

Revolutionary Communist League of Britain

Revisionism: The Politics of the CPGB Past & Present

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Foreword

The articles in this briefing are initial contributions to an assessment of revisionism in Britain. It was recognition of the political damage of revisionism that brought forth a counter political current of anti-revisionist activists. Many of these received moral and ideological support from the Sino-Soviet Polemics of the early 1960s.

In Britain, like elsewhere in North America and Europe, that Polemic did not see the political destruction of the old Moscow oriented parties. In Britain the anti-revisionist movement failed to unite with some activists expelled from the CPGB, and others remaining inside seeking to return the CPGB to Leninist basics.

The new ML groups that were formed emerged largely out of the radicalised petty bourgeois youth with a sprinkling of communist veterans. Most of these groups back-dated their ideological birth to the Polemic on the General Line of the International Communist Movement.

A source of strength to the adherents of such groups was Mao's China. That they

acted as if Mao's China was Marxism-Leninism incarnate, with every statement made carrying religious weight, was a source of weakness.

Those with contempt for theory were enthralled by the spontaneity of the struggle and confined themselves to the narrowest form of practical activity. Others confined themselves to the rarefied realm of understanding the world without the intention to change it. Between these two poles the early ML movement oscillated. The new self proclaimed "vanguard" were largely ignored: the failure to significantly challenge the influence of revisionism and social democracy in the working class meant that in the industrial countries very few of the new ML parties acquired notable influence in the working class of their countries.

Marxism-Leninism remains a minority tendency in the political constellation of the Left in this country. To understand the historically stunted development of the ML movement can provide some lessons to rectify that state of affairs.

Some effort has been made already with the article in OCTOBER *3. (1) These articles are more narrow in their concern concentrating on various aspects of modern revisionism as represented by the Communist Party of Great Britain.

The first, Revisionism in Britain, provides a useful beginning point to investigate, from the perspective of a participant, the state of the CPGB in the mid-1960s. The second, Notes on Revisionism, was written before the current disintegration of the CPGB and looks at the writings of John Gollan, if not the architect of the reformist party programme then a major promoter of 'The British Road to Socialism'. The third article looks at the CPGB's analysis and strategy for the 1990s. Without pre-emption of its conclusion, one can judge that for all its new style CP thinking has changed little since the first draft of BRS.

As always, comments and criticism, to strengthen our critique of revisionism, are welcomed.

(1)

Eurocentrism --the "key" link in theoretical work' (1985)

G. Lee

The Decline of the British Communist Party

Bradford 1988

INTRODUCTION

A. Britain Today

Perhaps one of the most surprising things about the last nine years has been the relative ease with which the government has been able to introduce policies that have so adversely affected so many sections of the community. Both the Labour Party and the trade union movement, with a few notable exceptions, have been virtually powerless to prevent, among other things, the reduction and even withdrawal of social security benefits from those most in need of them; the growth of homelessness particularly in London and the large cities; the infringement on trade union rights and restrictions on the use of trade union power and the gross under funding of the National Health Service (NHS), which led to the British Medical Journal using the leading article in a recent issue, to show that the NHS was literally moving towards terminal decline.

What is even more surprising in this decade, which is now witnessing a tremendous polarisation in society, and where it is becoming so much easier to observe the ever-widening gap between rich and poor, and between private affluence and public squalor, has been the virtual slide into obscurity of the British Communist Party (CPGB).

One might have felt that the fairly obvious political bankruptcy from a socialist perspective -of social democracy and Labourism under Kinnock, would have helped clear the way for the CPGB to play a much more active and noticeable role in British politics, particularly among those who have been most harshly hit since 1979. With its long history of involvement in political and industrial struggles and its many varied experiences, both positive and negative, one might have thought the opportunity now exists for the CPGB to fill the vacuum that currently prevails on the left.

Why it has not done so is the question to which my essay seeks to provide answers. Essentially the solution will be shown to lie in my view that since the time of the mid-forties, a fundamental revision of Marxism has taken place within the CPGB. However, it was not until the mid-sixties' that this had become sufficiently dear, particularly to those members who were growing increasingly

critical of the leadership and the party's failure to advance.

My essay will, therefore, commence with a brief description of some of the major events of the sixties in order to provide the reader with a background to what was going on within the CPGB around the time of its 29th Congress in November 1965. This will be followed by an initial explanation of what is to be understood by the term "revisionism" (and hence "anti-revisionism"), although it is expected that reading of the essay will help in illuminate this key element. It will then be necessary to look at the CPGB historically and also at the state of the communist movement internationally in the sixties before dealing specifically with events within the CPGB and its youth section, the Young Communist League (YCL).

B. The Sixties Remembered

The sixties will be recalled in different ways by all who lived through them. Politically, the start of the decade will be remembered by the massacre at Sharpeville when police shot dead 69 unarmed black protestors. In April 1961, the CIA backed an unsuccessful invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs. In November 1963, shock and mystery surrounded the assassination of President Kennedy. UDI was declared in Rhodesia in November 1965, while in the following year, the Cultural Revolution began in China. Two years later, hundreds of factories and schools were occupied as ten million French workers went on strike and students fought the riot police on the streets. In August 1968, tanks from Russia, East Germany, Poland and Hungary invaded Czechoslovakia, an event which coincided with the violent attack on young demonstrators outside the Democratic National Convention by Mayor Daley's Chicago police. And throughout the decade the war in Vietnam continued.

In April 1960, the Blue Streak missile project was cancelled after £100 million had been spent. June 1963 saw the Conservative government rocked by the Profumo affair. In October 1964, Labour came into office and Harold Wilson promised a White-Hot Technological Revolution. It was to be one that included wage freezes, cuts in spending on health, housing and education, devaluation of the pound and the emergence of the word redundancy as the Industrial Reorganisation Corporation, under Lord Kearton, proceeded to use taxpayers' money to finance mergers and create giant combines that changed the face of British industry. Enoch Powell made his infamous Rivers of Blood speech in April 1968 and London dockers marched to Whitehall to support him. Two months later, a handful of women sewing machinists reduced the whole of Ford's Dagenham works to a standstill bringing the demand for equal pay back onto the public agenda.

This brief review of ten memorable years is essential in order to help the contemporary reader, over twenty years later, get some feel for the times and for the political mood of a generation. The British Prime Minister himself, Harold

MacMillan, could see that things were not going to remain the same in the years ahead, for he told the South African Parliament: **“The wind of change is blowing through the continent. Whether we like it or not, this growth of national consciousness is a political fact.”**(1) Everywhere change was in the air and nowhere was this more so than in the international communist movement. The Soviet and Chinese communist parties engaged in along and bitter polemic which ranged over fundamental issues and it is against the background of a growing split of the communist world into two hostile camps that it is possible to begin to understand what was happening within the CPGB in the period 1963 to 1967.

c. What is Revisionism?

It is however necessary at this early stage to provide the reader with some idea of what is to be understood by the term “revisionism”.

This calls for two quotes, one from Lenin, who both sides would argue would have been on their side if he were still alive, and one from Mao Zedong, who was an active participant in the polemic.

“In the domain of politics, revisionism did really try to revise the foundation of Marxism, namely the doctrine of the class struggle. Political freedom, democracy and universal suffrage remove the ground for the class struggle we were told ... The revisionists said that since the 'will of the majority' prevail under democracy, one must neither regard the state as an organ of class rule, nor reject alliances with the progressive, social-reformist bourgeoisie against the reactionaries. It cannot be disputed that these objections of the revisionists constitute a fairly harmonious system of views, namely the old and well-known liberal bourgeois views. The liberals have always said that bourgeois parliamentarism destroys classes and class divisions, since the right to vote and the right to participate in state affairs are shared by all citizens without distinction. The whole of the history of Europe in the second half of the 19th century and the whole history of the Russian revolution in this century, clearly shows how absurd such views are. Economic distinctions are not mitigated but aggravated and intensified under the freedom of ‘democratic’ capitalism. Parliamentarism does not remove, but lays bare the innate character even of the most democratic bourgeois republics as organs of class oppression.”

(2)

“Both dogmatism and revisionism run counter to Marxism. Marxism must certainly advance; it must develop along with the development of practice and

cannot stand still. It would become lifeless if it remained stagnant and stereotyped. However, the basic principles of Marxism must never be violated, or 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 present circumstances, revisionism is more pernicious than dogmatism. One of the current important tasks on the ideological front is to unfold criticism of revisionism.” (3) Written in 1957, these were to prove prophetic words over the next ten years!

