 in 1949.

Soviet Architecture

The building and architectural developments that took place in the Soviet Union and later in the People's Democracies were of course of very great

importance to Communist architects in Britain. Soviet architecture was in the first fifteen years perceived as being 'Modernist' but by the mid-1930s a reaction to this had set in and the adoption of socialist realism as the norm in culture meant a replacement of 'functionalism' by a style of Greek pillars and temples and tumid ornamentations. It took some time for these changes to be fully comprehended by Party architects in Britain.⁸² Klingender's comparison of Soviet Russia with the Victorian age seemed to help explain for some but not for others why there should be a turn towards buoyant, triumphal, and extravagant buildings. One Party architect reporting on a meeting given by Klingender for the RIBA on 'Socialist Realism in Soviet Architecture' drew solace from the observation that:

The extravagance of the Victorian style resulted in a healthy reaction as expressed in the work of Voisy and Shaw and it can, therefore, be safely assumed that the present stage in Russian architecture will be superseded by an era of greater refinement.⁸³

Generally speaking, Communist architects still tended to see themselves as part of the Modern Movement and '... the congruence of this with progressive politics was more or less taken for granted'.⁸⁴ Literature on building in the USSR, produced by the British CP or Party architects/town planners, detailed the massive nature of the construction operations which were embarked upon and steered clear of stylistic aesthetic questions or the issue of what socialist realist architecture was. Arthur Ling's popular selling pamphlet, *Planning and Building in the USSR*, (1943), and the Marx House syllabus *The Building Industry in the USSR* by David Percival (1942) make no mention of socialist realism. Instead, particularly during the War, it was the wholesale moving of buildings, 'the construction of Fortified Zones', prefabrication, the

Moscow Metro, the way the architectural profession and building workers were organised etc., that was highlighted.⁸⁵

The wartime alliance with the Soviet Union produced a rise of interest in that country's architecture. In 1945 the Russian architect Victor Vesnin was awarded the RIBA Gold Medal and in the same year The Architecture and Planning Group of the Society for Cultural Relations (SCR) with the USSR came into existence. The new architectural section of the SCR was inaugurated at a reception at Claridge's Hotel and Professor Sir Charles Reilly, the President, suggested that architects, planners and builders had 'a real basis for mutual understanding with the USSR ... since professionally they were accustomed to put service before profit, regardless of the system under which they lived'.⁸⁶ The Group set itself the objective of encouraging the mutual exchange of information regarding architectural and construction matters in the two countries. As well as Reilly there were some important figures in the profession who associated themselves with the Group.⁸⁷ It was largely through the Group's translation of Soviet architectural articles which were relayed in the journal *Soviet Reconstruction Series*, edited by Ling and after 1950, *Bulletin of the Architecture and Planning Group*, edited by Lubetkin, that there was a much greater awareness of the philosophy behind Soviet architecture. In particular, in March 1948, the Group was responsible for arranging the first comprehensive photographic record of Soviet architecture ever to be seen in Britain at the RIBA. Over 4,000 people visited it and as a result there were major organised debates over the direction taken by architecture in the Soviet Union. Ling, in a guide to the exhibition, wrote:

It is perhaps a compliment to the Soviet Union that we expect to see, in a country with a completely new social system, the most advanced ideas in architecture, and some are disappointed to find that their conception of what is advanced is not accepted

by Soviet architects. It is hoped that this exhibition will help to make clear the aims of Soviet architects and assist the British architect to understand the origins of contemporary Soviet architecture.⁸⁸

The interest and attention in Soviet architecture grew as the massive post-war construction programmes got under way in Moscow, Leningrad, and other cities. 'Wedding Cake' designs were adopted for skyscrapers (not the 'functional' straight line) as was symbolised in the country's most prestigious building of this time, the Lomonosov State University in Moscow. Various organised 'cultural trips' by the SCR⁸⁹ ensured there was greater awareness of the distinctive Russian approach to style, which was so out of step with 'modern' Western architecture.

The 'Battle of Ideas' and the formation of the Architects' Group

The Architects' Branch had been disbanded in 1945 with the change in Party rules, but of course CP architects continued to meet together as a fraction in the ABT and SCR Architects' and Planning Group, and there was a Communist Branch at the AA School. It was not until the start of 1948 that a properly constituted Architects' Group of the Party was formed under the direction of the National Cultural Committee with over a hundred members, although with a regular attendance at meetings of 20-30. In the ideologically charged atmosphere of the late 1940s Communist architects were encouraged to develop a clearer 'Communist' approach to their professional work. They were expected to contribute within their own field of architecture to the overall Party fight against American-inspired 'cosmopolitan styles' and in defence of the 'National Cultural Tradition'. Obviously Soviet architecture was of great importance in stimulating debate among Party architects. Malcolm MacEwen, a *Daily Worker* journalist who attended meetings of the Architects' Group, describes the great arguments that took place over the Soviet rejection of Modern

Architecture: '... all our friends were adherents of the Modern Architectural movement ... instead you were getting "wedding cakes" in Moscow and Warsaw, and the mass production of classical detailing'.⁹⁰

Amongst Group members three sections emerged: 1) The uncritical defenders of Soviet architecture, very small in number, who claimed that as the architecture of an existing socialist society it was superior to what was produced in the West. 2) Those who tried to explain why architecture had taken the necessarily 'crude' retrogressive course it had in the USSR, seeing it as a temporary stage. Cleeve Barr expressed the belief, at an SCR event, that: 'Given time I am certain they will develop their own forms of modern architecture, but they will be much richer and more human than anything we yet know as Modern Architecture over here'.⁹¹ Or as Kenneth Campbell recalls his attitude in the 1940s and '50s:

Stalinist architects were absolutely right, the Soviet people weren't ready for Modern Architecture ... for us to have copied the architecture of a backward peasant society, however fast they might have been evolving or however just the system was, would have been dotty.⁹²

Some architects close to the Party who were committed 'Modernists' could not, or refused to, make an exception of Soviet architecture and saw the trend it was taking in the post-war years as fundamentally reactionary.⁹³

3) There were a number of Party architects who consciously attempted to develop a socialist realist approach to their work. Soviet architecture:

Was a goad or a prod to thought about the state of architecture in the West. One of the effects of it was that amongst those in the Group I was involved with there was an early realization that there was something sadly missing from the whole philosophy of Modern Architecture. There was the realization that it wasn't much liked ... that the debate about the form of architecture and content of it in the Soviet Union represented a real dissatisfaction with the

clinical, inhuman, undecorated, unfamiliar, hard-edged, antiseptic aesthetic of Modern Architecture. It didn't grab people who weren't involved in the intellectual debate, most people thought it was boring and some of us recognised that very early on.⁹⁴

In the first years of its existence Architect Group members evolved a critique of Modern Architecture,⁹⁵ the most developed attempt being a piece by the LCC architect Andrew Boyd, 'Marxism and Modern Architecture', in two parts in the *Communist Review* for April and May, 1949. Boyd defended the Soviet position on architecture and its rejection of functionalism as the all determining principle for the form a building should take. In particular: 'No idea runs more strongly through all the Soviet controversies or is more convincing than the insistence that socialist art and culture must be clear to, understood and felt by the 'plain' ordinary people'.⁹⁶ Modern Architecture had most certainly never been directed to the masses, it had been created to appeal to a narrow circle of educated people. Socialist architecture needed to base itself firmly on the historical traditions in national building: 'It is the evocative power of great art and its associations, which give it its emotional appeal and it can only be on the ground of a common heritage that the Architect will find that power'.⁹⁷ By recognising and using custom and tradition in planning new buildings it was understood that there would not be a 'vulgar imitation of traditional forms' as was carried out by revivalists. It was important that not all of the principles associated with Modern Architecture be rejected, in particular it was essential to hold on to the recognition that functions and structures do not stand still but change and new types of building will arise. Architectural style should therefore not be regarded as assumed but must be integral, the task, Boyd writes at one stage, was to carry out 'the enrichment, humanisation and popularisation of building forms designed integrally from function and structure ...'.⁹⁸ The socialist

architect must pay attention to the feelings and desires of the people but at the same time use his skills and training to take initiatives and suggest particular 'appropriate' approaches.

Socialist Realist Architecture

Those British architects who attempted to develop a socialist realist architecture realised that it was not simply a process of studying and copying the latest building designs in the USSR and People's Democracies. After all the constant refrain that was used in conjunction with socialist realism was that it was 'national in form, socialist in content'. Andrew Boyd, speaking at an SCR Symposium, 'What kind of architecture do we want in Britain?' stressed that he was 'not concerned either to criticise or to imitate Russian architecture. The forms in which we shall work out our solution will be from our own history and heritage and will be entirely independent of them'.⁹⁹ Or as Hugh Morris has later written:

We in the Group were isolated amongst "progressive architects" in our feeling that there was something sadly lacking in the Bauhaus-inspired international style of modern architecture. We felt (rather than "knew") that it had little real public appeal or support. All that we could agree (amongst ourselves in the Group and its circle of fellow-travellers) was that we were against formalism; and that the meaning generally given to functionalism was mechanistic and myopic and narrow; and that we could begin to see how William Morris, Webb and Co had also been looking for an architecture national in form and socialist in content. It was hard to define the socialist content except through social purposes (housing, education, health) for which we wished to build. Beyond that we had little clear consensus on what socialist realist architecture might look like - except that it was neither Swedish sanatoria, nor Corb's with Radiouse, nor Soviet wedding cakes.¹⁰⁰

As Hugh Morris remarks, various Party architects began to search out and study the building work of William Morris, Philip Webb, the principal exponent of Morris's architectural approach, and those who worked in this

tradition.¹⁰¹ In particular, the early work of the LCC Architects' Department, carried out at the turn of the century, by architects who were directly influenced by Morris and Webb, was felt to be of great value in the emergence of an indigenous socialist realist architecture. A long essay was published in the *Architectural Association Journal*, November 1954, by a CP architect David Gregory Jones which detailed the early LCC estates: Boundary Road Estate, Millbank Estate, Webber Row Estate and the early Cottage estates. Boundary Road Estate was so planned that the flats compose 'a picturesque urban village with a romantic skyline of gables and chimneys', red bricks were used in combination with light coloured bricks so there is a striped pattern effect produced on the upper storeys. The flats are five storeys high, with just two flats on each floor and are

a remarkable anticipation of the "point" blocks which are becoming fashionable today [early mid-1950s - SRP]. We can still learn from these sixty-years-old English "point" blocks in their use of expressive gabled roofs and sculturesque chimneys to make homely drama of their height.¹⁰²

Gregory Jones argued that these early municipal estates contrasted with the current (1950s onwards) 'obsession' with 'rectangular blocks in arid isolation' which, if used in excess, can destroy a sense of community. These early estates gave the working-class inhabitants the feelings of continuity and enclosure which '... are basic essentials of all successful town design'.¹⁰³

Colin Boatman, a CP member at the AA School, attempted to design a building in what he considered a socialist realist idiom for his final thesis in 1952. It was a psychiatric Day Centre (he sought the help of two Party psychiatrists George and Betty Morgan) designed in a symmetrical neo-classical manner, with a portico entrance, columns, and neo-Georgian detailing, which he justified on the basis that those with psychiatric disorders would be comforted by the 'familiar' building style. The thesis

was deemed unacceptable and Boatman was required to submit a more 'modern' architectural design. It was two British architectural competitions in the 1950s which provided a real opportunity for various Party architects to develop a distinctly different socialist realist approach: the Golden Lane in the City of London (Barbican) in 1952, and the sea front at Dover. Those Party members who entered designs for the competitions displayed them for the Group for debate and suggestions. An entry by David Gregory Jones for the Golden Lane housing competition achieved fourth prize, despite a fair degree of hostility. The design was dramatically different from the other winners (and of course what is there today); a solid quadrangle built around a large courtyard, not high - 6 floors, brick walls (copy of drawing reproduced). For the Dover competition Gregory Jones and Graeme Shankland put in a joint scheme which Hugh Morris felt was '... overheavy, palatial, and a bit too Russian socialist realist for my taste'.¹⁰⁴ Morris, in combination with two other architects, also entered a design

based on the Regency Terraces of the South Coast, especially the smaller ones (e.g. Royal Crescent, Brighton) with their vertical angular bay-window rhythms. Our scheme was also an essay in proving that, even at the high density prescribed, there was no need to build high at all. Ours was six storey, maximum, I think. And was a social as much as an architectural "thesis" - an attack on the prevailing conviction that high-rise building was a necessary and "progressive" thing.¹⁰⁵

John Kay was yet another member of the Group who entered both competitions. Although the one he did for Golden Lane was carried out while he was still at the AA School and was 'strictly Modern', his design for the slightly later Dover sea front competition was:

GOLDEN LANE HOUSING COMP

FOURTH PRIZE-WINNING DESIGN

BY D. M. GREGORY-JONES

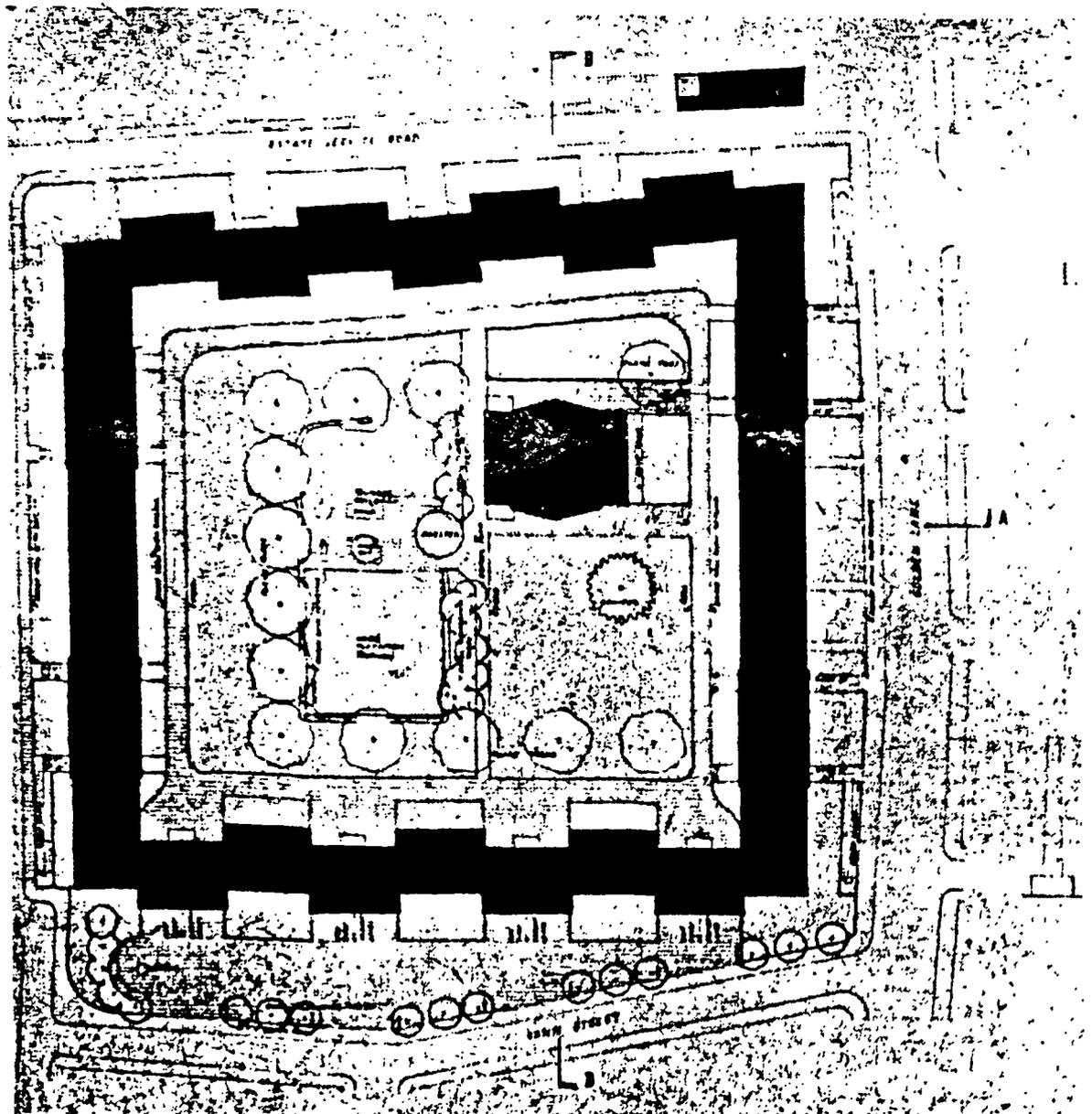
COMPETITOR'S REPORT

Of the eight elevations only four have been drawn and these are typical. The west external elevation is identical with the Golden Lane elevation but for the reduction in length containing maisonettes. North exterior elevation is similar to the south side of the courtyard but for the absence of "ways through" at ground level. The west side is identical with the east side but for the reduction in length of the central section. The north side is similar to the Fann

street elevation but for the a through."

CONSTRUCTION

Load-bearing block walls 1 floor level, 13½ in. above, spine walls 9 in. brickwork neering bricks up to third stocks above. Ground floor concrete. Other floors pate crete construction spanning walls and/or trimming bear turally supported staircase structed of 6 in. walls of c



DESIGN

et elevation but for the absence of "ways
ough."

CONSTRUCTION

ad-bearing block walls 18 in. on ground
r level, 13½ in. above, cross walls and
walls 9 in. brickwork in semi-engi-
ring bricks up to third floor, and hard
ks above. Ground floor slab reinforced
crete. Other floors patent precast con-
e construction spanning on the brick
and/or trimming beams. The struc-
lly supported staircase walls are con-
cted of 6 in. walls of concrete. Facing

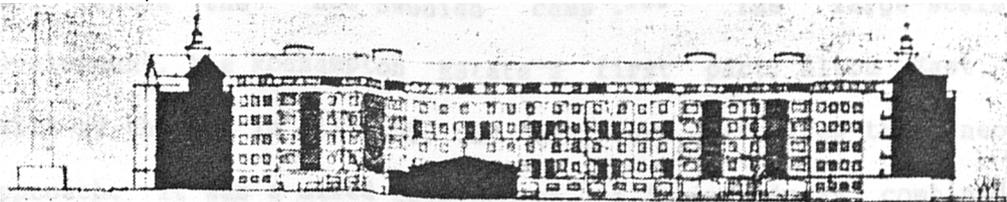
brickwork London stock. Ground floor
purple Sussex multi-stocks; faience tiles
beneath living room windows. Copings,
string courses, sills, artificial stone.

