



Fourth International

A JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL MARXISM PUBLISHED BY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

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Editors: Tom Kemp, Cliff Slaughter

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Just out!



PROBLEMS OF THE CHINESE REVOLUTION

by Leon Trotsky

The tempestuous events which have transformed China and the world situation in the past 40 years and the tasks with which Marxist revolutionaries are confronted today have enhanced the importance of this book. This volume is invaluable for the light which it sheds on a crucial and tragic episode in the history of the Chinese working class and peasantry. But its principal concern is with the tactics and strategy of world revolution. It forms part of a continuous struggle for theory waged by Trotsky and the Left Opposition which began in the early 1920s and is continued today by the International Committee of the Fourth International.

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EDITORIAL

AS WE GO TO PRESS, the French franc once again enters the world economic scene as the immediate major source of instability and imminent crisis. The Pompidou Government takes unprecedentedly severe measures to actually halve public expenditure in a whole series of departments, all in response to a flight from the French reserves of nearly £500 million in one month. What better indication could there be of the confidence of the French bourgeoisie in their own regime in France and of the new President and government who have replaced de Gaulle? What better proof is needed of the analysis made by the International Committee of the Fourth International and its sections: that the survival of de Gaulle after May-June 1968 could only postpone the crisis and the development of the revolution in France; that the November currency crisis was the inevitable consequence of the Gaullist *failure* to settle matters with the working class; and that the fall of de Gaulle in the April 1969 referendum was a great blow struck by the proletariat not only at the French but at the European and the United States capitalist classes, as well as at the counter-revolutionary Stalinist bureaucracy and its international policy?

All the major capitalist countries are confronted with the same changing relationship of class forces whose results we have seen in France.

With Wilson's acceptance of the TUC's proposals for industrial discipline, and the abandonment of the Labour government's proposed anti-union legislation, a new stage is marked in the political relations between the classes in Britain. Undoubtedly, the ruling class and the Tories intend to return to the question of anti-trade union laws when they are returned to office. They calculate that the TUC leadership's actions in industrial disputes, together with the disillusionment in the Labour government, will divide and confuse the working class in the intervening months. Then they hope to take advantage of the threatening crisis and unemployment, together with the possibility, as they calculate, of one or two heavy strike defeats for important sections of the workers, to inflict new reactionary penal laws on the trade unions.

However, the perspective for the coming months is decided above all, not primarily by the employers' plans, but by the actual relation of class forces, against the background of the developing economic crisis, together with the intervention of conscious political leadership basing itself on a Marxist estimate of this relation. The employers and the Tories had previously worked on the assumption that the Wilson government would leave them with a body of anti-union legislation which would have effectively paved the way for their own plans. In the past six weeks they have been compelled to recognize that Wilson could not achieve this. Together with the prices and incomes policy, the anti-union legislation has been pushed aside by the strength of the working class emerging from the boom years of the 1950s and 1960s. Finally, the capitalist press and political spokesmen openly advised Wilson to drop the legislation and leave it to the Tories, or even to combine with the Tories to carry it through. They were responding to an *international* trend in the working class, which is connected with the world economic crisis. Neither in France nor in Britain nor in any other advanced capitalist country has the bourgeoisie found a way to deal politically with the undefeated working class which has gone through the post-war years and the boom. This is the content of the utter collapse of incomes policy and Labour government legislative reform as methods of controlling the working class in Britain. Eighteen months ago President Johnson was talking about the USA, in view of growing balance of payments problems, turning to an 'incomes policy' solution of the British type. The strength and combativity of the working class in all the advanced countries has combined with the development of the monetary crisis and threat of recession to push the ruling class necessarily back into considering more 'classical' solutions: trade war, unemployment, wage cuts, and the imposition of political repression.

But they are faced in Britain, as everywhere else, with a real political crisis. They have seen only the *beginning* of the power which the working class can bring to bear. In Britain for example, the incomes policy was smashed by a series of

separate working-class struggles which, while extremely militant, were basically defensive—they did not yet go beyond the traditional wages framework; the Merseyside dock strike of October 1967, the threatened rail and engineers' strikes of 1968, and the Fords and Leyland disputes of 1969, while having political *implications* in relation to government policy and the fight for leadership in the unions, were at the same time the mature expression of the organized strength of the British working class on wages questions. The essential point here is that *even this* level of struggle, with the strength and political weight of the class so far expressed only obliquely through the treacherous TUC General Council and the Parliamentary Party's divisions, effectively halted the government's plans.

Now the employers and the Tories are undoubtedly vulnerable to the impact of this same strength, and they will have to encounter it under conditions where the revolutionary movement will have unprecedented opportunities for carrying forward its struggle against Stalinism and all varieties of opportunism. Nothing substantial whatsoever has been handed to the next Tory government by the Wilson administration. On the contrary, as some Tory commentators have anticipated, the workers are encouraged by this failure of Wilson to hand them over bound hand and foot to the Tories. Notwithstanding all the disadvantages for the working class which arise in conditions of unemployment (and unemployment is a certain result of the world economic crisis and Jenkins' policies) we can say that, within the working class at its present level of strength and confidence, the growth of unemployment will be a radicalizing factor in the workers' movement. The first lay-offs and the first serious threat of large-scale unemployment, coinciding as it will with the prospect or the fact of a general election, will give great impetus to the basic force of anti-Tory feeling in the working class. Having thrown back the plans of Wilson and Castle, the working class will make big political experiences in the struggle to find the political road to defeat the Tories and the employers in a direct confrontation.

When we say, therefore, that we start from the world economic crisis, we must emphasize that it is *not* a matter of calculating only what the ruling class will be compelled to inflict on the workers, and then how the workers will or will not be able to resist. We are already at a certain stage, a relatively advanced stage, of the political effects of the crisis. The political relationship of forces

now does not flow only from the immediate economic crisis and its changes, but also from the results already established by the successful resistance of the working class in France and Britain, which is itself now a major factor in the capitalist crisis.

* * * *

THE INTENSIFICATION of the crisis of the Soviet bureaucracy, of which the invasion of Czechoslovakia was the sharpest expression since 1956, takes place in close inter-relationship with the crisis of capitalism. World imperialism seeks to find a way between monetary collapse and a new depression by solving its problems at the expense of the working class. The resulting intensification of class conflict, especially in Western Europe, places the socialist revolution on the order of the day. The mounting offensive spirit of the European working class is as menacing for the Stalinist bureaucracy as it is for the bourgeoisie. The whole policy of 'peaceful co-existence', based upon the division of the world into spheres of influence and an agreement to maintain the status quo, would be exposed and smashed if the working class won major victories in either the East or the West of Europe. At the same time, the Soviet bureaucracy passes on to an open offensive against the Chinese Revolution, and seeks, in agreement with Nixon, to impose a compromise settlement in Vietnam.

Thirty years ago the signature of the Germano-Soviet Pact caused little more than temporary confusion and a few defections in the Communist Parties. Most members accepted the pact as a necessary tactical turn to defend the conquests of October, whatever their doubts. At the same time the 'democratic' and 'left' allies won to the Popular Front from the middle class deserted in droves to become defenders of the 'democracy' of their 'own' nation-states.

Stalin's opponents had been exterminated in the Soviet Union and isolated and slandered everywhere else. The working class stood at the end of a decade of unemployment, demoralisation and defeat and faced a new and murderous war. The prestige of Stalin stood high and grew still further after the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union in June, 1941, and during the war. As a force in the working-class movement the Communist Parties then went through a period of rapid growth in influence and organisation under the leadership of the hand-picked cadres chosen by Moscow in the late 1920s and 1930s. Under the command

of men like Thorez and Togliatti the decisions of Yalta and Potsdam were carried through without question. The Communist Parties in Western Europe thus played an indispensable part in the re-establishment of the bourgeois state and the salvaging of the capitalist economy. In the East European countries occupied by the Red Army the old property relations could not survive and, though under bureaucratic and military control, property relations consistent with the rule of the working class were established.

To look back at this period and to examine the situation of the world communist movement today is to measure the full extent of the crisis of Stalinism. No longer do the national party leaders accept unquestionably the needs of the Soviet bureaucracy as the guide for their own policies. Even weak parties like the British display an unaccustomed 'independence', which amounts in fact to an adaptation more directly to their own ruling class and its reformist agents. In Eastern Europe, first Tito and then, a decade later, after the Hungarian Revolution, other Communist leaderships began to break out of Moscow's leading-strings. The Rumanian Stalinists have gone furthest on national lines, despite their one-time complete dependence on Russian support. Most significant of all was the development in Czechoslovakia with the removal of the docile and obedient Novotny leadership which had managed the country for 20 years. Very rapidly, in the early part of 1968, all the signs of maturing political revolution began to become manifest in that country. The brutal irruption of Soviet and other Warsaw pact troops in the early hours of August 21, despite the efforts of Dubcek to hold the tide in check and find a modus vivendi with Moscow, gave evidence of the depth of the crisis which now besets the rule of the bureaucracy.

The suppression of the political revolution in Czechoslovakia has closed the door to the only way out of the economic, social and political crisis of the bureaucratic regime. Inevitably, the Stalinist ruling caste must now re-impose police and censorship measures on the working class and its allies. At the same time, economic measures are taken which bring unemployment and above all a drastic rise in the cost of living. The conditions are prepared for an even more explosive confrontation between the working class and the bureaucracy. What has happened in Czechoslovakia reflects a fundamental crisis not only in that country but throughout Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union itself. The mounting vocal opposition of writers, historians and others, their insistence

on an accounting with the history of Stalinism, their growing claim to be the only true defenders of the conquests of the October Revolution, herald a mighty wave of revolutionary struggle being prepared among the workers and the youth.

As the inconclusive assembly of Communist Party world leaders showed, the Stalinist movement is no longer what it was. It now has to cope with a situation very different from that of the 1930s where it is impossible to disguise the fact that it has passed definitely to the side of the preservation of the bourgeois social order. The role of the French Communist Party in the May-June events was a striking confirmation of this. Never had the leadership had to struggle so hard with its own militants to win them over to support the line. Never have the arguments given to justify a betrayal been so thin and unconvincing. Only two months later the same Communist Party was obliged to express its doubts about Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia. In the other Communist Parties, too, the events in France and then the Czech drama have shaken the party members, stimulated doubts and discussion and weakened the hold of the apparatus. With the new and forthcoming upsurge of the working class the Stalinist bureaucracy will less and less be able to play the role of a brake. The international crisis is reflected even in the parties which retain a strategically vital position in the working class, particularly in France and Italy. In the smaller parties the decomposition has reached a more advanced stage and the possibility of their exercising any real influence over the development of the class struggle has been greatly reduced.

Operating on the international scale, the Stalinist bureaucracy in Moscow draws its own conclusion from the events of 1968. It fears the proletarian strength of May-June, which eventually removed de Gaulle, just as much as does the bourgeoisie. It fears that successful workers' revolution in Western Europe would be the signal for political revolution in Czechoslovakia and throughout Eastern Europe, and even in the USSR itself.

For these reasons, the Russian Stalinist leaders have tried desperately to ensure the Republican President Nixon of their desire to collaborate in Europe. Thus Kosygin and Brezhnev press for all kinds of European security guarantees as well as plans for economic co-operation, hoping that imperialism will stabilise Europe. It promises to collaborate, as Nixon reported on his return from his 1968 international tour, in clearing up the 'trouble-spots' like Vietnam and the Middle East. Meanwhile it hastens, through provocations and

calumny, to work for the isolation of the Chinese Revolution. It condemns the Chinese leaders as advocates of a third world war in order to consolidate its own alliance with the imperialists, as well as to isolate the Chinese revolution from the struggles of the masses in the rest of Asia, and all over the world, thus preserving the relative equilibrium of international class forces upon which the bureaucracy rests.

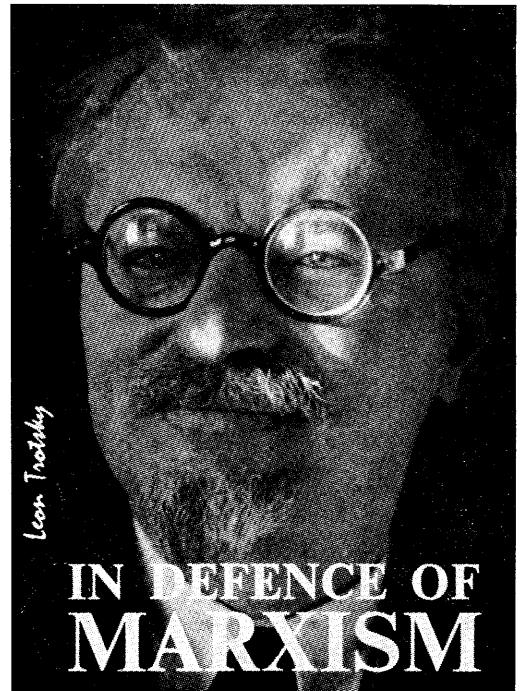
At the recent Moscow Conference of Communist Parties, the Kremlin bosses tried to re-impose what they could of the old orthodoxy. They desperately wanted to set the seal on their 'normalization' of Czechoslovakia, and to be able to guarantee to the imperialists their control of the world's Communist Parties. For these reasons they found it necessary to try to regulate as far as possible the divisions within the bureaucracy internationally as well as in the Soviet Union itself. But they are unable to control the extent to which many of the Parties adapt now more directly to their own bourgeoisies. Similarly the national Stalinist bureaucracy in Rumania, like its counterparts in every Eastern European country, will seek out to a certain extent its own, relatively independent, links with imperialism and the world market, within the general principles of 'peaceful coexistence' and 'peaceful competition' elaborated by Moscow itself. The invitation of Nixon to Rumania might not have been timed with Soviet agreement, but it is of course entirely consistent with the course long ago charted and embarked upon by Moscow itself.

The crisis of imperialism presents great opportunities for the Fourth International. It is necessary to work out in each country a tactical line which will force the Communist party leaders to expose the counter-revolutionary nature of their politics before their members and supporters. This is especially so where the Communist Party is the principal party of the working class, as in France, Italy, Greece and other countries. Here the Party must be confronted squarely with its responsibilities, up to and including the forming of a government of which the working class demands socialist policies.

Only by a struggle which will take the working class through such experiences with its reformist and Stalinist leaderships can it be brought to an understanding of the need for an alternative. A propagandist fight against Stalinism and reformism is not sufficient. The task now is to intervene to break the hold and influence of the Stalinist and reformist leaderships on the working class, to expose the crippling effects of their policy and

ideology in practice. The way in which this task is carried forward will obviously depend upon the political weight of the Communist Party in each country and the precise way in which it is affected by the joint crisis of imperialism and the bureaucracy. However, it is clear that this is an international question which requires the strengthening of the Fourth International and a consistent fight for its programme. Workers in the capitalist countries must, while preparing to overthrow their own bourgeoisie, also aid and support the political revolution of the working class in the workers' states. The success of the political revolution both requires this support and will open the way to the revolutionary overthrow against capitalism.

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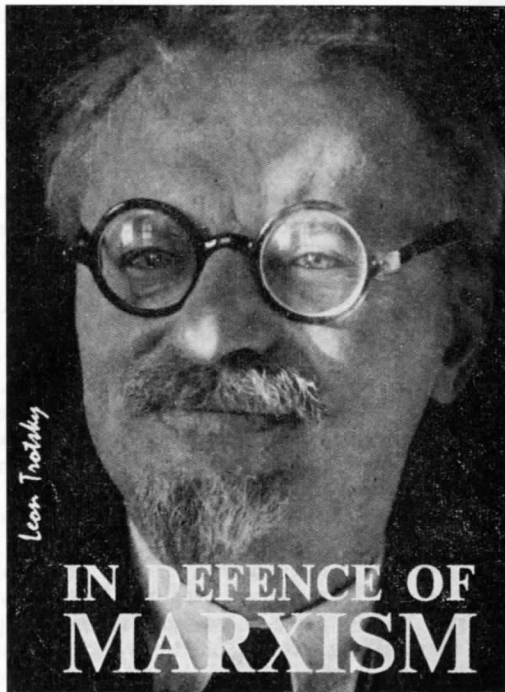
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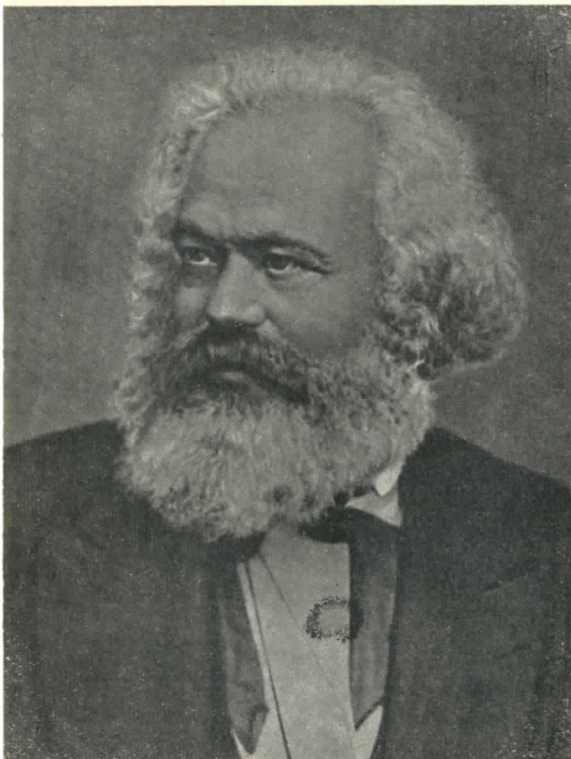
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Karl Marx



Mikhail Bakunin

The article which follows is a translation of the text of a lecture given at a meeting of the Cercle d'Etudes Marxistes de Paris on November 28, 1968.

Marxism

and

During the May-June events petty-bourgeois anarchist trends were prominent, especially among students, and Daniel Cohn-Bendit became an internationally-known figure. Like Herbert Marcuse and others who are enjoying a vogue, he claims that Marxism is out-of-date and denies the role of the working class and of the revolutionary party. Such ideas have been taken up in this country in the revisionist camp and need to be firmly opposed. Bloch shows from history and Marxist theory how absurd many of the anarchist pretensions are and how unfounded are the claims to modernity made by Cohn-Bendit and others. Their central ideas were, indeed, put forward by Proudhon and Bakunin and disposed of by Marx, as Bloch points out, a century ago.

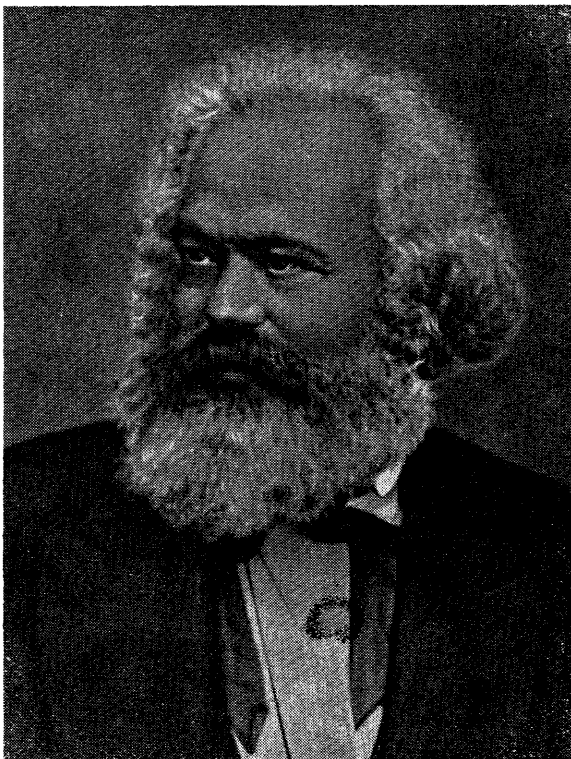
Anarchism

This contribution will therefore repay careful study and should enable the struggle against anarchist trends to be placed on a solid theoretical foundation. The original lecture was followed by an open forum in which a number of anarchists expressed their points of view. [The Editors.]

by **Gerard Bloch**

[Editors' Note.—Quotations are from Daniel Cohn-Bendit's 'Leftism'. These have been translated for this article, and are referred to here by indicating the page numbers in 'Leftism'.]

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IT IS ALMOST exactly a century ago, in September 1868, since Bakunin founded the 'International Alliance of Socialist Democracy', the public cover for a secret organization, in order to wage a struggle inside the International Workingmen's Association against the General Council, which had been directed by Marx for four years since the founding of the International after the St. Martin's Hall meeting.

Bakunin escaped from Siberia, where he had been deported by the Tsar, after many years' imprisonment in the Peter and Paul fortress, and returned to Europe in 1862. In 1863 he settled in Italy and there he founded the 'International Fraternity', the first of the secret societies around which his main activity always centred—Marx, on the other hand, worked to bring together the proletarian masses in their class organizations, around the International. In September 1867 Bakunin joined the 'League of Peace and Freedom', an international organization of bourgeois democrats, hoping to use it as an instrument for introducing his own ideas into the International. But the International, determined to stick to a class line, firmly rejected the League's proposals for unification at its Brussels Congress (September 1868). Bakunin, who had only joined the International as an individual member in July of the same year, then broke with the League and founded the Alliance, which called on the General Council of the International to recognize its programme and rules. Thus began the historic conflict between Marx and Bakunin, a conflict between two different programmes, two strategies for revolution, two conceptions of history and of society.

To see that this conflict has a renewed relevance today, if indeed it ever ceased to be relevant, it is sufficient to quote Cohn-Bendit's reply to the question: 'Whom do you recognize as having influenced your ideas? Marx, first . . .?' when he said: 'I am, if you like, a Marxist in the same way Bakunin was. Bakunin translated Marx and, in his view, Marx had not developed new theories, but, starting from the theories of bourgeois consciousness, had formulated the possibility of a revolutionary social consciousness. Bakunin has influenced me more . . .'

Cohn-Bendit, of course, made an enormous howler in describing Marx as the theoretician of the antagonism between two sets of ideas and not of the struggle of the exploited class against the exploiters; in addition to which he prefers to forget that Marx was above all, a revolutionary, always ready to abandon or postpone his theoretical research to take up his post in

the struggle, as he did in Germany in 1848, or to provide the International in its early years with a theoretical, political and organizational structure and devote himself, with tireless patience, to the day-to-day work of the General Council. But, most of all, Cohn-Bendit is incapable of understanding that for Marx, revolutionary theory and practice were indissolubly linked, to such an extent that Bernard Shaw, that coryphée of the petty-bourgeoisie, hit the nail on the head when he wrote, intending to belittle Marx, that in *Capital*, Marx talks about the bourgeoisie like a war correspondent in the class war. But we do not propose to go into all these questions here.

