

# britain's perfidious labour party

"We dyed the imperialist flag deepest red ...  
... By drenching it in the blood of the  
workers we bled!"





# **Britain's Perfidious Labour Party**

Communist Party of Great Britain (Marxist-Leninist)  
PO Box 78900, London, SW16 9PQ  
**[thecommunists.org](http://thecommunists.org)**

**Britain's Perfidious Labour Party**  
Harpal Brar with Ranjeet Brar, 2023

ISBN: 978-1-913286-11-8

First published in Britain by CPGB-ML, 2023  
PO Box 78900, London, SW16 9PQ

Cover illustration by Rob Amos

# Contents

<b>Preface</b>	<b>09</b>
1. A polarised nation and a polarised world	10
2. Labour's role in the struggle between workers and capitalists	11
3. The cold war	13
4. Thatcherite neoliberalism	14
5. The Labour governments of Blair and Brown	16
6. Privatisation, bank bailouts and austerity	18
7. The Corbyn project	20
<b>1. Harpal Brar's 1995 preface</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>2. Historical conditions preceding the birth of the Labour party</b>	<b>40</b>
1. The fall of the USSR	40
2. Blair and Blairism	41
3. Historical background since the defeat of Chartism: Rise of the 'labour aristocracy'	43
4. Tail end of the Liberal party	44
5. British monopoly of the world market and its effects on the working class	46
6. Bourgeoisification of the working-class movement	47

7.	Bourgeois respectability	49
8.	New unionism	51
9.	Why Engels' optimism was shortlived	52
10.	Export of capital	52
11.	Rising, but unequal, wages of British workers	54
12.	Poverty amid plenty	54
13.	Development of Marxian analysis by Lenin	56
14.	Every imperialist power bribes its labour aristocracy and crushes the lower stratum	57
15.	Irrevocable split, and our need to break with opportunism	58
<b>3. Organisational breach between Labour and the Liberal party</b>		<b>61</b>
1.	Formation of the Labour party	61
2.	Important role of Fabian opportunism	64
3.	Formation of the Labour party: opportunism continues unabated	67
4.	Sharpening struggle and Labour's response	72
5.	Labour and war	72
6.	The first world war	76
7.	War is the continuation of politics by other means	77
8.	Social chauvinism – social imperialism	86
9.	Labour and Soviet Russia	93
<b>4. Lenin's advice to British communists and the reasons therefore</b>		<b>95</b>
1.	CPGB's attempt at affiliation to the Labour party	100
2.	Labour's questions to the Communist party	102
3.	Labour becomes indistinguishable from the Liberals	105
4.	Why did the ruling class fear Labour if its leaders were loyal to imperialism?	106
5.	The first Labour government of Ramsay MacDonald	109
6.	The Kanpur trial	112

7. Labour's first government and the middle east	113
8. The Labour government and China	113
9. The industrial front	115
10. Empire socialism	118

## **5. Labour comes out unmistakably as the third capitalist party 119**

1. The 1926 general strike	119
2. Lesson drawn by TUC-Labour leadership from the general strike	121
3. Communists an obstacle to Labour's overt class-collaboration	122
4. Witch-hunt extended	124
5. TUC's attempts at crushing working-class resistance	125
6. External policy: China	127
7. External policy: India	128
8. Labour: the third capitalist party	129
9. Labour government of 1929-31	136
10. India and the second Labour government	136
11. Promotion of Gandhi as a means of blunting India's liberation struggle	139
12. Labour's policy in the middle east	142
13. Fall of the second Labour government	143
14. Britain's hunger marches	144

## **6. Labour since the second world war 146**

1. Greece	149
2. 'French' Indochina (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia)	149
3. The 'Dutch' East Indies (Indonesia)	150
4. Malaya	150
5. The middle east	150
6. Nato	151
7. Korea	151
8. Support for South African colonial apartheid regime	151

9. Record of the Wilson-Callaghan governments	152
10. Apartheid South Africa and Rhodesia	153
11. Vietnam	153
12. Ireland	155
13. Southall and Blair Peach	156
14. Working-class struggles	157
15. Paving the way for Thatcher's Tory government	158
16. Labour's record in opposition	158
17. Bobby Sands and the Irish hunger strikes	158
18. The Falklands war, the first Gulf war and nuclear weapons	159
19. Labour opposes working-class defence of its rights and wages	159
20. The miners' strike of 1984-5	159
<b>Notes</b>	<b>165</b>
<b>Index</b>	<b>197</b>





***Dedicated to Friedrich Engels***

*Co-founder of scientific socialism, who through his writing rendered an undying service to the British working class, and whose analysis of the conditions of the working class has been key to a Marxist understanding of the development of social democracy in Britain.*

## Preface

It remains an article of faith to many British workers, and much of the British left, that the Labour party is the mass party of the working class. The Labour party was founded by the British trade union movement, and it is widely believed that the Labour party brought us the National Health Service and the welfare state. These two statements – one a half truth, the other a fabrication – are generally considered enough to carry the argument.

And yet it is increasingly hard to overlook the fact that with every passing year, particularly since the mid-1970s, British society is becoming ever more inequitable and unjust. Economic crisis, war, unemployment, poverty, destitution, environmental degradation, physical and mental disease, worsening state education for the mass of the working class, the disintegration of our once highly-prized health service, the prevalence of degenerate culture, drugs and street crime – a deep malaise is afflicting Britain, just as surely as it afflicts the wider world.

It is the malaise of capitalism. Of individualism. Of inequality and want, at precisely the moment when the means to alleviate suffering and eliminate want are superabundant, owing to

the vast productivity of human labour employing modern technology, and a previously undreamt-of power (hugely enhanced by the latest innovations in microchip technology) to gather, analyse and share vast amounts of scientific, technical and administrative data.

## **1. A polarised nation and a polarised world**

Britain in 2023 has a ruling elite, composed of financiers and businessmen, comprising far less than one percent of the population, who have so enriched themselves that they own more than the poorest eighty percent of the population.

Just twenty-five thousand landowners – typically scions of the aristocracy who have interlocked their wealth with corporations – own more than half of Britain's land. By contrast, the combined landholding of all private homeowners occupies less than five percent of Britain's land.

In the decade and a half of austerity since the 2008 economic crisis, capital has been further concentrated and the living standards of the working population have fallen precipitously. Housing and rental costs have gone up with stock market speculation even as productive employment and wages have fallen, precipitating a housing crisis that is set to grow as more and more people default on rental and mortgage payments.

Current estimates show that five million workers in Britain are destitute, with incomes sinking further and further below subsistence level as a result of inflation caused by money-printing, mammoth energy price-hikes, supply chain disruption caused by Covid-19, imperialism's proxy war of aggression in Ukraine, and the blowback from sanctions imposed on Russia (and elsewhere).

The Marmot review, ten years on from its initial report that sounded the alarm on widening health inequalities, actually

## PREFACE

found in February 2020 that the life expectancy of the British working class is *falling*, particularly in the economically depressed north – despite Britain still being the ‘sixth-richest’ nation on earth. And that was *before* the economic depression of 2020 had struck the global stock-market and caused a twenty to thirty percent contraction of the global economy during the year of the coronavirus pandemic.

We live in a world in which a tiny handful of rich individuals, already multibillionaires, are close to becoming trillionaires; this tiny clique of six or seven multibillionaires has more wealth than the poorest half of humanity – than three and a half billion people combined.

## **2. Labour’s role in the struggle between workers and capitalists**

We cannot overlook the fact that the Labour party, in government and in opposition, has played a significant part in shaping this state of affairs. Rather than simply asserting that ‘the election of a Labour government under pressure from the left’ is an answer to all social ills, as is the custom of many, this slim volume aims to assess the real history of the formation of Labour party and its true role.

We shall briefly examine the people and the class forces that brought it into being, the struggles it faced and, most importantly, the role that its leadership consistently played in the crucible of class struggle that was the twentieth century.

It should not be forgotten that the Labour party was formed and cut its teeth in a period of fierce class struggle and imperialist conflict. The twentieth century witnessed the unparalleled horrors of two world wars – wars that caused the deaths of one hundred million workers – waged over the question of the primacy of the great powers and their right to exploit the

workers and resources of all countries.

The first world war brought on its heels the victorious October Revolution in Russia, in which the workers of a major imperialist nation, covering fully one-sixth of the world's territory, for the first time took political power and economic wealth into their own hands in order to forge their own destiny, abolishing exploitation and fratricidal strife, and replacing them with a new socialist economic and political order. In so doing, they set a mighty example that further fomented class struggle and the battle for workers' rights and workers' power in all nations.

The October Revolution ended the first world war, but that terrible interimperialist conflict also precipitated the fall of the social formations that had determined human destiny in the preceding centuries. It brought about the immediate collapse of four great empires – the tsars of Russia, the Ottoman sultanate of Turkey and the middle east, the Austro-Hungarian Hapsburg monarchy and the Prusso-German Hohenzollern dynasty. These empires fell to revolution, their social fabric crumbling amidst their defeats in battle; but the white heat of conflict also precipitated the international rise of the revolutionary working class and national-liberation movements that would see, at least in their old form, the end of the British and the French empires.

The construction of Soviet socialism posed a mortal challenge to the capitalist order, with the rise of the socialist world and the growing influence of the Third International (the communist international, or Comintern). The Chinese Revolution and the Indian independence movement threatened the old world order, in particular the material interest of the British empire.

The major imperialist powers saw their salvation from communism in the rise of Hitlerite fascism, which they aided and abetted in every possible way, hoping to turn Germany against their principal adversary – the revolutionary Soviet Union. The Spanish civil war was the stage rehearsal for World War Two,

## PREFACE

and the British working class was among many that sent volunteers to join the International Brigades, confronting the fascists of General Francisco Franco, while the Crown (the British monarchy) and significant sections of the British and US ruling classes sided with Nazism. We examine the attitude of the Labour party to those struggles.

When the second world war ended with the heroic victory of the USSR and China over fascism, in temporary military 'alliance' with Anglo-American imperialism, the Soviet Union, its Communist party and its leadership's prestige throughout the globe was immense, and a new wave of socialist governments were brought into being across central and eastern Europe, followed shortly by the epic victory of the Chinese Revolution in 1949.

### **3. The cold war**

Notwithstanding the wartime alliance between the Soviet Union, the USA and Britain – a victory for Soviet diplomacy, the herculean courage and energy of the Soviet working people, and the military strength and valour of the Red Army, rather than any change of heart on the part of the predatory British and US ruling classes – the most intense hostility was fostered in postwar USA, Britain and the capitalist world they led to 'the Russians'. This was a reinforcing and continuation of the vehement anticommunist struggle that was waged by the British and US ruling classes throughout the 20th century.

Former prime minister Winston Churchill's 1946 'iron curtain' speech (a term he quietly pilfered from Joseph Goebbels' Nazi propaganda) was delivered to an audience in Fulton, Missouri, while on a tour of the USA, and signalled the transition to the cold war. This was nothing other than a heightening of the class struggle, in national form, and drawn along the demarcation

lines at the closing of military operations of the second world war.

Nato, in the creation of which Britain's Labour party, under the leadership of Clement Attlee, played a leading role, was formed as an aggressive imperialist alliance, initially set up with the mission of opposing the socialist countries (the liberated working class). It was also, as has now become clear to all since the demise of the USSR, to act as an alliance of the imperialist brigands against all independent nations.

In the face of the stubborn, prolonged and earnestly fought social and political challenge to the old exploitative order, and while social unrest and industrial conflict was also raging in Britain, where did the Labour party leadership take its stand in this herculean conflict? In fact, the actions of the Labour party's leaders and the Trades Union Congress (TUC) general council during the 1926 general strike had already revealed the trajectory and set the course for the later development of Britain's labour movement for the following century.

In this pamphlet, we examine these key historical facts and draw conclusions accordingly.

#### **4. Thatcherite neoliberalism**

Margaret Thatcher's government was installed by Britain's rulers to enact a policy of deindustrialisation in favour of the unbridled dominance of the banking and financial service sectors. This fundamentally changed Britain, mirroring similar reforms in the USA under the regime of Ronald Reagan.

Swathes of manufacturing jobs evaporated across the country. Or, more precisely, capital was exported. Britain radically downsized its manufacturing base, embracing its role as an international banker, living by 'clipping coupons',<sup>1</sup> making super-profits from exploiting ultra-low wage workers overseas.



## PREFACE

While a privileged section of British workers were given considerable crumbs from the table during this looting and plundering process, the majority were largely excluded from the robber-barons' feast. Moreover, having lost their productive roles, increasing numbers were cast unwittingly into a degrading and parasitic life. As the great mines, mills and factories of Britain were abandoned, as the country's steel foundries and shipbuilding yards were dismantled, many working-class communities and social institutions were also destroyed.

Life on the dole was, for millions, quite literally a scrapheap of unemployment,<sup>2</sup> without hope of self-improvement and with no prospect of making a meaningful contribution to society. There was widespread anger with capitalism. And this conflict came to a head during the great miners' strike of 1984-5, heroically led by National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) leader Arthur Scargill.

Yet that righteous anger of the working class, channelled and directed by the Labour party, was transformed into anger only with 'the Tories' – with Margaret Thatcher, with her successor John Major, with Rupert Murdoch's 'lying press' and with the Tory party's 'eighteen years rule'.<sup>3</sup> The breaking of the unions that followed the miners' strike facilitated the introduction of widespread 'flexible' working and zero-hour contracts in poorly-paid service sector jobs, bringing with them the further erosion of working-class living standards.

A shot in the arm to the ailing international capitalist order was given by the collapse of the Soviet Union,<sup>4</sup> which in turn created conditions for a renaissance of classical Anglo-American imperialism; the ability of city financiers to intensify their economic exploitation both of the less developed oppressed countries and of the former Soviet nations. Far from receiving the promised 'peace dividend', workers in the west found that military spending skyrocketed.

Today, the USA alone spends \$850 billion a year on armaments, and the world has suffered a fresh wave of adventurist

and genocidal colonial invasions,<sup>5</sup> launched under US president George H Bush's slogan of a 'New World Order' to enforce Anglo-American imperialism's economic primacy.

'National' wealth increased, but it was drawn primarily from the profits of the financiers in the City of London, at the expense of the further impoverishment of the formerly colonised peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America, and was concentrated in ever fewer hands.

The majority of Britain's 'left' outside Labour during this period was typified by the Trotskyite Socialist Workers Party (SWP), which greeted the defeat of the rabid reactionary Neil Kinnock (Labour party) by John Major (Conservative party) in the 1992 general election as a national calamity. This was the same Trotskyite SWP that had greeted the fall of the Soviet Union, and the trail of rabid reaction that this fall set in tow, as a victory for 'real socialism'.<sup>6</sup>

## **5. The Labour governments of Blair and Brown**

So when Blair's Labour party won the 1997 election, more than a few workers hoped that his words 'A new day has dawned, has it not?' would mean a change of course for their lives. A warning note should have sounded in their minds when Labour's first act of government was to hand control of Britain's macroeconomic policy directly to the capitalists, in the form of the Monetary Policy Committee of the Bank of England. But without a leadership to point out the meaning of such lofty economic abstractions, of course, it did not.

Many – but not all – Labour voters now remember the premiership of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown with a sense of anger, disappointment and shame. Blair and his spin doctor Alastair Campbell were masters of platitude, soundbite and the well-shot propaganda film. Who else could address a conference

## PREFACE

of angry trade unionists, dash all their hopes, yet sufficiently diffuse their anger to receive a standing ovation?

'Tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime!' . . . 'Education, education, education!' So much empty rhetoric. Not without reason did Thatcher claim Blair to be her greatest success. Over three terms, it became abundantly clear that Labour under Blair was not a break with, but rather a *consolidation* of neoliberal politics and monopoly-capitalist economics.

Perhaps Tony Blair will be remembered above all – more even than for the monumental corruption and avarice that have seen him amass a personal wealth since leaving office running into hundreds of millions of pounds – for the genocidal and clearly unjustified and unjustifiable wars that the Labour party waged against small nations.

Most memorably and devastatingly, there was the war against Iraq, waged on the pretexts of Iraq being a threat to Britain owing to its *alleged* possession of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), of 'self-defence', and of defending 'democracy' and 'human rights' – particularly of the Kurds and Marsh Arabs (attacks on whom were historical, and had in fact been abetted by the British and US governments, and assiduously ignored by the corporate imperialist press). The human rights of the half-million Iraqi children murdered by 'allied' sanctions were not considered newsworthy.<sup>7</sup> It was abundantly clear to all that the real issue at the centre of that conflict was the Anglo-American monopoly capitalists' desire to loot the colossal oil wealth of Iraq and the entire middle east.

Many were uncomfortable with Blair's close relationship to the US Republican party during this period, whose leaders George W Bush, Donald Rumsfeld, Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice et al were certainly the most hawkish of right-wing Republicans; the representatives of US imperialism red in tooth and claw.

Perhaps they also remember Blair's wars on Yugoslavia, on Afghanistan, on Sierra Leone. The Labour party stood firmly

at the helm of the Nato war chariot, as the most powerful economic and military bloc the world had ever assembled, firing precision-guided missiles from the safety of battleships tens of miles away from the inhabitants' coastline, or dropping them from planes flying three miles above their defenceless victims, or from impregnable helicopter gunships, hovering out of sight, miles from the theatre of operations. Those wars in turn gave rise to protracted occupations and facilitated the unbridled looting of natural and financial resources, with devastating consequences for the conquered and subject peoples.

Julian Assange's WikiLeaks website brought the vivid and ugly realities of those wars for oil to a public that had been relentlessly bombarded with pro-war pro-imperialist propaganda, from dawn till dusk. And we have seen the chagrin of our ruling class in its vindictive persecution of this journalism, which is in glaring contrast with the benign treatment by imperialist media of Tony Blair's Labour's egregious war crimes.

Inciting war and genocide on totally false claims was defined by the post-WW2 Nuremberg tribunals as the highest international crime, although no reader of the British mainstream media would ever guess it. Far from being prosecuted or punished – or even ostracised – for his role in these horrific crimes, Blair was actually appointed middle east 'peace envoy' by the 'quartet'<sup>8</sup> supposedly overseeing the Palestinian peace process.

### **6. Privatisation, bank bailouts and austerity**

Nor should we forget that Labour during those years was the advocate and chief architect of the major escalation of privatisation of the NHS, as well as in schools, prisons, libraries and other branches of the state, through its favourite vehicles of public-private partnerships (PPP) and private finance initiatives (PFI).

## PREFACE

The NHS, for example, having been starved of running and capital costs and its premises run down, was the recipient of £12 billion of investment from private capital, for the purpose of building new hospital premises. In return for this largesse, the service will be bled of £92 billion in repayment costs, at the end of which it will not own the hospital premises but will be liable to eviction or to further extortion.

Prime minister Gordon Brown is now almost a forgotten footnote in Labour party history, but we should not forget his celebration of the British empire – conveniently overlooking, of course, its parasitic essence, the systematic bleeding of its subject nations, punctuated by famines and massacres and underpinned by a fiercely racist ideology. Not to mention the praises he sang to the supremacy of the capitalist 'free market' – deliberately blind to the inequality and exploitation this spreads nationally and globally, and apparently contradicted by his rapid moves during the 2008 economic crisis to proclaim Britain's bankrupt financiers to be 'too big to fail'.

Far from letting the market take its natural victims – the monopolists themselves – Gordon Brown bailed out the bankers by transferring their debt to the British state. Brown pushed through a gift of £500 billion, in coordination with the European Central Bank and the US Federal Reserve, from the poorest workers in Britain to the most wealthy oligarchy on the planet – all made under the supervision of the last Labour party government, the price for which we have paid with fifteen years of harsh austerity.

And yet, with the fall of these Labour administrations, much of the left was quick to return to the formula that 'we need to get the Tories out and elect a Labour government'. Blair was simply an aberration, they said. Some even try and offset the negatives against what they still perceive to be the 'benefits' of a Labour government.

A few point to the institution of the minimum wage – over-

looking the fact that the Labour government had set the minimum wage at a level so low that wages for a majority of workers were *dragged down* as a result of its institution (which, far from setting a 'minimum' simply became the 'new normal'). As a result, business was well satisfied that its profits would not be challenged.

## 7. The Corbyn project

The election of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour party leader in 2015 seemed a heaven-sent opportunity for these Labour supporters, long neglected and ignored since the Blair-Brown premiership, to 'reclaim' Labour for the working class, and to reassert the party's supposed 'founding socialist principles'.

To those who held on to the fervent and cherished desire to see a more just and equitable society, won by the simple expedient of casting a vote at an election to the Mother of Parliaments in Westminster, the unfolding of the Corbyn project came as a bitter blow. But the seeds of defeat were there for all to see from the outset of that ill-fated movement. We have dealt with them at length in another pamphlet and do not intend to dwell on them again here.<sup>9</sup>

It is twenty-five years since the contents of this short pamphlet were first published, initially written as a series of articles giving a comprehensive history of the formation, rise and deeds in office of the British Labour party. Those articles appeared in *Lalkar*, the publication of the Indian Workers Association (GB), and were written by Harpal Brar. We include his original preface, written on the eve of Blair's election victory, which is as hard-hitting and relevant upon rereading as it was at the time of publication, particularly in the light of our experience of that Labour government.

If the Tory party has been and remains the most *overt* agent

## PREFACE

of the governance of Britain's billionaire ruling class, it will be seen from the following pages that the Labour party has played the part of a most 'loyal parliamentary opposition' with strict decorum. In all matters, domestic and international, the interests of British imperialism have come first – and the interests of the most privileged section of the British workers have been assumed to be synonymous with the interests of British imperialism. The demands of the mass of relatively impoverished British workers have been placed a poor third, while the interests of the international proletariat have been firmly trodden underfoot at every turn.

It is of crucial importance to return to the Labour party's early history precisely because it continues to be presented by fake leftists and perceived by a considerable mass through a hazy fog of ignorance, propaganda and historical revisionism. The nostalgic myth of a 'golden age', in which the Labour party was truly socialist – an age to which we can and should by some means return – is painfully persistent.

This view has many promoters, both within and without the Labour party. From Trotskyites and revisionist communists to bourgeois academia and journalism, many can be found to promote the legend of Labour's socialist past – *all of which is ultimately aimed at holding back the development of a truly socialist movement that might challenge the material interests and unquestioned political supremacy of British capitalism.*

In view of the global economic depression and the political crisis that faces Britain's working class, many of whose poorer and more disenfranchised members have been steadily turning away from the Labour party for decades, it is particularly urgent for British socialists to revisit the history of the Labour party's formation and learn the necessary lessons.

As we look to the future and strive to build a genuinely socialist working-class party in Britain, a party that must be guided by the highest theoretical principles of scientific socialism, we

need to fully understand our past in order to avoid repeating the same mistakes and perpetuating the British proletariat's prolonged period of servitude and dependence.

**Ranjeet Brar**

London and Sheffield, June 2023



## 1. Harpal Brar's 1995 preface<sup>10</sup>

With some honourable exceptions, what passes for the revolutionary left in Britain regards the Labour party (the representative of social democracy in Britain) as a party of the British working class with the potential to unify the British proletariat in its struggle for social emancipation, maintaining that Labour can be an instrument for the attainment of socialism in Britain.

The present writer, however, is of the opposite view, maintaining that Labour never has been, is not now, and will never in the future be a party of the British proletariat; that it was formed to defend the interests of the privileged upper stratum (composed of skilled workers organised in craft unions, which at the time embraced a tiny minority of the workforce) of the working class; that since the privileged position of this upper stratum – this aristocracy of labour – depended on the loot from the empire and the extraction of imperialist superprofits from abroad, Labour from its inception was committed to the defence of the British empire and British imperialism alike, for it could not defend the one (the privileges of the labour aristocracy) without defending the other (British imperialism).

Therefore, Labour has throughout its existence, as its record

over nearly a century amply proves, been an imperialist party – a 'bourgeois labour party' to use Engels' remarkably profound expression.

The task I set myself in this book is to prove, by reference to irrefutable evidence, both historical and contemporary, the correctness of this assertion, and to make this truth known among the lower stratum, the vast masses of the British proletariat, whose interests the Labour party has never championed in the past and does not champion now.

The Labour party has always defended the interests of British imperialism and of the privileged sections of the working class – the labour aristocracy.

The composition of this labour aristocracy has undergone a remarkable change over several decades, but the labour aristocracy as such remains. If in former times it was composed of skilled craft workers, today it consists largely of skilled white-collar workers, administrators, labour and trade union functionaries, and those in supervisory and managerial positions.<sup>11</sup>

But what this new labour aristocracy shares with the old labour aristocracy is its total contempt for the poor, the deprived and the downtrodden at home and abroad, its total disregard for the plight of the most disadvantaged and most cruelly exploited sections of the population here in Britain or in the rest of the world. And this for the simple reason that such destitution – the existence of a 'functional underclass', to use Galbraith's terminology<sup>12</sup> – is a necessary condition for the maintenance of its privileged and parasitic existence, which explains its philistinism, the depth of its vilest subservience to, and its contemptible sycophancy in the service of the imperialist bourgeoisie.

Secondly, it is my task in this book to prove the continuing validity of the Leninist thesis concerning the very profound economic connection between imperialism and opportunism in the labour movement.

Imperialism engenders a split in the working class, for it has

singled out a handful of exceptionally rich and powerful states that plunder the whole world and are able to use a portion of the superprofits thus derived to bribe the labour leaders and the upper stratum of the working class.

This stratum of bourgeoisified workers, or the 'labour aristocracy', who are quite philistine in their mode of life, in the size of their earnings and in their entire outlook . . . , is the principal *social prop of the bourgeoisie*. For they are the real *agents of the bourgeoisie in the working-class movement*, the labour lieutenants of the capitalist class, real conduits of reformism and chauvinism.\*

The chief function of this bribed and therefore opportunist stratum is to act as the watchdogs of capitalism and the corruptors of the labour movement. On the basis of its monopoly profits, and the bribing of its labour aristocracy, the bourgeoisie of each imperialist country long ago begot, nurtured and secured for itself a bourgeois labour party.

The British bourgeoisie, since monopoly developed much earlier in Britain than elsewhere, was the first to secure such a party. The Labour party was precisely such a 'bourgeois labour party'. It is, as it always has been, a party of opportunism and social chauvinism, which is totally alien to the revolutionary proletariat, and unless a determined ruthless struggle is waged against this party, it is pointless and hypocritical cant to talk about the struggle against imperialism, about Marxism-Leninism, about the socialist labour movement, or about proletarian revolution.

Historical facts fully confirm that in the entire history of British capitalism there has been a split in the working class, apart from two brief periods during which British capitalism, while

---

\* VI Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, 1916, Preface to the French and German editions of 1920.

sustaining the privileged position of the upper stratum of the working class, was nevertheless able to provide adequate living standards to the mass of the working class.

These exceptional periods were:

Firstly, the years 1848-68, that is, from the defeat of the Chartist<sup>13</sup> movement to nearly the close of the seventh decade of the nineteenth century, when Britain possessed the largest empire and enjoyed complete monopoly in the world market and could, therefore, rightly be described as 'the workshop of the world'. During these years, Britain was not just the biggest act in town, it was the *only* act – it was the town.

This monopoly position yielded enormous profits to the British ruling class, thus enabling it to treat the working class rather more leniently. Because of these exceptional circumstances, after the defeat of Chartism there existed no party to defend the interests of the working class – not even that of its privileged upper stratum, which found it satisfactory to safeguard its interests through craft unions and in alliance with the bourgeois Liberal party – the Lib-Lab alliance.

From the 1870s, Britain's monopoly position was increasingly under challenge, especially from Germany and the United States of America, and by 1890 this monopoly was gone forever. With the disappearance of this monopoly, the British bourgeoisie could no longer afford its earlier leniency, and was thus forced to attack the living standards of the working class, including those of its upper stratum.

Finding itself under attack from its former ally (the liberal bourgeoisie), and being no longer able to defend its interests through the Liberal party, the labour aristocracy effected the first organisational breach in the hitherto existing notorious Lib-Lab alliance,<sup>14</sup> with the formation in 1893 of the Independent Labour party (ILP), and subsequently the Labour Representation Committee in 1900, which from 1906 began to be referred to as the Labour party. However, this organisational

breach in no way affected its Lib-Lab politics, which have continued up to the present day.

Secondly, the thirty years following the end of the second world war (1945-75), when postwar conditions of boom produced the Keynesian consensus,<sup>15</sup> leading to the reconstruction of British imperialism at the expense of the increased exploitation and oppression of the colonial peoples, the institution of the National Health Service, universal benefits, full employment and a rising standard of living for the entire working class.

Just as the successful challenge to Britain's monopoly position in the last quarter of the nineteenth century put an end to the consensus of that period, the deteriorating condition of British imperialism – its relative decline in comparison with its rival imperialist powers – has caused the breakdown of the Keynesian consensus, and with it the end of full employment, universal benefits and the National Health Service, at least in its hitherto existing form.

No longer can British imperialism sustain the privileged stratum of the working class and the petty bourgeoisie, while at the same time providing an adequate, let alone rising, standard of living for the vast masses of the working class. From now on, as indeed has been the case since the end of the 1970s, the privileged conditions of the former can only be maintained at the expense of the increased exploitation, poverty and misery of the latter.

What was considered unthinkable not so long ago is already happening. Every one of the gains of the postwar period (gains which the Trotskyite and revisionist coteries of renegades still continue dementedly to attribute to the 'socialist' government of Clement Attlee) – full employment, universal benefits, the National Health Service – is under attack.

The result is an increase in poverty, a widening of the gap between rich and poor, and an intensification in the split in the working class. The recently published inquiry into income and

wealth by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation bears eloquent testimony to this phenomenon. This report, in its analysis of wage trends over a period of eighteen years (1977-95), covering the last two years of Labour government and the subsequent sixteen years of Conservative administration, says:

After 1977, the gap between low wages and high wages grew, the experiences of three parts of the distribution diverged; wages for the lowest-paid hardly changed, and by 1992 were lower in real terms than in 1975; median wages grew by thirty-five percent; but high wages grew by fifty percent.\*

Commenting on the accentuation of this trend with the onset of the Thatcher administration in 1979, the report states:

Between 1979 and 1992, the poorest twenty to thirty percent failed to benefit from economic growth, in contrast to the rest of the postwar period, when all groups benefited during times of rising living standards.

From 1979 to 1992 there was a massive transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich. During these years, while the average income after housing costs rose thirty-six percent, this only served to hide the fact that, while the earnings of the upper ten percent went up by sixty percent, those of the bottom ten percent went down by seventeen percent in real terms.

The report says that an increasing ratio of the working class are now earning less than £127 per week – a mere half of the average household income – with a particular concentration of poverty among black people.

Since 1977, the proportion of the population with less than

---

\* Joseph Rowntree Foundation, *Income and wealth: Report of the JRF Inquiry Group*, 1 February 1995.

half the average income has more than trebled from seven to twenty-four percent.

And:

Ethnic minority incomes tend to be lower than those of the rest of the population. Whereas only eighteen percent of the population classified by survey interviewers as 'white' was in the poorest fifth of the whole population, more than a third of the 'non-white' population are in the poorest fifth . . . you are twice as likely to be poor if you are black than if you are white.

Council estates are increasingly becoming the dumping grounds for the poorest sections of the population:

In the 1960s and early 1970s fewer than half of the individuals living in council housing were in the poorest forty percent of the population; by 1991 the proportion was three-quarters.

The report goes on to highlight the fast-deteriorating employment prospects for the young, linking these prospects to educational success at school and at higher levels of education.

In the circumstances of the continued decline of British imperialism, the erosion of its manufacturing base, with the resultant bleak employment prospects, the government's education policy is tailor-made to produce not just the successful ones needed by capital for its self-expansion, but also the unsuccessful fated for the ranks of the bottom one-third, surrounded by conditions of dire, unrelenting and absolute poverty, shut up in deprived/problem working-class estates, attending problem schools starved of resources.

Yet the so-called 'left', grouped in various Trotskyist (both inside and outside of the Labour party) and revisionist organisations, these 'philistines in nightcaps', to use Lenin's very apt expression, possessed of an inordinate amount of inept pedantry

and imbued with a spirit of servility to the bourgeoisie, continue to deny the existence of the above split in the working class. The denial of this split is absolutely essential to their support for the Labour party as the party of the entire working class, for the recognition of the split in the working class cannot fail to force on them also the recognition that Labour represents the interests of British imperialism and of the privileged layers of the working class.

In denying this split, these ignorant country yokels, albeit implicitly, deny the imperialist character of British capitalism. Just as the contemptible scoundrelly gentry of the Labour party, cringing before the bourgeoisie, adapt every line of their programme to the requirements of British imperialism and of the labour aristocracy and the petty bourgeoisie, in the same measure our Trots-revisionist 'left', which fancies itself to be revolutionary, increasingly cringing before social democracy and adapting itself to bourgeois parliamentarism, adjusts itself to the imperialist Labour party and the latter's electoral requirements.

Treating history like Gogol's *Petrushka*,<sup>16</sup> representatives of lackey science that they are, our 'left' continue chanting the mantra that the Labour party is a mass party of the British working class. Their stance, their scorn for historical facts, their disdain for reality is distinguished by such a 'sweet naiveté, which would be touching in a child but is repulsive in a person who has not yet been officially certified as feeble-minded', to use Lenin's observation apropos Karl Kautsky.

The entire history of bourgeois democracy shows that bourgeois democrats have always practised deception and trickery upon the masses. They have always advanced, and still advance, all manner of slogans in order to trick the proletariat. The Labour party is no exception. Throughout its existence it has advanced demagogic slogans to hoodwink the proletariat, to lull to sleep the Simple Simons among the socialists, while



serving imperialism singlemindedly.

The task of the socialists, therefore, is not to be satisfied with these slogans, with idealistic or charlatan phrases, but to get to class reality and test the sincerity of those putting forward the slogans – *to compare their words with their deeds*.

Today, however, the continuing relative decline of British imperialism is increasingly forcing bourgeois democrats, including those of the Labour party, to shed much of their sloganising and to confront the mass of the working class with hideous class reality in the form of an assault on the gains of the postwar period.

During the past twenty-five years, the manufacturing workforce has been nearly halved (down from eight million to four and a half million)<sup>17</sup> while the number of those employed in banking and insurance has nearly trebled. Between 1979 and 1989 alone, while investment in banking services went up by one hundred and twenty-five percent, investment in manufacturing over the same period went up by a mere thirteen percent. No wonder then that during those ten years employment in banking and financial services went up by over one million. In 1992, manufacturing output was one percent above that of 1979.