Chapter One: A. The Early Days of the CPGB

The Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) came into being in three stages in the period 1920 to 1921. Before this time, there had been no mass socialist party organised on an individual membership basis, and the militants who were attracted to communism were scattered in propaganda socialist groups such as the British Socialist Party, the Socialist Labour Party, the South Wales Communist council, the left wing of the Independent Labour Party and groups connected with the war-time shop stewards' movement and the miners' reform movement. It was out of these groups and also under the influence and inspiration of the Bolshevik Revolution that the cadres and membership of a united Communist Party were to come. However, hardly had the party been formed when the economic crisis of 1921 to 1923 broke out and the growth of unemployment encouraged the employers to apply their traditional remedy of wage cuts. The reformist leaders of the railwaymen and transport workers broke up the triple alliance with the miners, leaving them to battle on heroically but unsuccessfully. Subsequently, all other sections of the working class were to suffer cuts in their wages. These were the general circumstances in which the CPGB had to transform itself from an association of propaganda groups into a militant national organisation that was capable of giving the entire working class a lead in its daily struggles while at the same time pointing the way forward towards a socialist system of society. Despite its small numbers, it was soon in the forefront of many struggles and played an important role in defending the interests of the working class. Two particular areas of political activity stand out in the inter-war years. Firstly, there was the work that the Party carried out among the unemployed, leading the campaign to build the Unemployed Workers' Movement, opposition from Party and TUC, its work on the anti-fascist front, Republican forces in Spain and its leading role in the battles against Oswald Mosley and his Blackshirts, culminating in the Cable Street events in the East End of London in 1936.

B. Piatnitsky's Criticisms

However, despite all the political activity it engaged in, and for which it won widespread support, the Party was not and could not be immune from making big

errors. In my opinion, this basically stemmed from the fact that it never fully mastered dialectical-materialism in the sense that it proved itself capable of applying the general principles of Marxism-Leninism to the particular conditions in which it found itself in Britain. The low level of theory and lack of political understanding of dialectics were to be emphasised in the report produced by Piatnitsky, a member of the Communist International, based on his observations on the work of a number of Communist Parties in Western Europe in the early 1930's. It was his general opinion that they were lagging behind the rise of the revolutionary labour and peasant movement. He then went on to explain why this was so:

“Each country has its objective causes to explain this backwardness. This does not mean, however, that the backwardness is not due in a very large measure to the subjective factor -the failure to utilise the discontent of the great masses of the toilers with the lowering of the living standards, with unemployment, starvation, the burden of taxation, the actions of the Social-Democrats and Socialist Parties and reformist trade union bureaucracy. How are we to explain this failure to capture the working masses from the Social Democratic and Socialist Parties and the reformists, and to consolidate, organise and keep those workers who joined the Communist Parties and revolutionary trade union movements of the capitalist countries? It is due mainly to the Social Democratic and reformist traditions, prevailing in every field of party and trade union work, which are deeply rooted in the Communist Parties, red trade unions and trade union oppositions.” (4)

Piatnitsky then went on to illustrate this in a number of ways. Two of his examples were particularly applicable to the CPGB. Firstly, in respect of party organisation, he noted that in many of the parties, and particularly those that were operating legally, there was super-centralism. This meant that the Central Committee controlled the whole political work of the organisation in a way that stifled and deadened the initiative of the local branches. Secondly, the leaders seemed to assume that because they knew exactly what was going on, then so did everybody else. Thus, instead of patiently showing in detail how and when the Social Democrats and reformist trade union leaders were betraying the interests of the working class, they felt it was enough to call them Social Fascist. But, of course, this only had the effect of repelling those honest workers who were members of the Social Democratic parties and the reformist trade unions. What was needed was careful explanation to win them away from Social Democracy and reformism rather than rhetoric that was driving them towards it.

Although these criticisms from the Comintern were not specifically aimed

at anyone Communist Party, much that was in the report highlighted the reason why the British Communist Party, despite all the hard work of its active membership, was not advancing. If the size of the membership was any indication of its degree of success then a look at the figures would be quite revealing in this period.

It is estimated that there were approximately 4,000 'founding' members of the CPGB. This rose to over 10,000 around the time of the General Strike, but by the time Piatnitsky looked at the Party, membership had fallen to much less than half that number. As he had noted, the source of many of the Party's errors lay in the low level of theory and nowhere was this more clearly shown than over its attitudes towards the state. This is, of course, the key issue that can be said to distinguish Marxists from those who have revised Marxism and because of its crucial theoretical importance, it is essential to expand on this point.

Chapter Two: A. Marxism and the State

In the Communist Manifesto, written in 1848, Marx and Engels noted that the executive of the modern State was but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie, but generally, the whole question of the state was treated in an extremely vague way. In the 18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon, the question was dealt with much more concretely and Marx's conclusions were much more precise: "**All previous revolutions had perfected the state machine, whereas now it must be smashed.**" (6 & 7) Also, in writing their preface to an 1872 edition of the Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels noted that the programme had in some details become antiquated: "**One thing especially was proved by the (Paris) Commune viz. that 'the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready made State machinery and wield it for its own purposes.'**" (8) In 1891, Engels wrote that "**in reality the state is nothing but a machine for the oppression of one class by another and indeed in the democratic republic no less than in the monarchy**" (9). Writing after the experiences of the Russian Revolution, Lenin wrote: "**The state is a product and a manifestation of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms. The state arises where, when and insofar as class antagonisms objectively cannot be reconciled. And conversely the existence of the state proves that the class antagonisms are irreconcilable.**" (10)

What clearly follows from this aspect of the Marxist doctrine is that in a capitalist country such as Britain, Parliament cannot be the means through which the working class could ever hope to win political power and take measures to bring about change in the direction of socialism. Rather it should be understood in a similar way as one understands the role of the police, army, judiciary in a class

divide society, i.e. in the service of the most dominant class in that society. For, as Lenin also noted in *State and Revolution*:

"Once capital has gained possession of the democratic republic (which he called the best possible shell for capitalism) it establishes its power so securely so firmly that no change of persons, institutions or parties in the bourgeois democratic republic can change it." (11)

B. The CPGB and the State

From such an understanding of the essence' of Marxism on the nature of the state in capitalist society, we are now in a much stronger theoretical position to look at the CPGB on this fundamental question. In its programme, the *British Road to Socialism* first adopted in 1951, it was stated that:

"The working people of Britain in industry and agriculture form the immense majority of the population and constitute with their families fully two thirds of the population. To these must be added the great bulk of the clerical and professional workers, the teachers, technicians and scientists, the working farmers, shopkeepers and small business men, whose interests are equally threatened by the big land-owning, industrial and financial capitalists, and whose security and future prospects are closely bound up with those of the industrial working class. Together these represent a mighty political force, fully capable of defeating the present exploiters and rulers of the British people and returning a majority to Parliament which represents the interests of all working people, and a government determined to carry through, with the active political and industrial backing of the people, a policy that will open out a new and glorious future for Britain." (12)

Then the programme went on to state that Britain would move towards socialism along her own road, just as the people of Russia and China had won political power in a way that was determined by their own specific historical traditions. Thus

"the people of Britain can transform capitalist democracy into a real People's Democracy, transforming Parliament, the product of Britain's historical struggle for democracy into the democratic instrument of the will of the vast majority of the people." (13)

In reading this document now, it is essential to be reminded of the time that it was written. In 1951, the majority of the adult population could still vividly remember the years of the Depression and the unemployment; secondly, the war and its attendant hardship and misery; and thirdly, the post-war Labour

government upon which so much hope had been placed in 1945. For many working class people, the policies of Attlee, Morrison, Bevin, Cripps, etc. meant that they continued to suffer while the government restructured the capitalist economy and fell into line with the global needs of the American government. Thus, in a sense, to the degree that the Communist Party was able to expose the "socialism" of Labour 'as reformism and put forward a programme that would, if implemented, mean a real transfer of wealth and power from the tiny minority of exploiters, it was as Harry Pollitt said **"a programme that corresponds to the needs and heartfelt desires of the great majority of the British people."** (14)

But whether it was possible to implement such a programme was a separate question, since it appeared to be totally at variance with all that Marx, Engels and Lenin had written about the nature of the state and the idea of peaceful transition from capitalism to socialism, which after all was the long term aim of the Party. In the defence of their position, the Party theoreticians pointed out that the post-war situation in Britain was totally different to that faced by Lenin and the Bolsheviks in Czarist Russia. Now due to the existence of the socialist camp aided by the fact that many colonies were winning their freedom and independence, imperialism was much weaker. In their view, the significance of the British Road To Socialism was that it took into account the more favourable relation of class forces in the world and in Britain. Thus James Klugmann, writing in Marxism Today in October 1960, said **"it was now possible for the working class to win around itself a broad popular alliance to win political power, to win a Communist and genuine Socialist majority, to transform the capitalist state into a state representative of the interests of the working people and to build Socialism in Britain, not without continuous class struggle, but without armed conflict."**(15)

However, one aspect that was not taken into account by those who were presenting the strategy as outlined in the British Road To Socialism, was that ever since Lenin had written State and Revolution, the rulers of the capitalist countries had been increasing the power of their state machine in all its branches (political, military, economic, ideological etc.). Thus, if there had been a need to smash the state machine in the early twenties due to the existence of a standing army and a bureaucracy, then how much more so would this be needed by the time Klugmann was writing in 1960?

