

Chapter Six

Opposition Inside the Party

We had joined the Party in 1952 and went along with Party policy as enshrined in the 1951 policy document *The British Road to Socialism* until 1955, when something occurred which changed all that for good.

One evening late in 1955, I went with a Nigerian friend of ours, Frank Oruwari, to help make toys for the *Daily Worker* bazaar at the house of another Party member. As we sat around the table, another member, Barbara Ruhmann, said something about Party policy on the colonies as presented in *The British Road to Socialism*. This booklet outlined Party policy, and its main thesis was that revolutions elsewhere may have been violent but it was the (almost) unique privilege of Britain that it possessed the conditions for achieving a peaceful transition to Socialism. There was also a long passage on what would happen to the erstwhile colonial countries after Britain had achieved its revolution and become Socialist. The idea was that a sort of federation, a “fraternal association,” would replace the British Empire. It is worthwhile quoting the relevant passage:

Above all, the Communist Party would solve the question of the relation of Britain with the countries of the British Empire.

The enemies of Communism declare the Communist Party, by underhand and subversive means, is aiming at the destruction of Britain and the British Empire. But it is a lie because it is precisely the Tories and the Labour leaders who are doing this by their policy of armed repression and colonial exploitation. British colonial policy and armed repression have resulted in the undying resistance and hostility of the people of Malaya, Africa and Egypt towards Britain.

In fighting to impose Syngman Rhee on the Korean people and in supporting reactionary puppets in South East Asia and the Middle East, it has earned the hatred of the people of Asia and thus placed our country at loggerheads with the majority of mankind.

The colonial policy of the Tory and Labour leaders is not only a crime against the colonial peoples, it is draining away our manpower in endless colonial war, and has cost, and will continue to cost, hundreds of millions of pounds. It has disrupted the production of food and raw materials. It can only weaken Britain still further. The colonial peoples struggling for national liberation can never be subdued.

The Communist Party would put an end to the present abnormal relations of colonial war and repression between the British people and the peoples of the Empire by establishing durable friendship with them on the basis of equal rights. This act of historical justice would help to wipe out the bitterness of the past, and would enormously strengthen Britain on a new democratic basis.

All relations between the peoples of the present Empire which are based on political, economic and military enslavement must be ended and replaced by relations based on full national independence and equal rights. This requires the withdrawal of all armed forces from the colonial and dependent territories and handing over of sovereignty to governments freely chosen by the peoples.

Only by this means can Britain be assured of the normal supplies of the vital food and raw materials necessary for her economic life, obtaining them in equal exchange for the products of British industry needed by those countries for their own economic development. This would provide the basis for a new, close, fraternal association of the British people and the liberated peoples of the Empire. Only on this basis can true friendship be established between the peoples of the present Empire to promote mutually beneficial economic exchange and cooperation and to defend in common their freedom against American imperialist aggression.

We did not have the document in front of us at the time, but Barbara was familiar with the content, and as she summarised this for our benefit, Frank went berserk. All hell was let loose, and the argument raged fast and furious. While Barbara defended the Party line, Frank protested at its blatant imperialism. Later, when Frank and I described the argument to Peter, we all went into a heated discussion that lasted until the early hours, and from then on, Peter and I fought for a re-formulation of the Party policy on imperialism and the colonies. (This led to our re-examining other aspects of Party policy and finding what we saw as weaknesses in several fields. See below.)

In fact, more was involved than simply altering the language (particularly those in bold). Only a little study revealed how deeply Party thinking and ideology were permeated by imperialist and chauvinistic assumptions. Our argument went as follows.

First, why assume Britain would be Socialist before the colonies achieved independence? This was rather patronising to start with. Second, a Socialist Britain would have no right to impose any political structure on the ex-colonies. The opposite should be the case. (How astonishingly old-fashioned all this sounds in 2009!)