If the present revival of anarchist ideas can very largely be explained by the fact that many young people, disgusted with Stalinism, confuse Stalinism with genuine Marxism—this would make a detailed comparison of Marxist and anarchist positions all the more necessary. Furthermore, it is essential to put forward, in opposition to anarchist ideas, a genuine Marxist view, not reformist, Stalinist, centrist or revisionist distortions of Marxism. If, 51 years ago, at the beginning of 'State and Revolution', Lenin had to point out: 'In such circumstances, in view of the unprecedentedly widespread distortion of Marxism, our prime task is to re-establish what Marx really taught'—what words would be required to describe the distortions of Marxism existing today, after 45 years of Stalinism? Today, to cite but one example, when someone like Herbert Marcuse can in cold blood give the title *Soviet Marxism* to a work summarizing the ideology of the Soviet bureaucracy! Finally, if, for us Marxists, anarchist ideas are, in the last analysis, the result of the pressure of petty-bourgeois layers on the proletariat, that in no way absolves us from the obligation—quite the opposite, in fact—of getting down to an analysis of the ideas as such. Only by an analysis of their content can we throw light on their social roots.

We therefore propose to compare succinctly the Marxist and the anarchist positions on the following four problems: the nature of the revolutionary forces in our epoch; society after the social revolution; the State; and the relation between the masses and their vanguard. For contemporary anarchist views we shall refer mainly to the review *Noir et Rouge*¹, which over the last few years has systematically attempted to

1 *Noir et Rouge*. French journal, mouthpiece of an anarchist-communist tendency in the so-called 'libertarian' movement. [Ed.]



Herbert Marcuse : enjoying a vogue

define the teachings of anarchism in a precise way. Its failure is, in our opinion, all the more significant. Finally, in passing, we shall settle a few accounts with revisionists who claim to be Marxists whilst distorting Marxism.

Where are the forces for revolution?

In his main theoretical work *Statism and Anarchy*, written in 1873 shortly before ill-health obliged him to cease all activity, Bakunin, in a polemic against Marx, gave his views on this topic quite unequivocally:

Nowhere is the social revolution as near as in Italy, yes, nowhere, not excepting Spain even, although the latter is officially in the middle of a revolution, and in Italy everything is apparently calm. In Italy an entire people awaits the social revolution and day by day advances consciously towards it. You can imagine how widely, how sincerely and passionately the proletariat has accepted and continues to accept the programme of the International. There does not exist in Italy, as in many other European countries, a separate layer of the working class, part of which is already privileged, thanks to high wages, and even boasts a certain acquaintance with literature and which is so imbued with bourgeois ideas, aspirations and vanity that the workers who belong to this milieu differ from the bourgeois only in their social position, not their politics. In Germany and Switzerland especially there are many workers of this type, whereas in Italy there are very few, so

few that they are lost in the mass and have no influence over it. What predominates in Italy is 'a proletariat in rags'.² Messrs. Marx and Engels and in their wake the whole school of German social-democracy refer to it with the utmost contempt, quite wrongly, because it is in the 'proletariat in rags', and not in the layer which has risen to the middle class, that the spirit and the power of the coming social revolution is to be found.

We shall deal with this point in greater detail later; for the moment we shall do no more than draw this conclusion: it is precisely because of this massive preponderance of the proletariat in rags in Italy that the propaganda and organization of the International Workingmen's Association have taken their most enthusiastic and most genuinely popular form in that country; and for that very reason propaganda and organization have overflowed from the towns and quickly won over the rural population.

Bakunin also includes the intellectuals among the revolutionary forces, especially poor students who 'bring positive attainments, methods of abstraction and analysis, as well as skill in organizing and forming alliances, which in turn create the enlightened fighting force without which victory is inconceivable'.

As for the workers in the advanced countries, as he writes a bit further on, they are 'not desperate enough'.

You can see how Bakunin's method is opposed to Marx's. Marx, working to provide the struggle of the proletariat for socialism with a scientific basis, which could stand up to any test, came up against the Utopian ideas of Weitling, who, like Bakunin, considered only the lumpenproletariat to be really revolutionary. Bakunin's method is idealist. He looks for the source of the drive to revolution in the desperate *feelings* of the poorest layers, particularly of the peasantry, and he sees their lack of culture as an advantage.

These uncultured masses need leaders. They cannot find leaders in their own ranks because of their lack of culture, but they will find them in the intelligentsia particularly.

We shall now hear what Cohn-Bendit has to say:

It is of prime importance to state forcefully and dispassionately that in May 1968 in France the industrial proletariat was not the revolutionary vanguard of society. It was the heavy rearguard. The most conservative layer, the most mystified,

2 In German, 'lumpenproletariat', a term which has passed into common usage since the 'Communist Manifesto. [G.B.]

the most caught up in the traps and snares of modern bureaucratic capitalism was the working class . . . This assertion . . . cannot be explained away purely in terms of an analysis of labour bureaucracies . . . The students, for the most part, are not poor; confrontation aims at the hierarchical structure, oppression in comfortable surroundings . . . Besides, in the French working class there are wide areas of real poverty, wages less than 500 francs per month, dirty noisy factories without air-conditioning, where workers are bawled out by the foreman, the overseer, the works' engineer. Finally you have 20th century industrial France, which raises, in the context of relative well-being, the problems of the relation between the leaders and the led and those of the aims and objectives of society.³

And after a lot more on the same lines he concludes: 'The revolutionary students can play a very important part in changing this picture'.⁴

Thus, for Bakunin, the industrial proletariat is not the motive force of revolution because it is not poor enough; for Cohn-Bendit it is the rear-guard because it is *too* poor. But what they both have in common is the idea that the vanguard, the revolutionary cadres, are the students—precisely because, according to Cohn-Bendit's definition, they are not poor and have no vulgar material preoccupations . . . It would be interesting to find out what French students Cohn-Bendit went around with, who were so well-off. What is more interesting is the attack on the Marxist thesis of the revolutionary hegemony of the proletariat made by contemporary theoreticians of 'confrontation' a century after Bakunin, with different, even opposite arguments. The most important fact in May-June 1968 was not ten million strikers, but the palavers in the Sorbonne . . . And the lumpen 'katangais'⁵ were the real cream, vanguard of the vanguard!

We shall now descend even further and bring up these unforgettable lines from the book by the revisionists Bensaïd and Weber:⁶

The revolutionary opposition, which had disappeared for a long period, was revived in May by the student movement. It took on this role.

3 *Leftism*, p. 125. Translated from the French text and not taken from the English version of Cohn-Bendit's book. [Ed.]

4 *Ibid.*, p. 125.

5 Mercenaries said to have fought in Katanga who were allowed to instal themselves in the Sorbonne while the students were in control of the buildings. [Ed.]

6 Leaders of the Jeunesse Communiste Revolutionnaire, inspired by Ernest Mandel and the revisionist trend he represents. [Ed.]



Wilhelm Weitling like Bakunin considered only the lumpenproletariat to be really revolutionary

Carried forward by the general upsurge of struggles, the student movement played the role of vanguard which had been abandoned by the workers' parties.⁷

And further:

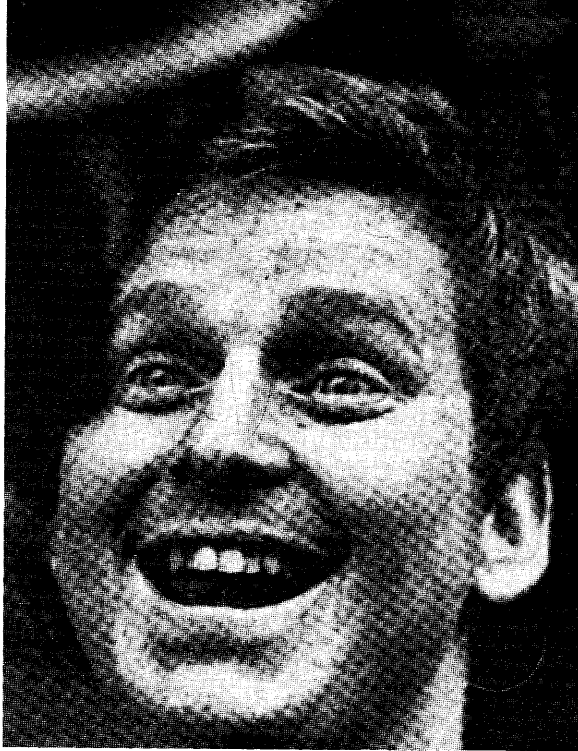
[The students] came to line up alongside the working class in struggle; but, on the other hand, it was the most resolute workers, the most militant, who demanded they come to the Sorbonne . . . Faced with the bankruptcy of the Communist Party and the CGT, the leading workers turned to the students as a substitute, an alternative leadership.⁸

This predestination of the students to lead the working class has its theoretician: Ernest Mandel, of course. Speaking at the Mutualité on May 9, he said nothing about 'neo-capitalism' or about 'structural reforms', on which, it is well-known, he is the specialist—nor did he talk about the epicentre of the revolution, to be found, once and for all, in the backward countries—no, he presented, according to Bensaïd and Weber 'a noteworthy analysis of the student revolt in the imperialist centres, based on a new appreciation of the position occupied by intellectual labour-power in the process of production'.⁹ For, believe

7 *Mai 1968*, p. 142.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 158.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 130.



Daniel Cohn-Bendit: palavers in the Sorbonne more important . . . lumpen 'Katangaies' in this vanguard

it or not: 'All the present-day features of the student milieu must be traced to a fundamental phenomenon, emphasized by Comrade Mandel on May 9 at the Mutualité; namely the reintegration of intellectual labour into productive labour, the transformation of men's intellectual capacities into major productive forces of society'.¹⁰

'Intellectual labour-power'?

We must now spend a little time on these theories, the essence of which is common to Mandel and the Stalinists, and which are supposed to be based on certain passages in the first manuscript of *Capital*. Marx's notes recently appeared in a French translation under the title: *Fondements de la Critique de l'économie politique* (Foundations of the critique of political economy).¹¹

All those who, like Mandel and Pablo, have rejected the Transitional Programme of the Fourth International, attack first and foremost the famous thesis which is the cornerstone of the programme: 'Mankind's productive forces stagnate.' They forget that the Marxist concept of productive forces encompasses man as a principal productive force

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹¹ Sometimes known as the *Grundrisse* after its German title; only relatively short passages have been translated into English so far. [Ed.]

and that, in a society which accumulates destructive force, which condemns the great majority of mankind and an ever-growing portion of the working class of the advanced countries to poverty and hopelessness, the productive forces have effectively ceased to develop.

Confusing science and technique with the productive forces, they maintain that, on the contrary, the productive forces are going through an unprecedented development. This should lead them to conclude that, in line with Marxist theory, the mode of production which is capable of such an upsurge of the forces of production, capitalism, has an unshakable stability. This is the meaning, in fact, of the Stalinists' 'new democracy'. Mandel is naturally more sophisticated. But he still claims—like Garaudy,¹² for instance—that the intellectuals in this society play a new and determining role—that the students are the vanguard, that the working class is no longer the revolutionary class. Thus he links up with Cohn-Bendit. According to all these 'theoreticians', the emancipation of the working class . . . will be the task of the students (the 'intellectuals' according to Garaudy—and we should not forget that in Stalinist language, 'intellectual' is camouflage for 'bureaucrat').

But we come back to the actual text of Marx, upon which they claim to base themselves:

The exchange of living labour against materialized labour, i.e. the manifestation of social labour in the antagonistic form of capital and wage labour, is the final development of the *value-relation* and of production founded on value.

The premise of this relation is that the total sum of labour time, the quantity of labour used, represents the decisive factor in the production of wealth. Now, to the extent that large-scale industry develops, the creation of wealth depends less and less upon the labour-time and the amount of work put into it, and more and more upon the power of the mechanical agents set in motion in the course of the work. The enormous efficiency of these agents, in its turn, bears no relation whatsoever to the labour-time immediately involved in their production . . . It depends rather upon the general level of science and the progress of technology, on the application of this science to production . . .

Real wealth now develops, on the one hand, thanks to the enormous disproportion between the labour-time expended and its product, and,

¹² Roger Garaudy, a leading French Communist Party theoretician, one-time loyal Stalinist, now a critic of some policies of the leadership from a right-wing standpoint which resembles that of the Italian CP. [Ed.]

on the other hand, thanks to the qualitative disproportion between labour, reduced to a pure abstraction, and the power of the production process of which it is in charge; that is what large-scale industry shows us.

Labour thus presents itself not so much as a constituent part of the process of production. Man's behaviour is much more that of a supervisor and controller vis-à-vis the process of production. (This is so not only for machinery, but just as much for the co-ordination of human activities and the circulation between individuals) . . .

The development of fixed capital indicates the extent to which science in general and knowledge have become an *immediate* (direct) *productive force*, and, consequently, to what extent the vital conditions of society's progress have become subordinated to the control of the general intelligence and bear its mark; to what extent society's productive forces are produced not simply in the form of knowledge, but also as immediate (direct) organs of social praxis (practice), of the real living process.¹³

Must we conclude, therefore, that, insofar as science 'becomes an immediate productive force', capitalism becomes capable of guaranteeing a new stage of the progress of civilization?

Marx's point of view is the exact opposite. According to him, this process brings the historical contradiction of capitalism to its culminating point and renders the proletarian revolution so much the more urgent:

So soon as labour, in its immediate (direct) form, has ceased to be the principal source of wealth, labour-time ceases and must cease to be its measure, and exchange-value ceases to be the measure of use-value. The surplus-labour of the masses has ceased to be the condition for the development of wealth in general, just as the non-labour of others has ceased to be the condition for the development of the general forces of the human brain . . .¹⁴

The labouring masses must therefore themselves appropriate their surplus-value. Given this fact *free time* no longer has a contradictory nature. From now on, necessary labour time is measured according to the needs of the social individual, and the development of society's productive forces increases with such rapidity that, while production is calculated according to the wealth of all members of society, so the amount of *free time* increases for everyone.

True wealth means, in fact, the development of the productive force of all the individuals. Henceforth, *it is no longer labour-time, but free time which is the measure of wealth.*

13 *Fondements de la critique de l'économie politique*, Vol. II, pp. 221-223.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 222.

If labour-time is the measure of wealth, that means that wealth is founded upon poverty, and that free time results from the contradictory basis of *surplus-labour*; in other words, this state of affairs assumes that the whole of the worker's time shall be considered as labour-time, and that he himself is dragged down to the level of a simple labourer and subordinated to labour.

This is why the most up-to-date machinery today forces the worker to work longer than did the savage, or rather did the labourer when he worked only with more rudimentary and primitive implements.¹⁵

In a word, in the capitalist system, the transformation of science into an immediate productive force, far from liberating the workers, constantly aggravates their enslavement still more.

At the same time, the capitalist system does not negate itself: its reason for existence is to produce exchange-values, measured by labour-time; and capitalism continues to reduce the amount of labour socially necessary for the production of a given sum of commodities.

Its motive force is the production of surplus-value; however, only *living day-to-day* labour produces surplus-value; and yet the portion contributed to the productive forces by the immense accumulation of means of production, machines, automatic control mechanisms, the product of *past labour*, increases ceaselessly.

Science becomes an immediate force of production: for this reason it is urgent that the working class expropriates capital and socializes the means of production.

Marx's conclusion is the direct opposite of the conclusions drawn by Mandel, Garaudy and company.

Have we gone a long distance from Cohn-Bendit?

Certainly not.

The critics of the 'consumer society'—as if the bad thing about this society was that it satisfied *too well* the material needs of its members!—proceed from the same misunderstanding, a basic one, of the Marxist notion of productive forces—the same replacement of Marx's materialist method by the method of idealism.

That is why they place the students at the head of a revolution which consists of 'criticizing' (e.g., the 'critical university' of Marcuse, the God of Bensaïd and Weber as well as of Cohn-Bendit and Rudi Dutschke) the values of modern society—a revolution in the realm of ideas, an idea of revolution—and not, for the producers, by taking

15 *Ibid.*, p. 226.

possession of the means of production, thus opening the way to the total re-conquering of the forces of production, to the transmutation of the productive forces of mankind into human productive forces, orientated no longer towards the production of exchange values but of use-values, of wealth, of goods for the unlimited satisfaction of the material and spiritual needs of men.

Society immediately after the Social Revolution

We shall again start with Bakunin who talks about 'a current that is in essence new, and which aims to abolish all exploitation and all oppression, be it political, juridical, governmental or administrative, i.e., to abolish all classes through the economic equalization of all property, and the destruction of its last rampart, the State'.

This text demonstrates, among other things, Bakunin's profound ignorance of economics, noted by Marx. He proposes the economic 'equalization' of all property. That means the continuance of the law of value, and of money, which is the measure of property, and their 'equalization'! (The programme of the 'Alliance' already included 'equalization of all classes' which the General Council correctly criticized.) For Marx, socialism, the classless society, pre-supposes a development of the productive forces on such a scale as to allow of the unlimited satisfaction of all needs (and not the 'equal' satisfaction of needs!). It can only reach its full flowering when value, money and the division of labour have withered away and disappeared. For this very reason socialism is not possible on the morrow of the revolution. The development of the productive forces must first be accelerated, and science, the 'direct productive force', be put at the disposal of humanity, not of private profit or the forces of destruction. In the meantime, in the transitional society, value, money, wages continue to exist and wither away gradually whilst alienation gives way to the satisfaction of human needs, productive labour-time diminishes and 'leisure time' increases. For Bakunin, just as revolution is seen as an act of will, 'equality' would be achieved immediately afterwards, by another act of will. That could just as well have happened 2000 years ago as today. So it is no great surprise to find, as we shall see next, that Bakunin's disciple Cohn-Bendit considers 'a profound and thoroughgoing change of thinking' to be necessary!

For our present-day anarchists do not take economic laws any more seriously than Bakunin.

Thus in *Noir et Rouge*, No. 30, we read:

We think that a short-term economic organization in a country must take account of the different regions, reduce the natural economic imbalances, distribute the products equitably. Federation is an economic imperative to avoid, or at least compensate for, the differences in development which lead to internal migrations, antagonisms, political and social divisions. Similarly, it is necessary to reduce the wage-spread as far as possible to avoid the dispersion of capital for individual ends and the consolidation or creation of social castes, tending to preserve their own existence by co-option, when economically, fundamentally, the only worthwhile criterion is value or capacity. This value, if it is to be preserved as such, must be permanently revocable. It is likewise to be expected that the interests and privileges of certain layers of society will disappear and that distribution will be as direct as possible so that the major share in the market value of a product should accrue to the producer, while being easily accessible to the consumer.

. . . Nor do we think that it is necessary to establish a transitional stage between capitalism and the economic measures we have described.

. . . Finally, we do not think that contemporary society, once taken in hand and re-organized, can lead to abundance, or that science can settle all the problems. Such a view is mythical and artificial.

We must work uncompromisingly today within the framework of the society we live in.

This needs no commentary. Of course it will all be achieved 'within the framework' of *capitalist* 'society', in the grip of the law of value, under the benevolent eye of the capitalist State . . . There will be no abundance, we shall all tighten our belts 'equally' together! Which inevitably brings to mind the anarchist Trotsky knew in his youth, who in reply to the question, 'How will the railways run in an anarchist society?' made this unbeatable reply: 'Why the hell should I want to travel on the railways under anarchism?'

The old favourite of 'self-management' is no different. We shall skip the glorious experiments in self-management carried out in May in this laboratory or that University Institute, setting aside such vulgar realities as the relations of the laboratory or the Institute with the rest of the world, with loans, grants, wages fixed by the capitalist state, etc. . . . not to mention the 'experiments in self-management' in this or that small firm, ignoring its relations with the capitalist market, the banks, etc. . . . Cohn-Bendit is in this respect no more imaginative than Bakunin or *Noir et Rouge*. After preaching 'a

profound and thoroughgoing change of thinking'¹⁶ he writes:

The abstract relation between things having value is incarnated in money, another abstract power, incarnating in turn the play of laws which in all real respects are beyond the control of men in general. Labour power, on the other hand, is a characteristic common to all men. The measure of the time each producer devotes to labour is the hour of labour-time. And the measure which allows us to calculate labour-time (crystallized in all the products of human activity, with a few exceptions: scientific research and other creative work) is the hour of average social labour-time, the basis of the communist production and distribution of goods.

But, you may ask, what is the difference between value-money and the 'consumption-note' calculated on the basis of an hour of average social labour-time? In the capitalist regime exchange is the expression of a basic fact: the immediate producer is not master of the means of production and social labour belongs to the ruling classes. The latter divide the products as a function of 'property rights', 'the degree of skill', the laws of the market and other laws, according to an enormous number of factors and rules, sometimes corresponding to reality but always distorted by the division of society into classes—of which trade union organizations are one expression. But when average social labour-time serves as a base for calculating production and consumption there is no longer any need for a 'wages policy'; the productive forces, i.e., the will of the producer or the existing productive capacities, automatically determine the volume of consumption, global as well as individual.¹⁷

This whole rigmarole boils down very neatly to Proudhon's theories of 'constituted value', theories which consist in preserving the good side of capitalism after destroying the bad, 'organizing' capitalism, 'regulating' the law by organizing 'direct exchange of their products' measured in labour-time between the producers—in other words a return to handicrafts and small-scale agricultural production. All of which was refuted by Marx—122 years ago. Cohn-Bendit is definitely right. He is a disciple of Marx, after the fashion of Bakunin. This Cohn-Bendit also pronounces himself in favour of a 'plan, the broad lines of which would be put before everybody and which would be decided by everybody'¹⁸ through a system of councils. What he does not seem to have realized is that once adopted by a majority, the plan necessarily becomes law for everyone,

16 *Leftism*, p. 117.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 119-120.

because it is an entity—and therefore presupposes a certain degree of constraint, in other words these councils will pay a political role, in short, they will exercise state power! It is only when abundance makes any kind of limitation on consumption pointless, even in the form of labour-time notes, that 'rule over men will make way for the administration of things'.

The State

The mystique of the State, carefully cultivated by the bourgeoisie—the State whose 'reason' is not of this world, the State which like God is endowed with a capital letter by the bourgeoisie—is mystified in a reverse way by the anarchists. For them, the State is not an historical product of the division of society into classes, which cannot be 'abolished' and must disappear with class society—it is a phenomenon in itself, the incarnation of the devil. Here are a few paragraphs from Bakunin's *Statism and Anarchism*, with the comments Marx wrote in the margin of his copy:

B.—If there is a State, it must necessarily involve dictatorship, and therefore slavery; a State without slavery, open or concealed, is unthinkable—and that is why we are the enemies of the State. What does 'the dictatorship of the proletariat' mean?

M.—It means that the proletariat, instead of struggling in isolation against the economically privileged classes, has acquired enough power and organization to employ general coercive measures in the struggle against them. But it can only use economic measures which destroy its own characteristic of being a class of wage-earners and thus, its class nature. Its rule is therefore terminated when its victory is complete.