C. The CPGB and Social Democracy

Having dealt with the question of the state, it is also necessary to look briefly at the relation between the Communist Party and the Labour Party) for it was around the issue of the 'Unity of the Left' that many members of the Party were to disagree with the leadership during the sixties. Writing in 1930, a CPGB

theoretician, Palme Dutt, wrote:

"The workers are urged to believe that if only the Labour government would move a point or two to the 'Left', all would be well; instead of being assisted to see that the whole line of the Labour government is the line of capitalism and imperialism, against the workers and that, therefore, support of the Labour government is necessarily support of capitalism. In this way, the 'Left' and the 'Right' in the Labour Party are objectively allied parts of a single machine." (16)

His statement was fully in line with the Party's aim of presenting itself as an alternative to the Labour Party and of working to win the masses away from Social Democracy, even though its methods sometimes had the opposite effect.

Yet in 1944, the Party published a pamphlet written by Peter Kerrigan, head of its Industrial Department, in which he wrote:

"It is imperative to have the Communist Party, which represents that section of the movement which is inspired by the economic and political theories of Marx, in the Labour Party." (17)

And at the Party Congress in 1945, the Chairman, Willie Gallacher, said:

"We have got to carry on continuous campaigns ... everywhere throughout the country in order to build up the greatest measure of unity of all working-class and progressive forces around the Labour government. This is the one sure way of strengthening the forces in Parliament for carrying out the policy the people desire." (18)

One might well ask whether between 1930 and the end of the war the basic character of the Labour Party had changed. In the traditional Marxist view, Social Democratic parties, while claiming to serve the interests of the working class, in reality were the main instrument through which the capitalist class maintained an ideological hold over the working class. It was due to the existence of Social Democracy that all British governments had found it much easier to keep the struggles they encountered within an acceptable framework of parliamentary democracy. By 1945, the Communist Party no longer sought to expose Social Democracy, rather it sought first to transform it, then as time went on merely to unite with it. By the middle of the sixties, in an attempt to achieve unity, the Communist Party had moved so far towards the Labour Party that the differences between it and the Labour Left were quite blurred. Also by the end of that decade, some Communist Party members were taking the ideas of the British Road to Socialism to their logical conclusion. For if the main thing was to push the Labour Party to the left, then the best place to do that was from inside it.

Three: A. The 29th Party Congress

Thus by 1965, the CPGB was in a crisis. Growing numbers of members were feeling that the leadership was wrong, even anti-Marxist. But until the sixties, two subjective factors tended to deter the rank and file from taking a firm stand against what was going on. Firstly, there were the social pressures. Most of a member's social contact tended to be with other members. Complete inter-generational involvement was not uncommon. A couple might meet in the course of their political work and later on decide to get married. If they had children, they would be encouraged, even expected, to join the Young Communist League. There, they would make friends, one that might possibly lead to marriage and so the cycle went on. It was a pattern that helped develop a sense of community and comradeship. But it also encouraged conformity to the Party and to the leadership, even when the latter might be clearly in error. The second subjective factor was every member's knowledge that the leaders 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.

However, despite these subjective factors, the reality of the situation was that the Party was going backwards not forwards. In 1965, membership was 25% less than it had been in 1945; circulation of the Daily Worker was below 40,000, the lowest since the 1930's and not very much more than the registered membership of the Party. The 1964 election results were miserably bad, despite all the work and expenditure that had been put in. Thus, as members began to prepare for the 29th Party Congress, in November 1965, hope began to rise among anti-revisionists that even if the deeply entrenched leadership could not be removed, at least it might be obliged to change course. In one of a number of documents secretly being circulated at the time, one member summed up well the state of the Party when he or she wrote:

"Few members can in their hearts believe that the Party is meeting these requirements (i.e., to build up a political organisation in Britain which, in appropriate circumstances, will have the experience and capacity to lead the people to a revolutionary reconstruction of society). Many of them never allow themselves to question the Party and this, in itself, demonstrates that the Party falls short of its duties and responsibilities. Self-questioning and criticism is something the leadership has avoided for years. It has no intention of doing otherwise, either now or at the forthcoming Congress." (19)

The writer then went on to say that numerous mistakes had been made over

the years because the Party had not made a serious Marxist appraisal of the Labour Party which, despite the ideas held about it by many workers, and despite its links with the trade unions, was still a capitalist party:

"The truth is that the Communist Party behaves in practice as a left wing section of Labour, not as a Marxist party. Its present role is similar to that of the ILP earlier on. This means that it serves in the final analysis the interests of the bourgeoisie, not the workers." (20)

From amongst those who had already been expelled came even more bitter attacks upon the CPGB leadership. In the first issue of Hammer or Anvil, the paper of the relatively short-lived Action Centre for Marxist-Leninist Unity, published in November 1965, in a long analysis of the revisionist nature of the Party, it was stated:

"Today, as never before in its entire history, the communist movement in Britain is faced with a crisis of unparalleled dimensions and significance. Nothing less than the whole future existence of the communist vanguard party of the working class is at stake. The programmatic perspectives of the revisionist clique to be presented to Congress puts forward a line which stands in direct contradiction to the fundamental principles of Marxism-Leninism, the scientific ideology and guide to action of the 'working class-and its communist vanguard and which represents a final capitulation to the policies of social democracy the ideology of the capitalist class within the working class movement ... Should this social-democratic theses and perspectives of the revisionist leadership be approved at the Congress, then this will only have one consequence of tragic and far-reaching implications for the working class movement, for all working people -in Britain; the culmination of over 20 years of degeneration with its appalling record of corruption, manoeuvring, demagoguery, unprincipled concealment and the steady whittling away of the Party's strength and prestige, will have reached its final outcome in the transformation of the once glorious CPGB into a second Labour Party. The Communist Party will have ceased to exist in Britain." (21)

Thus by the mid-1960's, it was fairly obvious that the Party's inability to advance was directly, bound up with its departure from the basic ideas of Marxism. But at the same time, it was noticed that this was not something that was peculiar to the British Party alone. The growth of revisionism could be detected in most other communist parties around the world, although it was far more in evidence in some than others. Hence anti-revisionists began to grasp the importance and the significance of the polemic between the Soviet and Chinese parties. By 1965, the stand taken by the latter against modern revisionism was providing a rallying point

for anti-revisionists around the world; they no longer felt isolated and their understanding of the content of the polemic helped raise their political level and their confidence to enter into struggle with those whom they described as the bureaucrats of King Street (the Communist Party headquarters).

Chapter Four: D. The International Polemic

Greater awareness of what constituted modern revisionism emerged when anti-revisionists looked back at the manner in which Khrushchov at the 20th Congress of the Soviet Party, had handled the question of how to evaluate the role by Stalin. This awareness deepened when they looked at the 22nd Congress, when the concept of the state of the whole people was accepted by the Soviet party. Basically, the differences between the modern revisionists and the Marxist-Leninists centred around such questions as the attitude to be taken towards imperialism, national liberation struggles, the nature of war in the thermo-nuclear age, and within the capitalist countries on how the working class could achieve state power. The general view of the modern revisionists, led primarily by the Soviet and Italian Communist parties, was that imperialism had become weaker as a result of decolonisation; that existence of the hydrogen bomb meant that the nature of war had changed resulting in the need for much more emphasis to be placed on negotiations between the Soviet Union and the United States of America to resolve world issues and prevent small local wars escalating towards nuclear annihilation. Peaceful co-existence thus had to become the foreign policy of the socialist countries and because of the changes in the balance of throughout the world in the favour of the socialist camp, it was now possible for the working classes in the capitalist countries to achieve power through the ballot box. On the other hand, the Marxist-Leninist view, led by the Communist Party of China and the Party of Labour of Albania, was that the nature of imperialism had not changed and remained the basis of all aggressive wars in the world; thus it was the duty of the socialist countries to give full support to the national liberation struggles, because besides being just, it would also prevent the imperialists, and particularly the American imperialists, starting a world war. In the capitalist countries, bourgeois democracy had to be understood as the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. There the state monopoly capitalists were continually striving to strengthen their state machinery and it was pure subjectivism to say that the working class could take over the direction and control of the state peacefully.

Particularly on the issue of colonialism and whether, and to what degree, it had been overthrown, there was a sharp difference between the two camps. In December 1963, Khrushchov had told an Algerian delegation to Moscow that

colonialism was a thing of the past. In the following month, Palme Dutt wrote in *Marxism Today*: (22)

“The majority of former colonial peoples have now won the establishment and recognition of their countries as independent sovereign states. When Lenin wrote his thesis on the national and colonial question in 1920, the colonies and Dominions and dependencies accounted for 77.2% of the territory and 69.2% of the population of the world. In 1963, only 7.7% of the world's area and 1.7% of its population remain under the direct domination of colonial rule.” (23)

The Chinese saw things differently:

“Most countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America are still victims of imperialist aggression and oppression, of old and new colonialist enslavement. Although a number of countries have won their independence in recent years, their economies are still under the control of foreign monopoly capital. In some countries, the old colonialists of a new type have forced their way in gravely threatening the existence of many nations in these areas. The people in these areas are still a long way from completing their struggle against imperialism.” (24)

This brief outline of the major differences within the communist movement was necessary on two scores. Firstly, to remind the reader that ever since the time of Marx himself and from when Marxism began to have influence within the working class movement, a number of struggles have taken place between Marxists on the one hand, and revisionists and opportunists on the other. Among them were two debates of the greatest historical significance. The first was that between Lenin and Kautsky, Bernstein and the Second International; this struggle advanced Marxism to a new stage of development, the stage of Leninism, which is Marxism in the era of imperialism and proletarian revolution. The second was the great debate which the communists of the Soviet Union and other countries led by Stalin conducted against Trotsky and Trotskyism. This successfully defended Leninism and elucidated Lenin's theory and tactics concerning the proletarian revolution, the dictatorship of the proletariat, the revolutionary struggles and their significance in the oppressed nations and the building of socialism. Thus the polemic in the early sixties had to be understood as a continuation of a struggle between Marxism and the distortions and revisions of Marxism. It was also confirmation of the concept that what is correct only emerges in the struggle against what is incorrect. Secondly, an appreciation of the differences should enable the present day reader to understand why it was both a source of knowledge and inspiration to the anti-revisionists within the CPGB (and other parties also), because it confirmed their own views about the leadership and it encouraged them to join the struggle

with greater conviction.

