

The Origin
&
Development
of
REVISIONISM

in the CPGB

Part I

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OPPORTUNISM - ITS ROOTS AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN.

INTRODUCTION

Revisionism had clearly become entrenched in the CPGB since the adoption of 'The British Road to Socialism'. Throughout the 1920's and '30's the Comintern played the decisive part in steering the CPGB and other European and western Parties along a revolutionary road. However, revolution cannot be exported if the conditions for sustaining the revolutionary power of a proletarian Party do not exist.

Likewise, the Comintern could become the condition of revolutionary change and development within the CPGB, but the basis of that development had to come from within the Party. Social-democratic prejudices and illusions, the influence and power of the labour aristocracy, nurtured by the blandishments of the bourgeoisie and bribed with the super-profits of imperialism, proved more powerful than the masses desire for revolutionary change.

The total collapse of the Soviet Union has shocked and disheartened many formally adhering to communism in Britain and throughout the world. But there could be no other outcome once revisionism had triumphed. The ideology of revisionism is the ideology of the bourgeoisie. The power of revisionism is the power of the bourgeoisie. When Khrushchev attacked Stalin and had his body removed from its place alongside Lenin, this was an attack on Marxism-Leninism and the victory of the October revolution. Khrushchev fell, but his revisionist line remained intact. It is perhaps a testimony to the efforts of the Soviet people and Stalin's leadership in laying the foundations and building socialism, that it took close to three decades before the new Soviet bourgeoisie could finally formalize its power and tear down the Soviet flag.

The Soviet flag will fly again and the workers and peasants of Russia and what once constituted the Soviet Union will take their revenge on the likes of Yeltsin and the criminals who are foisting their murderous authority in the streets of Moscow and other major cities. Stalin's contribution will be restored in the history books. The errors of the CPSU which have lead to this catastrophe will be mercilessly criticized by the Russian, Ukrainian Georgian etc. communists.

But we have got to make our own contribution here. Since the formation of the anti-revisionist movement and the emergence of an albeit disunited Marxist-Leninist movement in Britain; few attempts have been made to analyse opportunism and its roots in the CPGB. It must be said that this failure to make such an analysis is both a result and partly a cause of the failure to make a thorough-going break with revisionism and build a genuine Marxist-Leninist Party. There have been many organizations which whilst calling themselves a communist party, are only the faintest shadow of the old CPGB of the 20's and 30's. They, apparently, seek to recapture the militancy of that Party whilst not attempting to advance one jot beyond its stage of development.

It is important not to forget the achievements of the CPGB which will always have a proud place in the history of the working class movement in Britain. But its shortcomings proved decisive. When the CPGB was formed in 1920, it was only the beginning in the struggle for a revolutionary party. Social-democratic traditions had to be thoroughly criticized in the course of formulating a revolutionary program and tactics. The struggle against opportunism and the need to educate the working class in the spirit of anti-imperialism are the most essential requirements of revolutionary leadership in Britain. On this count the CPGB, while containing elements who understood this point in general, failed from the start to give prime place to the struggle against chauvinism. This being so the CP was incapable of solving the problems of proletarian revolution in Britain.

FORMATION OF THE CPGB - CONSTITUENT ORGANIZATIONS AND THE BASIS OF UNITY.

The largest of the constituent organizations in the unity negotiations was the British Socialist Party (BSP) formed in 1911. The BSP was the name given to the enlarged Social-Democratic Federation (SDF), renamed the SDP in 1908. At the time of the formation of the CPGB, the BSP claimed approximately 6,000 members. However, most were on paper only

The BSP was not a centralized organization with a firm party discipline but a loose body of socialist branches and clubs. Hyndman the founder and leader of the BSP up until 1916, was an opportunist and a jingoist who supported British Imperialism in the First World War. Hyndman(1) and the pro-war executive of the BSP were defeated at the BSP's 1916 conference. From then on consistent agitation against the imperialist war was published through a unofficial publication entitled 'The Call'. The BSP in the main initiated the unity negotiations and its representatives formed the majority of the membership of the new Party.

Tom Bell(2) was very critical of the BSP. The SDF, to which the BSP can be directly traced was once a part of the Labour Representation Committee - the fore-runner to the Labour Party. The SDF split from the LRC in 1901 when a resolution calling for recognition of the class struggle and the socialization of production was rejected. According to Bell, there was always a strong body of opinion inside the BSP who were opposed to this split for the wrong reasons. In the controversy at the founding of the CPGB about whether or not communist candidates in elections should be responsible to the Party, it was mainly BSP delegations that argued for candidates being responsible to their constituency.

The Socialist Labour Party was the second largest constituent organization taking part in the unity negotiations. The SLP was formed after a group of Scottish socialists, members of the SDF, led by George Yates (an engineering worker) published an article criticizing the SDF leadership for reformism in their paper 'The Socialist'. Those supporting 'The Socialist' were branded 'impossibilists' (A term used among French social-democrats of the time to describe those who believed in the impossibility of achieving lasting reforms) and expelled from the SDF at the 1903 conference.

In James Klugmann's 'History of the CPGB', the SLP is criticized for its support for Daniel De Leon, the ideological leader of the American Socialist Labour Party(3). However, Klugmann is forced to admit that Scottish SLP had a strong working class base of support on the Clyde. A telling omission in Klugman's book dealing with the early years of the CPGB is that the most prominent leader of the SLP at its foundation was James Connolly.

At its 17th annual conference in January 1920, the SLP claimed 1250 members, over half of whom were paying dues. It had obviously come a long way since 1903. Soon after its foundation, the SLP bought a printing press and published many Marxist classics. Some of the first printings of Lenin's works in Britain were printed by the SLP. Consistent with its founding link with Irish republicanism, direct assistance was given to the Irish by printing leaflets and papers. Publications banned in Britain were secretly printed by the SLP and the whereabouts of the printing press protected.

It is undoubtedly true that the SLP made some 'leftist' mistakes. The Party went so far as to bar any member holding official positions in the trade unions. The picture of the SLP drawn by J. Klugman, however, is questionable. He assumes that the BSP was more correct than the SLP. This is a false assumption. The contribution of the SLP, some of which is described above, is clear to see. Although a larger organization, the BSP did not match the SLP in its dissemination of Marxism. Klugman makes no attempt to analyse the theoretical weaknesses of the BSP and he glosses over the significance of the fact that the BSP was lead up until 1916 by the arch chauvinist Hyndman.

Although divided in its stand towards the First World War at its outset, the SLP took up a consistent stand against opportunist support for the war and led war time strikes.

The Workers' Socialist Federation was the renamed Women's Suffrage Federation led by Sylvia Pankhurst. Based in the East-End of London, the WSF published a paper called 'Workers' Dreadnought' which had tremendous support among East-End working class men and women. On the two issues which divided the unity negotiations i.e. participation in parliamentary elections and affiliation to the Labour Party, WSF adopted a 'left' sectarian stand against both. Not even the intervention of Lenin's views explaining the need for revolutionary participation in Parliament persuaded Sylvia Pankhurst that her views were mistaken. Consequently, the WSF split from the unity negotiations and later renamed itself CP (British Section of the Third International).

An organization called the South Wales Socialist Society (SWSS) was the fourth group which took part in the unity negotiations. The SWSS descended from the Miners' Reform Movement. It was loose in character and had a strong syndicalist tendency. Strongly suspicious of all political parties the SWSS was opposed to 'Parliamentarism'. This is how Klugmann describes their attitude toward Parliament. However, being steeped in revisionism himself, in making his assessment of the SWSS, Klugmann ignores the fact that communists should be opposed to Parliamentarism. The dividing line between Bolshevik participation in Parliament and sectarianism is not over what Parliament represents (hiding capitalist dictatorship behind a facade of bourgeois democracy) but refusal to expose Parliament from within.

Other groups supporting the formation of the CPGB were the Shop Stewards and Workers Committees. These contained varying trends. They were born out of opposition to the right wing(4) trade union leaders. They were particularly strong in the engineering industry. In their struggle against the chauvinist trade union leadership which supervised the Government's attacks on the working class during the war, they became a militant body against the War. The significance of strikes to defend trade union rights was a somewhat controversial issue in the CPGB in later years. J.T. Murphy seems to have been the source of this controversy. He claimed that they did not represent opposition to the imperialist war at all. Pollitt remarks that there was a feeling among workers that trade union rights should be defended in order not to let the soldiers down when they returned from the war. However much this may be so, growing discontent with the war aroused the workers to strike in defiance of Government and Labour Party Chauvinist appeals and warnings. The workers' consciousness and political opposition to the war developed and was deepened with the outbreak of the October revolution.