Within manufacturing itself, one in ten manufacturing jobs are accounted for by the manufacture of armaments. With such an erosion of its manufacturing base, and such heavy reliance on the manufacture of the merchandise of death, how is British imperialism able to support the increasing proportion of the population involved in unproductive labour – the vast unproductive layers who produce no wealth, no surplus value?

The answer, in the main, must be found in the export of capital and the earnings this brings.

For instance, in 1990, Britain's overseas earnings from capital invested abroad were close to £26 billion, which represented thirty-six percent of all profit made in Britain that year. With

such a high proportion of the profits of British imperialism dependent on the export of capital, one can see why banking (the City) and militarism have assumed such monstrously gigantic dimensions.

In these conditions, if British imperialism is to continue its parasitic existence (and it can have no other existence), if it is to continue to provide privileged conditions for the petty bourgeoisie and the labour aristocracy, every government policy must be subordinated to the interests of the robber barons of finance capital; every military adventure abroad must be fully and enthusiastically supported in order to make sure of the continued flow of tribute from abroad.

The support given by all bourgeois parties, including Labour, to the genocidal war against Iraq is but one of the scores of examples one could cite in this connection.

Notwithstanding the extraction of superprofits from abroad, the inexorable relative decline of British imperialism continues apace on all fronts – industrial, financial and political. British finance capital has come under severe pressure from German and Japanese finance capital, and Tokyo is increasingly replacing London as the global financial centre.

Without question, British capital is fighting hard, and, figures suggest, with some degree of success, to maintain its parasitic privileged position. Between 1986 and 1990, its overseas investments ran at the rate of approximately \$28 billion per annum. Although 1991 witnessed a sharp decline to \$17 billion in these investments, the following years saw a steady recovery. In 1992, Britain's investments rose to \$20 billion, in 1993 to \$27 billion, and in 1994 to \$30 billion – the latter figure making her the second largest overseas investor (after the USA, which invested \$58 billion abroad in the same year).<sup>18</sup>

These figures do not, however, detract from the general trend of the decline of British monopoly capital taken over a long period of time, particularly in the light of the erosion of its manu-

facturing base.

What they do reveal is that in the crowded global market, each imperialist power is fighting for a place in the sun – a most ruthless war with no holds barred; and that the City, this symbol of British finance capital, with three centuries of cunning and experience behind it, will be no pushover; that Britain is still a major player in this fight for a global carve-up.

The problem, however, is that even success in this field only serves to further its deepening crisis. On the one hand, the greater the investment abroad, the greater the inflow of super-profits. On the other hand, the greater the investment abroad, the less the investment at home, with the resultant further erosion of Britain's manufacturing base, more closures, more unemployment and a further exacerbation of the crisis of over-production. The gap between domestic investment in manufacturing and investment abroad is increasing year by year in favour of foreign investment.

While direct overseas investment in 1980 was equivalent to 113 percent of the domestic investment in manufacture, this rose to 250 percent in 1985 and 370 percent in 1989, before coming down to 164 percent in 1990. These figures, which reveal the truly parasitic character of British capitalism, do not include bank loans and portfolio investment, in comparison with which the direct investment figures assume a rather dwarfish look. If, for instance, between 1980 and 1986, direct overseas investment amounted to £46 billion, portfolio investment was £75 billion, and bank loans £200 billion.

Consequent upon the erosion of its manufacturing base, Britain is confronted with a huge balance of trade deficit on manufactured goods (currently running at the rate of £20 billion a year). The problem is further exacerbated by the dramatic decline in North Sea oil revenues, which are but a meagre proportion of their peak in the early and mid-1980s. The continuing slump, with the consequent rise in unemployment (currently

just under three million, even according to the much-massaged official figures), has sent the public sector borrowing requirement (PSBR) soaring sky high, and it continues to rise further.

Faced with this, its worst postwar crisis, British imperialism is intensifying its attack on the poorer section of the working class. Nearly half of all employees in Britain earn less than the European decency threshold, and with the bourgeoisie now bent on the dismemberment, if not the dismantlement, of the National Health Service, and the abolition of universal benefits, we are poised for a massive increase in poverty and the widening of the split in the working class.

Increasingly, the 'contented majority' is turning into a *minority*, and for the first time since the end of the war, the overwhelming majority of the working class are being sucked into the abyss of absolute poverty, hopelessness and misery.

Labour will not give a voice to, it will not represent, this vast mass of the destitute. Labour has lost four elections in succession for the reason that the privileged section of the working class deserted to the Tories. To win, Labour needs, in addition to the votes of the lower proletarian stratum, the electoral support of the upper stratum, as well as of a section of the petty bourgeoisie.

Since, as a result of the breakdown of the Keynesian consensus, it is no longer possible to reconcile the interests of the labour aristocracy with those of the lower stratum, Labour has, after each election defeat, moved away, distanced itself from the lower layers – wooing instead the upper layers and the petty bourgeoisie has become its main concern.

Labour lost the 1992 election because its commitment to a mild increase in spending on the National Health Service (£1 billion) and education (£600 million) proved unacceptable to the petty bourgeoisie and the upper stratum of the working class. As a result, Labour has dropped all such commitments.

The present-day Labour party has moved so much to the

right that the bewildered Tories are forever accusing the Labour party of stealing their clothes. And that arch-reactionary union-buster, media mogul Rupert Murdoch, has gone on record as saying:

I could even imagine supporting Tony Blair.\*

Only a few weeks ago, Blair travelled, in fittingly servile fashion (all expenses paid, courtesy of Mr Murdoch), to Australia's Hayman Island, off the Queensland coast, to explain Labour's policy to media executives at a conference organised by Murdoch's News International. In characteristic fashion, he delivered a vacuous speech, the contents of which do not concern us, if for no other reason than that it was devoid of all content except for a cringing plea, worded in suitably servile language, to be accepted as a faithful lackey of imperialism by one of the most ruthless monopoly capitalists.

The important point to note is that Blair, who even on bourgeois admission and by bourgeois standards is no more than a third-class mediocrity, was introduced at the above conference by Murdoch himself as one of the 'most outstanding political leaders in the world today'. This reminds one of the following observation made by Karl Marx apropos John Stuart Mill:<sup>19</sup>

On the level plain, simple mounds look like hills; and the imbecile flatness of the present bourgeoisie is to be measured by the altitude of its great intellects. [*And by its leaders, we might add!*]<sup>†</sup>

As this preface was being written, Blair – in response to criticism from within his own party, including from the veteran

\* Interview with *Der Spiegel*, 1994, cited in 'Murdoch's courtship of Blair finally pays off' by F Abrams and A Bevins, *Independent*, 11 February 1998.

† K Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1, 1867, Chapter 16.

right-winger Roy Hattersley, who for years acted as hatchet-man for that windbag Neil Kinnock (he who stabbed the miners in the back), to the effect that he was forgetting the poor and that Labour under his leadership has no definable ideological bearing – responded by saying that he was unashamedly wooing the votes of the ‘middle class’ and that he had no need to apologise for that.

In spite of this, the Trotskyite counter-revolutionaries and the revisionist renegades alike, while professing to be revolutionaries, are still harping on the theme of kicking the Tories out and electing a Labour government under pressure to implement socialist policies. This merely goes to show that the Trotskyite/revisionist gentry are but the left wing of social democracy and are themselves saturated through and through with the filthy social-democratic culture of corruption, making them oblivious to the plight of the poor at home and abroad, and whose objects of main concern are also the upper stratum of the working class and the petty bourgeoisie.

In the conditions in which, being let down by, and disgusted with, Tories and Labour alike, a significant minority of the working class is abstaining from voting at elections (notwithstanding the media blitz inviting them to take part in this great ‘democratic’ exercise), regarding them as a charade and a contest between two indistinguishable bourgeois parties with almost indistinguishable programmes. The ‘Vote Labour’ campaign of the left carries the additional risk of directing this disgruntled section of the working class into the arms of various fascist organisations, which do assert in their propaganda that Labour and Tory are as good (or bad) as each other, and who do make demagogic anti-capitalist noises – all, of course, in the service of crisis-ridden imperialism.

Labour does not even support the *economic*, trade union, struggles of the working class, let alone addressing the question of the social emancipation of the proletariat. The trade un-

ion leadership, composed by and large of the privileged upper stratum of the working class, is increasingly moving away from the collective representation of the working class to concentrate on the provision of personal services that can only benefit those enjoying higher-than-average incomes.

This same leadership fears like the plague any action that might transcend the boundaries of the draconian anti-working-class legislation put on the statute book by the bourgeoisie through its Parliament over the last fifteen years. Most significant industrial struggles have collapsed in the face of police violence, or drowned under the weight of legal cretinism, or been simply betrayed by the TUC leadership.

One exception to this was the heroic coal strike of 1984-5. During this year-long strike, the miners, led by the most courageous, militant and incorruptible leadership, carried the torch of struggle on behalf of the entire working class against unemployment and for better conditions, and challenged the power of capital to treat the workers as so much disposable trash.

In doing so, they revived all that is noble, heroic and self-sacrificing – the spirit of collectivism – in the long history of the struggle of the British proletariat. But, by the same act, they roused the frenzy of the bourgeoisie, the furies of private interest.

More than that, they roused the wrath of the Labour and TUC leaderships, who feared like death a miners' victory, for by their example the miners threatened to infect other sections of the working class with a spirit of defiance and rebellion against the dictates of monopoly capitalism.

So the Labour/TUC leadership joined forces with the Thatcher government, the National Coal Board, the police and intelligence services, the judiciary, the bourgeois media, and the blacklegs from the Nottinghamshire coalfields in order to isolate and defeat the miners. In the end, the 'exotic' range of forces arrayed against the miners proved too much; the miners, deserted by

other sections of the working class thanks to the treachery of social democracy, were starved and beaten – literally beaten – back to work.

In view of this, it is perfectly clear that Labour, far from being the mass party of the working class (as the Trots-revisionist outfits, these contemptible scoundrelly renegades to socialism, would have us believe), is, on the contrary, the party of imperialism and a privileged stratum of the working class, which supports imperialism to the hilt, for its privileges and conditions of existence depend on the extraction of superprofits from abroad and the intensified exploitation of the vast lower layers of the proletariat at home.

The task of the communists – revolutionary Marxist-Leninists – is to *recognise* the split in the working class, to *fight against* the 'bourgeois labour party', and 'to go down *lower and deeper*, to the real masses', for 'this is the meaning and the whole content of the struggle against opportunism'.\*

It is the task of revolutionaries to 'explain to the masses the inevitability and the necessity of breaking with opportunism, to educate them for revolution by a merciless struggle against opportunism', and to unmask 'the hideousness of National-Liberal-Labour politics and not to cover them up', for this is the only Marxist-Leninist line to be followed in the British, as well as the world proletarian movement.

Under attack, the vast masses of the working class are bound to fight back. It is the job of the communists to organise them outside of, and in opposition to, social democracy.

This is not a job that can be trusted to the 'left' wing of social democracy, to wit, the Trotskyite and revisionist gentry, who are marked by a staggering accumulation of corruption and filth through decades of opportunism and compromise with social democracy, and whose objects of concern, too, are the

---

\* 'Imperialism and the split in socialism' by VI Lenin, October 1916.



privileged section of the working class and the petty-bourgeois strata.

It is a job that can only be accomplished by making a definite break with the ideology and organisational forms of social democracy. Marxist-Leninists alone are capable of accomplishing this task. They can do it – they must do it. The formation of a truly Marxist-Leninist party in Britain would be a first, and very important step, in the accomplishment of this historic task.<sup>20</sup>

**Harpal Brar**

London, 5 August 1995

## **2. Historical conditions preceding the birth of the Labour party<sup>21</sup>**

Ever since the foundation of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) in 1920, the question of the attitude of communists to the Labour party (the main party of social democracy in this country) has aroused much passion and heated controversy.

Once again, this issue has come to the fore consequent, first, upon the collapse of the erstwhile Soviet Union and the people's democracies of eastern Europe and the tremendous changes in the balance of world forces wrought by this collapse.

### **1. The fall of the USSR**

The liquidation of the former Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and the disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) has given rise to two contradictory trends. On the one hand, under the impact of triumphant imperialist propaganda, which represents the collapse of the USSR as the final collapse of communism, of Marxism-Leninism, of

## HISTORICAL CONDITIONS

scientific socialism, it has brought in its train colossal renegacy and a dreary deluge of gloom and doom.

In the aftermath of the counter-revolution in eastern Europe, a number of parties, hitherto at least nominally communist, have liquidated themselves and openly embraced the counter-revolutionary ideology of social democracy, renounced Marxism-Leninism and declared the Great October Socialist Revolution to have been 'a mistake of historic proportions'.

On the other hand, the same collapse is making it possible for an increasing number of proletarians to realise clearly the terrible consequences of social-democratic departures (for that is what revisionism is in its essence) from Marxism-Leninism. They are increasingly realising how the wholesale revision, and downright distortion, of Marxism-Leninism in the field of political economy, philosophy and class struggle that was committed by the CPSU under the influence of Khrushchevite revisionism ever since the CPSU's twentieth party congress in 1956, has, over a period of more than three decades, led to the restoration of capitalism in the land of the Soviets, the land of Lenin, the land of once triumphant socialism. They are increasingly becoming aware how the same USSR, which beat the armies of fourteen imperialist countries and their stooges during the war of intervention (which followed the successful October Revolution) and which during the second world war broke the back of the Nazi war machine – how this same USSR collapsed so ignominiously under the impact of revisionism.

## **2. Blair and Blairism**

Secondly, the changes within the Labour party over a long period of time, culminating in the accession of Tony Blair to its leadership, and the decisions of the Labour party conference (held in Blackpool's Winter Palace from 3 to 7 October 1994),

have helped to push this question to the top of the agenda.

Communists can no longer, if they ever could, avoid discussing this question, and reaching conclusions on the basis of a sober, serious and all-sided consideration of the facts, discarding dogmatism, opportunism and sectarianism alike. This debate must be frank and fearless, yet comradely, for what is at stake is the very existence in this country of the ideology of the modern proletariat and its organisational form, namely: Marxism-Leninism and a Marxist-Leninist party.

Moreover, this question is not only relevant in Britain. In every other country, too, the revolutionary proletariat is faced with the same question of its attitude to its own social democracy. By way of our contribution to this debate and to the resolution of this extremely important question, we present our views in this series of articles.

We state at the very outset that, in our considered judgment, there is absolutely no basis now, if ever there was during a much earlier period, for maintaining the stance of supporting the Labour party, or of working for the election of a Labour government 'committed to socialist policies'.

What follows is a substantiation of this viewpoint of ours. In order to do justice to this issue, it is important to remind ourselves in the first instance of the historical circumstances and the conditions prevailing in Britain prior to, as well as immediately preceding, the birth of the Labour party.

This is rendered particularly necessary by the fact that young entrants into the proletarian movement are by and large ignorant of this history, while those from the older generation (at least the majority of them), having learnt their labour history in diverse revisionist and Trotskyist outfits, have an extremely distorted, one-sided and opportunist view of these events.

### **3. Historical background since the defeat of Chartism: Rise of the 'labour aristocracy'**

After the final defeat of the Chartist movement in 1848, there followed a period during which British capitalism had at its disposal not only a vast colonial empire, but also a monopoly in the world market.

The rapid expansion of industry consequent upon the above enabled British capitalism to ease the condition of the working class. Between 1850 and 1875, wages rose considerably, by almost a third. The major beneficiary of this rise was doubtless the labour aristocracy, consisting of skilled workers and craftsmen – these constituting between ten and fifteen percent of the working class. Their weekly wages were nearly double those of unskilled workers. This privileged stratum, increasingly assuming the leadership of the working class and turning its back on Chartism (which was undoubtedly revolutionary for its time), got on with the job of building craft unions designed to protect its trade and craft privileges in order to better the conditions for the sale of the labour-power of its members within the conditions of capitalism.

Far from working for the abolition of the wages system (which is the economic bedrock of the wage-slavery of the working class), this upper stratum increasingly acquired a stake in the system, becoming steadily infected with bourgeois respectability and a downright contempt for the mass of the working class – the vast majority constituting the unskilled workers. Friedrich

Engels described the prevalent narrow craft outlook and bourgeois respectability of these times, especially of the upper stratum of the working class, in these vivid terms:

The most repulsive thing here is bourgeois 'respectability' bred

into the bones of the workers. The social division of society into innumerable gradations, each recognised without question, each with its own pride but also inborn respect for its 'betters' and 'superiors', is so firmly established that the bourgeois find it pretty easy to get their bait accepted.\*

#### 4. Tail end of the Liberal party

In these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that no working-class party arose with the ability or willingness to represent the interests of that class. In his 1874 article on the 'English elections', Engels captured the depressing political scene, characterised by corruption and the sickening bourgeois respectability of Britain's labour leaders:

As regards the workers it must be stated, to begin with, that no separate political working-class party has existed in England since the downfall of the Chartist party . . . This is understandable in a country in which the working class has shared more than anywhere else in the advantages of the immense expansion of its large-scale industry. Nor could it have been otherwise in an England that ruled the world market . . .

Whenever the workers lately took part in general politics in particular organisations, they did so almost exclusively as the extreme left wing of 'the great Liberal party'.†

Even after the Electoral Reform Act of 1867 had 'opened the door of Parliament to at least sixty working-class candidates',

---

\* Letter to F Adolph Sorge by F Engels, 7 December 1889.

† 'The English elections' by F Engels, 22 February 1874.

## HISTORICAL CONDITIONS

In order to get into Parliament, the 'labour leaders' had recourse, in the first place, to the votes and money of the bourgeoisie and only in the second place to the votes of the workers themselves. But by doing so they ceased to be workers' candidates and turned themselves into bourgeois candidates. They did not appeal to the working-class party that still had to be formed but to the bourgeois 'great Liberal party'.

Earlier in the same article, Engels had remarked that

The shortest way would have been to proceed at once to form anew a strong workers' party with a definite programme, and the best political programme they could wish for was the People's Charter. But the Chartists' name was in bad odour with the bourgeoisie precisely because theirs had been an outspoken proletarian party, and so, rather than continue the glorious tradition of the Chartists, the 'labour leaders' preferred to deal with their aristocratic friends and be 'respectable', which in England means acting like a *bourgeois*.

Four years later, in a letter to Wilhelm Liebknecht, Marx expressed his total disgust at the demoralisation of the English working class by this period of corruption, and the venality of the trade union leaders:

The English working class had been gradually becoming more and more deeply demoralised by the period of corruption since 1848 and had at last got to the point when it was nothing more than the tail end of the great Liberal party, ie, of its oppressors, the capitalists.

Its direction had passed completely into the hands of the venal trade union leaders and professional agitators. These fellows shouted and howled behind the Gladstones . . . and the whole gang of factory owners . . . *in majorem gloriam* [to the greater

glory] of the tsar as the emancipator of nations, while they never raised a finger for their own brothers in south Wales, condemned by the mine owners to die of starvation. Wretches!\*

In 1883, Engels wrote to August Bebel

Do not on any account whatever let yourself be bamboozled into thinking that there is a real proletarian movement going on here. I know Liebknecht is trying to delude himself and all the world about this, but it is not the case.†

So how are we to explain the opportunism and the venality of the 'labour leaders' of that time? How are we to explain the phenomenon of the non-existence of a 'strong workers' party with a definite programme'? The answer must be sought in the British monopoly of the world market, and in the connection between that monopoly and opportunism in the British working-class movement.

## **5. British monopoly of the world market and its effects on the working class**

One cannot even begin to understand the history of the labour movement in Britain without acknowledging the effects on the working class of the monopoly exercised by the British bourgeoisie in the field of colonies and the world market throughout the nineteenth century.

From the superprofits resulting from this monopoly, the British bourgeoisie was able successfully to bribe and corrupt a significant minority (an 'aristocracy of labour' composed of skilled workers grouped in craft unions) of the working class,

---

\* Letter to Wilhelm Liebknecht by K Marx, 11 February 1878.

† Letter to August Bebel by F Engels, 30 August 1883.



## HISTORICAL CONDITIONS

thus causing on the one hand a split between the working class masses (the lower proletarian stratum) and, on the other hand, this bribed, corrupt and opportunistic upper stratum (the aristocracy of labour), whose leaders constantly deserted to the side of the bourgeoisie and were directly or indirectly in their pay. Marx and Engels, who from 1852 to 1892 traced this phenomenon, this connection between monopoly and the rise of opportunism among the privileged sections of the working class, earned the hatred of these scoundrels for branding them as traitors to the working class.

It must be observed [remarked Lenin apropos the question under discussion] that in Great Britain the tendency of imperialism to divide the workers in this way, to encourage opportunism among them, and cause temporary decay in the working-class movement, revealed itself much earlier than the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries; for two important features of imperialism were observed in Great Britain in the middle of the nineteenth century – vast colonial possessions, and a monopolist position in the world market. Marx and Engels systematically traced this relation between opportunism in the labour movement and the imperialistic features of British capitalism for decades.\*

### **6. Bourgeoisification of the working-class movement**

This systematic treatment, referred to by Lenin, these pronouncements by Marx and Engels, are extremely instructive for anyone desiring to gain an understanding of the material (*economic*) basis of opportunism in the British working-class

---

\* VI Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, 1916, Chapter 8.

movement. We now turn to some of the most important pronouncements of Marxism in this regard over a period of several decades.

In 1858, Engels wrote to Marx:

The English proletariat is actually becoming more and more bourgeois, so that this most bourgeois of all nations is apparently aiming ultimately at the possession of a bourgeois aristocracy and a bourgeois proletariat as well as a bourgeoisie. Of course, this is to a certain extent justifiable for a nation which is exploiting the whole world.\*

Nearly a quarter of a century later, Engels spoke again of

. . . the worst type of British trade unions, which allow themselves to be led by men who have been bought by the capitalists, or at least are in their pay.†

And a letter to Karl Kautsky in 1882, he wrote:

You ask me what the English workers think of colonial policy? Exactly the same as they think about politics in general: the same as what the bourgeois think. There is no working-class party here, there are only Conservatives and Liberal-Radicals, and the workers gaily share the feast of England's monopoly of the world market and the colonies.‡

---

\* Letter to Karl Marx by F Engels, 7 October 1858.

† Letter to Karl Marx by F Engels, 11 August 1881.

‡ Letter to Karl Kautsky by F Engels, 12 September 1882.

## 7. Bourgeois respectability

Disgusted by the spirit of bourgeois respectability with which the British working class had become infected, Engels, in an 1889 letter to Adolph Sorge, complained bitterly that

The most repulsive thing here is the bourgeois 'respectability' . . . I am not at all sure, for instance, that John Burns<sup>22</sup> is not secretly prouder of his popularity with Cardinal Manning, the Lord Mayor and the bourgeoisie in general than of his popularity with his own class . . . Even Tom Mann,<sup>23</sup> whom I regard as the finest of them, is fond of mentioning that he will be lunching with the Lord Mayor. If one compares this with the French, one can see what a revolution is good for, after all.\*

In March 1891, Engels referred to the old skilled unions as being 'rich and therefore cowardly' and, six months later, exulting at the unsuccessful attempt of the TUC to reverse the decision of the congress the year before to campaign for an eight-hour day, he said:

The old unions, with the textile workers at their head . . . had exerted all their strength towards overthrowing the eight-hour decision of 1890. They came to grief . . . and the bourgeois papers recognise the defeat of the bourgeois Labour party.†

Commenting on these profound pronouncements of Marxism, Lenin pointed out:

Here are clearly indicated the causes and effects.

---

\* Letter to F Adolph Sorge by F Engels, 7 December 1889.

† Letter to F Adolph Sorge by F Engels, 14 September 1891.

## BRITAIN'S PERFIDIOUS LABOUR PARTY

The causes are: (1) exploitation of the whole world by this country [Britain]; (2) its monopolist position in the world market; (3) its colonial monopoly.

The effects are: (1) a section of the British proletariat becomes bourgeois; (2) a section of the proletariat permits itself to be led by people who are bought by the bourgeoisie, or at least are in their pay.\*

Engels publicly expressed these ideas, repeated for decades, in his preface to the second edition of his *Condition of the Working Class in England*. In this preface, written in 1892, he spoke of the 'privileged minority' of workers as opposed to the 'great bulk of the workers'.

'A small privileged protected minority' of the working class, writes Engels, 'permanently benefited' from the exceptionally privileged position of England during 1848-68, whereas 'the great mass had, at least, a temporary share now and then'.

This is why he said:

The truth is this: during the period of England's industrial monopoly the English working class have, to a certain extent, shared in the benefits of the monopoly. These benefits were very unequally parcelled out among them; the privileged minority pocketed most, but even the great mass had, at least, a temporary share now and then. And that is the reason why, since the dying out of Owenism,<sup>24</sup> there has been no socialism in England.†

And with the end of English monopoly already in sight, Engels expressed himself in the following optimistic terms:

---

\* VI Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, 1916, Chapter 8.

† 'England in 1845 and in 1885' by F Engels, cited in his 1892 preface to the English edition of *The Condition of the Working Class in England*.

## HISTORICAL CONDITIONS

With the breakdown of that monopoly, the English working class will lose its privileged position, it will find itself generally, the privileged minority not excepted, on a level with its fellow workers abroad. And that is the reason why there will be socialism again in England.

### 8. New unionism

And Engels had good reason to be optimistic, witnessing as he was the revival of the East End of London, which had become the home of 'new unionism', that is to say, of the organisation of the great mass of unskilled workers. The new unions, said Engels, were 'essentially different in character' from the old unions in that, unlike the latter, they

. . . were founded at a time when the faith in the eternity of the wages system was severely shaken; their founders and promoters were socialists either consciously or by feeling; the masses, whose adhesion gave them strength, were rough, neglected, looked down upon by the working-class aristocracy; but they had this immense advantage, that *their minds were virgin soil*, entirely free from the inherited 'respectable' bourgeois prejudices which hampered the brains of the better situated 'old' unionists'.

He contrasted these 'new unionists' with the representatives of old unionism, that is, 'those people who are forgiven their being members of the working class because they themselves would like to drown their quality of being workers in the ocean of their liberalism'.

And so exhilarated was Engels at this development as to declare with his characteristic youthful joy that

. . . for all the faults committed [by the East Enders] in the past, present and future, the revival of the East End of London remains one of the most fruitful facts of this *fin de siècle* [end of the century], and glad and proud I am to have lived to see it.\*

## 9. Why Engels' optimism was shortlived

In addition to the emergence of imperialism (monopoly capitalism), which Marx and Engels did not live to witness, and of which much more later, two things happened to disprove Engels' optimism.

First, although Britain's industrial monopoly had disappeared by the end of the nineteenth century owing to powerful competition from the USA, Germany and France, its colonial empire was larger than that of its rivals, and larger than ever as a result of new acquisitions in the last two decades of the century, especially during the scramble for

The empire acted as a shock absorber against the rough and tumble of the competition from its rivals. Not only did the empire provide ample opportunity for direct, undisguised, straightforward plunder, it represented a source of cheap raw materials and an avenue of extremely lucrative investment – ie, export of capital.

## 10. Export of capital

The relative decline of British industry, its relative lack of competitiveness, were bound to, and actually did, express them-

---

\* Preface to the 1892 edition of F Engels *The Condition of the Working Class in England*.

## HISTORICAL CONDITIONS

selves in a declining rate of profit on investment at home, thus forcing British capitalism to look for profitable investment abroad. And the empire provided a ready-made arena for such investment, resulting in vast overseas capital accumulation. There was a dramatic rise in the accumulation of overseas investment as a percentage of gross national product (GNP).

Robert Clough in his book *Labour: A Party Fit for Imperialism*, has this to say in this regard:

Accumulated overseas investment rose as a percentage of GNP from 73 percent in 1870 to 139 percent in 1890, and 164 percent in 1910, by which time it amounted to a third of domestic capital investment . . . Nabudere<sup>25</sup> estimates that the years 1870 to 1913 saw a capital export of £2,400 million yielding a net income of £4,100 million, and that Britain was able to finance new investment out of the return on the old investment.\*

Clough reproduced from Nabudere's *The Political Economy Of Imperialism*, the following table representing British accumulated capital abroad:

### *Accumulated capital abroad*

<b>Year</b>	<b>£ millions</b>
1870	692
1880	1,189
1890	1,935
1900	2,397
1910	3,371
1913	3,990

Furthermore, British imperialism continued to exercise a mari-

---

\* R Clough, *Labour: A Party Fit for Imperialism*, 1992.

time monopoly, as well as a monopoly in the area of finance and insurance, which resulted in an ever-rising increment in invisible earnings. By the year 1913, invisible earnings from abroad as a percentage of GNP equalled gross private trading profits, the figures being 13.6 percent and 14.2 percent respectively.

During this whole period from 1879 to 1913, characterised as it was by the relative decline of Britain as an industrial power and the disappearance of its industrial monopoly, the trade deficit (visible trade) was nullified by the surplus on invisible earnings, thanks to the possession by Britain of a vast colonial empire.

### **11. Rising, but unequal, wages of British workers**

Thus, notwithstanding the disappearance of the British industrial monopoly, her ruling class was in a position, thanks to her colonial monopoly and earnings from investment abroad, shipping, insurance and financial services, to maintain its labour aristocracy in the conditions to which the latter had become accustomed in the period of Britain's industrial monopoly.

Real wages rose throughout the period from 1879 to 1900. It goes without saying that the chief beneficiary of such rises was the upper stratum (the labour aristocracy), composed of skilled workers whose weekly average earnings of forty shillings compared rather favourably with the miserable wage of twenty to twenty-five shillings for unskilled workers, and fifteen shillings for female and agricultural workers.

### **12. Poverty amid plenty**

In 1911, it required a minimum of thirty shillings for a family to maintain an adequate existence, yet five out of a total of eight



## HISTORICAL CONDITIONS

million male manual workers earned on average only twenty-two shillings a week.

In his 1905 study *Riches and Poverty*, Sir Leo Chiozza Money concluded that thirty-three out of Britain's forty-three million people lived in poverty, and thirteen million of them in destitution. Thus it is unquestionable that while the benefits of the empire flowed in the direction of the labour aristocracy, the lives of the vast masses (the lower proletarian stratum) presented a picture of poverty and destitution.

In view of the petty-bourgeois conditions of existence of the labour aristocracy, who had assumed the leadership of the working class, it is not surprising that the period under discussion was marked by the demoralisation of the working class, by the corruption and venality of the trade union leaders, the absence of a working-class party and political stagnation.

Robert Clough correctly remarked:

This period [1870-1900] was one of political stagnation. British imperialism could still afford to make concessions to [the] Labour aristocracy, in return for which it expected, and usually got, social peace.

There were the odd exceptions of course, one of them being 'new unionism' – ie, the organisation of the great mass of the unskilled workers, a development on which Engels had pinned so much hope and of which he had spoken so enthusiastically.

This brings us to the second reason as to why Engels' optimism proved so short-lived. The new unions, far from being helped by the old unions, actually had to contend with their hostility, owing to the latter's domination by the labour aristocracy, with its narrow craft outlook, bourgeois respectability and Lib-Lab politics. Such was the ferocity with which the combined forces of the bourgeoisie and its agents in the working-class movement, the labour aristocracy, attacked the new unions, that the latter

came to lose most of their membership within a period of three years. While their membership was three hundred thousand in 1890, by 1896 it had dwindled to a mere eighty thousand.

While in 1890 the new unions represented a quarter of TUC membership, by 1900 they were a mere ten percent of it. Moreover, under pressure from the ruling class, the leadership of the new unions, unable to resist the prevailing climate of bourgeois corruption, themselves began to follow in the footsteps of the political and organisational *modus operandi* of the old craft unions – even to the extent of refusing to recruit unskilled and casual workers.

### **13. Development of Marxian analysis by Lenin**

But neither Marx nor Engels lived to see the emergence of imperialism. Instead of England's monopoly disappearing in the conditions of imperialism, it merely gave way to the monopoly of a handful of financially rich and powerful countries.

It fell to Lenin to apply and to develop further the Marxist analysis in the conditions of the epoch of imperialism and inter-imperialist rivalries. Arguing against Karl Kautsky,<sup>26</sup> this is how Lenin described the change from the situation in which England alone enjoyed a monopoly to that in which a handful of powerful and rich countries, including England, managed to develop monopoly.

Imperialism is monopoly capitalism. Every cartel, trust and syndicate, every gigantic bank, *is* monopoly. Superprofit has not disappeared, it has remained. The exploitation of *all* other countries by one, financially rich, country has remained and become more intense. A handful of rich countries . . . have developed monopoly to vast proportions, obtain *super*profits amounting to hundreds of millions, even billions, ride on the

## HISTORICAL CONDITIONS

backs of hundreds and hundreds of millions of the populations of foreign countries, fight among each other for the division of the particularly rich, particularly fat and particularly easy spoils.\*

In the same article, Lenin developed in the following terms the Marxist analysis of the connection between monopoly and the growth of opportunism among a significant minority of the working class, the 'upper stratum', the 'aristocracy of labour' of a given country, and resultant split in the working class:

The bourgeoisie of a 'great' imperialist power is economically in a position to bribe the upper sections of its workers by devoting for this purpose one or two hundred million francs a year since its superprofits amount perhaps to a billion.

### **14. Every imperialist power bribes its labour aristocracy and crushes the lower stratum**

When the English industrial and colonial monopoly gave way to the monopoly of a handful of imperialist countries, each one of these great imperialist powers was in a position to bribe the upper stratum of workers in their countries:

Formerly the working class of one country could be bribed and corrupted, but now every imperialist 'great' power can and does bribe smaller (compared with 1848-68 in England) strata of the 'labour aristocracy'.†

Seizing upon Engels' apt expression, Lenin continued:

---

\* 'Imperialism and the split in socialism' by VI Lenin, October 1916.

† *Ibid.*

## BRITAIN'S PERFIDIOUS LABOUR PARTY

Formerly a '*bourgeois labour party*', to use Engels' remarkably profound expression, could be formed only in one country because it alone enjoyed a monopoly, and enjoyed it for a long period. Now the '*bourgeois labour party*' is inevitable and typical for *all* the imperialist countries.