ASSESSOR'S COMMENTS

The assessor wrote: "The design placed
fourth was the only one of its kind and the
assessor felt that it should be recognized for
its originality and independence of its treat-
ment. The buildings are arranged in a
solid quadrangle . . . Unfortunately it in-
volves an excessive number of lifts."



SECTION A-A



SECTION B-B

C 10 THUS
663 75 #

F 3 D 10 THUS
663 75 #

F 3 E 7 THUS
655 #

F 3 F 5 THUS
832 #

mildly monumental with some 17th or 18th century overtones. Neo-Georgian, one might say ... It is a bit ironic that new buildings illustrated in the glossy architectural magazines today come much nearer to my Dover designs than to the Modern Movement of 1930s.¹⁰⁶

These efforts at 'socialist realist architecture', however, made little progress in ever being realised/built as they were very much at odds with the spirit of the times in the profession. Little support was forthcoming outside of the small coterie of Party architects. Yet the most important reason for the 'defeat of British socialist realist architecture' was that it was simply too expensive, relying as it did on brick or natural stone and a good deal of craftsmanship. To quote Kenneth Campbell:

Even those architects who believed strongly in socialist realism when they came into positions of reasonable importance and influence found that they had to settle for the International Style we see all around us ... After all what are these big office blocks which everybody complains about, the concrete and glass boxes - they are simply so many thousands of square feet enclosed in the cheapest possible way that anybody can design.¹⁰⁷

Despite Reyner Banham's fanciful claim that the LCC Architects Department attempted to enforce an 'Anglo-Zhdanov line', in reality the socialist realist architects found themselves drawn fairly rapidly into what can be best termed the 'neo-Swedish camp'.¹⁰⁸ The large-scale housing development, the Roehampton Estate's first part, Alton East, which was built by the LCC in 1952-55, in many ways epitomises this 'neo-Swedish' approach. It was a mixed development of 'point blocks' combined with '.. a new type of cottage and a range of narrow-fronted deep-plan maisonettes, which became the standard high-density mixed development combination'.¹⁰⁹ The Estate was situated in grassland with trees and all the buildings were

given a brick finish and the maisonettes and cottages had pitched roofs. Charles Jenck in his *Modern Movements in Architecture* describes this as part of

"People's Detailing", the English version of "Socialist Realism" or Marxist aesthetics, that became mandatory at the L.C.C. in the early fifties: pitched roofs, bricky materials, ticky-tacky, cute lattice-work, little nooks and crannies, picturesque profiles all smuggled within a cardboard-like rectitude.¹¹⁰

Or, as an even more negative commentator described the 'middle ranks' of the LCC Architects' Department in this period: 'Marxist architects from the Thirties who paid lip-service to such icons as William Morris while practising a bland bourgeois vernacular of Swedish inspiration'.¹¹¹

The second part of the Roehampton Estate, Alton West, which was started in 1955 already shows that there was something of a reaction against the 'Swedish-Festival of Britain' architecture. Alton West was more inspired by Corbusier's Unité than anything else and the buildings are harsher; the maisonettes have flat roofs and windowless end walls, the concrete is not clad, and there is a much more formal layout. Those graduating from the AA School in the mid-fifties were much less overtly political and were concerned to design what they considered were more 'intellectually honest' buildings. It was the time when the term 'New Brutalism' was invented and tagged onto the work of a group of young architects, in particular Alison and Peter Smithson and James Stirling, who drew inspiration from Mies van der Rohe's work. As the LCC Architects' Department grew, more 'currents' came into it, in Dick Toms' words:

We attracted the "bright boy". The extremely strong influence, largely AA was what one might call Corbusian. Now when I went in 1952 to the LCC it was beginning to come in. I was given a big development job at Loughborough, already designed with hundred foot blocks which were really based on Unité by these

young AA graduates. I had a hell of a struggle at the time to handle them ... it was all concrete and I could see the great problem of trying to transplant the Mediterranean to here and what happens to concrete in England - it gets all green ...¹¹²

However, wider changes: the use of prefabricated systems in schools from the 1950s and of industrialised systems in housing from 1958, the constant pressure to build as many homes as possible, and other commercial and Governmental influences determined the general direction architecture/building took. Kenneth Campbell describes the emerging architecture as '... a sort of watered-down Modernism ... best described as the International style'.¹¹³

The decline of the CP architects

In the late 1940s and early '50s the effects of the Cold War were leading some Party architects to drop out of activity; there were official moves to impose a ban on the employment of Communists at the LCC and a Party decision was taken to disband the LCC CP branch. Party leaders gave approval at this time to a number of architects and others to 'drop their Party card'.¹¹⁴ Some refused, others who accepted this option or became secret members, drifted fairly quickly out of political activity. Some left the Party because of disillusionment with the actions of the Soviet Union while others became generally depressed with politics as the hopes engendered with the 1945 election slowly died away. Lubetkin is an example of the latter reaction, with his abortive involvement in the planning of Peterlee new town: 'My main reason for accepting the appointment of architect/planner was the solidarity and cohesion of the miners as a group, which I hoped would lay its stamp on the geometry and mutual interdependence of the new buildings'.¹¹⁵

From the late 1940s ABT membership began to fall:

Membership	-	3,906	-	December	1947
		3,673	-	"	1948
		3,301	-	"	1949
		3,097	-	"	1950

Despite the attempt by the union leadership to be careful and restrained in taking decisions on overt political questions the strong CP presence in the Association's leadership was too much for some. In 1948 sixteen people openly resigned on political grounds; undoubtedly the true number was larger. In the opinion of one architect, Percy Johnson-Marshall, the ABT went into decline as it became too firmly attached to the 'Party line' and the RIBA began to concern itself seriously with salaried architects and 'official architecture'. Various leftwing architects concentrated on working within the RIBA. The CP architect Thurston Williams completely ignored the ABT and instead became engrossed in the LCC Staff Association and by 1953 he was the chief negotiator for all of County Hall's administrative, professional, technical and clerical staff.¹¹⁶ The ABT's fate was finally settled by its inability to compete with NALGO which rapidly recruited among all local government employees, including architects, and actually gained representation in negotiations over wages and conditions.

In 1952, as one of a number of 'peace organisations of the professions', the Architects' Society for Peace was formed attracting some major professional figures including Douglas Bailey (chairman), Furneaux Jordan, Graeme Shankland, Skinner et al. This 'peace work' linked in well with the strong tradition among architects for international dialogue between members of their profession throughout the world. It helped re-establish a relationship and dialogue between Communist architects and fellow liberal colleagues in Britain, with the easing of international tension, however, this political work lost its momentum.

In the Architects' Group a major task undertaken was the production of a book on housing which, while it was written by Dick Toms under the pseudonym Alec Johnson, was a collective effort of the Group - draft chapters were discussed and amended. The book, *This Housing Question*, came out in 1954 and included a wealth of detail to back up the argument for increased subsidies and lower interest on housing loans, the complete nationalisation of building materials and the expansion of Direct Labour schemes. Expansion in no way was seen as excluding private building contractors who would work in partnership with Direct Labour. In substance the book argued for no more than the 'full' carrying through of Labour's 1945 programme. Inspiration was drawn from the fact that:

Only 150 years ago this country had the greatest tradition of urban living (for the privileged classes) in its Georgian streets and squares ... What possibilities the future has in store when the people are in power ... in our towns, some fine old streets and squares now dilapidated and going to ruin, will be quite magnificent once again, with their fronts repaired and painted and the old houses adapted as modern houses.¹¹⁷

Yet within a short time after the book had come out Khrushchev had effectively condemned 'socialist realist' architecture as practised in the Soviet Union. These developments, including the November 1955 Decree 'Removing Excesses in Architectural Design and Building', were relayed to Party architects and others by the Architects' Group of the SCR; Soviet architecture was clearly falling into line with modern Western architecture. Then came the events of 1956¹¹⁸, which led to the resignation of many members from the Party and the dissolution of the Group. The SCR Architecture and Planning Group also disappeared at this time.¹¹⁹ Leaving the CP allowed some to concentrate fully on advancing their own careers, so that by the 1960s and '70s it has been estimated that a dozen Local Authority Chief Architects were former members of the

Party,¹²⁰ of these architects a number did not completely reject the ideas and efforts of the Group.¹²¹ Other former Group members left public employment and joined private partnerships; thus Shankland formed his own practice in 1962, David Gregory Jones moved out of Local Authority work and even one of those who continued to be politically committed, Hugh Morris, left the LCC to end up becoming a senior partner in Robert Matthew Johnson-Marshall and Partners (RMJM).

Footnotes

- 1 K. Campbell, interview 23 January 1984.
- 2 1933 statement quoted by Edward Carter, 'Politics and Architecture', *Architectural Review*, November 1979.
- 3 See C.P. architect R.W. Toms's article, 'The Housing Exhibition at Olympia', *The Keystone*, October 1936, on the joint MARS/ATO exhibition 'New Homes for Old' where he compares MARS unfavourably with the ATO.
- 4 John Madge and Anthony Cox, 'MARS Exhibition of the New Architecture', *Left Review*, February 1938.
- 5 Described by Sir Denys Lasdun as '... the most outstanding architect of the 1930s in Britain'.
- 6 F. Skinner, interview 15 February 1985.
- 7 *An Exhibition on Working Class Housing*, Programme, April 1936.
- 8 110 members according to a 1935 ATO Bulletin.
- 9 Colin Penn, interview, 7 March 1983.
- 10 Undated ATO leaflet.
- 11 There were members in Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Sheffield, Cambridge and, a littler later, Birmingham, although London remained by far the predominant area of membership and activity.
- 12 *An Exhibition on Working Class Housing*, op. cit.
- 13 Presumably due to pressures of 'Popular Frontism' there was some conflict over Section 3 Aims of the ATO Constitution which was amended to alter 'Socialist Solution' to 'National Solution'. However, the issue was not settled and was opened for further discussion. I do not know the final decision.
The Organisation kept in close contact with the Party and its activities were covered in depth by the *Daily Worker*. An article, 'When Tenants Band Together' in the *Daily Worker*, 22 July 1936, purported to be by Skinner as Secretary of the ATO. In fact, the article was based on an interview with Skinner and there was a subsequent disclaimer in the paper: 'I would never have written a signed article in the *Daily Worker* myself ...' (F. Skinner, letter 30 April 1985). Skinner, a Party member, was keen to maintain a 'public distance' between himself (as a professional architect and Secretary of the ATO) and the CP.
- 14 F. Skinner, letter 'The Architect and the State: A New Organisation', *The Architect and Building News*, 1 February 1935 - see succeeding weeks issues for responses including a defence of Italian and German housing records.
- 15 Confidential Report by AASTA Chairman to Association Council 20 April 1935 - MRC, Warwick.

- 16 ATO and CP members R.W. Toms and C.T. Penn became full Association members in August and November 1936 respectively.
- 17 *The Keystone*, February 1941.
- 18 Source - C. Penn, interview 7 March 1983.
- 19 Not 1931 as claimed in Edward Carter's otherwise informative article, 'Politics and Architecture', *Architectural Review*, November 1979.
- 20 See - *The Keystone*, August 1921.
- 21 J. Summerson, 'Bread and Butter and Architecture', *Horizon*, October 1942.
- 22 The first article on the Soviet Union appeared in *The Keystone*, October 1935 and November's journal carried a substantial report of an 'Artists Against Fascism and War' exhibition etc.
- 23 K. Campbell, interview 23 January 1984.
- 24 Whether these 'Highpoint meetings' were or developed into CP Architects Fraction/Cell meetings remain uncertain. In addition there was a CP Cell formed by students at the AA School in 1935-36, involving Anthony Cox and Richard Llewelyn-Davies.
- 25 Never an actual Party member as it would have endangered his permission to stay in the country - source Skinner, interview. 15 February 1985.
- 26 'Addendum to Chairman's Report on Policy' - MRC, Warwick.
- 27 *Our History, Organisation and Aims*, ABT - Association name after 1942 - booklet.
- 28 A discussion on this followed an ATO meeting addressed by Tom Wintringham on the technique of modern warfare.
- 29 J.B.S. Haldane, *ARP*, p. 139.
- 30 'ARP Experts Called Up', *Keystone*, February 1941.
- 31 Peter Coe and Malcolm Reading, *Lubetkin and Tecton - Architecture and Social Commitment*, p. 65.
- 32 'Surely a record for a publication of any professional body in our field', *Keystone*, March 1941.
- 33 Dick Toms, letter 10 June 1985.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 See *Keystone*, September 1940 which carried two sizeable quotes from the two papers along these lines.
- 36 *Keystone*, September 1939.

- 37 Ibid., December 1940.
- 38 As expressed in letters to *Keystone* it was 'too political', 'anti-Labour Party', 'not supported by the TUC', 'a C.P. front' etc.
- 39 Andrew Saint, *Towards a Social Architecture: The Role of School Building in Post-War England*, p. 19.
- 40 D. Toms and C. Penn, 'The Tasks of the AASTA during the War', *Keystone*, September 1940.
- 41 A rise in membership was reported for the period March/April 1941, with 62 new members recruited in March and 72 in the succeeding, the previous record for recruitment in a single month was 60, attained in 1938.
- 42 *Keystone*, December 1940.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 Ibid., February 1941.
- 45 Ibid., April 1941.
- 46 Mary Toms - Assistant Organiser, 1941-43 - interview 22/23 August 1985. Mention should be made of one Communist who was very actively involved in the ATO and ARP campaign in Birmingham and became an AASTA member, the structural engineer William Henry Laithwaite. During the War he was in charge of the pontoons and articulated bridge for the Mulberry Harbour, a very direct use of his professional skills in the War effort.
- 47 K. Campbell, interview 23 January 1984.
- 48 A. Ling, 'The Royal Academy's Plan for London', *Keystone*, November 1942.
- 49 'Reconstruction', *Keystone*, March 1943.
- 50 Editorial, 'The Housing Conference and the Future', *Keystone*, July 1943.
- 51 C. Penn, interview 7 March 1984.
- 52 K. Campbell, interview 23 March 1984.
- 53 Churchill was particularly enthusiastic over the possibilities of prefabrication in his speech of 26 March 1944. It was one of the only things Party/Left architects could find to praise of his comments on housing and reconstruction.
- 54 As D. Gibson, Coventry City Architect, and chairman of the ABT branch there, had tried at the Association organised 1943 Housing Conference.
- 55 See 'RIBA - NUT - ABT Conference on School Buildings', report in *Keystone*, July/August 1945.

- 56 e.g. *Houses for Birmingham*, CP Plan, 1945, p. 5.
- 57 He proposed that all such buildings be stamped with a notice, 'not to be used as a dwelling after 1965'.
- 58 In the words of one writer: 'Popular writers of a later generation give the impression that the planners' dreams for the inner cities were slavishly Corbusian. This was far from the case ... There were two inevitable obsessions: what to do about traffic, and what to do about densities'. (Lionel Esher, *A Broken Wave: the Rebuilding of England, 1940-1980*, p. 44.)
The MARS Plan for London that was drawn up during the War and which redesigned the City into '... parallel districts separated by parks and feeding into central linear industrial zones on either side of a purified metropolitan core' (Anthony Jackson, *The Politics of Architecture*, p. 162) shocked even MARS members. Even if desirable it was felt to be impossible to undertake. The Plan was ignored by the Left (no mention of it in *Keystone*). The time when futuristic cities of skyscrapers were embraced and projected as the ideal by Communists (e.g. Ralph Fox's praise for Villeurbanne 'skyscraper city', *Daily Worker*, 25 February 1936, or Bernal's Wellsian speculations over future developments in housing in his *The Social Function of Science*, pp. 350-53) was a thing of the past.
- 59 E.J. Carter and E. Goldfinger, *The County of London Plan*, p. 31.
- 60 There was, however, a popular desire for house living, as Arnold Whittock, who gave lectures to approximately 250,000 servicemen during the War on planning and architecture, attests to. In discussions after his lectures he reports that: 'They were insistent on a fair degree of privacy: a house with a garden. They didn't like the idea of flats. That was a universal feeling'. (A. Whittock quoted in W. Harrington and P. Young, *The 1945 Revolution*, pp. 91-92).
- 61 See Dr. Phillips's article 'Town Planning' in *Labour Monthly*, April 1944, and reply by Osborn and a rejoinder from Phillips in the subsequent issue. The call for the construction of 'well built' flats, with shopping, washing and other facilities, to be rented out to working-class families had been seriously taken up by the CP in the 1930s. An important propaganda piece that the Party used was Tecton's design for flats in reinforced concrete to house 200 workers families (four storeys) which was entered for a competition arranged in 1934-35 by the Cement Marketing Co. Ltd. Photographs of the model flats were reproduced by the Party in the *Daily Worker* and pamphlets to illustrate what could be achieved under socialism.
See the memoirs of Jack Pritchard, *View from a Long Chair*, for an account of the building of Lawn Road Flats in 1930s Hampstead: 'The loyalty of radical architects was shifting from the old-time peasant housing, Arts and Crafts and Cottage culture, to mass housing for the workers, the massive flat developments which had risen up in Soviet Russia and Germany. In the pursuit of social justice and equality Lawn Road could surely not be anything but Lawn Road Flats. Nor could the flats be built in anything but concrete'. (J. Pritchard, *ibid.*, p. 13).
For an anarchist view in 1944 see the pamphlet, *Homes orhovels* by George Woodcock. Although Woodcock admitted flats were unpopular among workers, he also felt this attitude might well change if blocks