Lenin had written about the Tsarist Empire (after the revolution), the Party in the ex-imperialist power should lean over backwards to emphasise the right of the ex-colonies to secede; on the other hand, the Party in the ex-colonial country should stand for solidarity with the now-Socialist ex-imperialist power so that they might stand together against foreign aggression. A brief examination of Lenin's point makes it clear that it is a recipe for 'great-power chauvinism' in the hands of the unscrupulous.

I do not know any details about how matters were worked out between Russia and the border republics after the Bolshevik Revolution, but I strongly suspect the relative strengths of their Communist Parties was decisive and the republics had little choice but to remain with Russia in what was to be known as the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics (USSR). Most, if not all, of these have set up independent states since the fall of the Soviet Union, and it would seem that nationalism was never far below the surface.

What now seems clear is that the economic relationship between Russia and the border republics was an exploitative one, and the policy put forward by the British Communist Party for a 'Socialist' Britain corresponded to this. It called for a perpetuation of the imperialist relationship with cheap raw materials from the colonies and a market for manufactured goods for this country.

Not that this has fundamentally changed today—the great change is the globalization of imperialism, now dominated by the U.S. (but for how long?). The most powerful corporations still manipulate the prices of raw materials. They would still like to be able to dominate manufacture, investment, and financial dealings worldwide. When big corporations emerge in previously exploited colonial countries (e.g. China, India, South Korea), they become incorporated into the club of globalised capitalism. Woe betide any country remaining outside the sphere of the World Bank, etc., such as Yugoslavia and Iraq. Its days are numbered and it will be invaded (on some pretext or another) and dismantled. Economic equilibrium has to be established and maintained. Recently, there was mass privatisation in Iraq. The Iraq War may be a disaster for the people of Iraq and the soldiers from the invasion force, and its original 'planning' the work of inept politicians, but it has been a massive success for the international corporations.

There have been monumental changes worldwide since the 1950s and '60s, but exploitation and oppression have intensified through the use of new means of capital accumulation, particularly the buying and selling of money,

a sort of second-level capitalism, which is a whole level removed from production. This is not the place to list the characteristics of contemporary capitalism, whose main difference from the earlier sort is globalisation—the total internationalisation of capitalism and imperialism. It makes no difference to the structural outline that a number of previously colonial and semi-colonial countries (India and China) are now amongst the big operators. The economic relationships are the same.

How trivial and tawdry the opportunism of the CPGB appears now in retrospect. Such opportunistic vote-seeking did them no good, either in the short or long run. How absurd it was (as well as dictatorial) to lay down the lines for future historical development, especially in the light of our own present hindsight. At that time, Peter and I argued that even if there were to be a Socialist Britain before colonial independence, Malaya would be unlikely to look towards the UK but would be more likely to see its primary place as in Asia. Similarly, the then West Indies would look towards the U.S. for its trade. In the light of the limited knowledge at our disposal, we were not far wrong.

What had to be explained over and over was the history of the relationship of Britain to its colonies. The entire profits of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British industry had been built upon the profits from the slave trade. The so-called ‘golden triangle’ of slaves-gold-sugar between West Africa, the West Indies, and Bristol and Liverpool is now well-known. So is the financing of the Lancashire cotton industry from the profits of the slave trade. The most important fact is that industrialisation itself and the inherent structure of British industry were dependent on the slave trade.

In 1957 Peter wrote and sent an article to the Party weekly, *World News and Views*, setting this out and showing how a whole section of the working class had been ‘bought off’ by a combination of super-profits from imperialism and the ideology that went with this. It was replied to by Idris Cox, a full-time Party worker in the colonial sphere who wrote that there was no evidence even a penny of extra money came to the working class through imperialism, so it was not possible for them to ‘benefit’ from it. Peter replied to this along the lines that the important thing was the very conditions of life, which were made possible by the industrialisation (based on slavery), were a benefit and involved a corresponding level of wages. Idris Cox was querying whether workers could ever ‘benefit’ from capitalism, and Peter was, I think, making the point that much of the ‘petty-bourgeois’ ideology of the top layer of the working class rested on such conditions. I do not know whether I have done justice to the argument or have been unfair to Idris Cox. If I have, I apologise here and now, but the fact remains that what I have written is the gist of the argument.

