

# Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	vii
<b>Introduction: the Rise and Decline of British Bolshevism</b>	ix
Primary sources	xii
Secondary sources	xii
<b>1 High Hopes: 1920–28</b>	1
Before the Bolsheviks	2
Foundation	7
Bolshevisation	15
International	19
General Strike	24
Left turn	31
<b>2 The Zig-Zag Left: 1928–39</b>	36
Isolation and the new line	37
Challenges – right and left	42
The line changes (1)	45
The line changes (2)	50
Cable Street	57
Aid Spain	60
Moscow Trials	65
<b>3 The Party at War: its Finest Hour?</b>	69
Imperialist war: ‘what are we fighting for?’	70
‘Don’t you know there’s a war on?’: putting the line into practice	75
What sort of party?	81
June 1941: all change	84
‘The issue is clear: victory over the fascist barbarians ...’	85
‘Everything for the Front must be the rallying call ...’	87
The electoral truce	91
Conclusion	96
<b>4 Past its Peak: 1945–56</b>	98
Revolutionaries and labour	101
The Cold War (1)	104
The party in crisis	108
The Cold War (2)	113

<b>5 The Monolith Cracks: 1956–68</b>	118
The New Left	122
The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament	124
Building in the unions	127
Moscow or Peking?	135
Party life in the 1960s	136
The parliamentary road	138
Conclusion	142
<b>6 Not Fade Away: from 1968 to Dissolution</b>	143
Street-fighting man: students and the anti-Vietnam War protests	146
The British Disease: industrial militancy	150
Up against the law: fighting the Industrial Relations Act	155
White-collar workers	158
Labour in office	161
Anti-racism and anti-fascism: missing the boat	165
Gramsci, Eurocommunism and <i>Marxism Today</i>	168
The rise and fall of Bennism	172
Death throes	174
Dissolution and aftermath	179
<b>7 Conclusion</b>	184
<i>Notes</i>	188
<i>Bibliography</i>	212
<i>Index</i>	215

# 1

## High Hopes: 1920–28

At its foundation, the Communist Party of Great Britain possessed a membership made up of trade union militants who had played a leading role in several years of industrial struggle. In Walter Kendall's words, 'The Communist Party absorbed within its framework practically the whole pre-existing revolutionary movement and leaders. This movement and its participants, whatever its other faults, was at least self-acting, autonomous, a genuine endeavour to come to grips with the problem of British reality.' The industrial leaders of the party, including such figures as Harry Pollitt, Arthur McManus, Tom Bell and Willie Gallacher, were known and respected across the working-class movement. The party also enjoyed considerable prestige for its position as the British sister party of the Russian Bolsheviks. Their successful revolution offered hope to the oppressed people of the whole world. The method of soviets or workers' councils connected with the authentic experience of militant workers in Britain, France, Italy and throughout Europe. Yet by the end of the decade, the Communist Party had taken up the suicidal politics of Class against Class, seeing its main enemy in the Labour Party which represented the mainstream of working-class opinion. So within ten years of its formation, the party's membership had halved and its support collapsed. As two historians of the party, James Hinton and Richard Hyman point out, 'By 1930 the CPGB was little more than an isolated sect; its membership below the level at its foundation, and its influence, though less easily recognisable, surely even more catastrophically dissipated.'<sup>1</sup> If the party was committed to revolutionary politics, flexible in its approach and sound in 1920, then it follows that its weak state at the end of the decade is evidence of a serious decline. The purpose of this chapter therefore is to explain why this degeneration took place.

The reversal in the fortunes of the Communist Party in the 1920s was a product of the combination of two specific factors. First, there were weaknesses hidden within the indigenous socialist tradition on which it drew. The CPGB was shaped by the limited socialist traditions inside which its members had been schooled. Although such weaknesses were not necessarily fatal, we shall argue that this was hardly a positive inheritance. Second, the British party was unduly dependent on the quality of the advice it received from seasoned revolutionaries in the Communist International. In 1920 and 1921, the role of the Comintern was generally positive. As the young Communist Party lurched from left to right, it was often the arguments of leading members of the International, including Lenin and Trotsky, which brought the British party back on track. By the middle of the decade, however, the Comintern itself had gone into decline. As the Russian Revolution degenerated from within, so the body which was set up to spread its gains across the world also declined. By 1928 or 1930, the Communist International was well on the way to becoming a fully Stalinised shell of its earlier self, and was no longer capable of leading any of its constituent parties toward a genuine revolutionary politics. The CPGB moved at its own speed and according to local conditions. Yet the direction in which it developed was clear. As the International declined, so the British party went down with it.

### **Before the Bolsheviks**

Although the Communist Party was not decisively shaped by the nature of pre-1917 socialism, it was affected by the political traditions which it inherited from previous bodies. Thus the early history of the CPGB was shaped by the pre-existing traditions of the British left. At the turn of the century Britain was still the 'workshop of the world', the most powerful imperial power in the world. Precisely because the economy was so successful, a majority of workers naturally identified with the main political parties, the Liberals and the Conservatives. Even within the large minority who believed that there should be a separate workers' party, the majority supported reformism, which meant the tactics of the parliamentary Labour Party and the Independent Labour Party (ILP), which was associated with it. The big battalions of Labour and the trade unions were dominated by reformist ideas. As far as the Labour tradition was concerned, trade unionists could fight in the factories, but the law would be changed in parliament. In this way,

the excesses of capitalism could be reduced and the system transformed, without workers changing society themselves.

With regards to socialist politics, the main political opposition to the left of Labour came from the Social Democratic Federation, the SDF. This was a revolutionary party, but one without any living sense of how a workers' party could be built. It must be said that opinions on the SDF vary. Traditionally, most historians have been critical of the SDF, following arguments set down by William Morris and Frederick Engels at the time. More recently, Martin Crick has drawn attention to the role played by ordinary members of the SDF. According to Crick, the Federation 'was the pioneer organisation of the Socialist revival of the 1880s, the veteran campaigner of the free speech and unemployed agitation, a vital presence at the founding conference of the Labour Representation Committee.'<sup>2</sup> Of course, the rank and file contained many committed socialists. But the leadership of the SDF, personified in the dominant figure of the former Tory H. M. Hyndman, was middle class and remote. Like a religious sect possessed of a simple truth, the SDF ignored strikes, or described them as mere 'palliatives'. Indeed it had already been in existence for 16 years when the Federation first agreed that its members should be encouraged to join trade unions. Keith Laybourn suggests that the crucial weakness of the SDF was its 'failure to win substantial trade union support.'<sup>3</sup> This factor certainly explains the ability of the Labour Party to become the dominant force within the British left. Yet the SDF not only failed to displace Labour, it also failed to become a significant revolutionary party in its own right. The problem was an old one. The SDF – like the Labour Party and the ILP – saw politics and economics as separate categories. Like the Labour MPs, the members of the Federation gave no role to ordinary workers to change society themselves.

Although the pre-history of the British left is a story of inauspicious beginnings, the character of the socialist movement did begin to change. In successive waves of struggle after 1889, the working class itself was transformed by a gathering tide of struggle. Between 1905 and 1908 trade unions grew in size by 25 per cent, to a total of 2 500 000 members. In 1910, there were strikes in the mines and shipyards; in 1911, among dockers and rail workers. More and more workers were drawn into the movement. The number of trade unionists increased to four million. One militant union, the Workers' Union, with just 5000 members in 1910, grew until it was over 140 000 strong in the autumn of 1914. In such a radical atmosphere, the previously

quiet organisations of the left blossomed. The mood among the rank and file in the unions was for syndicalism, namely the idea that trade unions themselves could take over the running of society. In every industry, workers should organise in a single bloc. Out of this organisation, a new way of running the world would emerge. While the reformists argued for political change through parliament, and the sectarians for political change from outside, syndicalism took the economic position of ordinary working people more seriously. The prophet of the movement was Daniel De Leon, who argued for revolutionary organisation at the point of production.

Syndicalism, with its emphasis on workers' self-activity, was an enormously positive development, a real threat to the dominance of capital over labour. But it could not fill the traditional gaps in left-wing practice. Emphasising economic change, there was no strategy for political progress. The solution to all political problems would be found in the workplace, where political differences were subordinated into the economic need for all-out struggle. In effect, the old fatal gap between politics and economics was left intact. It would be perfectly possible for a worker to be a strong fighting syndicalist in work, and a more timid supporter of Labour or even the Liberals in their home. The syndicalist groups also failed to build permanent organisations. George S. Yates founded the Socialist Labour Party (SLP) in 1903, to carry on De Leon's ideas, but it never recruited more than a few hundred members. The influence of syndicalism was felt instead through the success of individuals such as Tom Mann, or pamphlets, including Noah Ablett's rank and file bible, *The Miners' Next Step*. Syndicalism remained as an idea, a fighting mood pervasive in the class, but it was not a party.<sup>4</sup>

In the absence of a large party based on syndicalist ideas, it was the SDF which enjoyed a surprising new burst of life. Other socialist currents also flourished, and a movement grew for socialist unity. In 1907, Victor Grayson stood as a 'Labour and Socialist' candidate for Colne Valley, and was elected. In contrast to the many Labour MPs since, Grayson had a refreshing contempt for parliamentary conventions. Within a year of his election, he was expelled from the Commons for accusing MPs of conniving at murder by allowing poverty to continue. Grayson lost his seat in 1910, but the enthusiasm of his first victory continued. Grayson began to call for Socialist Unity, meaning in practice a radical socialist alliance between the SDF and the ILP. Receiving the strong support of Blatchford's Clarion Movement, Grayson called a Socialist Unity Conference, which was attended by Grayson himself, delegates from SDF and ILP branches, Clarion groups and some radical

syndicalists. This conference resulted in the formation of the British Socialist Party, or BSP. Sadly the leadership of the SDF was unwilling to throw itself into the campaign. Hyndman offered, withdrew, and then offered his support again. This organisation originally claimed 35 000 members in 376 branches, but soon went into decline, having only 85 branches left by 1913. Grayson dropped out of all practical activity at about the same time.

There are different ways in which to judge this episode. On the one hand, the decline of the Socialist Unity project set back the hopes of creating a significant left block, with a different agenda to the parliamentary politics of the Labour Party. The British Socialist Party soon appeared to be no more than the old SDF with a new name. On the other hand, the very process of discussion associated with unification tended to break up some of the political lethargy of pre-1914 British socialism. After the formation of the BSP, Hyndman found himself more open to challenge from the rank and file of his own party. The anti-war left-wing within the BSP, organised around such individuals as John Maclean in Glasgow and Theodore Rothstein in London, was to provide some of the membership and a great deal of the leadership of the early CP.<sup>5</sup>

The outbreak of war in August 1914 temporarily quelled the fire of industrial unrest. Despite the previous ten years spent at peace conferences passing anti-war resolutions, the large majority of Labour MPs backed the war, as did most trade unions. Even the supposedly-revolutionary leadership of the BSP supported the war. With the jingo press pouring out stories of German atrocities, and only a tiny minority of socialist and pacifists offering any sort of opposition, it is no surprise that much of the working class was also drawn into the chauvinistic fervour. As Ian Birchall argues, the patriotic mood of 1914 has sometimes been exaggerated. A number of papers, including *The Times*, the *Economist* and the *Yorkshire Post* all bemoaned the lack of national spirit among British workers.<sup>6</sup> Much of the volunteering did not take place until late 1915, by which time it was effectively compulsory. Yet it remains true that most workers supported the declaration of war. Even those trade unionists who were more equivocal, still agreed to suspend their independent demands as they waited for the war to end. In this way, the war broke what had been a rising tide of class struggle, and the number of strike days fell by three-quarters, from twenty million per year in 1911–13 to five million per year, in 1914–18.