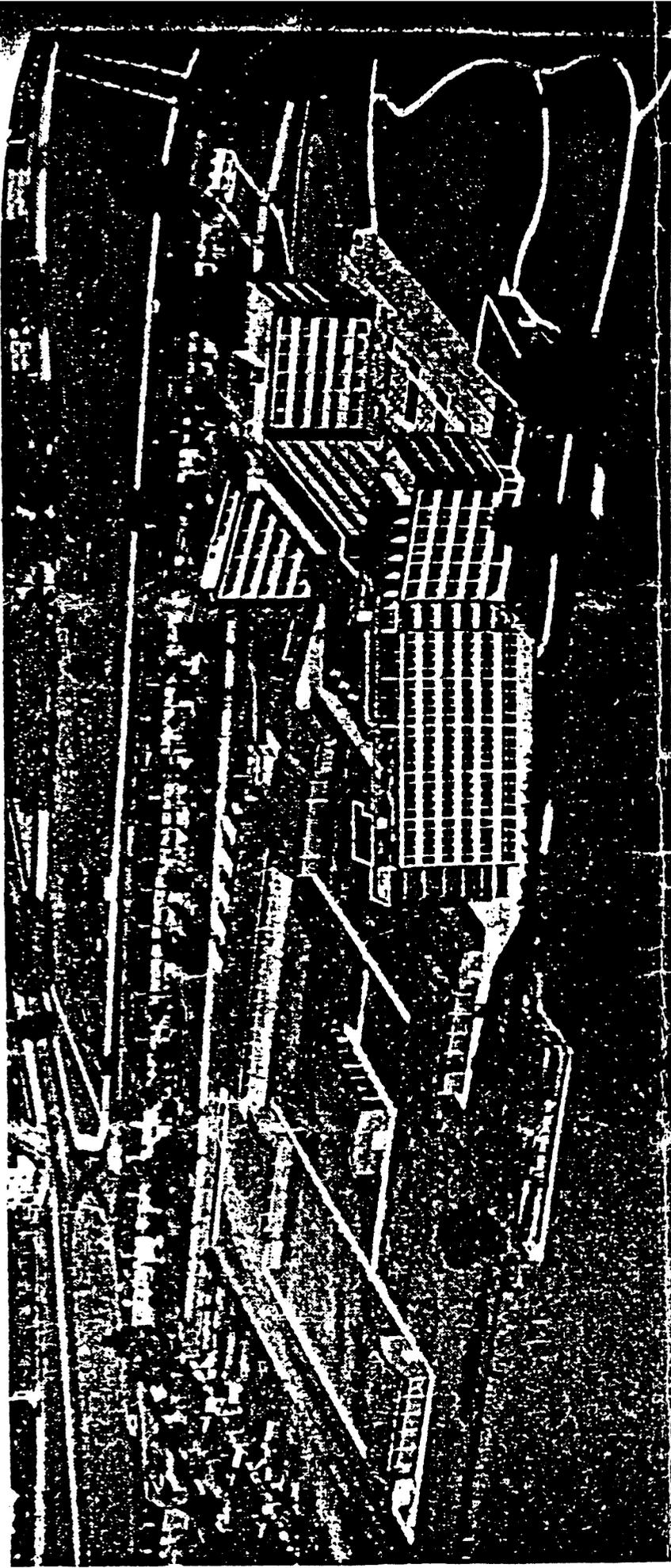
of flats were built widely spaced, with good facilities, and provided a degree of privacy for each family. The Conservative Party was more fatalistic, seeing flats as inferior to houses but agreeing that: '... flats have come to stay. We need to be realists and admit that in certain areas, notably the centres of existing towns, there is not - and there will not be for many years to come - any alternative means of rehousing some part of the existing population'. (*Looking Ahead - Foundation for Housing, interim report, Conservative Sub-Committee on Housing, March 1944, p. 10*).

- 62 Interestingly, Bevan, in his speech, gave his opinion that temporary housing had been a mistake and had injured the public's attitude towards prefabrication. He did, however, declare his interest in some systems of semi-prefabrication and was in favour of experimenting with clusters of high buildings in the countryside. Although Attlee did not carry out his promise to establish a separate Ministry of Housing, one of the CP's demands, there was a commitment to construct four million houses over ten years. A Communist architect who had recently returned to England after active service, Captain Graeme Shankland, catches the mood of radical architects in 1946: 'Everything connected with planning and housing is hot news. Exhibitions, Reports and books follow each other apace month by month. If the real thing comes out as good as the illustrations and the models, we will have certainly changed the face of Britain for the better in this generation. The general verdict on Aneurin Bevan's very difficult job on Housing is favourable, but the chronic labour and material shortage is still preventing the weary old machine of our building industry from reaching even its pre-war output level'. (Letter, *Keystone*, October 1946).
- 63 *Keystone*, November 1945.
- 64 C. Penn & A. Boyd, *Homes for the People*, p. 174.
- 65 Explicit criticisms of Le Corbusier were made in reviews of his books published in 1948-49. Colin Penn in a review of *The City of Tomorrow and its Planning* noted that even in the USSR where land was nationalised, the plan for the reconstruction of Moscow had rejected the two extremes of skyscraper city or garden city: 'It was decided that the form Moscow had acquired through the centuries would have to be taken as the basis of the plan'. (*Keystone*, February 1948). Writing on *The Home of Man* Andrew Boyd was even more critical, e.g. '... the few and uniform types of building provided by Le Corbusier's formula would be wearisome' (*Keystone*, March 1949). Boyd went on to attack Le Corbusier's conception of building and planning as a 'surgical operation' refusing to adapt to geographical/topographical circumstances or the organic and historical nature of cities.
- 66 *Keystone*, March 1944.
- 67 Regular articles appeared by Colin Penn on 'Electrical Lighting', 'Lightweight Concrete' etc in *New Builders Leader*, CP led building workers' paper, from 1945.
- 68 Sam Clare, *New Builders Leader*, November 1947.
- 69 Taken from the resolution, *Keystone*, October 1946.

- 70 For two defences of Labour's/Bevan's performance in the field of housing see Michael Foot, *Aneurin Bevan, 1945-60*, and Kenneth Morgan, *Labour in Power, 1945-51*. However, for a detailed contemporary account of the industry and the steps that could be taken for harnessing the building workers, their unions, and joint production committees, with the necessary state control, to the task of creating an efficient, modern, socialised building industry, see David Hall, *Cornerstone - A Study of Britain's Building Industry* (Lawrence and Wishart, 1948). Writing in 1947, Hall remarked: '... there is no real attempt to improve the efficiency of the building industry and to impose real control. The widely supported and ever-growing demand for a public enquiry is still brushed aside. Directly employed labour, whether by the Government, or by local authorities, is still, in practice, discouraged. The Ministry of Building seems now to be as far off as ever. Meanwhile, profits and the black market flourish ...' (introduction, *Cornerstone*, pp. iv-v).
- 71 Penn and later Skinner acted as ABT representative on the National Council of Tenants and Residents Associations.
- 72 A.N.Y., 'The Architect and the Community', *Keystone*, April 1948.
- 73 Sir Anthony Cox, interview 11 April 1985.
- 74 Kenneth Capon was another of the eight who restarted ACP and was still in the Party after the end of the War. An AA graduate of 1953 and Party member from 1949, Colin Boatman managed to get a job at the ACP, by which time it had become a large practice, and the underlying basis of the firm that all designs be put up for criticism by all members of staff had, in Boatman's opinion, become superficial: 'If anyone did criticise one of the senior partners' designs they were highly unpopular'. (C. Boatman, interview 10 February 1986). Boatman was eventually asked to leave and went on to join the LCC Architects Department. One of the first 'concessions' made (i.e. breaks with the original philosophy of the firm) was the employment of assistants in the drawing office. In the 1950s, under the pressure of Cold War reaction, they changed their name to the 'safe', one of the Architects' Co-partnership (on the suggestion of the President of RIBA, Howard Robertson - source A. Cox, interview 11 April 1985).
- 75 Source - Hugh Morris, interview 9 May 1985 and Colin Boatman, interview 10 February 1986.
- 76 John Kay, 'Architects and the Communist Party' document, March 1985.
- 77 *Architectural Association Journal*, December 1949.
- 79 Ling as reported at the 'ABT Conference on Technician's Part in Housing', *Keystone*, November 1945.
- 80 Campbell was in charge of the Schools Division from 1949-54, of General Buildings from 1954-58, and in charge of the Housing Division from 1958-74.
- 81 Senior figure in the Planning Division 1949-62.

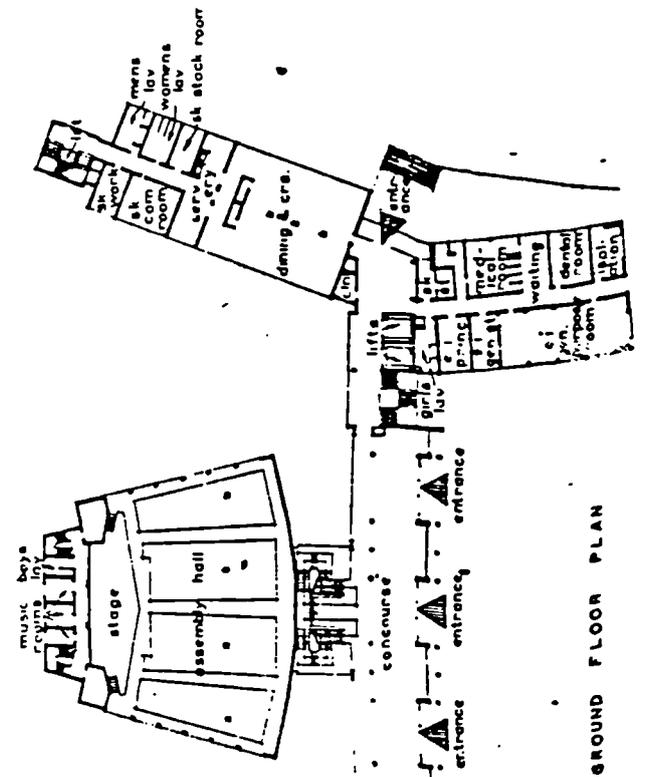
- ⁸² Lubetkin was naturally one of the first people in Britain to realise the decisive changes that took place in architectural thinking in the USSR in the 1930s - see Peter Coe and Malcolm Reading, *Lubetkin and Tecton: Architecture and Social Commitment*, essay no. 2 which mentions the conflict between the CP and the ATO over the Stalinist position on art and architecture. This, however, is challenged by Skinner: 'I think that exaggerates the amount of discussion that there was, I don't recall any such discussion ... I don't frankly think that there was anybody in the CP [leadership - SRP] at that time who was in a position to discuss questions of architecture ... literature yes ...' (F. Skinner, interview 15 February 1985). Writing an editorial note to a 1951 *Bulletin of the Architecture and Planning Group* of the SCR Lubetkin described the 'radical reversal' of Soviet architectural policy as being clouded in confusion for English architects: 'Various explanations of the change in policy were given at second-hand by visitors to the Soviet Union, and in not very authoritative articles which appeared ... but all this served to confuse rather than to clarify the issue. Nor did time bring any appreciable clarification' (April 1951). The aim of the *Bulletin*, Lubetkin declared, was to finally translate Soviet articles so there could be a proper understanding of the theoretical basis of Soviet architecture.
- ⁸³ R. Rosner, 'Socialist Realism in Soviet Architecture', *Keystone*, November 1945.
- ⁸⁴ John Kay, 'Architects and the C.P.', document March 1985.
- ⁸⁵ The emphasis placed by some on the 'great' construction schemes continued into the 1950s - see Chapter 13.
- ⁸⁶ *Soviet Reconstruction Series*, No. 6, May 1945.
- ⁸⁷ Prof. W. Holford, E.J. Carter, Prof. Abercrombie, Gordon Stephenson, Peter Shepheard, Elizabeth Denby, Wells Coates and party/fellow-traveller architects Cleeve Barr, Colin Penn, Nares Craig, Arthur Ling, John Pinckheard, Berthold Lubetkin.
- ⁸⁸ Arthur Ling, foreword, *Architecture of the USSR*.
- ⁸⁹ The SCR 1952 Cultural Delegation included John Pinckheard and in 1953-54 there was a major architectural delegation to the USSR.
- ⁹⁰ Malcolm MacEwen, interview 30 November 1983.
- ⁹¹ *Soviet Reconstruction Series*, July 1948.
- ⁹² K. Campbell, interview 23 January 1984.
- ⁹³ This was the case with the emigrés Ernő Goldfinger and Arthur Korn.
- ⁹⁴ Hugh Morris, interview 9 May 1985.
- ⁹⁵ There was also the first tentative attempts to form a Marxist approach to architectural history, e.g. Graeme Shankland wrote a Marxist critique of the then standard architectural history by Bannister Fletcher - 'A Study of the History of Architecture in

- Society', *The Architectural Association Journal*, issues October, November and December 1947. John Kay followed this with an essay on Christopher Wren.
- 96 A. Boyd, 'Marxism and Modern Architecture', *Communist Review*, April 1949.
- 97 Architects' Group contribution 'British Tradition in Architecture', in *Britain's Cultural Heritage*.
- 98 A. Boyd, op. cit.
- 99 A. Boyd, 'What kind of architecture do we want in Britain?', *Keystone*, May-June 1949.
- 100 Hugh Morris, letter 4 April 1985.
- 101 CP architect Ted Hollamby bought Morris's house at Bexley Heath, the Red House, and fellow member Dick Toms lived in a part of it, with his family, for six years, 1952-58.
- 102 D. Gregory Jones, 'Some Early Works of the L.C.C. Architects Department', *Architectural Association Journal*, November 1954.
- 103 Ibid.
- 104 H. Morris, letter 4 April 1985.
- 105 Ibid.
- 106 John Kay, 'Architects and the Communist Party', historical notes, March 1985.
- 107 K. Campbell, interview 23 January 1984.
- 108 Source - K. Campbell, letter 17 July 1985.
- 109 *Home Sweet Home*, LCC/GLC housing, p. 48.
- 110 C. Jenck, *Modern Movements in Architecture*, p. 245.
- 111 Nicholas Taylor, 'Honest to Brut', review of Banham's book, *New Statesman*, 10 March 1967. Although interestingly, one of the few buildings that was acknowledged as 'Socialist Realist', Eltham School, has a faintly 'constructivist' air to it of the kind you get in some Russian hospitals - source: Andrew Saint, letter 1 August 1986.
- Eltham Green Comprehensive School was built in 1955-56 and its architect was Party member Andrew Boyd and it is spoken of as one of the very few buildings constructed at this time which was acknowledged as being inspired by 'Socialist Realism'. There is extensive use of facing bricks, however; it is clearly 'modern' and, apart from a mural, has little ornamentation. It differs from other such schools built at this time in that it comprises of a single main block and not a collection of separate units. In the words of John Kay: '... a monolithic centralising feel to it, but no wedding cake features'. (J. Kay, letter 21 February 1986). Plan/photos attached.

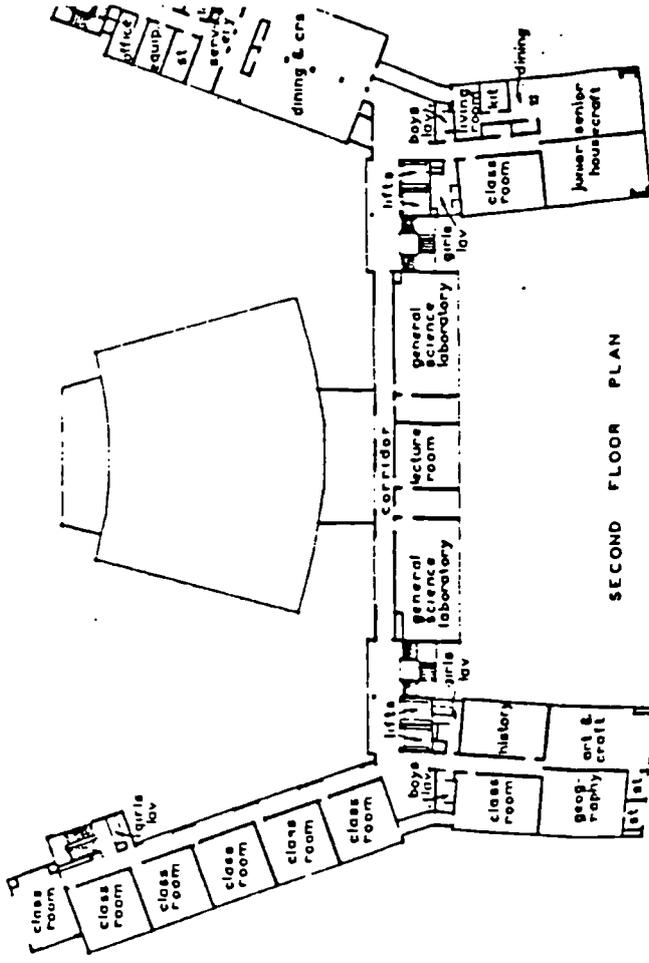


Aerial view of the new school from the south

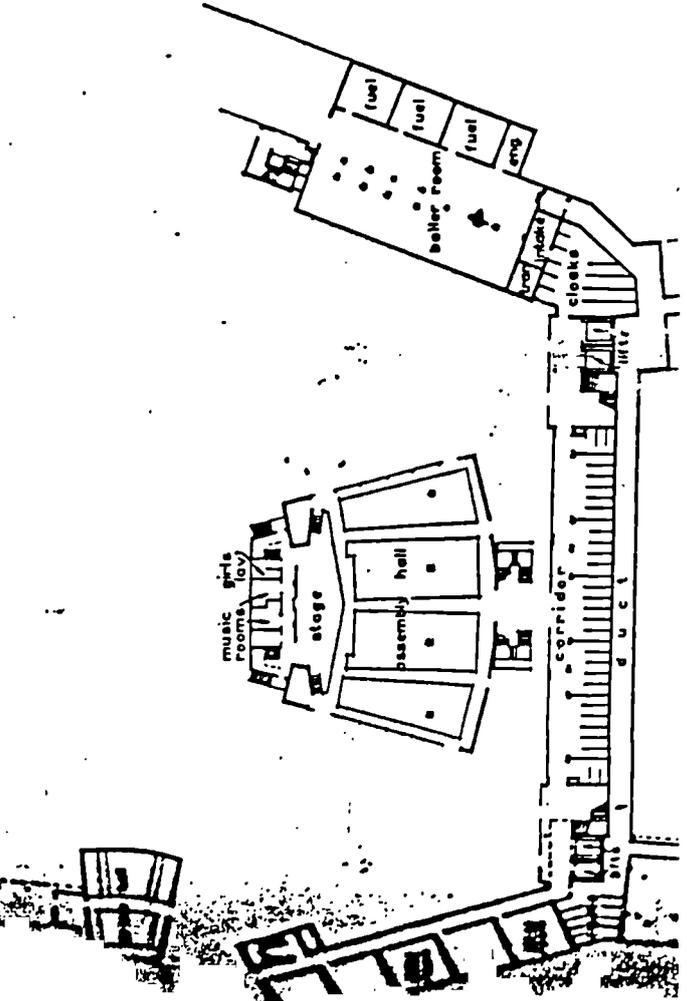
ELTHAM GREEN COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL,