B.—There are about 40 million Germans. Will they all be members of the government?

M.—Of course. For the whole thing begins with the self-government of the Commune.

As you can see, Marx and later Lenin saw the workers' State as being one in which 'every housewife' should exercise State power. It should also be remembered that Marx concluded in 1852 that the proletariat could not take over the old bourgeois State machine but would have to destroy it. We know what conclusions he was to draw from the Paris Commune, conclusions which Lenin took up and extended in *State and Revolution*. This causes *Noir et Rouge* to make the rather naive statement that:

The anarchistic attitude of Marx did a lot, unfortunately, to propagate the idea of a dictator-

18 *Ibid.*, p. 117.



The CNT-FAI : nearly a million members organized in the centres of production—a persuasive force

ship among the masses . . . Lenin fully exploited this confusion in *State and Revolution*.(!)

The necessity for a (state) power as an instrument of the masses, the need for a concentrated force to lead the fight against the bourgeoisie, and the *cul-de-sac* of anarchism, have been resoundingly proved in the Spanish Revolution. It is well-known that when all the conditions for a government of workers' councils had been fulfilled, when the central committee of the Catalonian militia was virtually the organ of the workers' power, the leaders of the organization to which the majority of the Spanish workers workers belonged, the CNT-FAI, entered the 'republican' bourgeois government and participated in the reconstruction of the bourgeois State, up to and including the repression of the May 1937 workers' insurrection in Barcelona, thereby opening the way for the Stalinist counter-revolution and ultimately for the victory of Franco.

Spain therefore remains a focal point around which anarchist thinking on the State desperately revolves. Thus in *Noir et Rouge* No. 36, one of the Spanish collaborators of this review writes:

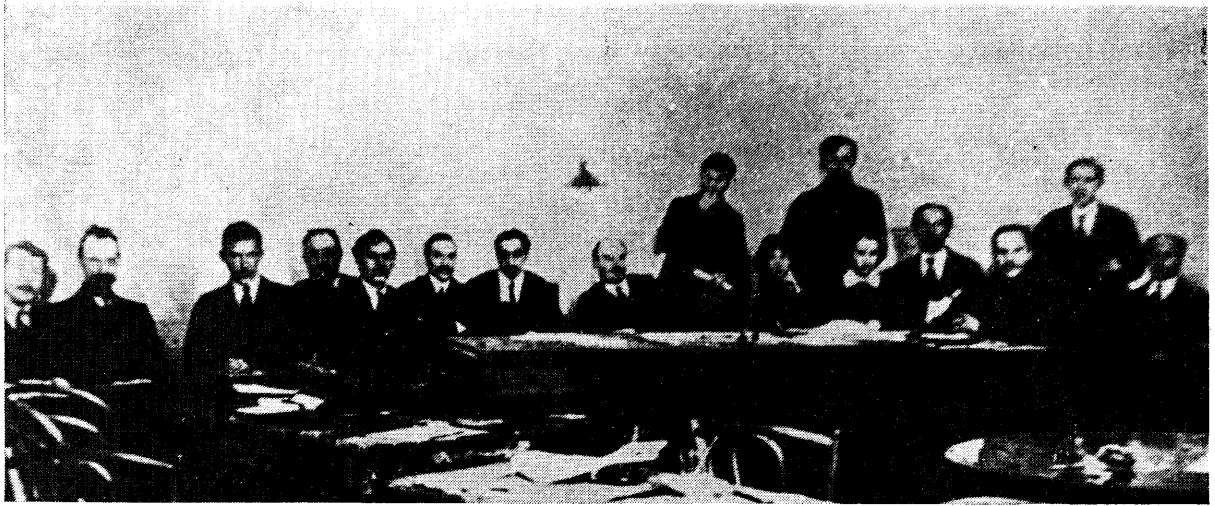
No-one can minimize the importance of the problems posed for the anarchists on July 20, 1936, when they realized they had control of the situation, but did not know what to do with it. We blame them not for retreating from an anarchist

dictatorship, but for having opted for counter-revolution. The dilemma as it was posed, i.e., dictatorship or entry into the government, is false. From the anarchist point of view, joining the government and dictatorship are one and the same. And two like things cannot constitute a dilemma . . .

With these 200,000 armed men and nearly a million members organized in the centres of production, the anarchists represented a respectable economic power and a no less considerable dissuasive force. Work to consolidate, develop and strengthen this force, in the face of the war, the attacks of the State and the revolution, would have made us invincible and at the same time made our work for the anti-fascist cause more effective.¹⁹

As if 'economics' and 'politics' (the State) were separate worlds! As if there could possibly be an 'economic power' which was not the power of coercion of one class over another (in this case, of the working class over the bourgeoisie)! As if 200,000 armed men constituted an 'economic power' unconcerned about the reconstruction of the (bourgeois) 'republican army' or the 'republican police'! . . . This sort of rubbish is not very far from 'student power in the universities, workers' control of the factories, etc.', and police-

¹⁹ *Noir et Rouge*, No. 36, pp. 26-27.



The first Soviet coalition government, January 1918: (l. to r.) Steinberg (Left SR), Brilliantov (Left SR), Alexeyev, Bonch Bruevich, Tomsy, Shlyapnikov, Proshyan (Left SR), Lenin, Stalin (standing), Kollontai, Dybenko (standing), Podvoisky, Chicherin

State power in the Elysée, CRS power in the barracks . . .

But in No. 37 of *Noir et Rouge* another Spanish anarchist has written:

If it had only been a question of revolution, the existence of the government, far from being a factor in our favour, would have constituted an obstacle to be destroyed; the fact is, we had to face up to the requirements of a violent war, with international complications. we were linked to international markets and a world of sovereign states. And to organize and lead this war, in the circumstances in which we found ourselves, we did not have at our disposal an organization capable of replacing the old governmental apparatus.²⁰

In other words, anarchists can carry out a revolution in 'favourable conditions'—peaceful conditions—but not in the real conditions, those of civil war (those of any real revolution). They have not got the necessary 'organization'!

The 'organization' they lack is Marxist theory—the Marxist programme of workers' councils.

Of course, the workers' State—any workers' state—can degenerate. Of course, as the Soviet Union has shown, this degeneration can assume monstrous proportions. It is, however, hardly necessary to recall that the conditions in which the Soviet Union degenerated—isolation of the workers' state in a backward country, in which the proletariat, itself still backward, constituted a weak minority of the population—are scarcely likely to be repeated, and that the possibilities opening up for a victorious working class in Western Europe will be incomparably more favourable, in countries in which the working class, pos-

sessing powerful traditions of organization, is the majority of the population—where the material conditions for the workers' state will from the start be incomparably better—where, in addition, long isolation of the revolution after the first victory is most unlikely.

Of course, any workers' state, because it is at the same time, in Lenin's words, a bourgeois state without the bourgeoisie, will involve bureaucratic tendencies, a danger of degeneration.

Should we therefore in May 1968 have refused to assemble, together with the central strike committee, the concentrated force of the proletariat for the assault on the power of the capitalist class? Is that the reason why we, the Marxists, were the only ones to raise this slogan? Is it not clear that to give up the demand for power to the workers' councils is to give up all idea of overthrowing the bourgeois state?

Let us deal in this connection with a few foolish ideas. 'One party in power and the rest in prison', was never a Bolshevik principle, quite the opposite. The Bolsheviks only used repressive measures against the petty-bourgeois parties reluctantly, because they collaborated with the White Guards in an armed struggle against the Soviet power. Need we remind you that the first Soviet government, following the October Revolution, was a coalition government of Bolsheviks and left Social Revolutionaries? And that it was not the Bolsheviks' doing that the Mensheviks were not associated with it? And that this coalition was broken not by the Bolsheviks, but by their partners?

There remains the question that the measures advocated by Lenin (following Marx) against

²⁰ *Ibid.*, No. 37, p. 23.



Lenin: advocated measures against bureaucratic tendencies

bureaucratic tendencies—recall at any time of the delegates by those who had elected them, limiting the salaries of officials, including government officials, to the level of a workers' wages, etc. may turn out to be insufficient.

That is one of the reasons why—although, in the objective conditions of a defeat of the proletariat internationally, nothing could have prevented the bureaucracy from taking over in the Soviet Union—we, as Marxists, revised one of the 21 conditions of the Communist International on this point by emphasizing in 1946 that the trades unions must preserve their autonomy not only in relation to the workers' State (as Lenin demanded in 1920-1921) but even in relation to the revolutionary Marxist party.

There is also the question that the masses, having experienced Stalinism, will be incomparably more vigilant about any manifestation of bureaucratism, even embryonic, when the revolution is next victorious.

But above all it must be said that the pretension of abolishing the State by decree has the same idealist and voluntarist nature as the claim that 'equality' can be established in the same way (or that you can abolish religion by writing 'Death is everlasting sleep' on cemetery walls). Let us repeat; to give up the struggle for

workers' councils, for the dictatorship of the proletariat, is to give up the fight for the socialist revolution.

The relationship between the masses and their vanguard

On the question of the necessity of an organization for the vanguard of the working class, the same infantilism, mixed up with moral considerations, appears to govern the idea of the anarchists. Of course this does not, for good reasons, prevent them setting up organizations like other tendencies in the labour movement.

Thus in *Noir et Rouge* (No. 18) we read: 'Creating an organization before creating the anarchist man is like beginning to build a house with the roof'. But how can 'the anarchist man' be created in capitalist society? We are not told. It is only assumed that there are 'some ethical factors without which it appears fruitless to build any sort of organization'. These 'ethical factors', seem to consist of asking whether 'an anarchist can be on friendly terms with a fascist' and things of that sort. At this level not much can be added. For Marxists, the organization does not have an 'ethical' but an emphatically political foundation: its programme.

It is perhaps more interesting to consider the way in which Cohn-Bendit sees the relationship between the spontaneous action of the masses and the intervention of a revolutionary organization in the specific case of the occupation of the Sud-Aviation factory at Bouguenais (Nantes) on May 14, 1968, which gave the signal for the general strike. For those honourable gentlemen Bensaïd and Weber the question is simple, as it was for almost all of the press: it was not the starting point of the general strike.

For Cohn-Bendit, the problem is more complex. He writes on page 71 of his book:

Once the general strike had been decreed, a *new step forward* was taken with the occupation of Sud-Aviation at Nantes. [In the English version (p. 67) we have: 'Perhaps the most concrete expression of this new sense of purpose was the occupation of the Sud-Aviation workers at Nantes. The workers, by imitating the students, were rediscovering a form of action that they had far too long discarded while playing the parliamentary game of the Stalinists'.]

Then, on page 98:

On Tuesday, 14th, late in the evening, those occupying the Sorbonne learned that the Sud-Aviation factory at Nantes had been occupied; and this movement, which was *still spontaneous*, was rapidly to spread. (The emphasis in these two passages



Sud Aviation, Bouguenais (Nantes) May 1968: intervention of a revolutionary organization gave the signal for the general strike

added by G.B.) [See page 91 of English version.]
Finally, on page 172:

From May 14 the Sud-Aviation factory at Nantes was occupied and the director was shut in his office . . . The Force Ouvrière trade union contains many left-wing militants. The departmental federation of this trade union has been known for its leftism for many years and is opposed to the national-reformist orientation of the national leadership of Force Ouvrière. It was not by chance therefore that it was the Sud-Aviation factory at Nantes and not some other factory which gave the signal for the strike. [See page 155 of English version.]

Work it out for yourself and take your choice! That must be the reaction of the unhappy reader of the worthy redhead. The reader is in any case not permitted the honour of knowing who these presumed 'leftists' in Sud-Aviation could have been. It was none of his business.

The occupation of Sud-Aviation is, however, a remarkable example of what can be done, in a favourable situation, by a revolutionary organization which has carried out, year in and year out, on the basis of a Marxist programme and slogans, and a tactic worked out at each stage, patient, systematic and persevering work.²¹

But we must now consider in parenthesis the

21 Bloch is referring in particular, of course, to militants in the plant who belonged to the French Trotskyist movement, the Organisation Communiste Internationaliste. [Ed.]

relationship which exists between a revolutionary situation and the revolutionary party.

On two miserable little falsifiers and the motives for their falsification

We open the above-quoted book of Bensaïd and Weber at page 166; these two gentlemen write: 'Much was said in May, from one platform or another, about revolutionary crisis, conditions or situations. It is not enough to choose one's term on the basis of a snapshot which shows only the power vacuum.

To judge more calmly the character of the situation it is useful, at the risk of being thought 'old-fashioned Marxists', to refer to Lenin and to his famous criteria enunciated in *The Collapse of the Second International*. There a situation is called revolutionary when the following four conditions are present:

- that those on top can no longer govern as before;
- that those underneath no longer want to live as before;
- that those in between lean to the side of the proletariat;
- that there exists a revolutionary organization capable of overcoming the crisis through revolution.

To what extent were those essential factors brought together in May?

And naturally they conclude, after lengthy deliberation, that, because there was no 'organized revolutionary force', 'the situation remained pre-

revolutionary' (p. 177). Therefore the working class should not have fought for power. This enables them to avoid explaining why they were hostile to the slogan of a Central Strike Committee (the situation, as you see, was not revolutionary—nor were they either) and to be ironical at the expense of the old-fashioned people who demanded that the workers' organizations call a million workers out on to the Champs Elysées on May 30. We understand why they feel hurt. For our two gentlemen are not 'old-fashioned Marxists' by any means; they are 'neo-Marxists' who have constructed a neo-Lenin for their own convenience. One will look in vain in *The Collapse of the Second International* for the four conditions which they give. On the other hand the following lines, which are worth quoting in full, will be found there:

A Marxist cannot have any doubt that a revolution is impossible without a revolutionary situation; furthermore, not every revolutionary situation leads to a revolution. What, generally speaking, are the symptoms of a revolutionary situation? We shall certainly not be mistaken if we point to the following three main symptoms: (1) when it is impossible for the ruling class to maintain their rule in an unchanged form; when there is a crisis, in one form or another, among the 'upper classes', a crisis in the policy of the ruling class which causes fissures, through which the discontent and indignation of the oppressed classes burst forth. Usually, for a revolution to break out it is not enough for the 'lower classes to refuse' to live in the old way; it is necessary also that the 'the upper classes should be unable' to live in the old way; (2) when the want and suffering of the oppressed classes has become more acute than usual; (3) when, as a consequence of the above causes, there is a considerable increase in the activity of the masses, who in 'peace time' quietly allow themselves to be robbed, but who in turbulent times are drawn both by the circumstances of the crisis and by the 'upper classes' themselves into independent historical action

Without these objective changes, which are not only independent of the will of separate groups and parties, but even of separate classes, a revolution, as a general rule, is impossible. The sum total of all these objective changes is called a revolutionary situation. This situation existed in 1905 in Russia and in all epochs of revolution in the West; but it also existed in the sixties of the last century in Germany, and in 1859-1861 and 1879-1880 in Russia, although no revolution occurred in these cases. Why? Because not every revolutionary situation gives rise to a revolution; revolution arises only out of such a situation when, to the above-mentioned objective changes, a subjective change is added, namely the ability of the revolutionary

class to carry out revolutionary mass actions *strong* enough to break (or to undermine) the old government, which never, not even in a period of crisis, 'falls' if it is not 'dropped' . . .

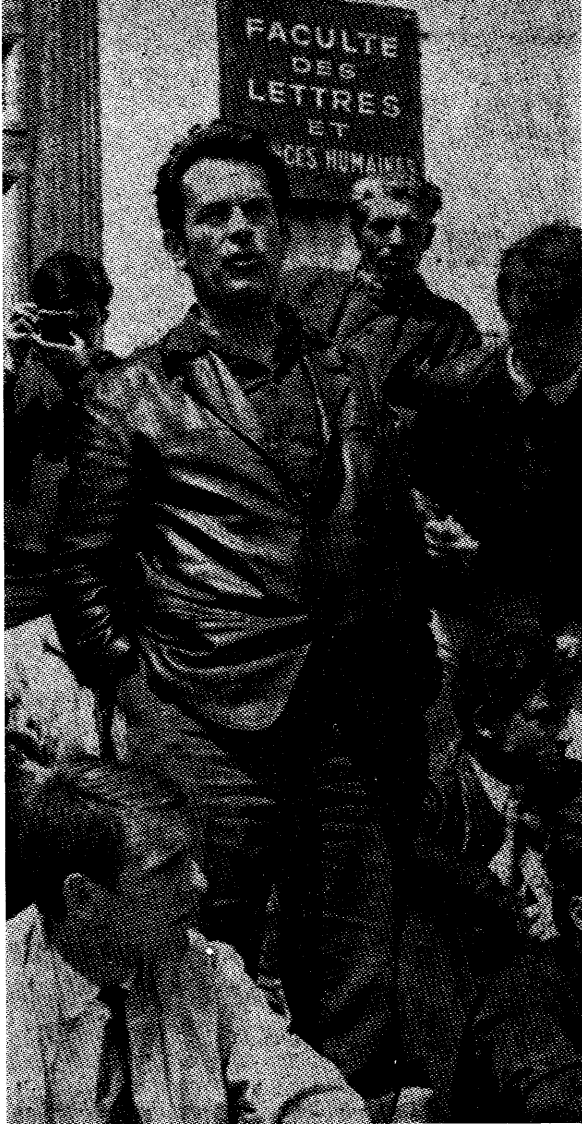
Will this situation last long? And how much more acute will it become? Will it lead to revolution? These things we do not know, and nobody can know. Only the *experience* of the development of revolutionary sentiments and the transition to revolutionary action on the part of the advanced class, the proletariat, will show that. There can be no talk in this connection about 'illusions' or about repudiating 'illusions', since no Socialist ever gave a pledge that this war (and not the next one), that to-day's (and not tomorrow's) revolutionary situation would give rise to revolution. What we are discussing is the undisputed and fundamental duty of all socialists: the duty to reveal to the masses the existence of the revolutionary situation, to make clear its scope and depth; to awaken the revolutionary consciousness and the revolutionary determination of the proletariat, to help it pass to revolutionary actions, and to create organizations, suitable for the revolutionary situation, for work in this direction.²²

The relationship between the objective revolutionary situation and the vanguard, between the masses and the conscious factor, is so clearly indicated in the foregoing that there is very little to add. Yes, the situation was revolutionary in May 1968. That is why it was necessary to define the slogans and strategy of the struggle of the masses for power. It was moreover the only way to move towards the construction of the revolutionary party, the reconstruction of the Fourth International, the indispensable instrument for the final victory of the socialist revolution.

This is what our two neo-Marxists are in no danger of doing; they only lack a programme, a banner and a backbone. They say, to be sure, that the Marxist programme, the Transitional Programme, is outmoded; they do not know what to put in its place and they scarcely care; empiricism is so much more comforting! At least they know one thing: that they are in no danger of having to face the difficulties of a revolutionary situation—because for this it is necessary to have 'an organized revolutionary force' and they haven't the least chance of building one!

Let us return to the problem of the party, and the anarchist criticisms of the idea of the revolutionary party. It is necessary to underline that,

22 This passage is taken from the English translation which appears in the pamphlet *The War and the Second International*, Little Lenin Library Vol. 2, pp. 11 and 13. [Ed.]



Pierre Broué: his History of the Bolshevik Party should be consulted

as in the case of the State, Stalinism has falsified the problem. When one thinks of that party (i.e. the Communist Party) one thinks immediately of a monolithic party related to the masses in the same way as a general staff is related to the army.

Nothing is more foreign to Marxism. The history of the Bolshevik Party (and for this purpose the

book by P. Broué, *Histoire du Parti Bolchevique*, should be consulted), until it was destroyed by the bureaucratic counter-revolution, was that of a constant struggle of tendencies and factions; and it cannot be otherwise for an organization which, subjected to all the pressures of hostile class forces, but armed with the Marxist method, struggles to win leadership of the proletariat and leads it to the assault on bourgeois power.

Drawing the lessons of this experience, the Organisation Communiste Internationaliste (French section of the Fourth International) wrote into its statutes not only the right to form tendencies but also the right to form factions. Was it on these grounds that Saint Marcellin²³ dissolved it?

The life of an authentic revolutionary organization has nothing in common with its bureaucratic caricature. At the Second Congress of the Communist International there were representatives of the Spanish CNT. Lenin and Trotsky hoped that it would join the International without making any conditions regarding its anarchist ideology. Here again it was the anarchists who broke with the Marxist 'sectarians' and not the reverse.

Certainly the revolutionary party can degenerate just as can the workers' state. Social forces hostile to the proletariat can destroy the party of the proletariat. Must it be concluded from this that the proletariat can do without an organization which sums up and puts into conscious terms, in its programme and action, the lessons of the experience of a century and a half of workers' struggles?

As Marxists we consider that this programme is the Transitional Programme of the Fourth International. The Marxists consider that this programme is the expression of the tasks of the proletarian revolution in our epoch, that of the death agony of capitalism. They are ready to debate it, in the framework of working-class democracy, with all proletarian tendencies which effectively struggle against the dictatorship of capital. Does that mean to say that they think that the class struggle has nothing more to teach them? One would have to be a fool to believe that when the greatest revolutionary struggles in history are approaching.

23 The OCI was one of the organizations banned by Minister of the Interior Marcellin in June 1968. [Ed.]

Marxism and Stalinism in Britain 1920-1926

(Part IV)

by M. Woodhouse

This the fourth and concluding instalment of a study of the early history of the Communist Party of Great Britain based on the book by L. J. MacFarlane and original research by the author. The third instalment appeared in **Fourth International**, Volume V, Number 2.

AS INDICATED IN the previous section of this article the practice of the CPGB at its formation was fully representative of the syndicalist and sectarian tendencies which came together in the party in 1920-1921 and whose methods dominated its work during the revolutionary crisis in 1921. The 1921 experience was to be of the utmost significance for the party's future development. It provided the basis for understanding theoretically the limitations of syndicalism in a period of revolutionary industrial struggles and for the party to orientate its practice towards mass work in the unions and Labour Party in conscious preparation for seizing the revolutionary initiative in future conflicts. At the same time, for large sections of the organized working class 1921 stimulated intense hostility towards the labour bureaucracy which had featured so prominently in the betrayal of the miners. With the passing of the worst effects of the 1921 defeat the conditions existed in the unions and the Labour Party for a sympathetic response to the CPGB, and a readiness to follow the practical lead of the party which was to be of crucial importance in the events around 'Red Friday', 1925, and which provided the pre-conditions for its development into a mass organization.