Although the original impact of the war was to impede the independent development of the workers' movement, the lull in the struggle

did not last. As the war continued, unofficial movements sprang up, winning real support from workers in different industries. The shop stewards movement brought together radicalised workers from different industries. There were important rank and file movements among engineers in Glasgow and Sheffield, while miners' Reform Movements were set up in South Wales and in the Scottish coalfields. The ground was prepared for a new wave of struggle, which continued on from the pre-war upsurge. As early as February 1915, Glasgow engineers were the first group of workers to walk out against wartime pay restraint. In August, the Clyde Workers' Committee was set up following a strike against dilution, the practice of employing unskilled or semi-skilled workers on accepted, skilled work. The following year saw a first national conference of shop stewards, which was a revolutionary step given the conditions of war. In the summer of 1916, the BSP finally split, with a young anti-war majority expelling the jingo leadership of Hyndman. In March 1917, ten thousand workers from the shipyards in Barrow-in-Furness took strike action. May of that year witnessed the beginning of the largest strike movement of the war, as up to 200 000 workers walked out against the conscription of skilled engineers. By January 1918, the shop stewards movement was discussing a call for a general strike which could have brought an end to the war.<sup>7</sup>

The greatest blow against the war came with the Russian Revolution of October 1917. All over Europe, there was a an explosion of anger against the war and a real hope that something different could be constructed. Workers across the world hoped that Russia would be the harbinger of a new society. Millions saw Lenin and the Bolsheviks as leading the way forward to socialism. There were many things which workers could learn from the Bolsheviks. One was an absolute hostility to the war. The Russian Marxists had opposed the war from the beginning, in marked contrast to the moderate socialists of western Europe. Another inspiration was the demand for workers' power. While the German Social Democrats were only prepared to countenance a future in which workers' councils played a slightly greater role in the supervision of industry, Lenin promised a revolutionary change and the abolition of class inequality. This goal was summed up in the slogan, 'all power to the soviets'.

Britain was in no way isolated from this revolutionary wave. Soldiers refused to fight against the Russian Revolution. During 1918 and 1919 there were mutinies of British soldiers at Archangel, Kem, Kandalaksha, Murmansk, Onega and Seletskoi near the front line. At home, trade union membership doubled from four to eight million workers

between 1914 and 1920. In 1919, coal heavers struck to prevent arms and supplies from being sent against the Russian Revolution. Two thousand soldiers in France mutinied and formed a soldiers' union. The anti-war mood crystallised in organisation. Councils of Action were set up in every area to organise protests and strikes against the possibility of a further war. Also in 1918, Labour's constitution was amended to include a new Clause Four, calling for the common ownership of industry. The Labour Party and the TUC established a National Council of Action, to organise 'the whole industrial strength of the workers against the war'. There were mass strikes in the mines, of Glasgow engineers, and even among the Metropolitan police. Between 1919 and 1921, British workers took nearly one hundred and fifty million days of strike action.<sup>8</sup>

In this ferment, large numbers of workers grew increasingly hostile towards the Labour leaders. The MPs and the trade union bureaucrats were seen to have voted and campaigned for the war and were regarded as traitors to the socialist cause. Tens of thousands of workers hoped for a revolutionary alternative which could challenge the old order, and Communist parties were set up across Europe. In Britain, at the height of the struggle, negotiations began to form a united revolutionary party. In June 1917, a United Socialist meeting was held between the Independent Labour Party and BSP. Both bodies called for the formation of soviets, on the soviet model. The first congress of the Communist International was held in revolutionary Petrograd in 1919. In Britain, Tom Bell and Arthur MacManus contacted the Russian Communist Party. Meanwhile, Sylvia Pankhurst ran a People's Russian Information Bureau from the same building as her paper, the *Workers' Dreadnought*. The Communist Party of Great Britain was finally established out of a Communist Unity Convention which was held at the Cannon Street hotel in London on 31 July and 1 August 1920.<sup>9</sup> This meeting was at once a sign of weakness and of strength. The largest Communist parties began as major factions within reformist parties – in Italy, the Socialist Party first sided with the Comintern, and only later split. In Britain, by contrast, unity was achieved by bringing together the fragments of an already-divided left.

## Foundation

Franz Borkenau notes that 'In England, compared with the small sects out of which the Communist Party emerged, the latter was a mass party and its foundation a step away from sectarianism.'<sup>10</sup> Members

from each of the Independent Labour Party, the British Socialist Party and the Socialist Labour Party all signed up to the new Communist Party. There were also other organisations which contributed, including Sylvia Pankhurst's Workers' Socialist Federation (WSF) which possessed a strong base in London's East End, the South Wales Socialist Society, the National Guild League and the Herald League, which grew out of the anti-war agitation of the trade union paper, the *Daily Herald*. The local branches of the Manchester Communist Party, for example, were based on the South Salford and Openshaw branches of the BSP, the Manchester Guild Communist Group, Gorton Socialist Society, and also activists from the local SLP, the Manchester Shop Stewards' and Workers Committee, Altrincham ILP and Manchester Labour College. Albert Inkpin moved directly from a position as national organiser of the BSP to the same post within the Communist Party. Otherwise, the leadership was dominated by former industrial militants from the Socialist Labour Party, including J. T. (Jack) Murphy, Tom Bell and Arthur McManus. The new party claimed at the outset to have 4000 members and also enjoyed a wide periphery of contacts within the Labour movement. By the mid-1920s, Communist Party sponsored publications enjoyed a circulation of between twenty and fifty thousand, which was impressive for a party of this size. By 1922 the Communist Party of Great Britain had established itself as *the* party of the revolutionary left.<sup>11</sup>

One of first challenges faced by the Communist Party was the question of how to relate to the Labour Party. If the CP enjoyed the support of only 4000 members, then it was clearly dwarfed by Labour, which enjoyed the support of the ILP, the socialist societies, and up to eight million members in affiliated trade unions. A number of leading Communists, including J. T. Murphy, Sylvia Pankhurst, Willie Gallacher and Harry Pollitt, believed from the start that the CP would be able to push the Labour Party quickly out of the way and establish itself as the major force within the British workers' movement. Gallacher wrote in Sylvia Pankhurst's paper *The Workers' Dreadnought* that 'the rank and file of the ILP in Scotland is becoming more and more disgusted with the thought of Parliament, and Soviets or workers' councils are being supported by almost every branch.' Pankhurst attended the second congress of the International. In her paper, she insisted that 'the Communist Party must keep its doctrine pure, and its independence of reformism inviolate; its mission is to lead the way, without stopping and turning by the direct road to the communist revolution.'<sup>12</sup> At the 1920 Unity Convention the motion calling for the

new party to apply to affiliate to Labour was only passed by a narrow majority of 100 votes to 85.

The decisive voice, urging the new party to take the Labour Party more seriously, was Lenin, the Bolshevik leader. His pamphlet, *Left-Wing Communism: an Infantile Disorder* (1920) replied to Sylvia Pankhurst, arguing that 'revolution is impossible without a change in the views of the majority of the working class, and this change is brought about by the political experience of the masses, and never by propaganda alone.' From this stance, it followed that the party should support Labour in its contest with the Tories and Liberals. Only once Labour was elected, would the Communist Party be able to demonstrate to a majority of workers why Labour was not enough.<sup>13</sup> Although Lenin's advice did eventually win a majority within the Communist Party of Great Britain, it was not uniformly successful. John Maclean, who knew Willie Gallacher and distrusted the former members of Glasgow BSP, refused to believe that the new party would take Lenin's advice seriously, and declined to join.<sup>14</sup> Sylvia Pankhurst disagreed with Lenin and left the British party.

In August 1920, the executive of the Communist Party of Great Britain applied for affiliation to the Labour Party. Declaring against reformism and for the Soviet system, the initial approach was better designed for publication than to win the support of the Labour Party's leaders. The Labour executive responded by reminding the CPGB of Labour's own tradition, 'the basis of affiliation to the Labour Party is the acceptance of its constitution, principles and programme, with which the objects of the Communist Party do not appear to be in accord.' Yet this rejection was only implemented very unevenly. In some areas Communists were excluded from local Labour Parties. In other towns and cities, where Communists had some influence, the local parties were more sympathetic and did not take action against members of the CP.<sup>15</sup> The question then came up at Labour's 1922 Conference in Edinburgh, where the CP's application for affiliation was rejected by 3 086 000 votes to 261 000. Frank Hodges of the miners made the platform speech accusing the Communists of being 'the intellectual slaves of Moscow ... taking orders from the Asiatic mind.' Although affiliation was now dead as a tactic, the possibility remained that individual Communists could enter the Labour Party, and win recruits in this way. Indeed in 1922, there were Communists active in the Glasgow, Sheffield, Manchester and Birmingham Labour Parties, and the number of Communist delegates to the Labour Party conference rose from seven in 1922, to 38, one year later. As late as 1924, the

view persisted within the Labour Party that individual members of the Communist Party should be allowed in, provided that their organisation was not. At that year's conference, the vote for Communist Party affiliation was defeated by 3 185 000 to 193 000, while the vote against individual CP membership was carried by just 1 804 000 to 1 540 000. Individual party members were not decisively excluded from Labour Party membership until the end of the decade.<sup>16</sup>

As well as the Labour Party, the CP also had to clarify its relations with other large forces on the left, including the ILP. The Independent Labour Party voted at its conference in 1920 to disaffiliate from the Second, Socialist International. However, the ILP leadership including Ramsay MacDonald spoke against uniting with the British Communist Party, and the conference did not vote to join the Communist, Third International. An internal opposition, the Left Wing Group, was formed to promote affiliation to the Comintern within the ILP. Then, having lost the same vote at the 1921 conference, the ILP lefts gave up their attempts to transform their party from within. Between one and two hundred members of the Independent Labour Party joined the British Communist Party in 1921, including the future Communist MP Saklatvala. More ILP members would follow at different times, over the next twenty years.

The Communist Party marked itself off from its parent bodies in the British socialist movement, by its emphasis on workplace politics, which it learned from the Russian Communists. This was a new approach for the British left. With its emphasis on the self-activity of workers, employed at the point of production, Bolshevism was a renewal of the revolutionary tradition of Marx and Engels. The SLP had possessed a similar emphasis on class struggle, but did not have the numbers or the organisation to leave a permanent mark. Other socialist parties in pre-war Britain, notably the BSP and ILP, had not given any sort of lead to industrial militants. The syndicalists had supported action, but without offering a coherent political strategy to the workers' movement. From its beginning, the CP placed a considerable emphasis on workshop organisation. In the summer of 1920, the Communist International argued that the way forward was through the construction of a parallel network of trade unions, and the Comintern established a Red International of Labour Unions (RILU) in 1921. By leading in the workshop committees, Communists would win support to build a revolutionary trade union International. Trade Union strategy was cast within an offensive framework, unemployed workers were to receive full pay from their last employer, while workers' commissions

should examine employers' books. This tactic of setting up fighting unions had greatest resonance in such countries as Spain where the union federations were already split, and where there were large syndicalist unions with a history of leading struggles. In 1920–21, leading British Communists tended to apply this line with some caution. They did not argue for splits in the unions, but rather for the consolidation of networks of socialist shop stewards, in opposition to the established trade union structures.

It is worth saying something here about the role played by the trade union bureaucracy, a theme recurring throughout the history of the Communist Party. The Bolshevik argument was that even the best professional trade union leaders become *representatives*, and thus have a tendency to become separated from the conditions of their members who continue to work at the point of production. As early as 1890, John Burns described the old guard of TUC delegates carrying 'good coats, large watch chains and high hats', in marked contrast to the poor clothes of their members. The timidity of the bureaucracy was not only a British phenomenon. In 1908 Robert Michels described the conservatism of their counterparts in Germany.<sup>17</sup> The enormous growth of the unions in the postwar era had been a mixed blessing for the trade union leaders. On the one hand, more members meant more permanent officials and the position of full-timers became more secure. As Richard Hyman notes, 'At the turn of the century the largest union with centralised control, the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, had less than 100 000 members; by 1920 there were a dozen unions larger than this, many of them substantially so.'<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, the growth of the shop stewards movement meant that there was a potential alternative leadership, made up of workers themselves, and more closely linked to the needs of ordinary people. It was for all these reasons that the early CP insisted that revolutionaries had more in common with shop stewards in the trade unions than they did with the union full-timers. It would be an exaggeration to suggest that the British Communists had assimilated the full lessons of the Bolshevik theory of union bureaucracy, but there was a willingness to think, and this willingness would soon be lost.