Among the Shop-Stewards, there was a strong suspicion of political parties and parliamentary activity. They saw in the October revolution the triumph of workers' organizations similar to their own. In 1920 they voted for affiliation to the Third-International. In general, the Shop-stewards movement was strongly against involvement with the Labour Party and was very strong in its condemnation of the trade union leadership.

A group calling themselves Guild Socialists, who renamed themselves Guild Communists before merging into the CPGB, were also involved in the unity negotiations. They represented the left-wing of the National Guilds League. Led by G.D.H. Cole they were mostly university and professional people who stood for a kind of respectable syndicalism. Only a small group of these turned toward Marxism and joined the Communist Party.

Within the ILP there developed a trend which supported the October Revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat. They were not involved in the negotiations, but fought within the ILP before finally splitting and joining the CPGB in 1921.

In addition to these there were various socialist clubs that joined the CPGB along with individual communists who developed in the 'Hands off Russia' campaign.(5)

Let us now deal with the basis of unity. Prior to the October revolution negotiations, there had been earlier attempts at unity. Prompted by, and on the insistence of the International Socialist Bureau, a socialist unity conference of the BSP, ILP and Fabian Society was held in 1913. This attempt at unity was almost a farce. What basis of unity could there possibly be between the BSP and the Fabians. Unity talks not based on principles of scientific socialism, which today must include a correct analysis of the origins of the collapse of the Soviet Union, are doomed to failure. The desire for unity is not enough. J. Klugmann in his 2 volume 'history' gives no explanation why the SLP did not take part in the 1913 unity discussions. However, I think we can guess. It is very likely that the SLP denounced them as an opportunist exercise that would lead to nothing.

Not until the 7th Congress of the BSP in March/April, 1918 was serious consideration given to the basis for unifying socialist organizations. Delegates began to stress that unity be based on the principles of Marxism. Unity with the ILP was questioned and they decided to invite the SLP to future unity talks. This congress took place at a time when it was clear the ILP had joined in the capitalists and social-chauvinist propaganda war against Soviet Russia. It was clear, therefore that there could be no revolutionary basis for unity with them.

The effect of the Russian October revolution in bringing home to Marxists and socialists throughout the world, the kind of Party needed to lead the struggle for working class power was tremendous. Workers on the Clydeside greeted the October revolution with such enthusiasm, it frightened the life out of Labour Party workers in the area.

According to Klugmann, there was no disagreement on 'fundamentals' at the first unity meetings between the BSP, SLP, WSF and SESS. The most controversial fundamental of the time being recognition of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Tactical differences over the new communist party's attitude towards Parliament and the Labour Party proved more controversial than the strategic questions. The BSP was for participation in Parliament and affiliation to the Labour Party.(6) The WSF supported neither. The SLP, while supporting participation in elections, was split over the question of affiliation to the Labour Party. A BSP proposal to refer the question of the Labour Party to a referendum of the membership 3 months after the formation of the new party was agreed. However, the executive of the SLP subsequently rejected the proposal. This amounted to walking out of the unity negotiations.

The delegates to the Unity Convention (MacManus, Bell and Paul) refused to accept this and appealed directly to the membership of the SLP to attend an unofficial SLP conference in Nottingham. The majority of the SLP's active members were represented at the meeting, which issued a Manifesto on communist unity. The pro-unity faction of the SLP renamed itself the Communist Unity Group. Nothing stood in the way of organizing the founding meeting of the Communist Party. Groups and individuals were invited to attend on the basis of support for affiliation to the Third International, the dictatorship of the proletariat and soviets. The question of affiliation to the Labour Party was decided at the founding convention.

The first Central Committee called the Provisional Executive Committee consisted of 4 representatives from the BSP, 4 from the CUG and 6 directly elected by the founding convention.(5)

A further unity conference was held Jan. 29-30, 1921 in Leeds which unified the CPGB, the Communist Labour Party(7) and Communist Party (British Section of the Third International CP-BSTI) (8). The pro-CPGB left-wing group of the ILP deferred actually merging with the CPGB at this stage because they were involved in a struggle inside the ILP. They joined in the spring of 1921.(9)

AFTER THE FOUNDATION OF THE CPGB - EARLY CONTROVERSIES.

The early years of the CPGB are described by Harry Pollitt in 'Serving My Time' as years when the Party was devided by 'petty jealousies and sectarianism'. However, neither Harry Pollitt or later historians of the CPGB, like J. Klugmann, make any attempt to describe positions taken on any question of principle. Harry Pollitt is credited with bringing the CPGB closer to the working class by struggling against sectarianism. But whatever correct stands he may have taken against sectarian isolation from the working class, it is clear from a study of the road the Party took after he became General Secretary, that he regarded as sectarian all direct political agitation against capitalism and imperialism. Furthermore, although Harry Pollitt took a 'leftist' stand himself during the unity negotiations, on the question of affiliation to the Labour Party, he clung to Lenin's advice long after it was applicable. Lenin's tactical advice was turned into a dogma which was used against any Party member pursuing a vigorous struggle against social-democracy. This point deserves careful attention by Marxist-Leninists today. That point is, the importance of always analysing concrete conditions and being alert to the phenomenon of one tendency concealing another in the struggle against opportunism and revisionism in the ranks of the communist party.

Tom Bell in a History of the CPGB published in 1937 does make points on the issues dividing the CPGB in these early years. When reviewing the struggle against the federal structure of the Party leadership, Bell emphasises the point that the representatives from the different districts failed to grasp the need for central Party leadership. In other words, he is highlighting the fact that it is the political consciousness of the district appointees to the Central Committee, not just the structure.

'Much difficulty was experienced in trying to educate the comrades to recognize the necessity for central direction and executive responsibility for political leadership: that it was not enough for executive members to come to a Central Committee, hear reports, ask questions and delegate their authority to one or two officials, leaving them the responsibility for carrying through the policy. Much discussion and educational work had to be carried on to get these comrades to realize their responsibilities as executive members, and to break them from the old social-democratic theory of formal representation by districts. In short, it was a struggle for the recognition of democratic centralism in the Party.' (The British Communist Party pg. 82 T. Bell)

Sylvia Pankhurst refused to allow her newspaper 'Workers' Dreadnought' to be under the control of the Party and the Central Committee. For her refusal to recognize central Party discipline, she was expelled. In addition to the struggle against federalism, Tom Bell refers to the actions of a number of romanticists and 'ultra-lefts' who toyed with illegal work including military drill, done without the consent of the Central Committee. However, it was felt that social-democratic practices and sectarianism manifest themselves chiefly in the form of a failure to take part in mass struggles.

In 1922 two congresses of the CPGB took place. At 4th Congress held in April, a groundswell of opposition to the Executive Committee developed. Leading this opposition were Harry Pollitt and R. Palme Dutt. Neither were members of the EC, although Pollitt was the London organizer for the RILU.

As already pointed out, Tom Bell refers to the federal structure of the Party and the struggle to educate EC members representing districts to contribute to the central leadership of the Party. At the April conference the EC proposed a resolution to set up a commission which would investigate Party organization. This indicates that the EC understood the need for central Party leadership and that federalism is not a principle of communist organization. However, this resolution from the leadership was amended

against the wishes of the EC, establishing that the commission be drawn from outside the EC. It must be said that such a decision itself as got nothing to do with the principles of communist organization. In fact, the commission was given sweeping powers including the power to make interim recommendations to the EC which the EC was bound to carry out. This is tantamount to giving a commission of relatively unknown and untested people higher authority than the executive committee. It is difficult to believe that the executive had entrenched itself so much that such violations of leadership were so necessary.

But what issues really divided the Party? The question of affiliation to the Labour Party had been settled in favour of applying. The Labour Party, however, had rejected the application on the grounds that the CPGB's support for the dictatorship of the proletariat was in opposition to the aims of the Labour Party. Lenin in 'Left-wing Communism an Infantile disorder', had explained how communists could turn acceptance or rejection of affiliation to their advantage. However, instead of using their rejection of unity to expose the Labour Party, arguments started in the CPGB about the form of the application. Charges were made that the letter sent was sectarian and designed to invite a refusal.

The question of relations with the Labour Party was constantly under discussion. Affiliation having failed, the question of the united front became a hot debating point. The CP was not using the rejection of affiliation to expose the Labour Party. Rather it was acting in such a way as to make the development of the CP dependent on its relations with the Labour Party. It was not striving to become the vanguard.

