

The Rise & Fall of Maoism: the English Experience

This article commemorates the fiftieth anniversary of a meeting in a London pub in 1963. It is an enlarged and hopefully improved version of material originally posted on at the premier site for anti-revisionist documentation from the 1960s onwards: the online collaborative Encyclopaedia of Anti-Revisionism Online [EROL].

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Dissent blooms

1935, 1943, 1947, 1951, 1963 - Where to begin? Well, individual members of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) expressed disquiet at the strategy laid out in *The British Road to Socialism* when it was first unveiled in 1951. In contrast to earlier programmes of the CPGB, *The British Road* proposed that socialism could be achieved by the labour movement working initially within Britain's existing democratic structures. George Thompson¹ may be the only member of the CPGB's Executive Committee to vote against adoption of *The British Road*, because "the dictatorship of the proletariat was missing,"² but he remained a member of the editorial board of the CPGB's theoretical journal, *Marxism Today*. There may have been expressions of doubt from former Education Organiser of the Communist Party, Douglas Garman but he remained a party member until his death in 1969.³

On the other hand, the writer Edward Upward and his wife Hilda resigned from the CPGB in 1948, in protest of its "reformist" direction. Edward later wrote about the inner-party struggle leading to their resignations in his novel, *The Rotten Elements* (1969). Others, like folk singer Ewan MacColl simply allowed his Party membership to lapse out of disagreement with the new strategic line, only to re-emerge in 1966 as a supporter of the anti-revisionist, pro-China journal, *The Marxist*. Arthur H. Evans, a rank and file CPGB member, was one of the few who waged a systematic campaign against what he perceived to be revisionism in the basic line of the Party in the post-war years, writing a series of letters to the CPGB leadership in the period 1947-1953.

One party member dates her shared unease, reservations and concerns with her husband Peter from the mid-fifties: Muriel Seltman recalls: "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... 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."⁴

¹ Born in Dulwich, London in 1903, George Thompson, Cambridge graduate, joined the Communist Party in 1936 when a professor of Greek at Birmingham University. An Executive Committee member, he also served on the Party's Cultural Committee.

² *Morning Star* 9th January 1989

³ Professor George Thompson dedicates *From Marx to Mao TseTung: a study in revolutionary dialectics* to Douglas Garman stating, "he created a network of Party schools, attended by industrial workers from all parts of the country and tutored by himself and others whom he trained in his superb method of teaching through controlled discussion. He gave up this work in 1950 owing to disagreements with the Party leadership over the revisionist line of the *British Road to Socialism*, which he opposed from the beginning. In that struggle he was defeated."

⁴ Seltman (2010) *What's Left? What's Right? : A Political Journey via North Korea and the Chinese and the Cultural Revolution*. Pittsburgh: Dorrance Publishing p48. Muriel met her future husband, Peter Seltman while studying at Trinity College, Dublin 1946, returning in 1951 to England, both joining the Communist Party. Peter Seltman died November 18th 1986.

The Seltmans, active in Finsbury Park branch, were to develop that critical enquiry, later published as a pamphlet called *Revisionism and Imperialism*, into political opposition in the anti-revisionist movement.

In 1957 Arthur Clegg “formally left the Party, not because he had any differences over major questions of policy regarding British politics but over China itself and regarded himself a Communist to the very end of his life.”⁵ He had joined the Communist Party as a student at the LSE in the 1930s and was active in the Friends of the Chinese People. He became its full-time national organizer when it merged with the China Campaign Committee in 1937.⁶ In 1941, he was appointed editor of *World News and Views*. In 1947, he moved to the *Daily Worker*, first as Far Eastern advisor, then diplomatic correspondent and finally foreign editor. He remained on the fringes, supportive to the pro-China activities, supporting public meetings and campaigns that concerned international issues, but was not visibly identified with the party-building activities of dissident communists.

Other dissidents described the 1951 programme as “revisionist,” but opposition to the strategy never coalesced into organizational form before the 1960s. Thus, the initial, post-World War II anti-revisionist opposition within the Communist Party was muted and individual in character. For British communists, Khrushchev’s theories of peaceful coexistence and the parliamentary road to socialism had been enshrined in party policies since the early 1950s. For those who were uneasy with such teachings there was nowhere else to go. One participant explained:

two subjective factors tended to deter the rank and file from taking a firm stand against what was going on. Firstly, there were social pressures. Cost of a member’s social contact tended to be with other members ...It helped develop a sense of continuity and comradeship. But it also encourages conformity to the Party and to the leadership, even when the latter were clearly in error. The second subjective factor was every Member’s knowledge that the leadership had the endorsement of the Soviet Communist Party. Thus, it was felt that to go against the Party in Britain, was to go against the whole of the international communist movement.⁷ If the British Road was okay with Stalin, what weight could be given to our concerns? John Gollan (1911 - 1977), a leader of the CPGB at this time was reported to have later told the Communist Party of China: “How can Khrushchev claim to have introduced peaceful transitions? I advanced it long before he did!”⁸

Given the entrenched viewpoints, the Sino-Soviet Polemic was less a dialogue and more a stand up fight for the "soul" of the International Communist Movement. The Albanian and Chinese Parties were most forthright in their defence of their position but it was generally present by political opponents as some form of knee-jerk Stalinist reaction to the policies advanced by the Soviet leader Khrushchev.

"Both dogmatism and revisionism run counter to Marxism “observed Mao Zedong. "Marxism must necessarily advance; it must develop along with practice and cannot remain still. It would become lifeless if it were stagnant and stereotyped. However, the

⁵ <http://www.grahamstevenson.me.uk/>

⁶ Clegg (1989) *Aid China 1937–1949: A Memoir of a Forgotten Campaign*. Beijing: New World Press

⁷ Lee (1990) "Revisionism in Britain: the Decline of the British Communist Party".

RCL Briefing, *Revisionism: the politics of the CPGB Past & Present*

⁸ Mao Zedong (1977) *Selected Works* Vol. V Beijing, Foreign Language Press: 495

basic principles of Marxism must never be violated otherwise mistakes will be made. It is dogmatism to approach Marxism from a metaphysical point of view and to regard it as something rigid. It is revisionism to negate the basic principles of Marxism and to negate its universal truth. Revisionism is one form of bourgeois ideology. The revisionists deny the difference between socialism and capitalism, between the dictatorship of the proletariat and the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. What they advocate is in fact not the socialist line but the capitalist line. In the present circumstances, revisionism is the more pernicious than dogmatism. It is an important task for us to unfold criticism of revisionism on the ideological front now." ⁹

Speaking in 1957, against the background of a growing split in the communist world, Mao Zedong advanced a position that sought to rescue Marxism from the theoretical dilution and weakening of militancy. Mao, amongst many others, condemned a political approach "to transform the capitalist state into a state representative of the interest of the working people" as against the canon of Marxist-Leninist teachings on the nature of the state. ¹⁰

Some compromise had been reached at the 1957 and 1960 meetings of communist parties but it proved fragile: they did not resolve the theoretical and ideological issues at stake. The international debate that publically unfolded with the 1960 Chinese publication of "*Long Live Leninism*" provided a rallying point for anti-revisionist communists. The Chinese position asserted that the main danger within the international movement was revisionism, meaning the policies and analysis pushed by Khrushchev and the Soviet leadership. The Russian line emphasised the dangers of dogmatism, meaning attacks upon the analysis and policies they promoted. An academic sympathetic to the Chinese argument observed: those carrying out the revisions which are seen by others as a 'negation' or 'abandonment' Marxism (or of 'Marxism-Leninism') will not admit that is what they are doing. For those who reject Marxism outright can hardly be labelled 'revisionists'. A 'revisionist' considers himself to be a Marxist, only his critics find his particular interpretation of Marxism to be an abandonment or betrayal of it." ¹¹

The polemic within international communism was a legitimate occasion for polemics within the Party in Britain. However an entrenched leadership was welded to the policies of the British Road to Socialism, a road attacked by some Party members as capitulation to social democracy, the ideology of the capitalist class within the working class movement.

The preparatory years of the anti-revisionist movement [as it was then styled] resembled a guerrilla struggle with the isolated resistance to the revisionist grip on the Communist Party. It was a momentous task in which definitions and analyses were largely improvised in the heat of sectarian and political struggle. The 1960 publication of *Long Live Leninism* by the Communist Party of China did give impetus and focus for the inner-party opposition to the revisionist course of the Communist Party of Great Britain. That opposition further crystallised with the exchange of polemics on the general line of the International Communist Movement among the Soviet, Chinese and Albanian Parties in

⁹ Speech at the Chinese Communist Party National Conference on Propaganda Work. *Selected Works of Mao Zedong* Volume V (1977) Beijing, Foreign Language Press:434

¹⁰ McCreery (1973) *The Way Forward: a Marxist-Leninist analysis of the British State, the CPGB and the tasks for revolutionaries*. WPPE (London):14

¹¹ Jitendra Mohan, Revisionism: towards a definition, *China Policy Study Group Broadsheet* Vol 18 :6&7 June-July 1981

the early 1960s as the political stance that would later be termed “anti-revisionism” began as a call for the return to Leninist orthodoxy.

Some militants had obtained publications from contact with the Chinese charge d’affaires and by April 1963 polemical texts were publicly on sale at Collet’s Bookshop in London and the *New Statesman* (April 5th 1963) carried adverts offering low priced English-language pamphlets from China.¹² Communists within the CPGB saw in the arguments advanced by the ruling Albanian and Chinese parties as reaffirmations of their own criticisms of the *British Road to Socialism* and the CPGB leadership.

“After years of opposition to the Party leadership on theoretical and related practical issues, in however modest a way, feeling weak and impotent, the arrival on the scene of a ‘big brother’ in the shape of the Chinese Communist Party came as a bolt from the blue. We felt euphoric. Far from being outsiders ‘crying in the wilderness,’ we were on the same road as the largest and, in some ways, most experienced Communist Party in the world. So, instead of concentrating on the immediate practical and theoretical differences between ourselves and the Party leadership, we eagerly read the pamphlets brought out by the CCP in the course of the dispute and tried to apply their points to the particular situation in which we found ourselves.

The Chinese accused the Soviet Party of the crime of “revisionism,” i.e., altering the content of Marxism-Leninism in an unwarrantable fashion, and soon we called ourselves “anti-revisionists.”¹³

Thus, it was the open disagreements within the international communist movement that sparked a concerted and co-ordinated attempt by CPGB members to challenge the political line and leadership of the Party. Stirrings of opposition were evident throughout the lower levels of the organisation, at the higher levels demands of Party discipline muted expression of sympathy for the anti- British Road positions. Oppositionist Party members began to organise amongst themselves, drawing anti-revisionist members together on a common platform. After the long period of disenchantment with the direction that the Party had been travelling, the emergence of a wave of anti-revisionist activism that, this time, found both political and organisational expression. The Central Committee was receiving reports of “organised groups” making interventions in internal party meetings and visiting contacts throughout the country.¹⁴

Anti-revisionist activists began coalescing in 1962, engaged in such activities as selling CPC literature and organising interventions at internal party meetings against the revisionist policies of the Party leadership. In London Dick and Margery Jones, CPGB branch officials from Coventry, discussed, together with Michael McCreery, secretary of Tufnell branch (Islington) and Peter and Muriel Seltman, on how to combat revisionism within the Party. The Seltmans had a group of friends together who would meet at regular intervals to discuss and criticise the document (*Revisionism and Imperialism*) that Peter Seltman was writing. All these friends were Party members who had discussed with each other the failings of the Party and its leadership and policies. Previously they had argued, they were not a faction because no joint action would result. As Muriel Seltman explained it,

¹² Radio Free Europe background report, *Chinese Pamphlets on Sale in Britain* April 8th 1963

¹³ Seltman (2010) 62

¹⁴ See: CP/CENT/ORG/07 on the Holiday School, Lyme Hall, August 10-17 1963.

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? ¹⁵

William Bland, district secretary of the Seven King's Branch, Ilford, wrote [in March 1962] to the Central Committee in defence of the Albania position¹⁶ Bland had been instrumental in forming *the Albanian Society* in 1957, becoming its secretary in 1960 (a post he held for almost thirty years, resigning in July 1990). Having visited Albania in 1962, he presented a film "The Land of the Eagles", to foster friendship with the little known Balkan "beacon of socialism". In a life time commitment, he learnt Albanian and edited the society's magazine, *Albanian Life*.

Bland was approached by McCreery,

I was very pleased to be contacted and said I would like to work with him, but he insisted, or as good as insisted, that everyone had to immediately resign from the Communist Party. And I said there is no other organisation, even though I am only a rank-and-file member of that party now, at least one can work among people with a similar outlook. I don't think that the time has come yet when everyone should withdraw.¹⁷

At the 28th national congress of the CPGB, held in September 1963, of the 461 delegates only 4 voted against, and 10 absented from, endorsing the Party's resolution of January 12th 1963. This resolution firmly placed the British Party on the Soviet side of the ideological dispute:

The issues of the dispute in our international movement are the key questions confronting humanity - war and peace, peaceful co-existence instead of thermo-nuclear war, disarmament, national liberation and form of transition to socialism ...On all of these our Party Congresses since 1951 have taken clear and unequivocal decisions. Above all, they concern the substance of our programme, *The British Road to Socialism*.¹⁸

The resolution described the international polemic as "a dispute between the overwhelming majority" of the parties of the international communist movement and the Chinese communist party. Such support did not bode well for any anti-revisionist centre within the CPGB.¹⁹ The Party leadership was solidly behind the Soviet line. CPGB leader John Gollan, writing in the *Daily Worker*, was in no doubt what was at stake: He saw *Long Live Leninism* and the general Chinese Party approach not only as a dispute with the

¹⁵ Seltman (2010) 55

¹⁶ CP/CENT/EC/08/07

¹⁷ Interview with Bill Bland by John Puntnis, July 1994. <http://www.geocities.com/hari6kumar/bland-full.htm>

¹⁸ Communist Party of Great Britain (1965) Executive Committee Statement on the International Communist Movement (November 1965)

¹⁹ The expulsion of "pro-Albanian" J.Wilson from Blaydon branch had been recorded in the EC Minutes for November 1962 CP/CENT/EC/08/12 and a steady stream of correspondence began to appear in the Executive's minutes e.g Tom Hill and W. Bland January 1963 CP/CENT/EC/09/01, Michael McCreery, Fred Ward, Dave Volpe, Rajni Amodia, J.Cormack, J. Little and others July 1963CP/CENT/EC/09/06

CPSU but also a challenge to the general line of the Party embodied in its programme *The British Road to Socialism*.²⁰

Successive editions of *the British Road to Socialism* increasingly moved the Party to embrace the British state as the acceptable framework for socialist advance. The Party's tactical discussions were how far they could utilise the capitalist state. No longer would the Communist Party express the position of *For Soviet Britain*, its 1935 programme that "workers' councils will break up the capitalist machinery of government and take the place of it."

While the CPGB leadership might protest, some bourgeois commentators agreed with the thrust, if not argument, of the anti-revisionists: The British Communist Party has come to accept the philosophy of gradualism and reform...In effect the British Communist Party has come closer to Stalin's definition of a reformism party - "a party which denies the socialist revolution and tries to establish socialism peacefully".²¹

If the policy of the CPGB was aimed at working with the Left of the Labour Party, it accommodated itself to the agenda set by the Labour Party. As such its own appeal weakened as it became less distinguishable from the general thrust of Labour Party politics. It was in reality a one-sided affair, as the Labour Party never reciprocated the Communist Party's courtship, rejecting time after time any application for communist affiliation to the Labour Party. This did not deter the Party leadership from the "strategy" of working for a Left Labour government, hopefully with Communist MPs supporting it.

With the emphasis on election politics, or preparing for such contests, anti-revisionists within the Communist Party raised a grave concern that the class nature of the Party was in danger of a claimed membership of 34,281 in 1964, of these less than 15% were in factory branches. The need to organise on a parliamentary constituency basis downplayed the need for communist organisation at the place of work. The need to return to build the organisation within the industrial working class was a re-occurring theme amongst Marxist-Leninists.

Militant party members did not have to be doctrinal purists to be unhappy with the political life within the CPGB. The author of one study on the CPGB concluded, "Formerly radical, vigorous and imaginative, now they are none of these things. They have grown conservative defending revolution." ²² It was not too far a step to question the party's revolutionary credentials: a consequence might mean an end to the careers of the present leadership and to the comfortable routines, which they have made for themselves.

The criticism aired in the Sino-Soviet dispute was raised in internal Party meetings to attack the revisionism of the Party Programme. The leadership of the CPGB rejected such a line of argument and went on the offensive. The resolution of September 14th 1963 asserted that on a number of occasions the Communist Party of China have attacked the significance of the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union for the development of the whole world communist movement, arguing that the Chinese comrades are attempting to repudiate some of the important new and correct developments which have occurred in the last few years.

²⁰ *Daily Worker* September 18, 1968

²¹ Wood, *The Empirical Proletariat: a note on British Communism. Political Science Quarterly* 1959:256-272

²² Newton (1969) *The Sociology of British Communism* Allen Lane :19

After this resolution was published on September 18th 1963 the Editorial Boards of the three main party publications, *The Daily Worker*, *Comment* and *Marxism Today* refused to carry further contributions which supported the positions advocated by the Albanian and Chinese communist parties.

Opposition to the resolution was voiced in a number of branches in the London District and elsewhere. The reluctances to take the struggle against revisionism outside of the Communist Party was now challenged when the London grouping of anti-revisionists decided to hold a conference of Marxist-Leninists to re-establish a communist party in Britain.

THE LUCAS ARMS MEETING

November 10, 1963 provides a convenient date for the birth of the organized anti-revisionist movement in Britain when a London meeting of communists, at the Lucas Arms public house in Grays Inn Road, debated the best way to combat revisionism. Michael McCreery addressed the meeting on modern revisionism in both its international (Soviet) and British (CPGB) aspects, putting forward a commitment to struggle against it with the aim of re-establishing in Britain a Communist Party based on the revolutionary principles of Marxism- Leninism. The meeting was divided on the apparently tactical issue of whether the struggle should be carried out openly or clandestinely within the Communist Party of Great Britain. Some were later to ascribe more sinister purpose with “elements seeking to disrupt the developing Marxist-Leninist Organisation – elements such as W. Ash, A. Manchanda and ‘the capitalist’ J. Perry. Perry and Ash were among those who played a leading role in the attempt to disrupt the London Conference in 1963 which set up the first open Marxist-Leninist Group in Britain – the Committee to Defeat Revisionism, for Communist Unity.”²³

McCreery led the argument for an open opposition to the Party leadership and drawing clear lines of demarcation in support of the anti-revisionist struggle in the criticism aired by the Albanian and Chinese parties. The decision had not been taken lightly: Yet only a slender majority supported the formation of an open political opposition at the Lucas Arms meeting.

An Appeal to All Communists from Members of the CPGB was issued from the Lucas Arms meeting in the name of The Committee to Defeat Revisionism, for Communist Unity (CDRCU). It called for all “to unite around the principles of the 1960 Statement of the International Communist Movement”. This “revolt among communists”, as *The Times* headed its report, was dismissed by the Party's leadership as the “work of one or two extremist intellectuals”. But they feared that the postal distribution of the five-paged Appeal to two thousand party members would hit a “tender spot”. The CDRCU “hope that their doctrine will appeal to many other smaller rebel factions and so induce them to join in a united struggle to abolish revisionism and to revert to a policy of Marxism-Leninist’.²⁴ Michael Baker, a signatory of the Appeal explained the purpose of the CDRCU to *The Times*: “the aim of the group was to win support from both inside the existing party and from outside” to gather a nucleus to fight revisionism.²⁵

Expulsion from the party inevitably followed their public stance. After the ‘Appeal’ had appeared in *Tribune* (November 15th), the CPGB London District Committee met on the 17th November and unanimously decided to expel its London signatories for publically organising opposition to the democratically decided policy of the CPGB.²⁶ Peter and Muriel Seltman were also expelled at the November 17 meeting despite the public distance they put between them and McCreery and their expressed willingness to remain Party members. The occasion was recalled in Muriel’s memoirs:

²³ *Report of the Central Committee of the M.L.O.B. On the Situation in the People’s Republic of China*. Section “Disruption in the International Marxist-Leninist Movement” London: Red Front, January 1968

²⁴ *The Times* November 11th 1963

²⁵ Quoted in Parker (2007) *The Kick Inside* - revolutionary opposition in the CPGB 1960-1991

²⁶ ‘Communist expel eight’ *Daily Worker* November 20 1963.

We were expelled because we distributed a copy of an article produced by the Chinese Party to Party members at a London District Meeting of the Communist Party. In this way, we violated Branch boundaries—you were not allowed to take any action except through your Branch. We did this because the London District Secretary, John Mahon, had made a speech criticising the Chinese for “racism” on account of their special references to “Asia, Africa and Latin America.” We decided to “defend” the reputation of the CCP and distributed the alleged offending speech which had been given by the Chinese delegate at the World Congress of Women to show the Party members that the speech was not racist.

We knew perfectly well what we were doing, although we asserted we had not really broken Party rules as we had not gone outside the Party, and in any case, the material we distributed was written by a “fraternal” Party. After various letters between the London District Committee and Peter and me, we were expelled in 1963.²⁷

Paul Noone recalls that Peter Seltman had agreed with the decision at Lucas Arms meeting but subsequently opposed the break to argue that “the anti-revisionist movement should function as an opposition within the CPGB working to take control of the CPGB.”²⁸

Arthur Evans was equally unimpressed by the policies suggested by Seltman.²⁹ Looking back, Evans recalled....The C.D.R.C.U. came into being as the result of a small group breaking away in late 1963 from the Communist Party. I was the exception having resigned from that party in 1953. The group was headed by Peter Seltman, a teacher of a round 30 in the higher schools and Michael McCreery, the eldest son of General McCreery of the British Army who commanded the Italian invasion troops. They had run across a pamphlet of mine in Colletts Charing Cross Rd, London, bookshop, and as a result came to visit me in my London Flat

I urged caution upon them, advising them to work within the Party until they had gained a following in all districts. However, impatience gained the day, early in 1964 they came out in the open and I was appointed Editor of their monthly paper, called Vanguard. Jealousy arose between Peter Seltman and McCreery within quite a short period of time. Seltman had been working for a three year period on a large work dealing with British politics.³⁰ Later, after my visit with him to Albania, I had a chance to read a few of his chapters. I came to the conclusion that he had no practical knowledge of T[rade] U[nion] work and the rest would not stand up to a Marxist examination. McCreery, who was financing the breakaway, was told of my findings and withdrew financial support toward the book’s publication. On the pretext of Trotskyist infiltration Seltman withdrew from group membership.³¹

A differing account comes from Muriel Seltman:

The break came one evening at a meeting at our house when he came along and announced the time was ripe for starting a new Communist Party and we would sit there all night if necessary in order to make this happen.

²⁷ Seltman (2010) 65

²⁸ Paul Noone’s introduction to McCreery, *The Way Forward*

²⁹ Evans (1965) What’s Wrong with Peter Seltman

³⁰ P.E.J. Seltman (1964) *Classes in Modern Imperialist Britain* ; another self-published tract was *Revisionism and imperialism* (1963).

³¹ A Letter in author’s possession from Arthur Evans dated 25/3/81

Peter and I and some others opposed this, both on the grounds of unpreparedness and, more importantly, no one in the group possessed the qualities required to become a Party leader or set up a Communist Party. In the end, the group split up, half going off with Michael McCreery (largely his friends) to set up Vanguard, a new anti-revisionist newspaper (where did the money come from?). The rest of us were left in a rather anti-climactic state, not knowing how we were going to proceed.³²

There was an over-optimism and impatience at the progress of the organisation, at the inability to accumulate and build the Marxist-Leninists forces in the country, which found expression in internal disputes.³³ In May, a sub-group of the organisation working in the Irish community had disengaged itself from the CDRCU and reconstituted itself as the Irish Communist Organisation³⁴.

Like a number of other Irish émigrés in London in the early 1960's, Clifford left the Communist Party of Great Britain and joined Michael McCreery's Committee to Defeat Revisionism for Communist Unity (CDRCU).

At the behest of the CDRCU, Clifford and his wife Angela began to organize an Irish sub-section intended to compete with the Communist Party influenced *Connolly Association* and perhaps lay the basis for a Marxist-Leninist group in Ireland. But by May 1964, Clifford broke with the CDRCU and in conjunction with Irish Trotskyites, formed the Irish Communist Group (ICG).

In the autumn of 1965, the ICG split into Trotskyite and anti-Trotskyist factions. Clifford and others endorsed the anti-Trotskyist position and formed the *Irish Communist Organization* in November 1965. The ICO's London section appeared soon thereafter and formed a part of the city's anti-revisionist current, publishing the first issue of "The Communist" in March 1967 and engaging in discussions and activities in London's vibrant student-fueled Marxist-Leninist scene, including initiating a meeting with the leadership of the Communist Federation of Britain (ML) in November 1970.

The group also began to publish detailed critiques of 'revisionism' in Ireland and elsewhere. It generally took a pro-Chinese and Albanian position in international politics. However it also placed itself in the Irish radical tradition and reissued forgotten or unavailable articles by James Connolly and Liam Mellows (as well as a reprint of Roddy Connolly's report (to the Comintern) on the two sides in the Irish Civil War).

Despite its international line, the ICO was never a "Maoist" group; its views were largely motivated by a defense of Stalin and the Soviet experience. In fact, the ICO undertook an investigation into the development of Maoism, and concluded that it was not a suitable model for an anti-revisionist group because, it claimed, Mao had supported the development of Khrushchev's "revisionism".

There was more disruption to the CDRCU when in September 1964 Arthur Evans, editor of *Vanguard* and Ron Jones, its features editor, both left the organisation. A contemporary newspaper report cites "left sectarianism" in "ignoring the stages through which a revolution must develop" as a motive in the break.³⁵ Evans went on to produce a

³² Seltman (2010) 64

³³ See Parker's account of an argument at McCreery's flat Note 48 page 25.

³⁴ This was associated with Brendon Clifford and later emerged as the British and Irish Communist Organisation.

³⁵ *Sunday Telegraph* November 11th 1964

pamphlet attacking McCreery, *Once Again, Truth Will Out*.³⁶ Years later he recalled the incident:

The group then ideologically split into two camps, one headed by McCreery, the other by me. McCreery wanted to transform the group into a party, I opposed it. On this issue I defeated him. He was mad for Chinese recognition he wanted to become a world figure. While I supported the general Chinese line as against that of Moscow I was openly critical of the influence upon Mao of Chou En Lai. (I had previously to the setting up of the grouping turned down an offered job from the Chinese as organiser of distribution for Mao's Little Red Book. They sent a representative from Peking to interview me. Believe it or not, he was of the opinion that if enough Little Red Books got into the hands of the British working class qualitative changes would automatically follow. I failed to convince him that he and the Chinese were living in a dream world.³⁷

Michael McCreery was an unlikely Marxist-Leninist leader. He had initiate knowledge of the British ruling class and the state apparatus. He was a class traitor; the Eton educated son of General Sir Richard Loudon McCreery. After Christ Church Oxford, Michael followed the family military tradition and joined the army, serving in military intelligence. As to why he first joined the Labour Party, and then left after two years to join the Communist Party in 1956, Thayer notes, he would only say that, during his many travels throughout the world, he had seen a great deal of suffering and had decided it was the fault of the capitalist system. He would not elaborate on the point further.³⁸

The Committee to Defeat Revisionism for Communist Unity was based at flat 3, 33 Anson Street in North London. George Thayer described the CDRCU operating amidst the squalor of unwashed milk: bottles, piles of dirty clothes, unattended dishes in the sink: and rumped beds. McCreery's office in the flat contains a library of perhaps 2,000 books and pamphlets, which line the face of one wall. Piles of loose literature are scattered over the floor. In the centre of the room is his desk on which he answers all his correspondence by hand in a neat, almost classic, script.³⁹

The short-lived organisation did grow throughout its fifteen months existence, providing a political testing bed for many activists who were to remain within the movement's second wave in Britain. The publication (and selling) of the *Vanguard* newspaper⁴⁰ and pamphlets, a flurry of lectures and political discussions, the attempt to accumulate revolutionaries and heckling of the revisionist Party meetings were part of the early days of establishing a political profile.

