7

Statement of the Political Committee of the British Communist Party

DAILY WORKER, London

June 22, 1956

THE BRITISH COMMUNIST PARTY, not unlike the French, did not respond promptly to the Soviet criticism of Stalin. Both the party's secretary, Harry Pollitt, and its propaganda leader, Rajani Palme Dutt, maintained what some of their critics were reported to consider an unjustifiably stubborn "pro-Stalinist" position. (See *The New York Times*, March 29 and June 22, 1956, but also the anti-Stalin remarks in Harry Pollitt, "The Role of Stalin," *Daily Worker*, London, March 24, 1956.)

Indeed, in the May 1956 issue of *Labour Monthly* (London), editor Palme Dutt discussed the current "Great Debate" with scant attention to the anti-Stalin drive:

> *What are the essential themes of the Great Debate? Not about Stalin. That there should be spots on any sun would only startle an inveterate Mithra-worshipper. Not about the now recognized abuses of the security organs in a period of heroic ordeal and achievement in the Soviet Union. To imagine that a great revolution can develop without a million cross-currents, hardships, injustices and excesses would be a delusion fit only for ivory-tower dwellers in fairyland. . . .*

(R.P.D., "The Great Debate," *Labour Monthly*, XXXVIII, no. 5, p. 194.) Such was the extent of public criticism.

On May 13, the Executive Committee of the CPGB adopted a resolution on "Lessons of the XXth Congress of the CPSU" (published on May 16), which acknowledged that "a number of serious mistakes and grave abuses" had developed in the Soviet Union between 1934 and 1953. On the same day, Harry Pollitt resigned as General Secretary, allegedly for reasons of health.

Discussion of the Stalin question continued in the London *Daily Worker*, which on June 11 accepted editorially the State Department's version of the secret Khrushchev speech:

The unofficial version fills in the shocking details of the evils which flowed from the cult of Stalin, from the gradual replacement of the leadership of the Party by a "miracle man" and the degeneration of the man as he became increasingly divorced from real life—and from the real day-to-day work of the Party and the People.

On June 21, after the American, Italian, and French parties had pressed Moscow for further clarification, the Political Committee of the British Communist Party issued the following statement, reproduced from the London *Daily Worker*.

The Political Committee of the Communist Party has had under consideration the unofficial published version of Comrade Khrushchev's report to the private session of the XXth Congress of the CPSU, together with the discussion in our party. At the private session of the XXIVth national congress of our party on Apr. 1, a resolution was passed and conveyed to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, regretting that a public statement on this question had not been made by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which could have enabled the members of all Communist Parties and the staunch friends of the Soviet Union to have understood fully the seriousness of the issues and helped them to a better understanding of everything that is involved. Our Party has not received any official version of the report of Comrade Khrushchev.

The continued absence of an official report has led to the publication of unofficial versions through gradual leakages and by sources hostile to Socialism. This has made many Communists outside the Soviet Union dependent on such enemy sources for information on these vital matters and has thus added unnecessary difficulties to the estimation and discussion of the facts. In the light of the unofficial text now published, which in the absence of official denial may be regarded as more or less authentic, we reaffirm the general lines of the resolution of our executive committee of May 13.

We consider that the XXth Congress of the CPSU was correct in condemning the cult of the individual and in endorsing the return to the Leninist principles of collective leadership and inner party democracy. We consider that the XXth Congress was correct in frankly exposing all the evils which followed from the departure from the Leninist principles, in order to put an end to these evils. All Communists, in common with all democratic and progressive people, are deeply shocked by the injustices and crimes which during the period under review violated the essential principles of socialist democracy and legality and dishonored the noble cause of Communism. We repeat that such evil practices are totally alien to socialism and Communism.

At the same time, we recognize that these evils arose not as a necessary accompaniment of working-class rule and Soviet democracy, as the enemies of socialism pretend, but

as a result of the violation of the socialist principles and during a specific period of abnormal strain between 1934 and 1953. This was the period of the rise of fascism abroad, the preparation of war, the Second World War, and the Cold War. The Soviet leaders have exposed the evils and abuses of this period in order to correct them and make a decisive turn to the fulfillment of the principles of Leninism, collective leadership, socialist democracy and creative Marxist work in all fields of science, literature and art.

We recognize that in spite of the grave harm caused by these abuses the Soviet people achieved very great and historic successes. In the face of terrible difficulties, they established socialism, withstood and defeated the Nazi onslaught, and reconstructed their country after the unparalleled devastation of the war. This achievement deserves the admiration of all and shows the superiority of the socialist system over capitalism and the creative possibilities it opens up for the people.