While monopoly permits a handful of the upper strata being bribed, it at the same time more than ever oppresses, crushes, ruins and tortures the masses of the proletariat and the semi-proletariat through high prices, hunger, deprivation, homelessness and the misfortune of imperialist wars. Contrasting these two tendencies – the opportunists to the increasingly oppressed masses – Lenin went on to state:

The history of the labour movement will from now on inevitably develop as the history of the struggle between these two tendencies: for the first [opportunist] tendency is not accidental, it is 'founded' on economics. The bourgeoisie has already begotten, nurtured, secured for itself '*bourgeois labour parties*' of social chauvinists in *all* countries . . .

The important thing is that the economic desertion of a stratum of the labour aristocracy to the side of the bourgeoisie has matured and become an accomplished fact. And this economic fact, this change in the relations between classes, will find political expression in one form or another without much 'difficulty'.

### **15. Irrevocable split, and our need to break with opportunism**

By way of emphasising the irrevocability of this split, Lenin went on to say:

## HISTORICAL CONDITIONS

The social chauvinist or (what is the same thing) opportunist *tendency* can neither disappear nor 'return' to the revolutionary proletariat.\*

And further, underlining the inextricability of the fight against imperialism and the fight against opportunism, he continued:

The fact is that 'bourgeois labour parties', as a political phenomenon, have been formed in *all* the advanced capitalist countries and unless a determined ruthless struggle is conducted against these parties all along the line . . . it is useless talking about the struggle against imperialism, about Marxism, or about the socialist labour movement.

Furthermore, said Lenin, in this struggle,

Engels draws a distinction between the 'bourgeois labour party' of the *old* trade unions, the privileged minority and the 'lowest mass', the real majority, and he appeals to the latter who are not infected by 'bourgeois respectability'. This is the essence of Marxist tactics!

Stating that the opportunists and social chauvinists represent only a minority, he went on:

And it is therefore our duty, if we wish to remain socialists, to go down *lower* and *deeper*, to the real masses. This is the whole meaning and whole purport of the struggle against opportunism.

By exposing the fact that the opportunists and social chauvinists are in reality betraying and selling the interests of the masses, that they are defending the temporary privileges of a

---

\* *Ibid.*

minority of the workers, that they are the vehicles of bourgeois ideas and influence, that they are really allies and agents of the bourgeoisie, we teach the masses their true political interests, to fight for socialism and for the revolution.

The only Marxist line in the world labour movement is to explain to the masses the inevitability and necessity of breaking with opportunism, to educate them for revolution by waging a relentless struggle against opportunism, to utilise the experience of the war for the purpose of exposing all the vileness of national liberal-labour politics, and not of concealing it.

Accusing the Kautskyites (of the German Social-Democratic Labour Party) of

. . . *fawning* on the opportunists, who are *alien* to the proletariat as a class, who are the servants, the agents of the bourgeoisie and the vehicles of its influence,

he went on to stress that

. . . *unless* the labour movement *rids* itself of them, it will remain a *bourgeois labour movement*.

### **3. Organisational breach between Labour and the Liberal party**

#### **1. Formation of the Labour party<sup>27</sup>**

Although, as pointed out earlier, the privileged workers continued to act as the tail end – an extreme radical wing – of the Liberal party right up to the end of the ninth decade of the nineteenth century, the early 1890s witnessed a change in this state of affairs.

The first organisational breach in this hitherto existing alliance – between the Liberal party and Labour – took place in 1893 with the founding of the Independent Labour party (ILP). This breach was the direct result of stiff foreign competition, in the face of which the liberal bourgeoisie, which was dominantly represented in the textile and mining industries, proved to be just as ruthless as the Tories. The defeat inflicted by the employers during the 1892 strike in the textile industry played the role of a catalyst in the formation of the ILP.

The founding conference of the ILP (in 1893) left no one in doubt that its leadership, in particular Keir Hardie,<sup>28</sup> who was the moving spirit behind the formation of the ILP, though in

favour of its *organisational* independence, was not in favour of the *political* independence of the ILP.

In other words, in the sphere of politics, the Lib-Lab alliance was to continue undisturbed. It was precisely for this reason that the founding conference refused to call the new party the 'Socialist Labour Party'. Instead, it was to be called the 'Independent Labour party' – on the flimsy excuse that the party had to appeal to the mass of workers and not merely to socialists. Translated into ordinary language, the 'masses' to whom the ILP wanted to appeal, and who comprised its constituency, were none other than the upper stratum of the workers, organised in craft unions and characterised by a narrow outlook, bourgeois respectability and a contempt for socialism.

This is how Lenin described this stratum and its political representative, the ILP:

. . . the petty-bourgeois craft spirit that prevails among this aristocracy of labour, which has divorced itself from its class, has followed the Liberals, and contemptuously sneers at socialism as a 'utopia'. The Independent Labour party is precisely the party of Liberal-Labour politics. It is quite justly said that this party is 'independent' only of socialism, and very dependent indeed upon liberalism.\*

Further, in a 1913 article, referencing the recently-held Leicester parliamentary by-election, Lenin gave a detailed and vivid account of the ILP's opportunism – its alliance with, and dependence on, liberalism. Leicester, like a few others, was a two-member constituency, and such constituencies were, said Lenin,

. . . particularly favourable for concluding a tacit bloc (alliance)

---

\* 'Debates in Britain on Liberal Labour policy' by VI Lenin, October 1912.



## FORMATION OF THE LABOUR PARTY

between the socialists and the Liberals . . . It was precisely in such constituencies that the prominent leaders of the so-called Independent (independent of socialism, but dependent on liberalism) Labour Party were elected. Keir Hardie, Philip Snowden and Ramsay MacDonald, the leaders of the Independent Labour party, were elected in such constituencies.

And in these constituencies the Liberals, who are predominant, advise the electors to give one vote for the socialists and one for the Liberals, that is of course, if the socialist is a 'reasonable', 'moderate', 'independent' one and not an irreconcilable social-democrat [this was written before the first world war, when social democracy was still associated with revolutionary Marxism], whom the British Liberals and liquidators, no less than the Russian, abuse as being anarcho-syndicalists.

What actually takes place, therefore, is the conclusion of an alliance between the Liberals and the moderate, opportunist socialists. Actually, the British 'independents' (for whom our liquidators have such tender feelings) depend on the Liberals. The conduct of 'independents' in the British parliament constantly confirms this dependence.\*

Having given an account of how the opportunists of the ILP, hand in glove with the bourgeois Liberal party, conspired successfully in the defeat of the revolutionary socialist Hartley,<sup>29</sup> Lenin concluded:

Class-conscious workers in various countries often adopt a 'tolerant' attitude toward the British ILP. This is a great mistake. The *betrayal* of the workers' cause in Leicester by the ILP is no accident, but the result of the *entire* opportunist

---

\* 'Exposure of the British opportunists' by VI Lenin, 16 July 1913.

policy of the Independent Labour party. The sympathies of all *real* social-democrats should be with those who are determinedly combating the Liberal corruption of the workers by the 'Independent' Labour Party in Britain.

## 2. Important role of Fabian opportunism

Since the most important leaders of the ILP, such as Keir Hardie and Ramsay MacDonald, were prominent Fabians, it is not surprising that the Fabian Society should have played such a significant role in providing first the ILP, and later the Labour party, with detailed facts, policies, programmes and theories.

Formed in 1884, always small in numbers and primarily educational, this organisation of middle-class socialists, stuffed full of careerists and intellectuals *par excellence*, was characterised by its love of *municipal socialism*, contempt for the working class, hatred of class struggle, and therefore of Marxism. For the Fabians, socialism was but an extension of bourgeois liberalism.

In three letters written between September 1892 and November 1893, by way of settling accounts with the Fabians, Engels gave the following, never to be forgotten, characterisation of this gentry. In 1892, he wrote:

You see something unfinished in the Fabian Society. On the contrary, this crowd is only *too* finished: a clique of bourgeois 'socialists' of diverse calibres, from careerists to sentimental socialists and philanthropists, united only by their fear of the threatening rule of the workers and doing all in their power to spike this danger by making *their own* leadership secure, the leadership exercised by the 'eddedicated'. If afterwards they admit a few workers into their central board in order that they

## FORMATION OF THE LABOUR PARTY

may play . . . the role of a constantly outvoted minority, this should not deceive anyone.

The means employed by the Fabian Society are just the same as those of the corrupt parliamentary politicians: money, intrigue, careerism . . . These people are immersed up to their necks in the intrigues of the Liberal party, hold Liberal party jobs, as for instance Sidney Webb<sup>30</sup> . . . These gentry do everything that the workers have to be warned against.\*

In 1893, Engels returned to the subject, saying:

The Fabians here in London are a gang of careerists who have understanding enough to realise the inevitability of the social revolution; but not trusting this gigantic task to the crude proletariat alone, they are gracious enough to stand at the head of it.

Their fundamental principle is fear of revolution. They are intellectuals *par excellence*. Their socialism is municipal socialism; the municipality and not the nation should, at first, at any rate, take over the means of production. They depict their socialism as an extreme but inevitable consequence of bourgeois liberalism. Hence their tactics: not to wage determined struggle against the Liberals as opponents, but to push them towards socialist conclusions, ie, to hoodwink them, to *permeate liberalism with socialism*, not to put up socialist candidates against the Liberals but to foist them on the Liberals, ie, to get them elected by deception . . . But, of course, they fail to understand that in doing so they are either lied to and deceived themselves or else misrepresent socialism.

Besides a lot of rubbish, the Fabians have published several good works of a propagandist nature, in fact the best of the

---

\* Letter to Karl Kautsky by F Engels, 4 September 1892.

## BRITAIN'S PERFIDIOUS LABOUR PARTY

kind which the English have produced. But *as soon as they get on to their specific tactics of hushing up the class struggle it all turns putrid*. Because of the class struggle, they fanatically hate Marx and all of us. (Our emphasis)

The Fabians, of course, have many bourgeois adherents and that is why they have lots of money . . . \*

Towards the end of 1893, Engels described the sudden change of the Fabian Society on the question of the independent activity of the working class, and its conversion to the idea of a separate workers' party:

These gentlemen, after having declared for years that the emancipation of the working class can only be accomplished through the great Liberal party, after *having decried all independent election activity of the workers in respect to Liberal candidates also as disguised Toryism* [our emphasis – does it not remind you of the cries of today's Labour aristocrats and Starmerites against the formation of a real workers' party?], and after having proclaimed the permeation of the Liberal party by socialist principles as the sole life task of the socialists [stay and fight!], now declare that the Liberals are traitors, that nothing can be done with them and that in the next elections the workers should put up candidates of their own, regardless of Liberals or Tories . . . It is a complete admission of sins committed by these overweening bourgeois, who would graciously deign to emancipate the proletariat from above if it would only be sensible enough to realise that such a raw, uneducated mass cannot alone emancipate itself and cannot achieve anything except by the grace of these clever lawyers, writers and sentimental old women.†

---

\* Letter to F Adolph Sorge by F Engels, 18 January 1893.

† Letter to F Adolph Sorge by F Engels, 11 November 1893.

## FORMATION OF THE LABOUR PARTY

The last two letters were written following the formation of the ILP. Engels' expectation that some good may come out of the organisational independence of the working class in Britain was not justified by the ILP, whose activities very soon assumed a decidedly opportunist and anti-socialist character.

'It is quite justly said,' to repeat Lenin's remark, 'that this party is "independent" only of socialism, but very dependent indeed on liberalism.'

Anyone who would doubt the veracity of the observations of Engels or Lenin on the Fabians, let him find out the truth through the Fabians' own mouths. In 1895, Beatrice Webb expressed her contempt for the working class thus:

Judging from our knowledge of the labour movement we can expect no leader from the working class. Our only hope is in permeating the young middle-class man.\*

And further:

What can we hope from these myriads of deficient minds and deformed bodies that swarm our great cities – what can we hope but brutality, madness and crime?†

### **3. Formation of the Labour party: opportunism continues unabated<sup>31</sup>**

Although the ILP was thoroughly opportunist in character, immersed in Lib-Lab politics and in no way opposed to the political alliance with the Liberal party, it nonetheless encountered

---

\* Diary entry for July 1895, published posthumously in B Webb, *Our Partnership*, 1948.

† Diary entry for July 1894, *ibid.*

hostility on the part of the old unions, which did their best, by a series of bureaucratic measures ranging from the adoption of the block vote to ending trades council representation (solely because the ILP dominated smaller unions and trades councils), to isolate it.

The economic reality, however, was inexorably undermining the possibility of preserving the Lib-Lab alliance, since that alliance could no longer guarantee the privileged status of the upper stratum of the working class.

Faced with stiff competition from abroad, British capitalism, throughout the last decade of the nineteenth century, forced on the unions several confrontations and inflicted on them bitter defeats. In the face of this sobering reality, the TUC felt obliged at its 1899 congress to decide in favour of convening a conference to form a Labour Representation Committee (LRC).

This conference duly took place in February 1890 and was attended by 65 delegates representing unions with a combined membership of 568,000, as well as by representatives of political organisations such as the ILP, the Fabian Society and the Social Democratic Federation (SDF).

The conference had little difficulty in rejecting the SDF formulation that the new organisation ought to be a 'party organisation separate from the capitalist parties based upon a recognition of class war'. Instead, it went on to accept, by a majority of one hundred and two votes to three, Keir Hardie's motion that

This conference is in favour of working-class opinion being represented in the House of Commons by men sympathetic with the aims and demands of the labour movement.

From the very outset, not only was the LRC intended to be a parliamentary body first and foremost, but it also excluded nine-tenths of the working class – formed as it was by the craft unions to protect their interests, inside and outside of Parliament,

## FORMATION OF THE LABOUR PARTY

better than was possible under the Lib-Lab alliance that had been rendered obsolete by the changed economic reality.

In 1882, only one and a half million out of a total workforce of fourteen million belonged to any trade union, and even fewer (less than a million) belonged to unions affiliated to the TUC. This ratio of the trade union membership to the total workforce hardly underwent any change until just before the commencement of the first world war.

The unions that set up the LRC were overwhelmingly the organisations of the aristocracy of labour. At that time, out of a total of ten million unskilled workers, a mere one hundred thousand were organised in trade unions. What is more, at a time when the majority of the workers had no vote (in addition to women being denied a vote, there was no universal male suffrage either), the working-class electorate, which was to be the constituency of the LRC, was largely drawn from the upper, privileged stratum of the working class.

The turn of the century brought with it such a decline in the competitiveness of British capitalism as to threaten the conditions of life even of that upper stratum. Unemployment among union members (remember that unionisation was mainly confined to the skilled upper layer) rose from two and a half to eight percent in the first decade of the twentieth century, while wages fell by six percent during the same period.

To these deteriorating conditions, the response of the unions was the same as that of the present-day trade union leadership (with the honourable exception of Arthur Scargill and the NUM) to the attack of Thatcherism. Strikes fell, this being further reinforced by the removal of trade union immunity for strike action consequent upon the 1901 Taff Vale judgment.<sup>32</sup>

In the face of these attacks, during this entire decade, the LRC – and from 1906 the Labour party (as the LRC came to be called from this year) – continued, as is clear from Lenin's observations cited above, to act as the tail end of the Liberal party,

concluding secret electoral pacts with the latter and making not the slightest attempt to become politically independent.

In Parliament, the Labour party, which by 1910 had nearly forty MPs and held the balance of power, acted merely as an adjunct to the Liberal party, refusing to oppose the latter on the pretext that such action would result in the fall of the government and its replacement by the Tories (does it not sound topical!).

Labour's parliamentary opportunism was captured by Lenin in a 1912 article, in which he reviewed the proceedings of the ILP's twentieth annual conference, held in Merthyr Tydfil on 27-28 May 1912.\*

Lenin commented particularly on the debate around Labour's parliamentary policy, describing how Frederick Jowett, MP for Bradford West, had moved a resolution against supporting the Liberals. Katharine Conway, who seconded the resolution, said:

The average worker is asking the question whether the Labour party in Parliament has a view of its own . . . A feeling is growing in the country that the Labour party is simply a wing of the Liberal party.

John McLachlan,<sup>33</sup> supporting Jowett, had this to say:

What are the interests of a political party? Are the interests of the party merely to be served by retaining men in the House of Commons? If the interests of the party are to be considered, then the men and women who are outside Parliament have as much right to be considered as the men in Parliament. As a socialist organisation we should try to give effect to our principles in our political activities . . .

Even if we lost every seat in the House through upholding our

---

\* 'Debates in Britain on Liberal Labour policy' by VI Lenin, October 1912.



## FORMATION OF THE LABOUR PARTY

principles, it would do more good than attempts to coax a Liberal government into making concessions!

The entire leadership of the ILP, including Kier Hardie and Philip Snowden (both MPs) opposed Jowett's resolution. Snowden, 'one of the most rabid opportunists, wriggled like an eel' and said that if Labour did not take into consideration the consequences of voting in Parliament on the fortunes of the government, such a 'policy would necessitate repeated general elections and nothing is more irritating to the public than such contests . . . Politics means compromise.'

Needless to say, Jowett's resolution was thrown out by a majority of one hundred and ninety-five against, with seventy-three in favour. And Labour's reward for its political subordination during this period to the Liberal party? Crumbs in the form of the Trade Disputes Act 1906, which did away with the Taff Vale judgment by restoring trade union immunity for industrial strikes.

In the same article, Lenin made an observation about the composition of the Labour party that remains of great interest:

It should be observed that the parliamentary Labour party consists *not only* of ILP MPs, but also of MPs sponsored by trade unions. These call themselves Labour MPs and Labour party members, and *do not belong* to the ILP. The British opportunists have succeeded in doing what the opportunists in other countries are frequently inclined to do, namely, in combining opportunist 'socialist' MPs with MPs of allegedly non-party trade unions. The notorious 'broad labour party', of which certain Mensheviks spoke in Russia in 1906-7, has materialised in Britain . . .

These words of Lenin need to be especially memorised, for we frequently meet with the opportunist argument that the Labour

party is a 'broad workers' party', a 'party of the working class', and so on and so forth. It is clear, however, that Lenin regarded such views as liquidationist<sup>34</sup> and treated them with utter contempt.

#### **4. Sharpening struggle and Labour's response**

The four years before the war witnessed a rise in the working-class movement, with marked resistance to the capitalist offensive. Millions of workers took to strike action. The seamen and dockers' strike of 1911, and that of the railwaymen and miners in 1912, marked a high point in the development of the working-class movement.

The Labour party earned notoriety for itself by its total condemnation of the rising militant strike movement. John Robert Clynes,<sup>35</sup> for instance, declared at the 1914 Labour party conference:

Too many strikes caused a sense of disgust, of being a nuisance to the community.\*

#### **5. Labour and war**

The only time that a significant section of the British labour aristocracy came close to adopting a stance opposed to British imperialism was during the Boer war. Under the influence of radical liberals, representing industrial capital, a large section of the labour aristocracy opposed the war as one waged by financiers for the control of the goldfields of the Rand and the

---

\* Quoted in R Miliband, *Parliamentary Socialism: A Study in the Politics of Labour*, 1961.

## FORMATION OF THE LABOUR PARTY

Kimberley diamond mines.

Following the lead of the Liberal J Hobson, the ILP opposed this war. Keir Hardie denounced the Boer war as

. . . a capitalists' war, begotten by capitalists' money, lied into being by a perjured mercenary press, and fathered by unscrupulous politicians, themselves the merest tools of the capitalists.\*

Forgetting about the fate of the overwhelming majority of the population of South Africa – namely, its indigenous colonised black people – Hardie went on to say:

As socialists, our sympathies are bound to be with the Boers.

Hardie was not alone in this. Most of those in the British labour aristocracy who opposed the war cared not a fig for the oppressed black majority in South Africa.

Moreover, not only was the labour aristocracy split right down the middle, but its ideological leadership, the Fabian Society, stood solidly on the side of British imperialism. To give the reader a flavour of the sickeningly hypocritical and twisted imperialist logic, allegedly in the name of socialism, we reproduce the following quotation from the leading Fabians, and prominent Labour party leaders of the day.

In his pamphlet *Fabianism and Empire*, George Bernard Shaw, having stated that the Fabians aimed at the 'effective social organisation of the empire', went on to reason thus:

The notion that a nation has a right to do what it pleases with its own territory, without reference to the interests of the rest of the world, is no more tenable, from the international social-

---

\* Essay in *Labour Leader*, 1900, cited in B Porter, *Critics of Empire: British Radical Attitudes to Imperialism in Africa 1895-1914*, 1968.

## BRITAIN'S PERFIDIOUS LABOUR PARTY

ist point of view . . . than the notion that a landlord has a right to do what he likes with his estate without reference to the interests of his neighbours.\*

Ramsay MacDonald was even more candid, declaring that

So far as the underlying spirit of imperialism is a frank acceptance of national duty exercised beyond the nation's political frontiers . . . [it] cannot be condemned . . .

. . . the compulsion to expand and to assume world responsibility is worthy at its origin.†

And further:

The question of empire cannot be decided on first principles, so far as this country is concerned. We have a history, and it is an imperial one.

A more benign attitude towards British imperialism would be hard to find. In view of this it is perhaps unsurprising that at the 1907 Stuttgart congress of the Second International,<sup>36</sup> MacDonald should find himself on the side of the 'socialist' opportunists supporting 'socialist colonialism'.

At a much later date, in 1921, in his *Labour and the New World* (hasn't the title got a strange resemblance to the contemporary 'new world order!'), Philip Snowden (later Viscount Snowden), by reference to China, was to assert the existence of 'inexorable limits to the right of self-determination' consequent upon which limits, China had no right to deprive 'the rest of the world' [read British imperialism] 'of access to her material resources'.

---

\* GB Shaw, *Fabianism and Empire: a Manifesto by the Fabian Society*, 1900.

† 'The propaganda of civilisation' lecture delivered to the West London Ethical Society by JR MacDonald, *International Journal of Ethics*, Volume 11, No 4, July 1901.

## FORMATION OF THE LABOUR PARTY

He concluded, in language not dissimilar to that used by Shaw:

By no moral right may the ownership and control of the natural and material resources of a territory [unless of course such territory was under the ownership and control of British imperialism] be regarded as the absolute monopoly of the people [unless they are British, is the implication again] who happen to be settled there.\*

The Boer war was to prove to be the solitary occasion on which a fairly large section of the labour aristocracy took a position in opposition to British imperialism. And, in the words of Robert Clough:

The Radical liberals created the space for this in their denunciation of British financiers. It was, however, their swan song. The growth of banking capital and its merging with industrial capital was already undermining the Liberal party as the representative of manufacturing industry. The future of the radicals lay in an alliance with the labour aristocracy, but in conditions where British imperialism's colonial monopoly would be increasingly under challenge. In these circumstances, neither could afford themselves the luxury of such demonstrations of opposition; their privileged position was mortgaged to British imperialism.†

Their attitude to the first world war was to prove this.

---

\* P Snowden, *Labour and the New World*, 1921.

† R Clough, *op cit*.

## 6. The first world war

Long before the first world war broke out, socialists of all countries, at the time grouped in the Second International, recognised that war was an inevitable concomitant of capitalism, that the then coming war would be an imperialist war waged by two groups of giant monopoly-capitalist coalitions, not in the interests of freedom, but for the redivision of the world – colonies, markets and overseas investment – and the strangulation of small nations; that therefore it was the duty of the socialists in all the belligerent countries to oppose such a war by refusing to vote for war credits and by mobilising the workers of all countries against such a war.

Thus in 1910, a whole four years before the war broke out, the Copenhagen congress of the Second International resolved that socialists in parliament should vote against war credits.<sup>37</sup> At the time of the Balkan war of 1912, the Basle world congress of the Second International declared that the workers of all countries considered it a crime to shoot one another for the sake of increasing the profits of the capitalists. That is what they said in their resolutions.

But when, with the outbreak of the imperialist war, the time came to put into effect these resolutions, the leaders and parties of the Second International, with the sole honourable exception of Lenin's Bolshevik party, proved to be traitors, betrayers of the proletariat and servitors of the bourgeoisie. Instead of opposing the war, they became the supporters of this imperialist butchery.

On 4 August 1914, the German social-democrats in parliament voted for the war credits. So did the overwhelming majority of the socialists in France, Great Britain and many other countries. As a result, the Second International ceased to exist;

## FORMATION OF THE LABOUR PARTY

it broke up into separate social-chauvinist parties, each warring against the other. Adopting a social-chauvinist position, and betraying the proletariat, the leaders of socialist parties became defenders of the fatherland – ie, the defenders of their respective imperialist bourgeoisies, for, to a great power,

. . . 'defence of the fatherland' means defence of the right to share in the plundering of foreign countries.\*

In a series of articles and pamphlets written during the war, Lenin exposed the treachery, the falsity and the hypocrisy of the slogan of defence of the fatherland in *that particular* war. He insisted on the recognition of 'the necessity of an historical study of each war',<sup>†</sup> and the recognition of the distinction between just and unjust wars, wars of national liberation and imperialist wars for the oppression, exploitation and strangulation of nations and for the division of the booty and the redivision of colonies.

### **7. War is the continuation of politics by other means**

Following Clausewitz,<sup>38</sup> whom he justly described as 'one of the profoundest writers on military questions', Lenin insisted that 'war is politics continued by other (ie, forcible) means'.<sup>‡</sup> Every war, he insisted, must be analysed from the point of view of its substance:

. . . *if* the 'substance' of a war is, *for example*, the overthrow of alien oppression . . . then such a war is progressive as far as the oppressed state or nation is concerned. *If* however, the

---

\* 'The collapse of the second international' by VI Lenin, June 1915.

† VI Lenin, *Socialism and War*, 1915.

‡ C von Clausewitz, *On War*, 1832.

## BRITAIN'S PERFIDIOUS LABOUR PARTY

'substance' of a war is redivision of colonies, division of booty, plunder of foreign lands (and such is the war of 1914-16), then all talk of defending the fatherland is sheer deception of the people.

How, then, can we disclose and define the 'substance' of a war? War is the continuation of policy. Consequently, we must examine the policy pursued prior to the war, the policy that led to and brought about the war. If it was an imperialist policy, ie, one designed to safeguard the interests of finance capital and rob and oppress colonies and foreign countries, then the war stemming from that policy is imperialist. If it was a national-liberation policy, ie, one expressive of the mass movement against national oppression, then the war stemming from that policy is a war of national liberation.

The philistine does not realise that war is 'the continuation of policy', and consequently limits himself to the formula that 'the enemy has attacked us', 'the enemy has invaded my country', without stopping to think *what issues* are at stake in the war, *which classes* are waging it, and with *what political objects* . . .

For the philistine the important thing is *where* the armies stand, who is winning *at the moment*. For the Marxist the important thing is *what issues* are at stake in *this* war, during which first one, then the other army may be on top.

What is the present war being fought over? . . . England, France and Russia are fighting to keep the colonies they have seized . . . Germany is fighting to take over these colonies . . . The real nature of the present war is not national but imperialist . . . it is not being fought to enable one side to overthrow national oppression, which the other side is trying to maintain. It is a war between two groups of oppressors, between two freebooters over the division of the booty, over who shall rob Turkey and the colonies . . .



## FORMATION OF THE LABOUR PARTY

The social-chauvinists plead self-determination in order to present this war as a national war. There is only one correct way of combating them: we must show that the war is being fought not to liberate nations, but to determine which of the great robbers will oppress *more* nations.\*

In the same article, Lenin went on to expose Kautsky's betrayal of the proletariat, his renunciation of Marxism, of revolution and of proletarian internationalism, by counterposing Kautsky the Marxist (prewar) to Kautsky the social-chauvinist (after the war had begun):

Up to the 1914-16 war Karl Kautsky was a Marxist and his major writings and statements will always remain models of Marxism. On 26 August 1910, he wrote in *Die Neue Zeit*, in reference to the imminent war:

'In a war between Germany and England the issue is not democracy, but world domination, ie, exploitation of the world. That is not an issue on which social-democrats can side with the exploiters of their nation!'

There you have an excellent Marxist formulation, one that fully coincides with our own and fully exposes the *present-day* Kautsky, who has turned from Marxism to the defence of social-chauvinism . . . It is a formulation that clearly brings out the principles underlying the Marxist attitude towards war.

War is the continuation of policy . . . 'World domination' is, to put it briefly, the substance of imperialist policy, of which imperialist war is the continuation. Rejection of the 'defence of the fatherland' in a democratic war, ie, rejecting participation in such a war, is an absurdity that has nothing in common with Marxism. To embellish imperialist war by applying to it the

---

\* 'A caricature of Marxism and imperialist economism' by VI Lenin, 1916.

## BRITAIN'S PERFIDIOUS LABOUR PARTY

concept of 'defence of the fatherland', ie, by presenting it as a democratic war, is to deceive the workers and side with the reactionary bourgeoisie.

Elsewhere, Lenin rightly insisted that:

Whoever justifies participation in this imperialist war perpetuates imperialist oppression of nations. Whoever seeks to use the present difficulties of the governments in order to fight for a social revolution is fighting for the real freedom of really all nations, a freedom that can be realised only under socialism.\*

In regard to the six main imperialist powers (England, France, Russia, Germany, Japan and the USA) and by reference to the most incontrovertible figures, showing that between 1876 and 1914, the six 'great' nations had grabbed twenty-five million square kilometres – ie, a territory two-and-a-half times the size of Europe; that these six nations held enslaved more than half a billion (523,000,000) colonial people; that for every four inhabitants of the great' nations, there were five inhabitants in 'their' colonies, Lenin went on to say:

Everybody knows that the colonies were conquered by fire and sword, that the colonial populations are treated in a barbarous fashion, that they are exploited in a thousand ways . . .

The Anglo-French bourgeoisie is deceiving the people when it says that it wages war for the freedom of peoples, including Belgium; in reality, it wages war for the sake of holding on to the colonies which it has stolen on a large scale. The German imperialists would free Belgium, etc, forthwith, were the English and French willing to share with them the colonies on the basis of 'justice'. It is a peculiarity of the present situa-

---

\* VI Lenin, *Socialism and War*, 1915, Chapter 1.

## FORMATION OF THE LABOUR PARTY

tion that the fate of the colonies is being decided by war on the [European] continent.

From the standpoint of bourgeois justice . . . , Germany could unquestionably have a just claim against England and France, because it has been 'wronged' as far as its share of colonies is concerned, because its enemies are oppressing more nations than Germany . . . . Germany itself, however, is waging war, not for the liberation, but for the oppression of nations. It is not the business of socialists to help the younger and stronger robber (Germany) to rob the older and fatter bandits, but the socialists must utilise the struggle between the bandits to overthrow all of them.

For this reason, the socialists must tell the people the truth, namely, that this war is in three senses a war of slaveholders for the strengthening of the worst kind of slavery.

It is a war, first, for the strengthening of colonial slavery by means of a more equitable division of the colonies and more 'teamwork' in their exploitation; it is, secondly, a war for the strengthening of the oppression of minority nationalities inside the 'great' nations . . . . third, it is a war for the strengthening and prolongation of wage-slavery, the proletariat being divided and subdued while the capitalists are gaining through war profits, through fanning national prejudices and deepening the reaction, which has raised its head in all countries, even in the freest and most republican.\*

At the end of May 1917, just four months before the October Revolution, in a lecture on war, Lenin returned to the topic insisting that one must never forget

. . . the class character of the war; why the war broke out; the

---

\* *Ibid.*

## BRITAIN'S PERFIDIOUS LABOUR PARTY

classes that are waging it; the historical and historico-economic conditions that gave rise to it . . .

War is a continuation of politics by other means. Every war is inseparably connected with the political system which gave rise to it. The politics which a certain country, a certain class, pursued for a long period before the war, are inevitably pursued by that very same class during the war; it merely changes its form of action.\*

### Continued Lenin:

War is a continuation of politics by other means. When the French revolutionary citizens and revolutionary peasants, at the end of the eighteenth century, after overthrowing the monarchy by revolutionary means, established a democratic republic, and having settled their accounts with their monarch also settled accounts in a revolutionary manner with their landlords – these revolutionary class politics could not but shake the rest of autocratic, tsarist, monarchist, semi-feudal Europe to its foundations.

And the inevitable continuation of these politics of the victorious revolutionary class in France was war, in which, pitted against the revolutionary class were all the monarchist countries of Europe, which formed their notorious coalition, and waged a counter-revolutionary war against France.

By way of a refutation of the attempts on the part of the capitalist press to read into the first world war a historical meaning which it could not, and did not, possess, Lenin went on to make the following observation:

Today, however, we are confronted . . . by two groups of capi-

---

\* 'War and revolution', lecture delivered by VI Lenin on 14 May 1917.

## FORMATION OF THE LABOUR PARTY

talist powers . . . the politics of which for a number of decades consisted of unceasing economic rivalry for world supremacy, to strangle small nationalities, to secure . . . tenfold profits for bank capital, which has enmeshed the whole world in the chains of its influence . . .

On the one hand there is Britain, a state which owns a great part of the globe; the wealthiest state in the world; which created this wealth, not so much by the labour of its workers as by the exploitation of vast colonies, by the vast power of the British banks which, constituting a numerically insignificant group of three, four or five giant banks, stand at the head of all other banks, controlling hundreds of billions of roubles, and controlling in such a way that we can say without exaggeration: *there is not a spot on the whole globe that this capital has not laid its heavy hand on* . . .

By the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries this capital had grown to such enormous proportions that its activities extended far beyond the frontiers of a single state and created a group of giant banks possessing incredible wealth. Pushing this insignificant number of banks to the front, it enmeshed the whole world in this net of hundreds of billions of roubles. This is the main thing in the economic policy of Britain and the economic policy of France . . .

On the other hand, opposed to this group, mainly Anglo-French, stand another group of capitalists, even more predatory and more piratical a group which came to the capitalist banquet table when all the places had been taken up, but which introduced into the struggle new methods of developing capitalist production, better technique, incomparable organisation, which transformed the old capitalism, the capitalism of the epoch of free competition, into the capitalism of gigantic trusts, syndicates and cartels.

## BRITAIN'S PERFIDIOUS LABOUR PARTY

This group introduced the principle of state-capitalist production, uniting the gigantic forces of capitalism with the gigantic forces of the state into one mechanism, and amalgamating tens of millions of people into a single organisation of state capitalism.

This is the economic history, this is the diplomatic history of a number of decades which . . . alone provides the correct solution to the problem of war and leads us to the conclusion that the present war is also the product of the politics of the classes which are now at grips in this war; the politics of the two great giants who long before the war had enmeshed the whole world, all countries, in their nets of financial exploitation, and who before the war had economically divided the world among themselves. They had to come into collision because, from the point of view of capitalism, the redivision of this supremacy became inevitable.