An internal circular of the CPGB noted the growing international coverage given to the CDRCU:

The journal REVOLUTION (Africa, Latin America, Asia) published in Switzerland, has given him [McCreery] considerable space and attention, in common with other breakaway organisations in other countries. It seems clear that this journal, which

36 London: David –Goliath Publication. Written after Evans left the CDRCU and “exposes the political degeneration of the late Michael McCreery”

³⁷ A Letter in author's possession from Arthur Evans dated 25/3/81

³⁸ Thayer (1965) *The British Political Fringe_a profile* Anthony Blond (London) :124. All very reminiscent of George Orwell's *Burmese days* and his own conversion.

³⁹ Thayer (1965) :124

⁴⁰ Copies of "*Vanguard*", organ of the Committee to Defeat Revisionism, for Communist Unity, associated with McCreery [incomplete] CP/CENT/ORG/20/09 1964-1968 : held at Labour History Archive and Study Centre (People's History Museum)

previously published some progressive articles, has embarked on a course of deliberately building up all breakaway splinter groups. A French edition of this journal differs in some respects from the English one, and is even more vicious towards the British Party.⁴¹

As its activities developed, the CDRCU was gaining acceptance internationally: Vanguard carried a picture of McCreery with the Albanian leader, Enver Hoxha, with an accompanying message that read,

“I wish you ever success in your very noble struggle against imperialism and modern revisionism for the unity of Marxist-Leninist Communists in your country, for the triumph of peace, freedom and democracy and socialism in the world.”

The constituent groups of the CDRCU consisted mainly of expelled Communist Party branches or sections of branches and other members in Scotland, Wales, Yorkshire, South Lancashire, West Country, Home Counties and London. Individual members, like Issy Siefert in Edgeware, resigned at a branch meeting stating support for McCreery⁴²; other prominent members of the CDRCU included CP London District Committee member from Stoke Newington, Johnny James⁴³ were expelled. Vanguard carried a statement in solidarity with James from the Stoke Newington CP branch, with 14 signatories, (all to be expelled from the CPGB) associating themselves “with the principled stand” and “fundamentally correct Appeal to All Communists” stating the leadership had substituted insults for serious political discussion, indulged in “vulgar lies” “damaging slanders” and “scurrilous practice”.

Tom Murray founder-Chairman of the Workers’ Party of Scotland (Marxist-Leninist) recalled his own departure from the CPGB:

In Edinburgh the C.P. Stockbridge Branch sent me as their delegate to the C.P. Congress in London in 1965 armed with a resolution attacking revision of Marxism-Leninism in the theory underlying "The British Road to Socialism" and directly attacking the leadership on that score and on their, failure to appreciate the importance and urgency of Scottish Nationalist development. Out of about four hundred delegates, less than fifty supported our resolution. I and several other members of our Branch resigned from the C.P. and associated ourselves with the C.D.R.C.U. In the absence of McCreery the C.D.R.C.U. deteriorated in petty squabbles⁴⁴

While born of the international polemic, the CDRCU was a serious attempt to build a revolutionary organisation. Indeed, the organisation was more than a British cadaver for the CPC or its Albanian ally ... there was a clear effort being made in [its newspaper] Vanguard to develop an indigenous appeal to the British labour movement and CPGB members through, for example, its industrial coverage and lively cultural pages, which went beyond merely dealing with the faults of the CPGB.⁴⁵

Vanguard was disproportionately lavish for the size of the organisation that produced it. The paper was produced monthly until the March 1965 issue reported McCreery’s illness. There were only four regularly published editions (three bi-monthlies and a monthly)

⁴¹ Central Organisation Department, *The Attack Upon the Party from the So-Called 'Extreme Left'* March 1964

⁴² CP CENT/ ORG/20/08

⁴³ Later associated with Working Peoples’ Party of England (WPPE) and better known for his role in the radicalisation of Campaign Against Racial Discrimination (CARD).

⁴⁴ Tom Murray, WPS (ML) 1966-1976 10th Anniversary. *Scottish Vanguard* Vol.6 No.8 Autumn 1976:3-6

⁴⁵ Parker (2007) p17

following his death in April 1965. Regular publication had ceased by October 1965. Criticism of the attempt to reach out to revolutionaries through a "professional-looking" publication smacks of the dismissive attitude that pervades the production of propaganda. McCreery had been criticised for sustaining the CDRCU's impressive public face with his money as if that was a political error.

McCreery, argued that

So long as the 3rd International endured, that is until 1943, the C.P.G.B. supported, in the main, the basic principles of Marxism Leninism, propagated these basic principles to the best of its ability and stood four-square behind the new Socialist state, the U.S.S.R., hope of all progressive mankind. Within Britain Communists was in the forefront of all class battles, and the Communist Party played an important role in defending the interests of the working people during these years. But it never fully mastered dialectical materialism, the Marxist world view, in the sense that it never proved itself capable of applying the generally agreed principles of Marxism-Leninism to British conditions, of working out its own independent and correct policies in each historical period. Continually, the Communist International had to correct lack of theory, lack of understanding in the C.P.G.B., which led the Party into error after error. ⁴⁶

McCreery "said that the history of the CPGB was and still continues to be a struggle not for revolutionary action but a struggle to enter the Labour Party. He claimed that the CPGB failed from the start to grasp the essentials of either dialectical materialism or any of the other basic Marxist-Leninist tenets. He felt that the members of the Party were empirical Marxists who had so deviated from 'true Marxism-Leninism' that they were now attempting to become respectable -'Left-Social Democrats', he called them. Therefore, he believed that they offered no alternative to Labour Party policies. ⁴⁷

However there were two organisations that emerged in opposition to The British Road to Socialism: an open group – the Committee to Defeat Revisionism for Communist unity (CDRCU) and a clandestine inner-Party opposition grouping, FORUM for Marxist-Leninist struggle.

Forum: Travelling down a *cul de sac*

FORUM provided a platform for those who would not agree with an open break with the CPGB. As described by Muriel Seltman: When we had recovered from the break up, we re-formed with a small number of comrades and set up a little journal called Forum, designed to be a genuine forum for discussion. Articles (on the way ahead) would be unsigned and, therefore, we argued, would not be clouded by personality issues and so could lead to objective discussion. ⁴⁸

The argument of those around FORUM was partly that leaving the party would mean leaving the international communist movement and abandoning those left behind to the

⁴⁶ The Way Forward *Vanguard* Vol 1 No 1 February 1964 p1

⁴⁷ *The British Political Fringe* p124

See also: Notes on revisionism -John Gollan in *RCL Briefing: Revisionism*. Quotes Gollan stating that the Party 'has always striven and always will strive for unity and agreement with the Labour Party, not only on the immediate issues, but for the achievement of political power and socialism."

⁴⁸ Seltman (2010) 65

revisionists; the dilemma was striving to remain inside would inevitably mean being forced to compromise on principle. It was based on the predilection that they would be allowed to operate within the CPGB. McCreery did not share this illusory assumption: "The press is now completely denied to us. Branch meetings are completely denied to us."⁴⁹ In a lecture delivered to student group at London School of Economics, his colleague Arthur Evans stated: The revisionists of King Street have broken with democratic centralism. The revisionist have closed all real avenues of discussion and use the Party press as a weapon to distort, cover-up and poison the minds of honest cadres.⁵⁰

There was a fundamental division between the anti-revisionists on where and how the struggle to reassert Marxist Leninist politics should take place. The formation of the CDRCU was seen by those around FORUM as having a serious retarding effect on the anti-revisionist struggle.

Michael McCreery was condemn as "essentially splittist" for acting on the analysis that the Party was in the image of the leadership, that the political effect of the British Road to Socialism had robbed the Party of its revolutionary nature. His rupture with a revisionist ruled and run Party machinery was described as "drawing off 'trouble-makers' into an organisation which can with ease be used to frighten the rest of the Party into acceptance of the revisionist line."⁵¹

Forum's duplicated bulletin, first produced in March 1964, circulated critical articles inside and outside the Party. It preserved the anonymity of its supporters to "oppose revisionism in Britain as part of the international struggle for correct Marxist-Leninist policies and revolution", however it was quickly associated with the anti-revisionist London Political Organisation.⁵² Its contact address was Evan Gibbon's, a member of the Party in Vauxhall, who was expelled by the London District Committee in March, 1964. He is on the Central Council of the Movement for Colonial Freedom⁵³. The LPO did not encompass all anti-revisionist groups in London and three quarters of its membership were still inside the Communist Party. The shared perspective was that it was not correct to aim at pulling as many members out of the Party as possible but to win as many members of the Communist Party for a Marxist line as possible. Peter Seltman, after initially joining with McCreery and then quickly denouncing the CDRCU strategy, was the (un)acknowledged leader of this grouping, "a very heavy set man, around thirty, a teacher" according to Arthur Evans, who visited Albania with him in the summer of 1964. Peter taught political science at Middlesex Polytechnic, and fellow FORUM activist, Muriel Seltman was Head of Maths at Trent Park College of Education. There were many young anti-revisionist opponents, such as Sean McGonville who established 'New Era Books' in Bath in 1965 to distribute English Language publications from China, and from the Young Communist League, Sam Mauger and Mike Faulkner, who rejected the 'Appeal to All Communists' which argued that the time was right to break ideologically and organisationally with revisionism.

⁴⁹ McCreery (1963) *Destroy the old to build the new!* A Comment on the state, revolution, and the CPGB p13

⁵⁰ Evans (1963) *Against the Enemy*

⁵¹ Forum. Comments on McCreery's Pamphlet, "*Destroy The Old to Build The New*" Typescript 1964

⁵² They did try to work within the confines of the organisation and throughout the Executive Committee's minutes are correspondents whose names were to reappear in the history of the Marxist-Leninist movement in Britain e.g. Ivor Kenna, J. Leatt (January 1964) CP/CENT/EC/09/10; Peter Jordan and Manchanda November 1965 CP/CENT/EC/10/13

⁵³ Central Organisation Department, *The Attack Upon the Party from the So-Called 'Extreme Left'* Communist Party of Great Britain, March 1964

FORUM attacked the CDRCU as a manifestation of "Left Opportunism in the Anti-Revisionist Struggle", the title of a 47-paged duplicated pamphlet produced by the London Political Organisation. McCreery's opponents believed that "the fight to build a Marxist Leninist Party must take place first within the Party itself and extending outside when the conditions of struggle demand it." While they affirmed the objective need for a new Party, they argued that the subjective conditions were absent, and charged McCreery of abandoning the 'battlefield within the Party'. Such an organizational break was only permissible when the anti-revisionist struggle has reached a point when nothing will carry it further except the establishment of a new Party.⁵⁴

The numbers of participants in the anti-revisionist struggle within the CPGB and those outside or expelled from the Party were never that numerous, and suffered from not being united in a single organization. These initial networks of dissidents which emerged within the Communist Party shared a number of important characteristics: they were mainly cadre groups which were small, politically isolated, and sectarian in their near exclusive focus on struggles with the existing revisionist organisation (CPGB).

The Communist Party leadership were not idle in the face of the anti-revisionists activities. An Executive statement in March 1964 said of the Communist Party of China, "their present type of unprincipled polemics do all in their power to encourage splits in various parties... (We) will resolutely deal with any attempts from whatever quarter to disrupt the fighting unity of our party."

What had been permissible within the Party became impermissible. The political struggle was now condemned. Those anti-revisionists within the Party who persisted in arguing politics were expelled. The Party leadership were determined to crush the anti-revisionist opposition:

The McCreery Committee against Revisionism has since made clear its desire - a vain one! - to destroy our Party. ..Our Party has repulsed all previous attempts, whether from the right or the ultra-left to disrupt our unity, discipline, and adherence to Marxism-Leninism and democratic centralism - We shall also repulse the present attack."⁵⁵

In March 1964 the leadership circulated a duplicated listing entitled, "The Attack Upon the Party from the So-Called 'Extreme Left'". Throughout the anti-revisionists struggle, attacks on Party policies were portrayed as an attack on the party, and through the party on the entire international communist movement. Loyalty to the organisation was placed higher than loyalty to principled political analysis and debate: loyalty to the organisation was the criterion by which friends could be distinguished from enemies. Betty Reid laid down the line in *Marxism Today*; the party "will not tolerate association with these people, or failure to fight for our policy when they appear."⁵⁶

The uneven guerrilla struggle undertaken by FORUM members within the Party was doomed. All real avenues of discussion had been closed; the Party press a monopoly weapon used against the anti-revisionists. The anonymity of FORUM designed to avoid a personality following developing amongst anti-revisionists and allow analysis to be judged objectively, offered no protection. All it took was to argue in the manner and

⁵⁴ London Political Organisation. *Left Opportunism in the Anti-Revisionist Struggle*. Undated (1964?)

⁵⁵ *Comment* supplement May 16, 1964 pp III and IV

⁵⁶ Trotskyism in Britain Today. *Marxism Today* September 1964. Interestingly, the internal circular, unlike the *Marxism Today* article, listed Maoist groups.

language of its publications, such as that which described the Labour Party as "Agent and Accomplice of Imperialism", to have 'your cards marked'. Equally, striving to remain in the Party at all cost and to transform it from within, which meant avoiding confrontation with the leadership, would inevitably result in a compromise of Marxist-Leninist principles.

Any attempt to organise and reach out to others was presented as "factionalism", and the answered with removal of the Party card. This was regardless of position in the branch or district: the Finsbury Communist Association original membership was on the branch committee, the Coventry Workers Association was formed by District leaders. Complained at the harsh treatment or expulsion of comrades and you were as likely to receive similar treatment as those in London in Stoke Newington Communist Party Branch.

The question was not when would they be forced out, but why did they tolerate such an unhealthy political existence within the Party for so long? What underlie the analysis of those who remained inside the Communist Party was an assessment of the strength and future development of the anti-revisionists forces. Those around FORUM believed the anti-revisionist struggle to be at a very "primitive stage": As yet the essential task of translating the anti-revisionist struggle from being nothing more than agreement with what the Chinese say into organised practical struggle against the British ruling class and against the revisionists has not began.⁵⁷ But the Party leadership and majority of its rank-and-file had accepted that line embodied in the Party programme more than a decade earlier, and was not prepared to have that questioned.

Undoubtedly the effectiveness of the anti-revisionist resistance was lessened by its divided nature inside, and outside the Communist Party. But that was a fact of life that McCreery and others in the CDRCU were attempting to overcome. McCreery's call for open, public forms of struggle were to gather the Marxist-Leninist forces and isolate the 'revisionist-leading clique' entrenched at the King Street headquarters. Those anti-revisionists around McCreery thought that the isolation of Marxist-Leninist opposition within the CPGB prevented a sufficient consolidation of Marxist-Leninists within the Party prior to the organisational break. It inhibited their development as a cadre force capable of successfully challenging the revisionist politics that dominated the CPGB. With the formation of the CDRCU in November 1963 a nucleus in open opposition to the revisionism in the Party had been consolidated. The attractions of open opposition were clear: it provided a rallying point for the promotion of a clear theoretical and strategic orientation that thwarted the bureaucratic dictat and lack of democratic discussion within the Party.

But in 1963 those around FORUM judged that the opportunities had not been exhausted "to expose to the full the treachery of the leadership" and maintain the perspective that Marxist Leninist forces would develop from "anonymous centres of anti-revisionist activity" developing " increasingly close co-ordination between such groups as a first step towards the formation of a national co-ordinating organisation. As the CDRCU led by McCreery was seen as setting itself up as a political centre, providing leadership to the nascent Marxist Leninist movement, outside of the CPGB, FORUM spent much time and effort attacking CDRCU. The attitude of FORUM was that an organisation of anti-

⁵⁷ Left Opportunism in the Anti-Revisionist Struggle p12

revisionists outside of the revisionist CPGB "must be condemned as diversionary and injurious to the struggle as a whole for a Marxist Leninist party." ⁵⁸

McCreery's opponents were rejecting the analysis that the political arena for the anti-revisionist struggle had shifted. At the beginning of the Sixties the Polemic between the leadership of the Communist Party of China and the CPSU had been conducted in disguised form, artificially polite, often through attacking proxies (either Yugoslavian or Albanian parties) and with the use of pseudonyms. In this situation, anti-revisionist members of the CPGB could engage in struggle and stay within the Party, even if the Party officials prevented effective opposition and refused to allow articles and letters in the party press or speakers in branches to broadcast anti-revisionist views.

Ironically, the moving forces behind FORUM were having their own doubts.

We felt dubious about the positive value of what we were doing in London. Only a small number of people were reading Forum and there was an objection by some other anti-revisionists that a group had taken it upon themselves to produce this journal and, as well, that contributions were not named so that no kudos was attached to the writing. I cannot remember how we kept things anonymous, but it did happen somehow. I remember our amusement when Jack Shapiro told us (in confidence) that Forum was produced by a bunch of workers in Holloway Bus Depot. ⁵⁹

Peter and Muriel Seltman were offered the chance to go and work teaching English or 'polishing' scripts for the Hsinhua News Agency or Peking Radio. The offer came to them through an acquaintance well-known in anti-revisionist circles, Jack Shapiro. Plans were made for departure in July 1965: At the departure dinner the Seltmans were asked if we would go to North Korea instead, What followed involved a short unhappy interlude working in Pyongyang before moving to Beijing to the Friendship Guest House, to live with other foreign 'experts,' just as the Cultural Revolution was unfolding. ⁶⁰

Someone returning from China in 1964, Virginia Penn, a party member of 28 years standing was amazed and horrified to find the extent to which the British party had misinformed and poisoned the minds of its members against China.

I have written a number of letters to the *Daily Worker* and *Morning Star*, which of course were never published. ...in China where every statement and attack made on her by parties and at conferences aboard was published in full. The Chinese Party and government have full confidence that their people can distinguish right from wrong and believe that the only sound basis for Marxist understanding is to know what the arguments are on both sides. ⁶¹

In September 1963 the situation had changed as the CPGB publicly condemned the Communist Party of China. The CPGB secretary John Gollan accused the Chinese Party leadership of being racialist and warmongers. These views were repudiated by all anti-revisionists but demonstrated the CDRCU view that the only way to revive the spirit of

⁵⁸ *Left Opportunism in the Anti-Revisionist Struggle*. Page 45

⁵⁹ Seltman (2010) 68

⁶⁰ See: Muriel Seltman (2010) *What's Left? What's Right? : A Political Journey via North Korea and the Chinese and the Cultural Revolution*.

⁶¹ *The Communist Party of Great Britain in the Anti-China Chorus* 1967 p6

Marxism-Leninism lay not through reform of the CPGB but by politically, and organisationally, challenging the power of the "King Street revisionists".

Those around FORUM had argued that "the only kind of new Party that could arise now would be a self-appointed leadership of the working class very much in the trotskyist tradition -highly theoretical, divorced from the practical experience of the masses and standing above them."⁶² The Joint Committee of Communists returned to this criticism: "Over emphasising and indeed distorting the role and possibilities of leadership, McCreery and his followers concentrated on the creation of a framework for which it was hoped grass-roots support could be won."⁶³

McCreery did see the CDRCU as a nucleus for a party building organisation that would attract the best elements of the CPGB and recruit new revolutionary activists. The idea that the CDRCU would announce the formation of a new party without the work to root it within the industrial working class was a distortion by those who remained outside of it. McCreery's attitude towards the charge of wanting to set up a new party prematurely was given in a letter in December 1963:

In the New Year regular weekly Marxist-Leninist lectures will be organised. a periodical will by then be appearing. Its role will be organisational, agitational, propagandist. -For we are pressing for the establishment of groups in all main industrial centres actively and openly advancing the Dew line, and regular national delegate meetings to hammer out an agreed policy for Britain. This National Council would be advisory during this period of preparation for the establishment of a new, genuine, Marxist-Leninist Party. Not until we have active, self-reliant groups in all main industrial centres can a Party be established."⁶⁴

The division at the very birth of an open political challenge to revisionism in Britain saw a split that was never healed, and the different personalities involved never reconciled. Leading members of the CFB (ML) would still be writing articles nine years later attacking McCreery under a title of "Wrong Tactics".⁶⁵ One of the few historical surveys of the Marxist-Leninist movement published by a participant judged that, The C. D. R. C. U. was a direct response to the subjective needs of a section of the anti-revisionist movement for an instant party, legitimated by international recognition and providing ready-made policies, formulae, and leadership. By the very manner of its origin, by its outlook and aspiration the C.D.R.C U. could not possible have made a positive contribution to party building in Britain.⁶⁶

The author echoed the criticism contained in the CFB (ML)'s predecessors founding document the Joint Committee of Communists Origins and Perspectives. This asserted that the CDRCU "was in essence a continuation of revisionism in the form of the party fetish, asserting organisation above politics'. The arguments were not new: those who stay inside the Communist Party had criticised McCreery's effort as organisational rather than political; as a task carried out by a small group of leaders in an attempt to attract members, rather than an outcome of political building and in response to the needs of political developments which had already taken place.

⁶² *Left Opportunism in the Anti-Revisionist Struggle*. page 20

⁶³ Joint Committee of Communists, Origins and Perspectives, *The Marxist* Autumn 1969 p7

⁶⁴ *The Way Forward* WPPE page 6

⁶⁵ Communist Federation of Britain (ML) *Struggle* May 1972 (No.30)

⁶⁶ 'Revisionism and the British Anti-Revisionist Movement' *Marxist-Leninist Quarterly* No3 Winter 1972/73 p7

The formation of the CDRCU after the Lucas Arms Meeting had been characterised as the consequence of "the irresponsible indiscipline of McCreery". There were vicious attacks on McCreery as a "self-appointed Lenin", "a modern left-opportunist's and little more than "a bourgeois idealist with a veneer of Marxism Leninism". McCreery was charged with having a "dangerous and disruptive influence' and "frankly bourgeois methods, reminiscent of the millionaire press owners' for sinking his personal wealth into the publication of "Vanguard".⁶⁷

Decades later, the rumours and charges reappeared in the memoirs of one political opponent of McCreery:

Some months later, a member of *Vanguard*, H. S., came to see us at home in a very worried state, saying that he had to talk to us because he could trust us. It appeared McCreery was regularly going into the office of *Vanguard* and going through the names and addresses of *Vanguard* subscribers, particularly from the Third World, and making a note of them! This clinched matters for us. We were convinced that he was an agent planted to form a 'flypaper' organisation, called a new Communist Party, in order to get these names and addresses.

How very melodramatic that now sounds, but Cold War paranoia was intense and, although we were definitely small fry and rather ineffectual, it may not have seemed like that to the powers that be, who would want to get their hands on any potential subversives, particularly in the Third World. The only thing we could think of doing as a result of H. S.'s disclosure was to send warnings to every one of our friends in other countries not to send in their names and addresses to *Vanguard*.⁶⁸

There were very strong personal animosities behind the political charges. Those who attack the CDRCU as 'adventurist' and were personally critical of McCreery committed a historical disservice in omitting to give full credit to McCreery for his positive contributions. The criticism contained in the duplicated monthly 'Forum -for Marxist-Leninist inner-party struggle' was sound Marxist critique of the policies of the Communist Party. But it was on the essential question of whether the CPGB could be transformed that FORUM was wrong. What was pernicious to this approach was evident in the report of Sam Mauger on the Communist Party's Congress:

British Communists, no less than other sections of the left, are faced with the problem of taking an attitude to the Labour Government. 'Why has the Labour Government been unable to provide even the basis for solving problems in which not only its own future but the future of the nation is at stake?': this question opens the Political Resolution endorsed overwhelmingly at the Communist Party Congress. The answers to the Government's problems are also phrased along national rather than specifically class lines and further on the Resolution states the necessity of arousing 'the patriotism of the British people' to remove American military bases. Throughout Congress a clear division was made between the 'imperialist' policy of the present and the potentialities of the Labour Party itself within which 'there is a growing revolt against that policy'. The decisive role of the Communist Party is seen in developing its influence on the Labour Party and the trade unions.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ See: *Left Opportunism in the Anti-Revisionist Struggle*.

⁶⁸ Seltman (2010) 63

⁶⁹ *New Left Review* 1/35, January-February 1966

And this emphasis negated anti-revisionist opponents' activity: after their consolidation around FORUM, these anti-revisionists within the Party were gradually isolated and forced out of the CPGB. The anti-revisionist opposition within the Party were too vulnerable to the Party's sanction to operate as an effective alternative to the entrenched King Street leadership. There was no person of national standing that clearly identified with the anti-revisionist argument: as the grip of Party discipline throttled the opportunity for Forum's supporters to operate within the organisation, there was a shift towards new anti-revisionist projects such as *The Marxist* and proliferation of more overtly Maoist groups that made up the second wave of anti-revisionist activism in the latter half of the sixties. By the end of 1967, the vast majority of these initial anti-revisionists had left or been expelled from the CPGB.

It would be true to judge that whilst the CDRCU did mark a new stage in the development of Marxist-Leninist politics in Britain, the failure to sustain its existence after McCreery's departure points to major weaknesses in its political life that reflective not simply a financial dependency but a political reliance. The efforts of Robert Archbold saw that statements and leaflets in the name of the CDRCU continued to be issued but its opportunity had passed as the majority of members went on to other political activity.

The anti-revisionist forces did not seriously threaten the leadership of the Communist Party: those inside the Party were either silenced or expelled. The loss of Party membership was a real deterrent to political opposition. The situation was not as in subsequent years when the Party was the largest of one among many possible political homes. The CPGB was the party of the Left. The leadership had a dismissive attitude towards its political opponents, contempt displayed in a pamphlet, penned by Betty Reid in 1969, entitled *Ultra Leftism in Britain*, and bourgeois commentators were less than complementary in their description of the people who defended Marxism without defeating revisionism.

Right-wing researcher, Peter Shipley described the anti-revisionists as "merely a rump of hard-line Bolshevik and Stalinist traditionalists, mainly intellectuals, a few workers and the impatient young whose views are very much out of favour with the party hierarchy".⁷⁰

Cold War warrior, Ian Greg listed David Volpe, who was better known for his activity on the Irish political scene, as chairman of CDRCU in his 1968 publication, *The Assault on the West*. Like much of the literature produced by the Foreign Affairs Publishing Company his information was inaccurate: the organisation was long defunct despite the charade of the appearance of a duplicated edition of 'Vanguard' published by R. Archibald, formerly of the Irish Communist Organisation.