Post 1921 and the first four Congresses

The realization of this potential in the post-1921 situation depended absolutely on the assimilation by the CP of the lessons of the 1921 experience and its relation to the work of the early congresses of the Communist International (CI). The whole emphasis of the second, third and fourth congresses was on the need to develop,

from the groups and parties that adhered to Communism from 1919, parties of the Bolshevik type, based, that is, on the generalized experience of the Russian party and in particular on the experience of 1917. The temporary passing of the post-war revolutionary crisis in Europe had revealed the general inability of the groupings adhering to the CI to provide concrete revolutionary leadership and had underlined the need for basic education of the emergent communist tendencies in the theory of Bolshevism. The work of the third and fourth congresses was particularly important in this context. The emphasis placed by these congresses on the central role of the party, the elaboration of the tactic of the united front, the struggle for the development and application of Marxist theory to the immediate and overall perspectives of the party, all these flowed from the historical experience of the Bolshevik party, combined with the theoretical estimate made of the character of the situation in post-war Europe. In the period of permanent economic crisis ushered in with the 1920s the conditions existed for sharp fluctuations in the consciousness of the working class, for rapid radicalization in reaction to the periodic deepening of the crisis and the predictable attempts of the bourgeoisie to stabilize their system at the expense of the working class. In these conditions the way forward for the constituent parties of the CI could only be through their orientation towards mass work combined with the development of a centralized, disciplined organization and a theoretically trained membership. It was, moreover, only through the constant deepening of theoretical understanding in relation to the work of the party that the relations forged

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between it and the working class could be strengthened and the conditions for consolidating the practical revolutionary leadership of the class understood and realized.

1921-1925 : applying the lessons

For the CPGB as it existed in 1921-1922 the emphasis of the CI on the central role of the party meant a complete break not merely from the practice of the party in 1920-1921 but from the traditions of spontaneity and empiricism which had characterized the Marxist and syndicalist groups over the previous generation and which were in many respects the militant expression of trade union politics. The struggle for a party of the Bolshevik type in Britain required the conscious rejection of these traditions; the transformation, in the first place, of the whole character of the party from the loose groupings devoted to spontaneity typical of the syndicalist period to a disciplined party capable of effective communist work in the mass organizations of the labour movement. In the second place, and no less important, a conscious break was required from the formalized, mechanical Marxism of the pre-1920 period (as analysed in part two of this series) and its replacement by an approach to Marxism which emphasized the need for the systematic application of theory to the work and development of the party. The history of the CPGB in the period 1921-1925 was bound up essentially with the struggle in the party to apply and develop these new methods of work, and in this process the twin questions of party organization and the fight for theory were inextricably connected. This period saw the party move a long way towards overcoming the weaknesses which had attended its inception. With the formation of the National Minority Movement (NMM) in 1924, and the beginning of the Left-Wing Movement in the Labour Party with the launching of the highly successful *Sunday Worker* in 1925, the party began to establish the basic pre-conditions for its emergence as a decisive political force within the labour movement.

These favourable developments were, essentially, the practical expression of the theoretical lessons derived from the experience of 1921 and the work of the early congresses of the CI. They cannot be seen, however, as the outcome of some straightforward, automatic process of reversal of the party's original weaknesses. The movement towards the creation of mass influence in the period before the General Strike was the outcome of a series of struggles within the party,

a process which has to be seen in dialectical terms. By 1925 the party had the potential for rapid growth as a result of its orientation towards mass work, but at the same time it still contained within it, both in the leadership and the branches, a strong disposition towards the empiricist, syndicalist methods characteristic of its formative period. It was still only in a very formal way that the tendencies present at its formation had been overcome by 1924-1925; on questions such as party organization, the relation of theory to practice, the party's grasp of Bolshevik method was necessarily imperfect. By 1925, then, only the pre-conditions for a potentially effective revolutionary party existed, and this was why the experience of 1925-1926, particularly the General Strike, was so crucial. It represented the first decisive test of the political strength of the party as established by the mid-1920s.

Theoretical backwardness and dependance on the CI

The most vital aspect of the development of the CPGB in the early 1920s therefore centred on its ability to apply Marxist theory creatively to the overall work of the party. Without such a development, without the growth of a theoretically trained membership, the work of the party must necessarily be empirical and spontaneous, lagging behind the revolutionary developments in the working class as a whole. In this context, the most striking feature of the CPGB's development was the formal way in which the main aspects of Bolshevik method were adopted. While the permanent crisis in the British economy and the sharp confrontations of workers, employers and the state made clear the vital necessity for a revolutionary solution to the problems confronting the working class, the strongly entrenched traditions of spontaneity, propagandism and empiricism established within the revolutionary movement from the 1900s clashed with, and to some extent negated, the adoption of Bolshevik methods of work. It would, of course, be the purest idealism to consider that the CPGB could develop in any other way than through a conflict between established practice and the struggle to apply communist principles of organization, and it is clear that in shaking off its past practices the party could only develop in a consistently revolutionary direction by reflection upon its past work in the labour movement and conscious efforts to change it in line with Bolshevik principles. Yet although efforts were made in this direction in the early 1920s, the considerable

theoretical backwardness of the party meant that in its endeavours to transcend its past it was very heavily dependent on the assistance, theoretical and practical, of the CI; and what was to be of the utmost significance throughout the 1920s was the party's tendency to rely absolutely for theoretical guidance on the CI. While this guidance was to be vital in directing the CPGB into positive revolutionary work in the early 1920s, notably in the establishment of the NMM, the CPGB's dependent relationship to the CI meant that it became quite impossible for the leadership to understand theoretically and resist the complete change of theory and practice in the CI which flowed from the growth of Stalinism and the international consequences of the 'theory' of Socialism in One Country.

The nature of the relationship of the CPGB with the CI is an essential guide to understanding the degeneration of the CPGB from the later 1920s which followed, in the first instance, from its inability to develop the revolutionary potential in the General Strike. It is, therefore, a major failing on Macfarlane's part that he does not really consider, except in a very formal sense, the inter-relationship between the CPGB and the CI. True, he records the campaign of the CPGB against Trotsky in 1925 in accordance with CI policy, together with the role of the CI in the adoption by the CPGB of the disastrous 'new line' at the end of the 1920s, but nowhere does he place these actions in the general context of the Stalinization of the CI or assess the effects of Stalinism on the work of the CPGB. However, it is demonstrably impossible to understand the overall development of the CPGB in the 1920s unless this is closely related to the role of the CI in this period, and this means considering not only what might be called the more 'dramatic' episodes, which Macfarlane uses to good effect, but also the positive revolutionary work conducted by the CI in the early period of its existence.

The CI fights for Bolshevik principles

It is the work of the CI in this early phase, its encouragement to the CPGB through theoretical training and practical assistance, which Macfarlane virtually ignores. But this assistance was of the utmost importance in laying the basis in Britain for the growth of an effective revolutionary party. In fact, the early years of the CPGB were characterized by the persistent efforts of the CI to educate the party's leadership in Bolshevik principles and to fight against the

tendency to the purely formal application of these methods. The Executive Committee of the CI (ECCI) was acutely aware, not only in relation to the British party, of the dangers implicit in a rigid, mechanical application of the principles of communist organization as laid down by the second congress that would negate the cardinal principle of democratic centralism. The third congress explicitly warned that:

... A formal or mechanical centralization would be nothing but the centralization of power in the hands of a bureaucracy in respect of its domination over other members of the party or the masses of revolutionary workers outside the party . . . and it stressed that the formation of centralized, disciplined parties was inseparable from the creation of a theoretically trained membership fully understanding and participating in the formulation of party policy.¹

The validity of this warning was amply demonstrated as far as the CPGB was concerned. The way in which the theses of the CI on the organization of the party were applied indicated the highly formal, untheoretical approach of the party leadership that was to characterize the relations generally of the CPGB with the CI. Recalling the response of the party to the re-organization in the early 1920s, J. T. Murphy illustrated this point very clearly:

We were of course far from having put into operation all that was required by the CI resolution to reconstitute the new Communist Party. We had made our political declaration of adherence to its principles, but it is one thing to accept a principle and another to apply it to life. The CP was supposed to be a Marxist party, but there were few in it who had more than a nodding acquaintance with the writings of Marx . . .²

Re-organization 1922-1923

The significance of Murphy's observation and the warning of the third congress was revealed in the way the re-organization of the CPGB was carried out in 1922-1923, following the presentation of the report of the Reorganization Commission (largely the work of Palme Dutt) to the Fifth Party Congress in October 1922. The material provided by Macfarlane on the Commission and the way its report was applied is of the utmost value in assessing the extent to which the CPGB was still dominated by the old conceptions; devotion to pure propaganda, to loose, undisciplined party organization and spontaneity.³ Clearly, such an

1 *Theses on Tactics.*

2 J. T. Murphy, *New Horizons*, p. 181.

3 Macfarlane, *op. cit.*, pp. ??

organization was totally unsuited to any serious revolutionary work; as the report noted, centralization and a strong leadership were needed.

At the same time, the way the report was drafted and applied displayed a lack of real political understanding and a tendency to introduce centralization as a purely organizational task divorced from the overall political perspectives of the party. Macfarlane is absolutely correct in pointing out there was no attempt by Dutt to explain how the report related to the political work of the party; as a result, a highly complex, top-heavy structure was imposed on the party in just the way which the theses of the CI had deplored. There was really no attempt at political preparation of the membership and the fact that the centralization scheme was introduced largely through the instrumentality of Dutt and Pollitt was not altogether accidental. The collaboration of these two, the main exponents of the formal and pragmatic approach to party re-organization, marked the beginning of what was to prove a lifetime partnership in the leadership of the CPGB in which they were to play a crucial part in the process of the party's Stalinization. The partnership was an ideal one, based on a division of labour between Dutt, the facile intellectual ready to provide a sophisticated veneer for the policies of Stalinism, and Pollitt, the intensely pragmatic party functionary and speaker. In the immediate circumstances of 1922, of course, their actions were not as yet related to the process of Stalinization, which still lay in the future, but their whole approach to re-organization revealed a conception of party work in general which was at a later date to allow them to play this role very effectively.

Formalism and organizational fetishism

The growing volume of criticism in the party press on the way re-organization had been carried out indicated graphically how divorced the process had been from the political perspectives of the party and from the theoretical preparation of the membership. Murphy effectively summed up the essentials of this criticism when he stated that:

If I were asked what are the principal defects of the party today, I would answer unhesitatingly, formalism, organizational fetishism, and lack of political training . . .⁴

There can be little doubt, from the contributions in the *Workers' Weekly* and the *Communist Review*, that there was serious concern at the abysmal level of theoretical development in the

party at the very time when a breakthrough to mass work was being achieved through the formation of the NMM. Yet on the part of Pollitt there was virtually no recognition or apparent understanding of the political problems posed by party re-organization. For him, it was a purely practical task, and he dismissed with evident contempt the vital points raised by Murphy and others:

The greatest hindrance to the growth of our party is not the lack of political training, it is a number of practical difficulties that our members are meeting with . . . Ask any local organizer in South Wales or Scotland what their biggest problem is, they won't say it was the absence of 'the will to revolution', they will say it was the lack of a common meeting place. Ask them what other things they were up against and we would find it wasn't 'the fetish of mechanical formalism' but lack of finance due to the poverty of the members.⁵

Aversion to theory persists

Given this inbuilt bias on the part of a section of the party leadership at national and local level to treat the question of party development in a purely organizational way, it is possible to pose the important question of how far the CPGB entered the period of its most substantial growth in the 1920s, 1924-1926, with a membership conscious of the revolutionary perspectives open to the party and ready to relate immediate issues of party work to an overall theoretical understanding of the chances for revolutionary development associated with the deepening of the economic crisis and the shift to the left among the rank and file of the trade unions and the Labour Party. The point here is not simply that the CPGB inherited from the work of the Re-organization Commission a bureaucratic, unwieldy party structure; in fact, once the worst abuses of re-organization were corrected, by 1924 the party was certainly far more able to carry out effective disciplined work in the labour movement. The crucial issue was whether there was any real attempt, after re-organization, to take up the theoretical training of the membership in a serious way. It was quite possible for the party to undertake practical tasks associated with the building of the NMM in the unions and the Left Wing Movement in the Labour Party, but how far was there a developing ability on the part of the membership to understand the theoretical and political considerations from which party practice flowed and to relate this to their day-to-day work?

4 *Communist Review*, January 1924.

5 *Ibid.*, February 1924.

To some extent this must be an open question as the limited evidence available does not permit any direct examination of the effectiveness of the political training of the party membership. An answer must, however, be attempted insofar as it was the theoretical weaknesses of the CPGB which rendered it so unresistant to the process of Stalinization in the CI in the mid-1920s and which prevented it giving any revolutionary lead during the General Strike. There can be little doubt as to the generally low theoretical level of the party leadership in the 1920s. The tendency to apply the policy decisions of the CI in a mechanical way unrelated to the conscious development of Marxist theory was very marked. The Executive Committee of the CI was continually criticizing this failing, and its comments on the weaknesses of the theoretical organ of the CPGB, the *Communist Review*, summed up the approach of the party to theoretical questions in general. The ECCI found, for example, that:

. . . the aversion to theory revealed itself everywhere in the columns of the *Communist Review*. . . . Whenever any theoretical questions were touched upon, their presentation and analysis were of a purely descriptive nature. No attempts were made to co-ordinate these questions systematically in conceptions and formulae. As a consequence the officials and advanced workers could gather nothing of the theory of Leninism as the uniform method of Marxism during the present epoch.⁶

In a letter (written shortly before his recent death) J. T. Murphy confirmed the general point implied by the critique of the ECCI, that the party leadership were very much steeped in empirical trade-union attitudes and saw Marxism still in the formal way in which it had been approached in the pre-1920 period.

. . . . We were ardent trade unionists, most of us experienced in leading unofficial movements. That was our strength . . . (but) the theoretical equipment of the leadership as a whole was not of a high standard. I remember there [were] only Tommy Jackson and myself who were at all familiar with the philosophical aspects of Marxism.

The CPGB and the Left Opposition

The clearest expression of the persistence of these long-established empirical traditions was provided in the position adopted by the CPGB over the struggle of Trotsky and the Left Opposition in the mid-1920s against the growth of the Stalinist bureaucracy and its ramifications throughout the international Communist movement. Thus

while the struggles in its Russian Party in the 1923-1926 period provoked a sympathetic response among important sections of the major European parties, notably the French, Polish and German, in Britain, they aroused virtually no interest. As Macfarlane observes, the sole contribution of the CPGB was the completely uncritical acceptance of the position of Stalin against the Left Opposition; in fact, it was this docile acceptance of the process of bureaucratization which prompted Stalin to hail the CPGB as a 'model party' by 1926. The point was that the CPGB never seriously attempted to understand what was at stake in the struggles in the CPSU. As far as the British leadership was concerned, this was a purely internal affair of the Russian party, having no relevance to the work in Britain. Indeed it was only after specific pressure had been applied by the ECCI that the CPGB took up the issue of the fight against Trotsky and duly echoed the theses of Stalin and the right bloc in the CPSU. The anti-theoretical attitude of the CPGB towards the crisis in the CPSU, and hence towards the overall development of the work of the CI, was clearly demonstrated in such contributions as the party did make to the debate on 'Trotskyism'. These showed a failure to grasp the issues involved and from this failure stemmed the inability of the party to grasp the disastrous international consequences of the 'theory' of Socialism in One Country with its emphasis on the recovery and equilibrium of post-war imperialism. There are definite indications that the CPGB was forced by the ECCI into taking an orthodox line on Trotskyism without seriously debating the issue or attempting to find out the reality of the situation in Russia. This is aptly demonstrated by the initial response of the party to the debate on the New Course in Russia. In 1924 Tom Bell was providing a full and accurate synopsis of the arguments advanced by the opposition against bureaucratization in the CPSU and was recording that:

. . . it was especially Trotsky who brought this discussion to the front which is proof enough to all who have the slightest acquaintance with the Russian Party that this crisis did not represent any danger for the unity of the Party.⁸

This article was mainly designed to answer those elements in the Labour left who were asserting that the Soviet system was on the point of collapse; the significance of it was that it evoked no evi-

6 Letter from the Agitprop department of the ECCI, February 24, 1925. *Communist Papers*, Cmd. 2682.

7 *Communist Papers*, p. 33.

8 *Communist Review*, February 1924.

dence of contradiction on the part of the CPGB leadership as a whole. It was not until 1925 that the CPGB swung completely to the other side on the question of Trotsky upon the intervention, as noted above, of the ECCI. What was so notable about this change of line, compared with Bell's position in 1924, was that the attack on Trotsky was now conducted on an anti-theoretical and consciously anti-intellectual basis. The most blatant example of this came from MacManus. Reviewing Max Eastman's *Since Lenin Died* (a work which exposed the bureaucratic degeneration occurring in the CPSU written by a member of the American Communist Party who supported Trotsky) he argued that the attacks on and purges of the opposition combined with the recruitment of politically untrained workers to the CPSU (the 'Lenin Levy') were purifying the CPSU and restoring its proletarian character and unity hitherto disrupted by intellectuals.⁹ The whole effect of this article was to appeal to the more backward elements in the CPGB still at a trade union level of consciousness to contrast the proletarian common sense of Stalin to the instability and divisive methods of the middle-class intellectuals. This same approach, as Brian Pearce notes,¹⁰ was again clearly displayed in the handling of 'Trotskyism' in the party press and conferences throughout 1925. The significance of these developments must be seen in the context of the overall work of the CPGB in the mid-1920s. The way the CPGB, with virtually no sign of resistance, was pressurized by the ECCI into the campaign against Trotsky was evidence of the extreme theoretical dependance of the party on the CI. In the early 1920s this dependance had helped the CPGB overcome some of its initial weaknesses and orientate itself towards mass work. In the mid-1920s it was responsible in a big way for the subordination of the CPGB to the anti-revolutionary line of Stalin, and for reinforcing the empirical, anti-theoretical tendencies in the party at the very time when its influence was growing rapidly in the labour movement. The failure of the CPGB to prepare any revolutionary leadership for the General Strike was intimately bound up with the campaign against Trotsky and the associated confirmation of the theoretical backwardness of the party. The practical expression of these developments was to be revealed in the party's trade union work in 1925-1926. It was the retreat from the fight for revolutionary politics in the unions into an essen-

⁹ *Ibid.*, June 1925.

¹⁰ *Labour Review*, January-February 1958, pp. 20-22.

tially syndicalist type of trade-union militancy which was at the centre of the failure of the CPGB in its first and, as it proved, only decisive test as a revolutionary party in 1926.

The retreat of the party into syndicalism in the General Strike was all the more disastrous when seen in the context of the substantial advance made from 1921 in developing revolutionary methods of work in the unions. By 1925 the process of forming Minority Movements in major trade unions was well advanced and the CPGB was consciously working through the Minority Movements and its own factory and pit groups to politicize the growing industrial militancy of the rank and file. Yet by 1926, although the influence of the CPGB had continued to grow, preparations to provide a revolutionary initiative had been virtually abandoned and the party entered the General Strike as a critical but essentially loyal ally of the TUC. In so doing, it reversed the whole of its revolutionary work from 1921 and the lessons of revolutionary organization learnt during that period.

Effects of the defeat of 1921

The ability of the CPGB to prepare seriously for revolutionary work in the unions derived from the inter-relationship of the lessons drawn from its experience in 1921 and the intervention of the CI to correct syndicalist manifestations in the party. Soon after the 1921 conflict the party was aware that the defeat of the miners had been bound up with its own theoretical and organizational inability to give expression to the revolutionary potential in the situation. J. T. Murphy noted self-critically that all sections of the labour movement, including the syndicalist unofficial movements and the CPGB '... missed or ignored the revolutionary political significance of the power accumulating in the growth of their organizations . . . The crises of the last three years have delivered smashing blows at all our old conceptions of the struggle . . . Who can now say: This is an industrial issue and that is a political issue?'¹¹

Although a correct appreciation of the change in the character of trade union struggles, this remained a purely formal response to the questions facing the CPGB in its trade union work until 1923-1924. While the mistakes of 1921 might be recognized, the party remained in the early 1920s utterly confused as to how to organize effectively

¹¹ *Labour Monthly*, January 1922. This point was repeated editorially by Dutt in the April 1922 issue.

in the unions. The depression and mass unemployment had knocked the bottom out of the syndicalist idea of squeezing out the employers by the escalation of pure industrial militancy; at the same time, sectarian and 'dual unionist' ideas persisted among those elements in the party who had come from the SLP, while among party activists in the localities the 1921 defeat and the depression promoted demoralization and disorientation which was matched by that of the trade union rank and file. The practical reflection of this situation was shown by the criticisms made by the party's Control Commission to the Sixth Congress (1924). The party's Industrial Department, it stated, had been bandied around from one EC member to another and had not even got down to the basic task 'of ascertaining the strength and co-ordinating the work of the Party nuclei in the Trade Unions and the Trades Councils'.¹² The unofficial movements in the unions had fared no better. Merged with the British Bureau of the RILU in 1922, they had been orientated towards pure propaganda for RILU affiliation by the trade unions and had given no effective lead on basic problems affecting the rank and file. As Lozovsky, head of the RILU, later noted, the British Bureau was totally unsuited to British conditions, not least because it allowed the trade union right wing to accuse the CPGB of splitting the unions by encouraging disaffiliation from the TUC.¹³

Recovery and the intervention of the CI

The chaos in the CPGB's industrial work was only partly a reflection of demoralization in the trade unions. The miners, badly hit by their defeat, were recovering in militancy by 1923 and became increasingly antagonistic to the collaborationist attitude to the owners on the part of the Executive Committee of the Miners' Federation. Their radicalization preceded that of other major trade unions, but by 1923-1924 there were signs of a general recovery from demoralization and a growth of combativeness on the part of the rank and file. This trend created favourable conditions for the expansion of the party's influence, yet theoretically and organizationally it was not really capable of seizing the opportunity. The intervention of the CI was decisive in this context, and the way it intervened was indicative of the weaknesses of the party leadership at this stage. The first steps towards the formation of an effective

opposition block in the unions under party control were taken in 1922. Borodin, the CI agent in Britain, by-passed both the national and district leaderships of the CPGB to obtain information from local party members in South Wales on the way the pre-1921 unofficial movement had operated and how far a revival of its methods would allow an opposition movement to be recreated in the MFGB. From this point he went on to organize party members and sympathizers at the MFGB's annual conference in 1922 into the nucleus of such a movement, now for the first time given the title 'minority movement'. The movement's aim was to rally all dissatisfied sections of the rank and file around an agitation for the overthrow of the 1921 agreement, the winning of a living wage and the destruction of the pernicious leadership of Hodges.¹⁴ Initially the movement was confined to South Wales, but by the latter half of 1923 minority movements were developing in other coalfields and by January 1924 an effective national movement was formally established.