The XXth Congress of the CPSU itself recorded the historic fact that socialism has now become a world system. It made major contributions to Marxist theory, and helped the working-class movement in all countries by its declarations on the possibility of preventing world war, the peaceful transition to socialism, and the new opportunities for developing working-class unity. The discussion arising from the XXth Congress and from the revelations regarding the 1934-1953 period of the Soviet Union is stimulating fresh and fruitful thought and endeavor in every field of Communist work and practice.

It is clear that a further review and discussion of the questions opened up by the report to the private session of the XXth Congress of the CPSU is needed.

We agree with the observations of Comrade Togliatti and the French Communist Party that it will be necessary to make a profound Marxist analysis of the causes of the degeneration in the functioning of Soviet democracy and party democracy; that it is not enough to attribute these developments solely to the character of one individual, and that a more adequate estimate of the role of Stalin, both in its positive and negative aspects, will be necessary.

It is clear that the steps taken for strengthening the operation of socialist legality and safeguarding the rights of citizens will lead to a further examination of all problems of the functioning of socialist democracy and legality. Those responsible for past violations of socialist democracy and for crimes against the people are being punished, and this is just and necessary. At the same time, it is understandable that concern has been expressed at the application of the death penalty in a recent trial in the Soviet Union. We express the view that in the light of the present world situation and the strengthened position of the socialist camp it should now be possible to bring about the abolition of the death penalty in peacetime in all countries, and we recognize that we have a special responsibility to work for the fulfillment of this aim in Britain and in the colonial countries under British rule.

Within our own party, we shall need to carry forward and encourage the widest and most thorough discussion, as already begun, of our political and organizational methods,

the functioning of party democracy, and the tackling of the problems before us, our relations with other sections of the labor movement and the aims of unity, as indicated in the executive committee's resolution. We shall also carry forward work on a new edition of "The British Road to Socialism," in which, among the many questions which will come up for review, we shall need to expand that section which shows how the democratic liberties won by the people can be maintained and extended, and how socialist legality will be guaranteed.

The enemies of our party hope that this discussion will weaken the party and open the way for attempts to smuggle anti-Marxist, anti-Communist bourgeois conceptions into the Party, striking at the roots of the Communist principles and organization. On the contrary, our party members and organizations will know how to conduct the discussion so as to strengthen every aspect of our party's work and activity. The democracy of our party is the widest democracy of any party in Britain. The freedom of discussion and democratic functioning which is possible in our party, and which the leaders of other parties fear to permit in theirs, is possible because of the essential unity of our party's Marxist outlook and our determination to reach, in the light of Marxism, unity on the policy which is in the best interests of the British working class.

Let us never forget, throughout this discussion, that the cause of Communism, of national independence, of freedom and peace, is advancing with giant strides throughout the world. All conditions are present here in Britain for a great advance of the labor movement. Given the correct

policy and leadership, the British people will defeat Toryism and move forward to socialism. It is the mission of our Communist Party to help achieve these aims, and it is in this spirit that, while discussing the urgent and important issues raised by the XXth Congress of the CPSU, we work to develop the greatest united movement of the people for the policy put forward by our XXIVth national congress.

17

Statement of the Executive Committee of the British Communist Party, July 14, 1956

DAILY WORKER, London

July 16, 1956

A BRITISH Communist delegation was among the various groups of Western European Communists invited to Moscow in the wake of the CPSU resolution of June 30. After three of its leaders had returned from Moscow, the Executive [Central] Committee of the British Communist Party on July 14 adopted the statement printed below.

Similarly, the Dutch Communists professed full "satisfaction" with Moscow's explanations. The Amsterdam daily, *De Waarheid* (July 11), carried Paul De Groot's endorsement of them, along with the pronouncement that "there had been no mistakes in the [Soviet] system, but rather mistakes of policy and mistakes in carrying out correct policies."

The Austrian Communist Party likewise claimed to subscribe entirely to the CPSU resolution. After a speech by Johann Koplenig, the party's leader, its Central Committee, while admitting the "temporary difficulties for Communist parties" as a result of the new Moscow line, "welcomed" the Moscow text and pledged to "renew again our firm ties with the Soviet Union and our unswerving determination to struggle side by side with the Soviet Communist Party for the great ideas of Marxism-Leninism." (*Volksstimme*, Vienna, July 15 and 17, 1956.) Moscow radio, in reporting the statement, omitted the sole Austrian complaint that the CPSU had failed to consider in advance the effect of de-Stalinization on the foreign Communist parties.