Paul Noone, the General Secretary of the Working People's Party of England (WPPE), always defended the contribution of McCreery. In an introduction to a collection of McCreery's writings entitled, *The Way Forward: A Marxist-Leninist analysis of the British State, the CPGB and the tasks for revolutionaries*, Noone argued that none had matched McCreery's analysis:

McCreery himself died from cancer in April 1965 after a long illness at the age of 36. This was a great tragedy as he was far ahead of his comrades in political development. Most were still enveloped in ideological, organisational and work-style deficiencies

⁷⁰ Shipley (1976) *Modern Revolutionaries in Britain* Bodley Head p152

inherited from the CPGB. Most really did not know (and still don't) how to take revolutionary initiative; how to develop class struggle at their workplace or in their communities.⁷¹

A favourable, while not uncritical, assessment came from within the newly emergent 'Maoist' movement. The influential analysis on party-building from the Communist Unity Association (ML), "Imperialism and the Struggle for a Revolutionary Party", while discussing the CDRCU's activities and publications in detail, criticises the CDRCU for its lack of a strategy for building a new party. It concludes that "it orientated itself too much towards the revisionists and was unable to rise above simple anti-revisionism." This would seem a harsh judgement given the short life and difficulties that faced the organisation. However the CUA (ML) did defend the CDRCU against the charge of "fetish for the party" advanced by the CFB (ML): in its opinion, the CDRCU's errors were political, "it failed in its attempt to give a lead to the movement but it was correct then and is now to make this attempt."⁷²

Even political opponents of the CPGB recognised that Maoism held an appeal both to industrial militants who looked back to the greater activism of the early 1950s and to those who felt the Communist Party did not give adequate support to the Colonial Revolution - in short, to those who rejected the social democratic path being followed by the Party leadership.⁷³

Scant attention is paid to the CDRCU by one sympathetic historian of the (now defunct) Communist Party. Willie Thompson, formerly on the editorial board of *Marxism Today* during the 1980s, writes of the CDRCU as Maoism "false start" in Britain, "it achieved a second wind in student politics further stimulated from 1967 by the Cultural Revolution in China with its evocations of revolutionary romanticism." Thompson wrongly asserts that McCreery was a New Zealander.⁷⁴ John Callaghan correctly names McCreery as the leader of the CDRCU, in his survey of the British political fringe, in a single sentence reference to a "small split" in 1963.⁷⁵

The CDRCU collapse after McCreery's death in April 1965, showed, in the opinion of the organisation's secretary, Mike Baker,

Important weaknesses were also present in the political framework and organisational structure of the CDRCU. In particular, the failure to establish correct organisational methods of work and correct relations between the Central Committee and the various CDRCU groups must be noted - an error, which later, was to result in the growth of sectarianism in outlook and in the implementation of policy, and to arbitrariness and spontaneity in methods of work and leadership. Above all, it must be recognized that the absence of principled unity amongst the various ML groups outside the CDRCU framework formed an important negative factor inhibiting the development of the CDRCU's political work and the growth and maturity and organisational stability within CDRCU ranks.⁷⁶

⁷¹ *The Way Forward* contained three articles by Michael McCreery – 'Destroy the old to build the new', 'Organise at the place of work' and 'the Way Forward'

⁷² CUA(ML) (1974) *Imperialism and the Struggle for a Revolutionary Party* p22

⁷³ Ian Birchall, 'The British Communist Party 1945-1964' *International Socialism* 50 Jan-March 1972

⁷⁴ Thompson (1992) *The Good Old Cause: British Communism 1920-1991*. Pluto Press p147

⁷⁵ Callaghan (1987) *The Far left in British Politics*. Blackwell p 172

⁷⁶ *Manifesto of the Action Centre for Marxist Leninist Unity*. August 1965

The background to Baker's analysis was his "expulsion" from the CDRCU after pushing for a firm democratic centralist structure with him at the helm. In March 1965 Baker had moved to London from Manchester to fulfil the duties of Political Organiser. His own analysis was of an organisation in bad shape, with arbitrariness and spontaneity in methods of work and leadership. The intention to strengthen the political control of the Central Committee at the expense of the powers "usurped" by the Secretariat -a body originally exercising only organisational functions of a day-to-day character -created an antagonistic atmosphere that saw Baker expelled three months later in June 1965. The issue of the relationship between leaders and the rank and file was to wreck more than one of the Maoist groups that were to emerge in the years following the demise of the CDRCU.

As the first anti-revisionist organisation in Britain, aiming explicitly at party building, it has considerable historical significance for us. The general errors of failing to unify theory with practice and to understand basic party-building tasks continued, after its collapse, to be characteristic of the Marxist-Leninist movement in Britain, in fact, McCreery's attempts to grapple with basic problems was unfortunately not a general feature of the movement for some time after his death.⁷⁷

Too late in the day did opponents of the CDRCU come around to share its conclusion on a key aspect of the anti-revisionist struggle. One time Party prospective Parliamentary candidate, Henderson Brookes was expelled in October 1964 ending membership of the CPGB, which began in 1947. He, and Dick Jones, both members of Coventry City Party Committee had been charged with anti-Party activity since 1961. Prominent figures in the anti-revisionist movement, Brookes and Jones were instrumental in the formation of the Organisation for the Defence of Marxism-Leninism, predecessor of the Coventry Workers Association; they published an analysis that argued:

Many comrades have fought against the policy of the leadership of the CPGB for several years, from inside the ranks of the Party...[They have] either been expelled or have become disillusioned and have finished with politics. Some comrades are still struggling inside the Party, but their fate will be the same as the others. The Coventry group of Marxists Leninists are convinced that the leadership and policies of the CPGB cannot be defeated from inside the organisation."⁷⁸

On the flanks, outside of the new party-building tendencies but sharing activists, there were other struggles generated by the Sino-Soviet split. The Communist Party had promoted from 1948, and controlled, the *British-China Friendship Association* (BCFA) and it reflected the tension and arguments being fought out inside the Communist Party. These came to ahead at the 1964 Annual General Meeting held in the Connaught Rooms, Great Queen Street, London. An organisation of a few dozen saw hundreds of new members join as voting fodder. Jack Shapiro, recently returned from a visit to China, countered the anti-China statements launched by R. Palme Dutt at the 1963 Annual General Meeting of the Britain-China Friendship Association. The AGM had been 'rigged' by obtaining a vast number of Dutt's followers to come on the day to become members and swamp the voting. Anti-revisionist CP member Ivor Kenna recalled,

⁷⁷ CUA (ML) *Imperialism and the Struggle for a Revolutionary Party* p22.

⁷⁸ *On Minimum Conditions necessary for the formation of a Marxist Leninist Party in Britain*. Undated (1965?)

The British CP went so far as describing the Chinese CP as racist. This produced a crisis within BCFA. A motion was put down for the 1964 AGM saying that China was not racist and the CP drafted hundreds of leading members into BCFA.

An anti-China member moved next business on the 'China not racist motion' to stop it being taken. The involvement of CP headquarters was suspected and next business was carried by about 200 to 100. There was uproar. However it was a pyrrhic victory for those who supported the CP line. The China traders, the old China hands and scholars and the pro-China communists were indignant and numerous other pro-China groups were set up. Prominent amongst these was the Friends of China group"⁷⁹

FRIENDS OF CHINA

February 5 1967 saw the inaugural meeting in London of "Friends of China" attended by about 300. Policy statements were read out by familiar activists on the London Maoist scene: Manchanda, its secretary Dave Volpe, and Ebrahim , an exiled member of the Pan Africanist Congress.

The Chinese news agency, *Hsinhua*, reported that more than a hundred attended a film showing of "The Great Victory of Mao TseTung's Thought" organised by the London Committee of Friends of China:

"A few provocateurs attacked China in their remarks but their reactionary fallacies immediately met with angry rebuff from other participants. Some of them retorted by reading aloud some quotations from Chairman Mao. "⁸⁰

A public meeting of Friends of China adopted a resolution that stressed the "glorious victory of China's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution is the great victory of the Thought of Mao TseTung and Chairman Mao's proletarian revolutionary line and is a great inspiration and powerful support to the revolutionary people of the world. ...the great brilliant light of the thought of Mao TseTung, Marxism-Leninism of the present era, is illuminating the path of world revolution. "⁸¹

The wording in such resolutions indicate a desire to be reported in *Hsinhua* news despatches rather than reach out and promote friendship with China. The identification of British Marxist-Leninists with China saw such absorption with Chinese political events that resulted in the spectacle of British marxists selling a pro-China Hong Kong Chinese language newspaper around the streets of London's Chinatown. The phraseology and concerns of Britain's Maoists in the late Sixties did not help develop a communist current in line with the specific and actual circumstances of the working class they praised so loudly. *Hsinhua* quotes a "British friend" response to the showing of the film "Chairman Mao with a million members of the Cultural revolutionary army", " at the inspiring moments when I saw the masses cheering 'Long Live Chairman Mao' I had a lump in my

⁷⁹ Sinophile-40 years on By Flo and Ivor Kenna, *China Eye* (Summer 2005) No.6 21-22pp. See also Derek Bryan's account in

China Now 51, April 1975

⁸⁰ *Hsinhua* News Bulletin. July 201967.

⁸¹ *Hsinhua* News Bulletin. August 271968.

throat and my eyes were filled with tears and I also wanted to shout with the Red Guards: "Long Live Chairman Mao! ' ⁸²

The lack of an industrial base for the majority of Marxist Leninists throughout the 60s and 70s is perhaps not surprising. The Cult of Mao was a genuine heartfelt response, the waving of the red covered booklet of revolution, the Little Red Book and the wearing of shining badges bearing Mao's portrait was evidence of the complete submergence into the political agenda of the Chinese Cultural revolution. Henderson Brookes described Mao as the "living personification of marxism-leninism", as the "true heir of Marx...the most respected leader of the international Marxist-Leninist movement". This attitude towards Mao was common to all Western Maoists; that the demi-god status of Mao may have actually detracted from the political integration with a working class that existed within an imperialist-dominated culture was an issue not addressed.

British communist, Jack Shapiro, remained an active 'Friend of China' until his death in January 2010, aged 93. He recalled the reaction to the attacks at the AGM.

"Disgusted with such tactics a number of us formed the Friends of China. Many of us soldiered on for three years and issued various publications and bulletins giving news of events in China. When SACU was first mooted we all joined in making its launch a success. Most of the people who worked in the Friends of China continued to work for SACU. Some of the leading figures in SACU over the past twenty years bridged their friendship with China from the BCFA through the Friends of China and continued uninterruptedly to work for friendship with China"

An obituary for former diplomat and University teacher, Derek Bryan acknowledges his quiet but influential role, as Founding Secretary, along with

Joseph Needham, the historian of Chinese science, in setting up the Society for Anglo-Chinese Understanding. Though its efforts to understand the cultural revolution (1966-76) were doomed to failure, it kept an important link open, and, for a time, provided the only way of visiting China. ⁸³

There is also "his talented Chinese wife Liao Hongying", equally constructive in "building bridges, as a teacher and publicist" as a friend of China. There were numerous individuals from business men like Jack Perry and Roland Berger, Professor Joan Robinson, Alan and Betty Paterson who selflessly contributed to the work of the friendship association.

SACU - the *Society for Anglo-Chinese Understanding* - was launched at Church House, Westminster on 15 May 1965 and soon achieved a membership of about 1,500 and acquired a national office at Warren Street. The BCFA's mainly inactive membership dropped to 80 and folded with the death of its secretary, and Communist Party member, Jack Dribben. With the formation of a new friendship organisation, the Society for Anglo-Chinese Understanding, these Friends of China group subsequently dissolved with most of the people continuing to work for SACU that provided a focus for many progressive, non-aligned Sinophiles and while those politically committed were active within SACU, the organisation was never politically dominated by any single

⁸² Hsinhua Jan 1st 1967

⁸³ John Gittings, *The Guardian* October 3, 2003

organisation.⁸⁴ This was fortunate for the Sinophiles given the experience of the various “Friends of China” groups set up by those whose main inspiration was expressing their support in the ideological struggle against revisionism.

A separate but related move saw , from 1964, until its demise in 1982, *the China Policy Study Group*, sustained by the work of Colin and Virginia Penn, provided an anti-revisionist ‘friendly understanding’ of China’s situation and policy concerns through its monthly four paged ‘Broadsheet’. It drew upon a cohort of pro-China intellectuals as in its public lecture, and subsequent pamphlet, ‘*Marxism in China Today*’ given by Professor George Thompson of Birmingham University, in March 1965⁸⁵. Thompson later authored two popular expositions on Marxism published by the China Policy Study Group: *From Marx to Mao Tse-tung: a study in revolutionary dialectics* (1971); and *Capitalism and After: the rise and fall of commodity production* (1973). A number of younger Maoist-inclined academics also contributed over time to the Broadsheet, amongst them, Sean Sayer , Jitendra Mohan, Robert Biel, and Jenny Clegg, daughter of former Daily Worker editor, Arthur Clegg, who remained around anti-revisionist circles until his death in February 1994.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ The main objectives of the Society for Anglo- Chinese Understanding were;- a) To promote and advance the education of the public in all aspects of China and the Chinese people. b) To promote and advance the education of the Chinese people in all aspects of Great Britain and the British people. It remains active today : <http://www.sacu.org/>

⁸⁵ The pamphlet is a slightly expanded form of a lecture first given on March 15, 1965 under the auspices of the China Policy Study Group.

⁸⁶ George Mathews wrote his obituary for *The Independent* (16 February 1994),

Second Wave

There were attempts to politically re-group anti-revisionists. In September 1965, a majority of the CDRCU members, some delegates of the Northern and Welsh groups of the CDRCU, regrouped at a Conference in Manchester. The consolidation of northern members was led by Mike Baker the CDRCU secretary in its final days, alienating much of the London supporters. The new organization, called the Action Centre for Marxist Leninist Unity, echoing the name of the McCreery-led CDRCU, had been formed with the aim of preparing for the convening of a conference of Marxist-Leninist Unity and initiated a series of "unifying" meetings chaired by William Bland in April 1966. Mike Baker had been he was elected Secretary and editor of its official organ, *Hammer and Anvil*.

The ACMLU, working with Manchanda (who was suspended from the Communist Party in November 1965), had invited Reg Birch to chair. This was attacked by Bernard Clifford, of the Irish Communist Organization, on the not unreasonable grounds that what evidence was there that Reg Birch should be considered an anti- revisionist. He had not known to have engaged in anti-revisionist struggle until the Communist Party support Hugh Scanlon in preference to Birch as Presidential candidate for the engineering union. The ACMLU failed to organise a second meeting, instead embarked upon a different course from "unifying the movement".

In April 1967 a preparatory committee for a conference of Marxist-Leninist Unity was initiated which culminated in the formation of the Marxist-Leninist Organization of Britain, on the weekend of September 9-10 1967. The Action Centre for Marxist-Leninist Unity had a high profile in the early days of the anti-revisionist movement, not least because of the energy and arrogance of Mike Baker, now secretary of MLOB. He displayed this with customary bravo and declared that communists who did not support the MLOB in the very near future would become agents of the class enemy. The MLOB published the journals *Red Front* and *Vanguard* (later renamed *Class Against Class*).

In addition to his activities in the MLOB, Mike Baker and other members of the group, notably his co-worker and wife, Maureen Scott, were active from August 1971 in the League of Socialist Artists (LSA).⁸⁷ John Walker argues that:

Despite their left-wing rhetoric, in certain respects the LSA artists were conservatives: they believed in representation not abstraction, employed traditional techniques such as painting and drawing, accepted art galleries as places to display work and the necessity for artists to make a living by selling their products as commodities.⁸⁸

Based at 18 Church Street, Camberwell ,The Communard Gallery, until 1975 provided the exhibition space where they exhibited their own work, delivered lectures, published the poetry of the Turkish Communist Nazim Hikmet , **The Wall** ,with illustrations by Scott, sold posters of Marx, Lenin and Stalin and generally promoted the cause of socialist realism.⁸⁹ Amongst the titles they published was the 1973 polemic, "Liberal

⁸⁷ Maureen Scott (b. 1940, Coventry), trained at Plymouth College of Art, Goldsmiths' and St Martin's ; Bernard Charnley (b. 1948), a graphic artist who studied at Leeds College of Art; and Mike Baker (1927- 90).

⁸⁸ Walker, (2002) Left Shift : Radical Art in 1970s Britain. London : I. B. Tauris p51

⁸⁹ See Walker for discussion of their cultural endeavours.

populism or revolutionary proletarian realism in art?": a reply to John Weber of the Chicago Mural Movement and in 1976, the illustrated book, **Class War in the Arts!**

While still a member of the CPGB, William Bland had become associated with ACMLU. He contributed to *Hammer or Anvil* from its first issue of November 1965 using the name of 'W.Steele', reflecting his 'Stalinist' persuasion. Born on April 28th 1916, Bland paid a visit to the Soviet Union at the age of 21, in 1937, and thereafter dedicated his entire life and activity to the advancement of socialism. He was Chairman of the MLOB and in the period 1967 to 1974 drafted a number of reports for the MLOB, including on the cultural revolution in China, and on the 'centrist' parties of North Korea, Vietnam, Cuba and the Communist Party of India (Marxist).

Shortly after the "Great Cultural Proletarian Revolution", an MLOB comrade returned from China and reported that the "party was being destroyed". Bland was instructed to investigate the charges. While the '*Report on the Situation in The People's Republic of China*'⁹⁰ contradicts most agreed propositions on political development within China, the argument it contained identified a "revisionist group around Mao Tse-Tung from at least 1935" as the source of China's woes.

Upon an open discussion of the original 'Report on the Situation in The People's Republic of China' at Conway Hall, and the questions and discussion – the organisation was riven and a much smaller fragment was left to continue the MLOB. While the MLOB achieved some notoriety in January 1968 with their publication the MLOB was similar to a number of other European anti-revisionists who could not accept the maoist critique, including Jacques Grippa in Belgium and the Centre Marxist-Leninist de France. This argument was extended when the MLOB under Baker repeated its argument adding that, after the "Cultural Revolution", the demise of the "heir apparent, Lin Biao", and the unmasking of the "Gang of Four", all power has been concentrated in the hands of the army, who rule on behalf of the national capitalist class. ...In short, China is a state-capitalist country, basically of the same type as that of the Soviet Union, but with a different class structure and state apparatus."⁹¹

The MLOB regarded Maoist groups as left revisionist organisations which objectively, served the interests of world imperialism, describing Maoism as a "revisionist perversion of Marxism-Leninism disguised by "leftist" phraseology"⁹². It declared that: "the faction headed by Mao Tse-Tung came to represent the interests of the pro-US ex-landlords and comprador capitalists", repeating its analysis that "the cultural revolution represented a counter-revolution" and established their repressive military dictatorship".⁹³

As far as the MLOB was concerned, they saw themselves partially as the victims of "the Foreign Ministry and diplomatic service of the People's Republic of China [that] were already dominated by counter-revolutionary agents of the Chinese capitalist class long before the "cultural revolution" began."⁹⁴ The MLOB could explain events in Britain as a

⁹⁰ 'Report of the Central committee of the MLOB on The Situation in The People's Republic of China' *Red Front* Special edition, January 1968.

⁹¹ *From Revolution through Counter-Revolution* to the consolidated rule of the national Capitalist class in China. 1977 pii

⁹² See: *Combat* August 1976

⁹³ *Combat* December 1975 :85

⁹⁴ See: Report of the Central Committee of the M.L.O.B. On the Situation in the People's Republic of China. London: *Red Front*, January 1968

result of intrigues against them and in favour of all the elements seeking to disrupt the developing Marxist-Leninist Organisation. After all, no mention was made in the bulletins of the Hsinhua News Agency of the Action Centre for Marxist-Leninist Unity, nor of the Conference of Marxist-Leninist Unity held in September 1967, nor of the Marxist-Leninist Organisation of Britain set up by that Conference.

Accusations and mistrust in the cockpit of the London Anti-revisionism was very evident as Muriel Seltman recalled in her memoirs,

“A major reason for deciding to go to China was that we would escape the petty hostilities of the ‘anti-revisionist’ movement. Here, there were a lot of left-wing groups which were forming and re-forming as rivalries came and went, and there seemed no escape as we had played a major part in this tiny pond up till then. Just to decamp and go to China seemed like a wonderful escape.”⁹⁵

Events could be explained through a conspiracy prism thus “It is clearly no accident that J. Zamler, who was expelled, from the Preparatory Committee of the Conference of Marxist-Leninist Unity for factional and disruptive activity, was closely associated with both Ash and the representatives of the People’s Republic of China in London”.

Furthermore, “Certain diplomatic representatives of the People’s Republic of China in London went so far as to disseminate verbally slanderous attacks against certain of the leading members of the A.C.M.L.U. and later of the M.L.O.B.”⁹⁶ The disruptive manoeuvres were obvious to the comrades of the MLOB : At the time the Action Centre and later the MLOB were “sincerely, although mistakenly” in support of Mao Tse-tung, yet , except on one occasion ,no invitations to receptions and film-shows at the Office of the Chinese Charge d’ Affaires were extended to leading members of the A.C.M.L.U. or M.L.O.B. And people who had long been on the official invitation list of the Chinese Charge d’ Affaires office were dropped from it as soon as their membership in the M.L.O.B. became known.

According to the MLOB,

“In general, the office of the Charge d’ Affaires and the Hsinhua News Agency gave support and publicity respectively to “broad organisations” of friendship with China, such as the “Society for Anglo-Chinese Understanding, Ltd.” and the “Friends of China”. The latter organisation, led by opportunists like D. Volpe and A. Manchanda, is, in fact, not so much an organisation of friendship with China as one to foster support for the faction headed by Mao Tse-tung; it functions, therefore, as a propaganda arm of the Chinese capitalist class in Britain, and also, through its “leftist”, “revolutionary” pronouncements, as a net to catch anti-revisionists and divert them from the developing Marxist-Leninist Organisation of Britain.”⁹⁷

Gaining “recognition” was a time-consuming vanity project for some activists, partly seduced by the euphoria of revolutionary opposition. Good relationships with the office of the Charge d’ Affaires and the Hsinhua News provided access to material, prestige and a reflective political vindication. There was another side to the relationship as Muriel Seltman later observed:

⁹⁵ Seltman (2010) *What’s Left? What’s Right?* p67.

⁹⁶ On the Situation in the People’s Republic of China. *Red Front*, January 1968

⁹⁷ Ditto

Like others in the so-called Anti-Revisionist Movement, we regularly visited the Chinese Legation for talks on the progress of the 'struggle' in England. There was an element of competitiveness in this, each small group vying for the honour of 'recognition.' Again, we did not realise that the personnel at the legation were using us for their own advancement and their political fortunes and jobs depended upon the degree to which they could convince their superiors they were recruiting support in England for the Chinese Party. They were probably assessing the likeliest "winners" in the stakes for a new Communist Party. Everybody behaved correctly, of course, but at this time we had no idea that claiming support from abroad was part of the power struggle in China."⁹⁸

Maybe MLOB had a point. Although the denunciation of Mao disqualified themselves as "Maoists", Bland thought that Enver Hoxha was still a Marxist despite what Hoxha said in praise of People's China and Mao. Their contribution to the British Maoist movement was negligible once they "went against the stream" in 1967, but they remained prolific publishers of material.

In 1973-74, tensions within the MLOB led to Baker seizing the press and literature. Mike Baker was expelled from the MLOB on November 13th 1974. Part of the charges against him included reference to his "left-sectarian" orientation, his "use of counter-productive virulent personal abuse at meetings involving other organisations and in published statements about them" and "serious flaws in his psychological outlook". The reasons for the split included the characterisation of the People's Socialist Republic of Albania. Bland argued it remained socialist under Hoxha; Baker initially rejecting it as a revisionist state. At that time, the adherence to Baker or Bland took the shape of adherence or otherwise to Hoxha and a pro-Party of Labour of Albania position.

The Spring of 1968 saw supporters of the Mao Tse-tung Thought" began to assert influence in the Albanian Society in a campaign directed against the Society's secretary. As Bland recalled:

"as soon as the MLOB changed its line, all the Maoists in the Society who had previously been active and supportive began to demand that Bland go on the grounds that my organisation, to which I belonged, had published a report which was anti-Mao Tse Tung and therefore anti-Albanian, and therefore I shouldn't any longer be allowed to be secretary of the Albanian Society. Instead they organised a faction within the society to get rid of Bland, and at the next AGM they organised a miniature cultural revolution in the Society. The chairman at that time was a Maoist called Berger, she wrote articles on wine, her husband was a leading member of the friendship society with China. They organised this sort of cultural revolution at the AGM whereby a lot of people who had never been members of the Society before appeared and demanded the right to vote, and Berger as chairman ruled that they had the right to vote because we were a democratic society and therefore anyone who walked in off the street to vote should be allowed to vote. This was "the masses speaking" you see. Unfortunately they hadn't got quite enough people to outvote the other members, and our members didn't agree with this particular line that it was reasonable grounds for sacking me, and so they lost the vote and I got re-elected as secretary and the Maoists walked out."⁹⁹ The pro-China elements eventually

⁹⁸ Seltman (2010) *What's Left? What's Right?*_p67

⁹⁹ J.P. Interview with Bill Bland, London, July 10th 1994

re-grouped to form their "New Albanian Society" around the CPB (ML) which functioned with full and official support from Albania until its abrupt dissolution in 1978.

Of those who had not joined the Action Centre for Marxist-Leninist Unity down its path to Tirana, a group in Islington founded the "Islington Workers' Committee", which in January 1966 became the "London Workers' Committee". The London Workers Committee that had been associated with the anti-revisionist CDRCU, but the claim to be the political successors of McCreery -to the extent of reprinting a selection of his writings in pamphlet form: "*The Way Forward*" was never fulfilled in the organisation's political practice.

The October Organising Committee Conference of October 1st 1967 was mainly the initiative of those active around ex-CPGB member Alex Hart's London Workers Committee, publisher of the London Workers Broadsheet. It led to the inaugural congress of the Working Peoples Party of England [WPPE] on May 4/5 1968 with Alex Hart as the chair of the organisation and Rod Lee the general secretary. Lee resigned by the end of the year to be replaced by Paul Noone, a founding member of the Junior Hospital Doctors' Association. Public members of the organisation were: John O'Dowd, Gillian & Michael Mouzouros, Malcolm Alexander, and Paul Noone & Davie Deans. The Working People's Party of England traced their political lineage direct to the CDRCU and devised five main organisational principles:

- Serving the people
- Uniting all who can be united against the main enemy
- Active members only
- Maximum initiative for members
- All officials subject to immediate recall by members

In May 1966 the Workers' Party of Scotland was established with seven founding members, formerly of the Scottish committee of the CDRCU. Arguing that the level of class antagonisms (and hence class consciousness) continued to remain higher in Scotland than in England, the decision in principle to form the WPS(ML) on the behalf of the Scottish working class was taken in Edinburgh in May 1966. The Scottish elements of the CDRCU were placed on a separate organisational basis. Newspaper reports of "membership of around 60" were an exaggeration.¹⁰⁰ It remained a small group.

Scottish Vanguard, the publication of the WPS (ML), was launched in September 1966 in the wake of the CDRCU collapse. Archbold deplored this move in the name of the CDRCU and accused the Edinburgh group of acting arbitrarily before fully debating the national question within the parent organisation.¹⁰¹ Furthermore,

members of W.P.S. have acted arbitrarily before fully debating the national question within this committee. In consequence of these actions and the motives underlying, having severed themselves from C.D.R.C.U. they can only be viewed as deviationists, for these actions will serve to temporarily divert and isolate the Scottish workers from ultimately uniting with their class brothers in England and Wales for their final aim, the overthrow of the British capitalist state to then replace it with a British Socialist Republic.

¹⁰⁰ Reg McKay, Scotland's Most Dangerous. *Daily Record* October 17 2007

¹⁰¹ The national question and the struggle for socialism in Britain: A statement by the Glasgow Communist Movement. *The Marxist* No. 12 Autumn 1969: 21-24

This is the only possible form of nation to come into being from, and be made possible by a moribund capitalist state such as ours.¹⁰²

The WPS (ML) was focused, less on its past than on its immediate tasks: our programme is one of action. We must secure the results which our workers have been striving to attain for whole generations and which are still outside their grasp: full employment and prosperity for all a crash programme to solve the housing problem, justice for the veterans of labour and attractive prospects in Scotland for our youth.