The old division was based on the fact that for several hundreds of years Britain had crushed her competitors . . . By means of prolonged wars Britain, on the basis of her economic power, of her merchant capital, established her unchallenged rule over the whole world.

A new robber appeared. In 1871, a new capitalist power arose, which developed ever so much faster than England . . . This rapid development of German capitalism was the development of a young and strong robber, who came before the league of European powers and said: 'You ruined Holland, you defeated France, you have taken half the world please give us our share.'

. . . this war is the continuation of the politics of annexations, that is, conquest, capitalist robbery, on both sides, on the part of both groups engaged in the war. Hence it is clear that the question as to which of these two robbers first drew the knife has no significance for us whatever.

## FORMATION OF THE LABOUR PARTY

Take the history of the naval and military expenditure of both groups during the past decade, take the history of all the little wars they have waged before this big one – ‘little’ because, only a few Europeans died in those wars, but of the nations who were strangled, who from the European point of view were not even nations (Asiatics, Africans – are these nations?) hundreds of thousands died; the kind of war that was waged against them was as follows: they were unarmed, and they were shot down with machine-guns.

Do you call that war? Why, strictly speaking, this is not war, and one may be permitted to forget about it. That is how they deceive the masses wholesale.

This war is the continuation of the policy of conquest, the shooting down of whole nationalities, of incredible atrocities, which were committed by the Germans and British in Africa, by the British and Russians in Persia . . . for which the German capitalists regard them as enemies.

They said in effect: you are strong because you are rich! We are stronger than you, therefore we have the same ‘sacred’ right to rob as you have. This is what the real history of British and German finance capital for decades preceding the war amounts to . . . This provides the key to an understanding of what the war is about.\*

Elsewhere, Lenin made a similar observation:

Comparing the ‘continuation of the politics’ of combating feudalism and absolutism the politics of the bourgeoisie in its struggle for liberty with the ‘continuation of the politics’ of a decrepit, ie, imperialist, bourgeoisie, ie, of a bourgeoisie which has plundered the entire world, a reactionary bourgeoisie

---

\* *Ibid.*

which, in alliance with feudal landlords, attempts to crush the proletariat, means comparing chalk and cheese.

It is like comparing the 'representatives of the bourgeoisie', Robespierre, Garibaldi and Zhelyabov, with such representatives of the bourgeoisie as Millerand, Salandra and Guchkov.

One cannot be a Marxist without feeling the deepest respect for the great bourgeois revolutionaries who had an historic right to speak for their respective bourgeois fatherlands and, in the struggle against feudalism, led tens of millions of people in the new nations towards a civilised life.

Neither can one be a Marxist without feeling contempt for the sophistry of Plekhanov and Kautsky, who speak of the 'defence of the fatherland' with regard to the throttling of Belgium by German imperialists, or with regard to the pact between the imperialists of Britain, France, Russia and Italy on the plundering of Austria and Turkey.\*

## **8. Social chauvinism – social imperialism**

Since the first world war was an imperialist war on both sides – as was conclusively proved by Lenin, and, indeed as it was recognised by the overwhelming majority of the socialists before the war broke out (as, for instance in the Basle resolution of the Second International) – how is one to explain the desertion, on such a vast scale, of the socialists of different countries to the side of their respective bourgeoisie? How is one to explain the conversion of socialists into social-chauvinists (socialist in words but chauvinist in deed), in complete betrayal of the interests of the international proletariat?

---

\* 'The collapse of the Second International' by VI Lenin, June 1915.



## FORMATION OF THE LABOUR PARTY

The answer is to be found in opportunism, for:

Social-chauvinism is opportunism brought to its logical conclusions . . . Social-chauvinism is consummated opportunism.

Social-chauvinism's basic ideological and political content fully coincides with the foundations of opportunism. It is *one and the same* tendency. In the conditions of the war . . . opportunism leads to social-chauvinism. The idea of class-collaboration is opportunism's main feature.\*

The war brought this idea to its logical conclusion with the betrayal of socialism by the most prominent representatives of the Second International, their desertion to the bourgeoisie, and their justification of an alliance between socialists and the bourgeoisie.

The economic basis of opportunism and social-chauvinism is identical too. In Lenin's words:

Opportunism means sacrificing the fundamental interests of the masses to the temporary interests of an insignificant minority of the workers or, in other words, an alliance between a section of the workers and the bourgeoisie, directed against the mass of the proletariat.

The war has made such an alliance particularly conspicuous and inescapable. Opportunism was engendered in the course of decades by the special features of the period of development of capitalism, when the comparatively peaceful and cultured life of a stratum of privileged working men 'bourgeoisified' them, gave them crumbs from the table of their national capitalists, and isolated them from the suffering, misery and revolutionary temper of the impoverished and ruined masses.

---

\* 'The collapse of the Second International' by VI Lenin, June 1915, Section 7.

## BRITAIN'S PERFIDIOUS LABOUR PARTY

The imperialist war is the direct continuation and culmination of this state of affairs, because it is a war for the privileges of the great-power nations, for the partition of colonies, and domination over other nations.

To defend and strengthen their privileged position as a petty-bourgeois upper stratum or aristocracy (and bureaucracy) of the working class – such is the natural wartime continuation of petty-bourgeois opportunist hopes and the corresponding tactics, such is the economic foundation of present-day social imperialism . . .

Chauvinism and opportunism in the labour movement have the same economic basis: the alliance between a numerically small upper stratum of the proletariat and the petty bourgeoisie who get . . . morsels of privileges of 'their own' national capital against the masses of proletarians, the masses of the toilers and the oppressed in general.\*

And finally, whereas before the first world war opportunism was in its 'adolescent stage', with the outbreak of the war

. . . it grew to manhood and its 'innocence' and youth cannot be restored. *An entire social stratum, consisting of parliamentarians, journalists, labour officials, privileged officer personnel, and certain strata of the proletariat, has sprung up and become amalgamated with its own national bourgeoisie, which has proved fully capable of appreciating and 'adapting' it.*\*\*

If the first world war witnessed the most flagrant betrayal of their socialist convictions by the majority of the social-democratic parties of Europe, if it witnessed the complete victory of opportunism and the transformation of the social-democratic parties into national liberal-labour parties, in the case of the

---

\* *Ibid.*

## FORMATION OF THE LABOUR PARTY

Labour party in Britain no such transformation was necessary. Right from the outset, from the time of its formation, opportunism stood triumphant and Labour was never anything other than a national Liberal-Labour party – a level to which most of European social democracy, hitherto revolutionary, sank with the outbreak of the war. This, among other factors explains, as we shall see shortly, the leading role that Labour came to occupy in the reconstituted postwar ranks of European social democracy in the latter's counter-revolutionary struggle against Bolshevism and the Third International (the Comintern).

Literally on the eve of the war – two days before its outbreak – mammoth antiwar demonstrations took place in Britain, at which Labour leaders not only denounced the then-impending war but also, as per the official policy of the Second International, *vowed to oppose it*. Yet by 5 August 1918, thirty-five out of forty Labour members of parliament had gone over to the bourgeoisie, leaving behind five pacifist MPs belonging to the ILP, including Keir Hardie, Philip Snowden and Ramsay MacDonald. More than that. Shortly afterwards, Labour, declaring first an industrial and then an electoral truce, went on to act as a recruiting sergeant in this, the most dreadful slaughter of the international proletariat, which was being waged to decide which group of the two imperialist robbers was to have what share of the booty.

With cynical and corrupt disregard for the hundreds of millions of people in the British empire, suffering the worst kind of exploitation and abominable oppression, humiliation and infamy, denied the most elementary rights, jailed and tortured for demanding freedom from the jackboot of British colonialism, Labour issued a wartime manifesto asserting:

The victory of Germany would mean the death of democracy  
... Until the power that has pillaged and outraged Belgium and  
the Belgians, and plunged nearly the whole of Europe into the

## BRITAIN'S PERFIDIOUS LABOUR PARTY

awful misery, suffering and horror of war is beaten there can be no peace.\*

And again, in February 1915, a meeting of allied socialists, convened on Labour's initiative, with matchless hypocrisy and cynicism resolved that:

The invasion of Belgium and France by the German armies threatens the very existence of independent nationalities, and strikes a blow at all faith in treaties. In these circumstances a victory for German imperialism would be the defeat and destruction of democracy and liberty in Europe.\*

As can be seen, Labour regarded a victory for German imperialism not as defeat for British, French, Belgian and Russian tsarist imperialism, but as 'the defeat and destruction of democracy and liberty in Europe'. And this at a time when these four countries possessed more than eighty percent of the world's colonies, denying democracy and liberty to several hundred million colonial slaves, who far outnumbered the populations of their colonial masters.

Even the reference to liberty and democracy in Europe was utterly false, for while Britain denied freedom and democracy to the Irish, tsarist Russia denied it to a score of minority nationalities. Not for nothing did Lenin denounce tsarist Russia as a 'prison of nations' and characterise it as the gendarme and hangman of European revolution.

The Labour leadership could not but have been well aware of all this. Therefore, its stance in defence of the interests of British imperialism flowed not from ignorance but from a deliberate desire to defend the privileges of the labour aristocracy, which privileges could not be defended without defending the

---

\* Cited in H Tracey (Ed), *The British Labour Party*, Volume 1, 1948.

## FORMATION OF THE LABOUR PARTY

empire and British imperialism. Nothing – no principle, no scruple, no qualm of conscience, no such trifle – was going to be allowed to stand in the way of its defence of these twin, and inextricable, interests. And if this defence required colonial slavery for hundreds of millions and the sanction of mass slaughter of the European, including British, workers in an imperialist war, Labour's hand was not to tremble at that.

Keir Hardie and Ramsay MacDonald soon became enthusiastic, not to say jingoistic, supporters of British imperialism's war effort. The latter stated that:

Victory must therefore be ours. England is not played out, her mission is not accomplished . . . The young men of the country . . . must settle the immediate issue of victory. Let them do it in the spirit of the brave men who crowned our country with honour in the times that are gone.\*

The distance that Keir Hardie had travelled since the days of his opposition to the Boer war, the dishonesty of the argument that he employed in justification of his support for the slaughter of the first imperialist world war, can best be gauged from the following remark:

A nation at war must be united, especially when its existence is at stake. In such filibustering expeditions as our own Boer war . . . where no national interest of any kind was involved, there were many occasions for diversity of opinion . . . With the boom of the enemy guns within earshot, the lads who have gone forth to fight their country's battles must not be disheartened by any discordant notes at home.†

---

\* Letter to the mayor of Leicester, quoted in T Cliff and D Gluckstein, *The Labour Party: A Marxist History*, 1988.

† Article in *Pioneer*, Merthyr Tydfil, 15 August 1914, quoted in R Miliband, *Parliamentary Socialism*, 1961.

## BRITAIN'S PERFIDIOUS LABOUR PARTY

The real meaning, the real content, of Labour's concept of democracy and liberty can perhaps be better perceived by reference to the party's attitude toward Irish freedom. When, taking advantage of the difficulty of the British government during the war, Irish people rose in the Easter rebellion of 1916 against British rule and proclaimed the Irish Republic, they faced nothing short of outright hostility and venomous denunciation on the part of the British Labour party.

*Socialist Review* and *Labour Leader*, both ILP publications, denounced the Easter Rising and warmly supported its suppression via armed force by the government, describing James Connolly, the foremost leader of the rebellion, and whose execution the war cabinet authorised following the suppression, as being 'criminally mistaken'. When it was announced in the House of Commons that Connolly had been executed, Labour parliamentary leader Arthur Henderson led Labour MPs in a burst of applause by way of greeting this news item.

On the eve of the victory of British imperialism, in its December 1917 'Memorandum of war aims', drafted by the Fabian Sidney Webb, Labour made it abundantly clear that it was *for* the continued maintenance of the empire and *opposed* to the right of self-determination of the subject peoples in the colonies – to whom it referred as 'non-adult races'. 'Nobody contends,' asserted the Labour party in response to the peace proposals of the Bolshevik government in January 1918, 'that the black races can govern themselves.'<sup>\*</sup>

---

\* Quoted in PS Gupta, *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement, 1914-1964*, 1975.

## 9. Labour and Soviet Russia

It goes without saying that Labour was deeply hostile to the Bolshevik revolution and to Soviet Russia. It tacitly supported the imperialist intervention, organised and led by British imperialism, against Soviet Russia. But the heroic defence of the revolution by the Russian masses and the Red Army, combined with the stiff resistance by the masses of British workers who, in the aftermath of the war, were in a state of ferment, prevented the success of the intervention.

Dockers, under the leadership of Harry Pollitt, on learning that the arms to be loaded on it were destined for use against the Red Army, refused to load the *Jolly George* in April of 1920. That spelled the doom of the intervention and forced the British government to put an end to it.

Through its efforts to reconstruct the Second International (the Berne International) and the formation of the Two-and-a-half International (Vienna), Labour did its dirtiest worst to isolate Soviet Russia and frustrate Lenin's attempts to form the Third International. The two opportunist outfits, the Second and the Two-and-a-half Internationals, merged in May 1923 to form the Labour and Socialist International (LSI), which has continued its counter-revolutionary work ever since.

The collapse of the Second International following the outbreak of the first imperialist war, and its break-up into warring national factions each supporting its own bourgeoisie, had the effect of putting the Labour party, which had been an insignificant section of the Second International, into a predominant position in the conditions following the defeat of Germany and the victory of Britain in the war. According to Ross McKibbin:

The war and the disruption of international socialism had land-

ed the British Labour party in a position it had not held before. Largely owing to the numerical strength and the wealth of the British trade unions, the Labour party found itself willy-nilly the leading allied socialist party and the rock upon which European social democracy was already building its fortress against Bolshevism. Consequently, it appeared necessary to construct a political party appropriate to this industrial support.\*

---

\* R McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party, 1910–1924*, 1974.



## 4. Lenin's advice to British communists and the reasons therefore

In the light of the foregoing, and knowing as he did the thoroughly opportunist nature of the Labour party, why did Lenin advise the British communists in early 1920 to support Labour; why did he even advise the then newly-formed Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) to *affiliate* to the Labour party?

First, the question of supporting the Labour party. The concrete conditions in which Lenin gave his advice were characterised by the following facts:

1. The British liberal bourgeoisie was abandoning the historical system of two parties of the exploiting class (the Tory party versus the Whig/Liberal party), a system which had hitherto been extremely advantageous to the exploiters, finding it necessary to unite their forces to fight the Labour party.

2. Although the leadership of the Labour party was thoroughly bourgeois ('opportunist', 'social-chauvinist', 'social-patriot' – these are the expressions frequently used by Lenin to characterise Labour leaders), there had as yet been no Labour government and, therefore, the workers still had illusions in

Labour.

3. In the aftermath of the first world war there was great ferment in the British working class – for, as Lenin correctly noted, 'even in the purely Menshevik and utterly opportunist Independent Labour party the masses are for Soviets'.\*

4. The British communists, who belonged to four separate organisations and had yet to unite themselves into a single party of the proletariat, found it hard to approach and get a hearing from the masses, who followed the Labour party.

5. The leadership of the Labour party was afraid to secure power for itself, preferring instead to form a bloc with the Liberals.

In these concrete circumstances, Lenin, although being fully aware that

It is true that the Hendersons, the Clynes, the MacDonalds and the Snowdens are hopelessly reactionary . . . that they want to take power in their own hands . . . , that they want to 'rule' on the old bourgeois lines, and that when they do get into power they will unfailingly behave like the Scheidemanns<sup>39</sup> and Noskes,<sup>\*40</sup>

nevertheless advised the British communists to unite into a single party, participate in parliamentary elections, give Labour some parliamentary support, and reach a bloc with it.

All this was, however, to be conditional on the Communist party being able to

. . . retain *complete freedom* of agitation, propaganda and political activity, for without this latter condition, we cannot

---

\* VI Lenin, '*Left-Wing' Communism: an Infantile Disorder*, 1920, chapter 10: 'Left-wing' communism in Great Britain. All following quotes from the same source.

## LENIN'S ADVICE

agree to a bloc, for it would be treachery; the British communists must absolutely insist on and secure complete freedom to expose the Hendersons and the Snowdens in the same way as . . . the Russian Bolsheviks insisted on and secured it in relation to the Russian Hendersons and Snowdens, ie, the Mensheviks.

Here is the thrust of Lenin's argument:

The fact that most British workers still follow the lead of the British Kerenskys<sup>41</sup> or Scheidemanns and *have not yet* had experience of a government composed of these people – an experience which was necessary in Russia and Germany so as to secure the mass transition of the workers to communism – undoubtedly indicates that the British Communists *should* participate in parliamentary action, that they should, from *within* Parliament, help the masses of the workers see the results of a Henderson and Snowden government in practice, and that they should help the Hendersons and Snowdens defeat the united forces of Lloyd George [Liberal party] and Churchill [Tory party].

. . . if we want the *masses* to follow us . . . we must, first, help Henderson or Snowden to beat Lloyd George and Churchill . . . ; second, we must help the majority of the working class to convince themselves by their own experience that we are right, ie, that the Hendersons and Snowdens are absolutely good for nothing, that they are petty-bourgeois and treacherous by nature, and that their bankruptcy is inevitable; third, we must bring nearer the moment when, on the basis of the disappointment of most of the workers in the Hendersons, it will be possible, with serious chances of success, to overthrow the government of the Hendersons at once . . .

In view of the above, the Communist party, said Lenin, should

## BRITAIN'S PERFIDIOUS LABOUR PARTY

propose an election agreement to the Labour party for a joint fight against the alliance of Lloyd George and the Conservatives, on the basis of the division of parliamentary seats

. . . in proportion to the number of workers' votes polled for the Labour party and for the Communist party (not in elections, but in a special ballot), and let us retain *complete freedom of agitation, propaganda and political activity.*

Whether or not the Labour party consented to a bloc on these terms, the communists would be the gainers, for in the first case

. . . we shall carry *our* agitation among the masses . . . and we shall not only be helping the Labour party to establish its government sooner, but shall also be helping the masses sooner to understand the communist propaganda that we shall carry on against the Hendersons, without any reticence or omission.

But what if the Hendersons and Snowdens rejected a bloc on such terms? The communists would still be the gainers, said Lenin, for

. . . we shall at once have shown the *masses* . . . that the Hendersons prefer *their* close relations with the capitalists to the unity of all workers.

Such an electoral alliance, argued Lenin, would enable the communists, who found it 'hard to approach the masses and even to get a hearing from them' not only to conduct propaganda in favour of the Soviets and the dictatorship of the proletariat, but also to explain that

. . . with my vote, I want to support Henderson in the same way as the rope supports a hanged man – that the impend-

## LENIN'S ADVICE

ing establishment of a government of the Hendersons will prove that I am right, will bring the masses over to my side, and will hasten the political death of the Hendersons and the Snowdens just as was the case with their kindred spirits in Russia and Germany.

As to the question of affiliation of the Communist party to Labour, Lenin expressed himself in favour of such affiliation – but on the condition that the Communist party ‘can preserve its freedom of criticism and can pursue its own policy’.

At the time, the structure of the Labour party was such as to allow for this freedom. As Lenin pointed out:

The British Socialist Party can quite freely say that Henderson is a traitor and yet remain affiliated to the Labour party.\*

Two weeks later, in another speech at the second congress of the Comintern, Lenin went on to elaborate his ideas by reference to the peculiar conditions surrounding the Labour party, saying that the latter was ‘not a political party in the ordinary sense of the word’, that it was ‘half trade union and half political party’, that it allowed ‘sufficient liberty to all the political parties affiliated to it’, that it allowed the British Socialist Party ‘to remain in its ranks . . . , to have its own organ of the press’ and openly criticise the leaders of the Labour party as ‘social-patriots and social-traitors’.<sup>†</sup>

In these circumstances, concluded Lenin, it would be wrong for the communists not to affiliate, since such a course would deprive them of the opportunity of exercising influence over a large section of the workers who still followed Labour.

---

\* ‘Speech on the role of the Communist party’ by VI Lenin, Second congress of the Communist International, 23 July 1920.

† ‘Speech on Affiliation to the British Labour Party’ by VI Lenin, Second congress of the Communist International, 6 August 1920.

## 1. CPGB's attempt at affiliation to the Labour party

Thus, as it can be seen, Lenin's observations on affiliation were made in a particular, concrete, historical context. In the conditions then prevailing, Lenin's advice was correct. That is why the newly formed Communist party did its best to put that advice into effect.

However, it takes two to tango, as the saying goes. Here briefly is the story of the attempt by the CPGB, soon after its formation, to gain affiliation to the Labour party, and the latter's consistent and rabid anticommunism in refusing this affiliation.

Following Lenin's advice, the Communist unity convention, held in London on 31 July and 1 August 1920, which founded the CPGB, decided by a small majority in favour of affiliation to the Labour party. In pursuance of this decision, the CPGB made its application for affiliation in a letter dated 10 August 1920.

There existed no constitutional reason why its application should be turned down by Labour, which had, after all, always been a loose federation of affiliated bodies, embracing trade unions, individual members and socialist societies. Most of the latter, the ILP being the largest, had their own press and programmes and could argue their point of view within the Labour party. Even the British Socialist Party (BSP), the openly Marxist predecessor of the CPGB, had been accepted as an affiliate. And yet the CPGB's application was repeatedly rejected by the Labour leadership, and these rejections were endorsed by the Labour party's annual conferences in 1921, 1922, 1923 and 1924.

James Klugmann,<sup>42</sup> commenting upon Labour's refusal to accept CPGB affiliation, particularly in view of the fact that the majority of the latter's membership had belonged to the BSP, correctly observed that there

## LENIN'S ADVICE

. . . was no formal reason, but there was a reason, and this was in a way a great compliment to the young Communist party. The reason was the recognition by the right-wing leadership of the Labour party and the affiliated trade unions – MacDonald, Henderson, Snowden, Clynes, etc – that the Communist party was to be something different from the old propagandist societies, that it would be capable of mobilising the workers for immediate struggles and/or ideas of socialism, and that . . . it would be a major obstacle to their policy of reformism and class-collaboration.\*

In September 1920, just a month after the newly-formed CPGB's very first application for affiliation, the Labour party's national executive committee replied, declining the application on the grounds that the aims and objects of the Communist party were not in accord with the constitution, principles and programme of the Labour party. The letter was signed by Arthur Henderson, Labour's secretary at the time. From now on, the Labour leadership's familiar refrain, and its consistent excuse for refusing affiliation to the CPGB, was that the latter was 'dominated by Moscow' and wished to pursue 'disruptive aims'.

Notwithstanding the Labour leadership's stance, there was strong rank-and-file pressure within Labour in favour of the accepting Communist affiliation. Bowing to this pressure, following the 1921 annual conference of the Labour party, the Labour leadership agreed to a joint meeting with representatives of the CPGB. The only outcome of this meeting (held at the end of December 1921), at which Henderson tried unsuccessfully to divert the discussion away from Communist affiliation to one of parliamentary democracy versus 'Soviet dictatorship', was the

---

\* J Klugmann, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain*, Volume 1: Formation and Early Years 1919-1924, 1969.

agreement by Labour to submit a questionnaire to the CPGB.

## **2. Labour's questions to the Communist party**

In this questionnaire, submitted at the beginning of 1922, and saturated through and through with anticommunism, Labour raised four questions.

First, whether the political line of the Communist party and its affiliation to the Comintern was not incompatible with the objects of the Labour party 'the political, social and economic emancipation of the people by means of parliamentary democracy'?

Second, that it was 'a fundamental principle of the Labour party to confine its operations to lawful means'. In view of its programme, its resolutions, its constitution, and its affiliation to the Comintern, could the Communist party claim to be consistent with this fundamental principle?

Third, was not the pledge of the Communist candidates, when elected to Parliament, to support the policy of the Communist party in Parliament, incompatible with Labour's constitution, which excluded the idea of such pledges?

And, lastly, whether the CPGB proposed to become a 'loyal constituent of the Labour party, conforming at all points with its constitution and working for the promotion of its objects'?

In mid-May 1922, the CPGB replied, dealing with all the points raised, but to no avail. Labour's executive committee considered this reply at the end of May, and resolved to recommend no change in existing policy.

The issue was again referred to the annual conference of the Labour party, which took place in Edinburgh from 27-30 June 1922. In opposing the affiliation, miners' leader Frank Hodges,<sup>43</sup> in a reactionary vituperative and racist outburst, typical of the Labour leadership, accused the Communists of being 'the intel-



lectual slaves of Moscow . . . taking orders from the Asiatic mind'.

By a card vote, the conference endorsed the decision of the executive committee by 3,086,000 to 261,000. The bloc vote was operating, as it almost always has done, in favour of the reactionary leadership. Frank Hodges, for instance, cast nearly a million votes against affiliation, even though everyone knew that from one-third to one-half of the miners would have voted in favour.

In fact, the 1922 conference went further than just declining Communist affiliation. It amended the party's rules by adding Clause 9, Section (b) – known as the Edinburgh eligibility clause – whereby delegates to local Labour parties, or to national or local conferences of the Labour party, were required *individually* to accept the constitution and principles of the Labour party, and no one was eligible to be a delegate who belonged to an organisation 'having for one of its objects the return to Parliament or to any local government authority of a candidate or candidates other than such as have been approved as running in association with the Labour party'.

Under great pressure from its membership, the twenty-third Labour party conference, held in London at the end of June 1923, while still endorsing the executive's decision to reject Communist affiliation, decided to delete from its rules the Edinburgh eligibility clause, having adopted it only a year before.

But just over a year later, by which time the minority Labour government, having been in power for barely eight months, was already in its death throes, the Labour party's twenty-fourth annual conference, meeting on 7 October 1924 in London, decided not only to endorse the recommendation of the executive committee to refuse Communist affiliation, but also 'that no member of the Communist party be eligible for endorsement as a Labour candidate for Parliament or any local authority'.

## BRITAIN'S PERFIDIOUS LABOUR PARTY

In a card vote, the rejection of Communist party affiliation was carried by 3,185,000 votes to 193,000; the rejection of communists as Labour candidates by 2,456,000 to 654,000; and the resolution that no member of the Communist party should be eligible for membership of the Labour party was carried by the much narrower majority of 1,804,000 to 1,540,000 votes. Thus the door was finally closed to any direct Communist influence over the Labour party.

The Labour party leadership, always anticommunist servitors of British imperialism, had been particularly stung by the CPGB's consistent working-class criticism of the first Labour government in 1924. Consequently, they were determined to put a stop to communist influence and to prevent the CPGB from becoming the rallying centre of rising working-class protest against Labour's abject surrender to British monopoly capitalism.

What is remarkable about this saga of the CPGB's battle for affiliation is the candid anticommunism and anti-Sovietism of the Labour leadership, which made it only too plain that the Labour party was a bourgeois party of class-collaboration in which there could be no place for any organisation or individual who stood for the interests of the proletariat.

Again and again, the point was repeated by the Labour leadership that whereas Labour

. . . seeks to achieve the socialist Commonwealth by means of parliamentary democracy . . . the Communist party seeks to achieve the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' by armed insurrection.\*

---

\* 'Report of the executive committee 1923-24', in *Report of the 24th Annual Conference of the Labour Party, 1924*.

### 3. Labour becomes indistinguishable from the Liberals

There is nothing surprising about the above attitude of the Labour party towards communism in general, and the question of communist affiliation in particular, for, if anything

Right-wing domination of the Labour party had been strengthened since the 1918 election, and anticommunism became part of its platform.\*

This was shortly to be reflected in Labour's programme entitled *International Peace and National Liberation*, issued on the eve of the November 1922 election, the contents of which, with their support for imperial policy in India and Ireland, opposition to the withdrawal of British troops from Germany, and so on and so forth, made Labour indistinguishable from the Liberals and hardly distinguishable from the Tories. No wonder, the *New Statesman* of 23 October 1922, wrote that

On all questions of foreign policy and on nearly all questions of domestic policy, there is no serious division of opinion between the Liberals and the Labour party.†

That old fox of the British bourgeoisie, David Lloyd George, expressed his satisfaction, stating:

Whoever wins, there should be no detriment to the national interest from revolutionary measures.‡

---

\* J Klugmann, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain*, Volume 1: Formation and Early Years 1919-1924, 1969.

† Cited in *ibid.*

‡ Electoral address to the National Liberal Assembly, 25 October 1922.

#### **4. Why did the ruling class fear Labour if its leaders were loyal to imperialism?**

Notwithstanding all this, the British ruling class feared substantial electoral advances by Labour. Why? The explanation is to be sought, not in the leadership, but in the pressure of its working-class supporters. In the end, this fear was to prove groundless, as was amply demonstrated by Labour when it formed its first administration at the beginning of 1924, following the election of December 1923.

In the 1922 election, however, Labour, having polled 4.2 million votes, and won 142 seats (compared with 59 in December 1918) as against the Liberals' 117 seats, established itself as His Majesty's Official Opposition in the House of Commons – and a very loyal and servile one at that.

Even before the first Labour government, Labour had given sufficient proof of its imperialist credentials on two questions so vital to British imperialism – namely, Ireland and India.

On Ireland, Labour stood for an Irish constituent assembly subject to two provisos: that is, there must be protection for the minority, and Ireland must not become a military or naval threat to Britain. Shorn of all euphemism, it stood for the partition of Ireland and a continued British military presence in the country.

As regards India, Labour stood for its continued subjugation. India was so important to British imperial interests that she was rightly, and without any exaggeration, regarded as the jewel in the imperial crown.

In his remarkable book *India Today*, Rajani Palme-Dutt,<sup>44</sup> on the basis of irrefutable statistics, calculated that by 1913-14 India was worth £78 million per annum to Britain. Out of this total, £28 million was accounted for by British trade, manufac-

turing and shipping profits, while the remainder represented income from British capital investments, which by this time stood at £500 million, and direct tribute in the form of home charges (£9 million a year at this time).

To get an idea of the enormity of these sums, one has to realise that in present-day terms they represent £8 billion a year, if not more [in 1995 – far more in 2023]. By 1921-22, India was worth £146.5 million a year to Britain. Labour was in no hurry to kill the goose that accounted for so many golden eggs in the imperial basket. In addition, India provided one million soldiers to help British imperialism 'defend democracy' (democracy that excluded, among others, the vast masses of India) against the onslaught of German imperialism – a war that cost the Indian tax-payer £300 million (£30 billion in today's terms).

Labour defended British imperialist interests in India, as it did elsewhere, for it could not defend its own privileges – privileges of the aristocracy of labour – without defending the empire. The defence of the former was dependent upon, and required, the defence of the latter. As history was to prove, Labour would be prepared to commit any crime in the defence of these twin interests. No crime, no brutality, no infamy was to be too much in Labour's defence of these interests.

'Forgetful' of Britain's lack of a democratic mandate to rule India, in the 1918 general election, Labour opposed full responsible government for India on the pretext that, since very few Indians understood the meaning and significance of the vote, the result would be to place the government in the hands of a tiny minority.

In the general election of December 1923, Labour won 192 seats as against the Tories' 258. However, together with the Liberals, who had won 157 seats, Labour was able to form a majority in the House of Commons. With the Liberals agreeing to support a minority Labour government, Labour formed its first-ever administration. The very composition of the Cabinet

gave a clue, if ever there was any doubt on this score, of things to follow. With Ramsay MacDonald as prime minister and foreign secretary, Philip Snowden as chancellor of the Exchequer, Arthur Henderson at the Home Office and JH Thomas at the Colonial Office, the rabidly anticommunist, incurably anti-working class, and born lackeys of British imperialism were securely ensconced in the key departments of government.

As to the rest:

. . . fourteen members of the Labour cabinet had served imperialism, directly or indirectly, in the capacity of members of previous governments, departments of state, governors of colonies or diplomatic missionaries.\*

Philip Snowden himself most aptly painted this vivid picture of the composition of the first Labour Cabinet and the reassuring effect of its announcement on the bourgeoisie:

The publication of the names of the Cabinet had a reassuring effect upon that section of public opinion which had been in terror about the advent of a Labour government. The most timid Conservatives and the most frightened capitalists took heart from the presence in the Cabinet of men like Lord Parmoor, Lord Chelmsford and Lord Haldane; they could not believe that these men would be the instruments for carrying out the socialist revolution.†

Absolutely correct! Further comment would be superfluous.

---

\* J Klugmann, *op cit.*

† P Snowden, *An Autobiography*, Volume Two 1919-1934, 1934.

## 5. The first Labour government of Ramsay MacDonald

Once in office, Labour got on with the job of defending British imperialism with an unprecedented zeal.

Although before the election it had opposed the reparations regime imposed by the victors upon the vanquished through the Versailles treaty,<sup>45</sup> within two days of coming to office, Labour, having made a one-hundred-and-eighty-degree turn, had accepted it. The Labour cabinet, stuffed full with labour aristocrats, racists and imperialists to their fingertips, very early on made known its brutal determination to defend the empire against revolutionary challenge from the subject peoples by force if necessary.

This is what new Labour prime minister Ramsay MacDonald had to say in this regard:

I can see no hope in India if it becomes the arena of a struggle between constitutionalism and revolution. No party in Great Britain will be cowed by threats of force or by policies designed to bring government to a standstill; and if any section in India are under the delusion that is not so, events will sadly disappoint them.\*

Within weeks of the formation of the Labour government, on 28 February 1924, the Rt Hon JH Thomas,<sup>46</sup> as this traitor to the cause of the working class had deservedly become known, expressed, in a pious tone, on the question of the 'sacred trust of empire', the hope that

it would be realised, when the time came for them to give up

---

\* Cited in 'Empire and war' by R Palme Dutt, *Workers Weekly*, 7 March 1924.

## BRITAIN'S PERFIDIOUS LABOUR PARTY

the seals of office, that they had not only been mindful of their responsibility, but had done nothing to weaken the position and prestige of this great empire.\*

Three months later, Thomas reiterated that the Labour government

intended above all else to hand to their successors one thing when they gave up the seals of office and that was the general recognition of the fact that they were proud and jealous of, and were prepared to maintain the empire.†

Sydney Olivier,<sup>47</sup> a Fabian now in charge of the India Office, stated his opposition to Indian self-rule in these flagrantly racist, smugly arrogant and imperialist terms:

The programme of constitutional democracy . . . was not native to India . . . It was impossible for the Indian people or Indian politicians to leap at once into the saddle and administer an ideal constitution . . . The right of British statesmen, public servants, merchants and industrialists to be in India today was the fact that they had made the India of today, and that no home rule or national movement could have been possible in India had it not been for their work.‡

That this same worthy Fabian, who from 1907 to 1913 had been the governor of Jamaica, had scant regard for the dignity of the colonised peoples anywhere, is made patently clear by this remark of his:

I have said that the West Indian negro is not fit for complete

---

\* Speech by JH Thomas on 28 February 1924, cited in J Klugmann, *op cit*.