Another controversial issue during the CPGB's early years was the question of how communists work in the trade unions and other broad organizations. The CPGB was, at this time, particularly involved with the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU) and later from 1924 the Minority Movement. Harry Pollitt was leader of the Minority Movement from 1924/9.

The RILU included in its aims, drafted at an international conference of trade unions organized by the Comintern, recognition of the dictatorship of the proletariat. This was a profound error. In fact, the aims of RILU, which was principally to be an organized opposition to social-democracy and social chauvinism in the trade unions, in recognizing the dictatorship of the proletariat, went beyond the aims suggested by leaders of the Russian trade unions. According to Harry Pollitt, two British trade unionists, A. Purcell and R. Williams (also a CP member), at the founding meeting of RILU, made considerable amendments to a rather modest draft manifesto. These amendments Pollitt refers to, one must assume contributed to the 'leftist' errors of the draft manifesto. As Mao tse-tung often stated 'left' errors are left in form but right in essence. R. Williams was subsequently expelled from the CPGB for his part in the betrayal by the Triple Alliance of Trade Unions of the miners strike in 1921. This defeat of the miners was called Black Friday. Purcell is known mainly for his part in the TUC's betrayal of the General Strike.(10 and 11)

Sectarian errors in the founding of the RILU were made. However, the struggle against these errors finished up throwing the baby out with the bath-water. Harry Pollitt's position as National Secretary in Britain was not based on a correct analysis of 'leftism'. It was more of a subjective reaction to revolutionary propaganda. Harry Pollitt as leader of the British section of the RILU, insisted that 'general propaganda for revolutionary ideas is the job of the Communist Party'. Undoubtedly, there was a need to insist that communists take up the workers' struggle for economic demands if this was not being done by the RILU. Nevertheless, it is incorrect for communists not to raise at every opportunity the wider political issues in line with the over-riding responsibility of communists to educate the working class politically. Not to do this is to do the work of social-democracy. It is an attempt to keep political agitation outside the trade unions. To put a wall between direct political agitation by a communist party

and communists working in the trade unions. Such behaviour gives a free hand to social-democracy to introduce its own anti-communist politics. Of course, trade unions must not be confused with the Communist Party. However, Harry Pollitt's tendency in 'Serving my Time' to distinguish the support he was able to get on economic questions from the opposition he met when raising political issues, is an oblique suggestion that it is not possible to raise politics in the trade unions. Albeit revolutionary politics.

I will show later how this contradiction was 'resolved' by the opportunists in the CPGB. For the present, I will note that this controversy was taking place and it represented a two line struggle. Tom Bell put his finger on it:-

'And our propaganda should be put forward clearly and definitely so that the masses will understand it and see the difference between the Communist Party and the Labour Party, and other bodies....
..Reasons are frequently advanced for keeping our program in the background. Comrades, if there are seven reasons out of ten why we should keep our program in the background before we get into office, then I can foresee that there will be eleven reasons out of ten why we should keep it dark once we have got into office - in case we get flung out.
That is the policy of opportunism. (Speech by T. Bell at the 6th Congress on relations with Labour)

Tom Bell's reference to a program is not accurate. The CPGB had resolutions passed at conferences, but it had not yet produced a program of revolution for Britain. Without such a program it is impossible to stick to the correct path through all the twists and turns, changes of mood among the masses and fashionable but incorrect theories which keep cropping up.

STRUGGLE OVER ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND REPRESENTATION TO THE CENTRAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The only coherent explanation of the political issues underlying opposition to adopting or rather applying the Comintern resolution on communist organization passed at the 3rd World Congress, is given by Tom Bell. In his book, 'A Short History of the British Communist Party', he places as the cornerstone of the struggle over organization, the struggle to eradicate social-democratic tendencies and traditions and the bolshevization of the Party. The federal structure of the Central Committee which was partly formed on a regional basis, created the situation whereby some EC members considered themselves to be representatives of their regions first. It needn't have produced this problem and indeed there would have been opposition from the start to a central committee partly formed on a regional basis if social democratic prejudices and forms of organization had been thoroughly criticized. Tom Bell understood clearly that the need to bolshevize the CPGB was not just an organizational question, but primarily a matter of political consciousness and class attitude.

The commission set up to investigate Party organization consisted of Harry Pollitt, R. Palme Dutt and Harry Inkpin. The commission's proposals, which amounted to the adoption of the Comintern resolution on organization, was presented to the 5th Congress held at Battersea in October, 1922. A unanimous vote of acceptance of the commission's report was given and Dutt and Pollitt were also elected to the EC. A proposal that Harry Pollitt be General Secretary was lost. The Comintern representative at the conference also voted against this proposal.

Implementing the commission's proposals proved difficult due to the resistance put up by many Party members to the changes in organization. More than this there appeared a certain bureaucratic formalism and hidden reluctance to implementing the decisions. A sharp conflict developed within the Political Bureau and the Central Committee on this

matter. Tom Bell does not explain the substance or the form of these disagreements. Maybe the 30 year rule used to keep cabinet papers under wraps applied. However, a meeting with the Comintern Executive on its invitation to discuss Party organization and bringing the Party closer to the masses seems to have resolved a number of problems. Besides reorganizing the party with District Party Committees etc., the Minority Movement (12) was formed following these discussions with the Comintern.

In the commission itself, Pollitt played a very small part. He attributes most of the work to Palme Dutt. None-the-less, he shared in the credit. Unlike Tom Bell who made an effort to explain the political issues and the reasons for the controversy, Pollitt attributes the differences to petty-jelousies among old leaders of the different organizations which united to form the CPGB. This is too easy and begs the question was it just a question of personalities requiring somebody to rise above these so-called clashes of personality. No, there were differences of principle which could have been traced back to the positions held by the constituent organizations - principally the BSP and SLP. The October revolution created the conditions whereby they could unite. But this could only be the beginning in the two line struggle against social-democratic traditions and the bolshevization of the Party.

Harry Pollitt shows his own failure to break with social-democratic politics and forms of struggle by his obscuring of the political weaknesses of the CPGB. In the commission's introduction to the report, it is regretted that organizational questions have taken precedence over politics. Tom Bell regretted this too. However, he does not exaggerate the importance of this stage in struggle and place its significance above subsequent struggles inside the Central Committee and the Party.

THE CPGB AND THE GENERAL STRIKE

In its preperation for an attack on the miners who a few months earlier had successfully struck against an attempt to impose wage-cuts, the Baldwin government ordered the arrest of practically the whole Central Committee of the CPGB. On Oct. 14th, 1925 and the days following, raids were made on the CP's headquarters. 12 leaders, including 8 out of 10 members of the Political Bureau were arrested.(13) The charges brought against the 12 were of 'seditious libel' and 'incitement to mutiny'.

The CPGB had earned the wrath of the bourgeoisie. A great deal had been done to alert the working class to the show down that the government was planning. 'Make the leaders fight' was the CP's slogan directed at the General Council of the TUC. A quadruple alliance of transport workers, miners, railwaymen and engineers was called for. Tom Bell notes that these slogans were correct, but that the CPGB was divorced from the trade union and mass movement. This was so in spite of the respect enjoyed by the Minority Movement, led by Harry Pollitt.

The interesting thing about the slogan 'Make the Leaders Fight' is that although not necessarily incorrect, it does not represent leadership by the Communist Party. Real leadership can only be given by a Party which has close links with the masses. Such a Party would not have to rely on such inadequate slogans. Subsequent events underlined the importance of coupling such slogans with exposure of real and threatened treachery by the Labour aristocracy. Illusions that making the leaders fight, or that a quadruple alliance under labour aristocratic leadership will win victory must be warned against.