Following on this, Peter was approached by Kay Beauchamp, another leading Party member working on ‘colonial issues’ and asked to join one of the Party committees dealing with such things, and he was on the Africa Committee for some time. (When she approached him, she asked him what he was interested in and his reply was, “the class struggle.”) He did not stay

on this committee for very long because any real discussion of core policies was blocked from the start, and in any case, we were soon embarked on a more head-on attack on Party policy as a whole.

In any case, such committees, supposedly dealing with 'colonial liberation' were a part of the patriarchal relationship existing between the CPGB leadership and Party members coming from colonial countries. National liberation struggles were emerging at this time all over the British Empire. Peter Wright made clear in *Spycatcher* that the British Government and its agencies were busy setting up and backing people who were their own choice of leadership for future liberated countries and also arranging for Sandhurst-trained armies to be in place, particularly in Africa. And the leadership of the Communist Party of Great Britain was busy telling the members from African countries (and elsewhere) to support these very people. Names that come to mind are Kwame Nkruma and Julius Nyerere, two of the more respectable. They were referred to as the "national bourgeoisie."

The patriarchal attitude of the Party leadership was much resented by many of the Party members from colonial countries but, in the event, many did accept the 'party line' on returning to their own countries and were swallowed up in future developments. This is not to say that the long-term history of Africa and the Caribbean would have been fundamentally different from what it has been had the CPGB encouraged serious Left-wing party building in colonial countries. What was at stake was what was the right thing to do with only the knowledge that we all had in the '50s and early '60s. What was called for was genuine help for the inexperienced members whose main requirement was Marxist education, which they could then use in the service of the intimate knowledge they had of their own countries. The CPGB simply reneged on this responsibility and all our attempts to raise such issues were doomed to failure. We were written-off as "middle-class intellectuals," and although we managed to get some resolutions passed in our own branch for London District and National Congresses in 1957 and 1959, they were swallowed up in the Black Hole of merged resolutions and disappeared forever.

At that stage, we still saw the Party as a genuine vehicle for Socialism, the arm of the International Communist Movement in Britain, and we kept strictly to the rules. That was not to continue after 1958 when we became aware of the Sino-Soviet dispute, which was to explode into the open in that year. Also we did not know that we were actually treading a well-worn path in the Party of opposition to the 1951 formulation on imperialism in *The British Road to Socialism*.

I must mention here that in 1955 or 1956 Palme Dutt, the most prominent Party intellectual and editor of *Labour Monthly*, brought out his book, *Crisis of Britain and the British Empire*. In a carefully-crafted book of some weight, well-referenced and documented, the main conclusion reached was that the main ally of the British working class in the struggle for Socialism was the colonial working class. Even here, and Palme Dutt was himself of Indian origin, Britain was in the lead, the colonial workers only playing bit

parts as “allies.” It seems not to have occurred to the author that the opposite might be the case!

Imperialism was the first of several issues to which we paid attention in Party policy. It was the issue which woke us up and caused us to start using our critical faculties. From about 1955 onwards we began to look critically at Party policy on peace, the relation of the CPGB to the Labour Party, the role of the Trades Unions, and finally, the policy known as the “peaceful transition to Socialism.”

The question arises here as to why we bothered to do all this. Why not simply resign and work elsewhere? And, it might well be added, if we entertained serious doubts about the leadership’s principles and honesty, why not also query what they wrote about the Soviet Union and elsewhere? I cannot remember when we began to entertain doubts about the Soviet Union. I don’t think we allowed ourselves to do this until the Chinese Communist Party did so as part of the Sino-Soviet dispute, and even then the criticisms were not to do with questions of personal freedom. At the time of the invasion of Hungary, we defended the actions of the Soviet leadership on the grounds that there was the danger of a Fascist government in Hungary! We thought we were being loyal. Again it was the reactionary “capitalist press” which was condemning the Soviet Union. We had not yet learned the enemy’s enemy is not necessarily a friend. That would come later in China!