From mid-1921, the industrial perspectives within the International changed. The original approach of the International had been based around the observation that capitalism was in crisis. By 1921, however, it seemed that the system had been briefly stabilised – at this stage, the Bolsheviks expected the lull to last more than two years. The Third World Congress of the Comintern opened with a speech by Leon

Trotsky, in which he argued that the postwar upturn in industrial protest had temporarily come to a halt, 'the open revolutionary struggle of the proletariat for power is at present passing through a stoppage'. One of the reasons for this change was the new period of high unemployment, which reduced the ability of workers to use strikes as a form of protest. Weaker at the point of production, trade unionists were less able to challenge the economic basis of society. At the Fourth Congress of the Communist International in 1921, J. T. Murphy described the industrial problems faced by revolutionaries in Britain, 'How can you build factory organisations when you have 1 750 000 walking the streets. You cannot build factory organisations in empty and depleted workshops.'<sup>19</sup> At the 1922 Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Comintern, Communists were encouraged to work together with non-revolutionary trade unionists, in a 'United Front' of all parties supported by the working class. Rather than simply exposing the failure of the trade union leadership, it was argued that revolutionaries should seek alliances with less militant workers and also sometimes with sections of the left-wing bureaucracy. Socialists should work for specific demands with friendly forces. Rather than setting up rival trade unions, socialists should work within the existing structures.

This new tactic was received with enthusiasm in Britain, where the economic downturn had proved especially sharp. The British economy had been built up in the early nineteenth century when it was the world's only manufacturing power, and was extended at the end of the nineteenth century, when Britain benefited from being the world's largest empire. The economy had thrived on guaranteed markets, for coal, shipbuilding, textiles, iron and steel. Yet the war had done untold damage to Britain's economic position. The country was now a debtor nation, while German reparations to France and Belgium meant that these goods were in competition with British products. In this new situation of over-production, British employers were forced to dismantle the war economy. Factories were closed, the number of strikes fell, and workers suffered.

As we have seen, the workers' struggle reached its height in 1918 and especially 1919. There were police strikes in Liverpool, troop mutinies, and Red Clydeside was subject to armed siege. Yet the slow-down in the economy from 1920 onwards reduced the scope for pure trade union struggle. Indeed having survived the wave of militancy, the employers felt confident to stage a major counter-offensive in 1921. Their first targets were the miners and the engineers. The defeat of the miners on Black Friday in 1921 gave the employers the chance to seek

further attacks on transport, distribution and building in 1924. Then the miners union was attacked again in 1925 and 1926. The limits on the CP's support and influence within the working class were determined by the defensive nature of much trade union activity in this period. From 1921 through the 1922 engineering lock-out to the 1926 General Strike, the manual working-class base of the party suffered a series of sharp industrial defeats. At each turn, the precious band of experienced Communist industrial militants including J. T. Murphy and Wal Hannington with roots in the shop stewards movement built up in the last years of the world war, were victimised.

The first wave of cuts began in 1921. Unemployment rose from around 6 per cent in December 1920 to just under 18 per cent at the end of June 1921. The National Unemployed Workers' Movement was established that year, under the leadership of Wal Hannington, formerly an activist in the engineers' union. James Hinton and Richard Hyman record a wry joke of the time, 'that the shop steward leaders of 1918 had become the unemployed leaders of the 1920s'. Left-wing Boards of Guardians briefly refused to skimp on Poor Relief, and George Lansbury and 29 other Poplar Councillors were jailed in the autumn of 1921. The crucial engagement of the early 1920s took place however in the mines. The owners imposed unilateral wage cuts, and although the miners voted to strike, they were locked out on 1 April 1921. The Triple Alliance of Miners, Transport Workers and Railwaymen met and called a solidarity strike in support of the miners. This was called off on April 15, Black Friday. With its defeat the hopes collapsed of united working-class resistance to wage cuts. The miners fought on alone for 13 weeks, and were eventually forced to accept wage cuts of around 34 per cent. Communists blamed Jimmy Thomas, the leader of the National Union of Railwaymen. A superb cartoon by Will Hope in *The Communist* showed Thomas as Judas at the Last Supper. Yet the miner's defeat lasted. By the end of 1921, some six million workers across industry had suffered pay cuts of around 8 shillings per week. Trade union membership fell from 8.3 million in 1920, to 5.6 million by 1922 and eventually 4.4 million in 1933. Strike days fell from an annual average of 49 million in 1919–21 to under 12 million in 1922–25. In a period of cutbacks from 1921 to 1926, the space for independent action was reduced, and the position of the employers was strengthened.<sup>20</sup>

It was the combination of economic slowdown and advice from the International which led the British party to play down the RILU goal of establishing up rival unions, and accept instead the tactic of the United

Front. This approach was embodied in the National Minority Movement, which was launched in autumn 1923. The movement's first conference took place on 23–4 August 1924, and there were 270 delegates present, claiming to represent 200 000 workers. The Minority Movement was a militant force within the trade unions, it argued for an offensive policy of improving wages and conditions. Roderick Martin, the historian of the Minority Movement, describes it as 'an uneasy alliance between the Communist International and the extreme left wing of the British trade union movement'.<sup>21</sup> The hope was that strike action would win results, which would expose the failure of the bureaucracy. Impressed by the success of their action, workers would then join the Communist Party. Harry Pollitt explained the objectives as follows:

We are not out to disrupt the unions, or to encourage any new unions. Our sole objective is to unite the workers in the factories by the formation of factory committees; to work for the formation of one union for each industry; to strengthen the local Trades Councils so that they shall be representative of every phase of the working-class movement, with its roots firmly embedded in the factories of each locality.

His emphasis was on strengthening the organisations of the Labour movement, the union branches and the trades councils, and even the TUC, 'We stand for the formation of a real General Council that shall have the power to direct, unite and co-ordinate all struggles and activities of the trade unions, and so make it possible to end the present chaos and go forward in a united attack in order to secure not only our immediate demands, but win workers' complete control of industry.' In Pollitt's speech, there were strong echoes of the old syndicalist demand for industrial trade unionism. Industrial unions would cover whole industries. At the top of the pyramid, a new body would represent the whole working class, regardless of trade or industry.<sup>22</sup>

The Minority Movement claimed 950 000 members in 1926. In order to reach this figure, any individual worker could have been counted several times. A leading steward in a large plant might attend a conference, as the delegate of a factory, a stewards' committee, or a trades council. With triple-counting, they might claim to represent several thousand workers – less than a hundred of whom may actually have taken part in any vote. Yet even if the claimed figure exaggerated Communist influence by a factor of ten, this would still suggest that

this small party had considerable influence in the unions, a periphery much greater than its membership. The Minority Movement had support in the mining and engineering unions, on the railways and in many other workplaces. It was credited with helping to obtain the election of A. J. Cook, a prominent supporter of the Minority Movement, to the secretaryship of the Miners' Federation. Yet, there were serious problems with this new industrial policy. Few Communist militants in the factories seem to have understood how exactly such unity should be built. Could you have unity only with your fellow workers, or should agreement be allowed with members of the union machine? In such alliances, how could revolutionary politics come to dominate? What was the balance to be sought between working with rival forces, and raising an agenda of your own? In the absence of a serious discussion of these problems within the British party, the leadership for understandable reasons tended to follow the latest advice which it received from the Communist International. Yet the International itself was in a process of degeneration from within, and the quality of its advice was to decline dramatically in the space of just a few years.

## **Bolshevisation**

Despite the excitement which followed the launch of the Communist Party in 1920, it took some time for the party to set up a sturdy network of local activists. The immediate revolutionary hopes of 1919 began to fade as the high-point of the upturn was passed. Party membership, which stood at 4000 in 1920, fell to 2500 one year later. For British Communists still struggling to establish themselves as a viable organisation, the application of the United Front – on Comintern advice – represented a potential way forward. Tactical alliances with members of the Labour Party and an orientation on trade unions, both represented means through which a larger revolutionary party could be built. For the British party as for many of the other young Communist Parties, the Comintern also prescribed a dose of Bolshevisation. Zinoviev argued that the failure of the workers' revolts of 1919–21 across Europe to result in the successful repeat of October 1917 lay not just in the objective conditions of capitalist stabilisation but also in the subjective failure of the new parties to put into practice the techniques learned by the Bolsheviks since 1903. Lenin argued that the national parties needed to think independently,<sup>23</sup> but this advice was lost, and the very opposite argument was put by Lenin's disciples.

The Comintern Third Congress had been keen to establish that party-building should not be a merely mechanistic, organisational process but should encompass a broad project of political education, yet as J. T. Murphy was to point out, organisational restructuring often took precedence over equally-important questions of political development, 'We had made our political adherence to its principles, but it is one thing to accept a principle and another to apply it to life. The Communist Party was supposed to be a Marxist party, but there were few within it who had more than a nodding acquaintance with the writings of Marx.'<sup>24</sup> More recently Stuart Macintyre's research has tended to confirm Murphy's account of the low level of political education within the British party. Before 1926, only a small number of Marx and Engels' works were available in English translation, and many of these only in expensive American editions. Other authors, including Lenin, Luxemburg or Trotsky were still harder to come by. Socialist ideas were assimilated through the writings of non-Marxist social scientists, atheists and evolutionists such as Ernst Haeckel, whose *Evolution of Man* was seen as a popular counterpart to Frederick Engels' *Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*.<sup>25</sup> Yet if Murphy was right, and the party activists had little understanding of Marxism, then how could this situation be remedied?

In the winter of 1921–22, a Comintern commission charged with investigating the worrying lack of progress in the British Communist Party, invited Arthur MacManus the Party Secretary and the CPGB's rising star Harry Pollitt, back to Moscow. On his return to Britain, Pollitt established a commission to overhaul the Party's organisation. The other members of the troika included the national organiser Albert Inkpin and a young writer, Rajani Palme Dutt. The commission eventually produced a 40 000 word report into every aspect of the Communist Party's organisation. Some of its recommendations were accepted, while others received vociferous opposition. J. T. Murphy suggested that the report mistakenly prioritised organisational answers to political problems. 'If I were asked what are the principal defects of the Party today, I would answer unhesitatingly, formalism, organisational Fetishism, and lack of political training'.<sup>26</sup>

Despite his protests, Murphy's worries were misplaced. The real problem of the report was the broader issue of what constituted Bolshevisation? For the Bolshevik party was itself in ferment, with Lenin dying and Trotsky star's on the wane. The goals of greater clarity, discipline and centralisation could not be so positive once rival perspectives were banned both in Russia and within the British party.

Under Zinoviev's leadership, the International succumbed to faddism, leaning one way and then the next without any clear logic to the changed positions. The intention of Bolshevisation was to produce a party of leaders, where every member could build movements in their home area of workplace. The actual outcome of this process was to facilitate the shift towards Stalinisation, a process which was successful by the end of the decade.