Belatedness of the NMM

The encouragement of this type of unofficial movement did not amount to a tacit encouragement of syndicalist methods. Via Borodin, the CI was endeavouring to orientate the CPGB towards the immediate problems of the trade union rank and file, to advance policies which would maximize opposition to the existing collaborationist union leaders and thereby bring the rank and file towards the party as a necessary preparation for politicizing their industrial militancy and thereby recruiting to and building the party. In line with this the immediate programme of the NMM started from the existing level of consciousness of the rank and file, but by advancing demands based on the desire of the rank and file for major improvements in conditions, the NMM sought to develop a revolutionary consciousness on the understanding that these demands were basically incompatible with the private ownership of industry, and that the unions could fight for them only through the growth within them of a revolutionary opposition to the union bureaucracy.

On the basis of the growing success of the Miners' Minority Movement the CI sought to convince the CPGB of the urgent need for the adoption of this method of organization generally in the party's trade union work. At a meeting of

¹² Macfarlane, op. cit., Part 1, pp. 121-122.

¹³ E. H. Carr, *Socialism in One Country*, Vol. 3, part 1, pp. 121-122.

¹⁴ Information based on interview with member of the CPGB in the Rhondda in the 1920s; also see *The Times*, December 23, 1926.

the party leadership with the ECCI and the RILU in Moscow in mid-1923 the CPGB was censured for its failure to make any real attempt to form revolutionary minorities in the unions and was urged to set about the immediate task of organizing them into a cohesive national movement.¹⁵ It was a sign of the continuing confusion in the party leadership and the strength of the attachment to the earlier syndicalist and sectarian methods that, even though the British Bureau was re-organized and Gallacher put in charge of it with the specific task of organizing a national Minority Movement, it was not until the latter part of 1924 that its first national conference was held¹⁶

Significantly, one of the factors inhibiting the party leadership in the rapid implementation of the Minority Movement policy was the deep-rooted belief that it represented a purely reformist tactic unrelated to the revolutionary aims of the party. It was later observed that:

. . . at the beginning of the National Minority Movement considerable time and energy had to be expended to fight down the belief that there was no room for a movement dealing with immediate and 'narrow' economic issues . . . and that such an organization would stand in front of and hide the party from the workers.¹⁷

After 1924: growing combativeness

The existence of this attitude was an indication of the basic difficulty of developing in the party at this stage a real appreciation of the necessary relationship between the 'pure theory' of Communism and practical mass work. Yet while the party was never able to overcome fully this tendency to compartmentalism in its thinking on questions of theory and practice, there was all the same a sense in which the development of the work around the NMM from 1924 did take the CPGB a long way towards realizing the necessary conditions for creating a mass party by the mid-1920s.

1924 saw the start of a marked radicalization among the working class which was to build to a peak in 1925-1926. The election of the Labour government was only one sign of this; it was accompanied by a clear tendency on the part of organized labour to fight for a restoration of the gains lost after the defeats earlier in the 1920s which took sections of the working class to the

15 Carr, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

16 These developments are detailed in M. Woodhouse, 'Syndicalism, Communism and the Trade Unions', in *Marxist*, Vol. 4, No. 3.

17 *Communist Review*, Vol. 4, 1932.

verge of a direct confrontation with the Labour government and produced, on the part of the miners, a build-up in militancy, stimulated by the NMM, which resulted in the winning of a ten per cent wage increase in the new agreement signed in mid-1924. Taken together with the disillusionment bred by the Labour government and the return of a strengthened Tory government in the autumn of 1924, these developments served to promote a leftward swing in the labour movement expressed, initially, through the strengthening of centrist tendencies in the trade unions and Labour Party (the election of the 'left' union leaders, Purcell, Hicks, *et al.*, to the TUC General Council; the growth of the Maxton grouping in the Independent Labour Party) but related, basically, to the growing readiness to challenge the employers and their state through mass industrial action. Accompanied as it was by a down-turn in the economy and a particularly acute situation in the mining industry, the growth of rank-and-file combativeness presaged a profound intensification in the class struggle and the opening of a period of industrial conflict bound, objectively, to challenge the private control of industry and lead to a direct confrontation between organized labour and the state. It was the fact that a clear tendency in this direction was established during 1924, implied particularly in the mood of the miners after the conclusion of their new agreement, which allowed the CPGB to reach a clearer understanding of the significance of the trade union policy which flowed from the establishment of the NMM and the way forward to the development of a revolutionary leadership in the unions.

The advances made by the party since the early 1920s shaped the way it approached the deepening industrial crisis in 1925. From the failure of the miners to win their full objective in the 1924 agreement, the living wage, the CPGB drew the conclusion that it was impossible for the miners, or any other individual trade union, to win advances in the prevailing economic conditions through isolated action. The way forward must be through the formation of an offensive alliance of trade unions which could take joint action around a common programme. Behind this alliance should be ranged the TUC and the overall direction of the mass movement placed in the hands of the General Council, mandated by and responsible to the rank and file.¹⁸ The proposal was made more concrete by the formulation of a definite pro-

18 The first proposals for such an alliance were made in mid-1924. *Workers' Weekly*, June 6, 1924.

gramme by the first annual conference of the NMM, August 1924, which centred on the £4 minimum wage and the 44-hour week,¹⁹ and by the development of a widespread movement for wage advances from the start of 1925 by a number of the bigger unions, the NUR, AEU, Shipbuilders and T&GWU among them. The most striking feature of the campaign by the CPGB to bring these developments together into a unified, offensive trade union movement was the fact that from the start the party fought against any tendency for its activities to become entangled with the centrist currents so strongly evident in the labour movement after the collapse of the Labour government and fought, too, against any syndicalist trend in the work of the NMM which would merely serve to strengthen the opportunism of the official left wing in the unions. For the CPGB, the policy of the industrial alliance was understood wholly in the context of the building of the party in preparation for the revolutionary turn which the coming industrial struggles must take. In its work in the unions the CPGB and the NMM did not operate with the idea of gingering the union leadership into militant actions from below but rather with the fundamental perspective of establishing rank-and-file control over the leadership through their day-to-day work among the rank and file and winning them to a revolutionary position. The practical work of the CPGB in the unions was therefore directly related to the deepening class conflict in Britain and the chances this created for the expansion of the party. As the Resolution on the Minority Movement, adopted by the CPGB's 6th Congress put it:

In the actual fight to achieve their immediate demands the workers will be brought up against the whole organized power of capitalism—the State . . . Therefore, as the struggle develops, the importance and absolute necessity of the Communist Party to the working class becomes more and more clearly revealed. The opposition movements can only go forward under the leadership of a powerful Communist Party. Out of the struggle of the opposition movements of today will be forged the Communist Party of tomorrow.

The resolution then went on to warn, very emphatically, against the dangers of syndicalism in the work of the NMM:

. . . the Communist Party, while working inside

¹⁹ The conference had been preceded by the formation of MM groups in the rail, dock and engineering industries as well as mining.

the minority movement, will on no account sacri-

fice its separate existence or limit its freedom of agitation and propaganda. By this means it will win the workers to the Party in ever-increasing numbers, and prepare the working class for the real problems that confront them, that of the conquest of power.²⁰

Attitude to the 'lefts'

It flowed logically, and correctly, from the 6th Congress and the contemporaneous launching of the NMM, that the CPGB should be cautious towards and critical of the leftward movements in the official leaderships of the trade unions, as demonstrated at the 1924 Congress of the TUC. While the Congress was marked by the active association of the 'lefts' with proposals for international trade union unity and the strengthening of the powers of the General Council to co-ordinate trade union action in Britain, the CPGB saw this tendency as a reflection of the pressure building up from the rank and file for effective mass industrial action and an adaption to this mood by the official left-wing. In itself, the activity of this left wing was of little value unless it led on to the formation of an industrial alliance under rank-and-file control. If the 'lefts' were to associate themselves with the NMM programme their support would be welcomed and every effort must be made, argued the CPGB, to win them to this position. At the same time this should in no way be made a substitute for the winning of the leading position among the rank and file by the party.

It would be a suicidal policy, however, for the Communist Party and the Minority Movement to place too much reliance on what we have called the official left-wing, wrote J. R. Campbell. On problems of TU organization this element is fairly clear, on other problems it has not broken away from the 'right' position. It is the duty of our Party and the Minority Movement to criticize its weaknesses relentlessly and endeavour to change the muddled and incomplete left wing viewpoint of the more progressive leaders into a real revolutionary viewpoint.

²⁰ That this resolution was indicative of the fact that the CPGB had, at least formally, learnt the lesson of its syndicalist trade union work in 1920-1921 was underlined by the observation of J. R. Campbell that ' . . . the chief danger is that it (the NMM) will develop into a purely industrial movement concerned only with union problems unrelated to the general struggle of the workers. That is . . . a marked trait of the old left official leadership. It is no less marked amongst the active rank and file in many of the unions.' *Communist Review*, October 1924.

But the revolutionary workers must never forget that their main activity must be devoted to capturing the masses.²¹

1925 : Stalin begins the change of course

The CPGB therefore approached the crucial year 1925, the year which saw the acceleration of industrial militancy and the anticipation of the General Strike in the events around 'Red Friday', in a potentially strong theoretical and organizational position. At the same time the party was placed in an increasingly contradictory position in 1925. In a period when the CPGB was beginning to make a decisive breakthrough in the establishment of its influence in the unions and the Labour Party it was subject to pressures emanating from the Stalin bloc in the CPSU for the adoption of an uncritical approach towards the centrist tendencies in the union leaderships. At the very time when the crisis of British capitalism was deepening, Stalin was seeking, through the intermediary of Tomsky and the Russian trade unions, a *détente* with British imperialism via the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee. While the Committee had obvious relevance to the RILU's strategy of seeking membership of the Amsterdam Trade Union International, the main emphasis came to be placed on the Committee's utility to the diplomatic interests of the emergent bureaucracy in the CPSU, and the CPGB was consequently placed in a position where it would be obliged increasingly to support, and in a practical sense identify with, the centrist currents considered so favourable by Stalin to the interests of the USSR. It would be a-historical to suggest that the course on which the CPGB was launched from 1924 was negated in any immediate sense by this development, but across the period between 1924 and the General Strike the international implications of the policy of Socialism in One Country served in the British context to confuse and neutralize the important steps which the CPGB was taking in the mid-1920s towards a full understanding of Bolshevik methods of party work.

It is a crucial failing on the part of Macfarlane that he almost wholly ignores the significance of this development for the work of the CPGB before and during the General Strike. While he throws valuable light on the struggles between Trotsky and Stalin in the context of Trotsky's fight in the CPSU and CI for theoretical clarity on the approaching revolutionary crisis in Britain, and indicates how, in its theoretical agnosticism, the

CPGB aligned with Stalin in adopting a non-revolutionary interpretation of the British situation, he appears ignorant of the fact that the adoption of this line by the CPGB flowed directly from the policy of Socialism in One Country and amounted to a complete rejection of the fight for revolutionary politics in the trade unions which the CPGB had been carrying on at least until 'Red Friday'. Macfarlane explicitly attacks the arguments put forward by Brian Pearce²² to the effect that the CPGB came to subordinate its independent, revolutionary line to the official left wing in the TUC and denies that the CPGB in any way played down its critique of the TUC up to the General Strike or departed from its own independent preparations for the strike. In so doing, Macfarlane adopts a basically a-historical approach. He employs the technique of selective quotation to demonstrate criticism of the TUC by the CPGB up to the General Strike but fails to show how the party prepared in any concrete practical way (as opposed to exhortation to the TUC) for the role of independent leadership during the strike. He also seems unaware of the fact that the quotations he produces are self-contradictory, some indicating uncritical support for the TUC left wing, others expressing criticism, but the whole in fact displaying the ambiguity and confusion in the party's attitude to the TUC which Macfarlane appears to share, and certainly fails to understand.

Abandonment of a revolutionary position

There is, in fact, the clearest evidence that, as it came to articulate more definitely the line towards the TUC emanating from the CI, the CPGB did gradually abandon its revolutionary position and assume instead the role of a critical, but essentially loyal, component of a bloc with the official left wing in the TUC; that instead of working on a tactical, united front basis with this left wing, in which context the party sought to advance its influence among the rank and file, the CPGB became involved in an opportunist relationship with the left wing which allowed the leadership of the General Strike to remain in their hands and lost the opportunity to seize this leadership which potentially existed.

The only way in which Macfarlane's distortions of the historical reality can be corrected is by looking at the work of the CPGB in the unions as it evolved in the period preceding the General Strike. The first point which must impress itself

21 *Ibid.*

22 B. Pearce, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-18.

on any investigator is the marked contrast between the party's role before and after the events which led up to 'Red Friday'. Before August 1925 the CPGB was attempting consciously to develop a clear revolutionary lead in the unions in preparation for what it felt must be a direct confrontation between the unions and the state in July. Thereafter, gradually at first but with increasing emphasis, it moved steadily closer to the official left wing and turned its work in the unions away from its revolutionary perspective of 1925 and towards the reinforcement of the official apparatus of the unions in anticipation of what it assumed must now be a purely economic, industrial conflict in May 1926. This reversal of the party's earlier work was doubly disastrous in view of the great increase in support gained by the CPGB in the preceding period; the mass demonstrations for the release of the party leaders imprisoned at the end of 1925 were the surface manifestations of the deeper-going relationship being formed between the party and the organized working class in the period following 'Red Friday' and were indicative of the way the practical leadership of the party was being strengthened through the growth in influence of its press, its nuclei in the factories and mines, and through the work of the NMM and the Left Wing Movement. There can be little doubt, when these developments are seen as a whole, that the CPGB was in the process of establishing itself in a position before the General Strike where it had the potential for providing a positive alternative to the inevitable betrayals of the TUC; the line it actually adopted, however, allowed it to realize very little of this potential.

Contrast between 1925 and 1926

The contrast between the position ultimately adopted by the CPGB in 1926 and that with which it approached the onset of the pre-revolutionary crisis in 1925 could not be clearer. The party's attitude towards the official left-wing at the start of 1925 was indicated by the way in which it initially reacted to the setting up of the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee. For the CPGB, the formation of the Committee was welcomed only insofar as it provided a means for furthering the process of revolutionizing the British working class. An alliance between trade union leaders alone would be useless and the party made clear that it would in no way subordinate its activities to the diplomatic requirements of this committee; as the *Workers' Weekly* observed editorially:

Unity that only means a polite agreement between leaders is useless unless it is backed up by mass

pressure. Unity that confines itself to negotiations between Amsterdam and the Russian Unions only touches the fringe of the question . . . Vast masses of workers everywhere are moving slowly forward. Those leaders who stand in the way are going to be swept aside. The class struggle cannot be limited to an exchange of diplomatic letters.

Effective unity, the paper went on to argue, could only be built up by the work of the CPGB and the NMM.²³ The implication of this attitude was of considerable significance for the immediate work of the CPGB in the context of the growing industrial militancy of the organized working class in Britain, for the CPGB saw the moves of the official left wing towards Russia and their left-wing phraseology in relation to the industrial situation in Britain, as the pale reflection of the confused, contradictory but quite definite movement among the trade union rank and file towards a revolutionary position. While the official left wing must therefore be urged on from below to translate their militant promises into practice, the CPGB must in no way compromise itself with the hesitations and confusions of this left wing but rather intensify its activity to clarify the rank and file on the developing revolutionary situation. The meaning of this approach for the practical work of the party was very clearly demonstrated in its trade union agitation in the months culminating in 'Red Friday'. From the start of 1925 there was a very favourable situation for the formation of a new trade union alliance to replace the defunct Triple Alliance. The miners were well aware, after their frustrations over the 1924 agreement, that hopes of future gains rested on the formation of such an alliance, and from the latter part of 1924 the NMM, with the backing of A. J. Cook, was working for an alliance which would unite major trade unions around a common programme for offensive action. Yet in supporting, indeed largely initiating, this trend it was vital that the CPGB should avoid entanglement with the opportunism inherent in the position of the trade union left wing and that it should relate the agitation for the industrial alliance directly to the question of the revolutionary education of the rank and file. This it went a long way towards doing in the first part of 1925, for while it encouraged the militancy of the sympathetic union leaders, it made the main emphasis of its trade union work the formation of an alliance under direct rank-and-file control in conditions where the CPGB and the NMM had the

23 *Workers' Weekly*, January 2, 1925.

practical revolutionary leadership of that rank and file.

In line with this, the CPGB called constantly, up to 'Red Friday', for the formation of an alliance of the miners, the AEU, the NUR and the Transport Workers,²⁴ but at the same time it made its main contribution to the formation of the alliance its campaign at local level for the creation of joint committees of rank-and-file miners, dockers, railworkers and engineers. These committees were designed not simply to pressurize the official union leaders into national action to conclude the alliance; their primary function was to revitalize the trades councils and convert them into Councils of Action for the direction of trade union action in the districts in the coming mass struggles. After an intense propaganda campaign on the need for such committees persistent efforts to set them up in all major industrial areas were made by the CPGB from April 1925. The response to the party's initiative was generally favourable. Within a month joint committees had been formed in all parts of the country and the conversion or preparation to convert trades councils into Councils of Action was almost as widespread,²⁵ these developments being considerably assisted by the recent rejection of the wage demands of many groups of workers, the engineers, shipbuilders, post-office, rail and transport workers amongst them. At the same time, the CPGB was laying the basis for a further considerable expansion of its influence among the working class through its drive to form party groups in factories and mines.²⁶

Anyone attempting to argue that the CPGB did not change its line towards the trade union leadership between 1925 and the General Strike could point to an apparent similarity in the agitational

24 Moves to form the alliance were made by the miners, the AEU, the T&GWU and the Rail Unions between April and June 1925, but the negotiations were overtaken by the events which led up to 'Red Friday' when the main question became that of securing the backing of the TUC as a whole for the miners. Formal moves to establish the alliance continued thereafter but broke down in practice through the deliberate attempts of J. H. Thomas to wreck unity and the hesitations of the left in the AEU leadership who did not organize a ballot on the proposed constitution until the eve of the General Strike.

25 *Workers' Weekly*, May 1925, *passim*.

26 On the eve of 'Red Friday' 120 had been formed. *Workers' Weekly*, July 31, 1925.

work of the party both before 'Red Friday' and the General Strike itself. The attempt would be an exercise in eclecticism little related to the historical reality. In contrast to its activity before the General Strike, the CPGB was, in this period in 1925, clearly relating its work in the trade unions directly to the creation of a revolutionary consciousness in preparation for the acute crisis which would arise with the outbreak of the conflict in the mining industry. It showed that it had learnt from the syndicalist weaknesses of the early 1920s and that it was now concerned *not* to become a mere 'ginger group' devoted simply to pressurizing the more sympathetic left-wing union leaders; on the contrary, it sought to create a revolutionary leadership in the approaching conflict and win the initiative from the official left wing. At the height of the party's preparatory campaign, immediately prior to the events of 'Red Friday', the leadership emphasized this point quite unambiguously:

The success of the Minority Movement, wrote C. M. Roebuck (T. Rothstein), is in reality a sign that the workers are coming to look upon the unions less and less as a means of improving their individual well-being within the framework of the capitalist system, and more and more as a weapon of struggle against the capitalist class. For this reason the Minority Movement cannot be compared with previous 'unofficial', 'vigilance' and 'reform' movements in the era of capitalist vigour . . . There can be no doubt that . . . many reformist leaders would rather swim with the current than against it. Without pushing away anyone who will fight, the task of the Communists in the Minority Movement is to see that this does not obscure in the eyes of the workers the fact that their fight is a class fight against a class enemy, and not a fight for small reforms . . .²⁷

There was, furthermore, no tendency for the CPGB to see the approaching conflict as a purely economic struggle, as it did in May 1926, or to separate the problems of the miners from those of the working class as a whole. In contrast with the position before the General Strike the CPGB was highly critical of the TUC before 'Red Friday' not simply because of its slowness to rally support for the miners but quite basically because the TUC's approach to the crisis was incapable of measuring up to its revolutionary implications. Thus Tom Bell commented editorially shortly before 'Red Friday':

All talk, such as the statement of Citrine, the acting secretary of the General Council of the TUC, that this is an 'economic dispute' is a definite

27 *Communist Review*, June 1925.

sabotage of the working-class defence against capitalist attack. The miners' crisis is part of the general economic crisis in British industrialism. For that reason it has passed beyond any purely economic stage. It is a definitely political crisis and can only be solved by revolutionary political means.²⁸

'Red Friday' and the preparation for power

The events of 'Red Friday' did nothing immediately to undermine this estimate of the crisis. Although the government, under the threat of a possible general strike, backed down, provided a nine-month subsidy for the coal industry and set up the Samuel Commission to investigate the industry's problems, it was quite clear that this was a delaying tactic only. For British capitalism the mining crisis could be solved only at the expense of the miners and the Commission was merely a device for adding respectability to the brutality of the owners' demands while making suggestions on the behalf of private industry as a whole for the necessary rationalization of the industry. The conflict had therefore been postponed for nine months, not avoided, and when it eventually came it would have the same implications as that in July 1925. A general strike, the CPGB warned, would be inevitable in May 1926, and the party and its supporters must prepare accordingly.

But let us be clear what a general strike means, warned J. T. Murphy. It can only mean the throwing down of the gauntlet to the capitalist state, and all the powers at its disposal. Either that challenge is a gesture . . . or it must develop its challenge into an actual fight for power . . .²⁹

It was completely in the context of these analyses of the mining crisis and its revolutionary implications that the CPGB approached the crisis as it initially developed in July 1925. Although a conference of the potential members of the Industrial Alliance was held on July 17 to consider a possible constitution, and although a special conference of the TUC on July 24 agreed to support the miners through an embargo on the movement of coal, the CPGB was highly sceptical as to whether these moves in themselves would lead on to any positive action. They could do so, in the party's estimation, only through the mobilization of the rank and file under the party's leadership to force forward a mass strike from below and to develop the ensuing conflict into a

revolutionary challenge to the state. Given the small size of the CPGB in mid-1925 and the fact that the growth of its organized influence among the trade union rank and file was still in its early stages, there was objectively no certainty that such a conflict could be precipitated by the party alone at this stage, but the CPGB entered the struggle with the aim at the very least of laying the basis for a mass membership through the political education which such a struggle must produce in the working class. As it stated when calling for the expansion of the embargo into a general strike, 'through the efforts of its members it (the CP) will be able to convince the workers that not the least of its tasks is that of building a mass Communist Party in Great Britain.'³⁰ The way in which it set about the realization of this aim was indicated in the strategy which it evolved on the eve of the implementation of the embargo by the TUC. The whole work of the party was to be directed towards the mobilization of the rank-and-file committees and Councils of Action previously established to call out the trade union rank and file and thus convert the action over the embargo into an unofficial general strike. The coal embargo, stated the *Workers' Weekly*, was a challenge to the government. 'Once you challenge the government you must go all out to win', and this led logically to a general strike. To achieve this the rank and file must prepare, under the party's lead, for immediate action.