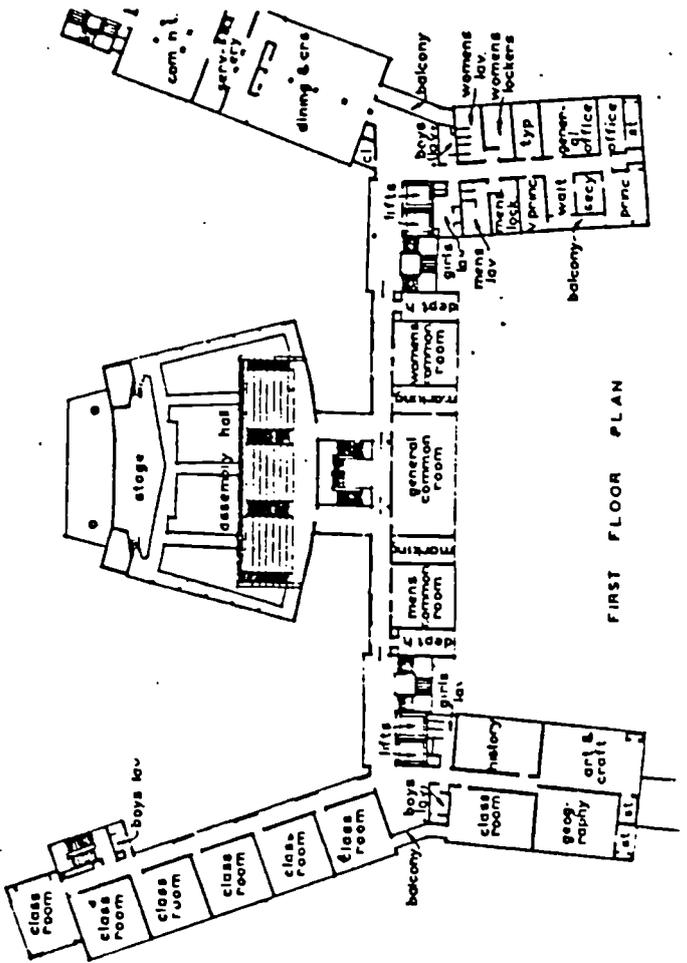
GROUND FLOOR PLAN



SECOND FLOOR PLAN



FIRST FLOOR PLAN



- 112 R.W. Toms, interview 22/23 August 1985.
- 113 K. Campbell, letter 17 July 1985.
- 114 Among those who were kept out of the LCC Architects' Department as a result of the 'ban' was Colin Penn who was turned down for a job at this time. Another Party member who sought a job in the Architects' Department in 1951 was Doris Deering; she had to wait until September 1952 before she could obtain a post there, i.e. after the 'ban' had been lifted (source - D.H. Deering, letter 14 July 1985). Outside of the LCC the 'red scare' had an effect on the AA School where the head of it, R. Furneaux Jordan, resigned in the wake of publicly expressed criticism of his tolerance of Communists on the teaching staff - see *The Builder*, editorial 24 November 1950 and correspondence in the same and two following issues: 1 and 8 December 1950.
Dick Toms, when he came to join the LCC in 1952, was visited by a deputation of two architects who advised him, with the sanction of Kings Street, that he give up his Party card and retain an informal link with the CP. Toms refused (as did Ted Hollamby at this time).
- 115 B. Lubetkin, 'Building nostalgia isn't the answer', *The Observer*, 16 June 1985. There was a fair amount of optimism among CP figures that Peterlee would be distinctly different and better than other New Towns. It would not be the low density, 'garden-city', dormitory suburb other New Towns were (see J.M. Richards, 'Failure of the New Towns', *The Architectural Review*, July 1953) but a 'real town' with a community feeling, that would build upon and express the miners' sense of solidarity. Lubetkin was engaged by Lewis Silkin with the promise of unlimited powers to create this town for 30,000 miners and their families. The CP's Social Services and Local Government Sub-committees debated the matter at length passing on their views to those in the area and requesting the North East District of the Party to cooperate in the project (Social Services Sub-committee meeting minutes 9 April 1948). However, the NCB obstructed his plans, they '... wanted semi-detached houses while the miners and I wanted London squares. The whole point of the original brief was the glorification of miners'. (Lubetkin, 'City of lost dreams', *The Guardian*, 29 December 1986) After two years of sinking ever deeper into bureaucratic deadlock Lubetkin resigned. A short time afterwards he completely left the architectural profession in disgust at what he saw as the failure of social architecture and with little feeling of sympathy for those Party architects' efforts at socialist realist architecture.
- 116 A conflict developed over the issue of where Party architects should concentrate their efforts - ABT or Staff Association. Although Kerrigan, the CP Industrial Organiser, ruled that it should be the former, the Party leaders were realistic enough to realise they could not impose an iron cast ruling on architect members. Thurston Williams did not alter his position, and brought the LCC Staff Association into the TUC, and in 1958 he was instrumental in forming an Association of Official Architects (connected to the RIBA).
- 117 Alec Johnson, *This Housing Question*, pp. 118-19.
- 118 A delegation from the CP Architects' Group went to see Gollan to express deep concern at the invasion of Hungary.

- 119 Ted Hollamby, writing in memory of Andrew Boyd, described the period of the mid-fifties as: '... a difficult period for leftwing architects and Andrew and I both began to feel the cold breath of disillusion. 'Socialist realism' no longer seemed an attractive theory and its practice was so obviously reactionary that it could only repel anyone as open-minded, intelligent and sensitive as Andrew. In politics, too, we were increasingly unhappy and critical about affairs in the Soviet Union, as well as the stagnation of progressive ideas in Britain ... With Andrew, this situation led to a sort of withdrawal from everyday affairs' (T. Hollamby, 'Andrew Boyd: His Life and Work', *Keystone*, Autumn 1962, special memorial issue).
- 120 Source - Communist architect, Charles Bornat, interview 5 September 1985.
- 121 Signs of the continuation of the Group's tradition in practical professional terms can perhaps be found in the architectural work at Hillingdon, London, where Thurston Williams was Borough Architect from 1964-77 (particularly the Civic Centre). Hollamby's big scheme in Kennington, while it consisted of one or two high blocks also rehabilitated quite a large number of existing buildings, which was quite a departure at that time and against the general trend of wholesale demolition. Henry Swain, Notts County Architect, would also seem to fit into this category - see his paper 'Building for People', *RIBA Journal*, November 1961. CP and former CP architects were also involved in 1955 in forming the William Morris Society with Graeme Shankland as its first honorary secretary and John Kay as a mainstay activist (which he is to this day).

CHAPTER 17

Communist School Teachers

Introduction-summary

There were school teachers who were members of the Communist Party from its earliest years. At the end of the First World War Communist teachers were very much a part of an established socialist and Plebs influenced tradition and therefore naturally became active in the Teachers' Labour League (TLL), formed in 1922 to win teachers to Labour and champion the cause of 'working-class and socialist education'. The League soon split over the issue of affiliation to the Educational Workers International, which was considered to be 'pro-Soviet', the Labour Party expelled the League and created a 'loyal' National Association of Labour Teachers in its place. What remained of the TLL became increasingly dominated by CP members, and with the adoption of a new name, the Educational Workers League, it was evident that it was being seen as an embryo 'Red Trade Union'; Party teachers were under pressure from the Party's Industrial Department to conduct an aggressive fight over wages, conditions and against the cuts. Much of the interest in developing and projecting new forms of 'progressive' or 'socialist' education began to be frowned upon, the Party's politics stressed the impossibility of reform under capitalism and castigated such 'theorising' as petty bourgeois and diversionary. Popular Frontism of the mid-1930s led to the winding-up of the EWL and concentration by Party teachers on making progress in the teaching unions and carrying out 'peace work'. The 1930s also saw the recruitment of more middle-class teachers and parents with an interest in the independent 'progressive schools' that were flourishing in this period. Although these recruits were tolerated, the state sector was seen, by the Party, as the place to teach and to send one's children. After suffering political

isolation in the 'anti-imperialist' phase of the War, Party teachers began to make significant progress in the teaching unions and played a direct part in the drafting of the 1944 Education Act. CP teachers were committed to creating a system of state education available for all children, and suited to a more modern technocratic age; this, they believed, was the essence of the 1944 Act. There was no talk of 'socialist education' or 'class-conscious education', and the number of Communist school teachers expanded as ex-servicemen entered the profession; there were four Party members on the NUT Executive, and by 1948-49 the 2,000 Party teachers were the largest group under the CP's Industrial Department. Post-War optimism soon began to wear thin and although a small number of 'experimental common secondary schools' were set up, in which some Communists were actively involved, a tripartite division of secondary education began to take on a firm shape, and Party teachers became foremost opponents of selection and IQ tests. Communist teachers faced a particularly hard time during the Cold War with official persecution (symbolised by the 'Middlesex Ban') and hostility within the NUT where they were swept from virtually all their union posts in 1949. It was during this time that the leaders of the Party Teachers began to express their attachment to formal education with an emphasis on teaching 'facts' and the teacher being 'in charge'; 'Modern' teaching methods were attacked as part of an American influenced movement to prevent working-class children from being 'educated'. In this they were encouraged by the Cold War hysteria and the example of Soviet education, but it also grew out of the 'conservative' educational approach of the secondary/grammar school teachers who came to dominate the Teachers' group (National Education Advisory Committee). Over the succeeding years the Teachers' group took on the shape of a 'Party within a Party', largely running itself, ^{and} a clear division took place between those CP teachers who were

active in their Party branches and those who were active in the Teachers' group. Some Party teachers made a point of severing their involvement in the Education Advisory Committee as they felt it was at odds with overall CP politics. After 'weathering the storm of 1956' the Teachers' group followed a pragmatic approach to the NUT; abandoning a long term opposition to differentials (favouring secondary teachers) and adopting a 'moderate' approach to controversial issues. By the mid-1960s 'the leading Communist teacher' Max Morris was elected to the NUT Executive where he distinguished himself by being one of the fiercest opponents of the 'radical Left' in the union world.

* * * * *

Radical Traditions

The present day National Union of Teachers finds its origins as far back as 1870, immediately following the Education Reform Act of that year, when the National Union of Elementary Teachers was formed. There has been an element among teachers who have from an early time sought to encourage a militant policy towards their employers - local and national government. Moreover, teachers have been evident in the ranks of radical movements and political parties. Teachers had been involved in the Fabian Society from its inception and there are many examples of Labour and socialist figures who were or had once been school teachers:¹ James Maxton, Teresa Billington Creig, a Manchester headmistress who became the first National Organiser of the ILP, John Maclean, Henry Salt who resigned as a master at Eton and joined the SDF in 1885 et al. A Teachers' Socialist Society was formed in Scotland to discuss the content of school education and how its capitalist bias could be challenged (John Maclean was an active participant). Leftwing school teachers gave their 'services to the cause'

through the Socialist Sunday School movement that began to blossom out in the 1890s and the WEA and later the Plebs League. At the end of the First World War there were major disputes involving teachers - one of the most significant being the Rhondda Strike of 1919 which secured the NUT basic scale for the area, doubling the teachers' salaries. A recent study of the strike has argued that its success was in part due to the influence of the Plebs League in the area, which had led various teachers and miners to co-operate in the project of 'independent working-class education'. The ideas of new industrial unionism, syndicalism, and Marxism had an impact on teachers as they did on miners in the area: 'The crucible of the Rhondda, which made great changes in the Miners' Union and was the main base of the Plebs League, influenced the way the teachers in that area saw themselves and their work. Those ideas spread outward into the NUT ...'.²

A number of teachers joined the CP on its foundation in 1920. Of the tiny number of women foundation members of the Communist Party several were school teachers: Ellen Wilkinson, Isabel Brown, Katie Kant/Loeber, Marjorie Brewer/Pollitt; they were nearly all from working-class families and had managed to win scholarships to teacher training colleges.³ Starting their teaching life in Local Authority schools they were, nevertheless, shocked by the poverty encountered, an experience which encouraged a political radicalisation. Isabel Brown's conventional religious beliefs had already been undermined by the death of so many young men of her generation in the First World War:

Later, when she had completed her college course, her experiences as a teacher also aroused a sense of the injustice of the social order. She was teaching classes of 60 seven and eight year olds from the poorest quarter of the town; children who were ill fed, badly clothed, and often barefooted and very dirty. The poverty and hunger of these children led her to delve into economics.⁴

From 1914 there was a growing movement in the NUT for affiliation to the Labour Party and the Union's 1917 conference called for a plebiscite on the issue. The vote was lost with 15,434 for affiliation and 29,743 against. The agitation, however, paved the way for the formation of the Teacher's Labour League (TLL) in 1922.⁵ Membership rose to around 800 members, organised in 27 branches by 1924.⁶ Leah Manning was the League's first chairman and a number of prominent Labour and educational figures publicly associated themselves with the body - Vice-Presidents included: Professor F. Soddy, Professor J.J. Findlay, H.G. Wells, Sidney Webb,^{and} R.H. Tawney. Many of the League's branches were affiliated to their local Labour parties and Trades Councils and at a national level the League attempted to influence the formation of Labour educational policy. The 1926 Labour Party Conference passed a resolution moved by H.S. Redgrove, TLL president, calling upon Party members to fight for the end of Empire Day celebrations in schools and the elimination of 'anti-working-class' views in school textbooks.

From the TLL's formation Communist teachers joined and took an active part in its work; in fact the Founder-Secretary of the League was the CP grammar school teacher David Capper. As Capper's partner Nan MacMillan, also a school teacher (she joined the CP in 1929), explained: 'The Teacher's Labour League was the area in which the Party teachers did their specialist work, there were no other separate Party groups'.⁷ In the early years of the CP's existence dual membership of the CP and Labour Party was not unusual. One Party teacher from Manchester, Ben Ainley, was a joint member until as late as 1929.⁸ There was no great division between Communist and Left Labour teachers; both were concerned to win teachers over to the Labour movement, fight the various cuts and economies that were being imposed on teachers and advance education of an ill-defined 'socialist character'. How many League members were Party members

in this very early period it is not possible to say, although the Special Branch reported⁹ that they knew of no more than seven who were 'definitely Communist'.¹⁰

Conflict over the international affiliations of the TLL was an important factor in the development of a major split within the League. Party teachers were particularly active in the fight to affiliate the League with the Educational Workers' International (EWI), a body which included Soviet teachers,¹¹ and finally achieved this by a vote of 291 to 211 at the December 1925 conference. Division in the League was further exacerbated by the growing divergence between Right and Left in the Labour movement that followed the defeat of the 1926 General Strike. An organised 'walk-out' of 'rightwing' delegates took place at the League's fifth Annual Conference in December 1926. Twentyfour of the 150 present left in protest, including the standing General Secretary and Treasurer, declaring their refusal to work with Communists. The ostensible reason for the 'walk-out' was that it was to protest against the League's advocacy of 'anti-religious and class-teaching'. These events were swiftly followed by the expulsion of the TLL from the Labour Party and shortly after this the creation of a 'loyal' National Association of Labour Teachers (NALT).

After the secession the League continued to encompass a broad range of activists: the new eleven man Executive contained no more than four Party members. ILP, non-party, and even Labour school teachers were still involved in the TLL along with Communists but the dis-affiliation speeded up its move away from discussing and developing Labour Party educational policies to concentrating on the teachers' unions. Most work was centred on the NUT but League members were also active in the NAS, NUWT (National Union of Women Teachers), and the IAAM (Incorporated Association of Assistant Masters).¹² TLL policy was to promote a federation of the

various teaching unions so they could present a united front against attacks on teacher salaries and conditions. They also agitated for NUT affiliation to the TUC and Labour Party, arguing that: 'Teachers are workers; their interests are inextricably bound up with those of the rest of the workers ...'.¹³

The Educational Workers' League

During the Third Period, confronted by what they saw as the inability of the NUT to act as a 'proper union', the League began to take on the character of an '... organisation working on trade union lines, with its own branches, paper¹⁴ and a developing political and economic policy'.¹⁵ Party teachers increasingly projected the League as the basis for uniting all teachers into one combative trade union.¹⁶ Party dominance in the League was all-embracing and in October 1930, the EWL officially affiliated to the National Minority Movement. There was a corresponding drop in the number of League members so that by 1930 it amounted to little more than a couple of hundred teachers of which 103 were Communists.¹⁷ The increasingly sectarian nature of the Party in the very early 1930s ensured that CP teachers and the EWL were, more than ever before, an isolated and relatively powerless force. In late 1931 Party teachers were reprimanded by the Industrial Department for their involvement with the Young Teachers' Movement, the Acton Teachers' Defence Organisation and other spontaneous protest movements that arose in response to cuts in teachers' salaries. The Party leadership condemned this 'capitulation' of CP teachers and the EWL to these 'manoeuvres of reformists', which in the case of the Young Teachers' Movement (YTM) had replaced the class struggle with 'youth versus age'. With a good deal of bad feeling Party teachers accepted these strictures and in a long self-critical resolution acknowledged that:

The EWL must combat the theory of bourgeois professionalism of the teachers, explain the class relations of the teachers, the breakdown of imperialism that is destroying the privileged position of large sections of the teachers who have been maintained as a labour aristocracy at the expense of colonial exploitation, and establish their conscious identification with the working class struggle.¹⁸

Although some Party teachers continued to be involved in the YTM and other such spontaneous campaigning bodies (this was clearly the case with David Capper and the YTM), as a whole the EWL and the CP Fraction had to distance themselves from such developments and hence failed to make any significant recruitment gains. Third Period politics led to a hostility towards not only teachers' groups outside the EWL but even to what the Party described as 'anti-working-class tendencies in the EWL' itself.¹⁹

'Socialist' Education

In the 1920s there was a great deal of debate among Communist and socialist school teachers as to what constituted 'socialist education'.²⁰ According to one educational historian, Martin Lawn, in the period before Soviet education was widely detailed and projected in Britain, the Burston Strike School set up in 1914 by the Higdones who had been victimised out of their teaching jobs, epitomised the 'socialist' changes that were sought for in the schools: 'comradeship', 'self-organisation', and 'initiative'.²¹ It was accepted by League members that they should fight against 'imperialist teaching' and the celebration of Empire Day at schools and that education should be co-educational and secular (both these points were included in the aims and objects of the EWL's *Constitution*). Many league members, including Party teachers, were interested in the various 'progressive' educational experiments of the 1920s and early 1930s; perhaps they prefigured the socialist education of the future. A League delegation visited the three main 'progressive'

private schools: A.S. Neill's, Bertrand Russell's, and Bedales. Russell's school made a particularly bad impression with its chaotic 'free-for-all' and neglect of the children in the nursery class where full potties were just left to stand around.