B. How the Polemic was Handled in the CPGB

It's now opportune to return to look at how the polemic was being handled within the Party. The following comment from a veteran party member provides a more than adequate account of how the issue was being dealt with at the time:

“I have been a member of the CPGB for 28 years, and have taken an active part in the work and campaigns of the party and of other 'organisations carrying out activities in line with party policy all these years. I worked in China from January 1962 to March 1964 and 'sought to understand the significance and methods of her great revolution. On returning home I was amazed and horrified to find the extent to which the 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. The editorial staff has every right to determine what things they wish to publish, but I cannot help but contrast their attitude to the one I found in China where every statement and attack made on her by parties and at conferences abroad 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. Now I feel that I can remain silent no longer.” (25)

Chapter Five: A. The Emergence of the Anti-Revisionist Movement.

The First Breakthrough

That open letter was written in 1967 by which time the break between the majority of communist parties, led by the Soviet party on the one hand, and a minority of parties led by the Chinese and Albanian on the other, had formally taken place. Around this time, a number of anti-revisionist and Marxist-Leninist organisations had come into existence and were beginning to participate in class and national struggles both at the level of developing theory and engaging in practice. It is in that context interesting to see how the anti-revisionist struggle had unfolded within the CPGB. The first successful, albeit temporary, attack on revisionism took place in 1963, when a number of long-standing party members at the Lucas Arms meeting issued the Appeal to All Communists. Their basic position was opposition to the British Road to Socialism and the concept of peaceful transition to

socialism, opposition to the characterisation of the Labour Party as a socialist party, opposition to the Soviet interpretation of peaceful co-existence and opposition to Khrushchov's wholesale denunciation of Stalin. Expulsion from the party inevitably followed their public stand on these issues and it was in this setting that the Campaign to Defeat Revisionism for Communist Unity (CDRCU) was formed. It is important to note that as in every country, the anti-revisionist movement did not fall out of the sky. Just as Marx noted that socialism will emerge out of the womb of capitalism, so the anti-revisionist movement emerged out of the CPGB and in many ways continued to bear some of its features. The early death in April 1964 of the leader of the CDRCU, Michael McCreery, only served to arrest any long-term hope for advance. Among all his contemporaries, he had been by far away ahead of them in terms of political understanding. Following his death, the organisation soon degenerated into an ineffective group without any clear direction where it was going and racked by internal differences, dogmatism and sectarianism.

B. The Second Breakthrough

The second and perhaps more important breakthrough occurred in the period 1966 to 1967. There were a number of individuals and groupings involved but in view of the lack of space, it is possible to look at only one particular struggle. This is the one that went on in the Young Communist League and it was particularly interesting and significant because all the people involved were fairly new to politics and to Marxism, and thus saw the essence of the polemic and the content of the work of the Party and the YCL in terms that were much more related to the issues of the time and less bound up with the way things had been in the past.

The YCL was the Party's youth wing. It elected its own leaders and decided its own policy. However, since most of its leaders and older members also held a party card; it was obligatory for them to support the line of the Party. Thus, there was little difference between what the CPGB and YCL said on basic issues. Membership of the YCL was open to all between the ages of 14 and 30, who took part in any of the YCL's activities, accepted its aims -and paid regular dues. Among the aims were (a) to learn, teach and win young people for the ideas of Socialism and Communism; and (b) to help unite young people to achieve a Socialist Britain, in which there would be the social ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange. On the front of the membership card were the stirring words "**Man's dearest possession is life and since it is given to him to live but once, he must so live as to feel no torturing regrets for years without purpose: so live as not to be seared with the shame of a cowardly and trivial past: so live that dying he can say –All my life and all my strength were given to the finest cause in the world -the liberation of mankind.**" Being a

member gave a young person a sense of identity, comradeship and a feeling that they were part of a movement that stood up against injustice, exploitation and oppression right round the world. The politics and the demands on the members were not too heavy, but at the same time, all were encouraged to use the facilities available both -for study of Marxism and also for their social activities.

To get some idea of the political mood of the YCL at this time it is interesting to read through the Report of the Congress of the London District which was held in November 1965. There had, by this time, been the experience of just over 12 months of the new Labour government, the war in Vietnam was now regularly hitting the headlines and Ian Smith had just declared UDI in Rhodesia. Thus in the section in the Report dealing with Labour's record, it was noted that:

“On all the major issues, the Labour government is carrying out policies against the interest of the working class, nowhere more so than in foreign policy. The 'East of Suez' policy so dear to Harold Wilson is a cover up for the imperialism that means bases in Aden, Cyprus, Singapore and Hong Kong to protect big business investments.”(26)

Then there were criticisms of what was happening within Britain:

"Labour has given us a five-year plan -250,000 words of anti-climax; but one word is conspicuous for its absence -Socialism. George Brown's national plan is a national dream, because while he is gazing into his crystal ball, Callaghan has to deal with the realities of capitalism today. His answer is to attack the people; an incomes policy backed by the threat of legal action, an attack on trade unionists fighting for better conditions, a high bank rate and cuts in social services. You would think from the capitalist press that it was Jack Dash (the London dockers' leader) who was holding up production in Britain; but it is not he who is closing the pits, who sold out the North Sea to the oil monopolies, shut down the railways and let the American monopolists butt up the car industry." (27)

In its conclusion, after noting that we were living through a time when the whole world was going through upheavals on a scale never previously witnessed, the report finished with a stirring call to the membership:

"We Young Communists in London live in the centre of the second greatest imperialist country. Our job is to work to restrain the imperialists in their threat to peace, to bring down capitalism in Britain and to give every possible assistance to the liberation struggles throughout the world. This is the challenge of history. This is our inheritance from the generation of Communists before us... Let us go from this Congress fired with these

aims, with the confidence in our class and our generation ..." (28)

One could well describe these words, on paper at least; as the positive side of the YCL. At a gut level, they struck a chord with the members, for in 1965 they were an accurate reflection of what was going on in Britain under the labour government. At the same time, they were inspiring for in a way they were what young communists felt that they ought to hear, about the Social Democrats propping up capitalism and the need to overthrow the whole rotten system. However, at the same time, there were serious errors -in the Report, and these inevitably were associated with the strategy outlined in the British Road to Socialism. For example, having exposed the Labour government it then went on to note:

"The election of the labour government was a first step, a necessary step, for which we have worked. But now we must step up the battle for the next step, to preserve a working class majority and to bring about a change in labour policy in a left direction. This is possible to the extent that we can help bring unity of all progressive forces against the right wing ... The most significant step we can take to build and strengthen the left is to build our YCL, because the Communist movement is the most important part of the left." (29)

And on the great polemic, the Report noted:

"Disunity now in the international communist movement and progressive movements is a tragedy and holds us back. We support the position of the CPGB in their efforts for unity of the communist movement, of the left and all progressive movements. Not at any price, not by sacrificing our independent policies and aims, but by unity in action on the things we agree about, against the common enemy, imperialism." (30)

What was significant about the last comment was that the polemic had never been openly discussed within the YCL. It was party policy to support the stand taken by the Soviet party and as far as many YCL leaders were concerned, that was the end of the matter. There was no comradely and frank discussion about the issue aimed at helping the younger members to come to a better understanding of what was at stake. Instead, there were sneers at the "war-like position" of the Chinese and calls for loyalty and discipline against the so-called "splitters in the movement". Equally on the issue of unity with the labour left and other progressive elements: any attempts to challenge this, raise questions about what it really meant, or refer to the nature of Social Democracy were inevitably restricted, and those attempting to raise such points were criticised as sectarians and dogmatists. This was the other side of the YCL: an organisation with a heavy-handed manner in dealing with

differences and one that only helped fuel the discontent that existed in small pockets up and down the country.