Although the CP increased its support following betrayal of the TUC leadership in the General Strike, the fact that the CP had campaigned for that leadership discredited the Party somewhat. The CPGB would have been in a much stronger position had it taken a stand of exposing social-democracy and not tailing in the wake of events. This is the lesson which constantly crops up in reviewing the CP's history. This weakness was summed up by Tom Bell in March 1925 when reporting advice given by the Comintern during a discussion on the bolshevization of the Party:-

'At the same time it warned the Party against the danger of becoming passive, as in recent attacks made upon workers, urged it to prepare for the new struggles that were rising, reminded it of the necessity of not lagging behind events, but of retaining and increasing, instead of losing, its living contact, and of acquiring the ability to manouvre in view of the next revolutionary wave. To do this the Party was urged to pay more attention to the international revolutionary experience of the various Parties and particularly the Russian Party. On the basis of the principles of Leninism. Further, it was necessary for certain weaknesses to be eliminated. Two of these were underlined: first, too dilettante an approach to questions, no fundamental theoretical analysis of the problems before the workers in the Party press, which is essential for the development of revolutionary Marxist-Leninist theory; and, second insufficient vital contact with the masses of the workers.' (History of the British Communist Party pg. 102 Tom Bell)

With the outbreak of the General Strike, Martial Law was declared. Over 1200 CPGB members were arrested. All leading members, who hadn't been arrested, went into the districts and localities. The slogans were:-

'Not a penny off the pay; not a second on the day'
 'Nationalization of the mines without compensation under worker' control'
 'Resignation of the Forger's Govt. (Zinoviev letter)
 'formation of a Labour Govt.'

The slogan 'All Power to the General Council' was also coined. This truly was an example of dreaming and empty rhetoric on the part of the CPGB. That the TUC was pushed into calling a General Strike is not disputed. There was a tremendous feeling of unity among the workers. Clearly, the CPGB was carried away by this apparent unity and forgot about the danger of a TUC betrayal. More, there is a social-democratic view of things which avoids struggle and controversy. Where this exists in a communist party and if it gains the upper hand, it ham-strings the organization and prevents it from being far-sighted in giving conscious leadership. The kind of leadership the bolsheviks gave, although only a small Party.

Even so, the Party increased its support and membership, particularly in the mining districts. This was in spite of the heavy losses the CP had suffered at the hands of the police.

THE CPGB AFTER THE GENERAL STRIKE - THE 11TH CONGRESS IN 1929 - COMINTERN LETTER.

Following the Great Strike, there was a need for the Party to change its tactics.(14) But this failed to happen. The 9th Congress held in October, 1927 did not draw the correct lessons and produced some grossly incorrect theories. Most important of these, was the theory of 'decolonization'. (15)

Great store was placed by the CPGB's 9th Congress in an election victory for the Labour Party, even though bi-election results had shown a drop in both the Labour and Tory polls. In deference to the disappointment felt about the first Labour Govt., it was added that the next Labour Govt. be controlled by the EC of the Labour Party. This idea of 'control' was presented in all kinds of rhetorical ways; 'control by the working class', 'control by the Labour Movement' etc. The Congress also decided to set up a national 'Left Wing Movement'.

The 9th plenum of the Comintern criticized the decisions and resolutions of the CPGB's 9th Congress. The main point that was argued was that the situation had changed since Lenin's advice in 1920. Experience of the 1924 Labour Govt. and the General Strike had brought about an increase of anti-capitalist sentiment. A line of class against class must be taken up and support for the Labour Govt. replaced with

the slogan 'For a revolutionary workers' Govt.'. The Party should fight for the transfer of the political levy from the Labour Party to a fund for local political activity by the trade unions. This latter point seemed to set the cat among the pigeons causing immense controversy. Warning was also given by the Comintern against treating the Labour Party in the same way as the Tories. Well, the CPGB had failed to use its brains to comprehend and apply Lenin's advice in 'Left-wing Communism...'. There was little indication that the Comintern was going to succeed where Lenin had failed.

At this point, those in the CPGB Central Committee who supported the Comintern's criticisms were in the minority. They were lead by R. Palme Dutt and Harry Pollitt. On the question of forming a Left-Wing Movement, the minority supported this but warned against tendencies to turn this into a third party. (16)

At the CPGB's first of two congresses held in 1929 (the 10th and the 11th), the 10th in January, saw the apparently unreserved adoption of the lines of the Comintern 6th Congress and 9th plenum. However, a sharp discussion flared up regarding the political levy. The CPGB Central Committee recommended payment of the levy but campaigning to have it used locally. Opposing lines called for non-payment of the levy or campaigning for disaffiliation of the trade unions from the Labour Party. The Central Committee resolution was overwhelmingly carried.

Voting split right down the middle on the question of the Left-Wing Movement. Those delegates involved in it, exposed it as a possible alternative to the Communist Party and called for its liquidation. Discussion in Party branches on this issue, which was unresolved at the Congress, unfolded a criticism of the Central Committee. During this inner-Party struggle, a 'closed letter' was sent from the Comintern sharply criticizing the leadership and accusing the Central Committee of seeing only an electoral policy in the new line.

By the time the 11th Congress was held in December, 1929, Rothstein, Inkpin and Wilson had been removed from the Politbureau. The Party report made strong criticisms of opportunism and social-democratic tendencies in the Party.

"The chief inner Party task is the struggle against the right wing opportunist deviation which largely takes a concealed form, namely voting loyally for all Comintern decisions but carrying out the old line in practice." (Report to the 11th Congress of the CPGB)

New forms of struggle were needed following increased membership after the General Strike. The report accused the old leadership of pacifist deviations with regard to the war danger. It was stated that there had been 'insufficient linking of economic struggles with political struggles.' The main task of the Party is to give independent leadership and expose social-democracy and social-fascism, continued the report. Instead of pacifism, the CP undertook to popularize the slogan of unity of workers, soldiers and sailors against imperialist war.

The letter from the Comintern stated that capitalist 'rationalization will irrevocably destroy the privileged position formerly enjoyed by the aristocracy of labour'. Working class strikes are a counter-offensive which in present conditions 'assume a political character'.

The Comintern letter was lucid in its political direction:-

'...develop new concrete forms of organization and methods of working class struggle...The new line demands that the communist parties, initiate and develop independent organs of struggle...necessary to transfer the weight of the party work..to the factories..build up a body of non-party militants around the party' and as a channel of its influence.

It is interesting that the CPGB feared the 'Left Wing Movement' in the way that it did. The political line of the CPGB must have been very amorphous or spontaneous not to be able to organize those that had left the Labour Party. Moreover, if the CPGB had a program and a thorough grasp of Marxism-Leninism, it would have known how to characterize such people. As it was the CP was steeped in social-democratic prejudices and illusions towards the Labour Party. Also, such was the recruiting policy in practice, that any body who left the Labour Party could automatically apply for membership of the CPGB. This is why the CP feared a left wing movement. The CP's rejection of it, however, did not mean, as is shown in extracts from the Comintern letter that the Comintern was against building a body of non-party militants.

Harry Pollitt was elected General Secretary at the 11th Congress.

THE CPGB AND THE ECONOMIC STRUGGLE.

In its early years the CPGB was correctly criticized for being divorced from the masses and being almost exclusively propagandist. Harry Pollitt puts this down to sectarianism and trying to relive the times of just after the October Revolution when direct revolutionary agitation in defence of the Soviet Union was the order of the day. Moreover, Pollitt seems to sneer at such times as attracting all kinds of dubious elements. In this he shows a complete failure to understand the significance of war weariness and the revolutionary ferment it gave rise to. To have had a communist party with a daily in this period could have transformed this ferment into revolutionary battles.

The involvement of the CPGB in economic struggles and in the trade union movement was first organized through the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU), formed in 1921. Harry Pollitt was the first London Organizer for RILU whose purpose was:-

'...popularize the principles of the Red International among trade unionists in opposition to the International Federation of Trade Unions, or the Yellow international as we delighted in calling this body'.
(Serving My Time page 127)

RILU's aims as expressed in the Manifesto of the Provisional International Council were extremely sectarian. They included recognition of the dictatorship of the proletariat. No detailed refutation of such aims for a trade union body is made by Harry Pollitt in 'Serving My Time' where he goes into some detail quoting the Manifesto. Instead he merely alludes to the fact that R. Williams (expelled from the CP for his part in the Black Friday betrayal of the miners in 1921) and Purcell (who took part in the TUC betrayal of the General Strike) argued strongest for the sectarian stand of RILU. The seriousness of this is not in Harry Pollitt exposing the treachery of Williams and Purcell but in leaving the reader to draw their own conclusions

The National Minority Movement, which continued the work of the RILU, was formed in 1924. Harry Pollitt was elected General Secretary and he held this position until being elected General Secretary of the CPGB in 1929. The MM did a lot to back strikes and expose the treachery of the TUC General Council. As an organized force inside the trade unions, it was feared and did a lot to put the TUC on the spot. Its contribution in winning support for strike action, including the General Strike, cannot be fully gauged. But they succeeded in earning the wrath of the TUC, who subject MM delegates to persecution banning MM delegates from congresses. Trade Councils organized by the MM under their auspices prompted the TUC to organize their own branches. It was soon made almost impossible for representatives of the MM to be elected to official positions in the trade unions.