Most of us were shocked and horrified with it, it was a nightmare of a school and Russell had no idea about education for the mass of the people. You see they [Russell, Neill etc - SRP] were trying experiments but experiments in the void so to speak ... they were not interested with things like the curriculum and changing it for the mass of the people. The main thing was a conscious fight against the disciplines of school so they were nearly all pretty free. Neill's very free, Bertrand Russell's free for everybody except Bertrand who had complete isolation in his office at the top of the stairs with even a gateway they couldn't go through so that he wouldn't be interfered with but everybody else was interfered with.²²

It was generally felt that the place for Communists to be was in the state sector teaching the children of the working-class and not involving themselves in 'educational experiments' centred around the middle-class.²³ As the EWL became drawn into the National Minority Movement and campaigning for the 'Workers' Charter' any time that could be spent theorising on the nature of education was severely restricted.²⁴ However, they were committed 'to investigate and popularise the principles of the Workers' School by a close study of educational methods in all countries, especially in the USSR'.²⁵ A few Party teachers had already visited the Soviet Union in the latter half of the 1920s and a TLL delegation, including David Capper, had visited Moscow in 1927. There was also an Education Section of the Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR (SCR) in operation by 1926, one of its earliest and most active sections. Party and League members were active in this body along with Labour, Liberal and non-political educationalists, teachers and others. There were 140 members of the Education Section by 1932 and a small number of

teachers who had actual teaching experience in the Soviet Union gave their impressions of education in the new society at SCR meetings. Although there was a common recognition of the massive efforts made by the Soviet authorities in educating their people,²⁶ given the state of flux and experimentation in educational theories and methods, it was natural that there were a variety of opinions and speculations expressed as to what was taking place. The EWL organised a delegation of 35 English teachers and educationalists to visit the Soviet Union for a fortnight in 1932 and their report, *Soviet Education As We Saw It*, helped to clarify the nature of Soviet education: 1) All schools were connected to a factory and a collective farm; 2) Every school was run by a soviet composed of teachers, pupils, parents and factory representatives; 3) Discipline was the responsibility of elected class committees with corporal punishment banned; 4) Co-education was the rule in all educational institutions.

In addition to these specific policies there was the amorphous claim that Soviet education was more geared to reality because,

the training and knowledge given have for their object the developing of a capacity for approaching scientifically the problems encountered in productive work and in other social activities; a striking contrast to the inculcation of "moral" precepts, superstitious beliefs and irrational prejudices which colour ... British and European education.²⁷

However, education in the USSR was generally seen and described by the CP and Party teachers in terms of the massive resources put into this area in contrast with capitalist societies and their penny pinching economies. Furthermore, a point constantly reiterated in Party propaganda, the teacher in Soviet society was given an enhanced status such that he/she stands '... on such a high place as he never stood nor can ever stand in a bourgeois society'.²⁸

A long and central article in *The Educational Worker* in late 1933 raised the issue of how much teachers could act professionally in a distinctively socialist manner:

Shall we ... ask the teacher who joins our movement to refuse to recognise the inspectorate, to refuse to participate in the examinations, to introduce a new discipline, sing socialist songs, and, generally, act as though an individual can step right into a new order of society?²⁹

As the framing of the question suggests the answer was in the negative. Teachers were no different from other workers. No one condemned the journalist for not writing the facts or the printer for issuing rubbish. They were required to carry out their duties or face the sack - and so it was with teachers. Teachers were warned not to expose themselves to dismissal by carrying out 'socialist education' in the classroom. 'Some experiment may be possible in a few free or private schools, but generally these opportunities are rare'.³⁰ Communist and leftwing teachers' responsibility was to work on the 'school front' with the mass of their colleagues, parents, and organised workers. According to the article research into how lesson material should be restructured from a working-class point of view had hardly begun. Only once this work had been undertaken could there be any real attempts to grapple with the question of the best methods for presenting the 'facts'. This 'necessary research' though, never seems to have been seriously undertaken by the EWL or the organised CP teachers group. Instead, practical campaigning around wages and conditions (and general Party duties) filled nearly all available time.³¹

Although there was a great deal of scepticism about the value of independent 'progressive' schools among leading Communist teachers the wider social recruitment of Party membership in the 1930s ensured that there were Communists who were interested and involved in these

'educational experiments'.³² From an early time a number of Communists were associated with A.S. Neill's Summerhill School in Leiston and by 1937 this amounted to some six to seven members of the staff,³³ and a growing but small group of middle-class leftwing and Communist parents sent their children there.³⁴ In 1936 a 'Socialist School', Fortis Green School, was launched by a group of socialist teachers in London: 'We believe that the ideas of "impartiality" and "absence of bias" in teaching are dangerous illusions, and we propose frankly that our teaching be based on socialistic principles, and that parents, staff and children should cooperate'.³⁵ The major force behind the enterprise was the Communist, Beatrix Tudor-Hart, who became the school's principal while another of the teachers, Marie Muir, joined the Party in 1938. Arguing her case at a meeting on 'State Education versus Private Education' Beatrix Tudor-Hart put the following questions:

Do those of us who live in decent dwellings and seek to improve the housing of those who dwell in slums give up our homes and seek a place in a slum? I think the answer is No. Then why do we send our children to educational slums?³⁶

Some Party members sent their children to Fortis Green, including a few Cambridge University academics (whose children boarded over the week), several trade union officials and a number of refugee Communists from Germany and elsewhere. Others opposed the experiment as it was felt to be an impossibility to carry out 'socialist education' in a capitalist society. One writer felt that the School had really come into being because certain 'middle-class socialists' still cling to their privileges and instead of sending their children to state schools wanted to buy them a 'better education', albeit of a 'socialist' variety.³⁷ As 'a Socialist Mother' wrote:

The children who will attend this Socialist school would be in all likelihood children who already live in a Socialist community of the Hampstead variety. I consider that these children are already cut off from the realities of the class struggle; and to send them to a special highbrow Socialist school isn't going to remedy this.³⁸

Fortis Green managed to survive the War (in fact it exists to this day, but only as a nursery school) and various 'progressive' educational ideas were put into practice. These efforts, however, had little impact on the CP and were considered, at best, an irrelevance by leading Communist teachers.

The Demise of the Educational Workers League

Expressing the new primacy of uniting anti-fascist forces around Popular Fronts the Educational Workers International took the decision at its conference in August 1935 to unify with its counterpart in the Second (Amsterdam) International. On 7 August 1935 a delegation was sent by the EWI to the Professional Secretariat of Education (Amsterdam) which accepted an 'organic unity' of the two bodies and the creation of one international of the teaching profession '... on the basis of the struggle against economies, fascism and war'.³⁹ As a result of these international developments the 'English Section of the E.W.I.', the Educational Workers' League together with its journal, *The Educational Worker*, was quietly dissolved.⁴⁰ In place of the League, Party teachers concentrated their political efforts in the established teaching unions and in 'peace work' as for example in the Teachers' Anti-War Movement which brought out the review, *The Ploughshare*. The demise of the EWL effectively brought to an end the remaining traditional Plebs influenced ideas on education, including such specific demands as the call for 'The Secular School' or the 'abolition of Imperialistic Teaching' in all educational institutions. New teachers who were recruited to the Party through anti-fascist, 'peace

work' and such bodies as the Left Book Club in increasing numbers in the latter half of the '30s, were completely ignorant of past activity in the EWL.⁴¹ Emphasis was now put, as it was in the Party policy as a whole, on Communist teachers working for the greatest possible unity in their profession; as a result, demands for secular education or an end to corporal punishment were not publicly campaigned for as they were felt to hamper the creation of a united response by teachers to the threat of war and for better educational conditions. Any concern with educational content or method was also considered a harmful diversion from the tasks in hand, something that was further encouraged by the growing realisation at the end of 1935 that Soviet education was settling down into a 'conservative mode'. Co-education was ended, school uniforms were reintroduced, marks and examinations became more important, university degrees were reintroduced and self-governing democracy within schools was ended with teachers given enhanced authority over children. Party teachers attempted to justify these changes on the basis that the Soviet Union had limited resources and had 'no human material to waste'.⁴² However, the general impact of the Soviet changes was to further distance the Party teachers group from 'progressive education'. When not occupied in selling the *Daily Worker*, Party branch duties, and such things as the Left Book Club, various Communist teachers were beginning to progress in their unions. C.G.T. Giles, who had established himself as a major figure among Middlesex teachers, was first elected to the NUT Executive in 1937, and in the same year another party member, Nan MacMillan, was elected London president of the National Union of Women Teachers and two years later she became the national president.

The change that took place to CP teachers' politics is clearly illustrated by the Left Book Club, 'New People's Library' volume published in 1939, *The People's Schools*, written by a 'Popular Front recruit' Max

Morris. It was not without significance that the book restricted itself to '... a "quantitative" approach. Little or no reference is made to the "content" of education, to questions of curriculum, or, for example, to the problem of biased textbooks. We have had perforce to be concerned almost solely with the system itself'.⁴³ Morris outlined a detailed list of what should be fought for in the struggle for 'educational reform' based around an expansion and improvement of existing institutions. There were demands for a 'national loan for school building' so that all blacklisted schools could be replaced in two years; a maximum limit of 30 pupils to a class; a playing field for every school and more school canteens. Although a call was made for the provision of secondary education for all there was no demand for an immediate overall reform of this area. Instead, Morris merely proposed that there be the 'establishment of experimental multi-lateral schools'.⁴⁴

Party Teachers and the 'Imperialist War'

As with a good deal of CP activity the opening stages of the War threw CP 'teacher work' into confusion as some teachers were called up, others moved to different schools and the evacuation of children resulted in a period of prolonged chaos in the education system. The adoption of an anti-war stand and the launching of the People's Convention provided the backdrop for Party teachers to rigorously campaign against the inadequacy of ARP facilities in schools. An appeal was made by the People's Convention to those in the educational world for their support given the 'serious decline' in educational standards that had occurred since the outbreak of War. Directly appealing to the interests of professional self-preservation the Convention's leadership declared their concern at the transfer of many teachers to other jobs: 'This may ultimately endanger not only the security of tenure but the whole status of the

profession'.⁴⁵ However, little progress was made in advancing the cause of the People's Convention among teachers. Those teachers who associated themselves with the Convention did so on an individual basis and Giles's attempt to get the NUT to send delegates to the body was defeated by 33 votes to Giles's one at the Union Executive. School teachers were particularly vulnerable to dismissal on political grounds which dampened any support the Party might have gained. Two of the first people to be arrested on the orders of the Home Office for distributing the CP anti-war pamphlet, *The People Must Act*, were Harold Worthy and Eric Sleight, both teachers at Sowersby Secondary School.⁴⁶

The 'Anti-Fascist War' and the Question of Educational Reform

The change to a pro-War stance by the CP allowed Party teachers to break out of their political isolation.⁴⁷ Giles could muster the votes of four other NUT Executive members in demanding the Union oppose Mosley's release in 1943 and a degree of support was gained for a campaign to affiliate the Union to the TUC. In this latter campaign a circular was sent to all the NUT Local Associations signed by ten prominent union members, four of whom were Communists and six Labour Party members, which led to virulent attacks on CP members in the Union by the NUT General Secretary, Sir Frederick Mander.⁴⁸ When the issue came up for debate at the Union Executive nine members voted in favour of affiliation to 21 against. Giles was no longer a lone figure.⁴⁹

It was during this period that the Education Advisory Committee of the Communist Party was formed in order to co-ordinate teacher work and help in the process of developing CP policy. The number of Party teachers began to rise not only as a result of the rise in pro-Soviet sentiment but because of the growing prominence of Communists in the teaching unions, particularly the NUT where Giles was elected President in 1944. With the

Emergency Training Course for teachers that was instituted at the end of the War a large number of ex-servicemen, a not insignificant proportion of whom were of working-class origin,⁵⁰ came into teaching. Among these former soldiers were members of the Communist Party, which further increased the size of the CP teachers' group.⁵¹ Some who took the decision to become teachers saw it as an opportunity to more closely relate their beliefs to their work; to be part of a new and reformed education system that would help produce 'new citizens for a new Britain'. Two Party members expressed these feelings in letters to Giles in 1944:

Following the line advocated by the best people, and my own inclinations for a niche and a more organic mode of existence, I am considering turning back to teaching after the War. Using the profession as a firm base for other activities rather than flitting bureaucratically from committee to committee, which without footing or status in life itself becomes a rather bankrupt activity. In any case the social need for teachers is pre-eminent and is the only profession I'm specifically qualified for.⁵²

My position is this. I have an hon. degree in history, and when I went down from Cambridge in 1935 I was in business until the War broke out. For the last two years I have been a flying instructor and I have found that I have achieved a certain amount of success in it. An important consideration is the political one. Before the War my political activities were entirely divorced from my daily work. This was most unsatisfactory, and is the other reason why I'm keen in getting into education - State education.⁵³

It was in the field of drawing up plans for education in a post-war Britain that CP teachers began to exert an influence, particularly after the Party leadership had taken a less negative attitude towards 'reconstruction talk'. Early in 1942 the Board of Education opened out a debate on the future of education by inviting numerous organisations to put forward proposals for educational reform. The major political parties accepted the need for thorough going reform recognising that the existing system of education could not meet the needs of a modern society. CP

teachers and educationalists were brought into the process of drawing up Party policy and one of the first and most comprehensive Communist memoranda produced was *Britain's Schools* (40 pages, late 1942). Continued attention was given to measures that ought to be carried out immediately in order to help the War effort, and a call was made for the formation of the educational equivalent of Joint Production Committees - 'Consultative Committees' in which teachers could be active in the 'day-to-day working of education'. The memorandum only then goes on to put forward the Communist educational policy for after the War; measures that should be taken to give children the opportunity for the fullest possible development of their capabilities (in a non-socialist society). CP policy was for: the whole education system to be brought under State and Local Authority control (no public schools, and no Dual Control), compulsion on Local Education Authorities to provide nursery education, free secondary education for all with a common form of education for all up to sixteen years of age, and compulsory full- or part-time education up to 18 years.

Accepting that the 1944 Education Act had its limitations, in that public schools remained outside its remit and there was nothing to ensure that university entrance was based on merit and not wealth, the CP regarded the Act as a great step forward. One of the Party's slogans in 1946 was 'guard against delay and sabotage of the Act'. Giles argued that the time was ripe for the creation of a new education system that was 'scientific' and 'democratic'. The War, he claimed, had shown the necessity of planning and organising resources on a scientific basis, it was now necessary to 'plan for peace as we did for war'. Interestingly, Giles pointed to the educational systems in USA as well as the USSR, as proof that industrial and technological advance was linked to 'equality of opportunity'. The real gist of the case contained in his book is summed up in the following passage:

Only by bringing everybody within the educational net can we hope to bring to the top all the ability, talent and genius which we possess and need. Equality of opportunity is not only a social, but an economic necessity.⁵⁴

Integral to the Party's idea of a new education system was, what was then called, the Multilateral School:

The whole of the educational policy was on the implementation of that Act [1944 - SRP] and in London we played a tremendous part. Even before the War I was on a body called the Multilateral School Committee and that was at that time what we felt was the shape that education should take when we had free secondary education ... we saw it as one campus with three buildings, one doing general education, one doing the classics, and one doing technical education and commerce ...⁵⁵

There was the possibility of Multilateral education being interpreted, as with the above quote, in such a way as to mean a large school in which children would be divided into types. Party policy though, laid down that there would only begin to be differentiation in curriculum when pupils reached 13 year of age and the 'common core studies' would still account for 70% of the lessons.⁵⁶ Apart from calling for a speed-up in demobilising teachers from the armed services, the rapid expansion of the Emergency Training Scheme,^{and} the immediate raising of the school leaving age, the Party declared its belief that '... the terms of the Act can best be fulfilled by the wide use of the Multilateral School'.⁵⁷ Initially there was a fair amount of optimism among the supporters of Multilateral education, who included not just Communists. Nan MacMillan was asked by the London Education Officer in December 1944 to speak to a conference of the capital's head teachers on Multilateral Schools - how they should be structured, why they should be established etc.

Post-War Educational Reality

A few Communists expressed their concern at the direction of Party educational policy. A letter to the CP weekly in 1944 urged caution before the Party tied itself too firmly to the 1944 Act and,

if the Party policy can be summed up in the sentence "a single State school system and a common secondary school for all children", then I for one do not agree with it. Such a policy would destroy all the pioneer schools and with them all possibility of any rapid advance in educational theory and practice.⁵⁸

Only when capitalism had been abolished could there be, according to the writer, the possibility of a State education system which would give full play to experimentation and the existence of 'pioneer schools'. It was Edward Upward's disagreement with the CP teachers' leadership over the 1944 Education Act and the 'reformist illusions' in Giles's *The New School Tie* '... which led on to my disagreement with the CP's post-war line as a whole'.⁵⁹ However, such criticism of the Party stance over education had little impact on the bulk of CP school teachers.