Following the London District Congress, a big drive to win new members was started. At this point, the concept of "pop politics" began to emerge. In the Report, it was alleged that every idea of the old way of life was now under challenge from the new generation and this was, for example, reflected in the protest songs that were getting into the Hit Parade:

"Never was a generation more open to the ideas of socialism. This is an opportunity for us. In this scientific technological age, the power of our Marxist ideas can attract young people. But just as they reject old-fashioned Tories and Right wingers, so they will reject old-fashioned Young Communists. This is what we mean in the draft resolution when we say that we have to change to become extrovert and attractive to our generation." (31)

From this outlook, a class-less view of a generation in revolt was popularised. To attract new members the YCL began to adopt a new image; gone was the need to concentrate on issues facing working class youth. Instead, material began to be produced that would appeal to young people supposedly of all backgrounds. Typical was the recruiting leaflet 'The Trend -Communism', with its 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 in the eyes of many YCL members. But what was also significant about this document was that it served as the issue ground which the struggle against revisionism would come to a head.

C. St.Pancras YCL

During 1966, the general differences within the YCL centred around such issues as how to build the organisation (pop politics or class struggle), the content of the YCL's monthly paper Challenge, Unity of the Left and how to define the left, attitude towards the Young liberals and other 'progressive' organisations and, of course, the British Road to Socialism and the international polemic. More specifically, differences emerged in practice over the issue of Vietnam. On paper, the YCL had a good position on the struggle of the Vietnamese against American imperialism. In the London District Report, it was stated:

“We London Young Communists consider ourselves part of the Vietnamese liberation movement whose heroic struggle is putting to shame the disgraceful support of Wilson and Stewart for the Pentagon's policies.” (32)

However, in practice, things were quite different. For a long time, one London branch, St Pancras, had been a real thorn in the side of the District Committee; it was unusual in the sense that all its leading members and most of its active members considered themselves anti-British Road and in many cases anti-revisionist. At a local Youth Parliament, which it was YCL policy to set up along with other youth organisations, the St Pancras branch had supported the motion that "Peace in Vietnam can only be achieved by a victory for the NLF". This was sharply challenged by the District Committee who charged the branch with pursuing a Trotskyist policy. The District Committee's view was that the YCL was in favour of ending the war based on US withdrawal, whereas the St Pancras branch was calling for a continuation of the war. Many people were to comment that the YCL position appeared to be that they favoured an end to the war on a basis short of a victory to the NLF. At this time, it had also become YCL policy to develop unity with the Young liberals and particularly on the campaign for votes at 18. Thus part of the criticism of the St Pancras branch was that it had alienated the local Youth liberals by their hard line stand on Vietnam. The fact that they had adopted a very reactionary and conservative line was totally ignored by the District Committee, for whom unity among so-called progressive organisations obviously overrode their duties to support national liberation movements.

In line with its general political approach, the YCL wanted to emphasise Peace and the suffering of the Vietnamese people. On the other hand, the anti-revisionist view was that it was American imperialism that was the cause of that war, and this had to be highlighted. Thus, the St Pancras branch, unhappy about the leaflets produced by the YCL and Party on this issue, produced their own. Entitled Blood Finger 00\$, condemned Johnson as Public Enemy Number One. Then it went on to describe Wilson as a servile yes man:

"For how long are we going to be taken in by this labour Government? Where are the increased wages, the homes and better social services that this government promised? Their plaintive cry is now 'We Can't Afford it'. But of course you can't, gentlemen, you allow the landlords and bosses to make millions in rents and profits. You throw over £2,000,000 of our money down the drain in arms. Arms to kill workers in Vietnam and Malaya, to secure fatter profits for the millionaires." (33)

Although the leaflet was well received by many young people both for its content and its style (the film Goldfinger featuring special agent Bond 007 was very popular at the time), the general view of the YCL District Committee was critical, but only along the lines that the branch should have used national material and not spent money on such leaflets of their own when, like every other branch, they owed money to the centre. What the District Committee did not want to do was discuss the politics of the leaflet, for their opposition to it would have clearly exposed them, even in terms of their own words in the London District Report. Moreover, it was this lack of genuine political discussion and instead an overemphasis on organisational matters (a typical feature of the Party) that ultimately enabled the YCL leaders to dispose of the problems caused by the -anti-revisionists from St Pancras. When the branch saw the leaflet, 'The Trend - Communism', they described it as anti -Communist, anti-Marxist rubbish and refused to distribute it on the streets. For this final act of defiance they were expelled from the YCL for "actions harmful to the League".

In the period 1963-1967, the number of active participants in the anti-revisionist struggle within the CPGB was fairly small. By the end of 1967, the vast majority of them had either left or been expelled, with many of them moving into new Maoist groups that were started around this time (see Appendix 2). As far as the Party was concerned, the numbers involved were quite insignificant. Party membership still stood at over 32,000 although it had dropped by around 1,500 between 1965 and 1968. Ironically, the YCL had "increased its membership by over 25% to 5,600 by the middle of 1967.

Chapter Six: The CPGB -In The Eighties

It is much more important to look at the current position however, in order to see how the cancer of revisionism which had been identified in 1965 has grown. Indications of the way that things were going could be identified in 1983 at the 38th Party Congress. By this time, there were two major groups active within the CPGB; the leadership was described as Euro-Communist and had the support of the majority, but there was a strong hard-line pro-Soviet minority who were slowly gaining control of the Morning Star. An inkling of what was in store was shown when the Party General Secretary, Gordon McLellan, obtained only 153 votes out of a possible 251 in the elections for the new Executive Committee. At the Congress, he had told the delegates: "**The party's problems were not that we have not fought for the British Road to Socialism, but that we have not fought for it hard enough or creatively applied it.**" (34)

Five years later, the CPGB has totally split into two hostile camps: one group, the Euro-Communists organised around the journal Marxism Today, the other, much more pro-Soviet and now in full control of the Morning Star and openly building up the Communist Campaign Group. Party membership is well below 5,000 and many of these are no longer politically active. Since the Party no longer decides what is written in the Morning Star, it has been forced to produce a new weekly journal, known as Seven Days, in order to ensure its voice can be heard. Any industrial base it ever had either in the shop stewards' movement or on the shop floor, has gone and it is rumoured that the YCL has all but collapsed.

Conclusions

In all article on the 38th Party Congress, entitled the British Road to Nowhere, one Marxist-Leninist journal, Class Struggle, concluded: "**In 1985, the British Communist Party will be 65. It would not be a bad thing if it were to retire early.**" (35) As things have turned out, this has not happened, though it is now questionable whether it will be able to continue for much longer in its present state. One possibility is that the Communist Campaign Group may force the pace and reconstitute itself as the new CPGB. Whether that happens or not will not detract in any way from the general theme of my essay, which in its essential features can be summarised in four main points.

Firstly, the decline of the CPGB can be explained primarily in terms of its break with Marxism on such essential questions as the state and social democracy. (One other key error, not expanded upon here, lay in its attitude towards the Empire, the colonies and the struggle for de-colonisation in the early 1920's.)

Secondly, the revisionism that afflicted the British Communist Party was also in operation in most other communist parties, but this was only brought out clearly when the Chinese Communist Party under the leadership of Mao Zedong led the attack upon it in the early 1960's.

Thirdly, it was that stand taken by the Chinese and Albanian parties that helped to crystallise the views of those members of the CPGB who disagreed with the concept of the parliamentary road; as a result, this helped provide a political base from which anti-revisionists were able to struggle against those who supported the British Road to Socialism.

Fourthly, although not specifically mentioned in my essay, the struggle against revisionism took many forms and covered many different areas of politics. The struggle in the YCL was not necessarily the most important but was chosen on the grounds that it involved mainly young people who tended to grasp the essence of revisionism in a way that was much more open and directly applicable in terms of the particular features of the class struggle in Britain in the sixties, than did the more theoretically advanced, though dogmatic and sectarian anti-revisionists associated with the CDRCU. Also, by choosing this particular one, my essay covers an area that generally has been ignored by most political analysts and observers of the British Communist Party.

It would, however, be quite incorrect in this piece of work to have paid no attention to the question of the external pressures upon the CPGB and in particular, the Soviet domination of the international communist movement and the latter's relationship with individual parties. It is certainly a fact that right from the early 1920's, whenever a line emerged from Moscow, most communist parties, and particularly the CPGB slavishly followed it, even when the 'advice' given was totally inappropriate to the local conditions. In seeking to discover who or what was at fault in this respect, it is necessary to pose the question who was committing the greatest error, he who gave the bad advice or he who acted upon it. Thus, in my opinion, it would be wrong to explain the history of the CPGB in terms of external factors alone, and so I feel justified in having concentrated primarily on internal factors; for as Mao Zedong noted in 1937:

"The world outlook of materialist dialectics holds that in order to understand the development of a thing we should study it internally and in its relations with other things; in other words, the development of things should be seen as their internal and necessary self-movement, while each thing in its movement is interrelated with and interacts on the things around it. The fundamental cause of the development of a thing is not external but internal; it lies in the contradictoriness within the thing." (36)

APPENDIX ONE: Communist Party Membership 1920 to 1974

(Source. Revolutionaries in Modern Britain by P.Shipley)

1920	4000		1960	26052
1926	10730		1961	27541
1930	2555		1962	32492
1935	7700		1963	33008
1939	17756		1964	34281
1942	56000		1965	33539
1945	43435		1966	32708
1950	38853		1967	32562
1954	33963		1968	32048
1955	32681		1969	30607
1956	33095		1970	29300
1957	26742		1971	28803
1958	24900		1973	29943
1959	25313		1974	28756
Young Communist League Membership 1956 to 1974				
1956	2600		1967	5642
1958	1387		1969	3850
1960	1734		1970	3452
1961	2702		1971	3200
1962	4019		1972	3000
1963	3989		1973	2890
1965	4276		1974	2355

Shipley's sources included

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NOTES ON REVISIONISM: John Gollan

John Gollan has an important role in recent CP history, he oversaw the transition of the CPGB to a party no longer concerned with making revolution. It was Gollan's view, one shared by many within the CP, that

" The Communist 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." (1)

This orientation Gollan faithfully pursued as the CP's General Secretary for nearly twenty years, from 1956 to 1975. He had been intimately concerned with the elaboration of the strategy outlined in all sections of the British Road to Socialism (henceforth: BRS). He was chair of the drafting commission of its second edition, and subsequently involved with the BRS revising commissions in 1958 and 1968.