† Quoted in *The Times*, 16 May 1924, cited in *ibid*.

‡ Cited in 'India and the British Labour government' by MN Roy, *The Labour Monthly*, Volume 6, April 1924.



## LENIN'S ADVICE

democratic citizenship in a constitution of modern parliamentary form, and I should certainly hold the same opinion with respect to any African native community.\*

Nor was Olivier alone in these sentiments. The leading lights of the Fabian Society, the chief theoreticians of the Fabian Society, as well as of the ILP and the Labour party, the people who had drafted clause iv,<sup>48</sup> the Webbs, were shockingly racist.

In *Labour and the New Social Order*, written in 1918 by Sidney Webb, at a time when nearly five hundred million people groaned under the heel of British colonialism, we find a hypocritical characterisation of this vast colonial empire as a 'great Commonwealth', which could not be regarded as 'an empire in the old sense, but a Britannic alliance', for 'the maintenance and . . . progressive development' of which Labour stood firmly committed.

The Webbs had already expressed their racist views in 1913 in the *New Statesman* in terms even more blatant, in connection with the falling birthrate among white peoples:

Into the scarcity thus created in particular districts, in particular sections of the labour market, or in particular social strata, there rush the offspring of the less thrifty, the less intellectual, the less foreseeing of races and classes – the unskilled casual labourers of our great cities, the races of eastern or southern Europe, the negroes, the Chinese possibly resulting, as already in parts of the USA, in *such a heterogeneous and mongrel population that democratic self-government, or even the effective application of the policy of a national minimum of civilised life, will become increasingly unattainable.*

If anything like this happens, it is difficult to avoid the mel-

---

\* Quoted in F Lee, *Fabianism and Colonialism: The Life and Political Thought of Lord Sydney Olivier*, 1988.

ancholy conclusion that, in some cataclysm that it is impossible for us to foresee, that civilisation characteristic of the western European races may go the way of half a dozen other civilisations that have within historic times preceded it; to be succeeded by a new social order developed by one or other of the coloured races, the negro, the kaffir or the Chinese. (Our emphasis)\*

## 6. The Kanpur trial

Almost the first act of the Labour government was to stage a political trial – the notorious Kanpur<sup>49</sup> Bolshevik conspiracy case in an endeavour to suppress the emerging, if still weak, Communist Party of India, which represented a mortal danger to British colonial rule and its imperialist interests in India. Eight leading Indian communists, including Shripad Amrut Dange, Muzaffer Ahmed, Shaukat Usmani, Manabendra Nath Roy and Das Gupta, were arrested and charged with attempting

. . . to use the workers' and peasants' associations to secure the complete separation of India from Great Britain, with such an economic programme as could easily appeal to ignorant people,

and with conspiring

. . . to organise a working-class party in India, and so deprive the King of his Sovereignty.

After the trial, staged in an obscure district court, four of the defendants were sentenced to four years' imprisonment each,

---

\* Quoted in F Lee, *ibid.*

on the basis of the evidence of police agents. The only 'crime' of which the accused were charged and convicted was that they were communists!

## **7. Labour's first government and the middle east**

As regards the middle east, the first Labour government went on to further stabilise the gains secured by British imperialism at the Versailles conference, refusing at the same time to entertain the legitimate claims of Egypt to the Suez canal.

Within six months of the formation of the Labour government, Iraqi tribal villages were being subjected to aerial bombardment<sup>50</sup> on the instructions of Labour's secretary of state for air, Lord Thomson.<sup>51</sup> A few days earlier, in his reply to a question in the House of Commons on 30 June from Sir Samuel Hoare<sup>52</sup> as to whether Labour's policy in Iraq was not identical with that of the previous Tory administration, the undersecretary for air, Mr Leach,<sup>53</sup> answered thus:

I cannot honestly say we have made any change in the policy of the late government.\*

## **8. The Labour government and China**

With regard to China, the Labour government supported the Canton Merchant Corps' rebellion (August-October 1924) against Dr Sun Yat-sen's nationalist Canton government, which was striking revolutionary blows against warlordism, feudalism, comprador capitalism and foreign imperialism alike.

---

\* Quoted in *Workers' Weekly*, 4 July 1924.

Ostensibly organised under the leadership of Chen Lien-po, a comprador capitalist of the British-owned Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, the real power of the Merchant Corps was none other than British imperialism – or, more correctly, Labour imperialism of the first Labour government.

From the beginning to the end, the imperialist record of the Labour government was flawlessly consistent. In its final week in office before the general election of 9 October 1924, in which it was ousted from office, the Labour government authorised the Indian colonial administration to promulgate the notorious Bengal Special Ordinances, which gave the authorities arbitrary powers of indefinite internment or imprisonment by executive order – without any specific accusation, trial or judicial sentence. All the major nationalist leaders of Bengal were arrested under these ordinances.

Perhaps the following quotation from leading Labour politician JR Clynes could justly serve as an epitaph on the tomb, not only of the first, but also of each subsequent Labour government. Answering the accusation that British Labour had a disrupting influence in the empire, he maintained that, on the contrary:

In the same period of years, no Conservative or Liberal government has done more than we did to knit together the great Commonwealth of Nations which Britain calls her empire . . . Far from wanting to lose our colonies, we are trying to keep them.\*

---

\* JR Clynes, *Memoirs*, Volume 2 1924-1937, 1937.

## 9. The industrial front

On the industrial front in Britain itself, all the major disputes in that short period involving railwaymen, shipyard workers, dockers, London traffic workers, workers at Wembley, miners, builders, etc, represent nothing but a succession of defeats or unsatisfactory settlements produced by the united front of the employers, the capitalist media and the reactionary Labour leadership, fully supported by the Labour government.

To the normal threats and cajolery practised by all bourgeois governments when they attempt to seek resolution of industrial disputes to the satisfaction of the employers, now a new form of blackmail was introduced – namely, the damaging effects that any strike might have on the Labour government. This combination of moral blackmail with the threat of the use of troops, sailors, police and the Emergency Powers Act (EPA), caused even the reactionary Ernest Bevin, during the February 1924 dockers' strike, to declare:

The union had in mind in the latter stages of the negotiations the earnest appeal of the prime minister to make a just peace and an honourable settlement. I wish it had been a Tory government in office. We would not have been frightened by their threats.\*

The year 1924 had commenced amid a revival of working-class militancy and determination to halt and reverse the defeats and retreats of the previous years. The result, however, was a succession of defeats. James Klugmann correctly remarked:

The employers' activities, the outcries of the press, the be-

---

\* Quoted in *Workers' Weekly*, 4 April 1924, cited in J Klugmann, *op cit*.

trayal of right-wing trade union leaders, this was nothing new. But what was new was that the workers, for the first time in Britain, saw social democracy in office. They saw a Labour government denouncing their strikes, demanding that they return to work, supporting the employers on committee after committee, enquiry after enquiry, threatening them with the use of troops and blacklegs, invoking and even using the infamous EPA.\*

Following as it always did the reformist theory of the 'neutrality' of the capitalist state, it goes without saying that the Labour government did not even attempt to make any changes in the departments of state, their composition or method of functioning. In regard to Ramsay MacDonald's conduct of the Foreign Office, a commentator justly remarked that *he came, he saw, he was conquered*. The obsequiousness with which Labour ministers, including MacDonald himself, responded to the establishment, the awe in which they held it, is breathtaking. The routine role of the armed forces in strike-breaking, the use of the secret police against the labour movement and the Emergency Powers Act were all left intact.

As early as the end of April 1924, the government's abandonment of working-class interests in the internal, foreign and colonial spheres had become so manifestly clear that the executive committee of the CPGB felt obliged to issue a manifesto entitled *Future of the Labour Government – A Call to All Workers*, in which it correctly stated:

In every direction the Labour government has shown itself the servant of the bourgeoisie. Labour cabinet ministers have become the missionaries of a new imperialism. They brag of the glory of empire. Armaments and coercion have become com-

---

\* J Klugmann, *ibid.*

monplace with them.\*

The Labour government having done its dirty work in the service of British imperialism, it was time for the ruling class to get rid of it on some pretext or another. In connection with the withdrawal, under some pressure from the labour movement, of criminal proceedings against the communist JR Campbell<sup>54</sup> for 'incitement to mutiny',<sup>55</sup> the Tories and Liberals joined forces to defeat the government.

On 8 October, Sir Robert Home, moved a censure motion against the government. A Liberal amendment which called for the appointment of a select committee to investigate and report on the circumstances leading up to the withdrawal of proceedings against Campbell received 364 votes, while for the Tory censure motion there were 198 votes. As Ramsay MacDonald treated it as a question of confidence, the government fell.

As the CPGB's election manifesto for the October 1924 election correctly stated, the Labour government had been put into office to do the dirty work of British capitalism on issues of internal and external policy – a task which it had performed in a manner most loyal and servile. Said the manifesto:

Sheltering behind the plea of being in a minority, it did exactly what a capitalist government might have done. It evicted unemployed, overawed strikes by threatening to use the Emergency Powers Act, arrested and spied on communists, strengthened the navy and air force, shot down and imprisoned workers and peasants in India, Mesopotamia, Sudan and Egypt.

In its negotiations with Soviet Russia, it defended the interests of British capitalists, not of British workers . . . Worst of all, it

---

\* CPGB, *Future of the Labour Government – A Call to All Workers*, 23 April 1924, cited in J Klugmann, *ibid.*

carried through the infamous Dawes Report . . .<sup>\*56</sup>

## **10. Empire socialism**

In concluding this section, it must be said that for a short nine-month period, representing the entire life of the first Labour government, these achievements in the service of British imperialism were no mean feat. In government, as out of government, Labour had proved its fitness to govern on behalf of British imperialism.

The exposure that Lenin had spoken of in 1920 thus took place during these nine months of 1924. By 1925, Labour's conversion to empire socialism was complete and irrevocable.

---

\* *Workers' Weekly*, 17 October 1924, cited in J Klugmann, *ibid.*



## **5. Labour comes out unmistakably as the third capitalist party**

### **1. The 1926 general strike**

After the fall of the first Labour government, the most important issue to confront the British working class was the general strike of 1926.<sup>57</sup> The TUC leadership, against its own will, and most reluctantly, was forced to call the general strike.

For nine days, two million workers, at great personal expense and hardship, downed tools, not in furtherance of their own interests, but in support of the miners who had been locked out for refusing to submit to a wage cut imposed by their employers.

Just as the strike began to gain strength, the TUC leadership, in total betrayal of the working class, called it off, thus leaving the miners to battle on singlehandedly for another seven months before hunger forced their defeat.

Meanwhile, in the aftermath of the general strike, humiliatingly savage agreements were forced on the railwaymen, transport workers, printers and seamen on their return to work.

The general strike failed because, first, the TUC and the

Labour party leadership refused to turn it into a political struggle; in fact the general council of the TUC

. . . feared like the plague to admit the inseparable connection between the economic struggle and the political struggle.\*

In direct contrast to this, the Conservative government,<sup>58</sup> from the outset, correctly treated the general strike as a fact of tremendous political importance which could only be defeated by measures of a political character – that is, by invoking the authority of the Crown and Parliament, and by the mobilisation of the army and the police.

Secondly, the general strike failed because, far from seeking international support and solidarity, the TUC leadership spurned all such help from precisely such quarters as were the most genuine supporters of this gigantic strike of the British workers. Thus it was that the general council refused to accept financial assistance from the workers of the USSR, who had, in response to the call of the All-Union Central Committee of Trade Unions (AUCCTU), made at the latter's meeting of 5 May 1926, decided to contribute one-quarter of a day's earnings in support of the British workers. The same day, the AUCCTU, remitted 250,000 rubles to the British TUC general council. Two days later, on 7 May, the AUCCTU sent to the general council two million rubles more that had been collected by the Soviet proletariat – only to be informed on 9 May of the general council's decision to *refuse acceptance* of this assistance.<sup>59</sup>

The spineless treachery of the TUC and Labour leadership was fully matched by the behaviour and actions of the Second International and the Amsterdam Federation of Trade Unions, which, while passing platonic resolutions in 'support' of the strike, refused to give it any meaningful financial assistance.

---

\* 'The British strike and the events in Poland', report by JV Stalin to a meeting of rail workers in Tiflis, 8 June 1926.

Only the equivocal conduct of these two bodies can explain the fact that all the trade unions of Europe and America combined donated a mere one-eighth of the amount which the Soviet proletariat found it possible to afford to the British proletariat. In addition, far from stopping the transport of coal, the Amsterdam Federation literally acted as a strike-breaker.

The British general strike proved conclusively, if such proof was still needed, that in any major confrontation between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, between labour and capital, the trade union and Labour leadership would unfailingly betray the cause of the proletariat and desert to the side of the enemy.

It proved conclusively, too, that international social democracy could always be relied upon to act as a reliable friend of international imperialism in the form of a Trojan horse within the working-class movement.

## **2. Lesson drawn by TUC-Labour leadership from the general strike**

If the CPGB at the time correctly drew the above conclusion from the events of the general strike, the lesson drawn by the TUC and Labour leaders from the same happenings was just the opposite: namely, 'never again' would they be party to such an enterprise, which they had not wanted in the first place and which they had called off at the earliest opportune moment.

Only the cooperation of the workers with the capitalists, argued these traitors to the working class, in the reorganisation and rationalisation of industry, aimed at increased productivity, could ensure trade union recognition and higher wages.

With the logic of servitors as their guide, the TUC's leaders entered into discussions with an influential group of employers headed by Sir Alfred Mond, the founder of ICI,<sup>60</sup> on questions such as rationalisation and industrial strife – that is, on ques-

tions of redundancy, speed-up and wage cuts. And all this at a time when Britain, like the rest of the capitalist world, was firmly and inexorably heading for the worst economic crisis it had ever experienced.

In the aftermath of the general strike, the Labour party too reaffirmed its faith in the gradual parliamentary road to socialism, and determined never to take any kind of direct action. From now on, persuading the middle-class voter, rather than leading the working class, was to be higher still on its agenda. Not surprisingly, therefore, the Labour representatives on the government (Blanesborough) committee jointly signed a majority report advocating cuts in unemployment benefit.

### **3. Communists an obstacle to Labour's overt class-collaboration**

However, there was one chief obstacle to the pursuit of this policy of docility and class-collaboration by the TUC and Labour leadership – to wit, the Communist party.

Although at the end of 1926, the CPGB was still very young (five years of age), with a membership of only 7,900, it enjoyed a disproportionately wide influence in the working-class movement, since it had initiated and led several important movements such as the Minority Movement (which acted as an instrument for trade union activists to propagate militant policies) and the National Unemployed Workers' Committee Movement<sup>61</sup> (which mobilised the unemployed with the slogan 'Work or Full Maintenance!')

In addition, one and a half thousand communists were inside the Labour party as individual members. Communists could still be elected by their trade unions as delegates to Labour organisations, including to the annual conference of the Labour party.

Thus, the CPGB and the communists, who acted as a magnet

for attracting support from non-communist militant workers, including members of the Labour party, were a terrible nuisance, to which the latter was determined to put a stop. So, to deal with this menace, while the Labour leaders got on with expelling the 'troublemakers' from their party, the TUC general council devoted its undivided attention to smashing the Minority Movement and to preventing the election of communists to trade union offices.

Although the decision to bar communists from individual membership of the Labour party had been taken at the 1924 annual conference of the Labour party (and reaffirmed at the autumn 1925 Liverpool conference), and the trade unions had been asked not to nominate communists as delegates to Labour organisations, there were serious problems in implementing this policy. For, at the end of 1926, out of the CPGB's total membership of 7,900, as many as 1,544 were still individual members of the Labour party, and another 242 were trade union delegates to Labour organisations.

In the aftermath of the general strike, the Labour party felt obliged to initiate a process of disaffiliating all those local Labour party branches that refused to expel those of their members who were also members of the Communist party, with the result that between 1926 and 1929, as many as twenty-seven local organisations were declared illegal and replaced by 'official' branches.<sup>62</sup>

Herbert Morrison<sup>63</sup> was the chief witch-hunter, and at the top of his hit-list was the Battersea branch, which had the honourable distinction of selecting as its local MP Shapurji Saklatvala,<sup>64</sup> who, in addition to being a communist, was among the first Indians ever to enter the House of Commons.

The Battersea Labour party was disaffiliated and replaced by an 'official' party after the former had defied Morrison's diktat to expel its communist members. At the time, Comrade Saklatvala made the apt observation that

The people who have started rival Labour parties in Battersea are the very ones who are always complaining that the Communists are splitting the movement. Here we have an example of the lengths to which the official clique are prepared to go in their efforts to show to the bosses that the Labour party means no harm to them.\*

### 4. Witch-hunt extended

Soon the campaign to expel communists was extended to those who wanted to cooperate and work with the communists, the latter being characterised by Morrison as 'elements it was not desirable to mix with'.†

Scores of prominent Labour party activists who associated with either the Left-Wing Movement, the Minority Movement or the International Class Prisoners' Aid were expelled from the Labour party. Undeterred by protests from its own radical members, at the 1928 Labour party annual conference, the national executive introduced a series of 'loyalty clauses' debaring trade unions from electing communists as delegates to Labour party meetings nationally or locally.

From now on, not only communists, but even non-communist members of the Left-Wing Movement were barred from sharing platforms at meetings convened by Labour party branches. In 1929, the Labour party went on to elaborate these 'loyalty clauses' so as to exclude members of organisations 'ancillary or subsidiary' to the CPGB, followed shortly afterwards by an executive circular listing seven such organisations: the Left-Wing

---

\* *Sunday Worker*, 11 July 1926, quoted in S Saklatvala, *The Fifth Commandment: Biography of Shapurji Saklatvala*, 1991.

† Quoted in M Branson, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain*, Volume 3: 1927-1941, 1985.

Movement, the Minority Movement, the National Unemployed Workers' Committee Movement (NUWCM), the League Against Imperialism, Workers' International Relief, International Class War Prisoners' Aid, and Friends of Soviet Russia. As a result, no member of any of these organisations could either belong to the Labour party or be elected as a delegate to Labour party meetings.

## 5. TUC's attempts at crushing working-class resistance

Simultaneously with the above happenings in the Labour party, the TUC leadership got on with the task of smashing the Minority Movement (MM), which had been established at the initiative of the CPGB in 1924 for coordinating militant movements in a number of industries. It was affiliated to the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU), the latter having been founded in 1921 as a radical antidote to the class-collaborationist International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU).

In a pre-1926 leaflet, the Minority Movement declared:

Most of the unions today are supporters of the capitalist system. We hold that it is the duty of the unions to stoutly resist the continuous encroachments of the employing class and aim definitely at the **overthrow of the capitalist system!**\*

In view of this, it is not to be wondered at that TUC general secretary Walter Citrine<sup>65</sup> hated the Minority Movement. In December 1927, in a series of articles later to be issued as a pamphlet with the title *Democracy or Disruption*, Citrine set out to attack the Minority Movement. Writing in the pages of the journal *Labour*, he argued that the trade union movement

---

\* Quoted in Maureen Branson, *ibid.*

should run 'in the direction of making the workers' organisations an integral part of the economic machinery of society', for to allow the trade unions to be used as instruments of social upheaval would be 'fatal to our hopes of ordered progress'.

In contrast, he said, the communists wanted 'to capture the trade union movement and exploit it for a revolutionary subversive purpose'. The Minority Movement, under the leadership of the CPGB, had as its purpose 'to set the rank and file of the working-class movement in bitter opposition to its elected and responsible representatives'. Taking due notice of Citrine's call, the executives of several unions duly barred communists and Minority Movement members from holding office or being elected as delegates to labour organisations.

In a parallel development, the TUC intensified its efforts to isolate the NUWCM. By the autumn of 1927, the TUC had severed its links with this body. In consequence of this, the November 1927 miners' march from south Wales to London, which aimed to draw attention to the appalling conditions of unemployed miners, took place with the communist Wal Hannington as its chief marshal and in the teeth of bitter opposition from the TUC, which circulated orders to local trades councils along the march's route instructing them *not* to organise receptions or hospitality for the miners.

The 1928 Swansea TUC congress confirmed the decision to outlaw the Minority Movement. After a persistent and shamelessly unprincipled attack lasting two years, the leadership of the Labour party and the TUC succeeded in hounding communists and non-communist militants from the Labour party and the trade unions.



## 6. External policy: China

In the international arena, the Labour leadership supported with limitless zeal all the brutal and bloodthirsty actions of British imperialism. When in August 1926, the British Navy subjected the Chinese town of Wanh sien,<sup>66</sup> on the banks of the Yangtze, to bombardment, killing five hundred people, Ramsay MacDonald gave his party's full support – for which he received the grateful thanks of the Conservative Sir Austen Chamberlain.

A few months later, the Shanghai strike of 1927, aimed at reclaiming foreign concessions in China, spread to Hankow and Canton,<sup>67</sup> and developed into a full-scale insurrection. The uprising was brutally suppressed by the traitorous Chiang Kai-shek<sup>68</sup> clique with the full support of British and Japanese troops.

British communist Tom Mann, on returning from a visit to China in 1927, expressed the anger of the Chinese masses at this imperialist aided-and-abetted massacre, which claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of Chinese workers and peasants, in the following words:

They [the Chinese people] have no illusions about the Chinese capitalists, but the greatest curse, they declare, is the foreign imperialists, and in this they are undoubtedly right; and of all the imperialist forces in China beyond any question Great Britain is the worst.\*

And the actions of this, the worst imperialist power, had the wholehearted and unreserved support of the Labour party.

---

\* 'My visit to China' by T Mann, *The Labour Monthly*, August 1927.

## 7. External policy: India

Towards the end of 1927, having rushed through Parliament the necessary enabling legislation, Tory secretary of state for India Lord Birkenhead set up the Simon Commission to review the progress of the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms.<sup>69</sup>

Although Indians had been excluded from the commission, Ramsay Macdonald, overruling even the objections of Labour's national executive committee, secured the appointment of Clement Attlee and Steven Walsh (an odious imperialist) as Labour nominees on the commission. This could not but inflame Indian opinion.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the Simon Commission's arrival in India on Friday 3 February 1928 was greeted by a general strike and mammoth demonstrations. With police firing on the demonstrators, wholesale arrests, and the army parading in the streets of the principal cities, India was overnight turned into an armed camp. The Indian working class played the leading role in opposing the Simon Commission, displaying in the process a degree of political clarity not seen even in some advanced imperialist countries. Shapurji Saklatvala aptly observed, in his report for the *Sunday Worker* of 5 February 1928, that:

It has been well-known for some time that the commission would have a hostile reception from the Indian workers, who view it as the latest weapon of British imperialism . . . When the Bombay workers burned the effigy of MacDonald in the streets along with that of Lord Birkenhead and others, they showed that they viewed the Labour party as nothing more or less than the willing hirelings of British imperialism.\*

---

\* Quoted in S Saklatvala, *op cit*.

## 8. Labour: the third capitalist party

In the light of the conduct of the Labour party in the years spanning the period between the first and the second Labour governments, when Labour had stuck to a bipartisan approach in the field of internal and external politics alike, when it had opposed every working-class mobilisation at home and supported with barely disguised glee every brutal imperialist suppression of the revolutionary national-liberation movements abroad, notably in China and India, when it had tenaciously opposed all united action with the CPGB and made vicious use of 'loyalty clauses', bans and proscriptions against the communists as a means of stifling all working-class mass movements, or avoiding any involvement with them, the CPGB was obliged to review its attitude towards the Labour party.

In particular, it had to answer three important questions. These were:

1. Should the CPGB, now being hounded out of the Labour party and the trade unions, continue its struggle to stay inside it?

2. In the light of Labour's home and foreign policy and practice, should the Communist party go on calling for the election of a Labour government?

3. Should the CPGB put up candidates of its own now that the communist candidates could no longer be adopted by local Labour parties?

Harry Pollitt<sup>70</sup> and Rajani Palme Dutt, among others, led the fight for a reversal of the party's line on all these issues, arguing that whereas in 1920 Labour's programme still incorporated many working-class demands and its constitution allowed affiliated organisations to have their own programmes and policy,

by 1928 it had become a third capitalist party, had 'surrendered socialism'; while its disciplinary measures made it impossible for affiliated parties to propagate their own programme.

They therefore proposed that the CPGB discontinue its attempts to affiliate to the Labour party, refuse to vote for Labour candidates unless the latter agreed to support the party's policy, and stand candidates against such open imperialists as MacDonald and Henderson.

Although representing at that time the minority of the central committee of the CPGB, the Pollitt-Dutt viewpoint won the day, with some considerable help from the analysis of the European scene made by the Comintern. According to this analysis, being in the grip of a severe economic crisis and intensified competition, all the capitalist countries were pushing ahead at a furious pace with rationalisation, resulting in the growth of trusts and a tendency of the latter to merge with the state. The effects of this rationalisation and trustification on the working class manifested themselves in ruthless exploitation, closures of vast enterprises and chronic unemployment on an unprecedented scale.

In most European countries social democracy led the workers. While preaching socialism, everywhere the social-democratic parties were in reality collaborating with capitalism. Although several European countries had by then had the experience of social-democratic governments, far from bringing socialism nearer, they had only served to strengthen capitalism and betray the working class.

Faced with this stark reality, the CPGB at its 1928 congress justly denounced the Labour party for having 'come out unmistakably as the third capitalist party' – a characterisation to which the Trotskyite social-democrats of the SWP,<sup>71</sup> Tony Cliff and Donny Gluckstein, took such a strong objection, dubbing it

### THE THIRD CAPITALIST PARTY

as the 'ultra-left insanity' of the Communist party.\*

On the eve of the 1929 general election, the CPGB, in its pamphlet *Class Against Class*, the programme with which it entered that election, elaborated further on its 1928 statement. Declaring itself in favour of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the programme went on:

The Communist party . . . enters the general election . . . to reveal to the working class the nature of the present crisis, to expose the sham of parliamentary democracy maintained by the Tories, Liberals and Labour alike . . .

Three parties . . . appeal to you in the name of the 'nation'. One party – the Communist party – appeals to you in the name of the working class. No party can serve two masters. No party can serve the nation so long as the nation is divided into two warring classes . . .

No party can serve the robbers and the robbed . . . The Communist party is the party of the workers, the oppressed.

Having characterised the Labour party as 'the third capitalist party', the programme went on to explain the reason for the CPGB's changed attitude towards it:

The situation in 1929 is entirely different from that of the years prior to the General Strike and the Labour government of 1924. In the years immediately after the war, the Labour party, in spite of its anti-working-class leaders, was forced by the pressure of the workers into action against the Tories and the Liberals, eg, threatened general strike against war on Russia, repudiation of the Versailles Treaty . . .

The Labour party also had not yet become a closely knit party

---

\* T Cliff and D Gluckstein, *The Labour Party: A Marxist History*, 1988.

## BRITAIN'S PERFIDIOUS LABOUR PARTY

with a single discipline. It was a federation . . . offering facilities for criticism from within.

The Labour government [of 1924] exposed the Labour party leadership completely . . . The 'minority' Labour government was nothing more than a coalition with the Tories and Liberals. The Labour leaders 'led' the General Strike only to betray it in the face of the challenge of the state.

The General Strike raised the question of power. The Labour party leadership . . . stood for capitalist power against working-class power, but from within . . . They developed the offensive against the Communist party and the revolutionary workers who stood for working-class struggle for power.

They tied the trade unions to the Tories and Liberals under the banner of Mondism and transformed the Labour party from a federal organisation to a single party with a capitalist programme under the banner of 'empire and Mondism'.

*It is now no longer possible for the Communist party or the trade unions to bring pressure to bear on the Labour party from within. It is a completely disciplined capitalist party.<sup>72</sup>*

In other words, with its accession to office, Labour had rid itself of its federal structure, and with it of all susceptibility to socialism and working-class influence.

In the preface he wrote for the first English edition of Lenin's writings on Britain (dated January 1934), Harry Pollitt further endorsed the CPGB's stance:

Just now . . . it is a common thing to hear certain 'left' leaders, defending their support of the Labour party and remaining affiliated to it on the ground that they are carrying out the advice given [by Lenin] to the British communists in 1920.

They never dare to state to the workers, what the conditions

### THE THIRD CAPITALIST PARTY

were that Lenin attached to the application of the Communist party for affiliation to the Labour party. Lenin insisted that it was only permissible to fight for this as long as there was no compromise on revolutionary principles, and with the fullest freedom of agitation and propaganda and criticism.

He added that the sections in the book dealing with Lenin's attitude on this question

. . . will reveal the unscrupulous opportunism of this school of 'leftists', who precisely because of their 'left' language deceive the workers, and retard their coming to communism. At the same time they will explain the political reasons why the reformist leaders of all kinds hate the insistence of the communists upon freedom of criticism, the use of which so powerfully exposes the anti-working class policy of the reformist leaders and strengthens the workers in their fight against all their enemies.

Thus it was that the CPGB, for the first time since its formation in 1920, came to the conclusion that the Labour party had become a closely-knit third capitalist party with a single discipline, no longer susceptible to working-class influence; that it was, therefore, useless trying to work for the election of a Labour government and equally useless trying to gain affiliation to the Labour party. It was far better to build a real working-class communist alternative.

These decisions reached by the CPGB were correct, based as they were on sound economic and political analysis of the British reality and the attitude of the Labour party to it. To describe these conclusions as 'ultra-insanity', as do the ultra-social-democrats, namely, the Trotskyites Cliff and Gluckstein, is to reveal one's incurable proclivity for social-democratic offal, verging on cretinism.

Although the CPGB was to revert in 1935 to its earlier policy of gaining affiliation to the Labour party, there was little basis, in principle or in reality, for such a change of stance. And the Labour party's rejection of the CPGB's application made this all too painfully clear.<sup>73</sup>

After the general election of November 1935 returned the national government to office with a big majority under the leadership of the Tory Stanley Baldwin, the CPGB applied for affiliation. In its formal application for affiliation, dated 25 November 1935, the CPGB pointed out that Ramsay MacDonald, Philip Snowden and JH Thomas, the most bitter opponents of communist affiliation, had since gone over to the enemy camp; that the return of the national government could only mean intensified oppression of the working class at home and support for Nazi Germany abroad, and that its defeat required united action. Besides, argued the CPGB, how could the Labour party claim to represent the united front of the working class if it excluded 'workers and organisations which hold the revolutionary standpoint'?

In its communication of 27 January 1936, the Labour party NEC rejected the CPGB's application stating that no circumstances had arisen as to justify a departure from the decision of 1922; that there was an 'irreconcilable' hostility between the Labour party's adherence to 'democracy' and the Communist party's commitment to 'dictatorship'; that the advent of fascist dictatorships abroad was attributable to communist activities that had split the working class; that, since the Communist party merely aimed at using the Labour party facilities as an instrument for the propagation of communism, any weakening on the part of the Labour party in the defence of democracy would only help the forces of reaction and hinder the victory of socialism in Britain.

Following this rejection, the CPGB launched a campaign for affiliation. By September 1936, more than 1,400 organisations



(including 831 trade union branches and 407 local Labour party organisations) had passed resolutions in support of communist affiliation. So alarmed were the TUC leaders that their 'black circulars' had failed to check the growth of communist influence that, in July 1936, the National Council of Labour, a body representing the TUC, the Labour party's national executive committee and the parliamentary Labour party (PLP)<sup>74</sup> had felt obliged to issue a document entitled *British Labour and Communism*, in which the by now familiar objections to communist affiliation were reiterated.

It was asserted in particular that communist revolutionary activities had 'stimulated fascist and Nazi reaction in some countries with disastrous consequences'. Not only was the victory of fascism attributed to the communists, but an attempt was also made to *equate* communism and fascism by presenting both as 'dictatorships' whose aim was to destroy the democracy so zealously guarded by the Labour party.

Notwithstanding a vigorous campaign by the CPGB, the Labour party annual conference in October 1936 rejected communist affiliation by a majority of 1,728,000 to 592,000 votes. Hardly anything better could be expected from a rabidly anti-communist and staunchly imperialist party such as the Labour party – a party which by 1933 had proscribed eleven organisations, including the Relief Committee for the Victims of German Fascism, for being 'ancillary or subsidiary to the Communist party'.

This meant that if a member of the Labour party belonged to, or actively supported, such an organisation, or spoke from its platform, he could be expelled forthwith. And any local Labour branch unwise enough to send a delegate to attend the meetings of such an organisation faced the threat of disaffiliation. The other proscribed organisations were: The League Against Imperialism, Left-Wing Movement; Minority Movement; National Unemployed Workers Movement; Workers' International Relief;

Friends of Soviet Russia; International Labour Defence; British Anti-War Council; European Workers Anti-Fascist Congress; and the National Charter Campaign Committee.

## **9. Labour government of 1929-31**

That the CPGB's stance was correct was proved only too well, not only by the conduct of the Labour government of 1929-31, but also by that of every subsequent Labour government in the sphere of internal and external policy alike.

From the general election of 31 May 1929, the Labour party, having received 37.1 percent of the vote, emerged for the first time as the largest party in the House of Commons and formed the next government.

## **10. India and the second Labour government**

In the wake of the near revolt of the Indian people that had greeted the arrival of the Simon Commission in India, British imperialism, emboldened by a split in the Indian National Congress (caused entirely by Gandhi's moderate, dilatory, bourgeois tactics, which gave the government until 31 December 1929 to accept the Congress's demand for self-rule), struck. At one fell swoop, it removed the entire working-class leadership of the Indian masses.

The most prominent leaders of the working class, including the entire leadership of the Red Flag Union, were arrested and taken to Meerut for trial on the charge of 'attempting to deprive the King-Emperor of the sovereignty of India'. Labour, in opposition, refused to support the demand for the release of the Meerut detainees. On coming to power in May 1929, Labour continued the policy of imperialist plunder and oppression, al-

beit under a veneer of socialist phrases.