Immediately a section of workers comes out on strike, mass demonstrations must be organized by the Councils of Action in conjunction with the strike committees of particular unions. If the miners come out there must be mass demonstrations to the docks and railway centres, where the workers should be told to form section and job committees and prepare for action. If the docks and railways are stopped then there must be a mass demonstration to the power stations and factory committees set up which will take unofficial action if official action is not called for.³¹

That this was not a mere propagandist posture on the eve of the expected embargo action but a considered statement of the party's intentions based on previous preparation of the party membership was indicated by the fact that in one area at least, South Wales, there had been full discussion at an aggregate meeting some time before

28 *Ibid.*, August 1925. (The issue went to press on the eve of 'Red Friday'.)

29 *Ibid.*, September 1925.

30 *Workers' Weekly*, July 24, 1925.

31 *Ibid.*, July 31, 1925.

'Red Friday' of the implications of the coming crisis and preparations made for action exactly on the lines laid down by the *Workers' Weekly*. Here, to enthusiastic applause, Frank Bright (a leading Rhondda member) declared that 'far more important than the fight for wages is the struggle for power' and went on to urge that 'in the event of them [the TUC] failing to give a proper lead we must be prepared to organize unofficial action by way of mass demonstrations of miners from the valleys to the steelworks, the big railway centres and the docks . . . To do so entailed work, sacrifice and danger. We shall be met by the armed forces of the State. Nevertheless, the work had to be done.'³² It seems highly unlikely that similar preparations were not made by other aggregates elsewhere, although they were not reported, and what was so very significant about these preparations by the CPGB on the eve of 'Red Friday' was that, in contrast to May 1926, they showed the party's readiness for independent leadership with no subordination of party policy to the opportunist elements in the union leaderships.

A new situation and new dangers

There are many indications that the CPGB and the NMM had created a situation by their agitation in the unions whereby it would have been impossible for the TUC to back down in July 1925 without letting the control of the struggle fall into the hands of the party. The significance of the events of 'Red Friday' did not, however, lie simply in the immediate effects of the party's work on the union bureaucracies. The experience undergone by the party in its campaigns up to July 1925 had done much to help it emerge from the position which it had occupied on the sectarian fringe of the labour movement in the early 1920s. The theoretical lessons of the earlier period would seem to have been assimilated and greatly enriched in this first experience of practical mass work. Yet there was no sense in which the way forward for the CPGB from 'Red Friday' was simple or clear-cut. The development of mass work on the scale apparent by mid-1925 created considerable problems in terms of the maintenance of a clear theoretical conception of the party's revolutionary strategy in relation to its day-to-day agitational work. The danger existed in particular that an immediate tactic might be elevated into a general perspective, that the agitational work of the NMM on questions of immediate trade union

significance might come to be seen by the party membership as their main work and its relationship to the building of the party and the fight for a revolutionary perspective lost sight of, or at best understood in a purely formal way. While there were indications that the party was aware of these dangers as it began to engage in mass work from 1924, there was always the possibility that the pressures operating on the party from the conditions in which it was working during 1925 might well nullify this necessarily formal understanding unless there was a constant deepening of its theoretical grasp of the revolutionary opportunities opening up in the period around 'Red Friday' and a constant struggle to develop the practice of the party in relation to this understanding.

Increasingly contradictory policies

As it was, the CPGB was operating under increasingly contradictory conditions from the latter half of 1925. While it had fought for a revolutionary perspective in the period up to 'Red Friday', it was at the same time subject increasingly during 1925 to the pressures emanating from the CI for the development of a working relationship with the left opportunist elements on the General Council of the TUC. While, on the one hand, it was attempting to actualize the revolutionary potential of the union rank and file, it was, on the other, obliged to adopt towards the TUC an attitude which would not embarrass the working of the Anglo-Russian Committee. The long-term outcome of these contradictions was that, when the General Strike took place in May 1926, the understanding which the CPGB had been developing of its role in the revolutionary situation into which the unions must be pushed was neutralized and the party placed in a position where, objectively, it had to act increasingly as the supporter at rank-and-file level of the official left wing on the General Council. The initiative in the deepening revolutionary crisis from mid-1925 was therefore allowed to pass from the CPGB, which had really made the running up to 'Red Friday', and forced on the TUC from below, to the opportunistic element in the union leaderships who, in their turn, assisted the right-wing in their sabotaging role during the strike. It was this process which allowed J. T. Murphy, who had written of the coming revolutionary crisis in September 1925 (see above), to place, on behalf of the Central Committee of the CPGB, the whole initiative in the hands of the TUC on the eve of

32 *Ibid.*, July 24, 1925.

the General Strike. In complete antithesis to the line of the party in July 1925 he then wrote:

Our party does not hold the leading positions in the Trade Unions. It is not conducting the negotiations with the employers and the government. *It can only advise and place its forces at the service of the workers—led by others . . .* Those who do not look for a path along which to retreat are good trade union leaders who have sufficient character to stand firm on the demands of the miners, but they are totally incapable of moving forward to face all the implications of a united working-class challenge to the State.

To entertain any exaggerated views as to the revolutionary possibilities of this crisis and visions of new leadership 'arising spontaneously in the struggle', etc., is fantastic . . .³³

These comments adorned the front page of the *Workers' Weekly* three days before the start of the General Strike; they were fully representative of party policy and put the party in a manifestly absurd position both in view of the objective conditions which must operate during the strike and the correct stand taken by the party on this question only a few months earlier. Yet while Macfarlane quotes this article, he totally ignores its implications, both for the actual character of the strike and the revolutionary role of the party, which he clearly fails to comprehend. The crucial point is that Murphy's statement was an admission of sheer theoretical confusion. Only a few months earlier Murphy and other leading party members had been at pains to emphasize the necessarily revolutionary character of a general strike and in the period intervening between 'Red Friday' and May 1926 the Baldwin government had made it quite evident that it was preparing for the coming conflict with its revolutionary implications very much in mind. Yet, despite all this, the CPGB could still adopt on the eve of the strike a position which basically denied the whole function of the party.

Assertion of centrist and opportunist tendencies

It would be a-historical to suggest that the party's approach to the General Strike came about through some dramatic reversal of policy. What did happen in the period from July 1925 was that the tendency associated with the Anglo-Russian Committee made itself more clearly apparent, that this occurred in circumstances where centrist and

³³ *Ibid.*, April 30, 1926. My emphasis. The latter part of the statement was clearly an implicit attack on Trotsky who was at this point warning the CPGB of the dangers of under-estimating the revolutionary character of the situation.

opportunist tendencies in the labour movement were reinforced by the TUC's support for the miners on 'Red Friday' and where there was a widespread belief among rank-and-file militants that the TUC must act firmly again in May 1926 when the postponed crisis would come to a head. In these conditions there was the strong possibility that the membership of the CPGB, particularly those working in the NMM, would be affected by the general mood of euphoria and opportunism after 'Red Friday' and that they would come to share in, or at least compromise with, the general belief in the efficacy of the official left wing. At the very time when the party needed to fight such illusions and false optimism most vigorously it was increasingly inhibited from doing so by the line emanating from the CI. Even before 'Red Friday' there were signs of confusion about the role of the official left-wing in certain areas of the party's work. In the period before the build-up to the events of July 1925 the *Sunday Worker*, the paper of the Left Wing Movement, ran a series of articles on the left-wing leaders in the unions uncritically extolling their virtues and fostering considerable illusions about their role in the TUC. Typical of these was the comment on Swales, chairman of the General Council, and his forthcoming address to the Scarborough Congress of the TUC:

. . . it will be something stated in plain blunt language and will give the whole movement a bold and clever lead. It will personify the simple and rugged strength of a far-seeing and courageous leader.³⁴

Elements of confusion

Attitudes of this sort towards the official left wing were not pronounced in the party as a whole before 'Red Friday', but thereafter there appeared a confused and vacillating attitude to their role on the part of the party leadership which marked the emergence of what was to be an increasingly uncritical approach to them in the period immediately before the General Strike. Characteristic of this was the CPGB's reaction to the events of 'Red Friday'. Very correctly the leadership observed that there was no occasion for euphoria; a temporary truce only had been won, preparations for a fight must continue and 'One thing that every worker and every workers' leader, must now recognize, and must openly and fearlessly face, is that the struggle for wages involves the struggle for power'. But it then went on to compromise this

³⁴ *Sunday Worker*, May 24, 1926.

formally correct estimate with the confused, and confusing, assertion that 'The leadership [of the events of 'Red Friday'] passed into the hands of good proletarians like Swales, Hicks, Cook and Purcell. And this proletarian leadership and the proletarian solidarity it was capable of organizing and demonstrating was the real big thing that came out of the struggle.'³⁵ Such an estimate was valid only if it was related to the task of converting the centrist tendency predominant in the unions into a consistent revolutionary position through the expansion of the party's work to force centrist tendencies either to work consistently with the party or to expose them for not matching up to their revolutionary protestations. The CPGB went in the other direction, however. What it came to do increasingly after 'Red Friday' was to work on the assumption that the TUC, under pressure from the official left wing and its Communist allies, would perform the same role in May 1926 as it had done in 1925, that there would be, in the last analysis, a division of labour between the leadership of the struggle by the official left wing and the supporting role of the CPGB among the rank and file.

Left wing in retreat

The emergence of this tendency on the part of the CPGB was illustrated by its response to the TUC's Scarborough Congress in September 1925. The Congress was marked by the passing of left-wing resolutions on imperialism, trade union unity, workshop committees and the increasing of the power of the General Council to lead joint trade union struggles; it was marked, also, by the attendance of a well-organized NMM-CPGB fraction which played a leading part in the discussions and was influential in the decisions of the Congress. But while the Congress seemed to mark a further stage in the movement of the left wing towards the Communist position, it posed the CPGB with a considerable dilemma. It was forced to note that on many of the crucial issues the official left-wing had been almost wholly silent and the running had been made by the party delegates.³⁶ Pollitt observed of the Congress that the left wing had been curiously silent in the face of the right wing who had been strengthened on the General Council by the return of Thomas and Clynes. 'There is now the greatest opportunity in our history,' he wrote, 'for those leaders claim-

ing to be left-wingers to come out boldly and take a prominent place in the revolutionary movement—they must do this, or they, too, will be forced to take up a position no different from that of the right-wing . . .'³⁷ There were, in fact, increasingly clear indications from the 1925 Congress on that the left-wing were retreating, yet the party failed to draw the relevant conclusions, despite Pollitt's comments. The post-Scarborough line of the party was not to develop the type of independent initiative in the unions evident in July 1925 but to press for the TUC to implement the left-wing resolutions of the Scarborough Congress and for the General Council to take steps to assume full controlling powers over the unions in anticipation of May 1926. The whole approach of the CPGB from the autumn of 1925 was thus based on the assumption that the real leadership of the coming strike would be in the hands of the General Council; the party's task would be solely that of pressurizing it from below. As Pollitt observed, in summing up this approach:

In view of the overwhelming decision for complete solidarity registered at Scarborough, the new General Council will simply *have* to prosecute more vigorously the fight on behalf of the workers. True, the right-wing of the Council is strengthened by the return of one or two people who do not give support to the idea that we are engaged in a class struggle, but I think that the mass pressure from behind will force even them to toe the line.³⁸

From this point, then, the whole tendency of the CPGB in its work in the unions was to subordinate its activities to the TUC leadership, and such criticisms as it made of TUC policy (and they were often vigorous in tone) took the form basically of exhortations to the TUC to prepare for action more effectively and were accompanied less and less by independent preparations by the party among the rank and file for the approaching struggle.

The first clear indication of the practical implications of this trend for party work came from J. T. Murphy's observations on the resolution on workshop committees passed by the Scarborough Congress. The whole context in which the resolution had been passed had indicated that, for the General Council, it was a piece of pious resolution-mongering not committing the TUC in any concrete way to the encouragement of committees of rank-and-file workers at workshop level. The only way it could have been implemented would have been by serious agitation by the CPGB in the

35 *Workers' Weekly*, August 7, 1925.

36 See, e.g., the comments of J. R. Campbell, *Communist Review*, October 1925.

37 *Labour Monthly*, October 1925.

38 *Sunday Worker*, September 20, 1926.

unions and Trades Councils locally to set up what would have been important centres of working-class organization in preparation for the General Strike. As it was, the party, via Murphy, placed the whole initiative for their formation on the General Council and pleaded with the latter to live up to their Scarborough commitments.

The initiative, wrote Murphy, should come from the General Council of the TUC and its sub-committee of trades councils . . . Both need, of course, the complete co-operation of the trade union executives and this ought not to be difficult to obtain if they are at all intent on defending their own interests.³⁹

Party avoids criticism of TUC

In the months preceding the General Strike the trend became even clearer. It was impossible for the party to ignore the fact that the TUC was doing nothing to prepare for the anticipated strike and certainly nothing to implement the recommendations of the Scarborough Congress. As Citrine later made clear, the General Council as a whole expected that the Samuel Commission would result in a permanent settlement of the mining crisis and in particular on the Industrial Committee, set up by the General Council to consider further support for the miners after 'Red Friday', this idea was very prevalent. While the Committee had a right-wing majority it contained at the same time prominent left-wingers, notable Swales and Hicks and others of a leftish character, yet despite this the Committee met only twice between Scarborough and early 1926 and decided at its second meeting that there was no need to take up the proposals of the Scarborough Congress for increasing the General Council's powers. It was a fair indication of the treacherous character of the official left wing that the four members present at this meeting included Swales and Hicks.⁴⁰ The left wing on which the CPGB was coming to place such reliance was thus completely involved in that process whereby the attempt was made by the General Council (both before and during the General Strike) to force the miners to accept the proposals of the Samuel Commission Report, proposals which meant wage cuts for the miners and the rationalization of the industry on an increasingly monopolistic basis under private control.

The CPGB might be excused for ignorance of the decisions behind closed doors in the TUC

39 *Labour Monthly*, November 1925.

40 A. Bullock, *The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin*, pp. 289-290.

but any misconceptions on this account were soon dispelled by the TUC itself when it notified the affiliated unions by letter of its decision not to seek the extra powers suggested at Scarborough to conduct a general strike. The response of the party to what it called 'this amazing circular' was significant of the extent to which it had departed from any independent preparation for the coming³ General Strike, for while the party protested at the circular and called on union branches and trades councils to oppose the TUC's decision, it drew no lessons from the TUC's action and in no way revised its attitude to the role of the TUC in the rapidly developing crisis. In fact, all that it had to suggest in a practical sense was that the issue should be taken up at the next congress of the TUC not due until the autumn, a suggestion totally irrelevant to the immediate crisis and avoiding any criticism of the role of the left wing in the TUC's decision.⁴¹

March Conference of the NMM : a myth dispelled

It could easily be suggested by Macfarlane and Stalinist critics that this point ignores the fact that the CPGB did expend much energy in the months preceding the General Strike in agitating for the type of trade union preparation necessary for the conflict. True enough, the party did conduct a vigorous propaganda campaign on this issue; the vital point, however, is to understand the content of this propaganda, not merely its form, for despite the fact that the party stressed that the Scarborough decisions existed on paper only and that the NMM had the responsibility for seeing that they were put into effect, and despite the special NMM conference in March devoted to the question of 'preparedness', there is very little concrete evidence that the party did anything to break out of the limitations placed on preparation imposed on the rank and file by the trade union apparatus or that it saw its role as anything more than 'gingering up' the official leaderships. In short, its activities were devoted to the exhortation of the TUC to act, not to preparing for an independent initiative in the light of the wholly likely betrayal by the TUC in the coming conflict. Stalinist writers are in the habit of making great play with the fact that it was the CPGB alone, at the March conference of the NMM, which urged the unions to prepare for the approaching General Strike. A look at the decisions of the conference dispels this myth, as far as any practical developments from the conference were concerned, for

41 *Workers' Weekly*, March 19, 1926.

while it was characterized by the display of much militant rhetoric it made no concrete plans whatsoever for definite action by the rank and file to organize its strength for the strike and certainly it was altogether unconcerned, as the CPGB had been in July 1925, with seizing the favourable opportunities at rank-and-file level for furthering the revolutionary role of the party. The nearest the conference came to this was in the resolution on 'The Capitalist Offensive', moved by Horner, in which delegates were urged 'to go back to their branches and not only report but gather round them the active membership and force their unions to inaugurate a militant policy in spite of the leaders . . .'⁴² But the suggestion was left in mid-air; no concrete proposals for action to rally the rank and file flowed from it and had they done so there would have been signs of a drive by the party and the NMM to implement them. As it was, the party leadership seemed utterly complacent about the coming struggle, confident that the TUC must continue to support the miners and anxious mainly to avoid 'sectarian' action by the NMM and party activists in the unions which would separate the party from the official union apparatus. The point was underlined by George Hardy, acting general secretary of the NMM, who when interviewed after the March conference of the NMM, had nothing at all to say about any campaign to rally the rank and file behind the lead of the party and was content merely to talk complacently about a summer campaign of outdoor meetings as though the General Strike was an issue of no great importance.⁴³ In fact, for Hardy, as for the party leadership as a whole, the coming strike was now seen as a purely industrial issue in relation to which the role of the party was not that of fighting for a revolutionary lead but rather of ensuring the maximum of trade union solidarity at local level wholly within the context of the official union apparatus and under the established union leadership. Hardy was thus acting quite logically when he ordered the NMM to subordinate itself entirely to the TUC and its local affiliates on the eve of the General Strike:

. . . we sent out from Minority Movement headquarters instructions to our members to work for the establishment of Councils of Action in every area. We warned, however, that the Councils of Action were under no circumstances to take over the work of the trade unions . . . *The Councils of Action were to see that all the decisions of the*

42 *The Worker*, March 27, 1926.

43 *Workers' Weekly*, April 9, 1926.

*General Council and the union executives were carried out . . .*⁴⁴

Given these trends in the party leadership it was highly probable that the lessons of the preparation for struggle gained by the party membership in the period before 'Red Friday' were undermined and destroyed and that in place of the emphasis then placed on seizing the revolutionary initiative the party activists in the unions were allowed to fall back into the type of 'rank and filism' which had characterized the CPGB's unofficial trade union movements in the early 1920s. The point was, of course, that the whole trend of party policy towards the TUC between July 1925 and May 1926 meant that that work of the NMM had to be orientated increasingly towards the pressurizing of the existing union leadership and not to the development of an alternative revolutionary leadership prepared for the betrayals to which orthodox trade unionism, however militant, must lead in a political confrontation of the type witnessed in the General Strike. In other words, the party membership was not being trained for the task of revolutionary leadership across the nine months; it was, by contrast, being encouraged to lapse into the 'ginger group' operation of the old type with the result that in the objectively revolutionary circumstances of the strike it was unable to see any way of transcending the methods of orthodox, militant trade unionism.

The Party caught in a contradiction

In circumstances where working-class consciousness developed very rapidly and where the task of the party was to provide concrete leadership to give this radicalization a revolutionary means of expression, the party inevitably lagged behind the developments among the working class; it was theoretically unprepared for them, unprepared for the treacherous role of the official left wing and unprepared for the movement of the General Strike towards a necessarily revolutionary challenge to the state. The result of this for the party's role in the strike was that it was unable to mobilize to the full the combativeness of the rank and file, unable effectively to develop the great potential for leadership which had been building up through its work in the unions since 1924. Looking back on the situation, George Hardy later admitted to the great theoretical confusion with which the party entered the strike:

Although we knew of what treachery the Right

44 G. Hardy, *Those Stormy Years*, p. 185. My emphasis.

Wing leaders were capable, we did not clearly understand the part played by the so-called 'left' in the union leadership. In the main they turned out to be windbags and capitulated to the Right Wing. We were taught a major lesson; that while developing a move to the left officially, the main point in preparing for action must always be to develop a class-conscious leadership among the rank and file.⁴⁵

The tragedy of the CPGB in 1926 was that it was precisely with this theoretical concept of the role of the party that the NMM had been launched in 1924 and had operated in the first part of 1925. Now it was caught in the contradiction of the policy emanating from the CI and its own inability to fight the implications of this. The outcome, as was later implied by the party itself, was a complete antithesis between the party's call for 'preparedness' on the eve of the General Strike and its subordination in practice to the leadership of the TUC:

In this, however, it [the CP] displayed a certain inconsistency, for while in itself it [the call for preparedness] was an organized protest against the defeatist policy of the General Council and was one of the principal instruments for exposing this policy, it nevertheless issued the slogan of concentrating the leadership of all the unions in the General Council . . .⁴⁶

Tail-ending the working class

The contradictory position of the CPGB did much to prevent it maximizing its influence during the General Strike. The previous growth of the NMM and the propaganda for 'preparedness' had indeed done much to make it impossible for the TUC to back down from supporting the miners, but when the conflict had begun the fact that the CPGB had approached it in a purely trade union sense did much to neutralize its potential effectiveness. The clearest indication of this was the fact that from the start the party leadership was virtually paralysed, for while the party might not have seen the strike as a potentially revolutionary struggle, the government was acutely aware of its implications with the result that the party bore the brunt of government repressive actions and its leadership was consequently able to function in only the most limited way. The Central Committee's Report to the Eighth Congress later admitted that:

Communications were a problem at the outset, as it became clear that we had not sufficiently

mobilized even the very scanty resources at our disposal and the question was complicated by the fact that, on top of the General Strike, the Party Centre after the first day or two was semi-illegal . . .

The point was that the leadership was paralysed not, as Stalinists suggest, because prominent party leaders had been imprisoned in October 1925 (six were released on the eve of the strike and the party had set up an alternative leadership) but because the CPGB had failed to understand the revolutionary implications of the strike or prepared accordingly. Moreover, party policy during the strike indicated the way the party lagged behind developments, tail-ending the working class and subordinating itself essentially to spontaneity, both phenomena being products of its own theoretical backwardness. As the Report to the Eighth Congress indicated:

The Party entered the General Strike with political and organizational slogans that were inevitably defensive in character . . . once the masses were on the streets the business of the Central Committee was to extend these slogans, at the same time making them more aggressive in character.

What this meant in practice was the advancing of the demand for the resignation of the Baldwin government, its replacement by a Labour government and the nationalization of the mines; but besides the anachronistic character of these slogans at a time when the strike was developing into the initial stages of a situation of dual power and the urgent need was to extend and link up the Councils of Action, the fact was that they were political demands and completely contradicted the party's previous assertion as to the purely economic character of the struggle. The slogans were, in fact, purely spontaneous reactions to events; they were unrelated to any previous political preparation of the party membership and had no effect on the course of the strike.