Perhaps the most lasting significance of the report was that it established a clear link between the process of 'Bolshevisation' and the two young men who were to lead the Communist Party through the formative years of its existence, Harry Pollitt and Rajani Palme Dutt. Many writers have contrasted the personalities of these two leading Communists. In Kevin Morgan's words, Harry Pollitt 'was a product of the that open, generous socialist culture that produced the First World War ... Born in the heart of industrial Britain, his passionate sense of identity with his own working class would underpin and occasionally clash with his allegiance to international Communism.' Pollitt was the public face of the Communist Party. He was a skilled boilermaker, who had played a prominent role in the Openshaw Socialist Society, which affiliated to the BSP in 1911. Later Harry Pollitt was a leading activist in the movement against sending arms to the counter-revolutionaries in Russia. He was clearly a talented organiser. Following the 1922 report, Pollitt took charge of the CP paper *Workers Weekly*, and quickly built up a network of paper-sellers and factory-floor journalists. By 1923, *Workers Weekly* had a circulation of 50 000. This could not match the 200 000 plus circulation of the *Daily Herald*, but any socialist party would be content with a paper sale ten times the size of its membership.<sup>27</sup>

While Pollitt could appear open and sincere, Rajani Palme Dutt let himself be seen as quiet, close-minded and cold. The distinctive qualities of his Marxism were epitomised by a famous entry on the meaning of Communism that he wrote for the 1921 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, which defined Marxism as the combination of the 'the strictest internal discipline' plus 'an external policy of revolutionary opportunism'. Such an approach was hardly designed to win converts! According to Willie Thompson, who saw Dutt at work late in his career, he 'possessed a brilliant intelligence ... but came to employ it ... in the composition of dishonest justifications for discreditable or criminal acts committed by the Soviet regime.'<sup>28</sup> Palme Dutt owed his rapid rise to prominence within the British party to the support of his later wife, Salme Pekkala, an early member of the Finnish left, and an acquaint-

tance of Lenin. Dutt was used throughout the 1930s as the mouthpiece of the leadership of the Communist International within the British party, justifying each twist and turn in Comintern policy, as the International required.

Support for Harry Pollitt and Rajani Palme Dutt came in the mid-1920s from a layer of talented and largely middle-class Communists. They included Tom Wintringham the novelist, Robin Page Arnot, later the historian of the miners' union, Esmond Higgins, Rose Cohen and Salme Dutt. Robin Page Arnot and Rose Cohen had worked together in the Fabian Research Department, which became the Labour Research Department (LRD). This was also Palme Dutt's background, and even Harry Pollitt was given a post on the executive of the LRD between 1923 and 1935.<sup>29</sup> Although they are now less well-known than their counterparts in the 1930s, there was an early milieu of young bohemian Communists, who were radicalised by the pre-war labour unrest and took part in the fight against the First World War.

Some of the character of these rare middle-class Communists can be seen by looking at the three Communist MPs of the 1920s. The first was the curious figure of Lt-Col. C. J. Malone, a National Liberal MP who was won over by the experience of seeing Russia in revolt in 1919, and was afterwards a Communist MP for two years, and then sat with Labour. The second Communist in Parliament, Walter Newbold, did not last there even as long as Malone. Although an open member of the CP, Newbold was elected as a Labour candidate at Greenock in 1922, and remained in Parliament for less than a year. At this stage, individual CP membership of the Labour Party was still tolerated. Thomas Bell described Newbold as 'an eccentric individual with a Quaker upbringing—entirely unsuited for communist work. He went almost unkempt and unshaven, wearing a dirty collar and clothes, trying to look "proletarian"!'. Beneath the aggressive contempt that was often hurled at renegade former members, there was may have been some truth in Bell's description. Newbold was a man of letters better suited to research than to sustained parliamentary agitation. The third Communist MP was Shapurji Saklatvala, the subject of a recent biography by Marc Wadsworth. 'Comrade Sak' was originally nominated by a Labour association and elected at Battersea in 1922. He was then expelled from the Labour Party, and stood again for Battersea as a Communist in 1924 and won, retaining the seat until 1929. Saklatvala had been born into a rich Bombay merchant family, and was a devout Parsee as well as a Communist. Indeed he

drew criticism from members of the party for having had his children initiated into his family religion, at a public ceremony in Westminster.<sup>30</sup>

In the 1920s relatively few writers or intellectuals became Communists. Many of those who joined the party quickly left, while others (although tempted) never quite signed up. Harold Laski described the Russian Revolution as ‘the greatest even in history since the Reformation’, yet remained a prominent member of the Labour Party. The philosopher Bertrand Russell was another who sided with the Russian Communists, but not with British Bolshevism. ‘The Russian Revolution is one of the great heroic events of world history ... Bolshevism deserves the gratitude and admiration of all the progressive part of mankind’, he declared, but Russell also argued that there was no chance of a similar event taking place in Britain.<sup>31</sup>

## **International**

From its inception, the Communist Party was proud to be a constituent member of the Communist International. National CPs agreed that the International should be based on democratic centralism, that decisions should be discussed and voted at the centre, and that the International Communist movement should act as one united force. The twenty-one Conditions of membership originally presented by Leon Trotsky and adopted at the Second Congress of the Comintern were intended to guard against the reformist dilution of the new Communist Parties. Communists could see the example of the Second International, where despite instances of collective discussion, individual parties had in practice been left to adopt policies free of central guidance. The result had been a continuous process of accommodation to the capitalist system, which culminated in 1914, when most of the socialist parties capitulated to nationalism and supported their own rulers in the First World War. By contrast, the relative centralisation within the International was originally a source of strength to the Communist Party of Great Britain. The revolutionaries gathered in Moscow had behind them the experiences of many years’ revolutionary struggle. Lenin’s insistence on serious parliamentary work, and the Comintern theory of the United Front, led the young CPGB both away from its early ultra-leftism and towards the mainstream of British workers. Stuart Macintyre describes the tone of Lenin’s meetings with Willie Gallacher and J. T. Murphy, at the Second Congress of the International in 1920:

In his dealing with the British delegates ... Lenin scrupulously avoided making use of his own authority and spent long hours in patient discussion – he thought it far more important to convince them of the efficacy of a style of Communist politics than to impose this or that decision upon them, for unless they shared an appreciation of the reasons for following a particular course of action, they would be incapable of implementing it properly.<sup>32</sup>

The easy and informal style of these early meetings stands in marked contrast with the subsequent formal and unequal relations between King Street and Moscow.

As Kevin McDermott has argued, the original problem with the democratic centralism of the Comintern lay in the unequal relationship between the teacher and the pupil. In Russia, the Bolsheviks had organised a successful workers' revolution, while in Britain, revolutionary forces were small and insignificant. It would have required real cheek for Murphy or Gallacher or any other British Communist to contradict revolutionaries of the standing of Zinoviev or Bukharin, let alone Lenin or Trotsky. Not surprisingly, the British party was noted from 1920 for its willingness to take orders. Indeed the German Communist, Teddy Thälmann, recorded in 1926 that the Communist Party of Great Britain was 'the only major party which had no difference with the Executive of the Comintern'.<sup>33</sup> Over time the inequality of political experience could have been solved, if only the British party had grown, and if the Russian Revolution had remained a real workers' democracy. But the pupil had no time to learn from the teacher, before the teacher itself had changed. By 1924 Lenin was dead, the hoped-for German October had failed, and in Russia the working class had been destroyed by foreign intervention and civil war. In this new situation, the function of the Russian party was transformed. The Soviet Communist Party with its cadres engaged in production, entrenched in their power and able to pass on their privileges, became a reactionary force, first holding back Russian workers, and then turning on them after 1928.

The degeneration of the British Communist Party is often described as a one-way process, in which British Communists meekly accepted the latest dictates of the International. Cold War historians have made great play of the sums received from Moscow, pointing out for example that the Communist International gave the British party £5,000 in 1924 and £16 000 in 1925. Such sums were considerably more than the party received in dues from its own members.<sup>34</sup> From

this, it is argued that the CPGB was a mere plaything of Soviet policy. Although such impressions may be broadly correct, there was more unevenness than the simple model of CP subservience to Moscow would suggest. In truth, the International line often found local supporters in the branches, who would be motivated by local or personal concerns. Also, it should be recognised that there were elements of a two-way direction to the process. Members of the CPGB played a role within the middle-levels of the Communist International. Such figures as J. T. Murphy achieved positions within the International and their resistance was weaker when decisions which they had shaped later rebounded against them.

Many of the leading cadres of the British party were sent by the Communist International to assist in the building of Communist Parties throughout the world. Tom Mann and Peggy Garman were both in China in 1926 and 1927, at the time of the Shanghai uprising. Here, the International imposed on the Chinese Communist Party the notion that the Kuomintang was a 'bloc of four classes', including some workers as well as the native bourgeoisie, and hence that it must be supported unconditionally in the struggle for national liberation. The Chinese Communist Party backed the Kuomintang, even as it butchered the Communist-led workers' movement. In effect, the Chinese Communists voted for their own destruction. Mann later expressed doubts about events in China, but both he and Gorman did play a role in legitimising a wretched Comintern policy.

Harry Pollitt was in Germany in July 1921, May 1923, July 1924 and December 1924. Although neither of his biographers mention it, his papers also include a letter which refers to his time at the Lenin School in Moscow. Indeed in 1956, Pollitt claimed to have visited Moscow 'fifty times' since 1921. J. T. Murphy was in Russia for most of the 1920s, and proposed the resolution expelling Trotsky from the Executive Committee of the International. Murphy was also on the directorate of the Lenin school which trained cadres to defend a very Stalinised version of Bolshevism. Harry Wicks was also sent to the Lenin school – although he drew the exact opposite lessons from his time in Russia and became an early British Trotskyist.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps more positively, the CPGB established a Colonial Committee in 1925 to co-ordinate the party's anti-imperialist work, and as John Callaghan has shown, its members were played an important part in setting up a significant Communist Party in India in 1927. Previous attempts had been to form an Indian party, but it was only after this initiative that a permanent organisation was established.<sup>36</sup>

The effects of the internal changes within the Communist International were catastrophic in Britain, and provide a major theme through this and the following chapters. As the International degenerated, so the first pressure on the British party was to the right. Rather than seeing the Minority Movement as a bridge towards a unity between Labour and Communist workers on the shop-floor, industrial militants in the CPGB were encouraged to see it as an alliance between ordinary workers and left-wing trade union bureaucrats. The whole emphasis of Communist Party industrial policy was changed. Independent organisation was limited and the importance of workers' self-activity was downplayed. Following the 1924 Trades Union Congress at Hull, an Anglo-Russian committee of TUC and Russian Trade Union leaders was set up. The slogan 'All Power to the General Council' acquired greater and greater prominence. The previous demand to reform the General Council, so that it would become the military command of the labour movement, was shelved. The argument was put instead that TUC lefts were already leading the British working class towards a new and revolutionary era of struggle.

The party's approach towards the Labour Party leadership changed in much the same way. A National Left-Wing Movement was set up to copy inside the Labour Party, the work of the Minority Movement within the trade unions. Criticisms of Ramsay MacDonald and the Labour leadership were downplayed. A minority of leading party members began to argue that the Left-Wing Movement could form the basis of a new party, a ginger group just slightly to the left of Labour. Their suggestion was that there was no need for the independent politics of the CP. Jack Murphy and Rajani Palme Dutt clashed over this question in 1925, with Murphy going so far as to recommend the dissolution of the British Communist Party.<sup>37</sup> The results of this rightward shift were to be felt during the General Strike 1926. Yet before the party could get there, it first went through the difficult experience of two years of sustained red scares.