Gollan joined the CP in 1927, and from his election as General Secretary of the Young Communist League in 1935 was part of the CP leadership, rising in the ranks to assistant secretary of the CPGB in 1947. He edited the 'Daily Worker' before becoming National Organiser of the CPGB in 1954. Here was a man who worked at the very heart of the CP, responsible for the political perspective that came to dominate (and eventual destroy) the revolutionary work of the CPGB.

The CPGB Programme, the British Road to Socialism, had in essence reduced the struggle for socialism to the winning of a majority in parliament by the working class and its allies. Adopted in 1951, BRS did mark a decisive turn from the pre-war past on how the CP saw "the advancement to socialism in British political conditions."

Adherents of the BRS claimed that it had long ancestry in CP thinking. Indeed, Gollan claimed Stalin's personal sanction:

" ...the main ideas in the programme, particularly that of the peaceful transition in Britain, were discussed in certain conversations Harry Pollitt had with Stalin at the time, who approved of our approach (2)

Party leader, Harry Pollit, in his 1947 pamphlet 'Looking Ahead', had raised the spectre of the BRS: he foresaw a process "in which British democratic institutions will be preserved and strengthened, and which will not necessarily be the road the Russian workers and peasants were compelled to take in 1917."

Gollan drew upon the unpublished 1939 Draft of the CP programme to argue: "The aim of the conquest of power by insurrection is not advanced. On the contrary, the violent struggle arises because of capitalist resistance, and this decides the

dictatorship of the workers." (3)

(The concept of "the dictatorship of the proletariat" was dropped from the 1951 BRS programme.)

In the 1970s, the writings of Italian communist, Antonio Gramsci, were appropriated to support the BRS strategy for social change. In its simplified form the sudden assault --the revolutionary overthrow --was no longer seen as relevant, and that the long haul for "hegemony" --dominating the political agenda --was the necessity.

The assumption inherent in the strategy was that British democracy existed with no specific class character, and that it only needs 'extending' or 'developing' to lead directly to socialism. Such revisions on Marxist understanding of the class nature of the state saw a steady, if gradual progress on the basis of universal suffrage and a political labour movement. The issue for the revisionists were the 'tory' limitations placed' upon democracy.

Gollan erroneously claimed that "the Soviet classical insurrectionary experience has, it seems to me, remained unique." (4) The protracted armed struggle to defend the gains of October 1917 have been repeated throughout the world as numerous revolutionary movements have trod the path of revolution. But the British CP had firmly rejected the option of the insurrectionary struggle for socialism in favour of a parliamentary alliance with the Labour Party. In truth a one-sided alliance as the Labour Party has never reciprocated the CP's courting.

The CP under Gollan's stewardship displayed a split political persona: its publications would observe

"...actual punitive measures taken by the Labour government against the working class, makes it abundantly clear that, even with a Labour government in power, the state remains the capitalist state." (5)

But the CP cannot draw a conclusion that is in tune with an analysis that "there is no pacifism within the state." (6)

Despite the perfunctionary references to mass struggles in Gollan's writings, the CP Programme is based on the basis that:

"It is the ideological standpoint of the dominant right-wing leadership of social democracy that has enabled the ruling class so far to fit the Labour Party into its scheme of things." (7)

Furthermore:

"It is the right-wing effort to impose capitalist ideas and policies on the

Labour Movement which has created the divisions on policy in the Labour Party." (8)

This provides the saving grace of the BRS: it is regarded as feasible with a LEFT Labour Party. Always the fault lies with Labour's Right, not its loyal Left.

Indictment after indictment of the Labour Party, that its policies are not socialist, are available in CP literature. As Gollan informs us, Labour's anti-working class policies are:

"no accident. It arises from their rejection in theory and practice, of the need to work for the ending of capitalism and the complete socialist transformation of the country." (9)

Writing in 1966, Gollan judged:

"...the years since 1945 have been the testing period of reformism, of rightwing Labour politics ...Labour politics have totally failed to bring about social changes of any real significance." (10)

He places Labour's policies in their context but cannot draw the necessary political conclusion on the need to oppose Labourism.

" Ever since World War Two, successive British governments, whether Tory or Labour," notes Gollan, "have sought to reestablish Britain's imperialist position in a world of national liberation and the disintegration of colonialism." (11)

But it is the total bankruptcy of right-wing social democracy that is ridiculed by Gollan. He attacked the performance of the Labour Party in government. He writes:

" ... the key motive of all the policies of the Wilson Labour Government is the defence of Britain's imperialism and monopoly capitalism." (12)

So, why advise people to vote Labour at elections as the CP did throughout the sixties?

Gollan preaches a message of hope. What we need is "left unity, unity of all socialists and communists to defeat the right wing grip on the Labour movement ... It means the unity of the existing left forces in the Labour Party and the unions with the communists, on all the main issues of the day." (13)

It is a unity which submerges the GP to the priorities of social democracy. It is a unity that involves concessions from the CP, using the words of marxism to deny marxist analysis and politics. The revisionist CP is riddled with opportunism, trimming policies to suit the needs of the Labour Party.

The gradual demise of the CPGB would seem to be an inevitable consequence of the BRS. The crux of the revisionist strategy lays in the conclusion that:

" the whole prospect of a broad democratic alliance is associated with the future development of the Labour Party and the Labour movement." (14)

If the BRS is little more than a blue print of the battle for a "left wing" Labour government, then the question is raised: why two reformist parliamentary parties of the left? Throughout its history the CPGB seems to have answered this question. The 37th National Congress (in 1981) rejected a proposal for immediate affiliation to the Labour Party, but a Party Executive statement declared:

"Affiliation is a long term perspective, not an immediate issue."

Indeed, given CP policy, its members know their place is within the Labour Party. People interested, in reformist politics are going to join the big reformists --the Labour Party --rather than the smaller and increasingly less significant one.

If one is led to believe that the Labour Party is essential, let alone capable of political action which significantly furthers working class interests --even to transform capitalist society --then why bother with the CP?

The revisionists' bolsters social democratic hold on the working class by presenting the Labour Party as the only political alternative to the Tories. Under Gollan, the CPGB's slide to political impotence was completed. He left a shell to gradually disintegrate.

In denying any leadership role for the CP in relation to the working class, the revisionists relegate their own role to that of a think tank for the left of the Labour Party; relying on left Labour to transform capitalism. The revisionist degeneration of the CPGB is clear in their declared strategy to take a permanent subordinate relationship to social democracy. An act not only of political suicide, but also political betrayal.

"Far from challenging bourgeois domination of society, reformist politics have been a major, if not the greatest single force in preserving that domination." (15)

The CP tied itself to that reformist politics at the expense of its revolutionary past, and now forms part of the problem in the struggle for socialism.

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New Times? Old Ideas!

“The need to confront the radically changed world in which we now live, and how that requires us to rethink the left’s policies and perspectives” That was the brief behind “Facing Up To The Future”.

Published as a special Communist Party supplement in September's Marxism Today, it is the latest shot in the revisionists attempt to define the terms of the political debate on the Left.

What confidence can be placed in a document when one of its authors, Monty Johnstone, disassociated himself from the supplement's "un-marxist and confused" definition of class. He said,

"I do not think it is sufficiently and distinctly a communist document."

Others, in the CPGB leadership expressed reservations. The party's general secretary, Gordon McLennan, said: “I would need to be convinced on some of the formulations. I would need to be very convinced.” Then he insisted that it was not the basis for a redrafted party programme, the British Road to Socialism.

He is being dishonest. "Facing Up to the Future" is the product of the CPGB's Executive Committee decision to appoint a group of eight to work, with a complete free hand, on a discussion document as a preliminary to the actual redrafting of the BRS in 19B9.

The document received public praise from Labour's Bryan Gould in The Guardian: "Here is the map of the territory we have to capture" he enthused. The revisionist's 'designer socialism' peddled by Marxism Today gets a ready welcome as ideological ammunition against traditional social democrats by the Kinnock leadership. The CP intellectuals want to make the Labour Party electable essential for the British Road to socialism --so Labour has to be considered safe/capable by public opinion (that is bourgeois opinion as in bourgeois society that is the dominant ideology).