Anti-communist witch-hunts were bitterly fought by CP and MM members. The Labour Party was denounced as an enemy of the working class and a social fascist party. Unstable elements of the so-called 'left' who had grouped themselves around the communists proved unable to stand up to the hostility of the official labour movement and deserted the Minority Movement. The ILP denounced and attacked communists inside and outside the trade unions.

It is against this background that we must consider Pollitt's criticisms and condemnations of sectarianism regarding the economic struggle after 1929. The point is, did the new leadership want to preserve the justified hostility towards the Labour Party and integrate it with closer revolutionary leadership of the masses. Or, did Harry Pollitt believe that agitation against Labour to be itself the cause of the anti-communist witch-hunts.

At the 11th Congress, although militant opposition to the Labour Party is expressed and detailed support for anti-colonial struggles given, economic demands were most detailed and meticulously worked out. Under the heading of the significance of economic and political struggles, the political character of economic struggles in times of crisis is grossly over-emphasised. What is more, in discussing the political character of such struggles, little attention is paid to the paramount importance of exposing social-democracy. In order to press economic demands the workers must fight not only the capitalists but the Labour Aristocracy as well. Because this conclusion or guiding idea was not given prominence in Party education, militant opposition to the Labour Party could be made to appear sterile. A document prepared for the 12th Congress, however, showed clearly that there were good elements in the Party striving to work out a strategic position of exposing the imperialist nature of the Labour Party.

By 1932 the Minority Movement was a dead letter. Post 1929 was certainly the period of setting up factory branches of the CPGB, which may explain the dying out of the Minority Movement. The Comintern letter to the 11th Congress, however, called upon the Party to set up a body of non-Party militants around the CPGB. This was described as a way of increasing links with the masses and assisting Party leadership. So, the dying out of the Minority Movement without replacing it with something else in the trade unions was a retrograde step. It reflected a certain retreat by the CP leadership in the face of attacks by the Labour Party and the TUC. A retreat which cannot be regarded as tactical because the ban on the Minority Movement delegates and members also extended to members of the Communist Party. Only renegades called for or suggested the liquidation of the Communist Party. (See appendix 17 for a brief account of the role of J.T. Murphy)

GROWING DISREGARD FOR THE COLONIAL QUESTION

The struggle for the Bolshevization of the CPGB required a break with pre-Leninist views on the colonial question. There were indeed sharp struggles in the CPGB to give more importance to winning support for struggles in the colonies. But throughout the crucial years of the 20's and 30's during which time the CPGB should have had many years of experience implementing a revolutionary line, social-democratic ideas and pre-Leninist conceptions were stubbornly clung to.

At the 7th Congress held in 1925, the first 'Thesis on the Colonial Question and the British Empire' was presented. It summarized the situation for imperialism as follows:-

'Imperialism is faced by growing difficulties and contradictions for which no solution can be found:-

These contradictions are:-

- 1) The growth of native capitalism, particularly manufacturing industry, in the under-developed countries - a growth largely caused by the very export of capital that is the era of imperialism.
- 2) Growing revolt amongst the masses of the exploited countries;
- 3) Resulting from these two, a decline in the privileged position of the workers in Great Britain.'

The thesis went on to say that whilst supporting 'every revolutionary nationalist movement' and 'honest sections within the dominions seeking secession, independence would have no meaning until imperialism is overthrown throughout the empire'.

It is not merely a question of the CP drifting into such a position which is fundamentally incorrect. The year is 1925, five years after Lenin's thesis on the national and colonial question adopted at the 2nd Congress of the Comintern. Certainly Lenin's position has been developed by Mao tse-tung. But if the authors of the CPGB thesis had paid attention to the responsibilities of communists in the oppressor nations and grasped the essence of imperialism, the CPGB would never have come to these conclusions.

There are at least two things which can be said about point 1 of the 1925 thesis. First, in its exploitation of the resources of a colony or neo colony, imperialism needs road, railways and the basic plant and equipment for the mining and extraction industries. Imperialism will even develop or build some factories. But what is built in the way of industry and railways is tied to the requirements of the oppressor nation - of imperialism. A small proletariat is brought into being, but in countries like India where the economy is predominantly feudal, the masses of the people are peasants tied to the land. The emergence of a proletariat and the national contradictions of the petty-bourgeoisie and peasant masses with imperialism will certainly be the grave diggers of imperialism. But what is not taking place is the bourgeois-democratic revolution under the tutelage of imperialism. Monopoly capitalism props up all the old feudal institutions and the power of the landlords, precisely because land reform and democratic revolution must grow into the socialist revolution in order for the oppressed nation to free itself from imperialism. The development of capitalism in third world countries as it developed in the West throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is impossible today in the era of imperialism.

The second conclusion to be drawn from the 1925 thesis is that imperialism is industrializing the colonies. This position became fully defined in CP policy two years later. Clearly such misconceptions are absolutely consistent with what the imperialists say about their so-called 'civilizing role'. Furthermore, such a position, rather than exposing the rapacious rule of imperialism and arousing the working class against it, embellishes imperialism and prompts workers to puzzle over the justification of anti-imperialist struggles.

The thesis asserts that self-determination is meaningless until overthrown throughout the Empire. This later developed into the implication that liberation of the colonies will only come about as a result of revolution in the imperialist heartland of Britain. Here, while paying lip service to colonial struggles for self-determination, assistance by the workers of Britain is made to look futile or a distant necessity.

Most interesting of all, however, is the conclusion that the privileged position of workers in Britain is declining. It would seem from this that the CPGB was aware of the importance of the effect of imperialism on the working class. In fact Harry Pollitt in 1932 referred to the affect of imperialism on the British working class. However, apart from the fact that the CPGB did not address themselves to this problem, the CPGB studiously avoided singling out the labour aristocracy as the trojan horse of opportunism in the working class movement. Where the labour

aristocracy is mentioned, the analysis of Marx and Engels describing the labour aristocracy when Britain was the workshop of the ^{world} is stressed. But this analysis of the labour aristocracy is insufficient and does not take into account the privileged sections of workers that exist under imperialism the highest stage of capitalism. Lenin described the labour aristocracy as existing and receiving an higher income under imperialism, drawn from the super-profits reaped from colonial plunder. It is clear that this important difference in the economic reasons for capitalism in decline still being able to buy off labour leaders and the skilled strata of the working class was never taken seriously by the CPGB. That the labour aristocracy is declining in influence is continually repeated, but nowhere is it analysed. Tom Bell a founder and outstanding ideological and theoretical leader of the CPGB understood the role of the labour aristocracy very well. He opened his short History of the CPGB with a quote from Marx on this question. He also deals, very briefly, with the labour aristocracy in the era of imperialism. However, Tom Bell also regarded it to be of declining importance. How much Tom Bell's limited attempts at dealing with the labour aristocracy were isolated in the CP's leadership are not known. However, W. Gallacher in his book the 'Rolling of the Thunder' has a fully expressed opinion that the question of misleadership in the Labour Movement is a question of the middle class only.

The thesis of the 7th Congress held in 1925 remained policy until the question was again debated in the Comintern at the 6th Congress in 1928. At the 9th Congress of the CPGB held in 1927, the position adopted at the 7th Congress had developed to its inevitable conclusion has dealt with above. The theory of what was termed 'decolonization' had become fully defined.

Tom Bell describes the theory of 'decolonization' as follows:-

'The Congress characterized the existing economic situation in the following way: While recognizing the depressed condition of the basic industries, it put emphasis upon the parasitical character of British capitalism, upon the increasing industrialization of the colonies, and attached great importance to the growth of the new industries as being one of the chief sources of profit.

If we study these expressions closely, we can see how they are linked up with the theory of 'decolonization' which ultimately found open expression at the Sixth World Congress. It is clear that if we deny that the basic export industries must still be the main source of extraction of profits and super-profits and the basis of the capitalist system in Britain, if we maintain that the depression in the basic industries is leading the British capitalists towards becoming only a rentier class, and see the chief source of profits only in light industry - we arrive at the theory of 'decolonization' (pgs 123/4 'History of the British Communist Party' Tom Bell)

This quote raises some interesting questions, but it does not expose the essence of the theory of 'decolonization'. If anything, one can see that the above unanswered questions underlines the need for the CPGB to analyse British imperialism; just how much is the British economy becoming increasingly parasitic on the profits of exploitation abroad. As things stood, the theory of 'decolonization' sprung up from an incorrect analysis of the colonial question and subjective conclusions drawn about the future of industry in Britain.