There was only a very slow dissipation of the optimism surrounding the 1944 Education Act and that there was a firm attachment to the principle of tripartite secondary education within the Ministry of Education from an early time was not fully comprehended. Party members were involved with Labour people and others in attempting to influence the plans⁶⁰ that were drawn up by LEAs (at the behest of the Ministry) but only a small number of schemes were proposed for secondary schools based on a Multilateral or Common School basis. Even where a Local Authority proposed a number of such schools the Ministry 'dragged its feet', e.g. Middlesex wanted to set up five Comprehensive schools; sanction was only given for two and the whole ^{plan} was then dropped when Labour lost control of the County Council to the Tories. Margaret Clarke, a leading Communist of many years standing, was given the headship of one of the few

'experimental schools' under the LCC, Peckham High School. Giles, as head of Acton County Grammar School, introduced a policy whereby there was no grading in the early years: even with the senior pupils there were still mixed-ability classes for many subjects. Yet Ellen Wilkinson, Labour's Minister of Education '... saw her job as one of reconstruction before reform'⁶¹ and gave a priority to defending the 'grammar school tradition'.⁶² The popular enthusiasm for the Common School reached its height towards the end of the War and the first year or so of peace, after which it began to decline (this was also true of the NUT which never committed itself on the issue). Labour's education policy turned out to be, in Brian Simon's words, 'a policy of containment masterminded by leading officials of the Ministry of Education'.⁶³

The National Education Advisory Committee and the NUT

In the years following the War the Party teachers' group began to take on a clear shape as organised under the National Education Advisory Committee. What soon became apparent was that 'Party teacher work' was more than ever closely related to the teaching trade unions and above all else the NUT.⁶⁴ During the War the Party centre had given sanction for Party members to participate in the New Education Fellowship (NEF), and in about 1941 H.G. Stead, a former Director of Education at Chesterfield, who had become a 'closed member' of the CP, was appointed Secretary of the NEF. The Fellowship carried out a fair amount of research on the shape the future education system should take and in August 1944, it held a 'valuable conference'⁶⁵ on the curriculum. In Brian Simon's estimation the NEF provided a useful platform to discuss radical changes in education and he went on to set up a branch of the body in Manchester and '... then the teachers decided that everyone must come out of the NEF and put their full attentions into the teachers' unions'.⁶⁶ The Education Advisory

Committee was strictly speaking a part of the CP's Industrial Committee which further encouraged a growing emphasis to be placed on trade union matters. In the mid and late 1940s,

there was quite a lot of re-thinking about the content of education and we had a conference in Manchester in the Party about the content of education ... but somehow as far as the Party leadership among teachers was concerned it all got rather bogged down. I'm afraid it just wasn't carried through into the 1950s.⁶⁷

One CP history teacher describes the sheer amount of work that was required of them as ensuring that there was virtually no time left to discuss 'theoretical matters'. The Teachers' group, he claims, devoted itself to 'really trying to implement NUT policy ... we had to fight like hell to get a figure named in negotiations'.⁶⁸ The response was always that the Union leadership 'knew best' and their 'hands shouldn't be tied' when entering negotiations. There was thus a long drawn out battle at NUT conferences over this issue and in order to get 'a salary figure' declared it was felt imperative '... to get some progressive people onto the NUT executive and we had a hell of a long campaign to get Max Morris onto the executive'.⁶⁹

'Communist' Educational Policy in the Cold War

Although the National Education Advisory Committee became increasingly centred around NUT work it would be wrong to think that there was no consideration whatsoever given to wider educational issues. From the late 1940s the Party teachers' leadership responded to some of the educational theories and practices that began to gain publicity. A distinct 'Communist' attitude was developed in this period and put forward in the Party teachers' own journal which began regular publication from 1948. Of course at an early stage selection for secondary education was challenged

and educational research was said to confirm '... what Marxism has always taught - the amazing plasticity of the human personality to adapt itself to "coping with new situations"'.⁷⁰ However, it was Brian and Joan Simon's critique of IQ and Intelligence Tests that gave the Teachers' group a sophisticated theoretical case against the philosophical basis of the division of children into mental 'types' (see Chapter 14, 'Communist Psychologists'). On 21 October 1950 a conference was organised by the National Cultural Committee on 'Intelligence Testing and the Class System of Education' where Max Morris gave the main speech (Simon was told it was best if he did not). Those attending were mainly school teachers and, despite some resistance, opposition to intelligence testing became the official position of Party teachers. Sam Fisher took the case up in the NUT's Grammar School Advisory Committee which issued a report questioning the scientific validity of psychometry. In many ways though, the leaders of the CP teachers adopted a conservative attitude to educational matters. Brian Simon characterises it as follows:

They believed, and I think here they were influenced by the Soviet Union even in those days in the late '40s and early '50s, that one could develop a systematic approach to teaching in which the teacher is the authority and controls everything - the teacher teaches and the child learns.⁷¹

At its most extreme there was a tendency to interpret new or 'modern' teaching methods as part of a conspiracy to introduce American inspired ideas aimed at creating an illiterate working-class. 'Visual Education' or 'Visual Aids' was part of this movement '... against the principle of causality and against rational understanding of the world. In the field of education their concern is to limit as narrowly as possible the thinking done by the rising generation'.⁷² The article went on to argue that the 'exaggerated' role assigned to sight in learning, as expressed in 'visual education', was linked with the 'plague' of US horror comics and

'pornographic illustrated magazines' and teachers were warned to keep on the look-out for '... infiltration of this kind of thing, of which the "Visual Units" scheme now undertaken by the Ministry of Education may be a warning'.⁷³ It was on the basis of this attitude that Communist school teachers largely initiated the campaign against horror comics between 1949 and 1955 which culminated in a 'victory' with the Children and Young Persons (Harmful Publications) Act of 1955. The horror comics campaign was obviously a part of the 'Battle of Ideas' but it was also clearly in tune with the view, as held by leaders of the CP teachers, that children's minds were highly malleable and required 'proper' direction. Within schools this meant not just attacking 'Visual Education' but challenging the fostering of 'Activity Methods' by the Ministry of Education, a product, the CP claimed, of that 'pseudo-progressive' idea that children develop and learn spontaneously as their interest naturally unfolds. Again, at its most exaggerated, the case against Activity Methods held that it was officially encouraged as part of a conscious effort to reduce standards and relieve pressure on grammar school places. To Sam Fisher: 'The apologists for capitalism desire a working-class "socially minded, co-operative" but ignorant, i.e. ripe for the illusions of class collaboration. Activity Methods cater for that need'.⁷⁴ As well as 'defending' the essential role of the teacher to educate there was also a resistance to the introduction of new subjects such as social studies. Social studies, in Secondary Modern Schools, was often replacing the traditional subjects of history and geography and in their place, it was felt, creating a 'hotchpotch' of 'unsystematic' activities.⁷⁵ The result was, according to this view, that: 'The aim is transferred from the achievement of knowledge to the development of certain desirable attitudes, attitudes of co-operation with other groups - even attitudes simply implying contentedness'.⁷⁶

The positions taken by the National Education Advisory Committee were not universally accepted by the 2,000 CP members who were teachers.⁷⁷ There were certainly contributions printed in the Party teachers' journal which criticised some of the wilder attacks on 'modern practices'. Various members came to the defence of 'activity methods', suggesting that the attacks were a caricature of reality: 'The understanding teacher knows how to make use of the active experience of the children to teach the skills, and, through the provision of stimulating material, to guide the direction of the children's development'.⁷⁸ Others were prepared to argue in favour of Social Studies pointing to its positive 'educational advantages'⁷⁹ and above all else the chance it provided to stimulate formerly uninterested pupils. In some ways the differences over these matters reflected the division between those in the secondary field, the bulk of the CP teachers' leadership, and some Communists who were primary teachers. As put in a rather extravagant way by Eric Porter who had been a Communist and primary school teacher:

Morris and Fisher waged a strong campaign against "free" methods from their Secondary redoubt. CP teachers in primary schools as I knew them generally operated and co-operated in "free" methods but usually (not always) resisted the more way out methods especially in the teaching of reading - "Look and Say", "Sentence Method" etc. I would count myself in this general grouping ... The Morris/Fisher attitude was designated generally by primary members as reactionary.⁸⁰

Another CP primary teacher (from 1950) has recorded that he always tried to operate a middle way between formal and authoritarian teaching with a 'Gradgrind emphasis on the facts' and an unstructured and chaotic form of Activity Methods.⁸¹

Teachers and the Witch-hunt

Apart from Party members in the civil service, Communist school teachers probably faced the most public and sustained witch-hunt in the Cold War period. In the House of Lords Vansittart was in the forefront of those pointing to the 'danger of Communism' and made much of the presence of Communists in the schools and universities, which he classified as 'another infected area'. Referring to the reported claim that there were 2,000 teachers in the CP he told his fellow Lords in 1950 that this amounted to 1% of the whole profession. Moreover, Vansittart asserted, the percentage of teachers among the Communist candidates standing at the 1950 Election far exceeded 1%. He therefore proposed that in addition to the purge in the civil service the ban on the employment of Communists should be extended to the educational profession.⁸² Outside of Parliament a Conservative and Unionist Teachers' Association was formed in 1948 in order to fight against Communists and socialists in the profession. A resolution was passed at their second annual conference calling upon the Government to investigate and act upon 'Communist propaganda' in the schools. One delegate declared:

We pay for Communist masters as State employees to teach in the schools, we must refute their statements, attack and expose them to the parents and Press. Let us refuse to work with them in school, on the playing fields and in the streets.⁸³

Catholics were also active in calling for the removal of Communist teachers and in one case a Catholic priest organised a petition against one young teacher in St. Ives, Cornwall.⁸⁴ There were also a series of forged leaflets and circulars distributed around schools purporting to be issued by a 'Young Communist Action Group' and timed to damage CP candidates in the 1949 NUT election.⁸⁵ Anti-Communism became very pronounced in the NUT and the journal *Teachers' World* ran a campaign

against CP members of the Union. This achieved a great deal of success with Giles, Margaret Clarke, John Mansfield and J.T. Jones all losing their seats on the executive (some only for a time) in 1949-50. If it had not been for this much publicised 'scare' about Communist teachers it would have been highly likely that the Communist headmaster of a large Maidstone Secondary Modern, John Mansfield, would have followed Giles by becoming the second CP president of the NUT. It was, however, the imposition of a ban on the employment of Communists as heads or training college lecturers by Middlesex County Council, that had the greatest impact. Middlesex was where Giles was a headmaster and Party members were strong in the Middlesex County Teachers' Association, thus the 'Middlesex Ban' was a direct attempt to break one of the CP teachers' 'strongholds'. As a result of the 'Ban' the appointment of R.P. Neal, a Party member, to the headship of a Middlesex School was reversed. Following on from Middlesex's example there were attempts to bring in a ban on the employment of Communists as school teachers in Essex, Surrey, and the LCC and although such moves failed to be implemented it was undoubtedly the case that surreptitious enquiries were made and Party members were not employed or passed over for promotion. The 'Middlesex Ban' (which was not initially confined to headships - all applicants for educational posts were required to fill in a questionnaire about their political affiliations) survived until 1957-58 and the NUT leadership's fight against this 'infringement of professional freedom' was highly equivocal. In general the period of the 'Ban' and the 'anti-Communist' feeling engendered among teachers ensured that CP progress in the NUT was contained. Although some Party teachers were re-elected to NUT posts after the '1949 clear-out' it was not until the 1960s that any major influence was regained.⁸⁶ Party teachers must have felt particularly

embattled in the late 1940s, a feeling which may have encouraged opposition towards 'progressive' (possibly equated with Social Democratic) educational methods and approaches.

'A Party within a Party'

As with all areas of the Communist Party the dramatic events of 1956 had an impact on the Teachers' group (it goes without saying that teachers were much in evidence in the general turmoil/debate that broke out in the Party among the 'critics' and 'loyalists'). Those who had long been at odds with the leadership of the teachers questioned the basis of much of the policies and attitudes that had been adopted over the years. Writing in the CP teachers' journal in 1956, Beatrix Tudor-Hart declared:

Many teachers, both in, and out of, the Party have been very disturbed for a long time at the Communist Party's attitude towards progressive ideas and methods in education, particularly primary education. We have damned activity methods, play, individual work, project methods, assignments, because the Soviet Union disapproves of them. Before 1948, any teacher who attacked intelligence tests was dubbed a bourgeois. We 'discovered' the truth about intelligence tests when we heard from Moscow in 1948 that intelligence tests were discredited ... Would we not gain more support ... if we discussed English methods and practice, in both education and psychology, from the viewpoint of Marxists using our own experiences?'⁸⁷

Included among the several thousands of those who left the CP in the years 1956-58 were many school teachers and the Party's National and District Advisory Committees suffered from the 'exodus'. A Communist teacher recalls:

In 1956 there were many thriving Party teachers' groups in almost every London division. I'm afraid 1956 damaged these in most cases, but they continued in weaker forms. They do not exist nowadays. We lost some active members who either left the Party or dropped out of this kind of activity.⁸⁸

Yet unlike many Party groups, the Education Advisory Committee was not wound up, neither did it fade away⁸⁹ of its own accord, and its journal maintained uninterrupted publication, selling 3,000 copies an issue in 1958. Not only did it continue to function but it took on an increasingly independent nature; gone were the days when Party teachers were sent strictures by the Industrial Department. There developed something of a division between those teachers in the group and those who were active in Party life in the Branches and Districts.⁹⁰ The Education Advisory Committee had its own annual conferences with its own agenda and resolutions with little relationship or connection with the overall Party organisation. Nigel Kelsey, a Party primary teacher in East London from 1950 for many years, remarks that:

For years and years *Education Today and Tomorrow* [initially called *The Educational Bulletin* and then for a short time *Education Today - SRP*] appeared under the masthead of The Education Advisory Committee of the Communist Party, 16 King Street, when in actual fact its policy was very different, it was much more sectarian than the national leadership ... it came about mainly because teachers in the CP seem to be Teacher Communists first. They would hardly ever be involved in writing articles on broad political issues, they would only write on teachers' issues.⁹¹

Kelsey made a conscious decision, as he says, to 'leave' the Teachers' group without leaving the Party as he felt the leadership of the CP teachers was not expressing 'Communist thought'.

Initiatives taken towards opening up a discussion on education as such within Communist circles seem to nearly all come from outside the Teachers' Group. Brian Simon, who had been on the Advisory Committee until asked to leave by Max Morris (on the grounds that he lived outside of London), wrote his books on Intelligence Testing and Comprehensive schools at the instigation of leading figures at the Party centre like Emile Burns, not Party teachers.⁹² Likewise, a yearly 'school' that was

run for Party teachers to discuss questions about the content of education and the psychology of learning was organised not by the Education Advisory Committee but by Brian Simon, John Daniels, a fellow education academic (Nottingham University), and a number of teachers from Leicester and Nottingham.⁹³ When Peter Mauger was invited by his son Sam, who was on the Editorial Board of *Education Today and Tomorrow*, to speak to the Board in 1965 on IDE (Interdisciplinary Enquiry in the Secondary School - an attempt to improve upon the 1950s attempts at integration in Social Studies developed at Goldsmith College) he was 'shot down in flames'. One particular member, a teacher from Southampton who later became NUT President, told Mauger he was talking 'airy fairy nonsense' and what was needed in the schools was 'real good discipline'.⁹⁴

As a consequence of its concentration on getting members elected to posts in the NUT the Teachers' group adopted a policy of not raising demands that might 'frighten away support'. Thus no support was given to those who campaigned for the NUT to support abortion, affiliate to the CND or aid the National Union of School Students. The position on salaries was also altered from the longstanding 'Basic Scale only' policy, based as it was on the need to create the maximum possible unity of the profession, to that of accepting a 'Secondary Differential' with regard to primary teachers. In the mid-1960s Max Morris was elected to the NUT Executive and a few years later he was joined by Sam Fisher. From his position in the Union leadership Max Morris took on the role as the 'hammer of the radical Left' throughout the late 1960s and 1970s. It is therefore no coincidence that the largest non-CP Left opposition to develop in the union world took shape in the teaching profession. Young Socialist teachers combined with an older generation of militants who were disillusioned with the CP Teachers' group (e.g. Eric Porter) to form Rank and File Teachers.⁹⁵

Pre-dating the recent split in the CP around the *Morning Star*, the national Party leadership in early 1984 ordered the removal of both the Secretary of the Education Advisory Committee and the Editor of *Education Today and Tomorrow*. They asserted that they could no longer tolerate a situation where the CP Teachers' leaders were so at odds with the overall ('Euro-Communist') position of the Party. This was resisted by nearly all of the Advisory Committee members with the result that they were replaced by appointees from the centre, thus bringing to an end 'a Party within a Party'.

Footnotes

- ¹ An essential element in the early radical movements like Chartism was the belief 'that the extension of organised education is an essential aspect of political and economic emancipation'. (B. Simon, *Education and the Labour Movement, 1870-1920*, p. 121). This attitude was revived among the socialists who emerged in the 1880s, was adopted by the Plebs League and 'found its way' into the Communist Party. It is therefore no surprise that figures on the Left have interested themselves in education and some have taken up teaching as a career.
- ² Martin Lawn, 'Syndicalist Teacher: The Rhondda Strike of 1919', *Llafur: The Journal of the Society for the Study of Welsh Labour History*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1984.
- ³ Nan MacMillan, who joined a number of years later in 1929, and became a leading Communist teacher, was one of 12 children of a working-class Bermondsey family. She won a scholarship and with the encouragement of her mother went to a London teachers' college, came top of her year and was able to gain a post at Battersea Park Road School. She joined the TLL on the suggestion of her headmistress, a League member Mrs. Goldsmith (the Jewish aspect is not unimportant as several of the Party's early female and male teachers were Jewish, e.g. David Capper, son of a rabbi). What was true of women was also true of many of the early male CP school teachers, although two early exceptions would be: C.G.T. Giles, the picture of a middle-class gentleman who was radicalised by his experiences in the First World War and reading the *Workers Dreadnought* during his convalescence, and A.L. Morton (Palme Dutt before he became fully employed by the CP also took up teaching for a very short period).
- ⁴ May Hill, *Red Roses for Isabel*, p. 4.
- ⁵ There is some suggestion that the TLL existed as early as 1917 in order to fight the affiliation campaign but it is generally acknowledged that it was established on a 'firm footing' in 1922.
- ⁶ PRO Ed. 24/1757. Source: Nan MacMillan, *Portrait of a Comrade*, unpublished biography of David Capper.
- ⁷ N. MacMillan, interview 8 March 1985.
- ⁸ Source - interview, Ben and Audrey Ainley 31 July 1968 by Ruth Frow.
- ⁹ A great deal of attention was given by the British Secret Service to the activities of the TLL and later the EWL and reports from this quarter were clearly used by *The Times*, which carried regular accounts of League meetings, and by Tory MPs.
- ¹⁰ PRO Ed. 24/1757 quoted by M. Lawn, Ph.D. thesis, p. 263.
- ¹¹ Martin Lawn in his thesis, 'Organised Teachers and the Labour Movement, 1900-1930' is confused over this matter when he states that the Educational Workers' International (EWI) was 'part of the '2½ International' (p. 261). By the time the EWI was in existence the '2½ International' had reunited with the main body of Social Democracy. The EWI, which included major teaching unions in France,

Germany and the USSR, declared its autonomy in respect of the two rival trade union internationals (Moscow and Amsterdam) as late as August 1927. The American, Robert W. Iversen in his 1959 book, *The Communists and the Schools* incorrectly claims that the EWI was a body of the Red International of Labour Unions.