In the 1950s, we were not unaware that things were by no means perfect, but why should this stop us from working for Socialism in Britain? The two countries had totally different histories and conditions. And whatever the shortcomings of the CPGB, what other representative was there in Britain of the International Communist Movement? The Party existed as an entity over and above the inadequate individuals who belonged to it.

However much we would have liked to start from scratch and set things up, we were actually stuck with a party formed nearly forty years earlier and had to do our best inside it and try and engineer reform from within. The answer to the question about leaving the Party boils down to the fact that we, like many others, were totally committed.

Peter and I had long discussions, both with each other and also with friends in the Party, and by 1957 we were fully embarked on an internal criticism of what we saw as the opportunism of the leadership and the incorrect policies which must, we thought, be responsible for the failure of the Party to gain the confidence of the masses of the people. At this time, we did not yet see the invasion of Hungary as a monstrous betrayal of the principles of Marxism and of Socialism. We believed the *Daily Worker*, where we read the choice for the Hungarians was either accept the Soviet invasion or face having a ‘Fascist’ government. We were critical from a point of view which can only be described as rigidly Marxist-Leninist. I cannot believe, from the vantage point of 2009, we thought that such policies would have persuaded the British people to vote for the Communist Party in large numbers, thus ushering in a Socialist Britain.

Having decided that things were very wrong with the Party, the next question was what to do about it. We had spoken in our own branch many times to little or no effect and had written articles and letters to the Party press, or rather, Peter had mostly done so. (My contributions were not so frequent due to self-doubt.)

The Party was run by 'full-timers' who were in place all the time and whose jobs were at stake. There was a strictly hierarchical structure given credibility through the system known as "democratic centralism." This was not as much of a contradiction in terms as it might seem, but an attempt to combine democracy through elections with the necessary united action for a party conceived as under siege by the enormously powerful surrounding forces of capitalism. Ideally, policies were voted on, committees were elected, and even though a member disagreed with the policy, he/she would put aside his/her own views and fight for the implementation of that policy. That was the ideal—what happened in practice was rather different.

Elections were dominated by, and their outcomes decided by, the so-called 'recommended list,' i.e., the candidates whom the leadership recommended for election or re-election. Not only did they have the weight of recommendation but also of being well-known to the membership, largely via promotion within the Party by the very leadership who recommended them in the election. Basically it was a system in which the leadership recommended members who were mirror-images of themselves.

It would be unfair to present this as solely a matter of corruption, as numbers of these members, elected to the Executive Committee, had considerable records of working class leadership in actual struggles. However, a member who led pensioners or tenants or who held a leading position in a Trade Union was, in the best British tradition of pragmatism and empiricism, unlikely to query Party policy on what should happen to the then-colonial countries after the achievement of Socialism. Naturally, no one who challenged the policies of the Party could hope to be more than an ordinary member of a branch, nor did we ever consider anything else. All we could see was an ossified, paid bureaucracy hanging on to policies which pandered to the imperialist ideology of the population and its deeply reformist attitudes for reasons of self-interest.

How were we to manage to get the issues debated? The *Daily Worker* (later to be re-named the *Morning Star*) was edited at that time by George Matthews, whose editorials repeated ad nauseam the same tired call upon the Labour Party to oppose the government more effectively if the government were Tory, or upon the Labour Left to act more effectively as a 'ginger group' in changing Labour policy, if Labour were in government. The Party attitude to the Labour Party demonstrated that it saw the Labour Party as the vehicle for achieving Socialism in Britain, and not itself. And this after the record of the 1945 Labour government in its formation of a bloc in alliance with US imperialism, in capitalist-favouring nationalisations, the pursuance of the Cold War and of nuclear arming, the pursuit of the arms race, its brutal colonial oppression, its suppression of strikes, its failure to nationalise the land, and so on.