It was the debate at the Sixth World Congress of the Comintern which exposed the essence of 'decolonization'. During the discussion, the only member of the British delegation to emphasize the plunderous and dominating features of imperialism in the colonies was J.T. Murphy. Palm Dutt who was in the leadership with Harry Pollitt in

the struggle against the Party's right line and leadership argued the 'decolonization' theory. At least, he did not make a break with it:-

'While I do not support the simple view that British Imperialism put 'impossible obstacles' in the way of the development of Indian industry, I do not think either that the contrary is true, that British imperialism makes every endeavour to develop the productive forces of India, that all kinds of industry are developed, or that there is an independent development of Indian industry in the interest of the Indian bourgeoisie as considered from their point of view...It is quite true to say that British Imperialism in certain directions, under certain conditions retards the development of Indian industry. Of course, Indian industry under independence would develop at a greater rate than under present conditions. But the question...is, does industrialization and its development present new problems with which the British bourgeoisie are faced? I think the only correct formulation is to say that the development of capitalist industry is inevitable, and that British Imp. seeks to control it in such a way as to receive the maximum profit'. (Quoted by the B & ICO from International Press Correspondence Dec. 1928)

The last sentence of this quote is the essence of Palme Dutts view, all other considerations apart. It is fundamentally in error. Like a liberal, he stumbles through 'on the one hand this' and 'on the other hand that', giving an impression of many sided deep analysis. But on the crux of the matter he cops out and declares the middle of the road general position which in this case is fundamentally incorrect. Land-reform is a progressive part of the development of capitalism. However, throughout the oppressed nations of the third world it is held back by the political and economic power of imperialism which props up all that is rotten and feudal in order to maintain its domination.

Imperialism will build industry where it is needed for grabbing raw materials and even some manufacturing industry; where cheap labour is the main consideration. But independent economic development is prevented and the oppressed nation impoverished. This can be witnessed most strikingly in India, South Africa, Latin America and so on throughout the third world today.

On the issue of 'decolonization' J. T. Murphy was profoundly correct and in agreement with the Comintern thesis(18) under discussion when he said:-

'The normal development of capitalism in general means eventually industrialization of a country, but the imperialist exploitation of the colonies forbids the normal industrialization of the colonies such as occurred in the metropolis. Instead of imperialism playing the liberating role to the inherent forces of production in the colonies, it adds its own contradictions to the contradictions within the colonies whilst sucking the life blood from them by its monopolist control'.

At the 11th Congress of the CPGB, by which time Rothstein (BSP), Wilson (ILP) and Inkpin (BSP) had been removed from the Political Bureau, a line of detailed and militant support for colonial struggles was outlined. The line of 6th Congress of the Comintern had been adopted at the 10th Congress, but was not being practiced. However, in concluding on this aspect of the period up to 1929, it would be incorrect to say that agitation for anti-imperialist solidarity did not take place. British intervention in China, the Versailles Treaty, anti-communist trials in India, Ireland etc were all given some attention. But not enough, and what little that was done was treated somewhat suspiciously on the grounds that it detracted from revolution or workers struggle in Britain.

Following the 11th Congress demands of support for colonial struggles were trimmed, distorted and even abandoned.

THE RISE OF FASCISM, THE UNITED FRONT AND DISTORTION OF THE RIGHT OF SELF-DETERMINATION FOR THE COLONIES.

Distortion of the demand for self-determination took a particular form during the thirties. The threat of war loomed larger every week, month and year. Demands by the German Nazis and Mussolini fascists for a redivision of the world were the headline news. The Japanese imperialists invaded China in a desperate move to realize Japanese domination in the Far East. British and American imperialism strove to turn the German Nazis East against the Soviet Union. To this end direct assistance to build up the German war-machine was given by Britain and America. These 'democratic nations' were helping the fascists. Every country in Europe and the Americas had the beginnings of, or a full fledged, fascist movement. Defence of bourgeois democracy against bourgeois fascism became a major part of the platform of communist parties. Unfortunately, the correct Comintern policy of a united front against fascism was distorted to justify all kinds of revisionist tendencies.

This was particularly the case in the policy of the CPGB which used the united front policy to blur the differences between the CP and the Labour Party and deny the vanguard role of communists. It is against this background that we must understand the drift of CP policy and the increasing adaption to opportunism.

Little was done in the thirties by the CP to assist the struggles in the colonies. Either ideologically, in the form of the exposure of what imperialist plunder means for the masses of subject peoples, or direct assistance to liberation struggles. CP Congresses ritually noted that more needed to be done. At the 12th Congress the 'colonial freedom' clause in 'The Way Out - A Manifesto' speaks for the first time of mutual assistance after the revolution. It is assumed that the colonies would advance towards socialism after the revolution in Britain has granted independence.

It was Harry Pollitt on behalf of the Central Committee who raised in his report entitled 'The Road to Victory', the following question:-

'How can England feed itself after the revolution?...Where will England, as a highly industrialized country, get the markets so that it can set its factories going after the revolution?' (The Road to Victory' Pg. 6)

At the thirteenth Congress the line of 'mutual assistance after the revolution' was defined more clearly. In a programmatic resolution entitled 'For Soviet Britain' the question 'Can Britain Feed Herself' was 'answered'. Britain could live on stocks of essential food for from four to eight months - says the resolution. However, in the long run Workers' Councils will have to arrange to import large quantities of food and raw materials. It is clear from this that the CPGB did not understand the economic relationship that exists between British imperialism and say India and Africa. It is also clear from the following quote that no fundamental change in this plunderous relationship was really expected. Instead there seems to be some unstated belief that under workers power the operations of the same economic laws will not mean the same exploitative relationship of oppressor and oppressed nation. Such ignorance of the fundamentals of Marxist economics is unforgivable in those who wish to be leaders of a communist party. What if the colonies or ex British colonies do not wish to sell their raw materials or food stuffs to Britain. If the workers power is thinking in terms of markets, at what price will the Workers' Councils be prepared to pay for these raw materials and foodstuffs.

'The British Engineering Industry under workers control will be able to propose co-operation with the colonial peoples, who will be able at last to build their own economy and develop their own industry and transport. They can get the iron and steel and machinery they require from Britain and other such countries in exchange for foodstuffs...and raw materials (Pg 18 'For Soviet Britain')

The nominal independence of third world countries since the war has proved that the imperialists are not averse to such a relationship of 'mutual co-operation'. The extent to which opportunism was beginning to make leading members of the CPGB fear the consequences of self-determination for the colonies, which the bourgeoisie argued would mean loss of markets and unemployment in Britain, is really revealed here.

Imperialism distorts the economies of third world countries, turning them into producers of a few or even one basic raw material or foodstuff. This also, although in a completely opposite way, distorts the economy of the imperialist metropolis. The financial oligarchy becomes increasingly parasitic. Whole industries producing unnecessary luxury goods are given precedence over ensuring a varied and self-sufficient agriculture. Raw materials such as coal lie untapped because it is more expensive to mine than oil pillaged from the third world. Clearly the main concern of communists is not how to maintain the inflow of raw materials and foodstuffs in a revolutionary Britain, but how to re-organize the economy on a socialist basis. The victory of working class power in Britain can have no interest in continuing the colonial and neo-colonial economic ties which plunder their wealth. Repudiation of colonial status is obligatory and has largely been completed. But neo-colonialism is far more subtle. Only a Marxist-Leninist analysis of the problems of socialist re-organization can ensure that necessary trade with all countries is on a completely equal basis. In fact, in relations with the oppressed nations Britain should expect to pay more than the market value.

'For Soviet Britain' does clearly say that a Soviet Britain will proclaim 'the right of all countries now forming part of the British Empire to complete self-determination up to and including complete separation.' However, I do not consider it too harsh on the CPGB to question their sincerity in this given that they dwelled on the need to continue importing the raw materials and foodstuffs of these countries. In a section headed 'Relations with other (capitalist) countries', the pamphlet boasts that the capitalist countries will be forced to trade with Britain. The example that is quoted is Argentina which is in fact an oppressed nation. The following truculent statement of Argentina's position is made:-

'For example, the Argentine would face immediate ruin if it interrupted its trade with Britain in foodstuffs and raw materials in return for British manufactured goods.' (Ibid pg. 29)

However, even this, to say the least, shaky position on the colonial question was undermined to the point of dropping all reference to the demand for 'self-determination'. By the 14th Congress the resolution in support of the struggles in the colonies had become in practice inadequate and a matter of routine. The Congress report regretted that little had been done in support of liberation movements. The 15th Congress went a step further by trimming demands to 'Full democratic rights for the colonial people including trade unions etc...' Support for liberation struggles had thus been removed from the agenda of the CPGB. It now became a matter of moralizing demands on the British Government to legislate reforms via their system of colonial governors and puppets.