THE Executive Committee has heard the report on the discussions between representatives of our party and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. We fully approve of the actions of our representatives in these fraternal discussions and recognize the great value of such mutual exchange of views. Arising out of such discussions further steps toward strengthening relations between Communist Parties can come, and such a development would be of the greatest importance for the cause of peace, democracy and socialism.

In previous statements, the Executive Committee and the Political Committee of our party have dealt with many of the great political issues arising out of the [XXth CPSU] congress. In the course of these statements we raised a number of questions on which we considered further explanation was necessary. We therefore warmly welcome the resolution of June 30 of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union: "On Overcoming the Cult of the Individual and Its Consequences." This resolution is of exceptional importance in its treatment of the main questions which have arisen in the course of our discussions.

The enemies of socialism have attempted to concentrate world attention on only one aspect of the XXth Congress of the CPSU—the reassessment of the role of Stalin. They want us to forget all the tremendous achievements and advances revealed by the XXth Congress—the fact that socialism is now a world system, the advance on the road to Communism in the USSR, the new possibilities for peaceful co-existence and for preventing war, the different forms of transition to socialism, and the new opportunities for achieving working-class unity.

We believe, therefore, that the resolution of the CPSU is absolutely correct to emphasize these questions on the background against which the negative features that had developed in the 1934–1956 period must be assessed. It deals frankly with these negative features, and does not attempt to hide the damage which they caused. It gives a far-reaching analysis of the historical and objective circumstances on which collective leadership was gradually weakened and the cult of Stalin arose.

The injustices and crimes associated with the 1934–1953 period caused grave harm to the cause of socialism and to the interests of the Soviet people. But it is not true, as the enemies of Communism allege, that they arose from the nature of the Soviet social system, or that they fundamentally changed its character. Political power and the means of production were firmly in the hands of the working people. Socialism was established in the Soviet Union and proved itself superior to capitalism in peace and war. These successes meant the ending of the exploitation of man by man, the ending of illiteracy and backwardness, the vast extension of education, the active participation of millions in social life and public work in town and country—in a word, a great human advance based on the economic transformation of society.

They would have been even greater but for the errors and abuses which had grown up in the Soviet Union. These errors and abuses had to be exposed, whatever the difficulties involved, in order to put an end to them and prevent such things from ever happening again. This the Soviet leaders have courageously done. We welcome this, and the far-reaching steps they are taking to rectify the past mis-

takes. The enormously beneficial effects of these steps can already be seen in the great successes of Soviet peace policy in the recent period, with the consequent relaxation of international tension; the prespectives of economic and cultural advance opened up by the Sixth Five-Year Plan; and the measures to safeguard socialist legality, develop Soviet democracy and protect the rights of Soviet citizens. As the CPSU continues the work of Marxist analysis of all the important questions involved in reassessing the past period, and the process of rectifying past errors and mistakes goes forward, further light will be thrown on some issues which are still not fully clarified.

Our party agrees with the estimate of the XXth Congress of the CPSU that the possibility exists of a peaceful transition to socialism and that there will be many different forms of transition to socialism. In 1951 we published our program, "The British Road to Socialism," in which we took into account the new world situation and the particular traditions, customs and institutions of our own people. But at the same time we believe in the vital importance of working-class unity, and of extending fraternal contacts, mutual discussions and solidarity between Communist Parties.

In carrying forward the discussion now going on in our party, we call on all our members to study and discuss the resolution of the CPSU. Our discussion has now reached a stage in which it is especially important to deal with our own policy and problems, in order to improve our work in the interests of the British people. We need to discuss how to develop the fight for working-class unity, which is vital

for the defeat of the Tories and the advance to socialism. We need to discuss the role and organization of the Communist Party, in order to build our party and improve its work, structure and democratic functioning. This will greatly strengthen the fight for unity. We need to carry forward the preparations for a new edition of our program, "The British Road to Socialism," taking into account the many changes in Britain and in the world since it was first issued in 1951.

Already discussion is under way on these questions, and further steps are being taken to stimulate it. We ask all branches and members to make their contributions, while at the same time carrying out the policy and decisions of our 24th National Congress, so as to help the Party to become a more effective instrument of the British people to resist the Tory offensive and achieve socialism. The Tories and the employers are attacking the living conditions of the British people and creating unemployment. But just because of this they are arousing the opposition of wide sections of the people. New opportunities have emerged for defeating the Tory offensive and driving the Tories from office. Alongside our discussions and development of policy let us fulfil our responsibilities to the British people by leading the fight against the Tories, strengthening working-class unity, and building our party as the indispensable weapon of the working class in the fight for socialism.