Only the National Health Service stood out as a beacon of hope that the Labour Party was not totally an alternative arm of right-wing politics.

On thinking this over and discussing it ad nauseam, Peter and I decided the only thing to do was to write a full, critical statement on the major issues and present this to the Party leadership for discussion. We knew from the start this would be rejected and decided that, if the leadership refused to consider the points we made, we would then do what was totally forbidden in the Party—we would publish it ourselves and distribute it to Party members. Remember the Party had already been in existence for close on forty years and had, at the time I am speaking of around 1960, not one single M.P. and (I have forgotten how many) practically no councillors. The only gains had been in the Trade Union branches and, even there, support was declining fast, especially following the ETU catastrophe.

I do not think the end-point was at all clear to us, but writing the statement was the immediate, engrossing task. We chose five issues we considered the most important: Imperialism, the Labour Party, Peace and Disarmament, the Trade Unions, and the idea of the ‘peaceful transition to Socialism.’ The first of these we did publish later as a pamphlet—it was called *Revisionism and Imperialism* (written by Peter). This came a little later, though, and connected with the Sino-Soviet Polemic which was to emerge into the open just before 1960. I will briefly summarise these aspects of Party policy:

a) Imperialism

I will not repeat what has already been explained above. Briefly, the leadership of the CPGB was so keen on getting a foot in the door of working-class allegiance that it simply announced to the colonial peoples that a Socialist government in Britain would keep the empire more or less intact, albeit as a ‘federation’ in exchange for manufactured goods (made from their raw materials!). This was intended to lull the British working class into a sense of security about the fitness of the CPGB to form a government and would induce them to vote for the Party in a General Election.

b) The Labour Party

The Communist Party in its early days had been affiliated to the Labour Party, but round about 1921 had been made into a proscribed organisation. The Party leadership continually hankered after the heady days of affiliation and would have loved to be re-affiliated. Hence attitudes towards Labour policy, either in or out of office, were expressed ‘more in sorrow than in anger.’ Editorial after editorial, year after year, in the *Daily Worker* called upon the Left in the Labour Party to make a supreme effort and change Labour Party policy. Year after year this did not happen. (The *Morning Star*, the re-named version of the *Daily Worker*, is doing much the same thing to this day.) Year after year, the call was for action by the combined forces of the Left

(Labour Party, Communist Party, and all other so-called progressive people) as if the Labour Party *qua* Party was genuinely and primarily concerned with working-class interests.

Of course, there were many individual Labour MPs who were honest in their intent on behalf of working people and indefatigable in their work, but such Labour Lefts remained a minority. Their existence and speeches only served to feed illusions about the Labour Party and its validity as an organisation supporting the interests of the working class and all other oppressed people. The Party leadership was mesmerised by the existence of the National Health Service and of nationalised industries and forgot all the reactionary policies and actions of the 1945 Labour Government. They were not to be deterred later by the fact that Dennis Healey approved the manufacture of a British H-Bomb. They were not deterred either by Michael Foot's approval for Margaret Thatcher's war in the Falklands/Malvinas in 1981. Whatever the Labour Party leadership has said in opposition that could be construed as 'progressive' they have always been predominantly pro-capitalist when in power. Actually, the road from 1945 to Tony Blair's New Labour is a pretty straight one, I am sorry to say.