The study of the CPGB's application of the united front against fascism involves some very complex questions. The CP's interpretation certainly needed to be criticized for its failure to expose British imperialism and the Labour Party. Trotskyites undoubtedly prattled with 'left' phrases and arguments to justify their essential sabotage of the united front movement. In this situation only a thorough Marxist-Leninist stand using revolutionary tactics of unity and struggle could criticize the weaknesses of the CPGB and avoid slipping into the mire of Trotskyism.

The slogan of 'Peace and democracy' was not a bad slogan. However, in no way could it be considered a strategic one. No doubt it was seen as a slogan which concentrated opposition to the growing threat of imperialist war. But who was going to deliver this peace. Wars between contending imperialist powers are inevitable. It is only blunting the

consciousness of the working class by spreading illusions that imperialism can be made 'peaceful' and 'democratic'. Applied to the 'colonial question', as it was from the 14th Congress it directly conflicts with what should be the strategic position of communists. In practice the slogan of 'Peace and Democracy' created a smokescreen behind which support for national liberation struggles was replaced with criticism of the form of colonial rule. The hopeless line of democratic rights for the oppressed and super-exploited masses of India and Africa miseducated the working class and promoted imperialist consciousness among the working class in a far more effective way than the bourgeoisie could achieve.

The united front policy required that all sections of the Third International use tactics of unity and struggle in the united front in order to achieve communist leadership and unite the broad masses against fascism. All the European parties failed in this to some extent in as much as the struggle against social-democracy took such a back-seat as to become non-existent. The CPGB's failure to struggle against the labour party as a major component of the Party's revisionist degeneration must be dealt with in a future follow-on talk.

In depth study of the history of the CPGB is an essential pre-requisite to rebuilding the Marxist-Leninist Party in Britain. I have put the emphasis on criticism because I believe that the CPGB's weaknesses were fundamental and never overcome.

NOTES

- 1) Hyndman later formed the rabidly chauvinist British National Socialist Party. National Socialism was clearly no isolated German phenomenon.
- 2) The American SLP, in an explanatory note in 'Lenin on the USA' is described as a sectarian organization without real links with the working class. De Leonism is a kind of syndicalism which recognizes the need for a Party. It states that political power must be won by the industrial working-class and in its vigorous opposition to opportunism in the trade unions committed sectarian errors in refusing to work patiently within them.
- 3) Of all the works of Lenin most quoted and mis-represented by right opportunists both inside and outside the CPGB, 'Left Wing Communism an Infantile Disorder' must rank first. This is the pamphlet most quoted to justify tailing behind the Labour Party. There is only one piece of advice opportunists and revisionists ever remember Lenin giving. That is tactical support for the Labour Party. What is ignored are the conditions existing when Lenin proposed the tactic of 'supporting Labour as a rope supports a hanged man'. Such conditions no longer exist and ceased to exist decades ago. More than this; support for Labour by the CPGB was rarely used as a tactic, it was rather a strategy.
- 4) The terms right and 'left' have very limited meaning when describing political trends. Tony Benn is regarded as 'left' wing and he undoubtedly ^{has} a place in the heart of many class conscious workers because of the stands he has taken whilst in opposition. But he was once a cabinet minister in a Labour Government which never challenged the interests of monopoly capitalism. However, I feel that using the term here is justified in describing the position of the shop-stewards since Labour's manipulation of 'left' appeals to nationalization would have been supported by many class-conscious workers and not, as is the case today, just by labour aristocrats and supporters of the Labour Party.

5) The first Central Committee consisted as follows:-

Thomas Bell (CUG), W.J. Hewlett (SWSS), J.F. Hodgson (BSP), Albert Inkpin (Secretary/BSP)
Arthur MacManus (Chairman/CUG), William Paul (CUG), A.A.Watts (BSP), F. Willis (BSP), -
Elected directly by the convention - George Deer, C.L'Estrange Malone M.P., William Mellor
(Guild Socialists), Dora B. Montefiore, Fred Shaw, Robert Stewart (Socialist Prohibition)

Break down by organization of leading members in the new Party:-

BRITISH SOCIALIST PARTY

Albert Inkpin
J.F. Hodgson
A.A. Watts
Fred Willis
Harry Pollitt
Theodore Rothstein

SOCIALIST LABOUR PARTY

Arthur Macmanus
Tom Bell
William Paul

SHOP STEWARDS AND WORKERS' COMMITTEES

W. Gallacher (BSP)
J.R. Cambell
David Ramsay
J.T. Murphy
E. Lismer

INDEPENDENT LABOUR PARTY

Emile Burns
R. Palme Dutt
E.H. Brown
Shapurji Saklatvala
Helen Crawford
J.R. Wilson
J.T. Walton Newbold

Bill Hewlett - South Wales Socialist Society

Bob Stewart Socialist Prohibition Fellowship

5) Cont...

GUILD SOCIALISTSHANDS OFF RUSSIA

R. Page Arnot
Walter Holmes
William Mellor
W.N. Ewer
Ellen Wilkinson

Tom Wintringham
Ralph Fox

6) Participation in Parliament cannot be rejected in principle, which was the issue here. However, neither is there a communist principle which demands that a Communist Party always takes part in Parliamentary elections. It depends on the consciousness of the working masses and even whether such an election is diverting the revolutionary struggle. Support for the Labour Party, however, is a tactic which has long ceased to be applicable.

7) The CLP was formed in Sept. 1920 from members of the Shop Stewards' Movement and Scottish revolutionary groups who had not joined the CPGB because of tactical differences over the Labour Party and elections.

8) This organization was formed by Sylvia Pankhurst in opposition to the formation of the CPGB. A debate at the 2nd Congress of the Third International which ended in a vote for revolutionary participation in elections and affiliation to the Labour, also assisted in achieving the unity of the CPGB, CLP and CP (BSTI).

9) A new provisional Executive Committee was elected at the Leeds conference on the basis of three from the CPGB, CLP 2, CP(BSTI) 2, and 10 elected by the convention on a geographical basis (Scotland 2, Wales 2, North of England 3, South of England 3).

CPGB: J. F. Hodgson	CLP: J. W. Leckie	CP(BSTI): R. Beech
W. Mellow	J. Macdonald	E.T. Whitehead
A.A. Watts		

Scotland: J. Maclean	Wales: T. Watkins	Northern England: J.T. Murphy
W. Kirker	W. J. Hewlett	W. Paul
		Harry Webb

Southern England: F. L. Kerran	Chairman: Arthur MacManus	Secretary (Appointed) Albert Inkpin
Mrs. D.B. Montefiore		
J.J. Vaughan		

CPGB EC's ELECTED AT THE 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th CONGRESSES5th Congress Oct. 19226th Congress May, 1924

Geo. Deacon J.T. Murphy
R. Palme Dutt H. Pollitt
W. Gallacher R. Stewart
A. MacManus T. Bell
A. Inkpin

R. Page Arnot W. Hannington
Tom Bell Arthur Horner
E. H. Brown T.A. Jackson
William Brain Arthur MacManus
J.R. Cambell J.T. Murphy
Helen Crawford Harry Pollitt
Geo. Deacon C.M. Roebuck
R. Palme Dutt Robert Stewart
Aitken Ferguson J.R. Wilson
William Gallacher A. Inkpin

7th Congress May 1925

R. P. Arnot (91)	Helen Crawford (76)	W. Hannington (85)	Tom Bell (96)
R.P. Dutt (85)	A. Horner (70)	E. H. Brown (49)	A. Ferguson (67)

NOTES CONT...

(iii)

9) Cont...