CP opportunism assists TUC treachery

The considerable potential which the CPGB possessed for playing the leading role in the strike was therefore largely unrealized. There is no questioning the party's great local influence—its members were active in leading positions on the great majority of Councils of Action—but the crucial issue was how this potential was to be realized when, until the very end of the strike, the party was subordinating its activity to that of the General Council. The party could, then, do no more than play a militant but essentially limited part during the strike and the influence which it was able to exert over the rank and file was of a

45 Hardy, op. cit., p. 188.

46 *The Communist International Between the 5th and 6th World Congresses*. CPGB, July 1928.

basically syndicalist rather than revolutionary kind. As a result, the CPGB was quite unready to mobilize the rank and file against the action of the TUC in calling off the strike at the very moment when later reports showed that it was just reaching the peak of its effectiveness. In fact, the party completely shared the astonishment and bewilderment of the rank and file, the *Workers' Weekly* commenting in a tone of aggrieved surprise:

We warned our readers of the weakness and worse of the Right Wing on the General Council—but here we confess that reality has far exceeded our worst forebodings . . . The CP had in fact consistently warned the workers that such was likely to happen, but even the CP can be forgiven for not believing it to be possible that once the struggle had begun these leaders should have proved themselves such pitiful poltroons as to surrender at the very moment of victory.⁴⁷

In fact, the CPGB had no reason for sharing in the rank and file's bewilderment. The betrayal of the General Strike was essentially bound up with the movement of the party into an opportunistic relationship with the TUC left wing and the fact that it had lent itself to the task of creating illusions about the character of the strike and the role of the TUC among the rank and file which had objectively assisted the General Council in its treacherous role. This may seem a harsh judgement; certainly it is in conflict with Macfarlane, who considers that the party's line was the only one 'practicable' under the circumstances. The point is, however, that a revolutionary situation places on the revolutionary party the responsibility for absolute theoretical clarity and complete firmness in carrying into practice the practical work which flows from this understanding. The CPGB failed in its first, and, as it proved, only decisive test as a revolutionary party precisely because of its inability to deepen theoretically its necessarily formal understanding of Bolshevik methods of work in the period when it began to emerge as a decisive force among the working

class. It was only through a ruthless critique of centrist politics and the opportunistic relationship to these of the line of the CI that the CPGB could have prepared for the General Strike and educated its membership for the revolutionary possibilities inherent in the situation. Without this the CPGB necessarily became involved in the confused centrist tendencies which were so pronounced in the labour movement in the mid-1920s and which rested on a certain opportunism in the working class which it should have been the work of the party to counteract, not appease.

Conclusion

It can be suggested, then, that the significance of the study of the origins and early history of the CPGB derives from the necessity for Marxists to make more concrete their understanding of the crucial role of revolutionary theory in relation to political practice in a period of acute class conflict. It is for the elucidation of this question that Marxists look to Macfarlane's work, but while they will find information of considerable value there hitherto unavailable for the study of the CPGB they will find no explanation of why the CPGB failed as a revolutionary party. Indeed, by implicitly lending support to the Stalinist line of the mid-1920s, Macfarlane helps perpetuate the myths propagated by the CPGB about its role in the General Strike ever since 1926. This is why his book (certainly the section up to 1926) is quite acceptable to his Stalinist reviewer, Monty Johnstone.⁴⁸ The aim of this set of articles, based partly on the material in Macfarlane's book, partly on new research, has been to indicate the main tendencies which went to make the CPGB, which shaped its empirical, syndicalist character in the 1920s, and made for its weakness as a revolutionary organization. Above all, the aim has not been simply to indicate the historiographical aberrations of Macfarlane but to suggest to Marxists who read his book the parallels which can usefully be made between the work of the CPGB in the 1920s and the present problems associated with the construction of the revolutionary party in Britain.

47 *Workers' Weekly*, May 21, 1926.

48 *New Left Review*,

Towards a history of the Third



Stalin and Bukharin

International

(Part III)

by Tom Kemp

Towards a history of the Third



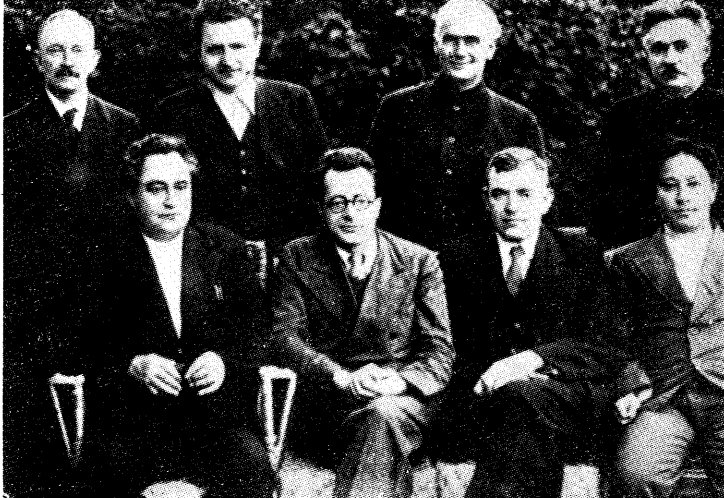
Stalin and Bukharin

International

(Part III)

by Tom Kemp

The Stalinist leadership of the Comintern.
 Back row : Kuusinen, Gottwald, Pieck, Manuilsky.
 Seated extreme left : Dimitrov, 2nd from left :
 Togliatti



1

REPORTING ON THE results of the Sixth Congress of the Communist International to the Leningrad party organization, Molotov declared that 'The Comintern has achieved unity on the basis of overcoming Trotskyism'. It was a premature assessment in both its parts. Before long Bukharin, the main figure at the Congress, was in disgrace, and the Stalinists initiated a bitter struggle against the Right Wing of which he was the spokesman. As for Trotskyism, it was for some time to come to be presented as a grave danger, as the purges of the 1930s were to show.

From the Sixth Congress, however, differences were settled more and more in the shadows rather than in public discussion and debate. This applied both in the Russian party and in the foreign sections. In a number of the latter a clean sweep was made of leading officials and a new cadre, trained in the Comintern's Lenin School, or whose docility could be counted upon, was installed. If these methods caused disquiet even to the new layer of leaders, such as Togliatti and Thorez, they suppressed their scruples and fell into rank as loyal supporters of every change in the line.

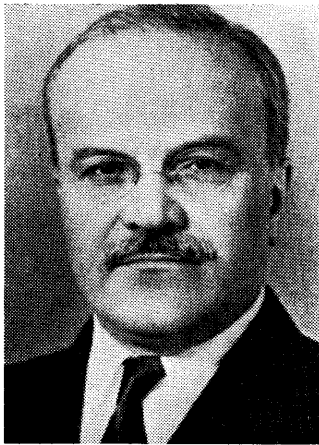
In the period from 1928 the character of the Comintern continued to change. Even Togliatti, later to become prominent under the name of Ercoli as a spokesman for Stalin, voiced his fears,

in a private letter to Trotsky, that the Comintern had become a burden to the Russian leadership. It was continued as a political machine which in practice was no more than an arm of the bureaucracy staffed by obedient functionaries with no will of their own. It went through the motions of being an international revolutionary organization until the events in Germany made necessary a sharp swing to the right; and even after 1933 it continued to preserve some of the old forms associated with the Comintern in its earlier years. But it is probable that Stalin found the Comintern increasingly an embarrassment even at this stage, as Togliatti and others sensed, but could not destroy it because of the opportunity this would have offered to the Left Opposition to extend its influence among Communist workers. Even so, seven years, instead of the statutory four, were allowed to lapse between the Sixth and the Seventh Congress, which was to be the last. And it is obvious that this Congress, which laid the theoretical groundwork for the turn to the Popular Front, had nothing in common with the Congresses of the early years. It remains, of course, to explain why men like Thorez and Togliatti, who had set out to be revolutionaries and for a time displayed some sympathy with the Left Opposition, should have become the docile spokesmen of the Stalinized Comintern.

2

When the Sixth Congress met in July 1928 a number of its most important national sections had suffered severe defeats or were still paralysed by internal crises. Only three parties, those of Germany, Czechoslovakia and France, could

claim a mass following. A number of parties in Eastern Europe, as well as the important Italian party, had been driven underground. In Britain, Scandinavia and North America the Communist Parties had established only a precarious toe-



V. M. Molotov :
The Comintern had
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Trotskyism

hold in the working class and were scarcely more than sects. Apart from China, where the party was still suffering from the defeat of the Second Revolution of 1926-1927, the International could only count upon small and poorly organized sections in most of the colonial and semi-colonial countries. In short, the balance-sheet was far from satisfactory.

The tactical line laid down by the Sixth Congress, nominally continuing the 'Bolshevization' of previous years, set the Communist Parties on a sectarian course which confirmed their isolation from the mass of the working class or, where they enjoyed working-class support, precluded the formation of an effective united front against fascism. This tactic was based upon a scholastic division of post-war development into numbered periods, the third of which was supposed to be currently under way. This so-called 'third period' was, in any case, broadly defined to include rapid technical development, growing contradictions be-

The responsibility of the Communist International for the catastrophic defeat of the German working class in 1933 was extremely heavy. The German party was by far the largest outside the Soviet Union and had the most experience—tragic as it was—in revolutionary struggle. Moreover, Germany occupied a key position in post-war Europe. The onset of the world economic depression in 1929-1930 brought the crisis of capitalism to a new and frenzied phase. All countries were swept by political convulsions in the wake of the violent economic blizzard which began in the USA and rapidly swept across Europe. Germany was the most vulnerable because the precarious recovery from the disaster of the First World War and the prosperity of the late 1920s had been made possible largely on the basis of an inflow of American capital, especially

tween the productive forces and contracting markets and sharpened dangers of wars between the imperialist states or against the Soviet Union. It was taken to offer great new revolutionary opportunities and therefore imposed upon the Communist Parties a sharp left turn in the form, particularly, of a struggle against the Social Democratic parties, already labelled as 'social fascists' at the Ninth Plenum of the Executive Committee in February 1928. The theory of 'social fascism' led to the conclusion that the social-democratic movement was no longer part of the working class. If there was no difference between a regime in which the social-democratic leaders joined the government and one dominated by a fascist party, then it would be difficult in practice to define fascism. It assumed that there could be a form of fascism in which the labour movement, especially the social democracy, continued to exist. Still more important, in practical terms, it was impossible to break the working class from reformist leaders by the so-called 'united front' from below by designating them as 'social fascists'. It gave the reformists the opportunity to move closer to their own bourgeoisie while denouncing the Communists as splitters. These new tactics of the 'third period' proved to be a disastrous failure, especially in Germany; they led the party into adventures including, at times, a form of alliance with the Nazis against the Social Democracy and into isolation from that majority section of the working class which continued to follow reformist leadership.

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short-term funds. When these were withdrawn following the Wall Street crash the consequences for the German economy were disastrous. Unemployment, insecurity and poverty became the lot of millions of workers. The middle classes, already embittered and partly ruined by the inflation of the early 1920s, were once again confronted with impoverishment and sought any remedy, however desperate, to escape such a fate. For a number of years a series of crisis governments grappled unsuccessfully with the situation as Germany tottered closer to civil war.

By maintaining the slogans and tactics of the so-called 'third period' the German Communist Party proved incapable of seizing the very real revolutionary possibilities which were presented in the early 1930s. In a series of brilliant articles



Nikolai Bukharin :
main figure at
the Sixth Congress
soon to be in
disgrace

and pamphlets Trotsky castigated the suicidal course thrust upon the Party by the Comintern. The victory of the Nazis, backed by the masters of heavy industry and all the most reactionary forces in German society, was by no means inevitable. The German working class was the largest and by far the best organized on the Continent of Europe. It had the oldest traditions of Marxist theory and organization. It was no use simply condemning the role of the reformist leaders and still more futile, as well as factually wrong, to describe them as 'social fascists'. The key to the situation lay in the hands of the Communist Party. By a correct united front policy, with its great influence over large sections of advanced workers and youth, backed by the prestige of the Soviet Union and if necessary by its material support, it could have brought the whole working class into action against the advancing brown tide of Nazism and won allies from sections of the middle class and peasantry. Instead, the ultra-left adventurism of the 'third period', while looking very revolutionary, brought division and confusion to the working class which in the end went down to defeat without a fight. Its leaders and militants were killed, imprisoned or forced into exile while the masses were terrorized by storm-troops and concentration camps.

After the legal coming to power of the Nazis the great organizations built up by the German proletariat over many decades were completely and thoroughly crushed. An all-enveloping apparatus of propaganda was turned towards eliminating all traces of Marxism from the consciousness

of the working class as a complement to the physical terror.

The defeat of the German working class was sudden and more complete than had been expected by the Communist leaders. Operating with a false theory of fascism they even sanguinely expected that after a brief experience with Nazi government their chances of gaining power would be improved. Some, undoubtedly, from what little evidence there is, had qualms all along about the tactical turn required by the Sixth Congress and imposed by the organs of the Comintern in the following years. It was significant that many of the German Communists who took refuge in the Soviet Union were sooner or later to be liquidated by Stalin's orders (some even handed over to the Gestapo in 1941). They knew too much, and were a living reproach to the architect of the biggest defeat in the history of the European working class whose effects are still visible, and not only in Germany itself, more than a generation later.

In the years after 1933 the usual Communist explanation for the German defeat was to blame it on the Social-Democracy. Instead of a rigorous examination of the tactics pursued and how they led to defeat, a few remarks were made about the mistakes of Neumann or other German Communist leaders. Trotsky's warnings went almost unheeded. After all, the Comintern was waging an all-out campaign against Trotskyism throughout these years. The supporters of the Left Opposition in Germany, few in number, thus found it difficult to gain a hearing from members of the Communist Party. They were, in any case, mainly young, with little experience of politics and no roots in the working class. From the lessons of Germany, however, Trotsky derived the conclusion that it was no longer possible to expect that the Communist Parties or the Comintern could be reformed from within. The defeat and betrayal of 1933 was an historical turning point as significant as the vote of war credits by the Social Democratic Parties in August 1914. It thus required a whole re-appraisal of the strategy of the Left Opposition. It was now necessary to prepare for the construction of a new Marxist International completely independent of the Stalinist bureaucracy and in political opposition to it.

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Meanwhile this bureaucracy and its functionaries in the Comintern were also digesting the lessons of the German experiences. The victory of fascism in the most industrially advanced European

country confronted the Soviet Union with the threat of a war spearheaded by German Nazism. It also opened up, at the same time, the prospect of fascist take-overs in a number of other coun-



Heinz Neumann :
a few remarks
about his
mistakes

tries in which social antagonisms were deepening. While there is some evidence that Stalin was seeking an understanding with Nazi Germany in the period after the accession of Hitler to power this proved impossible to bring about and Russian foreign policy thus sought to make defence agreements and pacts with the Western powers and began to support the League of Nations. The crucial step was the defence pact with the French government, whose premier at the time was Laval, in 1935, and Stalin's declaration approving French military preparations made at the time. From then on the bureaucracy explicitly recognized that it understood defence of the Soviet Union to depend upon alliances with bourgeois states and manoeuvres in the League of Nations rather than upon working-class solidarity and revolutionary struggle. At the Seventh Congress, in 1935, Togliatti (Ercoli), who had now made him-

It is impossible to follow out in detail the process by which the left adventurism of the 'third period' became the right opportunism of the Popular Front without knowing much more about the inner history of the Comintern than the available evidence reveals. It is only through published articles and documents and shifts in policy on the part of national Communist Parties that the outward signs can be followed until the new line was finally endorsed at the Seventh Congress in 1935. It would be interesting to know, for example, how a man like Togliatti silenced his doubts about Stalin and reconciled his fears that the intention was to allow the Comintern virtually to disappear with his appearance a few years later as the most sophisticated advocate of the new line. As he was an exile from a country dominated by fascism it could not have been the national social base which was determinant. If Togliatti threw in his lot with the bureaucracy and abandoned classic principles of Marxism-Leninism there must have been certain reasons affecting his convictions which must be taken into account.

Togliatti, after all, was only one of the most

self the most accomplished casuist in Stalin's employ, provided a lengthy justification for the change of front. According to him 'we see ever more clearly defined in Europe a group of capitalist states, dominated and directed by the most bellicose and reactionary forces, who are directly interested in an immediate outbreak of war in general and, in particular of a war directed against the Soviet Union. [This part was emphasized in the published report.] On the other hand, a group is appearing consisting of capitalist countries which for the most part have preserved a parliamentary regime and which are more or less interested in the preservation of peace'. In other words there were warlike capitalist states and peace-loving ('more or less') capitalist states. With the latter alliances and pacts could be made.

If there were peace-loving capitalist states with which peaceful co-existence could be pursued it followed that there were, inside these countries, elements in the bourgeoisie with which the Communist Parties could make political alliances. Hence they were encouraged to seek broad alliances of all 'anti-fascist forces' and to make 'the struggle against fascism and war' the centre-piece of all their activities.

5

outstanding of a generation which set out to be genuine Marxist revolutionaries and ended up as accomplished sophists defending every twist and turn of Stalinist politics. Some factors in this transformation may be suggested for discussion and investigation. Firstly, there was attachment to the cause of the October Revolution and belief that the first consideration should be the defence of its conquests against the predatory designs of Nazi Germany. These people convinced themselves that in the face of these great dangers the revolutionary struggle in the countries of bourgeois democracy had to be called off for the time being. Secondly, in their speeches and writings, the Comintern spokesmen, like Togliatti, Thorez and Dimitrov, conserved a revolutionary phraseology and presented the new line as a tactical turn within the long-term strategy of a revolution for world communism. Except insofar as they may have become hardened cynics and opportunists on the purely personal level, if they conserved any real attachment to Marxism it could only have been along these lines. For many party leaders and for the militants in the party—at least until new layers were recruited specifically



Palmiro Togliatti
threw in his lot
with the
bureaucracy
abandoning
Marxism-
Leninism

on the propaganda and policy of the Popular Front—the same reasoning must have applied.

The Seventh Congress, held in 1935, might be described as Stalin's show congress. Almost without any regard even for the immediate past the Communist International was launched on its new course. Georgi Dimitrov, hero of the Reichstag fire trial, gave the main report, flanked by reports almost as long by Togliatti (Ercoli), Manuilsky, Thorez and others. In the previous year or so a number of national parties had been moving on to the new line. In fact, only in France had any real success been attained, largely, no doubt, as a result of the temporary concordance of Stalin's foreign policy interests with those of the

French ruling class as shown by the pact of 1935. Hence the particular importance of Thorez's report, entitled *The Successes of the Anti-Fascist United Front*. He showed how the French Communist Party had taken the initiative in bringing together various left parliamentary groups and organizing a number of mass demonstrations of a popular front character. In the new spirit of casuistry which reigned in the Communist leadership he tried to show that support for the Laval pact did not mean support for the class policy of the French bourgeoisie. As befitted the politician who was later to exult in the title of 'the leading Stalinist in France', Thorez concluded his speech with the following words: 'We know that the battle will be hard, but we are sure of victory and we do not fear to breast the tumultuous waves at Dimitrov's summons since the helm of our ship is in the firm hands of the greatest of pilots, our dear and great Stalin'.

This record of his speech helped to establish the one-time secret sympathizer with the Left Opposition as an internationally renowned leader. Presenting himself in France as a rugged, proletarian 'Son of the People', Thorez went on to further successes of the same sort—helping the Blum government to power with Communist votes, bringing to an end the sit-down strikes of May-June 1936 and extending an outstretched hand to the Church.

6

Stalin took no more part in the Seventh Congress that he had done at the previous one. Probably he regarded the Comintern with contempt, but he exacted from the speakers and delegates an adulation never previously accorded to a living personality in the working-class movement. This reached its peak in the speech of Manuilsky devoted to Engels which was, in fact, designed to show Stalin as the true theoretical continuator of Marx, Engels and Lenin, thanks primarily to the theory of 'socialism in one country' which was, of course, the theoretical foundation of the German débâcle as well as of the popular front policy to which it led. After enumerating Stalin's other 'contributions' to Marxism, Manuilsky added with unconsciously grisly humour: 'And the Bolsheviks, led by Stalin, turned all these theoretical propositions of Stalin into flesh and blood.' In fact, within the next year or two, most of the remaining flesh and blood Bolsheviks in Russia, not excepting many loyal functionaries of the

Comintern, were to be liquidated in the blood purges. In fact, the terror turned against the Trotskyists and others suspected of opposition to Stalin was the necessary corollary to the new line, a guarantee to the bourgeoisie whose alliance Stalin now sought.

Now, more than ever, in the period after the Seventh Congress the line was laid down and applied by the national parties with little or no discussion and only the adaptations required by the circumstances of the country concerned. In fact, and this was one of the attractions of the new line, the national leaderships now had, in practice, more independence than before (and no doubt, more freedom from criticism from the Stalintern representative or from Moscow itself), in working out the details of national policy. The new line accorded with the opportunist bent of most of the party leaders. They could talk revolution while pursuing a policy which could give no offence to bourgeois liberals. Dropping much



Maurice Thorez :
'the helm of our
ship is in the
hands of . . .
our dear and
great Stalin'

of the old Comintern jargon which had gone with the 'third period' they could now speak with national accents. Communists caimed to be the staunchest defenders of national traditions, wrapped themselves in their respective national flags and began to sing the national anthem jointly with the bourgeoisie. The great figures of the bourgeois revolution were appropriated as fore-runners of Marxism. The Americans named their party school after the plantation land-owner and slave-owner, Jefferson. The French paid respects to the cult of Robespierre, who sent the left-wing agitators of the French Revolution to the scaffold and made it a capital offence to advocate the division of landed property. History was distorted to make it permissible to support the so-called 'national' or 'democratic' bourgeoisie in the less developed capitalist countries such as Spain. A wholesale prostitution of Marxism took place in which, in time, major theoretical questions could be decided by a chance remark of Stalin.

The Seventh Congress, in short, represented

To return to the Seventh Congress, it really marked the end of the Comintern as an international organization. It lingered on through its agencies in Moscow but interchange between national parties became purely formal; the only real traffic was between the national parties and Moscow. 'Internationalism' meant absolute fidelity to Stalin's policies. The speeches made in 1935 were funeral orations over a body which had long since died: the defeat of the German Communist Party had been its real death-blow.

The historian who seeks to write the story of the Comintern after 1935 is beset by a serious lack of information—which is locked away in the archives in Moscow or in those of the national CP, or has perhaps been destroyed. There are

the final abandonment of a revolutionary struggle for power as the objective of the Communist Parties. In its place came *national* policies designed to bring to power or support governments whose policies would counter the threat from Nazi Germany and thus, ostensibly, assist in 'defending' the Soviet Union. Thus the emphasis was on 'anti-fascism' and what was described as 'the struggle against war'. This did not mean that all the old phraseology was discarded; it still had a purpose in attracting to the Communist Party those workers seeking a revolutionary way out of the crisis.

The greater independence of the local leaderships on certain national political questions was coupled with the requirement of absolute and unswerving allegiance to the Stalinist bureaucracy on everything else. This fidelity became a touchstone for Communist leadership. The selective process begun in the late 1920s had now brought into the leadership of the national parties a cadre which owed its position to this fidelity. The new leading cadre often had received its basic theoretical training in the Lenin School maintained by the Comintern in Moscow or in party courses organized at home. It was thus axiomatic that Stalinism was the Marxism of the day. Most of the so-called Marxism which found a receptive echo in the ranks of the intelligentsia in the 1930s was this Stalinist version, which reached its finished form, complete with Stalin's interpretation of dialectical and historical materialism, in the famous *Short History of the CPSU*, first issued in 1939, which became the party textbook throughout the world.