For a long time, the CPGB has been committed to politics that were left reformist, and provided an organised centre for its dwindling militant trade unionist members. Each revision of the BRS bought it more in tune with the Fabian concerns and reformist perspectives of the Labour Party. Long aligned to the Labour Party the CPGB now advocates policies more suited to the Centre-Right of the Labour Party rather than its emasculated Left.

“Facing Up to the Future” does have its attraction for Labour: it offers an explanation for Labour's failure in external, objective factors rather than in Labour's own record and policies. It provides support for trimming policies to

accommodate the perceived ideological shift wrought by Thatcher's rule.

We are constantly told that all the parliamentary parties have embraced the major planks of the Thatcherite programme. Now if the market fails to deliver the goods, then will not all these parties be seen to failed? In a society of diminishing returns and spiralling crisis, the opposition would find expression outside of the agreed agenda. But this alternative is disregarded by the drafters of "Facing Up to the Future". They accept the bourgeois order. Marxism Today further flesher out its ideas by devoting its October issue to a special on Britain in the Nineties. It's forward explained:

“ In the 1980s, Marxism Today pioneered the analysis of Thatcherism and the state of the Labour Movement. It was the era of critique. Now to reconstruction. We present New Times!"

While Communists do independently analysis the peculiar conditions in which it has to tackle its particular task, theoretical conclusions cannot be changed with the change in the outlook. The basic principles of marxism~Leninism remain valid otherwise theory would itself disappear and become the means for justifying any step in practical policy. That is what has happened with the revisionism of the CPGB. Far from enriching the armoury of MLism, Marxism Today --those apostles of style --are following the path of Earl Browder from the 1940s towards "democratic reforms" and an idealisation of bourgeois democratic freedoms. In promoting a politics based on what MT terms "radical individualism" it focuses on consumerism and lifestyle. It disregards Lenin's counsel that:

" It cannot change the essence of the essence of the matter, for the essence lies in the class relationship."

The politics of the 'New Times' we are told must develop out of the self; from identity all else must radiate. As if 'identity' is unencumbered by people's lives and experiences. Today the tyranny of consumerism --can't think, must buy --is synonymous with inequality and oppression. MT fails to address the material oppressions and exploitation of capitalist society.

The idea, most developed in Financial Times journalist, Charlie Leadbeater's article, is that collective social action should be made "accountable to and designed to fulfil individual needs". This is the ideology of the meritocracy: individual reward rather than John Maclean's "Arise with your class “

No wonder there is nothing but praise for the "new breed of yuppie, anti-stalinist reformists" and the strategy that offers to endorse popular market politics from the political editor of the Sunday Times. His advice:

"...the Labour leader could do worse than lift the ban on communists joining his party; they could help him to turn outwards as they have. Doctrinally, they are as

pragmatic as he is. Organizationally, they could take on both the hard-left and the union stick-in-the-muds." (ST 28.8.88)

The bourgeoisie see no threat in the politics of "New Times". With its emphasis on the individual consumer it full accepts the agenda of the market. As importantly for the bourgeoisie, it endorses the idea that Labour's failure is in its failure to adjust to the social and economic forces behind, what the revisionists promotes as, the Thatcherite "new order": the values of enterprise culture and popular capitalism. Those who question this are said to be "profoundly wedded to the past".

At heart, what MT styles today's 'New Times' is a characterisation of capitalism's social organisation. According to its analysis, British capitalism is at period of transition from an economy (and society) marked by Fordism to a post-fordism.

Fordism -highly mechanised production line manufacture -while the most developed was never a typical form of capitalist production. It hardly dominates the world economic structure. Nor was it associated with social democratic regulation of the economy which has been the mainstay of western capitalist economies. So its use as a definition is questionable to begin with.

Post-Fordism is even less coherent, and with less general relevance than 'Fordism' if taken as meaning a diffusion of production to smaller more technical units and a more autonomous citizenship concerned with life-values.

We may indeed see an end to the old industrial workforce structure but to regard that as a progressive phase of capitalist development is plainly flawed. The restructuring of Capital is also creating new forms of exploitation, particularly in the service sector with its low-paid, un-unionised, part-time ad hoc jobs that are often unhealthy and dangerous. Where is the concern with subcontracting, harsh labour discipline and rivalries between corporations?

The pre-occupation with the consumers as evidenced on the importance of choice (based on expanded credit to sustain individual consumption) side-steps those with little money. Those in no position to exercise choices, let alone meet basic needs. Four million unemployed we can live with? What about those subject to the demands and limitations of their situation, childcare, social prejudices, all those restrictions that result from the exploitative character of capitalist social relations or from forms of oppression specific to capitalist society i.e. racism. There is no 'New Times' for those subject to such pressures, no exercising preferences in lifestyle if beyond your means.

The analysis of 'Post-Fordism' has no relevance for the vast majority of working people. As Morning Star deputy editor, David Whitfield, gleefully noted, "Facing

Up to the Future"

".. does not mention Marxism-Leninism, class principles, the working class or mass struggles". He describes the 'New Thinking' of post-fordism as plain old class collaboration.

Part of the MT project has been an attempt to re-assess class as political identity. Thus the emphasis on the concept of hegemony, isolating aspects of the superstructure --such as culture --from its economic base. Thus central to MT's analysis is an understanding of class far removed from any relation to marxist thought:

“Class in modern capitalism is not the product of a single polarisation between a ruling class, which owns the means of production, and a working class of wage labourers.”

Such an approach appeals to those social forces --the petty bourgeois occupations, the brain workers --at the expense of the traditional working class. If occupation is not so important then whose interests and concerns takes priority?

Marxism Today, the dominant faction within the CPGB, has long pushed a line that "Thatcherism" has introduced a new order that demands a complete rethinking by the Left. What is seen as the major Opposition forces is a "popular, progressive humanism": out with the old class politics. MT points to the international issues of peace, anti-apartheid, ecology and aid as having brought hundreds of thousands of people from all sections of society into political action. For them, no longer the mobilisation of the working class because the nature of that class has changed. For them, the ever present struggles on the wages front, against racist oppression or solidarity work for struggles nearer home are not attractive to "all sections of society".

The concept of class is pretty redundant for revisionists. Afterall, there are more pressing concerns:

“ In the new order, new divisions within the workforce and more flexible production are producing more segmented consumption and more diverse forms of social life.”

Ask yourself: is the fact that we are all consumers so overwhelming a revelation ? We may change our jobs if you have one in the first place. We can choose which t.v. from which manufacture, and yes, we will have a choice with multi-channel t.v. --all owned by the likes of Murdoch and Maxwell. Already as consumers we are faced by competing products produced by the same monopoly transnational. A choice in which capitalist newspaper we buy already exists but this did not lead

to a cry for 'radical individualism' to be the touchstone of our politics.

Public ownership in a capitalist system has never served as a socialist model, so share ownership, the setting up of "social capital markets" seem more accommodation rather than transformation of the market. Yet the revisionists call for the development of:

“an expanding popular culture of social ownership”.

Like forcing the top 200 companies to hand over 10-15% of their shares to workers trusts. Sod class conflict, have a dividend.

“The state's role must primarily be enabling. To enable people to come up with their own chosen solutions to problems through a plurality of autonomous collective organisation in society.”

Gone are collectivist notions from the GP's analysis. By putting forward its own version of the Right's arguments about individualism and citizenship, MT only endorses the propaganda that the anti-marxists were right all along. There is no credible perspective for advance by accepting the bourgeoisie's insistence that left values and principles are not realistic. Marxists seek to recreate the world. Of course their values are unrealistic to ideological enemies.

The revisionist's strategy for the nineties rejects the only analysis which does have relevance for socialist liberation. While it is clear there is a need to formulate the appropriate tactics, the road to liberation lies through the collective struggle to overthrow the social relations of production created by the capitalist system.

In their misreading of Gramsci's notion that revolution in the West requires a "war of position", a long haul to establish consensual advance, they talk of Thatcher's electoral dictatorship and the spread of an "authoritarian social culture" MT seeks to build alliance around the possibility of a Labour Government, not even a Left Labour Government as advocated in the British Road to Socialism. Humanism is the order of the day.

Hegemony must have a dialectical relationship to the social and economic forces in society. It must be organically related to the way a marxist party is organised, forges alliances in struggle and promotes its policy. The crumbling CPGB hardly fulfils Leninist conditions in any of these respects. The hegemony of Marxism Today is that of a self-perpetuating intelligentsia, commenting upon but in isolation from working class struggles. The revisionists of MT have sought a hegemonic position as an end in itself. In doing so they have left the concerns of marxism behind.

Marxism has a base position. Capitalism is a class system, based on the exploitation of the majority of the population by a minority which monopolises the

ownership and control of the means of production.

Marxism shows the existence of some constant factors throughout the different stages of capitalist development: that the contradiction between the needs of society and the system's pre-occupation with private property also ensures that Capitalism is inherently prone to crisis.

Changes in the technical means of production do not substantially alter the character of capitalism. It is not dependant on any particular form of workplace organisation such as large scale factory production. The jobs people do and the lifestyles they lead will change; the social relationship between Capital and Labour, the workers' subordinate relationship in the workplace does not alter. That is a constant that the revisionists no longer wish to acknowledge. That is the thing that revolutions are made off.