The WPS (ML) constitution was adopted in Edinburgh on December 5th 1970, and the party embarked upon a propaganda offensive producing leaflets and briefly two additional publications, *the Red Clydsider*, and *Dundee and Tayside Vanguard* in 1971. A Bookshop, 'Vanguard Books' on the south side of Glasgow acted as outlets for Marxist and Party literature.

The WPS (ML) was also instrumental in popularising the work of Scottish communist, John MacLean partly through the founding of the John MacLean Society. WPS Chairman, Tom Murray reported that an anonymous Gaelic scholar is considering undertaking the translation of 'The Thoughts of Chairman Mao'¹⁰³

The Party achieved notoriety in the spring of 1972 when two WPS members -Colin Lawson and Matt Lygate -and non-party persons were sentenced for robbery with violence of Glasgow banks to obtain money for political action.

The politically motivated crime – to finance the revolution through a series of robberies – saw Matt Lygate, a bookseller of previous good character who defend himself at the trial receive 24 years, Lawson , a former monk in a closed order before training as a psychiatric nurse , got 6 years. McPherson, a professional gambler got 26 years and Ian Doran, a second-hand car dealer got 25 years.

The Daily Record described Doran as “from a well-established Glasgow crime family, a professional hit man, wanted by Scotland Yard for a murder in Soho.”¹⁰⁴ These sentences of over twenty years imprisonment were at a time when the average sentenced for non-political robbery was 8 years; so “8 years for bank robbery and 16 for politics”. The sentenced Imposed by Lord Dunpark was confirmed at appeal. While protesting at the severity of the sentences, and noting the political function of the judiciary, the main thrust of a statement issued by the WPS (ML)'s Central Committee "A Crisis Met and Overcome" was to disassociate the Party from the "romantic adventurism of Lygate and Lawson. The statement stated clearly that such actions were never, nor would have been "authorised by the Party leadership."

Certain revelations at the High Court trial referred to came as a grave shock to our members generally and we must be perfectly frank and where appropriate, candidly self-critical. Apart from certain allegations against our members, Matt Lygate and Colin Lawson, which were accepted by the jury as proof of guilt, our Party was distressed to find that these two comrades had for many months successfully deceived their comrades in the Central Committee in relation to what amounted to factional activities. They seriously misused, without any authority from the Party, the Vanguard Books premises in

¹⁰² STATEMENT: The Committee To Defeat Revisionism For Communist Unity and the Workers Party of Scotland September 1967. *C.D.R.C.U. Bulletin*, No. 1

¹⁰³ *The Times* April 25, 1970

¹⁰⁴ Reg McKay, Scotland's Most Dangerous. *Daily Record* October 17 2007

Glasgow and they maintained a close association with non-party persons for purposes contrary to the Party's interests.

Over 30 years after the event, there was press speculation that the robberies could have been stopped before anything happened. A *Daily Record* reporter claimed that fellow WPS ML member Steven Niven had informed Edinburgh CID of the plans: Chief Super Ronald Clancy listened to the young man's talk of armed revolutionaries, then politely dismissed his claims as 'fanciful'. Further attempts to interest the authorities were equally dismissed until, after the bank robberies in which a shotgun was fired, they acted, late in 1971, upon an anonymous phone call and raided the Glasgow bookshop discovering weapons and £10,000 cash. Arrests were made. The 1972 trial saw five charges of armed robbery; very little of the proceeds went on funding the revolution: "it was spent on supporting McPherson and Doran's lifestyles."¹⁰⁵

A "Free Matt Lygate Campaign" was established a short while prior to his release in 1983. Lygate returned to militant politics: I came out my own man, not institutionalised, not broken. I think the authorities tried to get me to crack but I didn't and I never made any secret of my politics. My basic tenets remain the same.¹⁰⁶

The politics of the WPS (ML) were politically challenged by another Maoist element, the Glasgow Communist Movement, a component of the Joint Committee of Communist. The birth of the Glasgow Communist Movement, initially known as the Glasgow Marxist Group, was celebrated with the production and distribution on May Day, 1967, of a pamphlet introducing *The Marxist* in Glasgow. It was around the journal that the participants of the first meeting of the group assembled together.¹⁰⁷

Critical of the WPS (ML), grouping them with the "petty-bourgeois nationalism" represented by the Scottish Nationalist Party and the Welsh Nationalist Party, their stance on the struggle for Scottish independence was informed by the position that any struggle which is not a part of class-struggle is a dangerous distraction from real issues and, therefore, has to be vigorously opposed. The GCM argued:

The bourgeois democratic revolution, as Lenin pointed out, was completed here ages ago and thus the democratic development of nations in Britain has long since ceased. Bourgeois democracy in this country is now in process of rapid decay and a corporate state is developing instead. All that can be achieved through bourgeois democracy has been achieved in Britain. So to proceed towards socialism there is no intermediate stage of People's Democracy' or 'National Democracy' for Britain - here all problems of revolution are those of direct transition to socialism.¹⁰⁸

The GCM policy statement, *Where We Stand*, stated it "recognises that the degree of exploitation is different in England, Scotland and Wales. These places also have cultural differences and aspirations for independent development. Therefore the Movement, while

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ After a brief flirtation with the Scottish Republican Socialist party, who initiated the "Free Matt Lygate Campaign with the Glasgow Irish Freedom Action Committee [GIFAC] and the Revolutionary Communist Group, Matt Lygate, did try to revive a WPS (without the ML) producing in 1988 a publication, "*The People's Voice*" repeating the old WPS (ML) call for a Constitutional convention and advocated a Unilateral Declaration of Independence for Scotland.

¹⁰⁷ Report from the Glasgow Communist Movement *The Marxist* Volume 1 Number 7 Summer 1968:24-25

¹⁰⁸ The national question and the struggle for socialism in Britain

A statement by the Glasgow Communist Movement *The Marxist* No. 12 Autumn 1969: 21-24

standing for immediate separate administrative bodies for each of these places and proclaiming their right to secede, will not advocate separate working class organisations for these places at present. For, national aspirations for independence can only be satisfied after the replacement of the present system by a socialist one through unified struggle against the common enemy constituting a single class.”¹⁰⁹

The classic arguments on self-determination, complete with quotes from Stalin on the national question were reiterated by C K Maisels, writing in *The Marxist*, that the WPS (ML) was wrong; the only strategic remedy can only be the direct transition to socialism via the proletarian revolution. There is no intermediate stage in metropolitan imperialist countries.¹¹⁰ The implication was of organising a singular revolutionary organisation throughout Britain to complete that task was a position he retained in later membership of Communist Organisation in the British Isles.

¹⁰⁹ The national question and the struggle for socialism in Britain

¹¹⁰ C K Maisels, Nationalism and the Proletarian Revolution *The Marxist* No.15, Autumn 1970: 15-19e: EROL

Party Loyalty, Expulsion & new beginnings

If you were a member of the London district of the Communist Party in 1967, you would have been shown a letter at branch meetings and be expected to sign that it had been read and that you approved it. The statement condemned *The Marxist* as a disruptive little sect who have emerged to claim a virtual monopoly of Marxist understanding. Like all sectarian groups, they want the movement to go back to square one and start anew under their leadership.¹¹¹

The Marxist, in reply, called for study and debate of the issues involved. There was not much chance of that: the party machine invoked inquisitional committees of inquiry and applied the pressure of party loyalty to sustain wavers' organisational allegiance. By the time the first issue of *The Marxist* appeared in November 1966, the line of the Communist Party had been firmly aligned in the November 1965 Executive Committee statement: Our Chinese comrades are attempting to repudiate some of the most important new and correct developments which have occurred in the last few years in the international communist movement.

Those around the journal could not be dismissed lightly for they had a proven record of Party service. The first editorial board included a recent member of the Party's Executive Committee, trade union leader Reg Birch; Tom Hill, member since 1945 and an AEU convenor of shop stewards; Colin Penn, well known architect and party member since 1938; Jim Kean, engineer worker and party member since 1949, Mike Faulkner, a YCL member since 1956 who served on the Party's National student Committee; Ewan MacColl, a long time-Party cultural worker. Yet *The Marxist* itself was seen with some suspicion over its "bourgeois backing" (the financial support of business people, such as Jack Perry and the 48 Group, long associated with trade with China).¹¹²

Those around *The Marxist* repeated the same error as the earlier inner-party opposition associated with FORUM; was it a "collective organiser" to be a British Iskra and build a movement, or a journal of analysis and discussion (an anti-revisionist journal unaligned to any specific group). In the absence of a political strategy, divisions emerged within the year as Reg Birch and supporters were involved in their own political strategy of creating a new communist party. On the important matter of the way forward, the dominant view was one that foresaw the unity of groups coming out of engaging in practice together. The Editorial Board of the journal, by 1968 was dominated by the Brent Workers Association, which was associated with Tom Hill and Frank Huscroft.

The Marxist remained the publication of the renamed Brent Industrial Group based on a nucleus of North London engineering workers, through organisational name changes – the Marxist Industrial Group and The Marxist Publications. When the BWA did surface again within the movement it was regarded as on the national chauvinistic side of the arguments calling for "import controls" to aid the restructuring of industry in 1981 and supported the national defence line in the arguments over the "Three Worlds Theory". In the 21st century they acquired an Internet presence, realworldmarxism.org .

¹¹¹ "THE MARXIST:" A statement by the London District Secretary of the Communist Party January 1967

¹¹² See: <http://www.48groupclub.org> for an account of the trading relationship with China.

The original anti-revisionist impetus of the first wave might have ultimately stalled if it had not been rejuvenated by the second wave of activism fuel by the radicalised youth. These were drawn from a number of sources – student members of the Revolutionary Socialist Students Federation (RSSF)¹¹³, youth from the Young Communist League (YCL), and activists who were radicalized in the Schools Action Union (SAU) – all determined to form a revolutionary party. The YCL was the youth group of the CPGB. The RSSF was a radical national student group launched in June 1968 to unite revolutionary-minded students across the UK. Formed in London in January 1969, the SAU's basic demand was for students to have a say in how schools were run.

Schools Action Union

In London, the Schools Action Union (SAU) was formed on 4 Jan 1969 at a meeting attended by members of the Free Schools Campaign, Secondary School Students Union and various regional groups. The Schools Action Union basic demand was for students to have a say in how schools were run. The radical student members argued that “democracy in schools can only exist when we have democracy in society”.

Given the rapid turnover in student membership, it did not have a stable leadership. The SAU was not a Marxist-Leninist group, although members self-consciously describing themselves as Maoist or anti-revisionist Marxist-Leninist. These were prominent in its leadership but even so, many Young Communist League members were active in the SAU. Julius Robinson, the London YCL Schools Organiser, was the London Chair of the SAU in 1970, for example. According to a chronicler of the YCL, “many schools were unorganised and even where there were members of either the NUSS or the SAU, there was rarely a coherent leadership. The SAU's increasingly sectarian approach inevitably divorced it from the bulk of school students and led many activists into the blind alley of challenging authority per se, rather than building on genuine mass issues of concern. The YCL took the view that “strikes should only be called if they are well organised and if other methods have failed to realise just demands.”¹¹⁴

The Maoist students argued that if there was a good party, it would be the vanguard organisation of all sectors of the masses including school students. However, in the absence of such a party, SAU should be that vanguard for school students not the revisionist communist Party. The SAU newspaper was called ‘Vanguard’. The first issue was produced by the London Secondary School Student Union before the formation of the Schools Action Union (SAU), issues 2-3 were produced by the London SAU. Typical of the rhetoric of Vanguard was the oft-used slogan “Smash the Dictatorship of the Head”. From issue 4 onwards ‘Vanguard’ was adopted as the national journal of SAU. Prior to this, Rebel had been published with its ‘schools report’ column from individual schools highlighting injustice and pupil power.

¹¹⁴ Graham Stevenson , The YCL 1966-1980 - anatomy of decline
<http://graham.thewebtailor.co.uk/archives/000044.html>

The organisation reflected a heady activism: devising a national and regional structure drew up a list of demands, draft action plan presented to the London Region conference by South London SAU, SAU national manifesto and constitution, list of 'Schools in [London] Borough groups', schools charter, Secondary School Students Union draft constitution.

As part of a campaign for genuinely comprehensive education, the SAU organised a demonstration in June 1969 to Dulwich College, a selective school in South London, to test the openness of its 'Open Day'. It also called a strike for the last day of the Christmas term in 1969. The SAU cell at St. Dunstan's College (SDC) in Catford was pictured in Peace News interrupting the Headmaster with shouts of "rubbish" at St. Dunstan's College Speech Day 1970.

It faced opposition from within schools; five school students at Kingsdale School in London were expelled after the 1969 SAU Christmas strike. There was parents' disapproval and SAU was even investigated by MI5 as a "training school for revolutionaries". A participant recalls:
our finest hour - the "All London Schools Strike". Here we were, a handful of Maoist school kids (with negligible support from grown up Maoists) suddenly leading 10,000 mostly working class kids through the streets, head teachers panicking, cops carrying out arrests & press hysterical. We were in way over our heads.

The press of the day had focused on 18 year old Steve 'Ginger' Finch a pupil from Rutherford School in Marylebone as a leader of the rebellious youth. But Steve Wilson recalls:

A girl called Loulla Ephimou and a number of other members of North London's Greek community, people like me, idealistic teachers and so on were members long before Steve was approached by younger kids at his own school to organise a strike.

The Schools Action Union membership had a petit-bourgeois composition drawing on grammar and (fee-paying) public schools. The Schools' Action Union formed among pupils in London to protest against school meals, detention, caning and uniform. 'Pupil power' had arisen in a number of schools, and word spread to other London schoolchildren. Its numbers fell from 600 to 80 between 1969 and 1971 and failed to "take-off" following the London School Strike and its membership remained around 30. The 1972 School Strike was subject of a Giles cartoon in the Daily Express 16th May 1972 but was not regarded as lightly in the seat of government as protesting school students marched to Trafalgar Square.

But a participants' critical assessment is more telling about the leadership of the SAU, arguing that the "leadership proved unfit to lead a mass movement and lost its membership. By the time of the massive London school strikes of May that year [1972], when SAU were supposedly at the forefront of the struggles, they exposed their inadequacy. Not one school student was won to, the organisation from these strikes, they flared up spontaneously and died out just as rapidly, and, with it the hopes of a mass organisation of revolutionary school students."¹¹⁵

Many young radicals were just setting out on their political development as a result of their work in SAU, and were to be found active in future Maoist groups.

¹¹⁵ Reply to Comrade L., East London Marxist Leninist Association [Unpublished letter July 1975.]

YOUNG COMMUNIST LEAGUE

Most histories of the CPGB make passing references to the YCL as the youth wing of the organisation, its significance as part of the recruitment process into its parent organisation. Politically the YCL was the focus for microcosmic versions of the disputes that wracked the CPGB. Issues, discussions and polemics mirrored those within the Party. The Sixties saw disputes between younger and older communist activists over issues of the emerging youth culture of sex'n'drugs'n'rock'n'roll which saw the YCL move away from its earlier purist insistence on traditional folk as the musical form most compatible with its politics. There were wider issues: men who wanted to define the Left agendas and centre them around their traditional trade unionist conception of "class politics", with little regard for other questions emerging on the agenda such as women's oppression and racial oppression.

There were attempts to adapt to new styles, promoting communist politics in a package heavily influenced by the alternative press such as *International Times* and *Oz*. The message was that socialism would resolve the difficult question of what to do about drugs, the permissive society, exploitation of women etc. There was real confusion on how to relate to the challenge of a youth consumerism that posed as a radical cultural alternative.

From the late 1960s into the 1970s, increasing attempts by the YCL to reposit its politics in relation to where young people were 'actually at' fuelled significant debates within British Communism about how to view and relate to youth culture. A major debate on this issue in *Marxism Today* from 1973-5 discussed many of the deep splits between traditionalists and modernising, Eurocommunist, currents which were to shape the remaining years of the party¹¹⁶

At its 1967 Congress the CP leadership was reinforced by its youth representatives, the 22 year old Martin Jacques, the youngest member of its executive. But the Party was in bad shape, it had to compete for the loyalty of young radicals, even the Young Liberals seemed more radical than the CP and YCL. George Matthews explained in 1967 that "people of the extreme left who use revolutionary phrases are out of touch with reality". Under his editorship the *Daily Worker* was renamed *the Morning Star*.

How to translate the mass rebelliousness of the young generation into a Marxist direction was an issue that occupied the minds of the YCL leadership. From 1967 the "Trend is Communism" campaign saw the mass distribution in youth clubs and schools of a large, garish leaflet introducing communism to a new, politically inexperienced audience. A high point of the campaign was an International Youth Festival at the Derbyshire Miners' Holiday Centre at Skegness, held alongside the 26th YCL Congress at the end of May 1967.

In addition to political debates and meetings, there were performances by pop groups such as The Kinks, progressive poets such as Adrian Mitchell and folk singers. Criticisms of style had real political differences underlying them. Those recruited were less susceptible to party orthodoxy, less deferential and YCL membership had increased to 5,600 by the middle of 1967.

¹¹⁶ Waite(1995) *Opening the Books: essays on the social and cultural history of the British Communist Party*. Pluto Press: 218

The Y.C.L. has not remained unscathed by Maoist youth groups. A number of members have been lost to them and temporary damage has been done too Y. C.L. branches in some localities.¹¹⁷

Skegness proved too much for some young activists within the YCL. The approach of "The Trend is Communism" was criticised by anti-revisionists within the organisation. The recruiting leaflet was dismissed as exemplifying the class-less "pop politics" of an image designed to appeal to young people of all backgrounds. One participant in the struggle described it as presenting a naively over-simplified picture of what life would be like in a Communist Britain. The absence of any indication that it might be necessary to struggle for such a utopia rendered the document useless.¹¹⁸

In November 1966, George Bridges, the London District Secretary of the YCL sent a letter to members of the St Pancras YCL branch informing them that their committee had been suspended from membership of the League (later they were expelled). Amongst the reasons given was the following: "The St Pancras committee supported a resolution at the Youth Forum calling for a victory to the NLF i.e. a continuation of the war, which is a policy of the Trotskyists."¹¹⁹

The young communists of St. Pancras YCL were "a real thorn in the side of the [London] District Committee" publically arguing for Victory for the NLF in Vietnam. The YCL wanted to emphasis peace. Expulsion for "actions harmful to the League" came with their refusal to distribute "The Trends is Communism" leaflet which was described as "anti-communist, anti-marxist rubbish". Expelled YCLers reorganised: the St. Pancras YCL leading members and activists considered themselves opponents of the British Road to Socialism. St. Pancras YCL had been under pressure from the Communist Party's King Street leadership for its refusal to embrace the 'new image' and resistance to attempts to dictate which speakers the branch could have at their educational meetings.

The Branch Committee was expelled from the YCL, and the St. Pancras branch dissolved for its refusal to accept leadership from anyone imposed on them by the London District Committee. Much of the branch reconstituted themselves as a new youth organisation on December 3rd 1966 with Geoff Lee as secretary of Camden Communist Youth Movement. Mike Leatt replaced Lee as secretary of the (CCYM renamed) Camden Communist Group in September 1968. They were name-checked by the official Chinese news agency, describing the CCYM as "fully supports China's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution... this organisation consists of a group of anti-revisionist young people expelled by the British Young Communist League."¹²⁰

November 1967 saw a meeting of YCL dissidents who denounced the "degenerate political atmosphere" within the organisation. The experience of the 1967 Whitsun National Congress held at Skegness, where Party's International spokesman, Jack Woddiss

¹¹⁷ *Cognito*, March 1968

¹¹⁸ Lee (1988) *Revisionism in Britain*: 25

¹¹⁹ In the December 1968 issue of 'Labour Monthly', the same George Bridges, writing in his official capacity as London District Secretary of the YCL, has an article entitled 'Lessons of October 27' in which the following appears: 'The slogans on the march - "Victory to the NLF and the Vietnamese revolution." "Defeat US aggression". "End Labour government complicity" - correspond to the mood amongst the youth.' The Vietnam Movement, *The Marxist* Number 9 Spring 1969

¹²⁰ Hsinhua News Agency Release 16.2.1967

attacked China, convinced them that a break was inevitable. The previous month *China Reconstructs* had published a letter headlined "British YCL Opposes their revisionist leadership"¹²¹ and the uneasy membership of Maoists was no longer acceptable to the CP hierarchy. The appeal of Maoism was partly acknowledged as "Cogito" -the theoretical and discussion journal of the YCL- conceded, when it reprinted the lecture given by Jack Woddis as a "long overdue" analysis of the situation in China:

The shrilled attacks upon events in China had continued unabated since the publication of R. Palme Dutt's pamphlet *Whither China*. The attitude towards the Maoists in Britain was no less severe: there was no pretence of convincing by argument or persuasion. An editorial in *Cognito* bluntly laid down the line: Much of the ideology peddled by these groups is nothing but a bastardisation of Marxism. The concoction of slogans, mottoes and proverbs which is bible-punched so religiously is in no way a substitute for the analytical thought which is Marxism. Marx said, "Doubt all." These boys have ditched that marxism for the easier course of declaiming their ill-thought stuff, showing responsibility to nobody but themselves.¹²²

In the YCL, any challenge to the CPGB "Party line" were criticised as sectarian and dogmatic, and the heavy-handed manner in dealing with differences fuelled discontent in small pockets throughout the organisation. Expelled activists were to be seen in a variety of ML organisations that made up the Maoist movement in Britain. The comedian Alexei Sayle recalled, from the YCL, people like Ian Williams were in it, and they decided to become Maoists; so I split off and went along with them because they seemed like more fun. We became the Merseyside Maoist Group. ..We perceived Russia to be corrupt. China seemed to be a more thrilling, young country. ..in the Maoist group you had to study every week and studied the text, so I got a good grounding in Marxist theory.¹²³

Other London YCL branches had strong Marxist-Leninist oppositions that produced their own journals, notably Chelsea (Red Guard), Tufnell (Spark) and Northolt (Internationale).’ An editorial in Red Guard, produced by the Chelsea branch of the YCL, where Barry Levy was active, argued that the "reformist nature" of the organisation "cannot be changed from within" and that "comrades still upholding Marxism-Leninism inside the ranks of the YCL must leave and form a new youth movement". A group of London members of the YCL issued a statement that a new revolutionary party needed to be constructed.¹²⁴

An account of the Skegness manoeuvring by the YCL leadership was published in *Red Front*, publication of the MLOB. It echoed the experience of earlier anti-revisionist Marxists within the Communist Party:

"Those opposed to the revisionist line of the leadership were vetted by a group of loyal Y.C. L. spitters, and thus prevented from speaking. In the few exceptional cases where opposition speakers managed to elude the vetting committee, their words were shouted down by the chairman yelling over a microphone. Votes for the national committee nominations who oppose the revisionist line were conveniently "lost", as were some emergency resolutions. In all, it was a travesty of democracy. ...a new, revolutionary Party has to be constructed. "

¹²¹ *China Reconstructs* October 1967

¹²² *Cognito* March 1968

¹²³ Cohen (1997) *Children of the Revolution: Communist Childhood in Cold War Britain*. Lawrence & Wishart:47

¹²⁴ *Red Guard* Volume 1 Number 2 December 1967 ; *Red Front* Volume 2 Number 1, March –April 1968

SOLIDARITY WITH VIETNAM

It was on a Vietnam demonstration early in 1967 when I first became aware of Maoism. There was this extraordinary guy walking along by himself: he had a long hair, a strange beard and a floor-length overcoat. Using both hands, he carried in front of him a large poster of Chairman Mao Tse-Tung attached to a tube of grey plastic piping. As we passed a Chinese restaurant on Lime Street, all the waiters and chefs piled out of the restaurant cheering him and making the 'waving a little red book' gesture. Which, when I thought about it, seemed a bit odd since most of the Chinese in Liverpool had been in the city for three or four generations, spoke English with thick scouse accents, were extremely entrepreneurial and held no affection for Communism. Maybe they were just excited to see one of us parading around with a picture of one of them. This man was Nigel Morley Preston Jones and he was Merseyside's first Maoist.¹²⁵

In Britain student radicalization was associated with the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign. Established in January 1966, largely at the initiative of the Trotskyist International Marxist Group (and bank rolled by the English philosopher Bertrand Russell), it was in opposition to the CPGB-controlled British Council for Peace in Vietnam. Manchanda had led a split at the inaugural conference of the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign in 1966 because of its refusal to endorse the programme of the Vietnamese National Liberation Front. It was not as spontaneously militant as it seems: Manchanda had pre-booked the rooms for the British-Vietnam Solidarity Front founding meeting. In reality the British-Vietnam Solidarity Front [BVSF] which was a broad organisation under Marxist-Leninist leadership, did not really function at all until the beginning of 1968 when the Britain Vietnam Solidarity Front emerged as a new force to be reckoned with and played an important part in mobilising militants.

The BVSF saw common errors in the work of the young activists particularly the sectarianism evident in the policy statement of the BVSF, which pledged the organisation to fight for the 'unity of the whole working class in defence of their living standards and democratic rights and in their struggle for social advance'. This, a commitment appropriate to a revolutionary party of the British working class, reflected the confusion about what constituted a broad front organisation of solidarity with the people of Vietnam. Such solidarity activity was seen as the Party building activity merging and treating the broad front as the party organisation. Such an approach was seen repeated again as with the INSLF, North London Alliance and other occasions as the movement learnt how to work more appropriately and effectively in the broad movement and amongst the working class and people. There were lessons to be learnt as *The Marxist* noted:

The statements produced by the BVSF are all too frequently written in a heavy-handed cliché-ridden style which is of no use to convinced Marxist-Leninists and frankly unintelligible to the broad mass of people for whom the statements are presumably intended..... Such a writing style either reflects or can lead to a sectarian working style.

¹²⁵ Sayle (2010) *Stalin Ate My Homework*. London: Sceptre p227

People can not be won if they are not permitted to develop in struggle, but are simply told: "We are correct, join us." We must instead show how we are correct both through concrete work and by drawing correct conclusions from this work. Winning people to our position does not mean their passive acquiescence, but rather their lively participation. Marxism-Leninism cannot be learned by rote.¹²⁶

As the Joint Committee of Communists later explained:

The 'Revolutionary Marxist-Leninist League', for a short time a member group of the JCC, attempted to promote a strategy built solely around the issues of the national liberation struggle in Vietnam. Primarily because of its petty-bourgeois base it was (and is) unable to build up links with the working class or in any way develop the internal contradiction between Labour and Capital on which the proletarian revolution in Britain will be based. It also epitomised the 'leftist' error of which Lin Piao reminds us: that is, one-sidedly pursuing struggle' to the exclusion of 'unity'.¹²⁷

Vietnam demonstrations in 1967 and 1968 brought out tens of thousands in mass demonstration, and drew the attention of the state. The smaller British-Vietnam Solidarity Front, involved those associated with pro-Chinese positions, succeeded in making Grosvenor Square, rather than Hyde Park as the VSC organisers intended, the focus of the anti-war protest by organising a breakaway column on the march of October 27, 1968.