The attitude of the CPGB to the Labour Party was humiliating to the Communist Party. It was also a total failure. No offer of affiliation was ever forthcoming, and I am sure that it did not add a single vote to the derisory total Communist candidates obtained in elections.

c) Peace and Disarmament

At the time we are referring to, there were two possible stands on nuclear weapons: multilateralism and unilateralism. The former called for the dismantling of nuclear weapons by all 'nuclear powers,' with Britain leading the action but only in conjunction with others. The latter called for the unilateral dismantling of all such weapons by Britain irrespective of the actions of other countries. The line of CND (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) was to press for unilateral disarmament. The policy of the Communist Party was characterised by a sort of 'me-too-ism' and expressed an eagerness to be 'recognised' as part of the leadership of the Peace Movement.

Unilateralism was denounced by the media as a means of rendering Britain defenceless in the face of Soviet "threats." Our principal criticism of Party policy was aimed at its unqualified support for the then leadership of the Soviet Union which was, in fact, participating in the Arms Race much as the capitalist countries of the West were doing and, moreover, was joining in the international power struggle by establishing spheres of influence, especially in the Middle East, Africa, and elsewhere in the Third World (as it was then called). Party policy was, therefore, an uneasy combination of unilateralism and unqualified support for Soviet policy. The former was part of the

effort to gain acceptance for the Party in Britain and the latter was (as we now know) an obligation on the Party leadership in order to receive continued financial support from the Soviet Union.

This was brought out into the open only after the collapse of the Soviet Union several years ago. Moreover, in 1987, previous to this collapse, a group of retired ex-generals from the Soviet army put out a statement in which they admitted that the decision to participate in the Arms Race had been a grave mistake in 1947 and had resulted in serious damage to the Soviet economy.

A little later, in the 1960s, the Chinese Communist Party issued a statement following on the Test Ban Treaty. It said the more countries which had nuclear weapons the better, and nuclear war would not be the catastrophe predicted by the West and the Soviet Union as a new and more beautiful world would be built on “the radioactive ruins.” This Chinese point of view was only to emerge later, after Peter had written his statement on the policy of the British Party.

d) Trades Unions

Peter and I had no personal experience of an industrial Trade Union although we were, in the late fifties, both members of the NUT (National Union of Teachers). Our main political activity was, however, in the Party itself. Our first encounter with the problems in the way union matters were conducted by the Party occurred in the mid-1950s when Mark Young, a member of the (then) Electrical Trades Union (ETU) came to our Branch (which was his Branch) and reported his disquiet at his experience of ballot-rigging by the Party in ETU elections. He acted perfectly correctly as a Party member in bringing such an issue to his own Branch for the attention of its members so the Branch might take some action. The Branch might have passed a resolution calling for an enquiry to ensure that, if such ballot-rigging were happening, it would be stopped immediately and disciplinary action taken against the members concerned.

The meeting at which Mark Young spoke occurred before we became aware of the opportunist nature of the Party leadership. We were still profoundly loyal to the Party and so we, as well as most other members present at the meeting, rejected what he said as a string of anti-Party fabrications. In retrospect, it appears to me unbelievable this was our reaction. That reaction, strange though it may seem now, had an element of protectiveness in it—protectiveness to the Party, which was small, weak, and surrounded by large and powerful enemies.

There was an extra reason why we rejected what Mark Young had to say, and that was theoretical. At a social gathering of Party members at which he had been present, he had expressed some very unorthodox views about the road to Socialism in Britain—he thought it

was possible, and preferable, for the working class to rise spontaneously in revolution without the leadership of the Communist Party. We were shocked at this at the time as it was totally against Leninist theory on the gaining of state power by the progressive forces. I am now more shocked that I rejected what Mark Young had to say about his experience on the grounds of his theoretical unorthodoxy than anything else.

Why refer to this incident fifty years later? Because irrespective of the organisation or group to which loyalty is given, it reveals how easily unquestioning loyalty can be exploited even in *seemingly* rational people. Later, when the ETU scandal covered the pages of the press day after day and ballot-rigging was decisively proved, we were to learn this salutary lesson.