New Times New Ideas 2

Facing Up to the Future is concerned with the way forward, but it does not have much relevance for socialist advance. The crisis that the revisionists address is not the crisis of British Capitalism and the need to transcend this crumbling order. The crisis faced in the document is the crisis of social democracy in Britain.

Gordon McLennan, General Secretary of the CPGB, made this clear in his report to the Executive meeting held in January 1989. Then he stated:

" In our view the importance of preventing another Tory victory is so great that it should determine the approach to British politics in 1989 of all political parties and democratic forces who want a different course for Britain."

Facing Up to the Future is the latest landmark in a liquidationist course that has shadowed the Communist Party in the post-45 period. This latest manifestation has its birth at the beginning of the decade with the debate around the analysis of 'The Forward March of Labour Halted'. From the very beginning the incorrect terms of references were employed: it failed to address the vital question that the economic and sectional interests of the labour organisations were preserved by the Labour Party. There is a long history of the 'division of labour' with the Labour Party taking care of the political fight.

The long-term failure of Labour governments to work for the interests of working people, and its willingness to work for, and not against, the powers of the City and Trans-National Companies, has allowed the construction of a political agenda outside of the consensual bourgeois politics that had dominated post-1940 Britain.

The Communist Party is concerned about the Labour Party's inadequate prospects of coming to power alone. Judging that the Labour Party lacks intellectual presence, the CP's academics have addressed the problems posed by Labour's poor electoral performance. There is nothing new about this function except the difference that today the revisionists' message is for Labour's leadership rather than the leadership's left critics.

The other major determinant of the development of the 'new thinking' that the CP's promotes is that the output is almost exclusively taken up by, if not directed to, other members of the middle class intelligentsia. With the flow of commentaries, theory follows theory with always the provision that further investigation is needed. They fall into the activity that Marx warned against: that of interpretation, rather than changing the world.

In their own defence, the revisionists may argue that they are loyal to the basic doctrine of dialectical materialism that "the mode of production in material life

determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life." But this does not square with the two main propositions that inform the revisionists' analysis.

What has emerged as central to the analysis of what has been termed "Thatcherism" are the views that:

A Tory victory over the "hearts and minds" of the people can only be dislodged by moving to regain the ideological territory conceded;

The means to that end is that new forms and objects of struggle must be taken up to gain popular support and mobilisation.

The political direction of Facing Up to the Future rests on the judgement that we are living through a historical watershed. Since the late 1970s, we are told, we have politically endured something qualitatively new and far-reaching. According to this stance, Western industrialised societies are being fundamentally reshaped, with a new order emerging:

" The cultures of steel town, coal towns and textile towns are in decline. The sunshine culture of the hi-tech service towns is on the rise."

The keyword that shadows the analysis is taken from advertising: "market segments", the idea of social fragmentation based on distinctive tastes and lifestyles. We have supposed to have moved from an age of uniformity to an era where cultural and social life is becoming more diverse. It is rather hard to sustain the mythology of a 'pure' mass consumer given the variety of life experience amongst a working class multi-national in character, but the revisionist analysis identify a falling away in Labour's electoral support with a weakening of class allegiance. So at heart the CP's political strategy poses the creation of a new mass electoral alliance:

" The Left will only break Thatcherism's grip if it mobilises opposition around the aspirations and antagonisms bred by the new order. "

The liquidationist course of the CP's strategy was made clear early in the year when the Communist Party announced it would withdraw candidates at the next General Election in the interest of a wider anti-Thatcher victory. In purely electoral terms this is an irrelevant gesture. What it does demonstrate is that the CP's journal Marxism Today, which is the intellectual powerhouse of the organisation, has set its sights on becoming the house magazine for bourgeois politics within the working class. In the CP's strategy there is no intention of working class political independence. In the opinion of the Communist Party:

" The call for an electoral pact between all parties opposed to

Thatcherism is nothing short of revolutionary."

The January report by CPGB's General Secretary, Gordon McLennan, sees the central issue as work "on which to build electoral agreement for the next general election".

The line of Facing Up to the Future is a line devoid of working class partisanship. It argues that the modernisation of the productive economic base must be the prime economic ~ objective. To achieve this it is deemed correct to adopt the ideas of a social market. Thus every 18 year old should be provided with a social capital stake to invest as they see fit. The idea of social subsidies is thought largely redundant if we build "upon the informal solutions which abound among networks of women." This suggestion, in relation to child care, makes many assumptions that such networks exist without investigation of the whys and wherefores of their operation. Social policy, according to the document "cannot primarily be about expanding the welfare state through pumping in more resources". What Facing Up to the Future proposes is for "a plurality of autonomous collective organisations in society" that would enable individuals to find their "own chosen solutions" -presumably within the limits of what they can afford.

The 'new order' that we have to come to terms with, according to the Marxism Today school of thought, is based on the proposition of this being a period of Late Capitalism. According to this, the global spread of Capital has created interlocking cultural and political systems worldwide.

So far so good, but in an erroneous step, the MT analysis argues that this process has seen the obliteration of differences as the Market utilizes, and appropriates in cultural and economic terms, anything for recycling in mass consumption. Here the theory mistakenly grafts upon the world a critique of western experience that is far from universal experience of urban life. The promoters of this post-modernism analysis (as it has been labelled) seem to have been heavily influenced by the idea of a world moved by media, advertising and market research. The emphasis given to consumerism distorts the reflection of reality.

There is a selective superficiality that holds the idea of "market segments" dominating future social trends. It presupposes a lack of critical consumption and the suspension of value judgements, and assumes a basic affluence to sustain the consumption.

The analysis is one-sided in attributing omnipotence to the market mechanism: the market must respond as well as create demand. Thus the increased 'green-awareness' and ideologically-sound investment trusts have emerged. The

success of 'personal organiser' does not necessarily reflect on the supposed trend leaders: yuppies are subject to much ridicule and not taken seriously outside of their own narrow social base. And fickle fads do not a culture make!

Perhaps, Marxism Today should ponder the observation made by Labour MP, Paul Boateng, that the "Tatler is the real house journal of the Conservative Party ...their equivalent of Marxism Today."

The adaptation to the 'new order' side-steps the point that the expropriation by Capital of surplus value continues regardless of the packaging, and that class struggle is daily engendered in this process. There is a basic conflict of interest in material terms that cannot be wished away. The bourgeoisie have long insisted on the primacy of atomised individual behaviour harmonised through the market mechanism. The CP's intelligentsia now colludes with this position.

The tasks of the 1990s, according to one MT contributor is " how to articulate a new kind of socialism, how to make socialism ... without the masses." With the re-composition of the working class, and subsequent belief that "class cannot straightforwardly provide the collective interest for modern socialism", the insistence on the primacy of class falls by the wayside.

Tactically, the new course advocated sees economic and political struggles as separate, and to an extent, autonomous from each other, rather than an integration of an ensemble of relations.

Thus Marxism Today argues that Thatcherism is "vulnerable on a range of international issues which have been the focus of domestic protest" and cite such things as the Mandela Birthday Concert. It seeks to tap the "international, progressive humanism" that motivates such events.

However, progress to the harder domestic issues, such as racism, industrial disputes and Ireland, does not seem to be in the grasp of a strategy which promotes the idea of coalitions of diverse interests. In banking upon the ability to weld together different constituencies (namely, Black people, women, the churches, green movement) in an alliance around issues which faces /affects the quality of life, there are a couple of gremlins in the equation. Such a project faces shipwreck upon two permanent features of British political life.

one is the Labour Party's practise of substituting itself for broad social movements --it appropriates demands (e.g. unilateral disarmament) and disposes of them when they prove inconvenient ,

and more importantly,

the failure to acknowledge, or understand, the reciprocal relations and networks within communities, including their antagonism, existing in a material and ideological context of class, gender and ethnic relations.

By disregarding the cross fertilisation between the constituencies, the strategy has a crude bloc-building approach that has largely failed to sustain progressive politics in the U.S. It reflects the attitude that was dominant in Left circles: the exclusivity of regarding a worker as a worker as if she were only a worker. The deficiencies of the pursuit of issues independent of Class and Capital will reinforce capitalist social relations. Autonomy does not equal isolation.

The avocations of an alliance of interests implies consensus politics. The question is compromise with whom and on what terrain? The political project advocated by the Communist Party is an anti-statist strategy which both underestimates the power of the state (and the extent to which repression and control is used). It also exaggerates the potential of the new movements. The 'green movement' is regarded as a homogeneous and comprehensive political position --the rich have always been tasteful ecologists, saving the English villages for their own; and the move from being against road development to supporting Ford workers is not always understood outside of a marxist framework.

The CP seem to have a pessimistic view on the stability of the 'Thatcherite Agenda': the desire for a better life is also a collective impulse towards socialism rather than just an individual pursuit of the best insurance terms.

It is essential that the causes of democracy and community are informed by a marxism that recognises their intimate relation to the classes that struggle for, and within them. Without that perspective, one can hardly face the future with much chance of achieving success.