Compelled by the government's failure to respond to Gandhi's deadline of the end of December 1929, the latter was obliged to make a modicum of protest. So Gandhi, accompanied by a select group of his followers, led a march on Dandi<sup>75</sup> by way of protest against the government's monopoly of salt and as a prelude to his non-cooperation campaign. On 6 April 1930, as Gandhi made salt illegally, the Indian national movement, pent up for so long thanks to Gandhi's infuriatingly collaborationist tactics, burst forth like a volcanic eruption. Peasants in many areas refused to pay land revenue. Revolts broke out in many places. The north-west frontier town of Peshawar fell into the hands of the rebels.

This is how Rajani Palme Dutt captured one scene in connection with the incidents in Peshawar:

Two platoons of the Second Battalion of the 18th Royal Garhwali Rifles, hindu troops in the midst of a muslim crowd, refused the order to fire, broke ranks, fraternised with the crowd, and a number handed over their arms. Immediately after this, the military and the police were withdrawn from Peshawar; from 25 April to 4 May the city was in the hands of the people.\*

The government unleashed an unbridled reign of terror. The Simon Commission report of June 1930 had made no meaningful concession, and thus served only to exacerbate Indian sentiment. In its endeavour to break the deadlock, the Labour government of MacDonald convened a 'round table conference', to which were invited, among others, several puppet rulers of the princely states.

In return for a vague statement by MacDonald about responsible self-government, which committed the government to

---

\* R Palme Dutt, *India Today*, 1940.

nothing, Gandhi was lured into persuading the congress to call off its agitation and attend the conference in London. In return, the government agreed to withdraw its ordinances and release ninety thousand Indians who had been imprisoned during the previous ten months – except those guilty of 'violence' and 'incitement to violence'. Under this formula, the Meerut detainees and the Garhwali soldiers were excluded from the amnesty – as were a group of brilliant Punjabi revolutionaries, who were hanged immediately.

The Round Table farce continued for a year in London – away from the grim reality of the Indian subcontinent, where people suffered daily violence, humiliation, oppression and exploitation under the jackboot of British imperialism. No surprise, then, that a contemporary English revolutionary should have been driven to write:

Hanging, flogging, slaying, shooting and bombing attest the efforts of parasitic imperialism to cling to the body of its victim. The Round Table conference beside these efforts is like the ceremonial mumblings of the priest that walks behind the hangman.\*

Just as the first (1924) Labour government had supervised the Cawnpore trial against leading communists, so the second Labour government saw to it that the rising Indian working-class movement was decapitated through the trial, on trumped-up charges, of leading working-class leaders and the long prison sentences doled out at Meerut.<sup>76</sup>

India was too important to British imperialism for its fate to be decided by Indians. And Labour saw to it that the interests of British imperialism were defended with an unprecedented zeal and determination – for on the defence of these interests

---

\* 'The empire "solution" for unemployment' by R Page Arnott, *Labour Monthly*, September 1930.

depended the privileges of the aristocracy of labour, the upper stratum of the working class, represented by the Labour party. There were impeccable reasons for the tenacity with which all governments representing British imperialism – Tory, Liberal and Labour alike – wanted to hold on to India.

An issue of the *Manchester Guardian* in 1930 had occasion to refer to the material advantages which accrued to Britain from her Indian colony:

There are two chief reasons why a self-regarding England may hesitate to relax her control over India. The first is that her influence in the past depends partly upon her power to summon troops and to draw resources from India in time of need . . . The second is that Great Britain finds in India her best market, and she has one thousand million pounds of capital invested there.\*

## **11. Promotion of Gandhi as a means of blunting India's liberation struggle**

The suppression of the Indian liberation struggle of 1928-31 is the most shameful example of Labour's naked imperialism, for it eliminated the possibility of the Indian working class's taking the leading role in this struggle, which from then on became the preserve of the Indian bourgeoisie, whose most representative spokesman was the Congress grouping led by Gandhi. In this regard, one cannot but marvel at the wisdom contained in, and the prophetic nature of, the observation made by WJ Brown, an ILP member of parliament, in a Commons debate in 1930:

---

\* Cited in R Palme Dutt, *op cit*.

## BRITAIN'S PERFIDIOUS LABOUR PARTY

I venture to suggest that we should regard it as a cardinal feature of British policy to carry Gandhi with us, for if we do not, we have to face the alternative to Gandhi, and that is organised violence and revolutionary effort.\*

Brown's observation was fully confirmed by the biggest Indian industrialist and chief patron of Gandhi, GD Birla,<sup>77</sup> who wrote in a letter to Sir Samuel Hoare that

Gandhiji is the greatest force on the side of peace and order. He alone is responsible for keeping the left in India under check.†

As early as 2 March 1930, in a letter to Viceroy Lord Irwin, Gandhi himself had, with disarming candour, proclaimed the fight on two fronts – not only against British rule, but also against the internal enemy in India. This conception of the fight on two fronts corresponded to the role of the Indian bourgeoisie, which was increasingly alarmed as it saw the ground slipping from beneath its feet with the growing conflict between the Raj and the masses, and had been compelled to undertake the leadership of the struggle, despite the 'mad risk' (Gandhi's phrase in his letter to the viceroy), in order to hold it 'within bounds of reason' – ie, within bourgeois limits.

This is what Gandhi wrote to the viceroy:

The party of violence is gaining ground and making itself felt . . . It is my purpose to set in motion that force (non-violence) as well against the organised force of the British rule as the unorganised violence force of the growing party of violence.

---

\* Cited in 'The Indian national revolution' by C Dutt, *The Labour Monthly*, June 1930.

† Letter from GD Birla to MK Gandhi, 14 March 1932. Quoted in R Palme Dutt, *op cit*.

### THE THIRD CAPITALIST PARTY

To sit still would be to give rein to both the forces above mentioned.\*

Of all the bourgeois politicians of their time, Gandhi and MacDonald were undoubtedly the most accomplished, shrewd, hypocritically dishonest and, above all, committed to bourgeois property relations. They were therefore in the best position, if anyone was, to eliminate the leading role of the Indian working class – ‘the party of violence’ if you please – in the Indian liberation struggle, which leading role alone could have held the promise of the Indian liberation transcending the bounds of bourgeois rule. Alas, it must be admitted, they succeeded.

It is to be hoped that the reader will not regard the following penetrating description of Gandhi given by Rajani Palme Dutt as too much of a diversion from the subject.

[Notwithstanding] his personal idiosyncrasies, there was no question that he [Gandhi] was the most subtle and experienced politician of the old group, with unrivalled mass prestige which world publicity had now enhanced as the greatest Indian figure; the ascetic defender of property in the name of the most religious and idealist principles of humanity and love of poverty; the invincible metaphysical-theological casuist who could justify and reconcile anything and everything in an astounding tangle of explanations and arguments which in a man of common clay might have been called dishonest quibbling, but in the great ones of the earth like MacDonald or Gandhi is recognised as a higher plane of spiritual reasoning; the prophet who by his personal saintliness and selflessness could unlock the door to the hearts of the masses where the moderate bourgeois leaders could not hope for a hearing and the best guarantee of the shipwreck of any mass movement

---

\* MK Gandhi, *Selected Works*, Volume 4, Letters, 1968.

which had the blessing of his association.

This Jonah of revolution, this general of unbroken disasters was the mascot of the bourgeoisie in each wave of the developing Indian struggle . . . All hopes of the bourgeoisie (the hostile might say, the hopes of imperialism) were fixed on Gandhi as the man to ride the waves, to unleash just enough of the mass movement in order to drive a successful bargain, and at the same time to save India from revolution.\*

## 12. Labour's policy in the middle east

In the middle east – in Egypt, Iraq and Palestine – Labour continued its bipartisan policy, namely, its total support for imperialist subjugation of the people of the middle east. In fact, in regard to Palestine, Labour proved to be more pro-zionist than any previous British government.

In August 1929, the MacDonalld government suppressed with unprecedented and ruthless brutality a general strike of Palestinian workers and a peasant revolt in the countryside against ceaseless zionist expropriation of Arab land and increased jewish immigration.

Thus, one can see that it was not without justification that *The Times* should have expressed such confidence in the imperialist credentials of the Labour government:

Every far-sighted view of our imperial interests, and of the hope of removing them altogether from party controversy, goes to show how important it is that a Labour government, and no other, should have the handling of the great external problems which are crowding upon us this year – the Naval conference,

---

\* R Palme Dutt, *India Today*, 1940.



the Imperial conference, Egypt, and above all, India.\*

### 13. Fall of the second Labour government

Consequent upon MacDonald's defection,<sup>78</sup> the second Labour government fell in August 1931. In the autumn general election, Labour's parliamentary strength was reduced to 52 seats. The general election of the autumn of 1935 brought a partial recovery for Labour, although it returned the National government with a convincing majority. After 1931, Labour was to remain in opposition until 1940, when the Labour leadership accepted Winston Churchill's invitation to join his wartime coalition cabinet. But, in or out of government, in power or in opposition, bipartisanship on questions of imperial policy at home and abroad continued to be the hallmark of Labour.

On a whole host of issues on the home front, ranging from the struggles of the unemployed and the hunger marchers to the resistance of the poor to means-testing and benefit cuts, the resistance of working-class tenants to high rents, and the communist-led fight against Oswald Mosley and his British Union of Fascists, the attitude of the Labour party was characterised by its uncompromising hostility to anything that smacked of direct action in defence of the interests of the working class. Everywhere the Labour party strove for conciliation, industrial peace and class-collaboration. Hence its opposition to such movements as the Minority Movement (which united trade union activists campaigning for more militant policies), the National Unemployed Workers' Committee Movement (which rallied the unemployed around the slogan 'work or full maintenance!'), and rank-and-file movements of all kinds (of which the

---

\* Editorial comment, 15 April 1930, cited in R Page Arnott, *op cit*.

London busmen were an outstanding example).

The chief target of Labour's witch-hunt was undoubtedly the Communist party – for the sole reason that it was the only organisation which truly represented the interests of the working class and led the latter, through a number of movements, in resisting the encroachments of capital; which exposed the class-collaboration of the Labour party and TUC leadership; which alone espoused the cause of liberation of the colonial peoples subjugated by British imperialism; and which alone fought for the defence of the socialist Soviet Union.

The stubborn resistance of the Labour leadership to united action with the CPGB, and the bans and proscriptions imposed on communists, were aimed at stifling mass movements and as a means of avoiding any involvement in them.

### **14. Britain's hunger marches**

The hunger march in the autumn of 1936 against the means test illustrates this point very well indeed. The National Unemployed Workers Committee Movement (NUWCM) organised the march and invited the Labour party to sponsor it. The latter refused. The TUC for its part rejected a proposal for industrial action against the means test at its Plymouth conference in 1936, with TUC general secretary Walter Citrine telling delegates that it was not 'morally right' for a section of the community to subvert the will of Parliament by such methods as direct action.

Notwithstanding Labour's opposition, the NUWCM organised the hunger march and the marchers' arrival in London was greeted by a crowd of 250,000 people in Hyde Park – a circumstance that compelled the leader of the parliamentary Labour party, Clement Attlee, to accept an invitation to speak at the rally.

In the international arena, Labour's main concern was the

defence of British imperial interests, its vast colonial possessions, and the gigantic oil wealth of the middle east. In 1940, it joined as a coalition partner, without any qualms, the cabinet of Winston Churchill, whose chief preoccupation was the preservation of the empire rather than the defeat of fascism. Churchill's persistent refusal to open a second front to defeat Germany, while the USSR singlehandedly fought the entire might of the German army for three whole years, had the full support of Clement Attlee and the rest of the Labour leadership.

## 6. Labour since the second world war

The record of the Labour party after the end of the second world war is no better than its record before. The party has continued to furnish daily proof of its impeccable imperialist credentials and its total hostility to the interests of the overwhelming majority of the British working class – let alone those of the oppressed and superexploited peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

The governments of 1945-51, led by Clement Attlee, which have been portrayed by 'left' Labourites such as Tony Benn and Ken Livingstone, as well as by their Trotskyite poodles in the SWP, Militant and suchlike outfits, as shining examples of 'socialism', rested firmly on the twin pillars of the alliance with US imperialism in the crusade against communism and the reconstruction of the wartorn British economy at the expense of the colonial peoples inhabiting the British empire.

With commendable candour, Labour foreign secretary Ernest Bevin declared:

I am not prepared to sacrifice the British empire because I know that if the British empire fell . . . it would mean the stand-

ard of life of our constituents would fall considerably.\*

War had almost bankrupted British imperialism. To finance the war, it had incurred an external debt of nearly £3.7 billion (a sum huge for those days). It had also been forced to liquidate £1 billion of foreign investment in order to pay for arms purchases from the United States. The resulting fall in invisible earnings (return on capital) consequent upon the disposal of these foreign assets meant that the big deficit on trade in visibles (that is, export of commodities) could no longer be made up. This problem was exacerbated still further by two factors.

First, in December 1945, US imperialism terminated the lend-lease agreement that had enabled Britain to secure credit on favourable terms, thus forcing the latter to contract a loan of \$3.75 billion at market rates.

Second, there was the question of Britain's trade deficit with the USA, which at the time stood in the ratio of five to one in favour of the United States.

To solve this problem of dollar scarcity and dollar indebtedness, the 'socialist' Attlee government turned to the ruthless exploitation of the colonies – especially such high dollar earners as the Gold Coast (Ghana) and Malaya (Malaysia). Had it not been for the intensified exploitation of the colonies, the postwar reconstruction of the British economy would have been a far more arduous affair, risking social unrest and perhaps even revolutionary upheavals, for it would have had to take place by relying solely on the exploitation of the British working class.

Thus the naked plunder of the colonial peoples helped to protect the British working class from the worst effects of British imperialism's postwar crisis and the difficulties of reconstruction. Not without reason did one writer state that

---

\* Speech by E Bevin to the House of Commons on 22 February 1946, cited in R Palme Dutt, *The Crisis of Britain and the British Empire*, 1957.

## BRITAIN'S PERFIDIOUS LABOUR PARTY

The Labour government used the colonies to protect the British consumer from the high social price which continental countries were then paying for their postwar reconstruction. Consciously or not, this was to adopt 'social imperialism' in an extreme form.\*

Not without reason did Oliver Lyttleton, soon to become colonial secretary in the Conservative government, observe tauntingly during the autumn 1951 election campaign:

The government claims that the dependent territories were exploited in the past, but are not being exploited now. But in fact the socialist government seems to be the first government which has discovered how to exploit the colonies.†

If the British worker got off relatively lightly, the colonial worker and peasant was not so lucky. The intensification of exploitation in the colonies brought in its train intensified resistance and revolt on the part of the peoples of the empire against British imperialism. But the 'socialist' Attlee government put down all such revolt with ruthless severity and extreme barbarity – all in the interests of solving the deep crisis of British imperialism at the expense of the colonial people.

The 'socialist' Attlee government had succeeded in reconstructing Britain's shattered economy, had delivered on the front of nationalisation, the creation of the National Health Service and delivering full employment – but this came at the cost of millions upon millions of colonial slaves, tens of thousands of whom died in the revolts put down with such barbarity by Britain's 'socialist' government.

---

\* Cited by DK Fieldhouse writing in R Ovendale (Ed), *The Foreign Policy of the British Labour Governments, 1945–1951*, 1984.

† Electoral speech by O Lyttleton, 11 October 1951, cited in R Palme Dutt, *The Crisis of Britain*, *op cit*.

And if after all this those on the Labour, Trotskyite and revisionist 'left' still applaud the achievements of the Attlee government, this is solely to be explained by the fact that they represent the privileged sections of the working class, whose culture is thoroughly corrupt. That this 'left' is prepared to defend its privileges at any cost – and if this involves sacrificing the lives of millions of superexploited workers and peasants abroad, so be it.

Here briefly are the most important 'achievements' of Attlee's 'socialist' administration.

## **1. Greece**

Labour played a significant role in the suppression of the Greek liberation struggle in the aftermath of the war.<sup>79</sup>

## **2. 'French' Indochina (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia)**

Attlee's government helped restore French imperialist control over Indochina. British troops, commanded by Major General Gracey, armed the defeated Japanese fascist and French quisling troops, paving the way for the return of French rule.

It took the Vietnamese people another *three decades* of armed struggle and *several millions of lives* lost in brutal wars, waged first by French and then by US imperialism, to finally achieve the reunification and liberation of their country – thanks to the intervention organised by the 'socialist' Attlee government at the behest of US imperialism.<sup>80</sup>

### **3. The 'Dutch' East Indies (Indonesia)**

By similar methods, and at the cost of forty thousand Indonesian casualties, British troops under the direction of General Philip Christison helped restore Dutch imperialism's rule in the East Indies.

### **4. Malaya**

To protect Britain's high-yielding investments in rubber plantations and tin mining, both noted for their dollar earnings, Labour, using the most medieval methods of torture, murder, head-hunting and collective punishment, launched a barbaric colonial war against the liberation struggle of the Malayan people.

It was to be twelve bloody years before British imperialism succeeded in imposing its will.<sup>81</sup>

### **5. The middle east**

In the middle east, while refusing to withdraw troops from the Suez canal in Egypt, the Labour government endeavoured to install a whole host of puppet regimes to safeguard British imperialism's oil riches, and almost went to war with Iran over its nationalisation of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company.<sup>82</sup>



## **6. Nato**

In 1949, Labour played an important role in helping US imperialism establish the warmongering Nato (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) alliance.<sup>83</sup>

## **7. Korea**

Shortly thereafter, Attlee's 'socialist' government went on to give its full and unreserved support to US imperialism's genocidal war of aggression against the Korean people, waged with merciless inhumanity between 1950 and 1953.<sup>84</sup>

This first Nato war, waged under cover of a United Nations flag, was truly genocidal, costing three million Korean men women and children their lives. To their undying credit and eternal glory, the Korean people, with Chinese and Soviet support, fought US imperialism and its partners in aggression to a bloody standstill.

The British contingent, numbering twelve thousand, was the largest invading force after that of the USA. To this day, the tragic partition of the Korean peninsula is a legacy of this dirty war, in which the Attlee's 'socialist' government played such a central and shameful role.

As for Africa, not a single country obtained independence from Labour.

## **8. Support for South African colonial apartheid regime**

With a view to safeguarding its investments in South Africa, Britain's postwar Labour government outlawed Chief Seretse

Khama from the British protectorate of Bechuanaland.<sup>85</sup> This had been demanded by the then newly-elected nationalist government, which was to go on to institute the notorious apartheid system. Labour complied, for it needed South African gold and Southwest African (Namibian) uranium for atomic weapons.

In view of the foregoing, it is impossible to disagree with the observation of Robert Clough, apropos the Attlee government:

Labour never had to kill one British worker at home to rebuild British imperialism. But it had to kill untold thousands in the rest of the world, often with the enthusiastic support of its left wing. Hence those who seek to show that Labour played a progressive role can only do so on the racist assumption that the lives of the colonial people are of far less importance than those of British workers.\*

## 9. Record of the Wilson-Callaghan governments

After thirteen years in opposition, Labour was returned to office in 1964, this time with Harold Wilson<sup>86</sup> as prime minister, on whose government so many people had placed high hopes.

Their illusions were shattered within weeks. It soon became clear that his government was to be no different from any previous Labour administration, that the preoccupation of Labour now, as before, was the defence of the interests of British imperialism, without which defence Labour could not defend the interests of its own constituency – namely, the alliance of the labour aristocracy and a section of the middle class.

But this defence required an attack on the majority of the working class in Britain and on hundreds of millions of workers

---

\* R Clough, *Labour: A Party Fit For Imperialism*, 1992.

and peasants in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Labour was ready and willing to do the filthy work. Here is a brief summary of Labour's shameful record at this time.

## **10. Apartheid South Africa and Rhodesia**

The Wilson government maintained full trade links with the apartheid Pretoria regime, supplying the latter with fighter bombers.<sup>87</sup>

At the end of 1966, Wilson offered Rhodesian<sup>88</sup> rebel leader Ian Smith terms that would have guaranteed white minority rule for decades to come. Ian Smith's regime turned out to be too stupid to accept these generous terms, thus laying the basis for its own destruction at the hands of the Zimbabwean liberation movement.

## **11. Vietnam**

If Attlee's government had restored French imperialism to Indochina, Wilson's government fully backed the genocidal war of aggression waged by US imperialism against the Vietnamese and other Indochinese peoples.

When, in the summer of 1965, the USA started its Nazi-like bombing of north Vietnam, with Hanoi and Haiphong as special targets,<sup>89</sup> Wilson cabled his government's support to President Lyndon Johnson in these racist terms:

I wholly understand the deep concern you must feel at the need to do anything possible to reduce the losses of young Americans in and over Viet Nam . . . our reservations about this operation will not affect our continuing support for your policy over Viet Nam.

Although Labour's 'left' wing was too concerned with party unity to do anything but follow sheepishly in the wake of the Wilson government, Bertrand Russell<sup>90</sup> was so outraged by Labour's stance that he publicly tore up his membership card after making this statement:

When I compare the horrors of the Viet Nam war with the election manifesto of the Labour government, I find myself confronted with the most shameful betrayal of modern times in this country. Hitler, at least, seldom professed humanity, but these men who now pollute the chairs of office professed, before the election, the most noble and lofty ideals of human brotherhood . . . I can no longer remain a member of this so-called 'Labour' party, and I am resigning after fifty-one years.\*

What a refreshing contrast Russell's above statement presents to the utterances of such Labour 'left' charlatans as Ken Livingstone,<sup>91</sup> who, having made such a din about Tory (sorry, Tony) Blair's success in removing clause iv<sup>92</sup> from the Labour party's constitution, has finally and spinelessly, although not unexpectedly, made his peace with the following glowing tribute to the same Blair:

The legacy of Labour's compromisers and wafflers, from Wilson to Kinnock, was failure and defeat. The sense of relief when a competent, honest right-wing Labour leader finally appeared in the form of John Smith was felt throughout the party. We may therefore find to our surprise that Blair could yet deliver a Labour government of which socialists could be proud if he's prepared to take on the vested interests of the City.

If Blair does this he will win a place in history as the prime minister who transformed and modernised Britain. He would rank

---

\* Speech made on 14 October 1965, cited in R Clough, *op cit*.

with Churchill and Attlee as a truly great leader . . .\*

Well, we know what preoccupied Winston Churchill and Clement Attlee. Their preoccupation was the defence of British imperialism and the reconstruction of the shattered British economy at the expense of the vast colonial masses. If there are 'socialists' – and to our shame there are – who feel proud of the achievements of Churchill and Attlee, these are renegades from socialism who find it convenient to wear a 'socialist' mask to dupe the working class. It is precisely such kind of renegade 'socialists' who limbered up to greet an expected Blair government with pride.

Be it said in parenthesis, never was it the purpose of either Churchill, Attlee or any other British prime minister 'to take on the vested interests of the City'! On the contrary, for them it was an article of faith, and a fundamental principle of policy, to *defend* the vested interests of the City. A Blair government could be no different in this regard. Mr Livingstone, and he must have known this, was indulging in the wildest of illusion-mongering in even suggesting that a Blair government might 'take on the vested interests of the City'.

## 12. Ireland

In regard to the struggle of the Irish people for national self-determination and for the unification of their forcibly divided and occupied country, Labour's attitude was unremittingly hostile.

In the face of the growing strength of the civil rights movement, and the inability of the Stormont semi-fascist statelet to crush this movement, the Labour government sent troops to

---

\* 'The right face for the job' by Ken Livingstone, *The Guardian*, 12 June 1995.

Ireland in 1969 to suppress the nationalists.

In 1974, it put on the statute book the notorious Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) and presided over the Guildford Four and Birmingham Six trials, which since then have been exposed to be the most scandalous frame-ups of the twentieth century, which pass for British bourgeois justice.

Between 1976 and 1979, the next Labour government, headed first by Harold Wilson and then by James Callaghan, instituted a regime of terror through the police stations in the six counties of the occupied north of Ireland. The government withdrew political status from Irish national-liberation fighters in prison and established the notorious H-Block prisons to enforce its agenda of criminalising (and thus delegitimising) their struggle.<sup>93</sup>

### **13. Southall and Blair Peach**

Already gasping its last breath, in 1979 the Callaghan government sent five thousand police officers to Southall, home of large numbers of Britain's Indian community, to protect (in the name of 'free speech') a rally of the fascist National Front. The white supremacist organisation was using the cover of a general election to stage a provocative 'election rally', to attend which black people were not allowed. The resulting police carnage left one dead (New Zealand-born teacher Blair Peach), one thousand injured, eight hundred arrested and three hundred and forty-two tried on trumped-up charges.<sup>94</sup>

The racist police of the Special Patrol Group (SPG) were later disbanded when an enquiry showed them to have set out to use illegally doctored weapons on the crowd in Southall, with the intention of inflicting maximum physical harm. But, true to the form of the British imperial state, none of the officers faced any charge for their murder of Blair Peach or their crimes against thousands of other workers that day.

The SPG was simply rebranded and reorganised into the notorious Territorial Support Group (TSG), whose brutality has become well known to workers throughout Britain.

#### 14. Working-class struggles

As regarding the working class and its struggle, Labour was as vicious as any Tory government could be.

The thrust of its policy was to drive working-class living standards down through a host of devices such as productivity deals, statutory wage restraints, incomes policies and the notorious 'social contract', which justly came to be known as the social con-trick.<sup>95</sup>

Finding itself resisted on the industrial front, Labour published its *In Place of Strife*\* in an effort to control strike activity. Working-class opposition forced the withdrawal of the union-bashing proposals contained in these proposals.

This is how *The Economist* evaluated the effects of the second stage of Labour's incomes policy:

. . . the seven percent by which the past year's ten percent increase in earnings fell behind its seventeen percent increase in prices represents the biggest recorded fall in the average Briton's real disposable income for over a hundred years: worse than anything that happened in the 1930s.†

All this was accompanied by a dramatic fall in state expenditure as a ratio of the gross national product (GNP) – from 49.35 percent in 1975 to 43.25 percent in 1978 – with all the attendant harmful effects on the poorest sections of society.

---

\* B Castle (employment secretary), *In Place of Strife: A Policy for Industrial Relations*, Government white paper, 1969.

† *The Economist*, August 1976. Cited in R Clough, *op cit*.

## **15. Paving the way for Thatcher's Tory government**

The result of Labour's attacks on wide sections of the working class was the 'Winter of Discontent' of 1978, during which poorly-paid council workers went on strike.<sup>96</sup>

During the general election of the following summer, a combination of abstentions on the part of a sizeable section of the poorer workers, and the defection from Labour to the Tories by a significant section of the skilled workers (C2 voters in the pollsters' terminology) brought the Tories to office under Margaret Thatcher's leadership.

## **16. Labour's record in opposition**

After 1979, Labour was in opposition until 1997. In the 1992 general election it received its fourth consecutive defeat.<sup>97</sup> Its response to each defeat was to move further to the right in an effort to win the votes of the privileged layers of the working class and sections of the middle-class (petty-bourgeois) portions of the population who determine the outcome of elections.

As to the poorer sections of the workers, the deprived at home and abroad, they formed no part of Labour's calculations. Here are a few examples of Labour's rabidly anti-working class and undeviating imperialist stance during this period of opposition.

## **17. Bobby Sands and the Irish hunger strikes**

During the 1981 hunger strike<sup>80</sup> in which ten Irish prisoners, including Bobby Sands, became martyrs in their fight for recognition as political prisoners, Labour supported the government.



This was not surprising since it was Labour that had deprived the Irish liberation fighters of their political prisoner status in the first place.

### **18. The Falklands war, the first Gulf war and nuclear weapons**

Labour beat the jingoistic war drum even more loudly than the Thatcherites during the Malvinas (Falklands) conflict<sup>98</sup> and enthusiastically supported British imperialist participation in the Gulf war against Iraq.<sup>99</sup> It confirmed its commitment to the warmongering aggressive Nato alliance and to Britain's nuclear weapons.

### **19. Labour opposes working-class defence of its rights and wages**

At home, Labour made sure of its total condemnation of all and any resistance by the working class and the oppressed. It denounced in no uncertain terms the 1981<sup>100</sup> and 1985<sup>101</sup> revolts of the youth in inner-city areas of Britain. It opposed all mobilisation against the hated poll tax.<sup>102</sup>

### **20. The miners' strike of 1984-5**

However, during this period the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) coal strike of 1984-5 was the single most significant battle, which brought to the fore not only the split within the working class (the privileged upper layer, the labour aristocracy, versus the mass of the working people), but also made strikingly clear that Labour was on the side of the privileged

layer, committed to the defence of the latter's interests, which in turn required the defence of the interests of British imperialism – it being economically impossible to defend one without defending the other.

So it was that the Labour and trade union leaderships joined forces with the Coal Board, the Thatcher administration, the Nottinghamshire miners (who enjoyed conditions of relatively better job security and terms of service), the media, the police and even the intelligence services to defeat this historic struggle.

On top of the Nottinghamshire miners, who became willing hirelings of the Coal Board in the latter's attempts at defeating the strike, the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation (ISTC), abetted by its general secretary Bill Sirs,<sup>103</sup> cooperated with non-union labour to unload coal at Hunterston in Scotland, thus keeping the nearby Ravenscraig steelworks in commission for weeks. The Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunications and Plumbing Union (EETPU; the power workers' union),<sup>104</sup> led by the notorious Eric Hammond,<sup>105</sup> also decided against supporting the miners, while TUC general secretary Len Murray<sup>106</sup> did everything possible to sabotage any working-class action in support of the dispute.

As for the scab-in-chief, to wit, Labour leader Neil Kinnock, with characteristic hypocrisy and double standards he condemned the miners for defending themselves against police violence. From the rostrum of the September 1984 TUC congress he nauseatingly proclaimed:

Violence, I do not have to tell this congress . . . disgusts union opinion and divides union attitudes . . . and is alien to the temperament and intelligence of the British trade union movement.

This self-proclaimed apostle of peace and non-violence had

little difficulty in accepting daily police violence against the mining communities and pickets, let alone giving enthusiastic support for the imperialist Gulf war against Iraq and the barbarity of the zionist state of Israel against the Palestinian and Lebanese people.

The year 1994, nine years after the defeat of the coal strike, saw the publication of *The Enemy Within: MI5, Maxwell and the Scargill Affair* (1994). In this excellent book, author Seumas Milne revealed in great detail the powerful range of forces arrayed against the NUM, which together succeeded in defeating the strikers, although they failed to break the NUM president, Arthur Scargill – a special target of their hate and slander campaign.

According to Milne, in order to defeat the miners, Mrs Thatcher, who regarded them as 'the enemy within', not only employed thousands of police who subjected the miners to brutal violence and imposed an occupation regime in the mining villages, but also instituted a covert operation run by the MI5, the Special Branch and the government's GCHQ spy centre. For the Thatcherites, no mean and dirty trick was too low to stoop to, for as Milne rightly observed:

As far as the Thatcherite faction in the Cabinet and their supporters in the security services were concerned, the NUM under Scargill's stewardship was the most serious domestic threat to state security in modern times. And they showed themselves prepared to encourage any and every method available from the secret financing of strike-breakers to mass electronic surveillance, from the manipulation of *agents provocateurs* to attempts to 'fit up' miners' officials in order to undermine or discredit the union and its leaders.

Milne revealed that Thatcher gave personal authorisation for a mass electronic surveillance operation, in which GCHQ and

the US National Security Agency (NSA) facilities in Europe were used to trace miners' money.

In coordinating the scabbing activities of the working miners, Thatcher utilised the services of the millionaire David Hart,

. . . who contributed his own money and raised half a million pounds from Lord Hanson, Sir Hector Laing and others, funds which were to be put at the disposal of the scabs for use in court actions to get the strike outlawed. The resultant fines and the NUM's refusal to pay put the latter in contempt of court and its assets liable to sequestration.

It was essential, Hart believed, that the miners should be forced to return to work without a settlement – which at the initiative of Kim Howells and others in the NUM's South Wales area is what eventually happened.

The government employed the services of the former chief executive of the NUM, Roger Windsor, planted by MI5 to destabilise the union. Sent by the NUM to Libya during the strike to get the Libyan government to stop oil exports to Britain, Windsor insisted on personally meeting Libyan leader Colonel Gaddafi and embracing him in the glare of television cameras, thus providing a heaven-sent propaganda gift to the government and the bourgeois media.

Even after the strike was over, the government's attempts to destroy Scargill, who in providing such courageous and principled leadership to his membership during the strike had come to richly deserve the hatred of the ruling class, continued. In 1990, the MI5 again used Roger Windsor, who by then had departed from the NUM, to approach the *Mirror* with a false story that Scargill and NUM secretary Peter Heathfield had used Libyan money to redeem their mortgages.

Without the slightest attempt at verification, the *Mirror* paid £80,000 to Windsor and splashed the story across its pages,

along with an editorial signed personally by Robert Maxwell, the owner of the *Mirror* since 1984 and a Labour supporter. Whilst the tale about Arthur Scargill and the Libyan money was a patent falsehood, and was shown to be so, it is pertinent, not to say ironical, that Maxwell went on to embezzle £400 million of his employees' pension funds and committed hara-kiri, throwing himself from his luxury yacht, while the ruling-class agent and class-traitor Windsor is being proceeded against by the NUM in the French courts for the return of NUM money that he really did use to redeem his own mortgage.

However, the most shameful section in Milne's book is that which deals with the Labour party's dirty tricks in defeating the NUM. The Labour and TUC leadership hated Scargill and the NUM no less than did the Thatcherites. Not only had the Labour leadership known of the *Mirror* smear story in advance, but the active involvement of Labour's coal spokesman Kevin Baron and former NUM employee and now MP Kim Howells, shows that the smear campaign had Labour's full endorsement.

Representing as they did the spirit of resistance against the daily encroachments of capital, the miners and their leader presented a challenge to the Labour party, this proven representative of the interests of the labour aristocracy and of British imperialism alike, no less than to the Tory party. By their heroic resistance, the miners were setting an eloquent example to other sections of the working class – an example that could not but rouse the fury of the parties of imperialism, Labour included.

As Milne so correctly remarked:

The Scargill affair depended on a coincidence of purpose between an exotic array of interests, foremost among which were the Thatcher administration and the Labour leadership.

The coal strike proved, except to the politically blind who will

not see, that, if the NUM were rightly regarded by British imperialism as 'the enemy within', the British proletariat has, for its part, every right, nay, every duty, to treat the Labour party as its own 'enemy within'.