A Metropolitan Police Special Branch report noted,

During the early planning stages of this demonstration it was apparent that the question of the use of calculated violence as a political weapon was causing division in the ranks of the V.S.C members. The Maoists felt that violence was inevitable and said so. The more cautious representatives of the International Socialism and International Marxist groups paid lip service to the vision of a peaceful demonstration. In the event the Maoists did not gain any places on the National Council or the national ad-hoc committee, and are outpaced as apostles of violence by the more volatile anarchists. All the indications are that the Maoists and anarchists will disregard any sort of instructions – from Police or march leaders – and take an independent line on the day¹²⁸

And so it proved as Ernest Tate recalled the events of the day:

On the actual day of the October 27th, 1968, demonstration (which incidentally, I think was much larger than the 100,000 we had initially projected), we took action to ensure that the ultra-left would not try and divert everyone to the American Embassy. We placed recognized leaders – myself included — immediately behind the ultra-left contingent. Tariq Ali played an invaluable role here. When they made their move at Trafalgar Square to head towards the American Embassy, we simply turned around and stopped the demonstration and let the Maoists and their friends head off and Tariq took up a megaphone to explain what was happening to those behind us. The ultra-left and anarchists hesitated a little while and began yelling insults at us, but we told the people around us to wait until they left. I estimate they took around 5000 people to fight the

¹²⁶ The Vietnam Movement, *The Marxist* Number 9 Spring 1969

¹²⁷ *The Marxist-Leninist Movement in Britain: Origins and perspectives*. A statement by the Joint Committee of Communists *The Marxist* Number 12 Autumn 1969: 5-10.

¹²⁸ Metropolitan Police Special Branch, Vietnam Solidarity campaign "Autumn Offensive"

Reference to papers 346/68/15 (2) 10th day of September 1968 <http://www.isg-fi.org.uk/spip.php?article637>

police in Grosvenor Square and had quite a few people arrested, including people who did not know what they were getting into.¹²⁹

The Guardian reported, again with a different guessitimate of the numbers involved, what happened as:

The major section of the marchers, estimated at about thirty thousand, continued along their proclaimed route to Hyde Park. On the way they handed in a petition to No.10 Downing Street, and after listening to speeches by their leaders, dispersed quietly. In Grosvenor Square however, the breakaway element maintained constant assaults against the police cordon for four hours. At the height of the melee the police line nearly gave way, but it was immediately reinforced, and no demonstrators came nearer than 50 yards to the Embassy building.

During scuffles in which a police line in South Audley Street was broken through some of the demonstrators turned their banner stakes into spears, which they hurled at the police. Fireworks were constantly thrown, both into the crowds and into the police lines. Last night, as the marchers retreated in front of the advancing police line, Grosvenor Square was a litter of lost shoes, broken glass, torn banners, and discarded clothing.¹³⁰

The VSC had attracted attention by its siege of the American Embassy growing rapidly in 1968 attracting 10,000 to Grosvenor Square on 17 March and 100,000 in October 27 1968 with Maoist radicals calling for 'Victory to the NLF'. That was the high-point of the campaign and it went into decline in 1969. Those who went on to organise in the Camden Communist Movement characterised the YCL as the 'Young Cops League' in a leaflet distributed at the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign's march in October 1968. The leaflet had a snappy headline typical of the vocabulary that inflicted the movement echoing Chinese practice: YCL Revisionist Leaders Unmasked as Police Agents and Stooges of US Imperialism.¹³¹

Something that passed into leftist folklore was expressed in Police reminiscences of the day : "Fact of fiction I do not remember: But I seem to recall it was said the American Marine, security guards, had been instructed that should the embassy be invaded, any attempt to trespass from the ground floor, they were [to] open fire on these demonstrators."¹³²

One, Two Three, LSE.

Much has been written about the student revolt that burst on to the political scene in 1968. The best-known incidents in Britain were at the London School for Economics [LSE], Warwick and Essex University and Hornsey College of Art. The simmering student discontent was a slow boil: the revolt at LSE began towards the end of the academic year 1965-66. Some students were determined that the student body should have a greater participation in the running of the LSE. They wanted meaningful

¹²⁹ <http://www.isg-fi.org/spip.php?article637>

¹³⁰ The Guardian, Monday 28 October 1968

¹³¹ G.Lee op.cit.

¹³² http://www.fomphc.org.uk/viewpage.php?page_id=45&rowstart=8 What is beyond dispute is that Grosvenor Square anti-Vietnam War demonstrations led to the formation on 27 October of the Special Demonstration Squad (SDS) within the Metropolitan Police Special Branch - colloquially known as the "Hairies" because of their appearance. They adopt new identities, lived undercover and infiltrate 'extremist' groups.

participation; they planned disruption of the library as the final stage of escalation of their protest. The appointment of Dr (now Sir) Walter Adams, principal of University College, Rhodesia, as director of LSE provoked the interest of the Socialist Society. In October 1966, *Agitator*, their intermittent publication, attacked Adams. There was a slowly escalating protest that saw letter to *The Times* by Adelstein, a student union official, provoke a response of disciplinary action by the LSE authorities. Petitions and boycott of classes were proposed but defeated. The majority of LSE students were disinterested in the affair. The trial of Adelstein did see a sit in by Socialist Society outside the room where the proceedings were held; the Student Union had organised a quiet boycott. The differences in tactics represented a political struggle amongst the activist students. Adelstein was not punished.

Amongst the radical students the emphasis shifted as to discussing ways of employing direct action to prevent Adams taking up his appointment. About 600 students turn up to hear Marshall Bloom, an American student who was chairman of the Graduate Student Association, talk on the relevance of the Black Civil Rights Struggle and that of the students at Berkeley. The LSE had banned the meeting. The director came down to argue his case, and a new venue (the students' union bar) was agreed. The venue became the issue: those students who wanted the original use of the Old Theatre rushed the doors past the porters into the darkened theatre (the director had ordered the fuses from the lighting system removed). Edward Poole, a porter who had a weak heart, collapsed in the melee. The brief occupation dissipated when told that he had died.

Right wing students went on the offensive against the dominant left through circulation of pamphlets attacking leftwing students, motions of censure. The authorities set up a committee of inquiry, which led to further disciplinary trials of students: two were suspended for the rest of the year. As one moderate participant recalls: The reformist policy within the student body had failed entirely. There was nothing left but to support the policy of the militants, which was to "sit -in" immediately. The motion was in fact proposed by the new president of the Students Union, Peter Watherston, chairman of the Conservative Society.¹³³

Liberal indignation fuelled the protest. Watherston had been elected in a poll of thousand students in which the Socialist Society got only 200 votes. In the agitation and drama of protest the Hard Left were well ahead of the student body. IS [International Socialist] member, David Widgery, was accurate when he observed that LSE's "reputation as a centre of revolution is actually out of all proportion to the numbers of revolutionaries there."¹³⁴

Between 200- 800 people were spending their nights in the barricaded Old Theatre, the union was in constant session, sympathisers came in to the protest, hippies, and activists. This form of mass participatory action was often an end in itself, providing an alternative life style. Divisions began to appear: those who assessed a situation in terms of the usual possibilities pessimistically saw the sit-in break down with the onset of the Easter vacation. After a long and acrimonious debate the moderate position won out. Crouch observes:

Although the Far Left had successfully controlled the articulation of the LSE protest, they had not really been able to place the struggle against the school authorities in the wider

¹³³ Crouch (1970) *The Student Revolt*, Bodley Head: 52

¹³⁴ Widgery (1976) *The Left in Britain 1956-68*. Penguin:310

context of a struggle "against capitalism which most of them genuinely believed it was."¹³⁵

The year 1968 saw North Vietnam's Tet offensive, Enoch Powell's 'rivers of blood' speech and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Official criticism of the invasion prevented a 1956 exodus in membership but the Communist Party was hardly at the centre of radicalism. On the student front, the notion of turning universities into "red bases" appealed to the self-importance of student radicals. From then on student CP members were outflanked on the Left, firstly by the short-lived Revolutionary Socialist Students Federation and then by the growing trotskyists groups. The summer term of 1968 saw a re-emergence of student activism. There were two minor sit-ins by the Socialist Society: one in solidarity with French students, the other on the occasion of the inaugural conference at the LSE of the Revolutionary Socialist Students Federation.

Student representation was on the agenda in the autumn of 1968. The focus for the LSE student anger was directed at recently installed gates. The gates were iron "fire doors" protecting the administrative building. The gates were an intriguing symbolism: the gates were an act of authority.

Nicolas Bateson, a lecturer in social psychology later dismissed for his part in the event, said tearing down the gates was required of us if we were to show proper solidarity with the Africans in Rhodesia, the guerrillas in Thailand and the Arabs in Palestine). Robin Blackburn, a lecturer in sociology also later dismissed said the gates were the material expression of class oppression.¹³⁶

After a meeting militants attacked the gates with sledgehammers, crowbars and pick-axes. There were angry scenes as members of academic staff tried to hinder their progress. The police were called. Some militants in the student bar were brought out by the police, identified by academic staff and taken to Bow Street. Adams had decided to close LSE. The militants regrouped at the University of London Union building in Malet Street on the following Monday: a small number occupied it as their headquarters. The Left was not actually strong enough to shape events.

The LSE took out injunctions against thirteen persons involved in the "gates" incident. After three weeks the LSE was reopened. The support fanned by the RSSF was confined to a radical minority. On March 10 a student occupation, sustained by outside help, was the response of criminal summonses being taken out against eight students and two lecturers. There was no unity of purpose or strategy: anarchists called for "creative vandalism", wrecking offices. The occupation spluttered to a halt. Two "political" academics Bateson and Blackburn were dismissed "for their approbation of the destruction of the gates"¹³⁷ The expulsion of Bateson, who later became part of the leadership of the CPB (ML) and Blackburn, who remained a radical New left Review academic, in April 1969 saw student pickets enforcing a state of siege, disruption of classes, leaflets and posters covered the school but it was limited to a small, if ubiquitous group "dashing gestures in keeping with LSE's symbolic role in student-movement mythology."¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Crouch 1970 :59

¹³⁶ Crouch 1970 :84

¹³⁷ Crouch 1970: 94

¹³⁸ Widgery, 1976: 317

Student protest on the issue of student representation had occurred with sit-ins in December 1967 at the Regent Street Polytechnic and Holborn College of law and Commerce. The following month saw similar disruption at Aston University in Birmingham. Students at Leicester occupied the administrative building and here saw the first disruption of outside speakers of whom the students disapproved. An official of the US Embassy was covered in red paint when he visited the University of Sussex to talk about Vietnam. The Secretary of State for Education, Patrick Gordon Walker was shouted down at Manchester; Defence Minister Dennis Healey had great difficulty reaching a meeting because of protests by Cambridge students. Hornsey Art College occupation began on the issue of student representation; the sit-in was described as the Crouch End Commune¹³⁹. Other protests followed at Croydon, Guildford and Birmingham, at Bradford, Keele and Leeds: students were rebelling.

The Internationalists

Another trend developing that was to contribute to the student base of British Maoism was the Canadian export, based at Sussex University and active as the English Student Movement. The political inspiration came from Hardial Bains who had established a student group while working at Trinity College Dublin.¹⁴⁰ Bains was a former member of the Communist Party of India, having resigned in protest at the party's endorsement of Khrushchev's criticisms of Stalin. In March 1963, while a post-graduate student in Vancouver, Canada, he was active in a political study group called The Internationalists that evolved in a Maoist direction and later Bains was founder-Chairman of numerically the largest of the Maoist groups in English Canada, the Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist).

In Britain, the Internationalist off-spring was very much the product the upsurge in the youth and student movement. The prime influences were the "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution" raging in China and in the West Bengal region of India the revolutionary peasant uprising under the leadership of Charu Mazumdar, commonly known as the Naxalite movement¹⁴¹

Drawing on both the analysis and slogans emanating from China, the call was for conscious participation with the masses, the practice of criticism and self criticism and spirit of 'serve the people'. It was argued, Consumer life was the sole basis of the vacuousness, oppression and general degradation felt by the large majority of the petit-bourgeoisie in imperialist society.¹⁴² In stressing the importance of ideological struggle, the

¹³⁹ The Hornsey Film (1970), a documentary re-enactment of the student occupation included YCL member, Kim Howells, future Tourism minister in Blair's second administration.

¹⁴⁰ A lecturer in bacteriology who was originally from India, Bains left for Canada in 1959 and had completed his post-graduate studies in Vancouver at the University of British Columbia.

¹⁴¹ A meeting was held in London around the time of the "Necessity for Change Conference" in November 1967 and it was decided to reactivate the Hindustani Ghadar Party in support of Naxalbari. An ad hoc committee was formed to reorganize the Ghadar Party for the social revolution in India. Manchanda was elected its president and Hardial Bains was elected to be in charge of work in North America. When the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) was formed in 1969, the Ghadar Party became its external wing. The Ghadarites were advised by CPI (M-L) and Charu Mazumdar, its General Secretary, to propagate the cause of the Indian revolution in the countries where they were resident. Ghadarites defended the cause of the Indian revolution through their paper *Chingari* and also organized people against racist attacks in Canada and Britain.

¹⁴² ONE STRUGGLE, TWO ENEMIES, THREE GUIDELINES, FOUR LEVELS OF WORK (1973)

subjective desire was to tackle the effects of cultural disintegration and stifling intellectualism and egocentric behaviour of privileged student life.

Hardial Bains, decided to reorganize the Internationalists on the basis of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought. Like other young radicals, they saw the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution as a struggle against the dogmatism and bureaucratism of the old communist movement. They believed that Mao Tsetung Thought represented the re-establishment of Leninism in the communist movement, a means through the mass campaign of the Cultural Revolution of ensuring the constant renewal and revolutionization of both the communist movement and society. During this period would-be revolutionaries were looking towards China and Mao Tsetung for political leadership.

In London an Internationalist conference was organised and regarded as an important contribution to the development of the subjective factors for revolution, emphasized the essence of the Necessity for Change! analysis elaborated by Hardial Bains: "Understanding Requires an Act of Conscious Participation of the Individual, An Act of Finding Out." Colin McCabe notes that at the 'Necessity for Change' Conference held in London in August 1967,

they discussed their ideas with other elements of the British and Irish left. It lasted for two weeks, and among the groups invited were the Irish Communist Organisation (later the British and Irish Communist Organisation) who were also anti-revisionists. Talks of a merger between the two groups came to nothing, and in fact a serious animosity developed, one which played itself out on the pages of the two groups' respective publications for the next ten years.¹⁴³

Reading the speech given by Bains at the 'Necessity for Change' Conference, The Internationalists began "with a confused, individualistic-orientated philosophy which had no relation to Marxism, nor made any reference to it."¹⁴⁴ Yet from the "Necessity for Change" conference in August 1967 came the emergence of the "most strident and fanatical Maoist group of all" according to right-wing researcher Peter Shipley. Under what every name they operated, they "make little attempt to argue its case but prefers to rely largely on selected aphorism from the Thoughts of Chairman Mao as indisputable proof of the coming revolution."¹⁴⁵

The Conference saw a resolution adopted calling for another "International Congress" to adopt a "common program and organizational structure" based on the Internationalists as a multinational group operating simultaneously in as many countries as possible, including places where parties recognized by Albania and China already exist. An "International Committee" is established in London to act as an information centre "to coordinate with various liberation groups" in Asia, Africa and Latin America (*Mass Line*, No 10, Sept. 17, 1969, p. 9). This ambitious project fails but after the conference, Internationalist groupings complete with printing presses, etc., start up in earnest in Ireland, England and English Canada and Quebec with Bains as the big thinker behind all of them.¹⁴⁶ Interestingly Bains was an early pioneer in building the internationalist

Reprinted by the 'Necessity for Change' Institute of Ideological Studies (England-Ireland) to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the founding of the Internationalists March 13th, 1963.

¹⁴³ Colin McCabe, Short History of the Irish Internationalists// Communist Party of Ireland (Marxist-Leninist), Part One: 1965-1970. Dublin Opinion, May 18th, 2010

¹⁴⁴ CUA (1974) *Imperialism and the Struggle for a Revolutionary Party*

¹⁴⁵ Shipley 1976: 155

¹⁴⁶ <http://marxists.org/history/erol/ca.firstwave/isoncpc/appendix1.htm>

network. There were the post 1976 attempts of ‘rallying the troops’ by the MLPD and WPB, and the RCPUSA, but nothing like the almost trotskyists ‘4th International’ structure display by the Internationalists that encompassed four countries by the end of the 1960s.¹⁴⁷

In a statement Issued by ‘The International Committee of the Internationalists on the FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF THE HISTORIC ‘NECESSITY FOR CHANGE’ CONFERENCE August 1-15, 1967,’ they claimed:

Our activities have increased in depth and scope since the historic conference. We aroused the masses over the problems confronting the working and oppressed people. In the universities we exposed the decadent, bourgeois educational system which trains lackeys of imperialism; in the community we focused on the heartless exploitation of the masses -in housing, exorbitant rents, rising costs of living, unemployment; and on the Cultural front we exposed the modern Soviet revisionists and other liberal-bourgeois ideologies, e. g. ‘Castroism’, ‘New Leftism’ etc. because of these activities , for which the Internationalists gave leadership in theory and practice, and because of the historic upsurge of mass democracy in Trinity College, Dublin, the broad masses of the youth and students, as well as the workers and the genuinely patriotic and nationalist forces, see the Internationalists as a real alternative to the "revisionist" youth and student movements as well as their mass organisations, dogmatic ‘Marxist’ groups parading under various names, counter-revolutionary elements organised under various Trotskyist groups and the ‘new left’ types.¹⁴⁸

They operated on the fringes of the radical student movement. David Widgery wittily labelled them "Marxist-Leninist Children of God whose guru is Hardial Bains"¹⁴⁹ , and that probably was not that far from the impression they gave. Years later an internal organisational journal was equally critical of the group: "up until October 1969 comrades working in Sussex University used to give the slogan 'Be a Communist and solve your hang ups'...some comrades were preoccupied in trying to solve their 'sexual problems' instead of making revolution."¹⁵⁰

There were various organisational metamorphoses (often reflected in their internationalist’s counter-parts elsewhere) during which the English Student Movement was followed by the English Communist Movement (ML) in January 1970, and this was replaced on March 24th 1972 by the founding of the Communist Party of England (Marxist-Leninist)

The CUA saw them as essentially dogmatic and mechanical in their politics: Their ‘Marxism-Leninism’ was an abstract, sterile dogma distorted by their petty bourgeois student preoccupations and outlook. They elevated the ‘cultural’ struggle in universities to the primary role in class struggle, showing no concern about their total isolation from the working class and its struggles. This feature has remained the essential element of their approach. They concentrate totally on propaganda work, principally to

¹⁴⁷ Anecdotal evidence : The CPBML would tell the tale that one of their members who worked in a bank saw a cheque from Canada to the CPE (ML) worth a couple of thousand Canadian dollars so the messages of support were allegedly backed-up by pay cheques, solidarity in action.

¹⁴⁸ ONE STRUGGLE,TWO ENEMIES,THREE GUIDELINES,FOUR LEVELS OF WORK (1973)

¹⁴⁹ Widgery, 1976: 483

¹⁵⁰ The Marxist-Leninist Sept.1974

promote anti-imperialist solidarity with the national liberation movements, but make no effort to make their propaganda effective to a working class audience.¹⁵¹

The CUA's treatment of what had evolved into the CPE (ML) was unusual; the ultra-left posturing of the organisation rarely drew comment from the rest of the movement. The lack of critiques of the Internationalists trend among the British Marxist-Leninists is partly because they were never taken seriously as a part of the 'movement': they were made politically unintelligible by their style of work (publishing Workers' England Daily News release "All the News that serves the proletarian Socialist revolution") and adventurist posturing in public, quite quickly that 'internationalists' trend existed outside of the radar of other groups who while taking separate positions and lines would still work on the same issues occasionally, or even think them worth criticising. So a marked lack of interest in them, more as David Evans comments, "regarded as an embarrassment".¹⁵² The CPE (ML) were visible and aggressive in street protests at the start of the 70s: several members were arrested at Birmingham's Bull Ring market in 1971 after a meeting on Ireland, an attack on Professor Hans Eysenck at the LSE in 1973 and their "Bold Spirit" saw them charge police lines gaining them a reputation as "hotheads who like getting into trouble"¹⁵³ The CUA judged, "While we respect the motivation and enthusiasm of the comrades in the CPE (ML), as a Marxist-Leninist party this organisation is a very poor joke."¹⁵⁴

What was striking about the Internationalists was their cultural emphasis, not surprising considering the ideological heredity of the Internationalists. Amongst the CPE (ML) leadership was the composer, Cornelius Cardew (7 May 1936–13 December 1981). While teaching an experimental music class at London's Morley College in 1968, Cardew, along with Howard Skempton and Michael Parsons formed the Scratch Orchestra a large experimental ensemble. Keith Rowe, Scratch Orchestra member and a recent convert to Marxism argued that the orchestra's problems were class-based. At a meeting to air their differences, John Tilbury laid out the group's contradictions (such as its anti-establishment stance and reliance on government money), offering solutions in the form of quotations from the English Marxist Christopher Caudwell and Mao Tse-tung. Some of the members formed the Scratch Orchestra Ideological Group, which Cardew himself joined a few weeks later, and the orchestra gradually turned to a Maoist political orientation and aesthetic. In response, Cardew's style shifted to tonal music with a clear concern for class struggle, a move first evident in his Piano Albums of 1973 and 1974. Cardew and Sheila Kasabova, his third wife, went to live in Leyton, East London, where he helped to form a political rock group – People's Liberation Music – with Laurie Scott Baker, John Marcangelo, Vicky Silva, Hugh Shrapnel, Keith Rowe and others. Their songs, partisan and polemical, the group developed and performed music in support of various popular causes including benefits for striking miners and Northern Ireland. Involved and active politically, was active in the formation of the Progressive Cultural Association in 1976 from many artists, musicians and actors. He became its secretary. Richard Gott noted in an appreciative and politically critical review of a biography of Cardew¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ CUA (1974) *Imperialism and the Struggle for a Revolutionary Party*

¹⁵² Interview with 'David Evans', Secretary of the RCLB in the 1980s.

¹⁵³ Finsbury Communist 83 December 1971. From a hostile and often tendentious conspiracy researcher Larry O'Hara are, in Searchlight for Beginners, nefarious accusations against CPE (ML) members argued on the balance of probabilities.

¹⁵⁴ CUA (1974) *Imperialism and the Struggle for a Revolutionary Party*

¹⁵⁵ <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v31/n05/richard-gott/liberation-music/print>

‘The message of Yenan’ is clear, Cardew wrote in his journal in January 1972: ‘We must associate with, talk to, study, know deeply, live with, make intimate friends amongst, work with, the working class.’ In practice, he went on, we have regarded ‘our petty bourgeois comrades and friends as more important than workers’. Obsessed with the Maoist command ‘to serve the people’, Cardew now began to condemn avant-garde and ‘elitist’ music – his own and others’. The main focus of his attack was Stockhausen, his old friend and mentor. Stockhausen Serves Imperialism was the title of a talk he gave on the BBC in 1972.

REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALIST STUDENT FEDERATION

The Revolutionary Socialist Students Federation [RSSF] emerged from student militants attended what was an attempt by the Left to organise radicalised youth. The major participants at the founding conference were Maoists, various trotskyists and the International Socialists and some associated with New Left Review. A conference held at the London School of Economics [LSE] on June 15 1968, the Left chronicler, east end GP and SWP member, David Widgery recalls:

Stern bus-loads of militants assembled in a national conference at the LSE and duly founded the Revolutionary Socialist Students Federation, after some hours of haggling about its name and immediately proceeded by a very funny but totally vague address by Colin-Bendit. He had been imported with various rather bewildered- looking German, Japanese and Yugoslavian ex-students to explain about student power to the viewers of BBC TV and arrived at Houghton Street to the great annoyance of the LSE militants. Among their number was a Pakistani drama critic, Tariq Ali, who, although working in the Vietnamese Solidarity Campaign, was duly christened by the press ‘the leader of Britain's students’.¹⁵⁶

The RSSF grew rapidly to a strength of several thousands and at its 2nd Congress adopted an action programme around the Student Red Base concept -higher education as centres of opposition to the capitalist system- and to work for the October 27th Vietnam demonstration.

Radical student groups and others throughout the universities of the Western capitalist world¹⁵⁷ played an organising and agitational role in the great demonstrations and street battles of the year. Yet all of them withered or perished within a year or two, just as the idea of a central role for student radicalism itself faded. At its peak in 1968 the student movement envisaged ‘student power’ and espoused the ‘detonator theory’, based on analogies drawn from Third World guerrilla warfare and the foci proposition associated with Che, with universities as ‘red bases’ or liberated zones.

¹⁵⁶ Widgery, 1976: 314. See also report of Lynn Walsh, a delegate to the RSSF conference from Sussex University Socialist Club, *Militant* No.44, December 1968.

¹⁵⁷ In Germany the SDS (the erstwhile student organization of the SPD), in France the UNEF and 22 March Movement, in Britain the Vietnam Solidarity Committee and the short lived RSSF (Revolutionary Socialist Students Federation) and in the USA the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) were the organizational expressions of the wave of student revolt. In Norway, Belgium and Germany the student organisations proved the core to the growth of Maoist organisations.

The "Red Base" theory, which advanced the students as a new revolutionary vanguard in the West, was not a realistic domestic political aspiration, the creation of a revolutionary cadre in such an unstable and artificial environment, mobilised to reject bourgeois culture and institutions that were their future meal ticket, and then go out to win over the working class was delusional. Red Base theory elevated student isolation into a virtue, and the idea of LSE as an equivalent to Mao's Yanan excite the IMG rather than Maoist whose more orthodox views on party building was to call for worker-student alliances, for the orthodox inclined, it went against the Marxist idea of the working class as the vanguard and the Leninist prescription for political advance.

CPB (ML) C.C. member, John Hannington spoke at a conference of the London Revolutionary Socialist Student Federation rubbishing the idea of a student/worker alliance as "half-baked theory". Instead he called for "worker/student integration" within the CPB (ML):

We are indeed fortunate to have such able comrades as our Party Chairman" Comrade Reg Birch, and others whose long records in combatting social democracy, economism and revisionism have given our Party a firm ideological base on which to build.

Of course our Party has its critics, but whilst they talk endlessly of the need for a marxist-leninist party in Britain - we have done it, Action speaks louder than words.¹⁵⁸

Latent divisions within RSSF were evitable: the mixture of IMG, International Socialists, New Left intellectuals, Maoists was unsustainable; they doctrinally sniped at each other. IS domination provided contradictions as the latter attached little importance to the struggle in the colonial world and dismissed the Chinese, Cuban and Vietnamese revolutions, whereas it was precisely on these issues that RSSF students had been radicalised. Within a year of its foundation, the Revolutionary Socialist Students Federation [RSSF] saw deep doctrinal arguments appear early on within the main London group divided into two factions, both claiming to be the genuine article, each accusing the other of having expropriating the funds and each denouncing the other with at least venom as their several publications devoted to the capitalist class and world imperialism. There was also the inability for the organisation to develop a strategic view on the role of students in the overall revolutionary movement. In London, it was Maoists political perspectives that informed the local RSSF organisation. The inability to be clear on its strategic perspectives, or act in a co-ordinated and unify manner saw the RSSF decline. At the second congress at the Roundhouse in November 1968, leadership lay with *New Left Review* intellectuals.

The conference was a real student movement; the flavour of the event captured by David Widgery:

It also attracted a good selection of the unpleasant, egotistical, the politically insane and the sectarian types who are one of the occupational hazards of London political conferences. Discussion on student problems was desultory and local reports were ignored by busy conspirators. Maoist orators repeatedly rose to advocate immediate union with the working class, oblivious to the waves of boredom raking the audience. A speaker from Sussex Labour Club /Militant explained about the need to have faith in the working class, like a kindly teacher demonstrating the alphabet to short-sighted kids. The

¹⁵⁸ *The Worker* April 1970

New Left Review talked rather disdainfully about the need to transcend bourgeois ideology. Oxford students submitted a blank piece of paper as their manifesto. Another group, abusing the name of Mao Tse-Tung, delivered a draft constitution which the Red Army would probably have rejected as top-heavy and over-officed. The conference ended with an enormous Peking fan storming the platform, animal impersonations and situationist situation comedy. The chairman's table was busily overturned with cries of 'Freedom' etc. If several people weren't on the CIA payroll they deserved to be.¹⁵⁹

When it was in its dying throes, there was an attempt at its third and final conference before its collapse. By the end of 1969 the RSSF was dead. As a national organisation, RSSF had, like the rest of the student left had (in Widery's memorable description/phrase) "Make One, Two, Three Balls Up".