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the various accounts of defectors, but they are not of the first rank and they have their own axes to grind. One tends, therefore, to fall back upon the published sources; the periodicals, publications and documents of the Communist International or of its national sections. Therein lies the problem and a major paradox already referred to.

Those historians who pursue this method come up with an obvious but facile conclusion. Let us take for examination the thesis of Kermite McKenzie, an American scholar, in a book entitled *Comintern and World Revolution* published in 1964. Speaking of the Seventh Congress, he claims that 'the novel features of the new patterns of strategy and tactics could well create erroneous



Andre Marty (extreme left) in company with Duclos (centre) and Thorez (right) sincerely believed in his own propaganda

impressions. Some observers of the world communist movement made a mistake respecting *means*—and believed that the Comintern now was adopting a programme of peaceful, democratic evolution towards Communism. Other observers made a mistake respecting *ends*—and believed that the Comintern had abandoned the idea of struggle for world Communism. A careful reading of the report of the Seventh Congress as well as of Comintern literature of the next four years, reveals that the Comintern still insisted upon the necessity of a violent overthrow of capitalism by means of a Communist-led revolution and the erection of a Communist dictatorship, and still retained as its fundamental goal the establishment of world Communism' (p. 158). In other words, he is maintaining that neither the means nor the ends had changed: the Seventh Congress simply permitted greater flexibility in tactics and programme. According to this type of argument the Popular Front terminology was intended to deceive the innocent. According to the run-of-the-mill Communist conspiracy argument the real aims still remained seizure of power by violent means, establishment of a proletarian dictatorship subordinate to Russia and so on.

McKenzie claims that 'The Comintern never gave up the struggle for the transformation of the world that it had begun in 1919'. There was thus, in his view, essential continuity between the International of Lenin and Trotsky and that of Stalin and Dimitrov. This conclusion is essentially formalistic in that it rests (as he admits) on printed documents—which are then interpreted in

The period of the application of the line of the Seventh Congress was one of crushing defeats for the working class and the frenetic preparation

a particular way, certain declarations about revolutionary intent or objective being taken at their face value. The historian can hardly proceed in such a way. One can imagine, for example, what results it would give if applied to the European social-democratic parties or even the British Labour Party, which continued to include declarations about socialism in their programmes long after they had abandoned all intention of carrying them out. The contradiction is clearest in the case of some of the socialist or social-democratic parties which went on instructing their members in Marxism of a sort as late as the 1950s.

In fact, of course, there were reasons why the Communist movement continued to profess revolutionary pretensions when its practice had become counter-revolutionary. The historian has to examine what Communist parties *did* in pre-revolutionary situations and see how their actions squared with the words in the documents or the principles to which allegiance was proclaimed on ceremonial occasions. World history since 1935 is rich in such examples: Spain and France in 1936-1937 and, from 1944 to 1947 France, Italy, Belgium, Greece, etc., not to speak of more recent ones. Here were cases where revolutionary beginnings were stifled in the interests of the Soviet bureaucracy which felt its own position menaced by revolutionary outbreaks anywhere in the world.

Many faithful Communist Party members believed, and some still believe, in the revolutionary pretensions of the leadership. Some of the leaders themselves may sincerely believe in their own propaganda as, for example, André Marty apparently did until the conflict with Thorez which led to his expulsion from the French Communist Party. But the fact that many revolutionary workers and intellectuals, or even party leaders, were deluded, or deluded themselves, cannot change the objective record. The fact is that under Stalin's direction the Comintern was destroyed and ceased to be a revolutionary workers' international in the 1930s however many of the trappings of the past it still preserved. And the time was to come, as will be seen, when even these trappings became an embarrassment and had to be discarded.

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of the imperialist countries for the Second World War. These defeats, and the growing fear of war, spread demoralization and raised false hopes of



Willi Munzenberg :
successful
propagandist
died a
mysterious
death

some short cut to peace through class collaboration in Popular Fronts and by 'collective security'. All this was grist to the Stalinist mill. The Communist Parties successfully created for themselves a new image in the eyes of the middle strata and the liberal bourgeois politicians and journalists by becoming the vanguard of the 'anti-fascist' peace forces. On the same basis they attracted, for the first time, a numerous following among the intelligentsia, and a plethora of books and magazines carried their purportedly Marxist ideas and policies into wide circles of the population. Campaigns were waged on an international scale using modern techniques of propaganda and publicity. The inspiring genius behind much of this activity was the German Willi Munzenberg, a former leader of the Young Communist International, who, before his exile, successfully built up a popular Communist Party press in Germany. He had a good deal to do with the establishment of the many front organizations which were organized in the 1930s. Later he broke with Stalinism and died in mysterious circumstances in France in 1940.

The popular front policy made it possible to build up a very wide periphery of sympathizers in all strata of society. The wide ramification of Communist Party influence was, of course, the basis for the McCarthyite campaign in the United States after the War and the investigations of the House Un-American Activities Committee. But there was never a 'Communist conspiracy' in the sense which the witch-hunters sought to prove. Instead there was a wide but loose association of people more or less influenced by the popular front type propaganda which, in any case, had begun to break up as far back as the 1930s when the effects of the Moscow Trials began to show.

On paper, as it were, the Communist Parties in the countries where legal activity was still possible, could show considerable gains. But these parties had long since ceased to be revolutionary. Around them were built up various layers of supporters. There were the wealthy 'angels' who contributed to party funds and helped make possible more lavish outlays in all directions than could be

financed from membership dues or whatever subsidies found their way from Russia in one form or another. There were the much more numerous 'fellow travellers' of various degrees of innocence who formed the backbone of the front organizations and operated the party line in others. Another species were the 'friends', attracted by the glowing picture of the Soviet Union presented in the official propaganda or impressed by what they saw on a conducted Intourist tour. They included such figures as the Dean of Canterbury, who were close to the Stalinist leadership, and the famous Fabian couple, Sydney and Beatrice Webb, whose large tome on *Soviet Communism a New Civilization* was a monument over the methodology which had inspired a lifetime of mis-directed research. Such people served a useful purpose. They could be brandished as trophies by publicists like Palme Dutt and used as a cover for Stalin's crimes.

The Communist Parties increased their memberships, successfully built a new image and became to some degree politically acceptable in bourgeois parliaments and reformist trade unions. The politics with which they operated in day-to-day work were actually *to the right* of many social-democratic and reformist and centrist politicians. The search for alliances with 'anti-fascists' and 'peace-loving' bourgeois made the Communist Party a conservative force, above all in revolutionary situations as in Spain. The growth of the Spanish Communist Party during the Civil War came largely from middle-class recruits and less class-conscious workers attracted by the fact that it seemed to be the most energetic defender of the Republic and upholder of the authority of the army and the police, and not from revolutionary workers.

At the same time, the new sort of Communist Party proved to be a powerful magnet for the centrist trends which, earlier in the 1930s, appeared to be breaking from Social Democracy and, in some cases, moving towards the Fourth International. Thus parties like the ILP in Britain, members of the so-called London Bureau, participated in United Front and Popular Front campaigns which were effectively under Communist Party leadership and stilled their criticism of Stalinism. A whole school of politicians from the same camp, or from the left wing of the Social Democracy, now lent their pens to writing apologies for the Soviet bureaucracy. Those who had attacked the Bolshevik Revolution from 1917 onwards and had pursued Lenin and Trotsky with their criticisms now found much to

praise in Stalin, the realist, at the very time when the Moscow Trials and purges were reaching their crescendo. The task of the Left Opposition was thus made all the more urgent and at the same time doubly difficult. As mentioned, very soon after the German events Trotsky came to the conclusion that the time had come for a break with the Comintern and the organization of a new revolutionary vanguard. Not only the German defeat, but the unwillingness in the following months to consider its causes and discuss them before the

membership, had proved this. The period between 1933 to 1938, as the degeneration of the Third International continued, was also one of great historical importance, the period of intensive preparation for the foundation of the Fourth. The Left Opposition now became an independent organization, which, small as it was numerically, carried on its shoulders the heritage of the Communist International founded by Lenin and Trotsky.

9

In dealing with the history of the Comintern in its final 15 years we are dealing with an organization which would have been unrecognizable to its founders and was repudiated by its greatest living representative. In the purges, moreover, Stalin was picking off a series of old Bolsheviks and revolutionaries who had devoted much of their political activity to building the Communist International: Zinoviev, Bukharin, Bela Kun, the first German delegate from the Spartakusbund, Hugo Eberlein, and many others. Whole parties, whose main leaders were in exile in Russia, were destroyed: the Polish Party, the Yugoslav Party; many of the Germans and Spaniards also 'disappeared' in the 1930s. The complete record would include many of the delegates to the Congresses of the Comintern, many of the officials who for years had bent their spines to Stalin. Of those who were purged some were killed in short order, others imprisoned for years or sent to labour camps. Only a handful, like Victor Serge or Ciliga, lived to tell the tale.

Historically speaking there can be absolutely no doubt that the only interest in the final years of the Comintern lies in its role as an instrument of Stalin's foreign policy. It is a story which will not be told in detail here. The fact is that in the summer of 1939 Stalin decided that the kind of defence of the Soviet Union which he understood made it necessary to come to an arrangement with Hitler. The same methods of secret diplomacy which were being used in negotiation with the British and French were simultaneously having greater success with Hitler's envoys. The Communist Parties, whose role for years had in fact been to prepare the working class for a so-called 'anti-fascist war' alongside their own

bourgeoisie against Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, were suddenly, without any warning or preparation, confronted with a situation in which their propaganda had become obsolete and the existing line an embarrassment. Not surprisingly, the slow-minded leaders, like Harry Pollitt in Britain, took some time to adjust to the new situation. Once new instructions came through and the shape of the line required by Stalin was discerned the necessary adjustments were made.

The outbreak of the war which quickly followed the signature of the pact between Stalin and Hitler created a wholly new and unexpected situation for the Communist Parties. Many of the fellow-travellers and friends quickly whirled off with great shrieks about betrayal. As in a number of countries the party was driven underground or subjected to intense pressure from the bourgeoisie, loyalty kept the majority of members behind the leadership, despite the sudden changes in policy.

Through the early part of the Second World War the Comintern's role was to formulate the new line and convey it to the sections. There is no need here to analyse this phase which coincided, of course, with the partition of Poland, the Finnish War, the capitulation of France and the German occupation of Western Europe. It was possible to turn up quotations from Lenin about turning imperialist war into civil war and 'revolutionary defeatism' to justify a hard line, although the main weight of party activity was placed behind the demand for a negotiated peace. Once the Nazi conquest of Western Europe had been completed, and thus the relative weight of Germany compared with that of the Soviet Union had consistently increased, a new and



Nazi-Stalin pact :
created a wholly
new and
unexpected
situation for the
Communist
parties

dangerous situation arose in Eastern Europe. We now know that the Nazis were preparing the drive to the East from about the summer of

1940; we also know that the preparations made in the Soviet Union were lagging. In the course of 1941 a shift in emphasis appears in the Comintern line and then, with the Nazi attack in June, and the alliance with Britain which followed, an entirely new policy of complete support for the war effort in the Allied territories and for the resistance movement in occupied Europe became mandatory for the Communist Parties.

10

Once the Soviet Union was engaged in an alliance first with Britain and then with the United States the existence of the Communist International, however formal it had now become, was an obstacle to closer understanding. Its dissolution was only a matter of time, and, for that matter, had also a mainly formal character. It was the intention behind the deed as publicly expressed which was important. Thus, in examining the document which announced the end of the Comintern it must also be asked: was what was said meant?

Needless to say, there was no prior discussion in the sections before the decision was made. And, although put forward in the first place as a 'Proposal for Dissolution' it was accepted everywhere without question and articles were quickly written to approve it. The main argument for dissolution, obviously for the benefit of party members, was that: 'the organizational form for uniting the workers chosen by the First Congress of the Communist International and which corresponded to the needs of the initial period of the re-birth of the working-class movement, has more and more become out-grown by the movement's development and by the increasing complexity of its problems in the separate countries, and has even become a hindrance to the further strengthening of the national working-class parties'. In other words, 'socialism in one country' means the substitution of separate national 'roads to socialism' for an international struggle. But the 'deep differences in the historic paths of development of the various countries of the world' and various other differences which the document notes between countries had always existed. If used as a basis for dissolving the Communist International in 1943 they could very well have been used against ever establishing an International, whether in 1864, 1889 (the Second) or 1919.

The document thus provided an endorsement for theories of national exceptionalism which had

circulated in the Communist Parties, particularly in North America and the Anglo-Saxon countries, for some time. Earl Browder, in the United States, seized the occasion actually to dissolve the Communist Party (which had already publicly disaffiliated from the International) and re-form it as a 'Communist Political Association'. In fact, this was a logical course which followed from the completely un-Marxist arguments used to justify the dissolution. Capitalist countries were seen as separate entities, not as countries with a particular relationship to the world market. Thus it could be assumed that each would become ripe for socialism at different times, strung out over an historically extended period which might last for centuries, and necessarily involving the co-existence of capitalist and 'socialist' countries.

So far as there was any theory worth speaking of in this document it was wholly in keeping with Stalin's previous 'contributions' to Marxism and was of the same brand as that which still passes current in the present-day Communist Parties. Of course, in 1943 it was impossible to speak of 'peaceful co-existence' because one part of capitalism was actually waging a desperate aggressive war against the October Revolution's conquests. But Stalin thus needed all the more to establish good relations with the capitalist countries whose interests were also mortally threatened by Nazi Germany and its allies. Thus the Comintern, in its last message to the world working class, called not only for the defeat of the forces threatening the Soviet Union but stated that, 'in the countries of the anti-Hitlerite coalition, the sacred duty of the broadest masses of the people, and first and foremost of the progressive workers, is *to support in every way the war efforts of the governments of these countries* aimed at the speediest destruction of the Hitlerite bloc, and to ensure friendly collaboration between the nations on the basis of equal rights'. [Emphasis added—T.K.] In other words, in support for bourgeois governments (i.e.,

the Churchill coalition, Roosevelt, the governments-in-exile led by de Gaulle and an assortment of monarchists and nondescript politicians, anti-communist to a man) the Comintern went much further than Harry Pollitt had gone in 1939—since he did actually call for a change of government to wage the war more effectively!

It must be accorded, however, that Communist Parties, like that in Great Britain, had not waited for this declaration to throw their weight behind the war effort. To peruse today the files of a journal like *Labour Monthly* for the years from August 1941 (the line changed too quickly after June 21 to get in the next issue), is to be plunged into a world in which party work and war work are interchangeable terms. Palme Dutt purveys strategic advice to the Grand Coalition and his acolytes dispense, at a lower level, the prescriptions which all needed to work and fight harder behind their own government and to prepare to make a success of what was called 'post-war planning'. The Communist Parties, nurtured into existence in the early years of the Comintern, intended to break sharply with the reformist parties which had disgraced themselves by their support for the policies of their 'own' bourgeoisies in 1914, had come full circle.

Flaunting their ignorance or willingness to distort history the authors of the *Proposal for Dissolution* compared the move with that taken by Marx in dissolving the First International when they claimed that as a result of the matured situation for creating national workers' mass parties 'this form of organization no longer corresponded to the needs of the situation'. In fact, as is well known, Marx wound up the First International in the period of reaction which followed the defeat of the Paris Commune in order to prevent it coming under the control of anarchist elements hostile to working-class organization. The dissolution in this case was preparatory to the later re-constitution of the International on a higher level. The action of the Presidium of the Comintern in dissolving the organization could receive no sanction from Marx's behaviour in 1872 or from any accepted canon of Marxism. The Presidium was actually making a declaration of its final break with Marxist internationalism

and, more fundamentally, with the Marxist analysis of capitalism as a world system. The formation of the workers' internationals had never been a question of abstract solidarity, but a necessary way of pursuing the struggle against a system which was, and remained, world-wide. The first article of the Statutes of the Communist International, adopted at the Second Congress, stated:

The New International Association of workers is founded for the purpose of organizing joint action of the proletariat of different countries, aiming at a single and identical goal, viz., the overthrow of capitalism, the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat and of an international republic of soviets which will make it possible completely to abolish classes and bring about socialism, the first stage of communist society.

But according to the Presidium, each national working class was now to find its own way to socialism, either by supporting its bourgeoisie in the war effort if that ruling class happened to be a 'freedom-loving' bourgeoisie, or by underground struggle against it if it had gone over to fascism.

As the Manifesto issued by the Fourth International pointed out at the time: 'The unevenness of development of economy and the workers' movement in the various countries, far from being an argument against internationalism, was one of the main reasons insisted upon by Lenin and Trotsky for the establishment of the Third International. They never tired of stressing the mutual need which the proletariat of advanced capitalist countries and the peoples of the colonies have for each other—the workers of Britain and the masses of India, the US proletariat and the toilers of Latin America, etc.—in their common struggle against the imperialist overlords'. This is the authentic voice of international Marxism. But what did the Comintern line mean for the national and colonial struggles? The example of India was eloquent. The Communist Party of India became the only section of the national liberation movement to support the British war effort, with the result that its chances of winning influence over the masses and preparing for power were immeasurably reduced.

11

It is clear to all that the Comintern declaration, followed within a few weeks by the appointment of a committee 'to wind up the affairs, dissolve the organs and dispose of the staff and property

of the Communist International', was intended to re-assure Stalin's allies that he did not intend to support the revolutionary movement in Europe after the war. Certainly, then, this prepared the

way for the Yalta and Potsdam agreements which envisaged Four-Power unity and a division of Europe into spheres of influence for an indefinite period after the defeat of Nazi Germany. It was also an indication that there was no intention of promoting revolution in the colonial and semi-colonial countries, particularly those of Asia after the defeat of Japan—not even in China, because Chiang Kai-shek was a junior partner in the diplomatic arrangements preparatory to the ending of the war.

The fact that in all these respects Stalin kept his word is an index, if one is required, that the dissolution of the Comintern was not just a manoeuvre intended to deceive. The example of Yugoslavia, where for a long time the Russians refused to support the Tito partisan movement against the Chetniks and the Germans, provides further proof. The leaders of the Western capitalist countries were not children in these matters. No doubt they did not trust Stalin or the Russians as far as any agreements were concerned; they were not simply taken in. A bargain was tacitly made and for a time it was kept. If relations between the Western powers and Russia rapidly deteriorated after the end of the war it was not because the Russians were fomenting revolution or that the Comintern had been kept in existence in a clandestine way: it was the result of a clash between incompatible social systems.

Of course, the international contacts between the Russian party and the national Communist Parties did not cease. It went without saying that the leadership of these parties, even without the Comintern, pursued policies—especially in the international field—which harmonized with the needs of the Soviet bureaucracy and continued to do so until quite recently. Even the formation of the Communist Information Bureau in 1947, to which belonged the East European and the important West European Parties, in no way represented a reincarnation of the Comintern, even the Comintern in its degenerate post-1928 form. It was, like the latter, a means whereby the political line determined by the Soviet bureaucracy was passed on to the trusted leaders of these parties. But it never bothered to restore the formal apparatus of Congresses, Plenums, Statutes, Resolutions and so on which had been inherited from the early years when the Comintern had been a living body and which survived its political demise as an international of revolution.

What did survive, then, were the continued links between the leaders of the national parties and the hierarchy of the Soviet Party. Most of

these leaders had been selected and trained in the 1930s and were committed to support every turn of Soviet policy. In a sense, they did not receive 'orders from Moscow' because their reflexes were the same as those of the Soviet bureaucracy: their ideological assumptions had been formed in the Stalin school. From the Seventh Congress onwards, in fact, while their connection with the Soviet bureaucracy was preserved and took the form of complete fidelity to Soviet policy they also put down increasingly deep roots in the national soil. That was an inevitable consequence of the theory of socialism in one country as spelt out in terms of the Popular Front and, in the post-war years, in the various 'national' roads to socialism. Thus the Communist leadership, especially where it was in command of mass parties, built upon the post-war versions of popular frontism and strongly committed to the so-called national 'roads to socialism', became deeply involved in the institutional life of bourgeois society. In parliament, in the municipalities and in the trade unions, through the press and various other organizations, the basis was created for a party bureaucracy resembling in almost all particulars the old-established reformist bureaucracy. It is true that the Communist Parties in France, Italy and a few other countries where they had influence, were more centralized and more disciplined. But even these characteristics which, originally, had been necessary for revolutionary organization had now turned into their opposite. They were simply a means for consolidating the power of the bureaucratic apparatus, stifling dissent and any expression of independent thought.

The national Communist Party bureaucracies, in the parties where they had mass support, were thus able to establish an independent national base in the labour movement. There remained a necessary bond of common origin, mutual support and virtual identity of interest with the Russian bureaucracy making possible a harmonious working relationship which lasted through to the death of Stalin. From about that time, and then accelerated first by the events of 1956 and the Twentieth Congress and subsequently by the Sino-Soviet conflict, the trend which some bourgeois observers rather inaccurately described as 'polycentrism' became apparent. On many important issues wide differences began to appear between the views of the national party leadership and the Soviet bureaucracy. The process set going in the 1930s by the Seventh Congress and encouraged by the theory behind the dissolution of the Comintern was now working itself out in ways



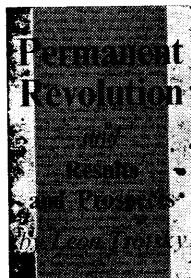
Potsdam: (l. to r.) Attlee, Truman and S

Yalta: (l. to r.) Churchill, Roosevelt and S

which the Soviet bureaucracy had not suspected. The condemnation of the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia in August 1968, by a number of the most important parties outside the Soviet Union, is the most striking example to date of the break-up of the remaining semblance of an international line in the world Communist movement. It has now become increasingly difficult to bring the parties together, let alone to reach agreement on basic political questions.

These tendencies are further proof of the degeneration of the Stalinist movement, but they represent no more than the working out of pro-

cesses which began 40 or more years ago. As has been shown in these articles the heritage of the first four Congresses of the Communist International, founded by Lenin and Trotsky, is carried on not by the parties which describe themselves as Communist—which in 1943 repudiated even the forms of revolutionary internationalism which remained—but by the Fourth International, which remained—but by the Fourth International. Indeed, it is only from this standpoint that a full and objective history of the international movement can, and one day will, be written.



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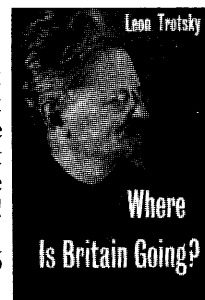
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