Unless it learns to do so, it will see victory no more than it will see its ears.

**Harpal Brar**

London, July 1995

## NOTES

- 1 The phrase 'clipping coupons' was memorably coined by VI Lenin in his seminal work *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916). He used it to emphasise how ever-wider sections of the population in imperialist countries are no longer engaged in any productive activity, but live parasitically on a cut of the wealth that is produced by workers in other parts of the world and exported back to the global centres of imperialist finance capital. p14
- 2 By January 1982, more than twelve percent (one in eight) of the workforce was unemployed, a level that had not been seen for fifty years. In northern Ireland, the unemployment rate was twenty percent (one in five). p15
- 3 Never mind that the Tory party has a two hundred-year and the British bourgeoisie it serves a four-hundred year history of oppressing the working people of Britain and elsewhere. p15
- 4 For more on the causes of the collapse and counter-revolution in the USSR, see H Brar, *Perestroika, the Complete Collapse of Revisionism*, 1992. See also CPGB-ML pamphlet by H Brar, *Revisionism and the Demise of the USSR*, 2011. Both available from [shop.thecommunists.org](http://shop.thecommunists.org). p15
- 5 In particular, the USA launched wars against Iraq (1991, 2003), Yugoslavia (1999), Afghanistan (2001), Syria (2011), Libya (2011), Yemen (2011), Ukraine (2014, escalated in 2022). 'Smaller' (ie, involving fewer troops) wars have been waged against Somalia (1992, 2007), Bosnia and other Yugoslav states (1992 onwards) and Haiti (1994 onwards). Many more 'military operations' have been carried out in Latin America, Asia and Africa under the guise of the endless 'war on terror' and 'war on drugs'. p16
- 6 Having so placed all their hopes in Labour, and failing to comprehend the real reasons for the defeats suffered by the working class during this period, a deep mood of defeat and pessimism set in amongst the self-

identifying 'left' comprised of Trotskyites, revisionists and various other left-Labour hangers-on. This in turn led to a deepening of their opportunism; a further turn away from the recognition that the working class is the agent of social change. p16

- 7 US secretary of state Madeleine Albright, questioned about the deaths of Iraqi children as a result of sanctions that prevented Iraq accessing food and medicines, became infamous for this sickening interchange with interviewer Lesley Stahl on the primetime US TV show *60 Minutes*:

Stahl: 'We have heard that half a million children have died. I mean, that is more children than died in Hiroshima. And, you know, is the price worth it?' Albright: 'I think that is a very hard choice, but the price, we think, the price is worth it. p17

- 8 This international 'quartet' was made up of the United Nations, the European Union, the USA and Russia. Perfectly predictably, Tony Blair achieved nothing in terms of reviving a peace process that the Zionists were intent on abusing and dismantling (with every cooperation and support from imperialism and such 'arbitrators' as Blair himself). He was able to use his position to further his personal business interests as an international 'consultant' to governments around the world. We leave it to our readers to imagine what kind of regimes find the services of such a faithful watchdog of imperialism to be worth paying through the nose for. p18
- 9 For a detailed analysis of Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour party, see CPGB-ML pamphlet by Various authors, *The Rise and Fall of Project Corbyn*, 2020. p20
- 10 The main body of this pamphlet is taken from H Brar's seminal work *Social Democracy, the Enemy Within* (1995), a detailed and damning account of the history and activity of the Labour party from the date of its inception until the time of the book's publication. The book is available to buy from [shop.thecommunists.org](http://shop.thecommunists.org). p23
- 11 Today we can add to this list the large and growing number of privileged workers employed in the supposedly independent (but really totally enmeshed into the fabric of the imperialist state machinery) charitable and 'non-governmental organisation' (NGO) sector. p24
- 12 John Kenneth Galbraith (1908-2006), an influential Canadian bourgeois economist, used the term in his book *The Culture of Contentment* (1992). p24
- 13 Chartism was the country's first mass revolutionary working-class movement. Active in Britain in the 1830s and 1840s, the Chartists held mass meetings and demonstrations involving millions of proletarians and petty-bourgeois all over the country. They also founded a prolific and widely-read



workers' press, most notably the Northern Star, edited by an Irish radical, Feargus O'Connor, from 1837-52. Chartist papers were regularly read out loud in coffee houses, public houses and market squares throughout this period.

The Chartists published several petitions to Parliament (the biggest of which garnered three million signatures), the most famous of which was called the People's Charter (1842), from which the movement took its name. The Charter demanded universal suffrage for men (ie, abolition of the property qualification for voting); secret ballot (instead of public hand-raising); the removal of property qualifications and introduction of salaries for Members of Parliament (in order that workers could become MPs); electoral districts representing equal numbers of people (ie, the abolition of 'rotten' boroughs and lack of meaningful representation for the urban population); and annually elected parliaments (as the best way to tackle corruption in elections and ensure the possibility of recall of unsuitable MPs). Parliament refused to hear the petitioners and rejected every point of their programme.

As the movement became more and more radicalised, it inspired a militant wing whose members believed the only way for workers to achieve their aims was through an armed uprising. These were planned in various parts of the country, especially in Wales and Yorkshire, and one in Newport (south Wales) actually broke out in 1839. Before it could spark similar revolts elsewhere, the Newport rising was bloodily suppressed. The movement continued to be split between those who believed in 'moral force' (the power of argument and petition) and those who argued for 'physical force' through strikes, uprisings etc.

The movement continued to grow, however, instituting the first ever general strike in 1842. Chartists bought land (in order to create voters) and contested several elections. Remarkably, Feargus O'Connor was elected as MP for Nottingham in 1847. More often, the Chartist participation was designed to highlight the undemocratic nature of the system. Repressive measures aimed at stopping a mass demonstration in 1848 had the effect of inspiring more militant activity. In Yorkshire especially, workers armed and drilled in preparation for clashes with the state.

The government ultimately crushed the Chartists with brutal reprisals and the arrest of their leaders. Despite its apparent defeat, many of the Chartists' main demands were gradually achieved over the ensuing decades (with the exception of universal suffrage, which did not come until after the first world war and the October Revolution). p26

- 14 The first trade union-sponsored MPs aligned themselves with the 'radical' section of the Liberal party until persistent anti-union actions by Liberal governments convinced them of the need for their own parliamentary organisation. p26

- 15 John Maynard Keynes (1863-1946) was a British economist who advocated the use of government spending as a means of averting the periodic economic crises that are an unavoidable feature of the capitalist mode of production. p27
- 16 Petrushka was a character in Nikolai Gogol's 1842 novel *Dead Souls*, a serf who loved books although he didn't really understand what he read. p30
- 17 In the thirty years since this was written, the trend has continued. Manufacture in Britain now provides two and a half million jobs according to manufacturers' organisation Make UK. p31
- 18 According to the Office for National Statistics, UK outward foreign direct investment in 2021 had risen to £1,769 billion (£1.77 trillion). (See 'Total UK outward FDI stock directional basis, current prices', ONS, 23 January 2023.) The USA's outward FDI total for the same year was \$6,369 billion (roughly £5,000 billion). (See 'Direct investment by country and industry, 2022', Bureau of Economic Analysis, 20 July 2023.) p32
- 19 John Stuart Mill (1806-73) was a nineteenth-century philosopher, economist, politician and civil servant. He served from 1865-68 as a Liberal party Member of Parliament (MP), and is considered to be one of the 'great minds' of English liberalism. p35
- 20 The Communist Party of Great Britain (Marxist-Leninist), (CPGB-ML) was subsequently formed in 2004. The task now is to build the party into an effective fighting force. p39
- 21 This chapter was originally published in the anti-imperialist working-class newspaper *Lalkar*, January 1995. p40
- 22 John Elliot Burns (1858-1943) was one of the militant leaders of the New Unionist movement. In the 1880s, he was a radical member of the Social Democratic Federation (SDF). He later left the party to focus on trade unionism and, with Tom Mann, was one of the organisers of the successful London dock strike of 1889.  
  
In the same year, he became a Progressive party (aligned with the Liberal party) councillor for Battersea on the first London County Council. In 1892, he was elected MP for Battersea on a Liberal party ticket. In 1905, he became the second ever working-class government minister, appointed by prime minister Henry Campbell-Bannerman as president of the Local Government Board. p49
- 23 Thomas Mann (1856-1941) was a largely self-educated worker from Coventry, who had begun working in his local mine at the age of ten. Working first in mining and then in engineering, Mann became an active trade unionist and gradually absorbed socialist politics. He joined the SDF

in Battersea in 1884, where he formed the Eight Hour League, successfully pressurising the Trades Union Congress (TUC) to adopt the eight-hour day as a key goal.

After reading *The Communist Manifesto* in 1886, Mann became a communist. He now believed the main purpose of the labour movement should be to overthrow capitalism, rather than just to ameliorate the condition of workers under it. He moved to Newcastle in 1887 and organised the SDF in the north of England. He managed Keir Hardie's electoral campaign in Lanark before returning to London in 1888, where he worked in support of the Bryant and May match factory strike.

With John Burns and Henry Hyde Champion, he began producing a journal, the *Labour Elector*, in 1888. One of the main organisers of the victorious 1889 London dock strike, Mann co-authored with Ben Tillett the pamphlet *New Trades Unionism* (1890).

Mann led the 1911 Liverpool general transport strike, during which Home Secretary Winston Churchill sent twelve thousand troops and a fully armed gunboat, in addition to tens of thousands of police, to beat the workers off the streets.

In 1912, Mann was convicted under the Incitement to Mutiny Act 1797 of publishing an article in *The Syndicalist*, as an 'Open letter to British soldiers', urging them to refuse to shoot at strikers (later reprinted as a leaflet, 'Don't Shoot'); his prison sentence was quashed as a result of public pressure.

Mann took a pacifist position during the first world war, but he welcomed the Russian October Revolution in 1917 and Russia's new communist government, calling for Soviets to be formed in the United Kingdom. In 1920, he was one of the founding members of the Communist Party of Great Britain. In the same year, Mann became a leader of the Red International of Labour Unions. He chaired the British Bureau from its inception and went on to head its successor organisation in Britain, the National Minority Movement, until 1929.

Mann continued to actively champion socialism, communism and the co-operative movement until his death in 1941. During the Spanish civil war, he had wanted to fight on the Republican side, but was by that time far too old. A unit of the British International Brigade, the Tom Mann Centuria, was named in his honour. p49

- 24 Robert Owen (1771-1858) was a Welsh textile manufacturer, founder of utopian socialism and of the cooperative movement. Owen used his position as owner-manager at a textile mill in New Lanark, Scotland to experiment with raising conditions for workers, improving wages, education and housing. Since the community was commercially successful, many social

reformers came to study Owen's methods.

In 1824, he moved to America and put most of his fortune into an experimental socialistic community at New Harmony, Indiana. This and other Owenite communities failed, however, and Owen returned to London in 1828. He continued to champion the working class, to develop cooperatives and the trade union movement, and to support child labour legislation and free coeducational schools.

For a detailed critique of Owen's utopian (as opposed to scientific) socialism, see F Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific* (1880). p50

- 25 Dani Wadada Nabudere (1932-2011), Ugandan politician, author of *The Political Economy of Imperialism* (1977). p53
- 26 Karl Kautsky (1854-1938) was an Austrian Marxist and comrade of Friedrich Engels. He was the leading theoretician of Germany's socialist (then called social-democratic) party and founding editor of its influential theoretical journal *Die Neue Zeit* from 1883 until 1917. Since the German party was at that time the largest and best-organised in the world, Kautsky was widely acknowledged to be the theoretical leader of world socialism during this period.

In the run-up to WW1, his analysis of imperialism diverged from that of VI Lenin, and during the war they came into open confrontation, as Kautsky put forward a position of slightly disguised social-chauvinism and argued that imperialism was a reactionary policy of a section of the bourgeoisie rather than a definite stage in the development of capitalism. He tried to act as a conciliator between the two wings of the socialist movement, which had been split irrevocably by the war into reactionary social-chauvinists who mobilised in favour of their own ruling classes and revolutionaries who tried to use the war to build a movement for revolution.

The most thoroughgoing and theoretically consistent party of the revolutionary wing was the Bolsheviks in Russia, led by VI Lenin. When the Bolsheviks succeeded in turning the imperialist war into a civil war and overthrowing the Russian ruling class, establishing the world's first socialist state, Kautsky came out against the October Revolution and sank into obscurity thereafter.

Although he undoubtedly made useful contributions to Marxism, Kautsky is best remembered for the retreat into reaction of his later years, immortalised in many wartime polemics of Lenin and in particular in *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky* (1918). p56

- 27 This chapter was originally published in *Lalkar*, March 1995. p61
- 28 James Keir Hardie (1856-1915) was a Scottish trade unionist and founder

of the Labour party, serving as its first parliamentary leader from 1906-8. Born in Lanark to a poor working-class family, he worked from the age of seven and was working in the mines by age ten, while also attending night school.

In his determination to escape the conditions of his family's hand-to-mouth existence, he joined an evangelical church and the temperance movement. A well-known preacher and agitator by the age of twenty, he led local miners in strikes in 1880 and 1881, becoming a full-time union organiser for the Ayrshire Miners Union, which he himself had founded, in 1886.

After concluding that the working class needed its own political party, Hardie founded the first Scottish Labour party in 1888, alongside Robert Bontine Cunninghame Graham, who went on to found the National Party of Scotland (one of the forerunners of the Scottish National party of today). An electoral campaign in Scotland was unsuccessful, but Hardie was soon elected to Parliament in West Ham (then Essex, now London) as an independent, going on to form the Independent Labour party (ILP) the following year. He lost his seat in 1895, but was re-elected to Parliament in 1900 for Merthyr Tydfil in South Wales. In the same year, he was one of the founders of the union-based Labour Representation Committee, which was renamed the Labour party in 1906.

A radical Liberal at heart, and one famed for his 'pragmatism', Hardie identified strongly with Fabian socialism. Among other causes, he fought for women's suffrage, and spoke in favour of both Indian and Irish home rule. He was also rabidly anti-immigration, denouncing Lithuanian miners working in Scotland for their 'filthy habits' and propagation of disease. In 1908, during a visit to South Africa, he said the socialist movement stood for equal rights for every race but that 'we do not say all races are equal; no one dreams of doing that'.

Hardie, as a lifelong pacifist, opposed the first world war before its outbreak and in its early months. His pacifism stopped short of wanting British imperialism to exit the war on terms that would be unfavourable to its interests, however, and by the time of his death in 1915 he was claiming that his speeches had encouraged young men to enlist.

29 Edward Robertshaw Hartley (1855-1918) was a working-class socialist who served as a councillor in Bradford on the Independent Labour party's ticket for ten years. During this period he left the ILP and joined the Social Democratic Federation, standing as a candidate in several parliamentary elections. A member of the social-chauvinist Clarion Van movement, Hartley came out strongly in favour of the first world war and left the SDF to join the British Workers League. p63

30 Beatrice (1858-1943) and Sidney Webb (1859-1947) were reformers of the

middle-class utopian socialist type. They believed in a combination of persuading the upper classes through facts of the need for social reform and in the need for an educated, civilised class capable of implementing such reforms in the interests of the workers, whose independent action they had no real faith in, despite their intellectual identification with 'socialism'.

The Webbs were early members of the Fabian society and were prolific social researchers, writing histories of British trade unionism, industrial democracy, English local government and more. Sidney Webb served for many years on the London County Council and is known for having instituted a system of secondary state education in London. The Webbs established technical and other post-school education facilities, including founding the London School of Economics and reorganising the University of London. They also founded the political and literary weekly magazine *The New Statesman* in 1913.

Before focusing on the Labour party, the Webbs had tried to 'permeate' their reform ideas into the government apparatus by working to influence high-profile Tory and Liberal politicians. Beatrice served from 1905-9 on the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws, producing her famous *Minority Report*, which advocated universal social insurance.

Beatrice and Sidney Webb joined Labour in 1914, after the outbreak of the first world war, and quickly rose to prominence in the party. As a member of its executive committee, Sidney drafted Labour's first real policy statement, *Labour and the New Social Order* (1918). He was elected as an MP in Durham in 1922 and served in both the 1924 (president of the Board of Trade) and 1929 (colonial secretary) Labour governments. He was promoted to the House of Lords as Baron Passfield in 1929.

Various proofs of the Webbs' racist views regarding the empire and the colonised peoples are reproduced in this pamphlet. Their names will be forever and most shamefully linked with the theory of eugenics. Along with fellow Fabians and petty-bourgeois 'socialists' including George Bernard Shaw, Harold Laski, John Maynard Keynes and Marie Stopes, they believed that the poorest should be prevented as much as possible from breeding in order to promote the 'high-calibre gene pool' from which people like themselves were obviously drawn, and whose prominence was required for the continued sway of superior British civilisation. They claimed as justification the revolutionary insights into evolution contained in the works of Charles Darwin.

Despite all this, the Webbs were enthused when they visited the Soviet Union in 1932, publishing two books endorsing Stalin's USSR towards the end of their life: *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation?* in 1935 and *The Truth About Soviet Russia* (1942).

31 This chapter was originally published in *Lalkar*, May 1995. p67

- 32 The Taff Vale judgement (22 July 1901) was the outcome of a court case in which the Taff Vale Railway Company successfully sued strikers for damages after more than a thousand of its employees had gone on strike. Their union, the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, was forced to pay a crippling 'compensation' of £23,000.

This House of Lords decision (then the highest court of appeal in Britain) gave tremendous impetus to the formation of the Labour party, as trade unions affiliated to the Labour Representation Committee and campaigned to have Labour representatives elected to Parliament. The effects of the judgement were to some extent reversed when Liberal and Labour MPs banded together to pass the Trade Disputes Act of 1906 – see especially its section 4. p69

- 33 John McKean McLachlan (1873-1930) was a left-wing member of the ILP in Manchester. p70

- 34 The liquidators were a faction of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) who, in the period of reaction that followed the first Russian revolution of 1905-7, considered that the best way forward was to dissolve (liquidate) the illegal party apparatus and concentrate entirely on legal forms of struggle that would be acceptable to the tsarist hangmen who were then in the full swing of oppressing and crushing the militant working class and its political organisations by most brutal and terroristic means. p72

- 35 John Robert Clynes (1869-1949) was a Labour MP (1903-31 and 1935-45). An avid supporter of the first world war, he served for a while as minister of food control in the Liberal-led wartime coalition government of David Lloyd George (1918-19). During his brief stint as leader (1921-2) he led Labour's 1922 electoral breakthrough, when it became the second-largest party in Parliament. Clynes served as privy seal in the first Labour government of 1924 and as home secretary in the second (1929-31). p72

- 36 The Second International was an international federation of the growing and influential working-class socialist parties, which met and functioned between 1889 and 1914. Its first congress opened on 14 July 1889 in Paris and was attended by delegates from twenty countries. It passed resolutions on working-class struggle and organisation, and on key aspects of world politics.

Chief among its struggles were the campaign for trade union recognition and for the eight-hour day. It was at a huge Labour demonstration in favour of the eight-hour day, held in Haymarket Chicago in 1884, that the police shot down several of the demonstrators, triggering the formation of the Second International and its decision that 1 May should henceforth be marked as International Workers' Day.

The International fought for the equality of women and in 1910 declared International Women's Day, first celebrated on 19 March and then on 8 March after the main day of the women's marches in 1917 during the February Revolution in Russia. The Labour party, Social Democratic Federation (SDF) and Independent Labour party (ILP) all sent delegates to the Second International, as did the RSDLP, whose delegate in 1910, 1912 and 1914 was VI Lenin.

The International broke apart under the pressure of WW1, when many of the social-democratic parties of the major imperialist powers proved to be social-chauvinists, voting for war credits and acting as willing recruiting sergeants amongst the working class for their own capitalist rulers. The victorious Great October Socialist Revolution enabled the Russian social-democrats (henceforward called communists) to initiate the Third (Communist) International (the Comintern) in 1917, whose key tenet was proletarian internationalism. p74

- 37 Voting for 'war credits' meant allowing the state to raise the funds to mobilise and equip its colossal armies, and was a necessary prelude for the waging of the first great inter-imperialist war that engulfed the chief imperialist powers in 1914-18. The imperialists formed into two great camps, ranged around the chief belligerents of the Triple Entente of France, Britain and Russia (and Japan) on the one hand, and the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austro-Hungary and Italy on the other. p76
- 38 Carl von Clausewitz (1780-1831) was a Prussian general and military theorist. His posthumously-published book *On War (Vom Kriege)* was considered one of the most important treatises on political-military analysis and strategy ever written, and remains influential to this day. p77
- 39 Philipp Scheidemann (1865-1939) was a member of the German Social-Democratic party and a member of the Reichstag (parliament) who supported his 'fatherland' in the first world war. When revolution broke out in Germany in 1918, Scheidemann worked to defeat it, agreeing with the imperial army command that 'Bolshevism' was a greater danger than the external enemy. In aid of defeating Bolshevism he proclaimed the Weimar republic and organised its first government. p96
- 40 Gustav Noske (1868-1946) was member of the German Social-Democratic party who supported the first world war under the slogan 'defence of the fatherland'. He became minister of defence in the first Weimar government between 1919 and 1920 and gained notoriety for his willingness to use army and paramilitary forces in the bloody suppression of the socialist/communist-led workers' uprisings of 1919, which resulted, for example, in the declaration of the Bavarian Soviet Republic, founded in April 1919. p96
- 41 Alexander Kerensky (1881-1970) was a member of the Socialist



Revolutionary party, elected to the Russian Duma (parliament) from 1912. At the time of the bourgeois revolution of February 1917, Kerensky was both a member of the Provisional Committee of the Duma and vice-chairman of the newly formed Petrograd Soviet. He used his popularity as a radical democrat to try to drum up support for continuing to fight in the first world war, despite its huge unpopularity.

The masses who had carried out the revolution had expected to be able to leave the front after the removal of the tsar. Kerensky became head of the provisional government and commander in chief of the armed forces in the summer of 1917. His government tried to organise a huge military push, under pressure from Anglo-French capital, and in the aftermath of its disastrous defeat at the hands of the Germans was ousted in October by the Bolshevik revolution, which was fought on the slogan of 'peace, land and bread'. After the October Revolution, Kerensky deserted Russia for the USA, where he worked for the Hoover Institution at Stanford university in California, contributing to the development of anti-Soviet propaganda. p97

- 42 Norman John Klugmann (1912-77), generally known as James, was a leading British communist writer and WW2 Soviet spy, who became the official historian of the Communist Party of Great Britain, writing its first two volumes. p100
- 43 Frank Hodges (1887-1947) was the general secretary of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain. For his services in betraying the strike of 1921 he was elected as Labour MP for the Lichfield constituency in Staffordshire. An MP for just one year, he was appointed First Lord of the Admiralty by Ramsay MacDonald in the first Labour government of 1924. p102
- 44 Rajani Palme Dutt (1896-1974) was a leading political publicist and theoretician in the Communist Party of Great Britain. Born in Cambridge, England, his father, Dr Upendra Dutt, was an Indian surgeon and his mother, Anna Palme, was Swedish – a great aunt of future Swedish prime minister Olof Palme. Dutt studied Classics at Oxford, where he obtained a first class degree despite having been suspended for a time because of his deemed subversive propaganda as a conscientious objector in WW1.

Dutt joined the Labour Research Department (LRD), a left-wing statistical bureau, in 1919 and, along with his brother Clemens Dutt, the newly formed CPGB in 1920. In 1921, he founded *The Labour Monthly*, a publication which he edited until his death. In 1922, Dutt was named the editor of the CPGB's weekly newspaper, the *Workers' Weekly*. Dutt served on the executive committee of the CPGB from 1923 until 1965 and was the party's chief theorist for many years.

He was briefly appointed general secretary of the party from the time of Britain's declaration of war against Nazi Germany until the German invasion of the USSR brought the Soviet Union into the war on the side

of Britain and France. He replaced (and was subsequently replaced by) general secretary Harry Pollitt, who had initially endorsed Britain's entry into the war as a progressive move (the Comintern's analysis was that the war from 1939-41 was an inter-imperialist war in which the workers had no side, but this changed when the USSR entered the war and workers everywhere were mobilised to defeat fascism and defend the socialist motherland). p106

- 45 Under the 1919 Versailles treaty, reparations were chiefly exacted from Germany by Britain and France, tsarist Russia having fallen to the great uprising of the Russian Revolution. Because of the financial situation in Austria, Hungary and Turkey after the war, few to no reparations were paid and the requirements for reparations were cancelled. The latter paid chiefly with the balkanisation of their empires, which were swallowed as 'protectorates' and 'mandates' by the British and French.

That this had been the explicit reason for waging the predatory war became clear when the fledgling Soviet republic published the secret treaties of the Triple Entente (made between the tsar, Britain and France). The partition of the middle east under the Sykes-Picot agreement and the seizure of further colonies in Africa by Britain and France were direct outcomes of the British and French victory in WW1. p109

- 46 James Henry Thomas (1874-1949) was general secretary during the successful national rail strike of 1919 that was called jointly by the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR) and Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (Aslef) against proposed wage reductions. In 1921, Thomas played a leading role in the 'Black Friday' crisis, when rail and transport unions failed to come to the aid of miners facing wage reductions, as had been previously agreed.

Before the 1926 general strike, the TUC asked Thomas to negotiate with Stanley Baldwin's Conservative government, but the talks were unsuccessful and the strike went ahead. Thomas took every measure he could, along with other leaders of the TUC, to sabotage, undermine and betray the general strike.

He was appointed secretary of state for the colonies in the first Labour government of 1924. In the second Labour government of 1929, Thomas was made Lord Privy Seal with special responsibility for employment. He became secretary of state for the dominions in 1930 and retained that position in Ramsay MacDonald's National government (1931-35). As a result of joining the National government Thomas was expelled from the Labour party and the NUR. For the first few months of the National government in 1931 he again served as colonial secretary. p109

- 47 Sydney Haldane Olivier (1859-1943), uncle of the actor Laurence Olivier, was a British civil servant. A Fabian and a member of the Labour party, he

served as governor of Jamaica and as secretary of state for India in the 1924 Labour government. He was raised to the peerage as the First Baron Olivier of Ramsden by Ramsay MacDonald. p110

- 48 Clause iv of the Labour party's rule book, adopted in 1918, was widely seen as a commitment to socialism, even though the word 'socialism' was not explicitly mentioned. It was drafted by the Fabians Sidney and Beatrice Webb and read:

'To secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange, and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service.'

Clause iv was never acted on in practise by any Labour government in office, but it proved a useful tool with which to dupe the masses during the period of the Soviet Union's existence when working-class belief in the ideals of socialism was very high. After the fall of the USSR, when the ruling class no longer felt itself under threat from socialism, even the pretence of a socialist orientation was felt to be unnecessary and more of an electoral liability.

Clause iv was removed under Tony Blair's leadership in 1995 and the party rebranded as 'New' Labour. 'The Red Flag' ceased to be sung at party conferences and the red flag ceased to be an emblem of the party, being replaced by a red rose. It was this that triggered National Union of Mineworkers' leader Arthur Scargill to launch the Socialist Labour party in 1996. p111

- 49 Cawnpore, now Kanpur, was an important British garrison town in the north Indian state of Uttar Pradesh until 1947, when India gained independence. On the west bank of the Ganges river, it is a major trade and commercial centre in north India, with the first woollen mill of India, commonly known as the *Lal Imli* by the British India Corporation (literally meaning 'Red Tamarind', for a brand produced by the mill), established here in 1876.

It was a major industrial hub, sometimes known as the 'Manchester of India'. As such, it was a hub of India's developing working class and a centre of activity of both the young communist and militant home rule and independence movements. p112

- 50 After the defeat of the Ottoman empire in WW1, leading to the birth of modern Turkey, the British empire seized Iraq. Its 'mandate' to rule was submitted to the League of Nations in December 1922. Immediately after the end of the war, Sir Arnold Wilson, the future high commissioner to Iraq, recommended the annexation of Mesopotamia (Iraq) to India as a

colony of India and the Indians, 'such as the government of India administer it and gradually cultivate its vast plains, and settle the warrior Punjab races in it'.

The northern city of Mosul was added to the region of British influence following the 1918 Clemenceau-Lloyd George agreement (a verbal agreement between the French and English prime ministers agreeing to the division of the Ottoman empire; precursor to the notorious Sykes-Picot agreement). The proposed Mesopotamia mandate faced difficulties in being established with the outbreak of a nationwide Iraqi revolt in 1920, after which it was decided the territory would become the Kingdom of Iraq, via the Anglo-Iraq Treaty of October 1922.

On 1 October 1922, the Royal Air Force in Iraq was reorganised as RAF Iraq Command and given control of all British forces in the country. In order to impose the chosen Hashemite monarchy onto the Iraqi people, the British used brutal violence, causing ninety-eight thousand casualties as they gassed and bombed the local resistance into submission. During the 1920s and 1930s, the monarchy was engaged with the British in fighting one revolt after another. p113

- 51 Christopher Birdwood (1875-1930), later Lord Thomson, had been an officer in the British army. He came from a military family and was elevated to the peerage by Ramsay MacDonald precisely so that he could join the Labour cabinet. p113
- 52 Samuel John Gurney Hoare (1880-1959), Viscount Templewood, was a senior British Conservative politician who served in various cabinet posts in the Conservative and National governments. He was secretary of state for air throughout much of the 1920s and subsequently secretary of state for India in the 1930s. p113
- 53 William Leach (1870-1949) was elected Labour MP for Bradford Central at the 1922 general election, having unsuccessfully contested the seat in 1918. He was re-elected in 1923 and served as undersecretary of state for air in the first Labour government. p113
- 54 John Ross Campbell (1894-1969) was a British communist activist who was acting editor of the *Workers' Weekly* at the time. p117
- 55 See James Klugmann's *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain* for a detailed account of the Campbell case, which hinged on the allegation that by printing an appeal to soldiers not to allow themselves to be used as strike-breakers the editor of the Communist party's newspaper was guilty of 'feloniously, maliciously and advisedly endeavouring to seduce divers persons unknown . . . from their allegiance to His Majesty'.

The article had appealed to British soldiers to 'let it be known that, neither

in the class war nor in a military war, will you turn your guns on your fellow workers, but instead will line up with your fellow workers in an attack upon the exploiters and capitalists'. The case was withdrawn under pressure from working-class outrage, including from many Labour party branches. p117

- 56 The Dawes Report was concerned with renegotiating the German reparations that had been stipulated in the Versailles Treaty but which were proving impossible to pay. Huge payments continued but were staggered and underwritten by loans from US Wall Street banks.

As part of the agreement, French and Belgian troops were removed from the industrial Ruhr area, which they had occupied to try and force the resumption of coal and steel shipments across the border. These were being withheld as part of German industry's attempts to rebuild itself in a deep economic crisis. The occupation outraged the local population and risked ending German payment of reparations altogether. p118

- 57 In 1926, the British general strike was a watershed moment in the history of British trade unionism and working-class politics. For a detailed analysis of the strike, see CPGB-ML pamphlet by H Brar, *The 1926 British General Strike* (2009). p119

- 58 The Conservative, or Tory party, to its credit, is a militant organisation of class combat. It is unashamedly and avowedly an organ of power of the British capitalist class. The enduring legacy of that organisation, rightly hated by many workers who have been on the receiving end of its policies, is owing to its ability to adapt and change in accordance with the needs of the capitalist class.

The answer for the working class is to develop its own militant political organisation, capable of articulating the political interests of the working class and rallying the latter around its independent programme. p120

- 59 While any political party must rest upon the internal strength of its own membership and the support of its own class, to cut off avenues of support when locked in mortal class struggle can only be regarded as an act of sabotage and betrayal.

Did the capitalist class cut off its own avenues for collecting superprofits and material resources from the exploitation of the colonies in order to ensure that this remained a domestic dispute, even for a day? To pose the question is to answer it, and to show the absurdity of the line of propaganda pushed by the imperialist bourgeoisie.

The capitalist draws strength from his exploitation of the workers, from division of the working class and from wealth drawn from all corners of the globe, which he can use to recruit an army to oppress the mass of

his workers and enforce his will. The workers draw strength from solidarity, from cooperation, from common struggle, from organisation and from internationalism. p120

- 60 Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI) was a British chemical company. For much of its history, it was the largest manufacturer in Britain. Formed through the merger of four leading British chemical companies in 1926, its headquarters were at Millbank in London. ICI was a constituent of the FT 30 and later the FTSE 100 indices. In 1993, the company split off its drug, pesticide and speciality chemical concerns into a new corporation named Zeneca Group PLC (now AstraZeneca). In 2008, what remained of ICI was sold to a Dutch company, AkzoNobel. p121
- 61 The National Unemployed Workers' Committee Movement was founded by the CPGB in 1921 and led by London communist Wal Hannington. Its founding mission was to highlight the plight of the unemployed under capitalism and help unemployed workers become a political force. Known simply as the National Unemployed Workers' Movement (NUWM) from 1929 onwards, the organisation functioned for eighteen years until its dissolution in 1939. For more on the work of the NUWM, see W Hannington, *Unemployed Struggles 1919-1936: My Life and Struggles Amongst the Unemployed* (1936). p122
- 62 Compare this determined right-wing action taken against its own militant socialist membership at the inception of Labour's history with the weak inaction of Jeremy Corbyn, who failed as Labour leader to deselect even a single MP, although the majority of his parliamentary colleagues repeatedly attacked him and his programme. The soul of Labour was determined long ago. p123
- 63 Herbert Stanley Morrison (1888-1965) was a founder member of the London Labour party who served variously as mayor and MP for Hackney, as leader of the London County Council and as a minister in various Labour and National/wartime coalition governments. As home secretary in Winston Churchill's wartime coalition government, the Morrison air-raid shelters that were installed inside homes with no garden (usually under a table) took their name from him.

In return for his services he was made a life peer in 1959. A virulent anti-communist, Morrison cheered the TUC's refusal of financial support for the 1926 general strike from Soviet trade unions. Morrison's grandson Peter Mandelson (aka the 'Spin Doctor' and the 'Prince of Darkness') was a notoriously reactionary and ruthless cabinet minister in the Labour governments of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, and later as Britain's commissioner in the European Union (essentially the EU's ruling cabinet). p123

- 64 Shapurji Saklatvala (1874-1936) was a remarkable speaker, politician, and socialist activist. Born in India, and scion of the wealthy Tata family, he

rejected both his wealth and the British Raj. The Bolshevik revolution in Russia of November 1917 was an inspiration to Saklatvala, and following the establishment of the Communist International in 1919, he became active in attempting to affiliate the ILP with that new organisation.