A. Inkpin	(88)	J.R. Campbell	(99)	W. Gallacher	(97)	T.A. Jackson	(80)
W. Joss	(68)	A. MacManus	(78)	J.T. Murphy	(94)	Harry Pollitt	(101)
C. M. Roebuc	(85)	R. Stewart	(86)	Beth Turner	(66)	Nat. Watkins	(55)

8th CONGRESS

William Allan	A. Inkpin	W.C. Loebar	R.P. Arnot
T. A. Jackson	A. Macmanus	T. Bell	W. Joss
J.T. Murphy	J.R. Campbell	R. Stewart	Harry Pollitt
T. Clark	S. Saklatvala	Dave Ramsay	Helen Crawford
T. Thomas	R.W. Robson	R.P. Dutt	A.G. Tomkins
A. Rothstein	A. Ferguson	Beth Turner	W. Rust
W. Gallacher	Nat. Watkins	A. Horner	

10) It is interesting to note how Harry Pollitt deals with this fact in 'Serving My Time'. He makes no attempt to analyse the right essence of 'Left' sectarianism. The way it is described is more intended to discredit anybody in the CPGB (Remember 'Serving My Time' was written after Harry Pollitt's forced resignation in 1939) who vigorously agitated against the Labour Party and for communism amongst the working class.

11) In this period, the CPGB had a line of forming a General Council of the TUC which had powers to lead the trade union movement. Purcell was supported by the CP because of his support for the Soviet Union. However, the CP's stress on such tactics came home to roost following Purcell's betrayal. The lessons of tailing after such limited demands were never learnt by the Party.

12) The original idea of the Minority Movement was to be a broad organization of workers and trade unionists who opposed class-collaborationism, and left elements who supported co-operation with the Communist Party. It developed into a purely industrial and trade union organization of minority groups of militants.

13) Tom Bell, J.R. Campbell, Ernie Cant, William Gallacher, Albert Inkpin, Harry Pollitt, Bill Rust, Tom Wintringham, Wally Hannington, Arthur MacManus, J.T. Murphy, R. P. Arnot.

14) This point is made by Tom Bell, but it has a certain hollowness about it. The Party most of all needed a program, an analysis of British imperialism which would answer questions of class analysis, the Labour aristocracy, what is nationalization etc?

15) This theory stated that the depression in the basic (export) industries was leading the capitalist class towards becoming only a rentier class. That British imperialism industrializes the colonies and runs down industry in the capitalist heartland. Therefore, it can be concluded, investments in the colonies should be transferred to Britain. This theory was also given expression by the British delegation to the 6th World Congress of the Comintern.

16) J.T. Murphy was particularly criticized for this tendency. In fact he made a proposal at the 6th World Congress for a new federation of local Labour Parties.

17) J.T. Murphy was a member of the SLP before the founding of the CPGB. He was in Moscow at the first meeting of the Third International as a delegate from the Shops Stewards' Movement at the time when the CP was formed. He did not believe it was necessary to split the SLP in order to overcome objections from the leadership toward merging into the CPGB. Like other leaders attempting to reach Congresses of the Comintern, he showed tremendous resourcefulness in travelling illegally. Gallacher, Bell and Pollitt also stowed away on their travels to Moscow.

Murphy regarded the formation of the Comintern as mistaken in uniting only Communist Parties that supported the dictatorship of the proletariat.

'Had the leaders of the Congress estimated correctly the relation of forces and their trends in the immediate international situation they would have been wise to content themselves with crystalizing the Marxist forces of the International Labour and Socialist Movement into an organized body to carry out a similar process to that which Lenin had pursued in the transformation of the Russian Social

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Democratic Party. This would have placed the full responsibility for any splitting of the working class movement upon the reformists. Whatever splits had to come should not have been initiated by the revolutionaries in a period when the working class was on the defensive. We should have been content to agitate, educate and organize, waiting for the right moment to come when again the workers could take the offensive.' (New Horizons J. T. Murphy pgs 144-5)

J.T. Murphy was clearly on the defensive himself and demoralized by the attacks on communism made by the Labour Party when he says this.

He was a passionate and vivid orator. In the early 1920's he was responsible for travelling to Dublin and working out an agreement with the IRA for giving support. Murphy is recorded as opposing the 'decolonization theory' taken up by most British delegates to the 6th World Congress.

By his own admission, Murphy did not support the militant line of the CPGB following the 11th Congress against the Labour Party. A Controversy flared up in which Murphy was accused of trying to form an alternative party to the Labour Party. The basis for such a third Party was supposed to be on the issue of the CPGB's stand toward those Labour Party branches and members who refused to support the anti-communist witch-hunts. It was referred to as the 'Left Wing' movement. The ironical thing is that although the CP leadership was capable of producing resolutions which condemned the idea of their being a 'left wing' of social-democracy, there developed the line championed by Harry at the 12th Congress of winning members of the ILP. The question of a 'Left Wing' movement is one of the issues on which Murphy left or was expelled from the CPGB. However, the issue which brought matters to a head came later.

Murphy contested an election in South Hackney and in Brightside in 1929 and 1931. In both he succeeded in polling only a few hundred votes. It was, of course the line of the CP that the experience of Labour's threachery would win more support among workers for the CPGB. Support did grow. But Murphy was pessimistic. A 'daily Worker' article drawing lessons from the number of abstentions in the 1931 election gave rise to a sharp controversy about how to characterise Labour's success or lack of it. That Murphy did fall into opportunism and despair is clearly revealed by the issue on which he did leave.

'Since our Leeds Congress, we have had to conduct practically as it where, a struggle both against right and the 'left'. The right as typified in the case of the renegade Murphy, who, this congress may be interested to know, has not even questioned his expulsion and has not even thought it necessary to make application to be re-admitted to this congress. Now the fight against Murphy was the best and most typical example of the capitulation to certain circumstances at a particularly decisive moment, but Murphy's line was a clever line in which there was a great danger of him being able to deceive unthinking masses into getting that line carried through on the assumption that he was standing for more work for the workers at the moment when workers were eagerly asking to work. But objectively what was his line. It was that the workers who were working on orders for the Soviet Government were building up the 5 year plan of socialist construction, were doing more effective work to fight against the armed intervention than strikes and protest meetings to hinder the transportation of munitions for use against the Soviet Union...And Murphy steps in a a moment when the struggle is sharpening when war preparations were reaching a higher point and the attention of the ruling class was being sharply directed against the revolutionary advance guard of the working class, the CP, and puts forward a line which would sabotage the direct fight against war and deflect the Party from its revolutionary line...' (The Road to Victory/Harry Pollitt)

In 'New Horizons', Murphy reveals his tendency to indulge in tittle-tattle. For example, he refers to Roy of the Comintern Colonial Commission as not being at the 6th Congress because he allegedly made a 'mess' of his responsibilities in China and had 'fallen out of favour'.

He supported the war against Nazi Germany from the beginning and believed it would result in a kind of socialist order in Britain. But he did not become part of a blatant anti-communist platform. He notes the depths the Trotskyites stooped to in their opposition to the Soviet Union. While declaring himself against the Trotskyists, Murphy had a hidden and maybe no so hidden sympathy for Trotsky.

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On leaving the CPGB he joined the East Islington Labour Party and became a member of the Socialist League, which included Stafford Cripps and ex CP Members such as William Mellor. He left the Socialist League on the issue of the coming 2nd World War. Murphy called for re-armement and collective security against Hitler and Mussolini. But the Socialist League agitated against the threat of war on the basis of opposition to capitalist and imperialist wars. This position he described as pacifist. The CP was in favour of a united front against fascism and war which involved acceptance by the LP of CP affiliation or an agreement between parties. Murphy opposed these conceptions as a non-starter. Joint public meetings between the CP and the Labour Party's Socialist League did take place. Following the threat of expulsions, however, by the Labour Party EC, the Socialist League dissolved itself.

Murphy formed the People's front Committee which had a large turn over of middle class supporters and didn't make much impact.

From the start Murphy revealed individualist and liquidationist tendencies. These were born out by his future activities. Even so, the opposition to him inside the CPGB was not consistently Marxist-Leninist.

18) '....the ruling strata of the previous social structure...allies itself with imperialism...Everywhere imperialism attempts to preserve and to perpetuate all those pre-capitalist forms of exploitation...which serve as the basis for the existance of its reactionary allies...the 'cultural' role of the imperialist states in the colonies is in reality the role of a executioner...In its functions as colonial exploiter, the ruling imperialism...acts primarily as a parasite sucking the blood from the economic organism of the latter...Just as the 'classical' capitalism of the pre-imperialist epoch most clearly demonstrated its negative feature of destruction of the old without an equivalent creation of the new precisely in its economy of plunder in the colonies so also the most characteristic side of the decay of imperialism, its essential feature of usury and parasitism, is clearly revealed in its colonial policy.