As for the London RSSF, this branch continued its activities long after the rest of the organisation had effectively folded, providing platforms for CPB (ML) speakers and encouraging the School Action Unions, which although reduced in number was led by Maoists, and taking part in demonstrations with the Maoist-influenced Black People's Alliance. There were some impressive political events organised by different Maoist groups [generally reflecting the strength of their mass work] such as, to name an early example, the march on the US Embassy and Department of Education in London in an internationalist protest against racist attacks. Some 700 students and black workers were led by the London RSSF and Black Panther Movement in a joint criticism of the sentencing of Bobby Seale and the doubling of accommodation fees for foreign students in Britain in November 1969.

A Flowering of Initials

The fag end of Sixties student radicalism saw student Maoists graduate and form a number of organisations that reflected the fragmentary nature of the movement. Concurrent with this was the tendency for the 'veterans' of the anti-revisionist to re-group into party-building formations. The main point is that the Maoist organisations of the second wave were consciously created in a process that saw the ranks of those expelled from the CPGB for their anti-revisionist politics reinforced by politically active students that were too Marxist for the YCL and numerous activists radicalised by events on the international scene, particularly the Cultural Revolution in China and the wars of resistance fought in Vietnam and elsewhere in the Third World. There was an enthusiasm and a desire to change the world for the better. By 1968, the movement was dominated by radicalised petty-bourgeois youth and intellectuals eager to "make revolution".

An extensive pen portrait of one such group and their weekly meetings, running a Saturday morning bookstall in Great Homer Street market in Liverpool 8 was supplied by Alexi Sayle in his memoirs, entitled 'Stalin Ate My Homework':

The leader of the Merseyside Marxist-Leninist Group was Ian Williams, the young man I had first encountered at the lame YCL meeting. Now a student at Liverpool University, he lived with his girlfriend Ruth who worked in an office to support them both since Ian, because of problems with his father, couldn't obtain a student grant. The MMLG was more diverse than a lot of left-wing groups. Its oldest member was a dock worker from Birkenhead called Wally Sturrock: high-

¹⁵⁹ Widery 1976: 315

cheeked and dark haired, part-gypsy, he was in his mid- twenties and unlike the rest of us was always well dressed in smart tailored suits, narrow shoes, colourful shirts and stylish slender ties. Another member, Dave, always reminded me of Pasha Antipov as played by Tom Courtenay in David Lean's film of *Doctor Zhivago*. Pasha is the disappointed romantic whose bitterness turns him into a cold-blooded and callous revolutionary known as Strelnikov. It was easy to imagine Dave travelling post-revolutionary Britain in an armoured train, shelling villages and shooting people for ideological deviationism. There was also the man with the picture of Mao on a stick, Nigel Morley Preston Jones. He had met Ian in a pub after some demonstration and, brought together by Nigel's photo of the Chairman, they had founded their own group. Nigel was converted to Marxism-Leninism by a guy he met in Glasgow who was a member of a tiny Scottish Marxist- Leninist party. Like all little parties this group put a great deal of energy into producing their newspaper, whose headline one month read 'Victory for Chairman Mao Tse-tung's Thought in the Gorbals'. Other members were a young couple of social workers from Yorkshire called Barry and Ingrid and a New Zealand woman whose name was Judith Wareham. I don't recall Judith's particular motives for becoming a Marxist-Leninist, but for some reason the sterility and asceticism of Maoism and its Balkan offshoot, Enver Hoxha's hard-line Communist Albania, seemed to hold a particular attraction for Kiwis. Sometimes at night I would tune the little blue and white plastic radio to Radio Albania whose English-language service, judging by the accents, seemed to be staffed entirely by New Zealanders. In reciting their long screeds of Marxist theory they would always refer to the Premier of China, the Great Helmsman, as 'Chairman May-ow, as if he was somebody's pet cat.'¹⁶⁰

Many of the Maoist groups repeated a familiar pattern whereby an organisation was started with quite a few and progressively dwindled spawning groups as a result of a split thus in the late 1960s and early 1970s there was a flowering of organisational initials of groups. The key RSSF London branch proved to be a rich source of Maoist activists. Organisations like the Revolutionary Marxist-Leninist League (RMLL), led by Abhimanyu Manchanda, one of those charismatic characters that populated the margins of student Maoist organisations in England, drew many of its members from the RSSF.¹⁶¹

REVOLUTIONARY MARXIST-LENINIST LEAGUE

Manchanda was born on September 4th 1919 in Gujranwala. India. He was active in the Communist Party of India, acting as a courier. In 1952, he attended an International Youth Festival in Europe but "on learning it was unsafe for him to return to India, he came to London". He had studied for a BSc degree in India, and during the 1950s worked as a labourer, as a laboratory technician at Bedford College London, and taught in South London schools.

Manchanda had joined the Communist Party *on arrival in* Britain. He met and became the partner of Claudia Jones, a member of the CPUSA from Trinidad deported to Britain under McCarthyite legislation. In Brixton, they started, under Claudia's editorship, a pioneering campaigning newspaper for the national minorities, *the West Indian Gazette*. Relations with the Communist Party deteriorated as Claudia Jones refused to toe the Party

¹⁶⁰ Sayle (2010): 229

¹⁶¹ Other RSSF activists from this period were to reappear as leading lights in other Maoist organisations: John Ritson and Fawzi Ibrahim in CPB (ML), Diane Langford in RMLL and Mike Earle in CFB (ML), fellow RSSF member Mike Kyriltsias and Helen Stoller were eventually to found, via the ELMWA, in the Revolutionary Communist League that united much of the diminished Maoist movement in the late 70s.

line with regards to China. She had visited China in 1964 before her death that Christmas. Her remains were interned next to Karl Marx at Highgate cemetery.

Manchanda took over the running of the Gazette which suspended publication five months later. He was in China at the time of Claudia's death, a visit that drew attention as Manchanda was identified as part of the developing Maoist network in Western Europe. A 'News Team' inquiry by The Times in 1968 described Manchanda as "a tireless, incisive Maoist theorist" as it sketched out the network of relationships on what it described as "the mixture of pro-Chinese communism and American-style Black Power on the immigrant scene". What the bourgeoisie feared was a re-run of events at the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination (CARD) when a tame semi-official body was radicalised by anti-racist activists in 1967. *The Times* suggested: "If an alliance uniting Indians, Africans, West Indians and Pakistanis were forged, a new force in British race relations could be mobilised -under Maoist leadership."¹⁶² Such concern at the militancy of those from the Third World in Britain occurred at a time of more resistance to the treatment of a racist society. Manchanda, as an Indian Communist *in* Britain, was also organising within the India Workers' Association. Avtar Joull, IWA General Secretary recalled in 1985, "I stayed- with Manchanda in, Hampstead for over a year to bring that paper out. At that point no printer wanted to touch Lalkar; Comrade Manchanda played a leading role in organising fraternal printers for Lalkar." Those fraternal printers for the IWA's paper were based in the Belgian capital, Brussels curtesy of Jacques Grippa, one of the earliest European Maoist.

Abihimanyu Manchanda was a name that aroused strong emotions in the ML movement in the 60s and early 70s. Despite a long record in the communist movement, and undoubted political ability, Manchanda was consciously shun by a majority of the movement in Britain. That aversion to him, both politically and individually, was expressed by one-time collaborator, Harpal Brar: the essence of his criticism was Manchanda's petty-bourgeois individualism...(he) rather be the general of a small clique than a soldier in a large proletarian army...in his attempts to promote self he uses all means -'revolutionary' and counter-revolutionary, personal slander, talking against comrades behind their backs in the cosy and snug atmosphere of the backrooms of English public houses, plays off comrade against comrade, launches vicious surprise attacks against comrades in meetings, organises factional activities to rob the organisation of its solidarity and turns contradictions among comrades into antagonistic contradictions."¹⁶³

For all his political experience and ability, 'only Manu could run any organisation containing him' seems to be the generally judgement, even from those who liked him:

Manu's great faults (I guess Claudia had held him in check to some extent) were extreme dogmatism (to the point of religiosity) and an inability to work closely with practically anyone else with a mind of their own for very long. He was a nice man at heart, but just bloody impossible!

A couple of vignettes at this point - during the Sino-Indian border war, he went to Peking and broadcast to India over radio, leading to his being branded a traitor and never able to return home.

After the Sharpeville Massacre, on behalf of the fledgling Anti-Apartheid Movement, he

¹⁶² *The Times* 15.3.68

¹⁶³ Association of Communist Workers (1972) *How Liberalism Split the REVOLUTIONARY MARXIST-LENINIST LEAGUE*. June 1972 p3

went on hunger strike outside South Africa House in Trafalgar Square. His close relations with the PAC and other African liberation movements date from this.

Anyway, during the sixties and the Cultural Revolution, he was one of the great characters of British Maoism, falling in and out with the other key players in a series of Technicolor splits and rows.¹⁶⁴

Manchanda shared a perspective common amongst the small groups that flourished in the ML movement: the Russian Revolution was led by Lenin; the Chinese Revolution was led by Mao, so who was to lead the British Revolution they would ask, and then promptly appoint themselves. Manchanda and others wanted the status of leader, and with it the respect and authority that revolutionaries like Lenin and Mao had earned in struggle but which the communists in Britain had not. However, his revolutionary pedigree did go back further than the young people he gathered around him.

It was as the representative of reportedly the largest single ML group - the *Association of Indian Communists* - that Manchanda was associated with Reg Birch's enterprise in late 1967 that saw the foundation of the *British Marxist-Leninist Organisation*. He served on its Provisional Committee until its transformation into the *Communist Party of Britain (ML)* at Easter 1968. This association was not to last and with militants from the London Revolutionary Socialist Students Federation the *Revolutionary Marxist-Leninist League* was formed with Manchanda as its prominent member.

Manchanda had achieved a standing within the ML movement. He drew upon his international recognition; he had visited Hanoi and Beijing as a delegate of the Afro-Asian Writers Association, had been active in the solidarity organisation Friends of China and led the British-Vietnam Solidarity Front.

At the inaugural conference of the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign in June 1966, Manchanda had anticipated the refusal of the initiators, the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation to accept the National Liberation Front as the sole genuine representatives of the Vietnamese people. A room had been booked at the Mahatma Gandhi Hall where those who followed Manchanda's walk-out to set up the British Vietnam Solidarity Front. A memoir, from one schooled in the Marxist classics by Manu, recalled:

To have his walk out, Manu rushed back from the Afro-Asian Writers Conference in Peking. As he told me years later: "The Chinese comrades asked me to stay. They pleaded with me. They begged me. But they wouldn't tell me why." Imagine Manu's disappointment when he opened his Hsinhua Bulletin to read that all the delegates, except him, had had the honour of being received by our great leader Chairman Mao in the Great Hall of the People.¹⁶⁵

October 27th 1968 proved to be the climax of the anti-war movement in Britain. Then a BVSF inspired breakaway from a VSC march to Hyde Park resulted in a 20,000 siege of the U.S. Embassy at Grosvenor Square. This was scattered after a prolonged police attack on the demonstrators.' The battle of Grosvenor Square' remains a part of the Left's glorious mythology and part of Manchanda's political capital.

The BVSF withered when the RMML attempted to use its activities in a party-building capacity. Many ML groups, not just the RMML, mistakenly used 'broad front'

¹⁶⁴ Anecdotal source. October 21st 2002

¹⁶⁵ Anecdotal source. October 21st 2002

organisations in an opportunist manner, gradually transferring the demands of the party-building organisations, with its Leninist discipline and commitment on to the campaigning members. Those broad front organisations could not, and did not survive on those terms. They eventually were little more than hollow organisations. But Manchanda "... for long time issued leaflets in the name of the Britain-Vietnam Solidarity Front and other organisations, long after they had to all intents and purposes, ceased to exist to a large extent because of his behaviour."¹⁶⁶

There was a similar experience with Friends of China long after it had been replaced by the formation of the Society of Anglo-Chinese Understanding (SACU). Friends of China dissolved itself in October 1971 long after it had had an actual existence after the 'Laurel Tree' debates. The RMML had participated in the formation of the Joint Committee of Communists in 1968 but left in the November of that year to pursue its own political existence.

Life within the RMML seemed to have all the characteristics of the worst elements of small group existence even though the organisation had three branches outside London - Hemel Hempstead, High Wycombe, and Watford -and members in Coventry. But Lisburne Road in North London was the focus of the organisation: that was Manchanda's home.

The internal manoeuvrings and intrigues of the short life of the RMLL were exposed in a pamphlet produced by the *Association of Communist Workers* – Harpal Brar, college law lecturer led the former RMML Hemel Hempstead branch. This organisation emerged after a split in August 1969 saw half the RMLL membership Leave the organization. It is ironic that the cover of the ACW pamphlet contains Lenin's observation that "Honesty in politics is the result of strength: hypocrisy is the result of weakness". It documents the petty, spiteful personal intrigues and violations of organisational behaviour that pasted for politics within the RMLL.

In the three years of effective existence of the RMLL, the priority given to internal affairs and the amateurism manner that such tasks were undertaken became the main focus of internal disquiet. The ACW charged that the RMLL had "no official minutes because Manchanda as secretary of the RMLL was either too lazy to do the job or thought the job too low for him to do."¹⁶⁷

There was another side: He worked with fanatical zeal and drove all around him in a similar way. And no good Manu meeting would be complete without - speakers from a selection of liberation movements, beautifully made banners, excellent photo display, film show, and some wonderful cooking.¹⁶⁸

It was on the issue of the functioning of the RMLL and Manchanda inability to meet the political tasks *in* his capacity as the secretary of the RMLL, BVSF and Chairman of Friends of China that opposition crystallised.

Any difference of opinion with Manchanda held by a comrade on a political issue *is* regarded as a challenge to his leadership All this leads to accusations and counter-

¹⁶⁶ CWM Internal Communication. (1978)

¹⁶⁷ Association of Communist Workers (1972) *How Liberalism Split the REVOLUTIONARY MARXIST-LENINIST LEAGUE*:1 hereafter ACW 1972

¹⁶⁸ Anecdotal source. October 21st 2002

accusations ending *in* a complete confusion of the political issues and a complete destruction of the comradely atmosphere for resolving contradictions.¹⁶⁹

In the preface to the pamphlet 'Liberalism Split the Revolutionary Marxist-Leninist League', the potential reader was warned that:

Quite a lot of things described in this document will seem petty to the reader and points of principle will appear to be of secondary importance only. But this is no fault of ours. We are dealing with Manchanda.

This warning far from prepares one for the description of such a warped internal life filled with suspicion, underhand struggle, abusiveness and whispering campaigns. What is laid bare, and this is far from restricted to the small groups of the ML movement in its early days is the damaging perspective that is engendered by being enveloped into a self-perpetuating existence devoid of a relationship with other daily concerns. The intensity of a one dimensional commitment whereby life revolves around, and is shaped by that allegiance distorts one's sense of proportion and priority.

Instead of accepting these criticisms, Mr Manchanda saw in the comrades criticising him and his trend rivals for leadership who had to be eliminated. In regard to Comrade Henderson, Mr. Manchanda got his opportunity when the former separated from his wife."¹⁷⁰

The 'issue' of Henderson Brookes separation was raised by Manchanda at a RMML Executive Committee meeting when he raised the question of whether Brookes had any "personal relationship" to another comrade, Margaret Heath.

The issue of personal morality does have political implications, and how an individual treats others does reflect on their political sincerity: proclaiming sacrifice and liberation whilst maintaining oppressive or indulgent personal relations does not suggest a genuine or trust-worthy comrade.

Within the enclosed circles prescribed by the RMML activities, Manchanda was regarded as surrounded 'by a crowd of acolytes by those outside of the organisation. They were often uncritical of his "guru-like status" within the organisation. So when he brought up this personal matter as a diversion from, and an avoidance of, his political accountability to the organization it was accepted as a legitimate political concern.

This was an abuse of his leading role- and the RMML, like many other groups on the Left, was not politically mature enough to distinguish a comrade's political office from that of the comrade themselves. The collapse and disintegration of the trotskyist *Workers Revolutionary Party* and pro-Soviet sect, *Proletarian* in the 1980s because of the revelation of sexual abuse carried out by their "leading guru", is evidence that this is a re-occurring failure. There is an abdication of collective political responsibility by the operation of a de facto 'cult of personality': political groups are identified by their leading cadres, and largely shaped by them. This was certainly true of the RMML.

When confronted by calls for accountability, Manchanda rallied his forces within the RMML and succeeded in getting a majority of the Executive Committee to vote in favour of both Brookes and Margaret Heath's suspension in their absence from the meeting. "' Manchanda has used' comrades' personal affairs on the one hand to get rid of those

¹⁶⁹ ACW (1972):4

¹⁷⁰ ACW (1972):14

comrades who criticised him, and secondly to prevent discussion of the real political issues facing the organisation. For example, Manchanda got Diane Langford to attack Bob Archbold for making approaches to her exactly at the time when Comrade Archbold was raising many important criticisms of Manchanda, M.Earle and the RMML.”¹⁷¹

The factional struggle that erupted in July 1969 split the RMML in half. But the opposition to Manchanda's position was not on a unified political platform so the split brought forth more groups to add to the ML constellation: principally, the *Association of Communist Workers* led by Harpal and Maysel Brar, and *Irish National Liberation Solidarity Front*.

Those who had rallied to Manchanda's side were to echo the criticism of those who had left. There was another split in March 1971, the RMML ceased to function. At that time, some of the former members -Mike & Sharon Earle and Chris & Dave Mackinnon - reconstituted themselves as the *Marxist-Leninist Workers' Association*.

The disintegration of the RMML was followed by a fallow period in Manchanda's political activity: it coincided with a period of ill-health.

INLSF to CWLB (ML)

Edward Davoren, London convenor of the RSSF and an RMLL activist broke with Manchanda in August 1969 went on to found the Irish National Liberation Solidarity Front, [INLSF] which published the newspaper *Irish liberation Press* [ILP]. Davoren had had a relatively long political career. Born in Galway Ireland in 1941, he attended Catholic Secondary school in Coventry when his family travelled a familiar route of Irish emigration in search of work. He got an apprenticeship at Humber Cars (Coventry) in 1956 but was sacked aged 19. He worked in various engineering plants before immigrating to South Africa in April 1963. Out there he was active as secretary to the Johannesburg Branch of the Laundry and Dry Cleaning Workers Union. He was arrested after addressing mass meetings at Advance Laundries. He was arrested and held at Marshall Square police station, Johannesburg until deported in February 1964.

Back in England, Davoren gained an Oxford University diploma in Economics & Political Science on a Ruskin College scholarship. Moving on to study a B.Sc (Econs) at the University of Hull but expelled at end of first year, and then active in tenants action union. By the time of the upsurge in student radicalism, Davoren was active in student politics at Regent Street Polytechnic and London Convenor of the RSSF, as well as with the Britain- Vietnam solidarity Front. In 1969 he was on £1,500 bail awaiting trial on charges stemming from an anti-fascist demonstration at South Africa House. A mainstay of the RSSF, RMLL and INLSF through their short histories, editing the newspaper *“Irish Liberation Press”* before his retirement from active political involvement around autumn 1972; it was said because of "ill health", a public cover to mask his retirement to pursue a successful business career in printing.

¹⁷¹ ACW (1972):24 The New Zealander, Diane Langford later married Manchanda.

The INLSF had been formed in September 1969 and produced 'Irish Liberation Press' in March 1970. The sectarian attitude of the INLSF was mixed with supreme confidence of its own abilities: "the INLSF is the only serious organisation in existence in Britain concerned to educate workers here as to the class nature of the struggle against British Imperialism in Ireland and the only organisation that is capable of mobilising any working class support for the people of Ireland. What was to prove the highlight of INLSF mobilisation was the August 15 1971 rally of 600 demanding "Stop Internment Now!" "British Imperialism and its aggressor troops get out of Ireland now!" A report in *The Times* of the rally carried a picture of Davoren with an erroneous caption stating he was a speaker from International Socialism, one of the organisers behind a 2,000 strong march. The confusion arose that Sunday because both marches converged at the same place.

Even for those heady days the self-delusion of those immersed into the daily life of the INLSF was astounding. There is a saying that self-praise is no praise, and ILP displayed a subjective assessment in arguing, "in the long history of the British Labour Movement, the 'ILP' has no equal. Now in 1971 it has no equal in the world."¹⁷²

The self-perceived role of the INLSF was not in support of the republican forces fighting in Ireland, ironic given the use of an AK-47 on the masthead of 'Irish Liberation Press'.¹⁷³ A statement of INLSF's attitude spoke of "qualified support" for Sinn Fein and the IRA when they were involved in struggle with the "forces of British Imperialism". An article that discussed whether, in the wake of internment, the war in Ireland would be extended to British cities, was headlined: 'Such a Campaign would be wrong, wrong, wrong.' They put forward arguments that were to become very familiar in the British Left: British Imperialism, not the Irish people, would gain. It was an individualistic form of struggle. It would fail to win the masses of the British workers to support their Irish counterparts. It would fuel "anti-Irish slander campaigns, turn British and Irish workers at each other's throats" Instead, INLSF argued that the "Second front" was a "war of educating British masses, a war of organising demonstrations, pickets, exhibitions and all sorts of solidarity protests."

That in some ways characterises the broad front emphasis of the organisation, where to its credit, working principally on the issue of Ireland [while it shared the Left's common hostility towards those actually fighting British forces: "the anti-people terrorists of the rightist Provisionals."]. Other Marxist-Leninists paid little more than lip service to the nearest national liberation struggle. However members were never clear on the political difference and responsibilities treating broad front work as if it were party-building work: thus INLSF was described by its paper, *Irish Liberation Press*, as the "vanguard organisation in Britain", identifying what was supposed to be a broad front with a Marxist revolutionary organisation¹⁷⁴

The INLSF had an undisclosed core, the Communist Workers League of Britain (Marxist-Leninist). The ILP was seen as a paper for Irish workers in Britain. This was seen limiting the appeal, and reach, of the political message. So ILP became "*Voice of the People*" in March 1972, around the time when the CWLB (ML) abandoned the cover of

¹⁷² *Irish Liberation Press* Vol.2 No.3

¹⁷³ Volume 6 of *Voice of the People* sported a new masthead designed. "This was a tactical decision arrived at because in the minds of many people the gun was associated with the anti-people terrorism of the rightist Provisionals".

¹⁷⁴ *Irish Liberation Press* Vol 2 No.3 1971

the broad front INLSF. *Voice of the People* was certainly the best produced ML paper in the 70s: typeset and in colour with professional layout, and had a dedicated selling team although delusional to claim “more copies of this paper are sold to workers than any other revolutionary publication in Britain.”¹⁷⁵. Throughout 1973 CWLB could organise fortnightly classes at the Laurel tree pub, Bayham Street, Camden, a move away from their previous haunt at the ‘Enterprise Pub’ in Chalk Farm, again north London.

A memory of the time, referring to the INLSF on the London Irish political scene: They were led by a man called Davoren who, according to reports, had been deported from South Africa for trade union activities. Their key political message was: Irish political power grows out of the barrel of a gun. I saw this message propagated to destruction at a London meeting in early 1970: Tribune held a meeting on Ireland. The platform speakers were Bernadette Devlin, Justin Keating and Michael Foot and many hundreds attended. After the platform speeches, the meeting was thrown open to contributions from the audience. Mr Davoren took the floor. The platform speakers were roundly denounced for their failure. They had not told the meeting about the instrument of liberation of the Irish people! In fact, said Davoren, reaching a crescendo” Nobody has told the meeting what is the instrument of the Irish people. Nobody has had the courage to tell the meeting that Irish political power.... At this point one of Davoren’s supporters could contain himself no longer and started shouting” The gun! The gun! The gun!” Audience collapses in laughter!¹⁷⁶

The organisation characterised the Provisional IRA as "catholic national socialist line" and argued that "the people are not being armed either with revolutionary politics or guns by either of these organisations...it is impossible for them to give adequate leadership in the fight against British Imperialism and domestic reactionaries, although at present they appear to have taken the initiative." You can perhaps excuse the INLSF inability to grasp the dynamics of the struggle in Ireland; it was a characteristic they shared with the rest of the British Left. The statement concluded, with a now familiar refrain, an expression of hope that the Irish people will "throw up genuine revolutionary working class leadership and will liberate their land from the aggressor."¹⁷⁷

Actually when bombs went off in Britain, the CWLB argued that “the Provisional campaign is anti-people and must be condemned by all workers and other progressive people.”¹⁷⁸ In contrast to what it termed “bomber politicians” and sectarian slaughter, the CWLB argued for a ‘return to the politics of Connolly’ for ‘the immortal revolutionary teaching of James Connolly provides the key to class clarity.’¹⁷⁹

There were obvious tensions within the organisation. As an organisation the CWLB fizzled out after a series of expulsions. 1972 saw: Norman Temple was expelled from both the CWLB and INLSF for abandonment of political principles, Roger Tidy, who was General-Secretary of the INLSF in 1971, was expelled in September for violating democratic discipline and sabotaging the *Voice of the People* to be followed the next month by Raymond Morris for alleged retention of *Voice of the People* money.

¹⁷⁵ Front page claim from issue Vol3. No.6

¹⁷⁶ NollaigO - July 13, 2009

<http://cedarlounge.wordpress.com/2009/07/06/the-irish-left-archive-ireland-one-nation-communist-party-of-britain-marxist-leninist-1974/#comment-47280>

¹⁷⁷ *Irish Liberation Press* Vol.3 No.1 1972

¹⁷⁸ BRITISH AND IRISH WORKERS, UNITE AGAINST THE BOMBERS! DO NOT ALLOW THE RIGHT-WING TO DIVIDE YOU! Statement dated 22nd November 1973

¹⁷⁹ *Voice of the People* Vol 5. no.2 p3

Voice of the People announced the expulsion of "two middle class political degenerates" Reading-based Richard and Jenny Turner for "anti-working class views, refusal to abide by democratic-centralism and their downright dishonesty".¹⁸⁰ The Turner's open attack upon the CWLB's alleged opportunism and sectarianism remarked that "upon resigning, in a long letter reiterating many of our criticisms and refuting many of the slanders they saw fit to level at us at that time, we invited the organisation to participate with us in fraternal discussion of the differences between us. In reply we got a short note which we felt obliged to place in the hands of our lawyers."

In June 1971, the chairman, a 22 year old from Luton J O'Neil, vice-chair B.Rose and N.Hurley were expelled from the INLSF. In addition Leo Bunting, Michelle O'Callaghan, Des McGuinness and another left after a special conference to ratify the decision. The original three leading members were charged with advocating a "reactionary nationalist line" that INLSF should only be opened to Irish people and Marxist-Leninists expelled, even though until June 1971, all three had been members of the CWLB (ML). Furthermore, they were opposed to the formation of the National Organisation for the Defence of Prisoners and Dependents, and advocated "the physical resolution of contradictions within the INLSF".¹⁸¹ "The Irish National Liberation Solidarity Front is not, and can never be, a Marxist Leninist party. It is a broad front with Marxist Leninist leadership, and is most definitely proud to be just that."¹⁸²

Throughout its existence, the INLSF and CWLB (ML) attracted state attention precisely because of its political activity around Ireland, and they were always quick to bring this police provocation to the notice of the movement. There was an alleged "Hairie" Special Branch infiltrator, who for a few months during 1969/70, worked within INLSF under the name of Dick Jackson. He suggested that a bombing be organised. "It was explained to him that the job of the INLSF was to educate and mobilise the masses for a revolutionary struggle, and that this was quite different from engaging in acts of individual terrorism."¹⁸³ As treasurer of the Kensington-Paddington branch of Palestine Solidarity Campaign "Dick Jackson" had sought information on Palestinian guerrilla- camps. Jackson disappeared from the scene as quickly as he appeared.