Even then, there were Party members who justified such fraud on the grounds that the other side did the same thing. Such an 'ends justifies the means' argument rests upon a spurious concept of class struggle in which 'to give as good as you get' becomes the totality of your objective instead of ensuring that our 'struggle' proceeds along a totally different dimension. To engage in ballot-rigging was not class struggle but a change of class affiliation while using the worst aspects of capitalist ideology and methods. It was also the case that Party members met in advance of union meetings to agree on a common candidate in coming elections. The Party leadership wanted Party members in positions of power in the unions and, instead of relying on the support of the other members, they were prepared to rely on very questionable methods.

Of course much excellent work was done by Party trade unionists over the years. This was very much the case in old working class centres such as South Wales, where Will Paynter, a life-long Communist, was president of the NUM (National Union of Mineworkers) and was enormously respected throughout the mining community. When we spent some time in South Wales in the early sixties, some people we met deplored the fact that the miners would vote for Will Paynter (a Communist) in the union but not for the Communist candidate in the general election! Over the years, there had been many cases of struggles for better wages and conditions led by Communist Party members, especially on the Clyde shortly after World War I, as a result of which Party members went to prison.

e) The Peaceful Transition to Socialism

This came last on our list and was chronologically the last thing we became aware of as a matter of concern. It was, of course, less immediate than the other issues, which were closely related to the practical day-to-day work of ordinary members. This issue was so remote as to seem in many ways to be merely a matter of pie in the sky.

The British Road to Socialism had a whole section, and it is worth quoting a few passages:

The enemies of Communism accuse the Communist Party of aiming to introduce Soviet Power in Britain and abolish parliament. This is a scandalous misrepresentation of our policy.....the people of Britain can transform capitalist democracy into a real People's Democracy, transforming Parliament, the product of Britain's historic struggle for democracy, into the democratic instrument of the will of the vast majority of her people.

Thus Parliament was envisaged as the instrument of revolutionary transformation of the country. Further down, it says,

In order, therefore, to bring about a decisive change in Britain, the millions of workers in the trade unions, co-operatives and individual members' sections of the Labour Party will have to use their political and industrial strength to make it impossible for either the right-wing Labour leaders or the Tories to carry on their present pernicious policy [...]. Only by united action between all sections of the Labour Movement can the working class rally all its forces and all its allies for decisive action to win a Parliamentary majority and form a People's Government.

However, we could not expect big business and the ruling establishment in general simply to sit down and accept all this without a murmur:

It would be wrong to believe that the big capitalists will voluntarily give up their property and their big profits in the interests of the British people.

It would be more correct to expect them to offer an active resistance to the decisions of the People's Government and to fight for the retention of their privileges by all means in their power, including force.

Therefore the British people and the People's Government should be ready decisively to rebuff such attempts.

How feeble can one get? “[B]y all means in their power including *force*?” This is as if ‘force’ is an afterthought to be used only as an extreme measure? Even then we all knew that the establishment had the means at any time to declare a state of emergency, bring in military government and dismiss Parliament. Today, in 2008, we see ‘the war on terror’ used to do away with just about every civil right which had been fought for since Magna Carta.

We saw this formulation as an attempt to present the Communist Party as a superior form of Labour Party with some more drastic policies economically. In fact, it was worse than that. To present the future in that way showed the leadership had no interest whatever in genuine power for working people but wanted a document which would allow them to hold on to power *in the Communist Party*.

As we saw it at the time, the Party was in the hands of opportunists, people whose policies were wrong and who were prepared to use the Party rules to keep them in power at any price (within the Party). The Party was very precious to us, and we distinguished the organisation itself, the instrument for the emancipation of the working class, from the individuals making it up.

What was to stop us from getting together with others to mount a challenge at the next Party Congress? Mainly the fact that getting together with any group other than your fellow comrades at Branch meetings was the greatest crime in the book. This was called “factionalism.” Any criticisms should be brought before the Branch in the form of a resolution to be put to the Party Congress, but inter-Branch communication was against the rules. If the Congress voted against the resolution, that was that, and you were supposed to accept this and continue working for policies as they stood, however much you disagreed with them. Naturally no hint of criticism of any aspect of Party policy must escape your lips outside the Party.