Despite the efforts of Labour leaders to distance themselves from the Communist Party, the jingo press remained convinced that the party's Moscow connection was somehow Labour's weak link. There were three major occasions on which the press, the Tories and the establishment attempted to exploit red shock stories. The first came in the summer of 1924, when the party was accused of fomenting mutiny among British troops; the second came later in the same year, with the publication of the fraudulent 'Zinoviev Letter'. On 25 July 1924, the *Workers' Weekly* published an open letter to the armed forces, encour-

aging the ‘workers in uniform’ to ‘form committees in every barracks, aerodrome or ship’, and concluding with the words, ‘Turn your weapons on your oppressors!’ This appeal came quite out of the blue, there was no sustained agitation which preceded it, and the article may well have been intended to challenge prosecution. Rajani Palme Dutt, the editor of the *Workers’ Weekly*, was absent at the time, and the acting editor was J. R. Campbell, a war veteran who had been wounded on active service. Whatever the party’s intention, Campbell was arrested and charged under the Incitement to Mutiny Act of 1795. The party responded creatively to the charges. Threatening to question the Labour Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald on a similar appeal he had issued in 1912, the CP received the support of a large minority of Labour MPs and the charges were dropped.<sup>38</sup>

The second important red scare came in the winter of the same year. The Conservative and Liberal MPs in the Commons responded to the dropping of the charges against the CP by blaming Labour, and the Opposition combined to bring down the government. In the election which followed, the Labour Party was described as the prisoner of the Communists. Winston Churchill claimed that Labour was ready to ‘shake hands with murder’. In an atmosphere tinged with fear and no little paranoia, the Tory press published a letter, apparently written by Zinoviev for the Communist International, urging his British comrades to make ready for insurrection and civil war. The Zinoviev Letter was a clear forgery, probably manufactured by the British secret services, but it certainly fitted well with the Tory campaign which employed the obvious slogan, ‘A vote for Labour is a vote for Bolshevism’. In response to the smears, the Labour vote rose, but many Liberals returned to the Tory fold, giving the Conservatives a large majority.<sup>39</sup> The third red scare came in October 1925, when around thirty detectives raided the London offices of the Communist Party. Twelve prominent Communists were arrested and accused of conspiracy, including Tom Bell, editor of *Communist Review*, Albert Inkpin, the party secretary, Harry Pollitt, general secretary of the National Minority Movement, and William Rust of the Young Communist League. All twelve were found guilty, and when they turned down the chance to be bound over, the judge sentenced each of these leading Communists to between six and twelve months in jail.<sup>40</sup>

Even if the Labour and the Liberal members of Parliament were hurt by these slanders, the Communist Party was not. The period from 1924 to 1926 represented the CP’s most successful years to date. Membership rose from 5000 in June 1925 to 6000 ten months later,

and 10 730 in October 1926. The number of factory branches was put at 316. A record 883 delegates attended the Minority Movement conference in March 1926, claiming to represent 957 000 workers. In terms of its size, the party was now at a first peak. The party also launched the National Left-Wing Movement, to campaign within the Labour Party. At the 1926 conference of this body, it was recorded that 65 groups had been established, the largest number being in London, Scotland and Yorkshire. Sixty Communists took part in the 1926 Conference of the Labour Party. The CPGB's strongest support was still restricted to a few marginal areas, the 'Little Moscovs' of East Fife, the Vale of Leven and the Rhondda.<sup>41</sup> Yet, with the inception of the National Minority Movement, the party could develop its support within the unions. Standing as a loyal opposition, represented within the Labour movement, building the unions from below, party activists were well positioned to benefit from any large struggles to come.

### **General Strike**

The years 1924–26 remained a time of industrial downturn. The number of strikes was falling, and the ones which did occur were typically defensive. Despite this, the employers' offensive did have the effect of radicalising workers to the left, as can be seen in the high Labour vote of 1924 and in the Communist Party's growth between 1924 and 1926. There was also a small increase in trade union membership between 1923 and 1925. This radicalisation reached its zenith with the 1926 General Strike in support of the miners. The role of the Communist Party before and during the heroic period of the General Strike has attracted criticism especially from Trotskyist historians, including Pearce and Woodhouse.<sup>42</sup> Their argument is that the Comintern, dominated by the rising Stalinist bureaucracy, pressurised the Communist Party into developing an all-too friendly relationship with left-wingers on the TUC General Council including Alonzo Swales of the Engineers, George Hicks of the Building Trade Workers and Alfred Purcell, leader of the Furniture Workers. This was sealed by the visit in 1924 of a Soviet delegation to the TUC conference which established the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee. Under pressure from the Comintern to maintain a good relationship with the Labour and Trade Union leadership in Britain, the Communist Party fell into the trap of supporting the leadership of the TUC uncritically in the General Strike. The slogan 'All Power to the General Council' thus disarmed the members of the unions, when after nine days the TUC

General Council called off the strike. Thus the hostility of the union leaders combined with the failure of the Communist Party to build as a rival pole of attraction, leaving the miners to go down to bitter defeat nine months later.

Much of the debate rests on the relationship between the Communist Party and the left-wing officials at the top of the trade union movement. The suggestion made is that in the run-up to the strike, the party's agitational literature did not take bureaucracy seriously. No distinction was made between such figures as A. J. Cook, a revolutionary trade unionist and a former member of the Communist Party, and Hicks or Purcell, left-wing bureaucrats on the TUC General Council with a temporary sympathy for the Russian state. Thus the sixth plenum of the Comintern Executive exaggerated the radical character of the Anglo-Russian committee, describing it as 'a new stage in the history of the international trade union movement ... it demonstrates the practical possibility of creating a unified International, and of a common struggle of workers of different political tendencies against reaction, fascism and the capitalist offensive.' Within the CPGB, Rajani Palme Dutt's editorials in *Labour Monthly* presented the TUC General Council as 'a leadership which is approaching more and more full recognition of the class struggle.'<sup>43</sup>

Despite Communist rhetoric, the TUC lefts were not a revolutionary force. Swales and the others first came to prominence as a group only in 1924, as the advent of the first Labour government shifted the balance of power within the General Council. Right-wing union leaders like Jimmy Thomas, Bondfield and Gosling were taken into MacDonald's government, and it was only in their absence that the TUC acquired a new verbal militancy. Alonzo Swales addressed the 1925 Trades Union Congress, calling for 'a militant and progressive policy, consistently and steadily pursued ... there cannot be any community of interest between the working class and the capitalist class.' Yet this Scarborough Congress barely contributed towards the organisation of a campaign. Apart from Swales and Cook, no other member of the General Council spoke in the debates. No attempt was made to arm the movement for the battles which were to come.<sup>44</sup>

Real preparations were desperately needed. The miners had already suffered deep wage cuts, with their average weekly wages falling from 90 shillings in 1921, to 48 shillings and sixpence, by 1925. So the miners' pay had already fallen by an average of 50 per cent, and now employers demanded further wage cuts of between 10 and 25 per cent. When miners were first locked-out to enforce this threat, the leaders of

the road and rail unions responded by promising to support their fellow workers. On Red Friday, 31 July 1925, the Conservative government stepped into the breach, offering the coal-owners a nine-month subsidy if they withdrew their threat. Despite this important working-class victory, neither side believed the final contest had come. Arthur Cook the miners' leader, warned the readers of the Left-Wing Movement's paper, the *Sunday Worker*, that another fight would be needed to prevent the wage cuts, while the government and the mine owners responded by setting up an Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies (OMS), to co-ordinate their response to any mass strike.

There is a mythic image of the General Strikes, which has been cultivated in the press and the popular memory. Stories abound of peaceful constitutional protest and policemen playing football with strikers. Somehow, these images are seen to reflect a national myth – that Britain has been a peaceful country, where conflict has always been resolved by compromise, and wars and domestic strife have been avoided. Keith Laybourn's history of the General Strike goes out of its way to insist that the conflict had no origins, and few consequences. Any struggle was a blip. In his words, 'Strike activity was declining during the early 1920s and there is ample evidence that the employers and trade unionists were actively involved in reducing the levels of industrial conflict from about 1916 onwards.'<sup>45</sup> It is quite true to say that some trade unionists were working to reduce the levels of conflict – but why was conciliation needed? In a situation of escalating conflict, it is more plausible to suggest that the leaders of the movement determined to restrain the activity of their members.

Despite the occasional sepia-coloured myths that have been passed down to us, the General Strike which finally broke out in May 1926 saw society divided overwhelmingly along class lines. The working-class response was solid. Two and a half million workers struck for the first eight days, and were then joined by a further million workers including engineers and ship builders on day nine. In each area Trades Councils were responsible for ensuring that local union branches kept to the General Council's instructions. A TUC communiqué reported the extent of working-class support, 'We have from all over the country reports that have surpassed all our expectations. Not only the railwaymen and transport men, but all other trades came out in a manner we did not expect immediately. The difficulty of the General Council has been to keep men in what we might call the second line of defence rather than call them out.'<sup>46</sup>

The support of workers for the General Strike was extraordinary. Less than 0.4 per cent of London firemen reported to work. Even with the assistance of OMS, no rail company managed to run more than 8 per cent of its freight or 20 per cent of its passenger trains. Four national unions, including the transport workers and the steel workers' unions, were bankrupted by their support for the strike. Meanwhile, the propertied classes also mobilised *en masse*. Four hundred thousand people volunteered to oppose the strike, and 200 000 special constables were sworn in. Cambridge students attempted to work the London docks, while car owners were sent to the Horse Guards Parade. Even members of the British Fascisti, led by Rotha Lintorn-Orman, were allowed to join OMS, in semi-militarised fascist brigades.

Although the large majority of workers remained solidly behind the strike, and indeed the numbers taking part grew daily, the Labour Party and the TUC General Council decided to end their support on the ninth day. Beatrice Webb described the strike as 'a proletarian distemper which had to run its course'. Ramsay MacDonald's ally Philip Snowden sneered at 'the futility and foolishness of such a trial of strength'. Within the leadership of the Trades Union Congress, Ernest Bevin claimed that 'there was uneasiness among the men who were entitled to pensions and superannuations'. More convincingly, Charles Dukes of the General and Municipal Workers Union told a 1926 special congress of the TUC that the real reason the strike was ended was to prevent the control of the movement being taken by the rank and file, 'Every day the authority was passing into the hands of men who had no authority and no control.'<sup>47</sup>

While the strike continued, the ordinary members of the Communist Party of Great Britain took part to the full. In Jeffrey Skelley phrase, the party's activists played a role 'out of all proportion to their numbers'. At a local level, they were the backbone of the movement, 'Wherever the Councils of Action were most effective, wherever the local strike was most solid, there a knot of CP members was usually to be found in the thick of it.' Members of the CPGB provided the activists and local leaders who held the movement together at a local level. The militant London busworkers remained out for two days after the official ending of the strike; here it was Communists who helped glue the strike together. In Battersea, Oxford, Edinburgh and elsewhere, members of the party were represented on the Councils of Action. The best evidence of the party's involvement is the attitude of the British police. Over 1200 Communists, or around one quarter of

the party's pre-strike membership, were arrested for taking part in the events. Indeed an individual member of the Communist Party was more than 200 times more likely to be arrested in May 1926 than their contemporary within the Labour Party.<sup>48</sup>

Despite the activism of the party's members, the CP was caught off guard when the strike ended, and unable to provide any means of continuing support for the miners once the TUC had caved in. In the run-up to the strike, party literature refrained from even fraternal criticism of such TUC lefts as Purcell and Swales. The party's manifesto, *The Political Meeting of the General Strike*, emphasised only the demands of the Miners' Federation, including nationalisation and the replacement of the Tories with a Labour government. A March 1926 statement on the Royal Commission Report identified the danger of the TUC selling out, but warned only of the TUC right, 'a small number of Labour leaders who are so obsessed with the ideas of uniting all classes and speaking of the interests of the "community as a whole" that they fail to defend the workers they represent.'<sup>49</sup> The party saw no danger that the lefts too could sell out.