In 1973 Special Branch raided two East London addresses associated with Voice of the People -Peter Grimes, his sister Carmel and her husband John Disley were detained and questioned. Joe Grimes, his pregnant wife Marion and three-year-old daughter was detained in simultaneous raids: ILP reported. "The pretext for the raids was the recent indiscriminate bombings which the Special Branch and any reader of Voice of the People knows full well this publication does not support."¹⁸⁴

Throughout 1970 INLSF and Black Unity & Freedom Party were working together under the Anti-Fascist Revolutionary Coordinating Committee of National Minorities. There was some overlapping membership with BUFP Central Committee member George Joseph and Leonard Chambers of the BUFP both having membership of the INLSF. One of the strong underdeveloped points that such co-operation sought was an "analysis of the

¹⁸⁰ *Voice of the People* Vol.5 No.3

¹⁸¹ *Irish Liberation Press* Vol.2 No.5 (1971:9)

¹⁸² *Irish Liberation Press* Vol.1 No.6 (1970: 2)

¹⁸³ *Irish Liberation Press'* Vol.2 No.2

¹⁸⁴ *Voice of the People* Vol.2 No.6

class role of the national minorities"¹⁸⁵ The importance of this question was never fully realised within the Left generally and it was not until the late 70s, with the thought-provoking issue of *Revolutionary Communist* from the Revolutionary Communist Group, that Marxist-Leninist forces focused on the issue in a manner other than a traditional anti-racist black and white unite and fight.¹⁸⁶ Indeed, this approach was reflected in local work: CWLB members were instrumental in 1975 of establishing 'Reading People Against Racism and Fascism' on the basis of three slogans: 'Fascists and Racists Out of Reading', 'Black and White Unite and Fight Racism and Fascism' and 'No Freedom of Speech for the National front Nazis'.

The CWLB shared a common apocalyptic perspective in the mid-seventies amongst the Left in general: that the serious crisis of capitalism could result in the coming to power of fascism and the rise of a boss-dominated corporate state.¹⁸⁷ This was a constant theme in the propaganda of the movement, some more emphatic in asserting that

Here in Britain the ruling class is step by step resorting to fascism, which is growing at a quite rapid pace. Fascism is capitalism in a state of crisis. Fascism is growing in Britain right now.¹⁸⁸

Similar sentiments could be read in the publications of the CPE (ML) active, some argued reckless so, in anti-fascist confrontations and in those associated with the North London Alliance grouping. However, it would be accurate to describe the main thrust of the Marxist-Leninist activities, whatever group, as weighted towards campaigns against the manifestations of state racism, while the street-level boot-boy fascist confrontations were a secondary aspect but more frequent in the latter half of the 1970s and 1980s especially in terms of defending Irish Republican Solidarity activities.

For & Against Chairman Birch

In tandem with the developments amongst student radicals there was the consolidation and political development towards a distinctively Maoist trend on the British Left. In the aftermath of the demise of the CDRCU, evident prior to McCreery's death from cancer on April 10th 1965, a number of co-coordinating trends emerged among anti-revisionist activists. There was a flurry of activity in 1967 perhaps not unconnected to the rumours of the intentions of Reg Birch. April 1967 saw the emergence of the Joint Committee of Communists:

From bilateral contacts and arrangements the formal recognition of the need for groups to work together came to be formulated. Some early experience which went from the extreme of sectarianism to that of liberalism, by seeking unity through ignoring real differences, also taught valuable lessons. On the basis of such experiences and centred round comrades engaged in anti-revisionist struggle within and outside the YCL, the JCC was created.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁵ *Irish Liberation Press* Vol.1 No.7 1970:8

¹⁸⁶ "Racism, Imperialism and the Working Class" *Revolutionary Communist* No.9 Summer 1979.

¹⁸⁷ *Voice of the People* Vol.6 No.1 p9

¹⁸⁸ *Voice of the People* Vol.2 No.6

¹⁸⁹ The Marxist-Leninist Movement in Britain: Origins and perspectives.

A statement by the Joint Committee of Communists *The Marxist* Number 12 Autumn 1969: 5-10.

Just as important a motive was the emergence that year of Reg Birch as an anti-revisionist. Lawrence Parker's work in the archives of the Communist Party resurrected evidence of the growing tensions in the fractured relationship between Executive Committee member, Reg Birch and the Communist Party leadership.¹⁹⁰

Already in the spring of 1965, the leadership's investigation of Birch involves the interception of his personal letters and "his name and character being dragged through the mud" including leaks to the Daily Mail, reporting on May 25th that the CPGB was set to expel Birch for his pro-China views.¹⁹¹ In October 1965, the London District Committee declined to nominate Birch for re-election to the Executive Committee: He is opposed to party policy on a vital issue and that his opposition is not limited to reservation of opinion but is active opposition.¹⁹²

Reg Birch did nothing to reassure his comrades when he provided the introduction to a pamphlet produced by the leader of the trotskyists 'International Socialists', Tony Cliff and Colin Barker published by the London Industrial Shop Steward's Defence Committee.¹⁹³

Birch's views on the Sino-Soviet split and his difficulties with the leadership were "common knowledge", especially when the CPGB decided to support Hugh Scanlon in the 1967 AEU presidential election. Reg Birch's opposition was clearly telegraphed when, towards the end of 1966, he was named as a member of the editorial board of *The Marxist*. The new discussion journal contributors included other AEU/CPGB members such as Jim Kean, Ted Roycraft and shop stewards' convenor, Tom Hill. Its pro-Maoist political positions confirmed by the presence of expelled CPGB members such as Colin Penn and Mike Faulkner. January 1967 Birch was suspended from Party membership. The CPGB actively campaigned "in a vicious manner"¹⁹⁴ when Birch stood in the 1967 AEU presidential election against the CPGB-supported Scanlon: he was defeated. When re-visiting the events of the time, Parker concurs with Reg Birch's contemporary critics that "his departure ... can be explained by his disgruntlement at the decision of the party to withdraw support for him in the 1967 AEU presidential election in favour of [ex-CPGB member] Hugh Scanlon". If you agree with this story, argues Parker, "his Maoist politics become little more than a sub-plot"¹⁹⁵. Parker, like Birch's then contemporary critics, examines and rejects the alternative story told by Will Podmore¹⁹⁶ that Birch was a long-standing opponent of revisionism and the BRS, and that the founding of the CPB (M-L) was the culmination of his long, principled struggle.

Reg Birch was expelled for "being in correspondence" with foreign Marxist-Leninist leaders. In August 1967, Birch visited China at the invitation of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions. Upon his return, there was immediate mobilisation to rally the Maoist movement behind him. The timing was important as noted in a hostile account of the origins of the CPB (ML): the implication was that Birch had been informed by the C.P.C

¹⁹⁰ Next few paragraphs draw heavily on the chapter, "Birch branches Off" from Parker(2007) *The Kick Inside*

¹⁹¹ Cited by Parker (2007) Note 27 p39

¹⁹² CP/IND/GOLL/04/06 cited by Parker (2007) :39

¹⁹³ *Incomes Policy, Legislation and Shop Stewards* (1966) available at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/cliff/works/1966/incomespol/index.htm>

¹⁹⁴ According to Podmore (2004) *Reg Birch: engineer, trade unionist, communist*: 65

¹⁹⁵ Parker (2007) :26

¹⁹⁶ Podmore (2004) *Reg Birch: engineer, trade unionist, communist*

that it supported the immediate formation of a Marxist-Leninist party in Britain and had asked him to act.¹⁹⁷

Or as the 'usual suspect' tells it: As for "returning from a trip to China" Reg was actually on a TU trip to Japan, but took the opportunity to pass through Peking on the way back. He met Kang Sheng, then head of both the Party International Liaison Department and the Intelligence service, who said to Reg something like: "All over the world, Marxists Leninists are forming new parties. What's happening in Britain?" Reg the old rouge came back and declared: "The Chinese have told me to form a party."¹⁹⁸

Reg wrote on September 6th 1967 "to a large number of his colleagues in the industry, and to others whom he thought should be involved.

'Dear Comrade,

The time is overdue for the establishment of a Marxist Leninist Party. A meeting has been convened for Sunday Sept. 17th to discuss this, and to decide the formation of a Provisional Committee to establish a Marxist Leninist Party.

'The problems are great, the strong participation of the Industrial Comrades is the key question. Essential also is the involvement in the discussions of all who seek to end political fragmentation. In addition to Marxist Leninists, we must also engage in discussion all those who are earnestly seeking to break with revisionism and social democracy.

'Will you please give this meeting absolute priority.

'Yours fraternally, Reg Birch.'¹⁹⁹

There were initially 44 people at the Conway Hall on the 17th September. An account of the proceedings, written from the perspective of the CFB (ML) leadership, observed:

Concerted opposition to Birch was small, and as has been said, not fully effective. The opposition group was two or three in number, and argued from a largely subjective and empirical base. Much larger was the group that was in complete disarray and did not know where to turn when faced with Birch's reputation as an Industrial leader, and by the cleverly implied endorsement of the Central Committee of the C.P.C. There was a widespread echoing of the opposition group's criticism of the manner in which the meeting had been constituted, but it would not be unfair to say that this was the highest level of unity against Birch's opportunism. The low level of unity and political argument unfortunately was an accurate reflection of the stage of development of the anti-revisionist movement. At the end of the day, Reg. Birch and his supporters did go ahead and set up the Provisional Committee of *the British Marxist-Leninist Organisation*.²⁰⁰

From the very beginning the BMLO assumed that its leadership of the movement was in the natural order of things. The secretariat of the organisation set itself the task of co-ordinating and assisting the various associated ML groups "in taking active part in the day-to-day struggle of the British working class and people." The goal that was set was to organise discussions and conferences for the preparation of the draft revolutionary programme, and undertake the preparations for convening a national congress for the formation of a Marxist-Leninist Party.

¹⁹⁷ Revisionism and the British Anti-Revisionist Movement *Marxist-Leninist Quarterly* No.3, Winter 1972/73

¹⁹⁸ Trainspotter message 15958 February 26 2003

¹⁹⁹ Podmore (2004) :73

²⁰⁰ Ditto.

The attitude of the Provisional Committee that generated mistrust, it was the assumption that other groups would be expected to agree with the BMLO political line "by mutual consultations and agreement with the Secretariat, they decide to dissolve and let their members join the local units of the organisation."

The BMLO did produce a duplicated internal bulletin which had more of the character of a news bulletin than that of a publication aiming to consolidate and rally activists to a political platform. It carried news of strikes and BMLO resolutions in response to international events etc. The contact address for the Provisional Committee of the BMLO in (NW7) London, was Reg Birch's home address. Premises were obtained at 155 Fortress Road, Tufnell Park in December 1967 as the Central Office for the BMLO. It also housed Bellman Books²⁰¹ which began Saturday openings on March 16th 1968. At successive Party Congresses, Reg referred to the circumstances of the Party's birth.

The background of the emergence of the party was against a furore of international and internal polemic. Here in Britain it was late beginning mostly because of a long improper understanding of the meaning of Leninist democracy, of democratic centralism. The acceptance of our party, in some circles, is still rejected, for this reason alone; it is regarded as an heretic, as a breakaway in its embryo beginning it took on an artificial characteristic, a debating forum. We must still guard against this. The party must demand self-sufficiency, self-reliance within the line in all localities in all branches. The caretaker, the director of the whole, the Central Committee.²⁰²

One of the few public events organised by the BMLO was a celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the Russian Revolution held at Beaver Hall (nr. Mansion House tube) on 18th November 1967. Reg Birch held the chair, while AEU associate Ted Roycraft, Rhujana Sidhanta, Manchanda and John Hannington were billed as the speakers.

It was an open secret that Easter 1968 would see the launch of a new political party led by Reg Birch. He had told *The Times* in February:
We will form for the first time a Marxist-Leninist party based on the working classes of Britain." There would be no intelligentsia on the party's governing body.²⁰³

The formation of the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) came on Sunday, April 14, 1968 as the concluding act of a three day Congress of 70 delegates held at the Party Centre -- Bellman Books. The formation of the CPB (ML) was presented as the culmination of the preparatory work of the BMLO set up in September 1967. But the Party had rallied few additional recruits to its ranks and most Marxist-Leninists remained outside of the CPB (ML) in various groups. Manchanda departed before the founding Congress.

A public meeting was arranged for June 15th at Conway Hall to unveil the CPB (ML) chaired by Reg Birch who led the 25 member Central Committee. From the very start there was a contemptuous attitude towards the rest of the movement. In the CPB scheme, once the Party had been founded then genuine Marxist-Leninists were inside it: As Reg

²⁰¹ Named after a character in Lewis Carroll's nonsense poem, 'The Hunting of the Snark'.

²⁰² *Congress '76 (1976):5.*

²⁰³ *The Times* 3rd February 1968

Birch said at a National Conference of the CPB (ML) in January 1970, the burden of revolution was on:

one brave band, one hope, our Party --small, as yet relatively ineffectual, plagued as all new born organisations with the advice of every passing stranger who would put us right. A party exposed to all the manifestations of petit-bourgeois influence, groupism, pseudo-intellectualism -those who would be the Roman Catholics of politics - faith not works.

Unlike other organisations in the movement, the CPB (ML) did not make a fetish of proclaiming Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought. Indeed there was no reference to it in the constitution of the Party and its publications seldom indulged in using the icons (like the 'Heads' graphic of Marx-Engels-Lenin-Stalin-Mao) that populated the pages and banners of smaller Maoist groups. The organisation gave a much more sober, even serious impression of not being a transplanted political expression.

A few hundred strong at its height, the CPB (ML) had the advantages of a recognised trade union leader as its founder, geographical representation across the country, and a working class base. It produced a newspaper, *The Worker*, starting in January 1969 and enjoyed international recognition by both Albania and China. 'The Worker' April 1969 reported the first public meeting of the New Albanian Society on March 15 1969. Dorothy Birch, a teacher who visited Albania in the summer of 1968, "gave an interesting account of the country and its socialist development" accompanied by "interesting slides of many aspects of the country." Chairman of the society was Professor Cyril Offord, F.R.S. (London University), its secretary Joanna Seymour of Westbourne Grove, London W 11. Programmes of events were drawn up: typically as on June 13 1969: an illustrated talk on Albanian folk music at 155 Fortess Road. The British premiere of the film, 'Triumph over Death' was shown at Conway Hall on Friday October 31st 1969. The Society was to be a regular feature of Party life until the late 1970s. Although active within, there was no success in supplanting the existing 'non-party' friendship organisations focussed on China, who were not as active in cultivating fraternal parties as were the Albanians.

Birch observed at the 1982 Congress, that,

The founding was an act forced by events, taken after long thought. We were compelled to do so and our beginnings were small and composed mainly at that time of Workers from the industrial section of our class, craftsmen, many of whom had years in class struggle as workers, and in direct political activity. Together with them were other workers, including some professional workers.²⁰⁴

The CPB (ML) seemed attractive to those looking for a serious political force: it offered the opportunity to rectify the stunted development of the movement by providing an organisation organically connected to the working class in Britain. With a pedigree of both trade unionism and Communist Party activity, Chairman Birch offered the possibility of gathering the best forces of the Marxist-Leninist movement around the standard he had raised. Many wanted a unified centre to build the movement around; after all, Britain's Maoist were a minority tendency in the creative political constellation of a British Left swamped by revisionists and Trotskyists. Those disgusted with the squabbling that seemed to dominate the activities of many anti-revisionist circles looked forward to the opportunity for serious political work in trade unions and campaigns directed at winning working class support in the appropriate Leninist fashion. It attracted Alexi Sayle and his comrades:

²⁰⁴ *Congress '82 :12-13*

In early 1969 reflecting the consolidation that was taking place in the automobile industry, banking and retailing, the Merseyside Marxist-Leninist Group ceased to be independent and became the Liverpool Branch of the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist). The CPB (ML) had been founded in 1968 by Reg Birch, an angry, grey-haired little man in a suit, , along with other leading members of the engineering union, all of them disillusioned by the Soviet-aligned Communist Party of Great Britain. At the time it had maybe three hundred members, which made it a giant amongst left-wing groups.²⁰⁵

There was a distinct base in North London engineers, around the AEU, that added to the credibility of the organisation. Why was this source of support significant? Samuel notes in his work *The Lost World of British Communism* that it was engineers that were “the bedrock of the [Communist] party’s trade union strength.”²⁰⁶ In the post-war period, AEU members accounted for 154 of the 655 delegates at the 19th Party Congress in 1947, 108 out of 615 at the 23rd Congress in 1954 and in 1963 for 87 of 461 delegates. Samuel argues that the industrial cadre of the Communist Party was largely drawn from working class aristocracies, the industrial craft elite such as the tool makers “skilled men who were expected to use their own initiative” “were proud of their knowledge and skill”, “good industrial militants”. It is not surprising that “workerism” flowered in the organisation that Birch founded and led: it indeed, reflected its social origins. In their own opinion,

The British working class created our unique trade unions: in Britain the birth of the trade unions was the birth of dignity for our class. Ever since engineering workers founded the Associated Society of Engineers (ASE) in 1851, they led in organisation and in the struggle for wages and conditions. They were the vanguard of the working class for over a century.²⁰⁷

‘Proof’ for a self-belief that they were the vanguard of the class. The enmeshment into trade unionism, with the blessing of the Party Centre, was little more than a reinforcement of actual political practice for CPB (ML) members. The claim to be the working class party was slightly exaggerated: it was not a working class party in any representative sense but had more workers than any other organisation (the exception may be organisations based on third world nationalities). That added to its appeal.

Nonetheless, the CPB (ML) had its critics. Birch and the creation of the CPB (ML) were, as Parker comments: unable to win hegemony over an extremely fragmented extra-CPGB Maoist left, the new organisation being set up itself on the basis of a split with his former comrades in *The Marxist*²⁰⁸

The absence of Birch and his allies (Ted Roycraft and Sam Nelson) from the editorial committee of *The Marxist* was not noted in the winter 1967-68 issue of the journal. Instead, the new Committee of Management, (reinforced by some younger activists like Martin Darling) outlined its broad political position, which seemed to draw the same

²⁰⁵ Sayle (2010): 285. It did cause a split in the group with two members joining “our deadliest enemies” the Communist Federation of Britain (Marxist-Leninist)

²⁰⁶ Samuel (2006) : 189

²⁰⁷ WORKERS, May 2010

²⁰⁸ Parker (2007) 37

conclusion as the departed Birch, that there were no more advantages to remaining inside the CPGB – no doubt a conclusion reinforced by the expulsion policy of the CPGB:

It is now no more than a left adjunct of social-democracy which, like the social-democratic parties actually assists the capitalist class in maintaining its power.²⁰⁹

The next issue's editorial gave a nameless acknowledgement of the existence of the CPB (ML):

Towards a new Party

IN THE LAST ISSUE we published 'Where We Stand' which outlines our broad political position. We also said that we would play our part in the formation of a Marxist-Leninist Party, whilst at the same time expressing the opinion that it cannot be built overnight. Differences have arisen between the Marxist-Leninist groups already in existence, In our opinion the main reason for these has been a surfeit of abstract theorising and insufficient summarising of the experiences gained during the course of practical work. 'The Marxist philosophy of dialectical materialism has two outstanding characteristics. One is its class nature: it openly avows that dialectical materialism is in the service of the proletariat. The other is its practicality: it emphasizes the dependence of theory on practice, emphasizes that theory is based on practice and in turn serves practice.' Mao Tse-tung Selected Works Vol1 p 297.

Our attitude to other groups

We do not intend to enter into the fratricidal warfare which exists between some groups, nor adopt an attitude of hostility towards them. At the same time we do not accept that any group at present, whatever it may call itself, is qualified to assume the role of The Marxist Leninist Party, to which all other groups must of necessity gravitate.

In our opinion the process of forming a Party will require more than a few short months of preparation and the issuing of a manifesto.

The truth must be faced that the Marxist-Leninist groups in Britain are, on the whole, isolated from the working class and rarely, if ever participate in the practice of class struggle. By class struggle we mean actual involvement with people and not manoeuvring for advantage on committees or just seeking elevation to leading positions in the working class movement.

As the groups become involved in the practice of class struggle and summarise their experiences, comparisons can be made and practical conclusions drawn, so that a real, as distinct from a formal, unity is developed.

It follows from this, that we welcome the coming together of groups in order to form larger units, and it may well be that a unified movement will begin as a loose federation of such groups. The first steps in this direction are now taking place.²¹⁰

Those opposed to Birch saw the shadow of the CDRCU. They had opposed the stress on centralist structures attempting to stimulate local activism to "build the Party". The view that the Party could be built rooted in grass root groups co-ordinating so as to build bottom up was reflected in the local character of their activities and the federal structures adopted for any national structure. In September 1969 the loose affiliation of groups and activists in and around the Joint Committee of Communists that had coalesced out of activists from the YCL, radicalised students and a sprinkling of veteran anti-revisionists, formed the Communist Federation of Britain (Marxist-Leninist).

²⁰⁹ Statement by the editorial committee, *The Marxist* Volume 1 No. 5 Winter 1967-68,

²¹⁰ *The Marxist* Volume 1 Number 6 Spring 1968 p2

The JCC origins lay in the co-ordination of London activists. In September 1967 a co-ordinating committee with representatives from "Beckenham", Camden, Willesden, SE London and Islington was organised. Although each group was autonomous, deciding its own work and perspectives, the purpose of the co-ordinating committee was to exchange information and reports of activity, to learn what developments were taking place, with the intention to "bring into collective and formulate perspectives and activity for all groups working together."

By November 1968 the participants in JCC were:

- *Camden Communist Movement, essentially from the YCL
- *Organisation for the Defence of Marxism-Leninism (Coventry)
- *the South West London Group
- *Glasgow Communist Movement,
- *Communist Workers League in the West of England (CWL)

The CWL had been established in March 1966 as a result of the expulsion from Bristol South of Terry Mann, Pete Jordan and Sam Valentine. Expulsions were epidemic throughout the Communist Party in the region. In Cheltenham, Jack Walkey was expelled and eleven others, mostly industrial comrades, resigned. The CWL had its roots in a duplicated anti-revisionist journal "*Struggle*" that first appeared in October 1965 from dissident members of Bristol CP branch who sought 'to secure the victory of Marxism-Leninism and the propagation of the teachings of Marx-Engels-Lenin-Stalin, in the knowledge that it is only by being thus armed that the working class will triumph. '.

It was not until January 1967 that the journal first carried an article on "The Thought of Mao Tse-Tung" proclaiming: there can be no hope of revolutionary success, however small, without a close and diligent study of the thought of Mao Tse-Tung."²¹¹

The CPB (ML) also drew upon Bristol for support, from activists such as Bill Paxton and Danny Ryan who set up the Bristol Workers Association after their expulsion from the CP. They had a perspective of forming local centres for the re-grouping of ML forces coming together to form a new party.

The Brent Group, like the CWL West of England, contained a core of older expelled CP members, had inherited the non-aligned but mistrusted journal *The Marxist*. The Brent group joined JCC in December 1968 but decamped the following spring (1969) to eventual emerges as the Marxist Industrial Group. The JCC had lost a group in Birmingham that had dissolved, unable to break with the Communist Party, in the summer of 1967; a group in Leeds had left and subsequently dissolved, some of its members remaining in the YCL and others joining the Trotskyite International Socialists and Socialist Labour League. The Revolutionary Marxist-Leninist League led a split from the JCC after November 17 1968 meeting, they had allies with some of the Coventry group and Camden Communist Movement members (Nick Bateson, dismissed from the LSE, Valerie Bateson and Iraqi-born Fawzi Ibrahim, later in the leadership of NATFHE, the lecturer's union). The CCM members, rejected overtures for unity with Manchanda's RMML, formed the short-lived London Communist Group before joining in the spring of 1969, the CPB (ML) and within a short time the LCG was almost in its entirety on the C.C.

²¹¹ *Struggle* No.9 Dec66/Jan67

In any discussion about what began as the 'the anti-revisionist movement' but became known as the ML movement in the late 60s should understand that even if it wanted to, the ML movement was largely incapable of responding to struggle on a national level. Maoists were disorganised in dozens of different groups and campaigns - their forces weakened so that they could make almost no lasting impact. Certainly the use of movement as a term reflected the proliferation of small active groups, and it seemed the smaller the group the more introspective its members were. "In 1969 an unofficial survey unearthed twenty-eight such groups"²¹².

There was never a confluent movement in existence, various initiatives co-existed. Those who left the Young Communist League did so on a piecemeal even geographical basis and not with a national exit strategy that would provide the basis for a youth movement for a new party building organisation. The initiatives of prominent individuals would often gradually peter out as seen with Ewan MacColl (1915–1989). He was part of an informal, often social network of anti-revisionists personalities that good intentions aside, never coalesced into a commitment to a new party-building organisation.

At the height of his powers MacColl became the major force behind the award-winning series of eight *Radio Ballads*, an innovative synthesis of documentary, drama and song, created in collaboration with singer, songwriter and musician and his wife, Peggy Seeger (half-sister to American icon Pete Seeger), and BBC radio producer Charles Parker between 1958 and 1964.²¹³

MacColl had become increasingly remote from the Communist Party and allowed his membership to lapse in the early 1960s. Probably, suggests, Ben Harker²¹⁴, when he moved to live, with Peggy Seeger, at 35 Stanley Avenue, Beckenham. He made no public renunciation at the time. However MI5 had monitored the folk singer Ewan MacColl, an edited version of his file was declassified in 2006, because of his Communist view tracking him for more than 20 years.

By the mid-1960s MacColl was reengaged with radical politics as the resurgence of revolutionary Marxism-Leninism in part inspired by Chairman Mao's China opposition to Soviet revisionism revitalised the disenchanted 'Stalinist old guard'.

Mao spoke MacColl's language on cultural questions...share MacColl's enthusiasm for those revolutionary national liberation struggles in Cuba, Algeria, Vietnam and Latin America...considered that the Soviet Union has gone soft.²¹⁵

Things were to change when MacColl came into contact with "like-minded London firebrands" mixing with trade union leader Reg Birch (former member of the National Executive Committee of the Communist Party), Texan novelist and BBC script-editor, William Ash, the film-maker and Quaker, Felix Greene and his old friend Professor George Thompson associated with the China Policy Study Group for which he produced three books on Marxist theory, the first and most well-known called "*From Marx to Mao*".

²¹² Tariq Ali (1972) *The Coming British Revolution*. Jonathan Cape :143

²¹³ Ewan MacColl may well have been the most influential person in the British folk song revival, regarded as was one of the foremost interpreters of traditional songs ever recorded. His songs have been covered by performers as diverse as Dick Gaughan, the Pogues, Roberta Flack, and Elvis Presley.

²¹⁴ author of *Class Act: The Cultural and Political Life of Ewan MacColl* (London : Pluto, 2007).

²¹⁵ Harker 2007:202

MacColl's temperament and judgement was in tune with the intellectual opposition to the very first draft of the '*British Road to Socialism*' expressed by the Graeco-Roman scholar George Thompson. There were other ties: his musician wife Katherine Thompson worked with Ewan MacColl and another 'cultural Marxist', A.L.Lloyd on '*Singing the Fish*'.