This vertical, hierarchical structure was called “Democratic Centralism,” in other words decisions were supposed to be reached democratically by vote at the Congress that elected the Executive Committee, but that having been done, the centre was paramount. Unfortunately, elections were fixed through having a “recommended list” and by having a “Congress Arrangements Committee” to meld resolutions together and rewording them blandly. Thus leadership and policy were preserved.

In the face of these obstacles, we decided to get a group of friends together who would meet at regular intervals to discuss and criticise the document that Peter was writing. All these friends were Party members who had discussed with us and each other the failings of the Party and its leadership and policies. This, we argued, was not a faction, because no joint action would result, the endpoint being a much-improved document which only Peter and I would present to the leadership. We would challenge them to print it for Party debate, and if they refused (as they certainly would), we would publish it ourselves and risk expulsion.

At the same time, we wrote as much as possible to the Party press (mostly unpublished) and worked extremely hard in Finsbury Park Branch to ‘prove ourselves,’ i.e., to show we were not simply middle-class theorists but could be successful in practical activity amongst working people. We had moved to Finsbury Park in 1958, and Peter soon became Branch Secretary and I was the Membership Organiser.

We had a recruitment drive that doubled the Branch membership in three months and although an article appeared in the *London District Bulletin* later,

it had no effect whatsoever on the leadership as far as listening to our challenge was concerned. In fact I have some feelings of shame as I recall that membership drive because we were so intent on increasing numbers, we paid no attention to the quality/personal characteristics/integrity of the new recruits. We did not ask ourselves questions about the nature of the Party and the people who should be asked to join or even whether a 'mass' Party was a good idea. All sorts of people were recruited, a semi-criminal in one case and, in another, a family which used the Party largely to borrow money.

However, we saw the Party, despite all its shortcomings, as the only available instrument for changing society and building a better world. We really believed we were rescuing it from sinking even lower into what we then called 'reformism,' that is a Party from which every trace of revolutionary theory, activity, and purpose had disappeared. We saw the Party as having been hijacked by interlopers (much as many people saw what Tony Blair did to Labour all those years later in the nineties). We were not going to leave. They would have to expel us.

There were many things about the Soviet Union which we were told and did not believe, for example, that anti-Semitism still flourished there. After all, one of the central reasons why I had joined the Party in the first place was that it was antiracist. Furthermore, in 1957, in response to the invasion of Hungary, we both defended the Soviet Union on the grounds that the alternative was Fascism. Again, how could the Soviet Union be guilty of any form of imperialism when its policy was anti-imperialist everywhere?

All around us, all the time, the radio, press, and TV had the Soviet Union under attack. We knew then (and it has been shown to be true after the fall of the Berlin Wall) the CIA was working night and day to destroy the Soviet Union from within. We were not always wrong. Their education system was excellent in many ways, as I saw for myself at an exhibition on teaching Mathematics in the Soviet Union when it was put on in London.

After all, it was the enemies of the working people of Britain who seemed to be the most virulent opponents of Socialism. I think now the problem was we did not know what to defend and what to reject in the situation in the Soviet Union. Today we all know how TV can be manipulated to show what the presenters want to show. Material can be cut and pasted together in different ways in order to distort the facts. No one really believes what they see on television. In those days we relied on logic, and it told us to reject what the owners of the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express*, etc., told us.

I think this is why we based our opposition in the Party on opposition to its theory. When we read *The British Road to Socialism*, we knew where we were. We could read the words before our eyes and argue about them on the basis of the knowledge at our disposal. It was 100 percent clear that imperialist ideology permeated the policy on the colonial countries and the idea of a peaceful transition to Socialism via parliament was an illusion. It was in this frame of mind that we faced the immense shock of the Sino-Soviet dispute in 1958.