After the strike ended, the party quickly produced a leaflet, 'Stand by the Miners!'. It responded to the betrayal with anger, 'The General Council's decision to call off the General Strike is the greatest crime that has ever been permitted, not only against the miners, but against the working class of Britain and the whole world.' The leaflet assigned 'direct responsibility' to the Rights on the General Council, but noted that 'most of the so-called Left Wing have been no better than the Right.' Shortly afterwards, Willie Gallacher, Wal Hannington and other leading Communists issued a joint declaration, stating that 'the events of 1926 have shown that Purcell, Hicks and Bromley were only with the miners while it was a question of phrases and resolutions ... When the crisis came they ran away.' All these criticisms of the TUC lefts were justified – but the party had prepared nothing before the end of the strike to counter the betrayal. Important local activists such as Peter Kerrigan, one of the leaders of the Glasgow Committee, admit to having 'never thought' that the strike might be called off. For D. A. Wilson, a delegate on Bradford Trades Council, the news was also a 'surprise'. Even national figures, Jack Murphy, Tommy Jackson and George Hardy of the Minority Movement, record similar astonishment.<sup>50</sup>

How did the members of the British Communist Party respond to the suggestion that they had failed to prepare the movement for its betrayal by the TUC? Often, when historians raise such criticisms of a

previous generation, they take the risk of lapsing into anachronism. It is far too easy to say 'we know better', without finding anyone at the time who thought the same. Not so in this case – the charge of failure was levelled at the time, by members of the Comintern. Tom Bell replied for the leadership of the British Communist Party at a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) in June 1926.

There is criticism from some quarters that our Party has not properly understood the left wing, that we have not criticised it and that we have been under illusions as to the role the left wing would play in times of crisis. As a matter of fact the Party discussed this question of the left last year and issued a manifesto explaining that the left wing and the leftists, are always to be found hesitant, timid, hysterical, weak and cowardly, when face to face with a real crisis. Our Party have clearly understood that in our campaign for promoting the Minority Movement, these left wing leaders would in all probability betray us in a crisis.<sup>51</sup>

If the party had been so well prepared, then why did so many leading Communists express their surprise at the news of the betrayal? If the Communists had successfully separated themselves from the left-wing of the General Council of the TUC, then why did they march under the slogan of 'All Power to the General Council'? If Tom Bell's explanation to the International appears evasive now, it can hardly have played much better at the time. The one genuine explanation Bell could have used to explain the debacle – that the tactics of 1926 came from Moscow, and they had failed – was the one explanation that he would not use then.

For Pearce and Woodhouse and other left critics of the Communist Party, it is the failure of the CP to differentiate itself from the TUC lefts which deserves greatest criticism. The leading members of the party were drawn from a milieu of trade union militants with many years' experience of working with such lefts at the top of the trade union machinery. At the start of the decade, the party's industrial propaganda made a serious attempt to educate new members in the experience which these older comrades had learned. A mistrust of the machinery is one of the oldest principles of militant trade unionism. Yet at the moment when such lessons needed to be remembered most clearly, and under advice from Stalin, Tomsky and Zinoviev in Moscow, the leaders of the Communist Party forgot the lessons of their

own previous activity. The party's failure to offer an alternative pole of resistance was not inevitable. If the Communists had persuaded a layer of workers that such a betrayal was possible, if indeed the party had retained a stronger independent base within the trade union movement, then more pressure would have come from below, and a different final outcome might have been achieved by the movement.

Pearce and Woodhouse's case can certainly be criticised in parts. They almost suggest that a revolution was possible in Britain in 1926. Yet although the General Strike did challenge the institutions of British capital, the strike did not constitute a revolutionary situation. The control of the strike remained at the top of the labour movement, with each union calling out its own members. There was little co-ordination at the local level, the first meeting between different Councils of Action took place after the strike had been called off. Indeed one reason for the strike's premature end was precisely the General Council's fear that if the strike continued, the leaders would lose control of their members, and a more revolutionary situation could develop.<sup>52</sup> Despite this criticism, the important points of the Trotskyist argument remain otherwise vindicated. The CPGB was set up as a revolutionary party. Its aim was to convince workers that they had the power to change society. The Communists failed to distinguish themselves from the TUC lefts. The role played by the party was inadequate.

A number of historians, including Chris Wrigley and Keith Laybourn, have recently suggested that the consequences of trade union defeat in 1926 were limited. G. A. Philips writes that 'the reverses of this year simplified a previous ambivalence, without giving birth to new values.'<sup>53</sup> The common argument is that the number of strikes was already falling before the General Strike was declared. Therefore nothing changed. The point that these accounts miss is the enormous psychological blow that people suffered in 1926. Five years of small losses had already encouraged lethargy within the movement. This terrible, symbolic defeat made the demoralisation much worse. In the immediate aftermath of the strike, large numbers of militants were victimised, and many union branches were forced to call their members back out just to secure re-employment on the old terms. Over the next decade, trade union membership declined, and most important for Communists sensitive to working-class confidence, strikes fell in 1927 to the lowest figure since records began in 1891. Thanks also to the consequences of the Depression, strike figures were to remain at historically low levels until the mid-1930s. As important for the British party was the new situation within the Comintern after 1928. All the

national sections of the International were presented with a new analysis which required a sharp turn to the left in the practice and rhetoric of the parties.

## **Left turn**

Class against Class, or the 'Third Period' of 1929–34 is widely accepted as a disaster for the international Communist movement. In describing Social Democratic parties as 'social fascists', the Communists separated themselves from the majority of ordinary workers. Through applying this formula to the German socialists in the SPD, the Comintern prevented united working-class resistance to fascism and thus effectively paved the way for the rise of Adolf Hitler. In most countries including Britain, Communist parties suffered from a haemorrhaging of support. Membership of the Communist Party of Great Britain fell from a high point of 10 730 members in autumn 1926 to 2724 in 1930. Yet the British party suffered less extreme disruption in terms of expulsion and vilification of 'rightist' leaders than many other parties. The survival of the leadership may well be due to the ability of figures including Harry Pollitt and Willie Gallacher to sense where Comintern functionaries would turn next. Franz Borkenau observes that the 'submission to Moscow' of Tom Bell, Albert Inkpin and other figures from the Communist Party's founding generation did at least avoid 'a complete break-up of the traditional leadership.'<sup>54</sup>

Mike Squires has argued that the Third Period was as much a product of British Communist desire as Comintern policy. Andrew Thorpe has made a similar claim, as part of his general argument that the changing politics of the British Communist Party were formulated by local leaders, according to local sentiment, as local conditions determined.<sup>55</sup> Clearly there were some activists who responded to the new turn with real enthusiasm. It seems that both Shapurji Saklatvala and Harry Pollitt were calling for a left turn some years before this became party policy between spring 1928 and autumn 1929. Saklatvala was motivated by his experience as a Member of Parliament, which convinced him that the Labour Party was now just another bosses' party. As early as 1925, he suggested that 'the real political crusade for Socialism has been abandoned by the Labour Party. Therefore only the Communist Party must now set itself up as the only anti-capitalist party.' By October 1927, Robin Page Arnot could describe the Labour Party Conference as 'a further stage in silent coalition with the bourgeoisie'. Allen Hutt was just one of several young London comrades

who championed the new politics in 1928 and 1929. According to Hutt, the new line meant 'a new independence for the Communist Party both in political and economic struggles', and if it was delayed then this was due to the conservatism of his own party's leadership which had now been in place now for nearly ten years.<sup>56</sup>

Others were motivated by the changing mood within the Labour Party. As already mentioned, the National Left-Wing Movement held its foundation meeting in September 1926. The movement's paper, the *Sunday Worker*, was popular among Labour Party members looking for an alternative to MacDonald's leadership. The miners' leader A. J. Cook was a regular contributor. The paper soon achieved a circulation of 100 000 copies. Yet after the failure of the General Strike, the Labour leadership turned with new energy against Communist sympathisers within its own ranks. In 1927, eleven members of the Communist Party were banned from attending the Labour Party conference. The 1928 conference demanded that local associations should sign a 'loyalty clause'. In the same year, a national referendum within the Boilermakers' Society voted by three to one to deny Harry Pollitt and Aitken Ferguson the right to act as union delegates at TUC and Labour Party meetings. By 1929, twenty-six local Labour Parties had been expelled. The status of the National Left-Wing Movement naturally changed. Many Labour lefts chose to cut their ties. Meanwhile, Rajani Palme Dutt in Brussels fell victim to the strange illusion that the Left-Wing Movement was about to cut its ties to the CP. He described one editorial in the *Sunday Worker* as 'the definitive proclamation of the Leftwing as a new political party'.<sup>57</sup> The movement was chided for its decision to publish a separate manifesto alongside Labour and Communist brochures in Northampton. In 1929, the National Left-Wing Movement was finally closed down. In an atmosphere heavy with suspicion, it is not surprising that many ordinary Communists despaired of the Labour Party turning left, nor indeed that these young activists saw the new line as a genuine response to the experiences which they had lived through.

Although some younger comrades were enthusiastic, they did not initiate the new line. Thomas Bell's official history of the party insists that the decisive impetus came from the International, 'The tactical line of "Class against Class" was adopted not only for the British Communist Party, but was applied to a series of countries such as France and the Scandinavian countries, where social-democratic traditions were still strong in the Communist Parties.'<sup>58</sup> Indeed Bell is an important figure, as he was responsible for liaising with the Executive

Committee of the Communist International (ECCI). He told the February 1929 meeting of the ECCI how difficult it was to implement their advice. The following report was sent back to Moscow.

Our Party, like a number of other sections of the CI, is going through a testing time, our Party is trying to adjust itself to its new line in a very difficult period. Undoubtedly it is a far cry say, from Moscow to London, but it is not a far cry from WEB [the Comintern's Western European Bureau in Berlin] to London. I think it is necessary that the WEB should be instructed to insure [sic] that there is some daily contact with the Party.<sup>59</sup>

In Britain, the new line was introduced against the open resistance of such leading Communists as Wal Hannington of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement and Arthur Horner of the South Wales Miners' Federation. Horner was threatened with expulsion for his opposition to the new tactics. Robin Page Arnot sent the following message from Berlin: 'group to demand publicly his submission and repudiation [of] his opportunist mistaken opportunist line [-] can his expulsion be considered?' Wal Hannington showed real mettle in backing Horner against the threats of his critics. Eventually, Horner agreed to visit Moscow, to receive political education in the new line. He returned to admit that he had been wrong – and loyally intoned that Labour was the greatest enemy facing the trade union movement.<sup>60</sup> Other prominent Communists including Albert Inkpin were won round to the new policy, but only with deep reservations. In short, the Third Period was opposed by precisely those figures who had most experience of building mass campaigns.

So whatever the popularity of Class against Class among some younger Communists, the fact remains that the introduction of the policy was decided by external factors. Stalin's break with Bukharin and his 'Right' bloc in the Kremlin was justified in terms of a politics which claimed that global capitalism had now entered into a new period of deep crisis. This 'Third Period' line became policy across every Communist Party in the world. It was argued by members of the Comintern apparatus and their local supporters, always with vigour, and their speeches were often accompanied by expulsions of the critics. Those historians who find local factors to explain the shift are arguing – in effect – that every single Communist Party, just happened by coincidence to make exactly the same shift at the same time. This 'explanation' is profoundly implausible.

The politics of Class against Class had disastrous consequences in Britain. The Communist Party's election literature sneered at Labour, describing it as 'the third Capitalist party. It lays claim to the title of Socialist party, but has nothing to do with Socialism.' The tactics of the Third Period led to a complete reversal in the party's industrial policy. The CP leadership now demanded the formation of new unions in place of the old reformist shells. Losovsky outlined the new perspective in an article for the paper of the Red International of Labour Unions, 'It must always be kept in mind that the reformist organisations are tools in the hands of the bourgeois state and the employers' organisations to crush the revolutionary wing of the Labour movement and to enslave the broad proletarian movement.' Factory committees were to be created, while the Minority Movement was supposed to become a revolutionary alternative to the TUC.