Thompson was a leading communist academic, Professor of Greek²¹⁶, who had an equally leading role in the CPGB internal party education programme in the Forties. A member of the Executive Committee, and on the editorial board of *Marxism Today*, he never lost his political beliefs. He was committed to working-class education, including giving lectures to factory workers at Birmingham's Austin car plant, ran night classes on Marxism at Birmingham University attended by some future members of the Birmingham Communist Association.

One study in the blooming field of academic interest in the Communist Party noted that:

Birmingham seemed the model of a more inclusive party culture, with no dominant occupational grouping or pronounced sense of social distance. Members of its distinguished university branch contributed actively to wider party activities, encouraged by the fact that their foremost representative, the classicist George Thomson, had held tenures in both the party and university dating from before a separate university branch existed. Resistant to revisionist tendencies- he eventually became a Maoist- Thomson led the way in taking local and factory group classes, and at home provided a setting for socially inclusive party gatherings at which his wife Katharine Thomson entertained on the spinet. 'The life of many of our branches and districts is pitifully narrow and unimaginative', he wrote in a mission statement for party intellectuals, 'it is for us to broaden it and make it more attractive'. Despite the echo of Toynbee Hall, and the 'bollocking' Thomson used to give his factory class members if they turned up unprepared, Stan Martin recalled never being made to feel uncomfortable in such situations: '[they] really did treat you as an equal, and in some cases you were more than an equal'.²¹⁷

While Thompson retained his political sympathy for the anti-revisionist perspectives (coexistent with an affection, and support, for the *Morning Star* in his later years), he was never identified with a specific organisation that emerged in opposition to the British Road. In 1951, he was the only member of the Communist Party's Executive Committee to vote against the Party's programme *The British Road to Socialism*, because "the dictatorship of the proletariat was missing"²¹⁸. Thompson continued to write and was later associated with the Society for Anglo-Chinese Understanding. His other life-long passion was the Irish language and culture following a visit to the Blasket Islands off the west coast of Ireland in 1923.

In common with occurrences elsewhere, "MacColl started his own Beckenham political reading group... Mao's writings were discussed until the small hours. MacColl and

²¹⁶ Published studies include *Aschylus and Athens* (1941), *Studies in Ancient Greek Society* (1949), *The Prehistoric Aegean* (1950)

²¹⁷ Quoted in Morgan, Gidon & Flinn (2007) *Communists and British Society 1920-1991* London: River Oram Press

²¹⁸ *Morning Star* 9th January 1989

Seeger became readers of the *Peking Review* (cancelling the subscription in 1970 after incensed by a critique of the 'reactionary bourgeois Stanislavski'²¹⁹

MacColl and Seeger subscribed to the monthly broadsheet published by the China Policy Study Group from May 1965. In 1966 MacColl supported *The Marxist*, appearing in a list of editorial board members when published in November-December 1966. He did not write a single article but lend his service as a singer, appearing at a couple of fund raising concerts. Harker noted, "Long associated with the Communist party, MacColl's public involvement conferred gravitas on a trend openly critical of the official Party line. It marked a significant leftward shift."²²⁰

As anticipated, those editorial members of '*The Marxist*' who were still members of the Communist Party were promptly expelled. Rumours were that the journal was tainted by being financed by a consortium of pro-China London businessmen associated with trading links to China [the 48 Group].²²¹ The publication survived in a pale imitation of its former glory [typeset A3 stapled bound] after intra-Maoist factionalism saw Reg Birch depart from the editorial board and de-camp to set up his own Maoist party in 1968.

MacColl did not join Reg Birch's Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) or any of the other new Marxist groups that courted in the 1960s. As Harker observed: "He now preferred to work instead as a freelance Marxist-Leninist cultural activist, and would judge causes and organisations on their merits."²²² As MacColl wrote in his autobiography, talking of a Communist Party wracked by rival 'revisionist' factions, "So the party I had served was moribund but the ideas and concepts which gave rise to it are still as alive as ever they were. Has there ever been such a desperate need for a revolutionary party as there is today?"²²³

It has suggested that a small group in the context of British Maoists was one with fewer members than the number of initials in the group's name. Undoubtedly, many groups provided to be transient, reflecting a particular set of conditions within the movement at a given time, and reading the realms of documents there is a growing familiarity with the named individuals as groups were formed, split and reconstituted by the same individuals each time.

The local groups could not break free from their fragmented and apolitical response to struggle because there was no organizational framework around which to operate. The character of the Maoist movement saw two courses: groups struck out to build a base in a locality and proceeded to ignore the rest of the movement - they achieved some local victories but then proceeded to petted out as the dimension of the task in the absence of a sustaining movement took its toil; or groups tended to look at the movement and attempted to build a leading centre which effectively blunted and distorted its political

²¹⁹ *Peking Review* 22 May 1970 issue 21

²²⁰ Harker 2007:203

²²¹ See: 'The Economic Background to The Marxist', *Hammer or Anvil* (July-August 1967): 12- 15

²²² Harker 2007:204

²²³ *Journeyman, an autobiography* [London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1990]

Harker noted: "MacColl had his differences with the old-guard class warriors now digging in around the *Morning Star* newspaper- they'd never grasped the significance of Mao, cultural activity in general or the people's music in particular - but his contempt was entirely reserved for the modernisers currently talking of new times in their highly successful journal *Marxism Today*."

effectiveness. One would conclude that the negative outweighs the positive if the concrete criticism were the only thing that could be cited in defence of the young movement. However such mistakes, deviations and errors occurred against a background of practice -often internalised and misdirected -but a practice that sought to apply Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong thought to the concrete conditions as they were understood.

Some organisations like the CPB (ML) and RMLL, later the *Communist Workers League of Britain* acted as if they had already created template for the re-built Leninist-type Party -they only needed some more members. Despite this belief that they were the future in embryo, they failed to act as national organisations on the big national and international issues of the day, ironic given the early impetus to Maoism in Britain by the solidarity work over Vietnam. The very proliferation of groups and campaigns hindered the emergence of an experienced core of political organisers and activists who could build the movement: more Maoists left politics burnt-out by the demands than those expelled for genuine political opposition.

Within a decade of its emergence, the architecture of the UK anti-revisionist movement was more or less established: there were very few ML groups that could be described as national in scope; in practical terms there were only two trends that offered the possibility for the politics of intervention - the CPB (ML) or the Communist Federation of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) and a host of smaller groups, considered large if they had a stable membership of a dozen – continuing to exist.

The ‘Third Element’

The British anti-revisionist movement was always international in composition, including the presence of Irish communists (like Noel Jenkinson, the Official IRA member convicted of the Aldershot bombing) in the CDRCU, and a sprinkling of men and women communists of Indian, Canadian, Jamaican, Greek, American, French and German nationality in even the smallest of Maoist groups. The so-called ‘Third element’ of the Maoist movement in Britain – those communists born overseas, and largely organised within association based on national identity – was an element that the old Party members and newer youth activists could never successfully integrate within the movement.

From the early 1960s onwards, communist organisations were built within migrant communities, such as in the north London Greek Cypriot community and there were progressive associations including the Pakistani Workers Association, Kashmiri Workers Association, and later Bangladeshi Workers Association. In the 1980s, Kurdish refugees to the UK would bring their militant politics with them, along with Iranian exiles, initially organized in the Confederation of Iranian Students. These organizations often demonstrated an anti-revisionist, even Maoist orientation, in addition to a generally progressive outlook and support for the anti-imperialist struggle throughout the world, and the struggle against racism in Britain. These organisations participated in campaigns but significantly, activists never combined their roots in their national communities with activism within a wider revolutionary party-building project, with perhaps the exception of the RIM aligned organisation in the 1980s when they were the main impetus for

organisation building. Without being swept up in the 1960s journalistic hysteric prophecy there is some truth that:

“Given the right target, the right leadership, the right moment, the right fervency from militants and some popular support, the mixture of pro-Chinese communism and American-style Black power on the immigrant scene can be devastating.”²²⁴

Claudia Jones

A prime example of what might have been can be seen in the case of the Trinidadian communist, Claudia Jones. Jones arrived in Britain in 1955, driven out of America, despite ill-health, during the McCarthy repression and almost shunned by the CPGB despite her considerable organisational and propagandist record in the CPUSA as the National Director of the Young Communist League. She lived in Notting Hill in west London where she was active in campaigns to defend the black community during the riots against them of 1958, also protesting against the racist killing of Kelso Cochrane. Claudia was the main initiative behind the progressive, campaigning newspaper, *West Indian Gazette*, printed in London for the Black community. It provided a forum for discussion of civil rights as well as reporting news that was overlooked by the mainstream media. Claudia worked as editor on the paper until her death.

The outbreak of fascist violence in Notting Hill in August 1958 led to the creation of the broad front organisation: Claudia Jones and Abihimanyu Manchanda became founder members of the *National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People*, designed to unite all those who could be united against racist violence and the institutionalised racism of the British state at a time of rising racist attacks. Ella Rule observed,

In these circumstances, the *West Indian Gazette* came into its own, as a campaigning tool supporting those organising self defence and anti-racist and anti-fascist campaigns, raising money for the defence of both black and white youths who were being prosecuted for putting up resistance to fascist violence.²²⁵

In her work within the Caribbean communities, Claudia Jones worked to create links between political campaigns and cultural activities. The Notting Hill carnival is undoubtedly Claudia Jones lasting legacy, which she helped launch at St Pancras Town Hall in January 1959 as an annual showcase for Caribbean talent. She helped launch the event as a response to the 1958 riots, when tensions had turned violent as racist mobs attacked local Black residents. Using the West Indian tradition of carnival, the event was intended to create closer relations between all local communities. These early celebrations were held in halls and were epitomised by the slogan, 'A people's art is the genesis of their freedom'. Then Carnival moved around for a few years; by 1965 it took to the streets of Notting Hill and has grown ever since, today a lasting legacy of cultural pride in the Caribbean heritage.

In the early 1960s, despite failing health, Jones helped organise campaigns against the 1962 Immigration Act. This had made it harder for non-Whites to migrate to Britain. She also campaigned for the release of Nelson Mandela, and spoke out against racism in the workplace.

²²⁴ The Times News team (1968) *The Black Man in Search of Power* (London: Nelson :154)

²²⁵ Ella Rule, *Claudia Jones, communist*. A presentation made to the Stalin Society on 22 March 2009
<http://www.lalkar.org/issues/contents/mar2010/claudia.html>

She made a visit to China in 1964, a few months before her death, when she was highly enthused by everything she saw. On her return from China she wrote:

I observed first hand with my own eyes the magnificent achievements of 15 years of Socialist Construction and its effect on lives, agricultural industry and society of the 650 million people of the New Socialist China. I talked and spoke to many of China's leaders – in government, in the People's Communes, in light and heavy industry – in the ardent revolutionary men, women, youth and children of New Socialist China who are led by the Chinese Communist Party and their world Communist leader, Chairman Mao Tse-tung ... The great achievements in Socialist Construction in New China, based on its policy of Self Reliance which permeates every aspect of its society – in agriculture and industrialisation in light and heavy industry. A new morality pervades this ancient land which less than 15 years ago was engaged in a bitter, protracted anti-imperialist armed struggle to free itself from the ravages of feudalism, semi-colonialism, bureaucratic capitalism and imperialism, and achieved victory over US imperialism, the Kuomintang puppets and the Japanese militarists.²²⁶

Claudia Jones died Christmas Eve 1964, aged 49 from a heart condition and tuberculosis. She was buried in Highgate Cemetery next to Karl Marx. In the nine years in Britain, her progressive, anti-racist, anti-imperialist politics and her reaction to a visit to China marked her out as a potentially influential leader of the young anti-revisionist movement. Her early death meant that she had not cemented a relationship with the newly emergent anti-revisionist movement in Britain. She was working on the West Indian Gazette with Manchanda, [later founder-leader of the Revolutionary Marxist-Leninist League] and mixing socially within that anti-revisionist scene. Up to her death, Claudia Jones: Was still working to lay the foundations of the Campaign Against racial discrimination, which was to influence deeply a generation of black leftists. An African mourner at her funeral indicated what her death meant: "We have lost the only person who had qualified as the leader of the Afro-Asian Caribbean peoples in Britain."²²⁷

The anti-revisionist movement was poorer without her, and other overseas-born cadre. The movement was poorer for their absence, their experiences, their relationship with organisations engaged in struggles in the Third World and their abilities that in a multi-national organisation may have helped steer organisations through choppy times.

Knowledge of this 'third element' remains sketchy: some notes on the largest of these national associations, the Indian Workers Association, which had tens of thousands of members, and the communists working within it illustrate the difficulties, contradictions, and lost opportunities. But first, a brief background on Indian Communists in the UK and in the C.P.G.B.

Association of Indian Communists

²²⁶ From an untitled and unpublished draft report made to the Committee of Asian and Afro-Caribbean Organisations, found among the papers of Claudia Jones inherited by Diane Langford on the death of Manchanda. Carole Boyce Davies has deposited all the Claudia Jones papers held by Diane Langford with the Schomburg Library in New York where it is entitled 'The Claudia Jones Memorial Collection'. Quoted by Ella Rule, 2009

²²⁷ In Memory of Claudia Jones (1915-1964) *Class Struggle* Vol.9 No.1 February 1985

According to the research of De Witt John, Indian members of the Communist Party of Great Britain in the 1950s formed their own branches, and elected their own officers and they were largely conducted in Punjabi. Although these Indian branches of the CPGB took part in some of the campaigns led by the organisation, they were also very active in organising Indian migrants on the basis of class interests, and as such, had close links with many local Indian Workers Association branches, and were also instrumental in founding new branches during the 1960s.²²⁸

At a meeting of Indian Communists held in Coventry in July 1966 the Association of Indian Communists (AIC) was formed after preparatory work undertaken by Sohan Singh Josh, of the Communist Party of India, Central Office. The AIC reflected an influential minority within the broader based IWA constituents.

Teja Singh Sahota, having been a member of the Communist Party of India, joined the Communist Party of Great Britain on his arrival in 1953. He settled in the Coventry area, and then in Leamington Spa, working in mines and factories over the years. In Britain, he rejected the revisionism of the CPGB and in 1966 he became a founder member of the AIC and was elected to its Central Committee and Secretariat. In 1967, he was elected as the General Secretary of the AIC. He visited China as a member of AIC delegations invited by the Chinese Communist Party.

The politics and factional divisions in India throughout the 1960s were reflected in the Indian diasporas as represented both in the broad national based IWA, and among the Indian-born communists active within it.

The Birmingham leadership of the AIC, for example, planned a translation of the “Little Red Book” of quotations of Mao Zedong and a school on Marxism-Leninism and the political thought of Mao Tse-Tung, for its members. 'Resolution no.2' passed by the Association of Indian Communists expressed support for the Naxalite peasant uprisings in West Bengal.

The Maoist connections were plain: Avtar Jouhl was appointed editor of '*Lalkar*' (Challenge) in September 1967. Described by *The Times* as published in Brussels courtesy of the Pro-Chinese Belgian, Jacques Grippa, 1500 copies are “printed in Punjabi, it has been flown to London at no small expense and sold to Indian immigrants in Britain as part of an effort to convert them to Maoist revolution.”²²⁹

Indian Workers Association (IWA)

The history of the IWA is closely associated with the histories of three individuals – Jagmohan Joshi, Avtar Jouhl, and Teja Singh Sahota.

In 1958, Avtar Jouhl was instrumental in setting up the Birmingham branch of the IWA. The Association's initial role was to support local workers, helping them to write letters and supporting any claims of unfair dismissal. One of the IWA's main campaigns during the 1960s was against immigration legislation, in particular the 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Bill. The IWA, in conjunction with other bodies such as the West Indian

²²⁸ De Witt John (1969) *Indian Workers Associations in Britain*, Institute of Race Relations/Oxford University Press : 66-70

²²⁹ *The Times* News Team 1968:156

Standing Conference, and the Standing Conference of Pakistan, fought hard against this legislation, putting together a pamphlet entitled *Victims Speak* and posting it to each Member of Parliament.

A. S. Rai was General Secretary of the IWA in 1961, and the national organisation seems to have been focused on Southall during this period. Avtar Jouhl took over as General Secretary in 1961, and the focus of national organisation probably move to Birmingham at this point. Jouhl, together with Teja Singh Sahota, who was elected as Vice President of the national IWA in 1959 and served as its President from 1967-1991, and Joshi, this triumvirate were politically influential in the organization. In 1967 a report entitled *'The National Question: The Application of Marxist Analysis to the National Minority Question in Britain'*, presented by the sub-committee of the Association of Indian Communists, consisting of Avtar Jouhl, Teja Singh Sahota and Jagmohan Joshi, and approved by the Secretariat, reflected their political leadership.

Avtar Jouhl was succeeded as General Secretary by Jagmohan Joshi in 1964, who held this position until his death on June 3rd 1979, and during this period, the national organisation was probably at its most active and radical in terms of its campaigning activities. The work of the national organisation during this period was driven by the aims and campaigning activities of the Birmingham branch. In the 1960s Joshi initiated the formation of the *Coordinating Committee Against Racial Discrimination (CCARD)*, a broad based campaigning committee of 26 organisations, and in the 1970s continued to challenge through participation in *the Campaign Against Racist Laws (CARL)*.

The Indian Workers Association led by Joshi campaigned against discrimination and social exclusion facing Indian and other black and Asian migrants in Britain through poor housing conditions, employment inequalities such as the segregation of facilities in factories where its members worked; the operation of a 'colour bar' in employment and education, as well as in shops, public houses, and other leisure facilities; and the restrictions of immigration legislation introduced during the 1960s and 1970s. Joshi was instrumental in constructing an anti-racist campaign, the Co-ordinating Committee Against Racial Discrimination, formed in Birmingham and fronted by Victor Yates, MP for Ladywood, who was the first president. Maurice Ludmer of the Jewish Ex Servicemen's Association and editor of *Searchlight* anti-fascist magazine played a significant role, together with Jagmohan Joshi and academic, Shirley Fossick, who later married Joshi.

The IWA supported industrial disputes involving black and Asian workers at a number of workplaces in the Midlands and expressed broad solidarity with the Trade Union movement - attending May Day rallies, encouraging members to join trade unions and supporting the miners strikes of the early 1970s and 1984-1985 – although it also campaigned against racial discrimination within trade unions. The organisation aimed to support all black and Asian workers and general working class struggles; however The Indian Workers Association remained concerned with political and social developments in India and campaigned in particular against the repression of political opponents, particularly the imposition of a State of Emergency between 1975 and 1977, in the *Alliance Against Fascist Dictatorship for People's Democratic India*.

However, one should not take at face value that the structure and activities of the IWA were what they claimed, or what they would have liked them to be. There were branches in Birmingham, Bradford, Coventry, Derby, Erith, Glasgow, Gravesend, Huddersfield,

Leamington Spa, Leeds and Leicester, Nottingham, Southampton, Wolverhampton. This list changed with the circumstances of a changing community. May 1979 saw the publication of a nine-page resignation letter from East London IWA members highlighting the contradictions within the national organisation. It spoke of the frustration at 'happy family relationship' within the IWA structures, of the feudal mentality that failed to address weaknesses, that "drinking partners and friendship are more important than

political actions and principles", complaining that no new branch had been formed since 1974 in Derby.

As community-based organisations, when mobilised they could swell the numbers of any rally or march and the leadership provide a political speech pitch perfect. In Joshi, the IWA had a charismatic leader, and accomplished poet (under the name of Asar Hoshiarpuri). The majority of the membership was Punjabi, mainly from two districts – Hoshiapur and Jalandher, known as Dwaba – and most of these members came to Britain during the 1950s. In the 1960s it was a community whose first language was not English, and whose working class composition could be supported and organised by fellow Indians. Later on a small number of Gujarati members also joined the IWA. Members of the Executive Committee of the Association were all Punjabi. Desai, "divided IWA leaders in Birmingham into three categories: those who held prestige within their village-kin group; entrepreneurs who ran the internal economy of the community; the university-educated immigrants with experience of Indian national politics", mostly with left-wing views.²³⁰

The Times described Joshi as "uncompromising and thoughtful Maoist industriously working for broad-front multi-racial British militant organisation". Partially true: the IWA was his prime focus, but in April 1968 he convened the *Black People's Alliance*, attracting 50 delegates representing 20 Indian, Caribbean, Pakistanis and African organisations throughout Britain. But such a heady mix of pro-Maoist and Black Power activists proved an unsustainable agenda in the absence of a unifying revolutionary party.

One of Joshi's personal contributions was his instrumental encouragement in the formation of the Birmingham Communist Association in 1975. It was eventually to merge with the RCLB. A statement by the *Birmingham Communist Association* (BCA) in tribute to his contribution noted:²³¹

Comrade Jagmohan Joshi was known as a determined campaigner against racialism and imperialism and for his support of the struggle of the Indian people for national liberation. He opened many eyes to the realities of oppression in India and other parts of the Third World, and introduced many people to a greater understanding of racialism. At this time, we particularly wish, 'to remember Comrade Joshi as a Marxist-Leninist. In Birmingham he was instrumental in bringing together various progressive people, and facilitated the formation of a discussion group.

He always emphasised the need to participate in the working class struggle in this country, and to strive to build a communist movement. He struggled against revisionism and never hesitated to denounce the so-called parties of the working class as frauds. At the same time as a mature communist, he understood "who are our enemies" and "who

²³⁰ Quoted in Heineman: 110

²³¹ *Class Struggle* May 29th to June 11 1980 (Vol. 4. No.11)

are our friends", and worked and discussed with progressive people at all levels, always involving as many people as possible in broad front work.

With Joshi's support and encouragement the Birmingham Communist Association was formed in 1975 from members of the discussion group. Our relationship with him contributed greatly to our development as communists. Our tribute to Comrade Joshi is to continue the struggle in which he played such an important part.

There was a danger of exaggerated expectations of the Association of Indian Communists because of its association with the IWA, whose large membership did not necessarily exceed the objectives "to further India's attempt to achieve independence, to promote social and cultural activities and to foster greater understanding between Indian and British people."²³²

There was also the added factor that curtailed the contribution of such national minority organisations like the AIC. Nationality based formations reflected the issues and divisions of the 'Motherland' and the fractious nature of the IWA is seen in the catalogue of organisational splits and creation of alternative (but similarly named) rivals.

In the early 1960s, the Indian Workers Association in Southall split from the rest of the organisation and became known as the Indian Workers Association (Southall). There are conflicting opinions over whether the Southall group was ever part of the centralised Association. The Indian Workers Association (Southall) claimed that it did not affiliate; the Indian Workers Association (GB) claims that it affiliated and later withdrew. There are suggestions that Vishnu Sharma and the leadership of the Southall group considered that the Indian Workers Association (GB) was too influenced by Communist politics, and felt that they wanted the Southall organisation to bring together Indians with different political views in an Indian Association. The Indian Workers Association (GB) was seen more as an organisation of Indian workers, concerned with the class interests of that specific group. In addition, the Indian Workers Association (Southall) was more committed to welfare and social work than campaigning, and was able to make money through showing Indian films at the Dominion cinema which they were eventually able to buy.

The Indian Workers Association (Southall) and the Indian Workers Association (GB) also had different perspectives on race relations in Britain. The Indian Workers Association (GB) appears to have considered that the Indian Workers Association (Southall) had an assimilationist philosophy and saw their role in educating Indians to make themselves acceptable to the British. This was in contrast to the Indian Workers Association (GB) which considered the problem to be racism, and saw their role as one of fighting racism and not of changing Indians. After the passing of race relations legislation in the mid-1960s these differences became more pronounced. The Indian Workers Association (Southall) worked with government bodies and with the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination whereas the Indian Workers Association (GB) refused to become involved with state-sponsored groups.

At the Leicester Conference in 1967, the IWA (GB) split into two groups: One, led by Prem Singh, supported the Communist Party of India (Marxist), while the other, under the Birmingham leadership supported the Chinese perspective.

²³² Interview with J. Joshi, General Secretary of the IWA, GB June 1st 1967. Quoted in Heineman:109

This was related to political disagreements within the Association. Members had differing views on Indian politics and in particular the Naxalbari uprising in West Bengal, which was supported by Jagmohan Joshi and other members but opposed by followers of the Communist Party of India-Marxist. The analysis of Joshi on this issue was seen as a Marxist-Leninist one, linked with Chinese communism. It is likely, however, that the split was as much to do with issues relating to politics in Britain. Joshi's supporters thought that black workers needed to lead struggles against imperialism and exploitation in their countries of origin and in Britain, and would then be joined by white workers.

Other members of the Indian Workers Association did not think that black workers had a special role to play. As a result of this, the Indian Workers Association (GB) led by Jagmohan Joshi formed alliances with other black groups, and was involved in the formation of the Black People's Alliance in 1968.

Because the split was of the centralised body of the Indian Workers Association (GB), it affected all the branches, and resulted in two Indian Workers Association operating in most areas. One Indian Workers Association (GB) continued to be led by Jagmohan Joshi (1936-1979), while the other Indian Workers Association (GB) was led by Prem Singh. The two groups continued to do similar work, and in some cases even campaigned together in some trade union struggles, for example, against immigration control in groups such as the Campaign Against Racist Laws [CARL] and the *Campaign Against Racism and Fascism* [CARF], and against the State of Emergency introduced by Indira Gandhi's government during the 1970s. It seems, though, that both groups struggled for recognition as the 'real' Indian Workers Association during this period.

A further split took place within the Indian Workers Association (GB) led by Prem Singh in the early 1980s and resulted in Naranjan Noor, president at the time, creating his own organisation. Of the original fracture in Southall, the Indian Workers Front (Southall) acted as the local branch of the Indian Workers Association (GB) following the split of the Indian Workers Association (Southall) from the centralised organisation. However, by 1979 there were two factions of the Indian Workers Front (Southall). One organisation known as the Indian Workers Front (Southall) was led by Harpal Brar, founder of the ACW and who also served as National Organiser of the Indian Workers Association (GB) and editor publishing Lalkar. The politically active East London IWA branch had been very dismissive of Harpal Brar being allowed back into membership of IWA. It added to their criticisms of the organisation. Brar treated Lalkar as a personal publishing vehicle and maintained its existence after departing from the IWA as an independent Marxist-Leninist journal. It was co-existent with Proletarian the bi-monthly journal of the CPGB-ML of which Harpal Brar was founder-Chairman in 2004 after being expelled from the Socialist Labour Party of miners' leader, Arthur Scargill.

Both Indian Workers Associations (GB) came into conflict with Akali party supporters during the 1980s that began to recruit through Gurdwaras. The Indian Workers Associations were opposed to this because they considered political campaigning should not take place where people came to pray or meet socially. Both of the Indian Workers Associations (GB) was attacked by Khalistanis, who supported the creation of a separate Sikh state.

As more joint campaigning work took place during the 1980s, a Co-ordinating Committee was formed in 1989, and the Indian Workers Associations (GB) held a Unity

Conference on June 9th 1990 at Smethwick, Birmingham, with the merger conference taking place 16-17 February 1991. Avtar Jouhl, who had become General Secretary of the Indian Workers Association (GB) led by Jagmohan Joshi after his death in 1979, became General Secretary of the merged Indian Workers Association (GB) and Prem Singh, General Secretary of the other Indian Workers Association, became the President.

In 1992 the Indian Workers Association claimed fourteen branches and a membership of about 20,000. Yet again reflecting the fractured nature of the communist movement in India, *People's Democracy* reported in 2004 the existence of two IWA's in Britain, one of which is influenced by Avtar Sadiq, Secretary Association of Indian and affiliated to the Communist Party of India (M).