¹² Two of its presidents in the 1930s, Wiles and Mabs, were League members and later joined the CP - source: Nan MacMillan, interview 8 March 1985.

¹³ *The Educational Worker*, November 1927.

¹⁴ *The Educational Worker*, monthly journal of the TLL/EWL, started publication in 1926.

¹⁵ M. Lawn, op. cit., p. 292.

¹⁶ With some justification the NUT was increasingly seen as compromised and acting more and more as a professional pressure group than a trade union. During the General Strike the NUT affirmed its support for the Government and opposition to the strikers (the TLL was the only teachers' organisation to side with the miners) and while other unions declined in membership the NUT grew: 115,577 in 1921 to 142,772 in 1931 (figures taken from P.H.J.H. Gosden, *The Evolution of a Profession*).

¹⁷ The figures are taken from the papers of C.G.T. Giles (Working-Class Movement Library) - a handwritten note which gives the following breakdown of membership for 1930 and 1931:

	1930	resigned	new	1931
Blackburn	4	-	-	4
Manchester	8	-	5	13
Merseyside	8	4	3	7
East London & Leyton	13	2	14	25
West London	16	-	9	25
Unattached	<u>54</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>35</u>	<u>88</u>
	103	7	66	162

New members recruited through:

Defence Committee	-	21
Party	-	7
USSR	-	6
NYTM*	-	3

* National Young Teachers' Movement

In 1931 there were eight Teachers' Cells in London. CP members in the EWL paid on top of all their other subscriptions a levy of 0.5% of their annual salary to the EWL Party Fraction. Clearly by 1932 the EWL was firmly under Party teacher control. With the 'go-ahead' to form Party cells in schools, attached to a local branch [like a factory cell] it was envisaged that '... it should be possible to build round the cell an E.W.L. group functioning like an M.M. group'. (Giles Papers - letter to CP teachers 22 January 1932).

¹⁸ Giles Papers - 'Resolution of the Party Fraction of the E.W.L.'

¹⁹ Ibid., point i.

- 20 See the journal *The Plebs*, July 1927, which includes the 'suggestions' submitted by General Secretary of the National Council of Labour Colleges to the ILP - 'Towards a Socialist Educational Policy'. In addition to general reforms such as smaller classes and raising the school leaving age a list of eleven proposals of a 'specific socialist character' were proposed, e.g. re-writing textbooks from an 'evolutionary point of view', a 'Labour Day' to replace 'Empire Day', excluding religion, evolutionary theory and elementary sociology to be taught, pictures/furnishings extolling the monarchy, war, capitalism to be removed etc.
- 21 B. Edwards, *The Burston School Strike* mentions that Giles sent his eldest son to Burston school for a year (pp. 145-46) and in the 1920s two members of the Russian trade delegation arranged to have their children educated there.
- 22 N. MacMillan, interview 8 March 1985.
- 23 But as late as 1934-35 the EWL was still publishing articles in its journal by advocates of 'progressive' private schools, e.g. *The Educational Worker*, September 1934 advertising a special article in a coming issue on a well-known experimental school.
- 24 Ken Jones in his book, *Beyond Progressive Education* gives one of the fullest published accounts of the TLL/EWL. By 1930 he feels that the League had 'jettisoned' the bulk of its educational programme so as to concentrate on showing up the treacherous role of Labour '... the real effect of this position was to liquidate much of the radical educational heritage of the 1920s' (p. 122).
- 25 E.W.L. *Constitution*.
- 26 As a *Guardian* report of an SCR meeting on 'Education in Soviet Russia' in November 1926 put it: 'No education fervour in this or any of the older civilisations would be likely to equal the passion for education ... [in the USSR - SRP]' quoted in the *S.C.R. Annual Report, 1926-27*.
- 27 Review of SCR pamphlet on Soviet education, *The Educational Worker*, September 1933.
- 28 Lenin quoted in *The Educational Worker*, June 1934.
- 29 *The Educational Worker*, November 1933.
- 30 *Ibid*.
- 31 Edward Upward gives a fictionalised account, although obviously closely modelled on his own experiences, of a Party school teacher's attempt to resolve 'progressive' educational practice with Third Period politics, e.g. 'To try to be an educator under the present system, as Alan had been trying, was fraudulent and shameful. He would try no longer. He cleansed himself of educationism, would from henceforward be as nearly as possible an automaton while in school, and all the energy he thereby saved should go into the political fight outside'. (E. Upward, *In the Thirties, Vol. 1 of The Spiral Ascent*, p. 117).

- ³² It is generally accepted that the Left Book Club involved a good many teachers, some of whom went on to join the CP, and of these a few would have worked in private education. Certainly a number of the 'literary figures' who joined the Party taught for a time at private schools, e.g. Cecil Day Lewis (Cheltenham College), Rex Warner (Frensham Heights - which in contrast to Cheltenham was co-educational and included in the *Modern Schools Handbook*, Gollancz, 1934) et al. See V. Cunningham's encyclopaedic *British Writers of the Thirties*, pp. 123-25 for details of schoolmastery by many writers and poets.
- There were some unusual 'educational recruits' to the CP in this period. Douglas Hyde remembers that the head of a boys' boarding school for the sons of 'gentleman farmers', Hampton Grammar School in Glasbury, Wales, joined the Party in 1934 after a caravan holiday on Hyde's holding in North Wales. He returned to his school to run up a red flag in place of the Union Jack on the school's flag pole with the result that parents rapidly began to remove their boys. The wife of the head (Bill Lloyd) wrote to Hyde pleading for him to help dissuade her husband from destroying their livelihood, which Hyde did, telling him not to indulge in 'childish leftism'. (Source - D. Hyde, interview 1 October 1989).
- ³³ Lee Chadwick, interview 19 August 1984.
- ³⁴ See Jonathan Croall, *Neill of Summerhill*, particularly Chapter 13, 'The Politics of Freedom', and Ray Hemmings, *Fifty Years of Freedom - A Study of the Development of the Ideas of A.S. Neill*, particularly pp. 92-93. Party members who sent their children to the school included Bernal, Allen Hutt, Ivor Montagu, and Nan Green (fees paid for her children so that she could be in Spain as well as her husband. Nan Green contributed to D. Corkill and S. Rawnsley (eds.) *The Road to Spain: Anti-Fascists at War, 1936-1939*.) Nan MacMillan feels that the EWL didn't exist after 1935 (source - N. MacMillan, interview 8 March 1985).
- ³⁵ Letter, 'Socialist School Proposal', *Daily Worker*, 29 September 1936.
- ³⁶ Quoted in *Beatrix Tudor-Hart remembered*, p. 5.
- ³⁷ Beatrix Tudor-Hart was often derided by other CP members as a 'Hampstead Communist' - source. Marie Muir, interview 19 June 1985.
- ³⁸ Letter, *Daily Worker*, 2 October 1936.
- ³⁹ *Daily Worker*, 16 August 1935.
- ⁴⁰ Rather than being formally dissolved the EWL, according to Upward's memory, just 'quietly faded away' (E. Upward, letter 10 November 1987).
- ⁴¹ Margot Heinemann, who was a teacher herself for one and a half years from 1937 and has subsequently interested herself in CP history, claimed that she had '... never heard of the Educational Workers' League' (M. Heinemann, letter 7 November 1986).
- ⁴² See the prolonged debate in the *Daily Worker*, 25 November 1935 - 2 December 1935 on the changes in Soviet education.

- 43 M. Morris, 'Foreword', *The People's Schools*.
- 44 M. Morris, *The People's Schools*, p. 95. In fact, the overall Party policy was in advance (more radical) to that propounded by Morris as is evident in the Draft Programme that was to be submitted to the 16th Party Congress in October 1939, that was called off at the last moment with the outbreak of War. The part of the *Programme of the C.P.G.B. for the Transition From Capitalism to Socialism* dealing with education called for the establishment of a 'single school system' for all children (p. 45).
- 45 Duplicated letter by Pritt, Adams et al, 4 December 1940, sent to teachers.
- 46 *Daily Worker*, 22 July 1940. Margaret Cohen, school teacher and Communist, refers to the hostility she faced in the classroom during the 'anti-war period' in J. Attfield and S. Williams, (eds), 1939: *The Communist Party of Great Britain and the War*, pp. 123-24. Of course attacks on 'Red teachers perverting the minds of children' was and to an extent remains a constant refrain of the Right. As a 1930s example the rightwing Catholic Arnold Lunn could write: 'Most of those to whom we entrust the education of our young are politically Left Wing. Many of them are avowed Communists. The attack on the Christian creed ... which made England great is proceeding unchecked in Elementary and Secondary Schools and in the Universities'. (A. Lunn, *Spanish Rehearsal*, p. 156).
- 47 It should be noted, however, that there was a degree of co-operation in 1940 between Communist teachers and some in the National Association of Labour Teachers - see *The Schoolmaster and Woman Teachers' Chronicle*, 25 April 1940 and 9 May 1940 for NUT attack on a NALT and CP 'parent-teacher' protest meeting in Sheffield.
- 48 See *The Schoolmaster and Woman Teachers' Chronicle*, 16 December 1943, 6 January 1944.
- 49 Communists on the Executive who joined Giles were: Charles Darvill, Margaret Clarke, and John Mansfield.
- 50 A working-class Communist (job on the London Underground) who went into teaching after the War was George Leeson - see his contribution in D. Corkill and S. Rawnsley, op. cit., p. 80. Three of those Party teachers I have interviewed, all working class in background and pre-War occupations, came into teaching through the Emergency Training Scheme: Eric A. Porter, Charles Godden and Nigel Kelsey (a fourth's husband squeezed into teaching the year after the Scheme - Henry Saltiel).
- 51 It was no doubt also the case that some of those who were trained at this time were first attracted to the Party by Communists they met like Max Morris, who was deeply involved in the Training Scheme as a lecturer (Emergency Training College, Trent Park).
- 52 Giles Papers - Sam Fisher, letter to Giles 28 July 1944.
- 53 Giles Papers - P.G. Mauger, letter to Giles 31 August 1944.

- ⁵⁴ G.C.T. Giles, *The New School Tie*, p. 74. The nature of Giles's *The New School Tie* is dissected at length in *Unpopular Education - schooling and social democracy in England since 1944* by the Education Group, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies.
- ⁵⁵ Nan MacMillan, interview 8 March 1985.
- ⁵⁶ A CP policy memorandum, *The Multilateral (or Common) School* was brought out in October 1944.
- ⁵⁷ 'Resolution on Education', *Communist Policy for Britain, Report of the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party, November 1945*, p. 68.
- ⁵⁸ Joan B. Thompson, *World News and Views*, 10 June 1944.
- ⁵⁹ E. Upward, letter 8 December 1987.
- ⁶⁰ The CP and Party teachers felt that the Parent-Teacher Associations, a product of the 1944 Act, had a particularly important part to play in the process of 'educational reform'.
- ⁶¹ B. Vernon, *Ellen Wilkinson*, p. 225.
- ⁶² It was not until 1947 that the school leaving age was raised and then only to 15 years. The Education Act's requirement that every LEA must provide nursery education for 2-5 year olds was never fully carried out, while the plan to establish County Colleges (compulsory part-time education for those up to 18 who were no longer at school), which had been very favourably regarded by the CP, never saw the light of day.
- ⁶³ B. Simon, paper 'Labour in Power' delivered at the Leicester History Workshop Conference, and with hindsight Max Morris wrote in 1953: 'The 1944 Act, which so many hoped would be a means of ending the class system of education [himself included - SRP], was so designed as to maintain that system'. (M. Morris, *Your Children's Future*, p. 27).
- ⁶⁴ The longstanding call for 'professional unity' was taken up by CP teachers leadership with renewed vigour in the wake of the 1944 Act. It was largely seen in terms of building the NUT and amalgamating the smaller teaching unions to it. Kline, a leading Party figure in the Leeds NAS for 19 years left the Association and joined the NUT in 1949. (*The Educational Bulletin*, October 1949) and Nan MacMillan left the NUWT and joined the NUT in 1950-51.
- ⁶⁵ P. Tibbles, 'Post-War Schools in the Making', *World News and Views*, 19 January 1946.
- ⁶⁶ B. Simon, interview 18 February 1986.
- ⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 2 July 1985.
- ⁶⁸ P. Mauger, interview 30 September 1985.
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid*.

- 70 'Thoughts on selection for secondary education', *The Educational Bulletin*, June-July 1949.
- 71 B. Simon, interview 2 July 1985.
- 72 B.P., *The Educational Bulletin*, June-July 1949, p. 12.
- 73 Ibid.
- 74 *The Educational Bulletin*, April-May 1952.
- 75 The 'conservative' educational attitude of the Party teachers' leadership contrasted with their earlier openness to new ideas. As late as July 1948, Max Morris welcomed the fact that: 'All over the country teachers are discussing how to modernise the content and methods of the school curriculum. New methods are being applied, the keynote of which is the development of the children's initiative through activity rather than the passive absorption of knowledge'. (Max Morris, 'Education - the Problem Today', *World News and Views*, 10 July 1948). By 1953 in a major pamphlet he had written, *Put the Children First*. Max Morris, as with his pre-War booklet, *The People's Schools*, avoided any real discussion of the content of education.
- 76 S. Sellars, 'Social Studies', *The Educational Bulletin*, January-February 1952.
- 77 A number claimed by C.G.T. Giles at the 21st Congress of the CP held in November 1949 and widely reported at the time as part of the 'Red Scare'.
- 78 J. Miles and A. Rosen, *The Educational Bulletin*, May-June 1951.
- 79 E. Scott, *The Educational Bulletin*, April-May 1952.
- 80 Eric Porter, letter 3 March 1985.
- 81 Nigel Kelsey, letter 13 March 1985.
- 82 And the BBC - see *Hansard - House of Lords*, 29 March 1950, pp. 607-31.
- 83 *The Right Angle*, Vol. 1, No. 3, Spring 1949 - journal of the Conservative and Unionist Teachers' Association.
- 84 Not only Catholic clergy campaigned against Communist teachers; in Bill Moore's case it was an Anglican vicar member of the Education Committee. After Moore had stood as a CP candidate in a by-election the vicar wrote in his parish letter for May 1950: 'I cannot refrain from saying a word about the fact that a Communist candidate put up in our Parliamentary by-election last month - a school teacher from one of the nearby schools to which many of our children go ... it is an open question whether such a person, now publicly known as an avowed Communist, can still be considered eligible to teach in a school to which many parents are bound to send their children'. (*The*

Monthly Kalender, May 1950, Sheffield). Luckily for Moore he was a popular teacher and was able to call upon the help of fellow Party member and the major NUT figure in Sheffield, Charles Darvill. He came out of the brush with the vicar relatively unscathed. (Source Bill Moore, letter 13 March 1989).

85 There is some very tentative evidence to link these forgeries with Tory teachers in West London - see *The Educational Bulletin*, March-April 1949.

86 As with other Party members in the professions an important area of activity which to a limited degree managed to break out of the political and social ostracism experienced by Party members in the late '40s and early '50s was campaign for 'peace' (also the fight against Horror Comics in the case of teachers). Forty British teachers attended World Congress for Peace in Paris during April 1949 (out of 350 British delegates) and these teachers formed a provisional committee of Teachers for Peace as a section of the British Peace Committee. A little later a more representative committee was elected at a mass meeting of 400 teachers which was addressed by Bernal. Party teacher Marie Philibert was Secretary of the body and in her words: 'I rather specialised on peace work on the Education Advisory Committee' (M. Philibert, interview 25 April 1985). A not inconsiderable amount of support was gathered behind Teachers for Peace: the London conference in December 1951 was attended by 250 teachers, Leah Manning, Dora Russell and a large number of university lecturers, chairmen of NUT and ATTI County Associations lent their names to appeals, petitions, and conferences arranged by the organisation.

Another example of the official hostility during the Cold War is revealed by the Home Secretary's refusal to admit any of the foreign delegates to a Teachers for Peace conference in late 1953 on 'International Tension and Education' (see report of the proceedings, *World Tension and Education*).

87 B. Tudor-Hart, *Education Today and Tomorrow*, July 1956.

88 Nigel Kelsey, letter 30 November 1983.

89 Although there are no figures as to how many teachers left the CP in 1956-58 those I have communicated with seem to be of the opinion that proportionally fewer teachers resigned or dropped out than in general:

'I have a feeling that we found the Party teachers remained very faithful' (Marie Philibert, interview 25 April 1985).

'I don't remember Hungary actually decimating the Party teachers, well the odd ones left, of course, but not many, it didn't hit teachers quite so savagely as the Party organisation in general'. (Eric Porter, interview 11 July 1984).

'In my experience there were not very large losses among CP teachers. Some left the CP and joined other sections of the radical Left and helped to widen the divisions between traditional Left and radical Left which have bedevilled socialist politics in the NUT, particularly in London, since the sixties'. (Nigel Kelsey, letter 13 April 1983).

- ⁹⁰ That school teachers often played an important role in CP branches as secretaries, treasurers and those in charge of political education is evident from a cursory reading of Party journals and the *Daily Worker*. To take one Party Congress, the 25th in 1957, the personnel of all the Congress committees (Election Preparations, Congress Arrangements, Congress Appeals, etc) reveals that of the 85 people involved 13 (or 15.3%) were teachers.
- ⁹¹ Nigel Kelsey, interview 12 July 1984.
- ⁹² Source - B. Simon, interview 2 July 1985.
- ⁹³ The radical educational journal *Forum* which dated from 1958 and has continued uninterrupted publication to this day, was launched by Brian Simon and non-CP educationalist Robin Pedley. Although Party teachers like Peter Mauger contributed articles it had no connection and received no help from the Education Advisory Committee. Some work was done by the History Teachers Section of the Historians' Group on how history could be taught more productively at Secondary level - debate around 'Line of Development' approach in 1949 which even involved Max Morris and Sam Fisher (Morris also edited *From Cobbett to the Chartists*, 1948 L.W.). Peter Mauger was asked to be the secretary of the Section; however, after a time he remembers being castigated by Morris for spending too much time in the History Group and not enough in the Teachers' Group. Of the History Teachers' Section, 'Not an awful lot came of it actually now I come to think of it'. (P. Mauger, interview 30 September 1985).
- ⁹⁴ Source - P. Mauger, interview 30 September 1985.
- ⁹⁵ A contributory cause to the growing division and antagonism between Party teachers and those to their Left may well have been the fact that many longstanding Communists had achieved senior posts including headships.