The August 1929 Sixth Annual Conference of the Movement insisted that the best workers were outside the unions, and demanded 'unity between employed and unemployed workers, between organised and unorganised.' Workers inside the reformist unions were written off. 'Independent leadership' became the slogan, at a time when the rank and file was still reeling from the defeat of 1926. By 1930, the size of the Minority Movement had shrunk to just 700 subs-paying members. It was no longer anything more than a memory. In James's Hinton's words, 'the perspectives of "class against class" marked the demolition of the framework of organisation and activity carefully constructed in association with non-party militants. The isolation of the Communist Party from the bulk of the organised working-class movement reached its culmination.'<sup>61</sup> The first moment of opportunity had been lost.

It is appropriate to end this chapter by asking if the ultra-leftism of 1929 was an inevitable return to the habits of the pre-war British revolutionary left. Walter Newbold knew Pollitt and Gallacher before 1918 when they were both ultra-lefts. He suggested that the sectarianism of Class against Class was merely a return to the natural reflexes of this generation of militants, the revenge of the anti-parliamentary instincts of Sylvia Pankhurst and her old admirers like Gallacher:

Men and women may be persuaded to abandon their rooted preconceptions ... . But they do not become able thereby to adapt their methods of thinking and acting from which they had deliberately swung away and to which they had sprung back without spontaneity.<sup>62</sup>

From this argument it would follow that the CP was always doomed to irrelevance by some British variant of original revolutionary sin. Workers will never fight, revolution is impossible. In Britain, workers simply don't do things that way.

The argument of this chapter has been different. We have suggested that the original leaders of the Communist Party made an impressive and sustained attempt to escape from the mistakes of the pre-war left. While the Russian Revolution was on the rise, such figures as Tom Bell, J. T. Murphy and Willie Gallacher benefited from the experience of a generation of successful revolutionaries in Russia. Old ideas about the self-activity of the working class were taken off the shelves, dusted down, and thought anew. Habits of isolation were lost. Lenin's advice, in particular, was crucial to winning the young British party to a policy of careful work with socialists inside the Labour Party. After 1924, however, Comintern instructions ceased to play such a positive role. Indeed by 1926, the assistance of the Comintern had become downright destructive. Turning from left to right and back, the British Communist Party was unable to offer any consistent alternative to Labour's reformist politics. Although at the decade's end, the CPGB remained a workers' party, the elements of its later degeneration were all in place.

# Index

- air raid, 78–80  
aircraft industry, 48, 70, 87, 88  
Alexander, Bill, 61  
Ali, Tariq, 147, 150  
Anglo-Russian Trade Union  
Committee, 22, 24, 25, 192n  
Anglo-Russian Parliamentary  
Committee, 65  
Anti-Nazi League (ANL), 158  
Amalgamated Society of Engineers  
(ASE), Amalgamated Engineering  
Union (AEU), Amalgamated Union  
of Engineering Workers, (AUEW),  
11, 78, 79, 88, 98, 99, 105, 127,  
130, 131, 163, 166, 174  
Amalgamated Society of Locomotive  
Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF), 98,  
99  
Aircraft Shop Stewards National  
Council (ASSNC), 87  
armed forces, 22, 75  
Arnot, Robin Page, 18, 31, 33, 65  
Attlee, Clement, 53, 105, 115  
Amalgamated Union of Engineering  
Workers Technical and Supervisory  
Section (AUEW TASS), 159  
Amery, Leo, 96  
  
BBC, 69, 85, 106, 140  
Baldwin, Stanley, 50  
Balham Group, 45  
Barbarossa, Operation, 84, 85, 91, 92,  
97  
Behan, Brian, 109, 121  
Bell, Tom, xix, xxi, 1, 7, 8, 18, 23, 29,  
31, 32, 35, 44  
Benn, Tony, 172–4  
Bernal, J, D, 123  
Bevan, Aneurin, 54, 113, 115, 125  
Bevin, Ernest, 27, 88  
Birch, Reg, 131, 132, 134, 135  
Birchall, Ian, vii, xx, 5, 100, 117  
  
Birmingham, 9, 49, 88, 96, 107, 152,  
154, 160  
Blair, Tony, Blairism, 172, 181, 182  
Blunt, Anthony, 114, 115  
Bolshevism, ix, x, 1, 2, 6, 9, 11, 15,  
20, 44, 55, 65, 91, 145  
Branson, Noreen, xv, xviii, xix, 36,  
44, 52, 53, 62, 66, 93, 95, 101  
*Britain for the People*, 93, 99  
British Council for Peace in Vietnam  
(BCPV), 149  
British Leyland, 158, 163, 164, 165  
*British Road to Socialism (BRS)* 53, 106,  
116, 127, 138, 141, 142, 144, 156,  
159, 161, 172, 179, 182, 186  
British Socialist Party (BSP), 5, 8  
British Union of Fascists (BUF), 48,  
49, 50, 58, 59, 107  
Broad Left, 128, 131, 132, 138, 147,  
148, 156, 158, 159, 161, 163, 164  
Brockway, Fenner, 53, 92, 149  
Browder, Earl, 94  
building workers, 24, 48, 102, 109,  
112, 121, 134, 157, 160  
Bukharin, Nicholai, x, 20, 33, 65  
Burgess, Guy, 114  
  
Cable Street, Battle of, xix, 57–60, 65,  
167  
Callaghan, James, 172  
Callaghan, John, 21  
Cambridge University, 27, 114, 115,  
181  
Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament  
(CND) 123–7, 137–9, 142, 149, 172  
Campbell, John, 23, 46, 71, 72, 82,  
90, 102, 106, 114, 120,  
Cannon, Les, 121, 132  
Carter, Pete, 160  
Castle, Barbara, 54  
Central Committee (of CPGB), 37, 39,  
48, 51, 56, 61, 69, 70, 71, 83

- Chamberlain, Neville, 66–9, 72, 75, 77, 80, 83, 96
- Chapple, Frank, 121, 132
- Chater, Tony, 175–6
- Churchill, Winston, 23, 67, 75, 85–87, 94–6
- Citrine, Walter 54
- Clarion Movement, 4
- Class against Class, 1, 31–6, 43–50, 54, 56, 194n
- Cohen, Jack, 65
- Cohen, Phil, xx
- Cohen, Rose, xv, 18
- Cold War, xii, xviii, xx, 20, 40, 97, 104–6, 113–15, 124, 138, 145, 147
- Communist Information Bureau (Cominform), 104
- Communist International (Comintern), ix–xv, xix, 2, 7–35, 41–7, 51–3, 66, 70, 71, 78–83, 86, 94, 104, 135, 179, 180
- Comment*, 161
- Communist Party Historians' Group, 121
- Communist Party of Britain (CPB), 178, 179, 182
- Communist Party of Great Britain (Marxist–Leninist), 132, 136
- Communist Review*, 23, 39, 44, 50
- Communist University of London, 149
- Connolly, James, ix
- conscription, 6, 67, 84
- Conservative Party, xi, 2, 23, 26, 43, 46, 55, 57, 67, 77, 80, 91–2, 94, 95, 101, 107, 115–16, 143, 147, 151, 155, 166
- Cook, A. J., 15, 25, 26, 32
- councils, town or parish, 13, 59, 117, 129, 137, 139, 140, 166
- Councils of Action, 7, 27, 30
- Coventry, 78, 88
- Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), ix, xviii, 135, 136
- Cripps, Sir Stafford, 46, 54, 104, 115
- Czechoslovakia, 66, 79, 118, 144, 145, 169, 180
- Daily Herald*, 8, 17, 39, 58
- Daily Worker*, xix, 38–40, 44, 49, 52, 61, 62, 65, 67, 68, 71–5, 80–2, 90, 91, 98, 102, 106, 109, 113, 114, 119, 120, 124, 126, 128, 136, 137–41
- Daly, Lawrence, 121, 153
- Dash, Jack, 166
- Democratic Left 179, 181, 182
- Dimitrov, Georgi, 52, 57, 180
- Discussion*, 56, 65
- docks, 3, 27, 44, 89, 102, 105, 107, 112, 113, 150, 156, 157
- Dubcek, Edward, 144
- Dutt, Salme, 17, 18
- East Germany, GDR, 118, 169, 177, 179
- education (political), 16, 33
- Education, Today and Tomorrow*, 159
- elections, CP participation in General, by–, council, 34, 47, 53, 74, 77, 78, 80, 91, 92, 94–6, 101, 102, 119, 129, 139, 140–2, 182
- elections, Trade Union, 15, 38, 55, 88, 129, 131, 132, 133, 153, 161
- engineering industry, xii, 13, 15, 70, 77–80, 87–91, 98, 109, 127–31, 134, 136, 152, 156,
- Electricians' Union (ETU) 98, 116, 121, 127, 130–3, 142, 153, 155
- Eurocommunism, xv, 100, 138, 141, 148, 149, 165, 168–82, 186
- Executive Committee (EC) of the CPGB, 85, 92, 99, 119, 120, 121, 123, 135, 141, 175
- Executive Committee of Communist International (ECCI), 2, 12, 21, 29, 33, 45–7
- Fabian Society, 18, 55, 82
- fascism, and anti-fascism, xix, 31, 41, 49, 50, 51–3, 57, 59, 61, 63, 66–70, 80, 82, 86, 100, 107, 108, 112, 165–7, 186
- Fire Brigades' Union (FBU), i, 98, 99, 116, 121, 125, 127
- finance, party funding, 'Moscow Gold' 37, 39, 179–81
- Finland, 68, 78, 82, 83
- Foot, Michael, 172
- For Soviet Britain*, 93
- France, xi, 32, 44, 52, 63, 100, 104, 143, 144, 145

- Franco, General Francisco, 60, 61, 63, 66, 82  
 French, Sid, 145, 171  
 Fryer, Peter, 106, 120, 121
- Gaitskell, Hugh, 125  
 Gallacher, William, xxi, 1, 8, 9, 19, 20, 28, 31, 34, 35, 46, 53, 71, 96, 98, 102, 109  
 General Strike, xiii, 13, 22, 24–30, 32, 41, 43, 45, 152  
 Germany 20, 21, 31, 44, 45, 50–5, 126  
*see also* East Germany, Nazi Germany  
 Gill, Ken, 159, 170, 175  
 Glading, Percy, 115  
 Glasgow, 5, 6, 7, 9, 28, 41, 42, 43, 78, 89, 90  
 Gollan, John, 117, 121, 122, 136, 140, 153  
 Gollancz, Victor, 63  
 Gorbachev, Mikhail, xv, 176, 177, 178  
 Gramsci, Antonio, 162, 163, 168–71, 183, 185  
 Groves, Reg, 45  
*Guardian, The*, 137  
 Guevara, Che, 144
- Haldane, J. B. S., 106  
 Hall, Stuart, 171, 182  
 Halpin, Kevin, 170  
 Hannington, Wal, 13, 28, 33, 40, 41, 42, 87, 99  
 Haston, Jock, 114  
 Haxell, Frank, 132, 133  
 Healey, Dennis, 174  
 Healy, Gerry, 120, 122  
 Heath, Edward, 155, 156, 163, 171  
 Heffer, Eric, 109, 172  
 Henderson, Arthur, 50  
 Hicks, George 24, 25, 28  
 Hill, Christopher, 110, 123  
 Hitler, Adolf, xv, 31, 51, 52, 63, 66, 67, 658, 73, 74, 84, 85, 92, 96, 178  
 Hilter–Stalin Pact 67, 68, 79, 80, 82  
 Hobsbawm, Eric, x, 110, 121, 123, 170, 173, 174, 178  
 Horner, Arthur, ix, 33, 56, 99, 102, 106, 153  
 Horner, John, 99  
 Hungary, 74, 117–21, 123, 126, 127, 132, 133, 136, 142, 144, 145, 180  
 Hyde, Douglas, 168, 109
- imperialism, and anti-imperialism, xi, xx, 21, 39, 72, 96, 106, 115, 144, 186  
*Independent, The*, 181  
*Independent on Sunday, The*, 178  
 Independent Labour Party (ILP), 2, 3, 4, 8, 10, 41, 46, 49, 53, 55, 58, 79, 89, 92  
 India, 21, 39, 96  
 Industrial Relations Act, 155, 156, 161  
 Inkpin, Albert, 8, 16, 23, 31, 33  
 International Brigades, 61  
 International Marxist Group (IMG), 147, 148, 160  
 International Socialists (IS), later Socialist Workers Party (SWP), 144, 148, 152, 160, 166, 167  
 Invergordon Mutiny, 44  
 Italy, 7, 100, 143, 145, 148, 168, 169, 183
- Jacks, Digby, 148  
 Jacques, Martin, 170, 171, 181  
 Jews, and anti-Semitism, xix, xx, 57–60, 68, 96, 107, 108, 114, 121  
 Johnstone, Monty, 73, 169  
 Joint Production Committees (JPCs), 87, 88  
 Jolly George, ix  
 Jones, Jack, 163
- Klugmann, James, 106, 121  
 Korean War, 113, 117  
 Kruschev, Nikita, 111, 117, 118, 122, 135
- Labour Co-ordinating Committee, 173  
*Labour Monthly*, 25, 45, 53, 56, 65, 75, 85, 102, 105, 119, 132  
 Labour Party xi, xii, xvii, 1, 8, 9, 10, 15, 18, 22, 24, 31, 32, 35, 36, 50, 53, 54, 75, 91, 95, 98, 102, 106, 108, 111, 127, 128, 131, 139, 140, 172, 173, 186

- Labour Research Department, 18  
 Lansbury, George, 13  
 Lawrence & Wishart, 81, 169  
 Left Book Club, 63, 82  
*Left Review*, 62  
 Lenin, Vladimir, ix, x, xiv, xviii, 6, 9, 15, 16, 18, 19–20, 35, 38, 40, 54, 72, 81, 91, 109, 169  
 Lenin School, 21  
 Liaison Committee for The Defence of Trade Unions (LCDTU), 134, 155, 156  
 Liberal Party, 2, 4, 9, 18, 23, 45, 55, 67, 79  
 ‘Little Moscows’, 24, 96, 139  
 London, xix, xx, 23, 27, 31, 33, 41, 48, 58–9, 60, 75, 78, 80, 102, 111, 119, 132, 135, 139, 149, 156, 157, 166–7, 182  
 London School of Economics, 147  
 Luxemburg, Rosa, 16
- MacDonald, Ramsay 10, 22, 23, 25, 27, 32, 43–6, 48  
 Maclean, John, 5, 9, 41, 53  
 McLennan, Gordon, 175  
 McManus, Arthur, 1, 8  
 McShane, Harry, 41, 109  
 Manchester, 8, 9, 38, 40, 43, 69, 73, 74, 76, 107, 132, 151  
 Manuilsky, Dimitri, 46, 81  
 Mao Tse Tung, 46, 81, 132, 135, 136, 144, 146  
 Marx, Karl, x, xx, 10, 16, 17, 37, 56, 64, 65, 100, 103, 109–11, 122, 132, 168, 177, 184  
*Marxism Today*, xv, 101, 123, 148, 161, 163, 168–75, 178, 179, 181, 182  
 Matthews, George, 61, 118  
 Maxton, James, 53  
 Members of Parliament, 3, 4, 5, 7, 18, 23, 31, 43, 45, 55, 64, 93, 98, 102, 109, 111, 117, 142, 161, 167, 186  
 MI5, 50  
 Militant Tendency, 175, 183  
 miners, Miners’ Federation, National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), ix, xii, 4, 6, 9, 12, 13, 15, 24–8, 32, 33, 37–8, 54, 56, 64, 98, 99, 102, 106, 116, 121, 125, 127, 134, 148, 152–5, 175, 176  
*Miners’ Next Step, The*, 4  
 Morgan, Kevin, xii, xiii, 17, 74, 119  
 Moore, Bill, 44, 70, 71, 73, 79, 82  
*Morning Star*, 101, 137, 138, 149, 153, 155, 157, 160, 161, 166, 167, 174, 175, 179, 180, 182  
 Morrison, Herbert, 54, 91, 92  
 Moscow Trials, xv, 65, 66  
 Mosley, Sir Oswald, xx, 48, 49, 50, 57, 58, 59, 74, 90, 92, 107, 108, 112  
 motor vehicle industry, 87, 143, 154, 121  
 Mulgan, Geoff, 181  
 Munich Crisis, 66, 67, 72, 79  
 Murphy, JT, ix, xvii, xix, 8, 12, 13, 16, 19, 20, 21, 22, 28, 35, 44, 45  
 Myant, Chris, 178–9
- National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE), 159, 174  
 National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCL), 42, 108  
 National Government, 42–6, 53, 57, 67, 91, 92, 94,  
 National Left–Wing Movement, 22, 24, 26, 32,  
 National Minority Movement, 14, 15, 22, 23, 24, 28, 29, 34, 47  
 National Unemployed Workers’ Movement (NUWM), xx, 13, 33, 40–2  
 National Union of Seamen (NUS), 134  
 Nazi Germany, 51, 66, 79, 80, 81, 85  
 New Left, vii, xiii, xx, 100, 122, 123  
*New Left Review*, 123  
*New Propellor*, 87  
*New Statesman*, 62, 65  
*Newsletter*, 120  
 New Times, 177, 182, 184, 186  
 Newbold, J.T. Walton, 18, 34  
 National Union of Teachers (NUT), xii, 158–60  
 Nicholson, Fergus, 124, 149

- Observer, The*, 119  
 Orwell, George, 55, 63  
 Oxford, 27, 49, 67, 74, 87, 135
- Palme Dutt, Rajani, ix, 16–18, 22, 23, 25, 32, 39, 45, 50, 67, 70–3, 80, 83, 85, 94–6, 117, 119, 121, 132, 135, 145, 171  
 Pankhurst, Sylvia, 7–9  
 Papworth, Bert, 98, 105, 155  
 parliament, Communist attitudes to, 4, 5, 8, 19, 34, 52–3  
 parliamentary road to socialism, 93, 96, 99, 116, 138–42, 156  
 Peace Pledge Union, 76  
 Peoples' Convention, 85, 88  
 Philby, Kim, 114, 115, 181  
 Piratin, Phil, 58, 96, 98, 102, 109  
 Political Bureau (of the CPGB), 47, 53, 70, 81  
 Political Committee (of the CPGB), 133, 136  
 Pollitt, Harry, ix, xxi, 1, 8, 14, 16–18, 21, 23, 31, 32, 34, 39, 46–8, 50, 51, 53, 55, 66, 67, 69–73, 77, 78, 81, 82, 85, 86, 89–91, 94, 96, 97, 106, 116–19, 121, 180  
 Popular Front, xv, 36, 37, 41, 48, 52–67, 72, 74, 75, 79, 81, 82, 84, 87, 93, 96, 100, 116, 126, 144, 149, 169, 172, 176, 182, 185, 186  
 Powell, Enoch, 143, 166  
 Peoples Press Printing Society (PPPS), 175  
 Petrovsky, xv  
 POUM, 55, 60, 61, 62, 66
- racism, and anti-racism, 59, 60, 147, 165–8, 171  
 Radek, Karl, x, 82  
 Ramelson, Bert, 134, 157, 163  
*Rank and File Teacher*, 160  
*Reasoner, The (New)*, 111, 122, 123  
 Red Army, ix, 84, 86  
 Red International of Labour Unions (RILU), 10, 13, 34, 47  
 Reid, Betty, 114  
 Reid, Jimmy, 140, 151
- Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP), 108, 114  
 Robinson, Derek, 164–5  
 Russian Revolution, ix, xix, 2, 6, 7, 19, 20, 35, 44, 185  
 Rust, Bill, 23, 61, 70–2, 83
- Saklatvala, Shapurji, 10, 18, 31, 55  
 Saville, John, 110–11, 121–2  
 Scanlon, Hugh, 132, 163, 164  
 Scargill, Arthur, 152, 153, 154, 175, 176  
 Scottish Mine Workers' Union, 37, 38  
 Scottish Socialist Party (SSP), 183, 185  
 Second Front, 86, 95  
*Seven Days*, 177, 178, 182  
 Sheffield, ix, 6, 9, 40, 42, 70, 73, 79, 82, 109, 113, 128, 131, 160  
 shop stewards, ix, 6, 8, 11, 13, 78, 87, 88, 90, 99, 105, 115, 128–31, 134, 138, 156, 157, 163, 165  
 Slansky, Rudolf, 121,
- Social Contract, 162–5, 172  
 Social Democratic Federation (SDF), 3, 4, 5,
- Socialism in One Country, x  
 Socialist Alliance, 182, 183, 185  
*Socialist Commentary*, 115  
 Socialist International, Second International, 10, 19  
 Socialist Labour League (SLL), 120, 121  
 Socialist League, xvi, 46, 53, 54  
 Socialist Labour Party, 4, 8  
 Socialist Workers Party, *see* International Socialists  
 Soviet Union, ix–xii, xv, xviii, 47, 62, 72, 80, 82–4, 86, 97, 100, 136, 169, 176, 178, 181  
 Spain, 47, 50, 55, 58, 60–3, 66, 69, 79  
 Special Branch, 81  
 Spender, Stephen, 63, 64  
 spies, 115, 179, 181  
 Spinghall, David, 55, 71, 83  
 squatters, 111, 113  
 Stalin, Joseph, x, 29, 33, 51, 66–8, 74, 82, 83, 85, 94–6, 99, 105, 106, 111, 114, 116–20, 136, 178, 179, 185

- Stalinism, xx, xxi, 2, 17, 21, 40, 45, 66, 100, 117, 135, 138, 144, 169, 177, 185, 186
- Strachey, John, 50, 63, 66, 72
- students, National Union of Students (NUS), 27, 38, 65, 67, 114, 115, 124, 143–9, 158, 169, 173, 181
- Sunday Worker*, 26, 32
- syndicalism, 4, 10, 11, 14, 100
- Tehran Conference, 94
- Temple, Nina, 179
- Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU), 13, 26, 27, 98, 99, 104, 155, 156, 158, 163
- Thatcher, Margaret, 171
- Third Period, 31–4, 40, 45, 46, 48, 49, 51, 80, 186
- Thompson, Edward, 110, 111, 121, 122
- Thompson, Willie, xvi, xvii, 17, 133, 152
- Tito, Marshall, 74, 100, 105, 106, 121
- Trades Councils, 14, 26, 28, 42, 108, 138
- Trades Union Congress (TUC), 7, 11, 14, 22–30, 32, 34, 43, 54, 64, 98, 104, 105, 125, 130, 133, 157, 159, 160, 162, 175
- TUC General Council, 14, 22–30, 64, 98, 104, 105, 159, 175
- Tribune*, 62, 63, 115, 125
- Triple Alliance, 13
- Trotsky, Leon, ix, x, 12, 16, 19, 20, 44, 45, 54, 62, 65, 106
- Trotskyism, xii, xvi, xx, 21, 24, 30, 44, 45, 50, 61, 66, 79, 80, 84, 88–90, 92, 108, 120–3, 143, 146, 160, 183
- United Front, x, 12, 15, 19, 36, 48, 54, 55, 63, 113, 186
- Upper Clyde Shipbuilders (UCS), 150–2, 164
- Vietnam War, anti-war campaigns, 121, 138, 143, 144, 146, 147, 149, 150, 165, 178
- Webb, Sidney and Beatrice, 27, 55, 82
- Weekly Letter*, 136, 140
- Westacott, Fred, 70, 71, 73, 83, 137
- Wilson, Harold, 127, 134, 140
- Workers' Socialist Federation (WSF), 8
- Workers' Weekly*, 17, 22, 23
- Young Communist League (YCL), xx, 23, 61, 75, 79, 127, 137, 154, 169
- Zilliacus, Koni, 105
- Zinoviev, Gregory, x, 15, 17, 20, 22, 23, 29, 65