CHAPTER 18

Conclusion

It is evident that from the Communist Party's foundation it greatly benefited from the presence in its ranks of various individuals from middle-class backgrounds. Those with knowledge of foreign languages (in particular German and Russian) were responsible for translating some of the key works of Marxism and Leninism into English and for helping to facilitate communication between the British Party and the Comintern. University-educated Communists also clearly played an important role in establishing and developing the Party's political journalism and propaganda and above all else, most clearly epitomised in the person of Palme Dutt, providing theoretical leadership. Moreover, from the Party's early years those members (and sympathisers) in the legal profession have been much valued, providing as they did some form of help in the numerous court cases brought against Party leaders. Wealthy and moderately well-off members and sympathisers were always a source of finance for a Party that, from its inception, suffered from lack of money.

Despite all this it was not until more than a decade after the formation of the Party that middle-class Communists - apart from a select group at the Party centre - were accepted as having a distinct contribution to make. Before 1932-33 most of the small number of those from the middle-class who joined accommodated themselves to the time-consuming rigours of day-to-day Party work ('chalking', selling literature, demonstrating) and often attempted to adopt a more 'proletarian manner' - they were required to 'prove themselves'.

It was only from the 1930s, when the Party began to attract relatively large numbers of middle-class recruits, that fuller use began to be made of their particular talents, many Popular Front cultural

initiatives were undertaken and radical movements emerged in a number of the professions often with Party members at their core. Within the Communist Party official sanction was given for the first time for members from various professions to establish groups and contribute their particular skills to the cause of the Party. Here Communist artists and musicians made the most immediate and apparent contribution in the way they helped to enrich internal Party life and improve the effectiveness and quality of CP propaganda. At branch level middle-class Communists began to take on a more prominent role in educational and organisational matters and no longer felt they were members on sufferance, while at a national Party level members from the professions were drawn into the process of devising detailed Communist policy for a wide area of social and economic matters as the British Party distanced itself from its 'insurrectionary roots' in favour of 'socialist constructionism' and the 'blue printing of the future'. The greater emphasis on electoral campaigning also gave middle-class Communists greater scope in working for the Party through standing for council or parliamentary elections. Communists with academic and professional credentials were given more visible prominence in the Party in order to present the impression of a political force with a broad class makeup committed to the cause of science, efficiency and progress.

The place the CP gave to the 'ideological struggle' - against fascism, for peace, and later in the 'Battle of Ideas' - ensured that Party members from the cultural, scientific and social scientific professions would be expected to take the lead in this area. At its worst this could mean little more than serving the immediate propaganda requirements of the Party in defending the latest Soviet practice or condemning all things American, but it also led to extremely lively conferences which increased optimism within the Party, helped uncover

aspects of popular radical culture from Britain's past, and introduced many working-class Communists to the 'greats' of past bourgeois culture. Those middle-class Communists involved had the satisfaction of knowing that they were directly contributing to the Party's struggle for socialism; it was also for many of them a two-way process. They not only acted as educators but in turn they were educated by their fellow working-class Party members. Despite the changing political line of the CP, with its looser internal discipline, it remained a self-declared 'political party of the working-class' and many middle-class Communists retained a feeling of humility with regard to militant industrial workers.

A unique feature of the Communist Party, although it has varied in intensity throughout its history, has been the high degree of commitment required of those who join. Guided by a world philosophical system, dialectical materialism, that revealed the 'pattern of life and its future development', Communists had confidence that they were acting as the 'conscious and willing instruments of the laws of the universe'. Communism was thus politics of an all-embracing character - 'We Communists are people of a special mould' - and as a Party member one should be Communist at all times and in particular at work. It was a standard rule that in their jobs Communists should aim at being as conscientious and proficient as possible and in this way win the respect of their fellow workers and make them more receptive to being won over politically. This applied to all Communists, including middle-class ones, once it was accepted policy that they should concentrate on influencing and winning over those from their own class milieu (a change inaugurated in the early 1930s). For those in the professions it meant working in their professional associations and relevant trade unions and attempting to convince their colleagues of the need to join forces with the Labour Movement (affiliate to the TUC). Beyond this, Communists in the professions saw it as their

task to apply their politics, dialectical materialism, to their work. Socialism would not spell an end to professional workers but would in fact enhance their prestige and power and enable them to fully utilise their skills and expertise for the benefit of the society and the great mass of the people. In the struggle for power it would be extremely useful for the Party to have some well-placed members in the state machinery (some were covert Communists while a very small number were drawn into Soviet espionage - 'defending the bastion of socialism') and after the revolution it would be necessary to have as many qualified middle-class professionals, technicians, scientists and others as possible committed to the task of constructing socialism. It was necessary to be as good in one's profession as possible and to begin the process of discovering in what ways their work would need to be changed or developed in order to become a 'socialist profession'.

As the CP increasingly adopted a reformist political stance, middle-class members often linked their Communism with their immediate professional concerns. The Second World War and the period of reconstruction and building of a 'New Britain' opened the way for Communists in professions to fully integrate professional and political concerns (as it did for Party factory workers to link their politics to production with Joint Production Committees, although this proved more problematical). Through their professions many Communists could directly contribute to the War effort and the fight against fascism - new weapons, better air raid protection and health measures, improvements in industrial efficiency and production, helping to raise morale through the arts, etc. At the end of the War with the election of a Labour Government with an overwhelming majority and a programme of major reforms there was a feeling of great optimism and belief in the possibilities of creating a fundamentally new society. It was thought not unrealistic that the

planning, state direction and popular engagement of the War could be carried over into peace time and the opportunities for gaining employment in a professional capacity in the public service and becoming involved in the 'reforming zeal' was greatly expanded. Communist professionals were 'in tune' with the wider progressive trends that were visible at this time. Later, with the growing disillusionment with Labour and the rise of the Cold War, this 'progressive mood' began to break down and CP members in the professions became more isolated.

The 'Battle of Ideas' and the Zhandovian theoretical reaction in the Soviet Union led to calls for the critical re-examination of past attitudes and practices by Communists employed in the arts and sciences. Here, there was a great variety of responses, for some the hardening Communist orthodoxy was basically rejected, for others it meant they tried to copy Soviet (Eastern European) methods, while it led some to question the existing 'progressive trends'. For the latter the contention that socialist realism should be 'national in nature and socialist in content' was taken seriously with some interesting results although with limited impact given the overall political situation.

The organised groups of Party members in the professions differed widely in their size, nature and relationship with the Party centre. Some like the school teachers encompassed hundreds of members, while the CP psychologists and psychiatrists were composed of only a very small number of not much more than a dozen. Moreover, it is clear that the wider realities of a profession played an all-important role in determining the nature of a specific Party group. Communist teachers largely concentrated on 'politically working' in the teaching unions, in particular the NUT, and were careful about adopting a 'Communist approach' in their teaching, as to have done otherwise would have risked dismissal. Where the Teachers' group did take a position on teaching practice it tended to set

itself against those 'progressive' ideologists who were deemed to be undermining the importance of the teacher in the educational process. In part this was due to how Soviet educational practices and theories were received and the dominance in the group of Max Morris and his close associates, but the particular position of school teaching with its somewhat insecure status no doubt encouraged a 'line' which highlighted the 'professional importance' of the school teacher. In contrast, the small number of Party psychologists were largely concerned with helping to improve one another's professional competence and laying firmer foundations for a more 'scientific psychology'. Other groups, such as the CP Architects' Group were, however, much more open (less professionally self-obsessed) and took up professional issues, became active in trade union organisation and Party campaigns and discussed how and in what ways their work would alter in a socialist Britain and how it could take on a more progressive character in the present.

By focussing on the activity of a number of groups of middle-class Communists, this study has been able to give some indication both of the importance of their middle-class contribution to CP activity in the Party's peak years, and to the contribution made by Communists to the practice of the professions, and the evolution of ideas of professionalism. It is clear that British Communism cannot be understood simply as a variety of working-class politics. Nor can the evolution of ideas about the role of the professions in mid-twentieth century Britain be fully understood without paying attention to the contribution made by Communists.

BIOGRAPHICAL APPENDIX

RUTLAND BOUGHTON - was one of the foremost English composers of the 1920s and 1930s. His opera 'The Immortal Hour' from the 1920s still holds the world record for the greatest number of consecutive performances. He was the son of a grocer and largely musically self-taught (apart from a year in the Royal College of Music). Boughton was sympathetic to the Left from an early age - founder of the London Labour Choral Union, one of the first Western European composers of repute to visit the Soviet Union (1925) and active in arranging choirs and performances in aid of the miners during 1926. Boughton resigned from his position as Musical Director of the LLCU because of a disagreement with Morrison and was replaced by his friend and deputy, Alan Bush. Always to the left of the Labour leadership, he joined, left and rejoined the CP on a number of occasions. See R. Samuel's chapter 'Theatre and Socialism in Britain', including notes 121 and 166 for details on Boughton, in R. Samuel, E. MacColl and S. Cosgrove, *Theatres of the Left, 1880-1935*.

ALAN BUSH - unlike Boughton, came from solid middle-class stock, was given private music lessons and went to the Royal Academy of Music in 1918. He joined the ILP in 1924 after he had finished at the R.A.M. and answering an appeal in the *Daily Herald* for people to join the LLCU, Bush wrote in and became the permanent conductor of an affiliate choir in Finchley. Further radicalised by his experiences in Berlin where he went to study at the University from 1929-31, he left the ILP on his return to England because of what he felt was its growing Trotskyism and in 1935 joined the CP (Bush is one of that significant group of ILPers who went over to the Communist Party in 1935, including in the number members from the professions).

V. GORDON CHILDE - was born in Australia and took classics at Sydney University and then Oxford during the War. On his return to Australia he faced political persecution for his leftwing views and pacifism and subsequently lost a scholastic appointment at Sydney University. He went into Australian Labour politics and became Secretary to the Premier of New South Wales, an experience that convinced him of the underlying weakness of reformism which he made clear in his first book, *How Labour Governs*. He came to England in 1921 in an official capacity but within a month of his arrival Australian Labour had been defeated and he went into the academic world here (eventually and with difficulty holding chairs at Edinburgh and then the London Institute of Archaeology). Childe applied Marxism to his work on pre-history - a materialist interpretation being well suited to this area of study - and made a lasting and influential contribution. Retained links with Palme Dutt and among other involvements he was on the editorial board of *The Modern Quarterly*. He committed suicide in 1957 - the events in the Soviet Union and World Communism in the past year apparently a contributory factor in this decision.

RALPH FOX - (Bradford Grammar School, school friends with J.G. Crowther) graduated from Magdalen College, Oxford and became involved in Quaker relief work in the Soviet Union in the 1920s. He is reputed to have joined the CP in 1926 and wrote a number of Party pamphlets and books. Among his books was an impressive attempt at a Marxist account of literature, *The Novel and the People*. He died in Spain in 1936 fighting for the Republic as a volunteer in the International Brigade.

BERNARD STEVENS - was a leading composer who wrote 'Symphony of Liberation' which was performed in Queens Hall 1946-47 ('put him on the map' - Bush) and went on to produce about 14 choral works, including five substantial ones with orchestra. A WMA member, he joined the CP in 1941 leaving it in the 'great exodus' of 1956 (October) and was Professor of Composition at the Royal Academy of Music for a time. Writing of his discussions with Soviet musicians as a member of an SCR cultural delegation to the USSR, he throws light on how he regarded Soviet musical composition and the fact that it could not be directly applied to the British context. To quote from his report 'Soviet Music Today': 'Our other [other than the greatly respected Vaughan Williams - SRP] composers were admired for their imagination and skill, but they were disturbed by the absence of specifically British characteristics. However, I think I succeeded in convincing them that the problem of writing characteristically national music was far greater in a country such as Britain, where folk music had lost its popularity, than in the USSR, where the folk music tradition had never been interrupted'. (*Anglo-Soviet Journal*, Winter 1942-53).

MICHAEL TIPPETT - also came from a middle-class/professional background, although there was an element of radicalism there as his mother had been a suffragette. He went to the Royal College of Music in 1923. Deeply influenced by seeing the poverty of working people during a hitch-hiking tour of the North of England he became a Communist but remained a Party member for only a short time as he adopted Trotskyism in 1935-36. While in or close to the Party he was Musical Director of Morely College, Westminster Bridge Road, under whose auspices he ran an orchestra mainly recruited from unemployed musicians. This orchestra was an important element in the renaissance of leftwing music in the Thirties, e.g. Tippett conducted it for two performances of Bush's 'Pageant of Labour' in 1934, it accompanied the LLCU in a series of 'Unity' records which were released from the end of 1935 including Red Flag, Songs of Labour, In Praise of Learning (by Hans Eisler) etc.

ANGELA TUCKETT - worked for her father, a radical Bristol solicitor, became involved with the CP (joining it) in 1930-31 and used her legal training to help NUWM/CP activists when they were in trouble with the police. In the late 1930s she joined the NCCL as a full-time national legal officer where she remained until 1942 after which she joined the *Daily Worker*, and later became Circulation Manager for *Labour Monthly*. Her sister Joan was also an active Communist and a major force in the Bristol Unity Players - see A. Tuckett, 'The People's Theatre in Bristol 1930-45', *Our History*, no. 72.

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Christian Hamp, 8 May 1985 (taped)
Beatrice Tudor-Hart, September 1978 (taped) - conducted by P. Reboul
Ray Hawkins, 6 October 1982 (taped)
Tom Hill, 28 October 1982 (taped)
Rodney Hilton, 14 December 1983 (taped)
Fred Hollingsworth, 28 June 1982
John Horner, 8 July 1975 (transcript) - conducted by T. Segars
Douglas Hyde, 2 February 1987 (taped)
" " 14 September 1987 (taped)
" " 13 June 1988 (taped)
" " 1 October 1989 (taped)
Percy Johnson-Marshall, 16 March 1984 (taped) - conducted by A. Saint
Monty Johnstone, 30 June 1981 (taped)
Jennifer Jones, 16 May 1985 (taped)
John Kay, 27 September 1984
Leo Keely, 24 June 1981 (taped)
Nigel Kelsey, 12 July 1984 (taped)
Margot Kettle, 12 February 1987 (taped)
Martin Lawn, 17 March 1985
Malcolm MacEwen, 30 November 1983 (taped)
Nan MacMillan, 8 March 1985 (taped)

Peter Mauger, 30 September 1985 (taped)
 Bill Moore, 27 April 1983 (taped)
 Hugh Morris, 9 May 1985 (taped),
 " " 12 August 1985 (taped)
 Marie Muir, 19 June 1985 (taped)
 Vivian Nash, 8 May 1985 (taped)
 Neil O'Connor, 12 September 1985 (taped)
 Margot Parish, 9 June 1981
 Colin and Virginia Penn, December 1983 (transcript) - conducted by A.
 Saint
 Colin Penn, 7 March 1984 (taped)
 Marie Philibert, 25 April 1985 (taped)
 Charles Poulson, 20 July 1977 (transcript) - conducted by T. Segars
 Eric Porter, 11 July 1984 (taped)
 Jim Roche, 11 April 1981 (taped)
 Andrew Saint, 5 December 1984
 Betty Saltiel, 17 September 1985 (taped)
 Monte Shapiro, 11 February 1986 (taped)
 Brian Simon, 2 July 1985 (taped)
 " " 18 February 1986 (taped)
 Francis (Freddie) Skinner, 15 February 1985 (taped)
 Dick (R.W.) Toms and Mary Toms, 22-23 August 1985 (taped)
 Reg Turner, 7 March 1984 (taped)
 Albert A. Wallis and Violet Wallis, 24 June 1983 (taped)
 Bill Warman, 5 June 1981

* 1981 interviews were conducted by me in the course of my research for an M.A. degree.

6. Correspondence

This has been much too extensive to fully record; however I will detail the most important from the point of view of my work:

Professor Emeritus Colin Adamson-Macedo, 10 December 1987
 John Archer, 18 October 1984
 Stuart Bell, 5 May, 21 June 1985
 Noreen Branson, 9 June 1981, 2 June 1989
 Peter Cadogan, 21 January 1984
 Kenneth Campbell, 17 July, 8 December 1985
 Professor Alan D.B. Clarke, 25 April, 6 June, 2 September 1986
 Doris H. Deering, 14 July, 8 September 1985
 Jim Fyrth, 16 March, 11 May 1983, 28 August, 7 September, 26 September, 27
 October 1986.
 Moira Gaster, 10 October 1986
 Professor Max Hamilton, 13 January, 23 May 1985
 Dennis Hamlyn, 26 September 1987
 Alexander Tudor-Hart, 24 May 1985
 Margot Heinemann, 7 November 1986
 Douglas Hyde, 20 October 1986, 16 March, 12 May, 8 June, 11 December 1987,
 15 January, 17 February, 3 March, 21 April, 1 September, 12 October
 1988, 22 February, 24 February, 14 March, 3 May, 6 June, 22 June, 9
 August, 17 October, 8 December 1989, 7 February 1990
 Monty Johnstone, 14 April, 27 April 1983
 John Kay, 21 November 1985, 21 February 1986
 Nigel Kelsey, 13 April, 30 November, 19 May 1983, 13 March 1985
 Bill Laithwaite, 30 April 1985

Malcolm MacEwen, 24 December 1984
 Bill Moore, 13 March 1989
 Hugh Morris, 4 April 1985 (letter to J. Kay, copy to me).
 Leslie Nash, 27 May 1985
 Eric Porter, 3 March 1985
 Arnold Rattenbury, 17 November 1988, 2 April, 27 April, 18 May 1989
 Dr. Harold Rose, 23 July 1988
 Doreen Rudé, 3 April 1989
 Andrew Saint, 1 August 1986
 Monte Shapiro, 29 November 1986
 Colin Siddons, 3 September 1987, 10 January 1988
 Brian Simon, 12 March 1985
 Dick (R.W.) Toms, 5 June 1984, 10 June 1985
 Angela Tuckett (Gradwell), 12 December 1987, 31 January 1989 (plus entry
 written on Cecil Powell for the *Dictionary of Labour Biography*)
 Edward Upward, 8 December, 10 October 1987
 John Vickers, 28 March 1983

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For a Lasting Peace, For a People's Democracy, 1948-1951
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International Press Correspondence (continued as *World News and Views*), 1925-1938
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Labour Monthly, 1921-1980
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Leiston Leader (Leiston CP), 1948-1952 (N.B. first number January 1936)
London District Committee Bulletin (London District CP), 1951-1953
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