He settled in Britain, where he took up the cause of the revolutionary working class. There he met and married Sarah Marsh, a working-class English girl from Derbyshire. A staunch anti-imperialist and ardent communist member of the ILP from 1909, he was a great intellect and passionate and persuasive public speaker. He was among the founder members of the original CPGB.

Saklatvala stood as the Communist party candidate in the working-class constituency of Battersea North, in the general election of October 1922, and was elected with 11,311 votes – topping his nearest rival by more than two thousand votes.

The CPGB-ML's party headquarters in Southall, west London, is named Saklatvala Hall in his honour. The hall was opened in December 1999 with an inaugural meeting addressed by veteran British communist and former party chairman Harpal Brar, by Saklatvala's daughter Sehri Saklatvala, and by Arthur Scargill, former leader of the National Union of Mineworkers and of the great 1984-5 miners' strike. p123

- 65 Walter McLennan Citrine (1887-1983) is best remembered now for having written the *ABC of Chairmanship* (1939), which was a Labour party staple and remains a standard business text instructing novices on how to chair a meeting, but his real role was presiding over and perfecting the machinery of class-collaboration from the mid-1920s to the end of WW2.

A working-class Liverpoolian with Italian origins, Citrine rose rapidly through the ranks of the TUC and was appointed as its general secretary in the aftermath of the defeat of the general strike. With other right-wing Labour figures, he had opposed the forming of the Triple Alliance between the miners, railwaymen and transport workers, and played an important role in negotiating the transport workers' (TGWU) withdrawal from the general strike in 1926, thus enabling its defeat.

During his twenty years at the helm of the TUC, Citrine was said to have taken the unions 'from the path of class conflict', and to have moved them 'from Trafalgar Square to Whitehall'. That is, he and his ilk oversaw the process of confining the trade union bureaucracy within respectable bourgeois limits and of embedding its (and the Labour party's) structures into the state machinery of British capitalism.

This push into 'pragmatic' cooperation with employers and government in return for union recognition was entirely acceptable to the capitalist class. Citrine, who was also president of the International Federation of Trade

Unions (IFTU) for most of the same period (1928-45), was rewarded with a peerage in 1935. p125

- 66 Wanhsien, now written as Wanxian, has since been renamed as the Wanzhou District of the Chongqing municipality in central China. p127
- 67 Hankou is now part of Wuhan, capital city of the Hubei province in central China. Canton, now known as Guangzhou, is now the capital of the Guangdong province in southern China. p127
- 68 Chiang Kai-shek (1887-1975), having trained as a young cadet in the Japanese imperial army, joined the Chinese revolutionary movement under the leadership of Dr Sun Yat-sen and became the leader of the nationalist Kuomintang (KMT) party after Dr Sun's death in 1925 and of its National Revolutionary Army. While Dr Sun's leadership had been progressive, favouring friendly links with the Soviet Union and with China's communists (CPC), the Kuomintang under Chiang's leadership moved steadily to the right.

In 1927, Chiang ordered a massacre of communists (ten thousand were murdered in just twenty days) and 'radicals' (one million peasants done to death), although at the time the KMT and the CPC were in an alliance, with communists serving in the KMT army. Following this, the communists regrouped under the leadership of Chairman Mao Zedong, and the CPC founded the People's Liberation Army (PLA). The two forces fought a bitter and bloody civil war which lasted until liberation in 1949, with only a brief respite when the communists forced the nationalists into a reluctant united front to fight the Japanese imperialist occupation (launched in Manchuria in 1931).

Chiang was supported by imperialism, and by US imperialism in particular, throughout his bloody anticommunist campaign. Before the PLA marched into Beijing to declare the new democratic republic (1 October 1949), Chiang had already fled with his remaining forces to Taiwan, where he was able to remain thanks to continued protection by the US navy. Bloody anticommunist pogroms were carried out by the Kuomintang in order to subdue Taiwan's population after the nationalists' arrival there, and Chiang continued to lead the fascistic breakaway neocolony known as the 'Republic of China' (ROC), with US protection, until his death in 1975. p127

- 69 Britain enacted the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms (named after Edwin Montagu, the Liberal party's secretary of state for India during the latter part of the first world war and Lord Chelmsford, viceroy of India 1916-21) in 1919 in an attempt to counter the rising movement for national self-determination that was inspired by the 1917 Russian Revolution.

The reforms, along the lines of so-called 'Dyarchy' in the provinces, or



division of portfolios between British and Indian ministers (with important budgetary, police and military matters firmly retained in British hands, and British veto retained over all legislation), also attempted to create divisions within the Indian bourgeois-nationalist class.

The review of their implementation was scheduled to take place ten years after the reform programme, such as it was, had been initiated. Many Indians had refused to cooperate with the process, which did not satisfy their demands for sovereignty, and opinion was hardened after the Amritsar massacre of 1919. p128

- 70 Harry Pollitt (1890-1960) was born in Droylsden, Lancashire. His father was a blacksmith's striker and his mother a cotton-spinner. Pollitt's parents were socialists and it was his mother, a member of the Independent Labour party, who provided him with his first induction into the principles and local networks of socialism. A boilermaker by trade, he travelled around the country, becoming an active trade unionist.

During the 'Hands Off Russia!' campaign, Pollitt was active in campaigning amongst British workers to support the revolutionary working-class government of the young Russian Socialist Federation of Soviet Republics (RSFSR was the original name of revolutionary Russia, later to become the USSR). His influence among London dockers was key in organising their famous act of solidarity, when dockers refused to load munitions onto the *SS Jolly George* on 10 May 1920. That ship had orders to supply the counter-revolutionary monarchist interventionist forces of General Wrangel in Poland. The munitions were off-loaded on 15 May 1920 and Britain's involvement in the war of intervention against Soviet Russia was effectively ended. Pollitt later recounted the incident in his pamphlet *A War Was Stopped!* (1933)

At the end of the WW1, Pollitt joined Sylvia Pankhurst's Workers' Socialist Federation, which became the Communist Party (British Section of the Third International). As a member of this group, he joined the Communist Party of Great Britain when it was formed in 1920.

Pollitt was heavily influenced by the Communist intellectual Rajani Palme Dutt, and the two remained close allies for many years. From 1924 to 1929 Pollitt was general secretary of the National Minority Movement, a communist-led united front within the trade unions, and he served for many years as the party's general secretary (1929-39 and 1941-56). p129

- 71 The Socialist Workers Party (SWP), founded and led by Tony Cliff in 1950 as the International Socialists, was a Trotskyist party that found a space to organise in Britain thanks largely to its rabid anti-Sovietism and disguised petty-bourgeois critique of communism, apparently 'in the name of real communism'.

Trotskyism was a marginal force in the years between the two world wars, but, particularly in the imperialist countries, sections of the so-called Trotskyist 'Fourth International' (so named as they followed Trotsky in denouncing the USSR and the communist movement) grew to prominence with the advent of Soviet revisionism.

It is perhaps hard to appreciate now, as this group fades into insignificance, that with the decline of the CPGB, in the 1970s and 1980s, the SWP was viewed as 'the left' by petty-bourgeois strata in Britain, and was heavily promoted as such by the bourgeois media. The SWP did much to bring 'socialism' into disrepute by its brand of petty-bourgeois university campus 'socialism' and in this and many other ways did much to bolster Labour party social-democracy.

The SWP always looked to the 'left wing' of the Labour party for working-class salvation at home, and always found a 'revolutionary' excuse for supporting imperialist brigandage abroad. In the 1950-53 Korean war, it effectively supported US (and British) imperialism by coining the slogan 'Neither Washington nor Moscow'. In recent years, an SWP split gave birth to Counterfire, which, together with the revisionist Communist Party of Britain (CPB) controls the Stop the War coalition (StW) in Britain – an 'anti-war' coalition that refuses to campaign for any meaningful antiwar action, confining itself to petitions and weekend placard-waving. StW in turn acts as an electoral platform for the imperialist Labour party. p130

- 72 We invite you to compare this honest, open and forthright appraisal of the character and politics of the Labour party machine, already solidifying around a staunchly pro-capitalist, pro-imperialist and anti-worker position, as outlined here in the CPGB programme of 1929 – can it really be ninety-one years ago? – with the debate that is *still* going on about the nature of the Labour party under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership and beyond. Truly history repeats itself; the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce! p132
- 73 The rump of the Communist Party of Britain, formerly the publisher of the *Morning Star* newspaper (which is now an independent trade union publication with which the CPB is loosely affiliated) maintains this slavish support, this unrequited love for the imperialist Labour party to the present day. The CPB in fact repeats the Trotskyites' criticism of anyone who does not join them in this mindless support for Labour (including the greatest historical forebears of British communism, whose staunch working-class fighters together formed the once proud and militant CPGB), dismissing them and all their principled reasoning as 'ultra-leftist'. p134
- 74 The parliamentary Labour party (PLP) is the organisation exclusively composed of Labour party MPs. This group, although officially part of the same party, is in reality entirely independent of the wider Labour membership, except through selection of candidates – a process that itself is tightly

controlled by the central party apparatus.

The PLP has become, since 1921, a key part of the general mechanism by which the parliamentary group imposes its will on the Labour membership. The chair of the PLP is elected by Labour MPs at the start of each annual session of parliament to oversee meetings of the parliamentary party. By tradition, only the elections at the start of each Parliament, following a general election, are competitive.

From 1921-70, the chair of the PLP was also the leader of the party as a whole (before 1921, leadership of the party was arguably split between the chairman of the PLP, the general secretary and the party chairman). When the leaders of the Labour party joined coalition governments during the first and second world wars, an acting chair was appointed to lead the rump of the party in 'opposition'. p135

75 Dandi is a small village in Gujarat, on the west coast of India. p137

76 The Meerut Conspiracy case was a controversial court case staged by the British Raj in India between 1929 and 1933. The British government was worried about the growing influence of the Communist International and of the spread of communist and socialist ideas propagated to the workers by the Communist Party of India (CPI). The communists' ultimate objective, so the government perceived, was to achieve 'complete paralysis and overthrow of existing governments in every country (including India) by means of a general strike and armed uprising' (ie, national liberation and socialism – the rule of the Indian working people themselves).

Shripad Amrut Dange, Shaukat Usmani and Muzaffar Ahmed (leading members of the CPI) were arrested along with thirty others in March 1929 and were put on trial under Section 121A of the (British) Indian Penal Code, which declared: 'Whoever within or without British India conspires to commit any of the offenses punishable by Section 121 or to deprive the King of the sovereignty of British India or any part thereof, or conspires to overawe, by means of criminal force or the show of criminal force, the Government of India or any local Government, shall be punished with transportation for life, or any shorter term, or with imprisonment of either description which may extend to ten years.'

Among those convicted at Meerut were two British communists (Philip Spratt and Ben Bradley), who had been helping to organise the Indian communist movement. The court passed severe sentences on twenty-seven of the accused, but nine of these were later overturned completely while the rest were reduced in length. All the same, even while helping to promote communism amongst the Indian working class, the Meerut trial deprived the Indian national-liberation movement of firm revolutionary working-class leadership and thus perpetuated the dominance of the bourgeois and moderate Congress party. p138

77 Ghanshyam Das Birla (1894-1983) was an Indian businessman. His sons and nephews remain one of the largest industrialist and commercial ruling-class families in India, owning and managing the Birla group of companies, which are involved in all sectors of communications, finance and manufacture. p140

78 Ramsay MacDonald crossed the floor to join Tories and Liberals in forming an austerity-focused 'National government' after failing to carry the whole Labour cabinet with him (although most acquiesced) in enforcing swingeing cuts to public-sector wages and unemployment benefits. The cuts were aimed at 'balancing the national budget' in light of the deep overproduction crisis (aka the Great Depression) that was wracking the world capitalist economy in the wake of the stock market crash of 1929.

MacDonald worked with the King, the bankers and the leaders of the other bourgeois parties to prepare plans for the National government, behind the backs of his party and Cabinet colleagues. Snowden and Thomas joined MacDonald in this move, leading to the expulsion of all three from the Labour party but also to Labour's total rout at the emergency election that was then called. MacDonald was once again appointed as prime minister of the National government that was elected (1931-35), but real control of the government was in the hands of the Tories, who had won a huge majority of seats in Parliament. p143

79 For more on the Greek revolution see the video presentation 'The crushing of the Greek revolution' by N Kosta and G Korkovelos on *Proletarian TV*, [YouTube.com/@proltv](https://www.youtube.com/@proltv) (June 2022), published as an article in two parts in *Lalkar* (July and September 2022). p149

80 For an overview of the titanic struggle of the Vietnamese people, see 'Fight to Win: How the Vietnamese people rose up and defeated imperialism' by C Martinez, *Lalkar* (July 2015). p149

81 For an insight into the Labour government's suppression of the Malay people's national-liberation struggle, see 'The Malay files', *Proletarian* (June 2012). Available to read on [thecommunists.org](http://thecommunists.org). p150

82 Known from 1909-35 as the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, the AIOC returned to Iran under the new name of British Petroleum (BP) in 1954. Following the success of an MI6/CIA-organised coup (Operation Ajax, overseen by CIA agent Kermit Roosevelt, grandson of US president Theodore Roosevelt) against the popular nationalist government led by Mohammad Mosaddegh in 1953, Iran's deposed shah (king) was restored to power by his imperialist backers. The shah immediately signed a deal with the international oil consortium allowing fifty percent ownership of Iranian oil to foreign companies. p150

83 Billed as a 'defensive' formation, Nato was always an aggressive forma-

tion for the projection of US imperialist power and the control of its 'allies'. Nato's first secretary general, Hastings 'Pug' Ismay, famously declared that the organisation's mission was 'to keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down'.

Our party's literature contains a wealth of detailed analysis of Nato's true nature and role, but see especially the party pamphlet H Brar, *Nato's Predatory War Against Yugoslavia* (2009) and G Shorter, *Neo-nazi Nato's Proxy War Against Russia* (2023). p151

- 84 Our party has produced a wealth of material also on the topic of Korea in general, and particularly on the socialist DPRK and the Korean war (known in north Korea as the Fatherland Liberation war and in China as the War to Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea). Many articles can be read online at *thecommunists.org* and *lalkar.org*, and presentations and speeches from party members and Korean diplomats can be viewed on *Proletarian TV*.

For a useful overview, see 'Withdrawal of the US's hostile policy towards the DPRK – an indispensable prerequisite for peace and stability on the Korean peninsula', a paper by the Institute for Disarmament and Peace, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (25 June 2020), available to read at *thecommunists.org*. p151

- 85 The Bechuanaland protectorate was established by Britain in South Africa in 1885. It became the Republic of Botswana in 1966. p152
- 86 James Harold Wilson (1916-95) was a middle-class grammar-school boy from a politically active Yorkshire family. Having studied Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE) at Oxford, he stood for election in the postwar election of 1945 and was returned in the Labour landslide. He remained an MP until 1983. Clement Attlee brought Wilson into the 1945 government immediately, and he was appointed as President of the Board of Trade when he was just thirty-one.

In 1963, Wilson became leader of the Labour party and in 1964, he became prime minister (1964-70; 1974-76). Elected on a plan for growth, he instead launched a programme of austerity aimed at countering inflation and balancing the books. Wilson is particularly remembered for his firm support of Israel's six-day war against the Arab states in 1967, for sending troops to northern Ireland in 1969 and for overseeing the application and then the referendum that confirmed Britain's membership of the European Economic Community (later the European Union) in 1975. p152

- 87 The racist apartheid regime in South Africa received a considerable financial boost from the activities of Labour's minister for energy, that legendary 'left winger' Tony Benn. In 1968, Benn signed a contract with Rio Tinto Zinc to extract 7,500 tons of uranium by establishing the Rössing mine in Namibia, on land that was illegally occupied by South Africa. This was in

spite of a United Nations ban on all such activities. (See 'Tony Benn: heir to Cecil Rhodes' by Richard West, *The Spectator*, 19 March 1977.)

Both the British-based mining conglomerate RTZ and the South African government went on to make a killing from the fruits of the soil that the Namibian people were denied, while the world's biggest open-pit uranium operation has brought sickness and environmental degradation in its rapacious wake. The condition of the workers who constructed and worked in the mine was found by the United Nations Council for Namibia, to be 'virtual slave labour under brutal conditions'. The company is known to maintain a well-equipped private army to handle labour or civil unrest at the mine. (See also the London Mining Network and R Moody, *Plunder!: Story of RTZ – The World's Most Powerful Mining Company*, 1991.) p153

- 88 Rhodesia, formerly the British colony of Southern Rhodesia (named after the arch-colonialist Cecil Rhodes of the British South Africa Company), was renamed Zimbabwe in 1980 after the white supremacist apartheid regime led by Ian Smith was deposed by the revolutionary struggle of the Zimbabwean masses, and the elections that followed that ten-year liberation war.

This armed struggle was led by the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (Zanla), armed wing of the Zimbabwe African National Union (Zanu). Its leader was Robert Mugabe, who became the first prime minister of liberated Zimbabwe from 1980-7 and then president from 1987 until his deposition in 2017. For a full account of the Zimbabwe liberation struggle and the British solidarity movement, see H Brar (Ed), *Zimbabwe Chimurenga!* (2004). p153

- 89 The Democratic Republic of Viet Nam, or DRVN. Hanoi was the capital city of north Vietnam, while Haiphong was north Vietnam's industrial centre and only major port. p153

- 90 Bertrand Arthur William Russell, 3rd Earl Russell, (1872-1970) was a mathematician, philosopher, logician and intellectual. Born into an influential and liberal family of the British aristocracy, his grandfather, the first earl, had been a Whig prime minister. A lifelong pacifist, Russell was imprisoned for antiwar activities for six months during WW1.

A reformer with Fabian and eugenicist views, his anticommunism was apparently confirmed by impressions he received during a trip to the young Soviet Union, although the other delegates who travelled with him came home enthused by the same experience. In November 1948, Russell shocked an audience at Westminster School by suggesting that a pre-emptive nuclear strike on the Soviet Union would be justified as a 'humanitarian gesture' to get the inevitable showdown over as soon as possible and allow humanity to survive. He later backed down from this stance, instead arguing for mutual disarmament by the nuclear powers.

Towards the end of his life Russell became well-known for his vocal opposition to the Vietnam war and the USA's genocidal prosecution of that war. He organised the Russell Tribunal in 1966 alongside other prominent philosophers including Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, which fed into his 1967 book *War Crimes in Vietnam*.

Russell's final political act was to condemn the Israeli bombing of Egypt in 1970. p154

- 91 Kenneth Robert Livingstone (b 1945) was a prominent left-winger in the Labour party for decades. He started his political life as a councillor in the London boroughs of Norwood (1973), then Hackney (1977), then Paddington (1981) before being elected leader of the Greater London council (GLC) in 1981. He became well-known in the national press as 'Red Ken' for his supposedly socialist beliefs, the measures his council tried to take that could benefit the poor, his support for Irish (and British) republicanism, and his vocal opposition to the Tory government led by Margaret Thatcher.

After Mrs Thatcher abolished the GLC in 1986, Livingstone was elected as MP for Brent East in 1987. He was officially a 'critic' of Tony Blair's leadership of the Labour party, but no socialist principle brought him to resignation from the party that provided his living – including the betrayal by the Labour party of the miners' strike and the removal of clause iv from Labour's constitution (see note 48) or the formation of the Socialist Labour party (SLP) by miners' leader Arthur Scargill (see note 92).

In 2000, however, when the position of London mayor was instituted and Labour refused to nominate him as its candidate, Livingstone was motivated to resign from the party in order to stand as an independent. His name was so strongly associated with London's GLC that he won the election twice, serving as London mayor for eight years before losing to the Tory party's Boris Johnson in 2008. The second time, he stood as a Labour candidate, the party having magnanimously decided that since he was going to win anyway, he might as well do it on Labour's behalf.

Livingstone was a strong supporter of Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour party from 2015 but fell victim to the antisemitism witch-hunt conducted by the party establishment as part of its campaign to oust Corbyn and prevent his being elected as prime minister. A (fundamentally correct) comment Livingstone had made about the relationship between Adolf Hitler and zionism resulted in his suspension from the party in 2016, and he finally resigned his membership in 2018.

Throughout his political career, Livingstone, like Corbyn, was one of the Labour party so-called 'socialists' whose presence in the party was supposed to justify the faith of workers in the possibility of the whole party making a 'turn to the left' and 'enacting socialist policies' via the mecha-

nism of bourgeois elections and the British imperialist state machinery (with or without 'pressure from below') p154

- 92 The removal of clause iv from the Labour party's constitution, which explicitly declared that the Labour party was *not* a socialist party was the final straw for miners' leader Arthur Scargill. He resigned in disgust and founded a new party, the Socialist Labour party, in 1996. Despite their apparent agreement with him on all points, none of the other Labour left-wingers at the time (Jeremy Corbyn, Ken Livingstone, Tony Benn, George Galloway, John McDonnell, Diane Abbott, Bernie Grant etc) were prepared to ditch their comfortable careers to join in him in this new and uncertain venture.

Nervous that this initiative might gain some traction amongst the masses and cause a mass departure from the Labour party, the ruling class and its Trotskyite hirelings worked overtime to confuse and sabotage the project. Not only did various Trotskyite groups infiltrate the SLP in order to disrupt it from within, but others immediately set up a rival electoral force called the Socialist Alliance (a hodge-podge of Trotskyite groups brought together for the sole purpose of putting alternative 'socialist' candidates on the ballot paper).

These tactics combined with a heavy media blackout, a narrow focus on electioneering, and an antipathy towards *real* socialist politics ultimately led to the collapse of this promising initiative. Although a great and principled leader of trade union struggles, and although he had effected an important *organisational break* with Labour, Arthur Scargill as leader of the SLP was not able to break from the ideology of social democracy and proved unable to coexist for long with those who were working in this direction. When Marxist ideas started to become too strong in the SLP, Scargill used his ability to control card votes and committee meetings to have many elected NEC members and the party's entire Yorkshire region expelled.

This rupture was what led to the formation of the Communist Party of Great Britain (Marxist-Leninist) in 2004, whose founder members had all been members of the SLP, doing what they could in a principled and open way to bring a Marxist orientation to that party. The SLP still officially exists, but ceased to have a meaningful presence after the exodus (by expulsion and resignation) of those who formed the CPGB-ML. p154

- 93 It was in the H-Blocks that the prison protests of the jailed Irish national-liberation fighters took place. These lasted for years, beginning with the 'blanket' protests against prison uniforms (the physical indication that republican prisoners were no longer classed as political prisoners but as criminals), escalating to the 'dirty' protests (a refusal to slop out cells as prisoners were being mercilessly beaten when they did so), and culminating in the hunger strikes of 1981, in which ten republican prisoners died.



The first and most well-known of the hunger strikers to die was Bobby Sands, an IRA volunteer who had been elected to the British parliament during the course of his strike. For a detailed description of conditions in the H-Blocks and the Irish POWs' struggle against them, see B Campbell, L McKeown and F O'Hagan (Ed), *Nor Meekly Serve My Time: The H-Block Struggle 1976-1981* (1998). p156

- 94 Those arrested in Southall on 23 April 1979 were antiracist protestors who had turned out to oppose the National Front's fascist rally and the police's protection of that rally. While claiming to be holding an 'election rally', the NF had chosen for the event's location an area of west London occupied almost entirely by Indian immigrants and their families – people who were the regular targets of NF violence and certainly not the natural constituency for NF electioneering. It was a clear provocation, and one supported by the police and government – James Callaghan's Labour government.

In fact, clashes between racists and immigrants had been going on ever since the beginning of Indian immigration into the area in the 1960s. Impoverished by the effects of British colonialism generally and partition of their country (into India and Pakistan in 1947) in particular, these Indians had been recruited largely from Punjab to fill empty posts in understaffed local factories (Notably Wolfe's Rubber factory) and an expanding Heathrow airport.

In June 1976, the racist murder of Gurdip Singh Chaggar outside the offices of the Indian Workers Association inspired National Front former chairman John Kingsley Read to announce: 'one down, a million to go'. Chaggar's murder led to the formation of the Southall Youth Movement (SYM) to challenge the rise in racism and attacks by the National Front. Uprisings also took place in this period as Asian and Afro-Caribbean youths together fought heavy-handed and racist police. (See also note 100.) p156

- 95 As part of its campaign to 'bring down inflation', the government agreed a 'social contract' with the TUC, under which pay rises for workers were held down to limits set by the government – limits that were very far below actual inflation, which was rising steeply at the time. The basis of this agreement (betrayal) was the understanding that only by complying to this demand would the workers retain a Labour government.

As can be seen, the ruling class has in every generation made good use of the argument that to rock the boat for a Labour administration is against the interests of workers because it will 'let the Tories in'. This, indeed, has been so useful that Labour is often the ruling class's party of choice during difficult times, when particularly anti-worker measures are needed to be pushed through. p157

- 96 Against a backdrop of high inflation (which officially reached 26.9 percent

in the year to August 1975), the government tried to hold pay rises down to a maximum of five percent, but a strike by Ford workers in the autumn of 1978 was settled with a raise of seventeen percent, which became the benchmark for other private sector disputes.

A bitter road hauliers dispute coincided with severe storms that cut off remote areas and threatened to affect vital supplies of all kinds, including food and fuel. A million workers were temporarily laid off during the dispute as a result of disruption in supplies, and the strike was eventually settled with a twenty percent pay rise.

Public sector discontent broke out in January, particularly amongst the worst-paid. Amongst those striking were train drivers, ambulance drivers, ancillary hospital staff, gravediggers and binmen. So many essential services were disrupted that prime minister James Callaghan called strikers' action 'free collective vandalism'. p158

- 97 Neil Kinnock (b 1942) was the Labour party leader at the time of the 1992 general election. Son of a Welsh coalminer and a self-declared 'moderate', he was also at the helm during the miners' strike. Kinnock rendered invaluable service to the capitalists during the ruling class's assault on the organised working class in Britain, of whom the miners had always been the militant vanguard.

The help of Labour and the TUC was pivotal in defeating the miners' strike, a defeat that paved the way for a thoroughgoing assault on the entire working class – its unions, its pay, pensions and working conditions, its public services, its community facilities, its civil liberties and all. As a result we have seen a huge decline in working-class living standards since 1984, accompanied by a massive transfer in wealth from the poorest to the super-rich.

As a reward for services rendered, Kinnock was given a sinecure in Brussels as European Commissioner in 1995 before being kicked upstairs to the House of Lords as Baron Kinnock in 2005. p158

- 98 The Falklands war was a ten-week conflict between Britain and Argentina in April-June 1982, which followed Argentina's move to take by force territory it had long claimed as its own. The South Pacific archipelago, known also as Las Islas Malvinas, had been under British control since 1833 – a part of the British empire's string of island bases dotted throughout the oceans of the world. The jingoistic media coverage of the war was instrumental in securing the re-election of Margaret Thatcher's unpopular government in 1983. p159
- 99 The first Gulf war of January 1991 saw a coalition of forty-two countries ranged against Iraq, including not only all the imperialist nations and their stooges, but even several formerly socialist countries such as

Czechoslovakia, Poland and Romania. The main aggressive forces were the USA and Britain, alongside Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia and Kuwait paid most of the costs of the war, which had been provoked in the final instance by long-running disputes between Iraq and its neighbour Kuwait. An imperialist-aligned sheikdom, Kuwait was accused of stealing Iraqi oil from the joint Rumaila oilfield, and had also been producing oil far above its Opec-agreed quota – thus keeping global oil prices low and causing great damage to both the Iraqi and other Opec nations' economies. Iraq had already been ravaged by eight long years of war with Iran, waged at the behest of the Anglo-American imperialists after the overthrow of their puppet, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, in 1979.

The ultimate cause of the Iraq war was the imperialists' desire to remove Saddam Hussein as leader, since he had moved from a pliant and reliable ally of theirs to a position of increasing independence and 'non-cooperation' with imperialist policy. p159

100 In the spring and summer of 1981, youth uprisings broke out across England. They followed the murder of antiracist activist Blair Peach by the police in Southall (see note 94) and were caused by a combination of inner-city deprivation and tension between working-class black British youth and the police, exacerbated by the racist use of stop-and-search powers.

The most serious uprisings took place in April in Brixton (London) and spread to Toxteth (Liverpool), Handsworth (Birmingham), Chapeltown (Leeds) and Moss Side (Manchester) in July. In total, outbursts occurred in more than thirty towns and cities across England, all of which suffered from high deprivation rates.

Labour leader (and supposed 'left-winger') Michael Foot told the 1981 Labour party conference that 'what happened in Moss Side and Liverpool is what we in the Labour party are dedicated to stop'. Another leading light of the Labour 'left', Tony Benn, averred that 'the Labour party does not believe in rioting as a route to social progress, nor are we prepared to see the police injured during the course of their duties'. The Trotskyite SWP described those participating in the uprisings as 'lumpen proletariat'. p159

101 The 1985 uprisings began in Brixton in September, once again having been sparked by racist and violent policing. The wrongful shooting of Mrs Cherry Groce when armed police came searching for her son sparked a wave of protest that lasted for several days. Anger spread to deprived black communities elsewhere, in particular to Peckham (south London), the Broadwater Farm estate in Tottenham (north London) and Toxteth (Liverpool). p159

102 The poll tax was trialled in Scotland in 1989 and the introduced in England and Wales a year later. Replacing the centuries-old rates system, which

taxed households on the rental value of their property, this tax was a fixed-rate charge per head of the population, with no reference to income or property.

Although students and unemployed paid a reduced rate, this was obviously a big shift in the tax burden from the rich to the poor and was greeted with mass resistance, including wide campaigns of refusal to pay. The Labour party refused to back a nationwide demonstration against the tax, which was instead organised in March 1990 by the All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation (a campaign that had been initiated by the Trotskyite Militant Tendency).

Over six thousand actions were held around the country in the first few months of 1990, several of which turned into pitched battles with police. The national demonstration of some two hundred and fifty thousand protesters ended in hours of fighting between riot police and protesters in Trafalgar Square (central London). These events, which took place at the same time as the Tory party conference, were one more nail in the coffin of Margaret Thatcher's leadership, and she was replaced by John Major as Tory party leader and prime minister in November 1990. p159

103 Bill Sirs (1920-2015), although from an industrial working-class family in the north-east of England, was a right-winger in the Labour party. He served as general secretary of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation from 1975 to 1985 and gained notoriety for his role in betraying the miners. p160

104 The Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunications and Plumbing Union (EETPU) merged with the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU) to form the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union (AEEU) in 1992, a combined force that was then the largest union in Britain. The newly combined union was born shortly before its leader Eric Hammond retired, and the merger brought the electricians back into the TUC, from which it had previously been expelled (see note 105). Further mergers saw it absorbed into Amicus (2001) and Unite (2007). p160

105 Eric Albert Barrett Hammond (1929-2009) was general secretary of EETPU from 1984 to 1992. Having already been recognised as a 'safe pair of hands', Hammond was awarded an OBE (Order of the British Empire) by the Queen in 1977.

Hammond's real infamy began during the miners' strike, when he described Arthur Scargill's leadership of the NUM as 'lions led by donkeys' and refused to take the electricians into the strike on the side of the miners, even though many of the union's members wanted this to happen. The potential power of the strike was thus severely weakened and its duration stretched out by many extra months. In the end, the sheer length of the strike was a factor in its defeat, with the miners essentially starved

back to work.

A self-declared fan of Margaret Thatcher, Hammond acquired further infamy as a result of his union-breaking collaboration with Rupert Murdoch when the latter moved the headquarters of his media empire (including *The Sun* and *The Times*) to Wapping from Fleet Street. Secret negotiations between Hammond and Murdoch in advance of the move gave Murdoch's operation the green light by assuring him that not only would the electricians *install* new machines in the Wapping premises; they would also *operate* them. This offered Murdoch the chance to finally break the power of the print workers' union, which he had long detested. During the bitter struggle that followed, Hammond helped bus in scab labour – even past his own picketing members.

For the role it played in negotiating 'no-strike' deals with major companies, especially in the new electronics industry, the 365,000 strong EETPU was eventually expelled from the TUC in 1988 and did not return until after Hammond's retirement. Embracing many of the Thatcher government's anti-union laws, Hammond was the first to accept government funding for union elections carried out via postal ballot – also against TUC policy at the time.

A regular visitor at 10 Downing Street during Mrs Thatcher's premiership, Hammond was appointed by her to sit on the National Economic Development Council in open defiance of the TUC, while in 1989 he became the first trade union leader ever to serve on the inner councils of the Confederation of British Industry (CBI). p160

106 Lionel (Len) Murray (1922-2004), after an early foray into communism, became a stalwart of Labour party 'moderates' and 'pragmatists' in the Trades Union Congress. Having studied Politics, Philosophy and Economics (PPE) at Oxford after the war, Murray took such 'realistic' positions as assisting with the Labour government's programme of wage restraint or bring down inflation and endorsing 'no-strike' clauses for staff at the new Government Communications headquarters (GCHQ) spy centre in Cheltenham.

As unemployment began to rise fast in the early 1980s and various schemes were launched to put young people to work without proper wages, Murray told the Guardian: 'I do not think full employment is desirable or even necessary.' (1981) When printworkers were in dispute with the notorious union-buster Eddie Shah, Murray's TUC decided not to back the union's 'unlawful' action in what was at the time a most significant battle of classes, in which police, judiciary, media and government were all lined up on the side of the employer while the official union movement's leaders sat on the sidelines and claimed 'neutrality'.

Murray was equally appalled by the open class conflict of the miners' strike.

He preached about the importance of 'legality' in the face of anti-union laws and took early retirement as the strike was developing. Awarded an OBE in 1966 and appointed to the privy council in 1976, he was made a life peer as Baron Murray of Epping Forest in 1985, shortly after his retirement and the end of the miners' strike. p160

# INDEX

## A

Africa 6, 16, 73, 85, 146, 151, 153  
Attlee, Clement 14, 27, 128, 144, 145, 146, 155, 186

## B

Blair, Tony 16, 17, 18, 35, 41  
Boer war 72, 73, 75, 91  
Bourgeois respectability 43, 44, 49, 55, 59, 62

## C

China 13, 74, 113, 127, 129  
Churchill, Winston 13, 143, 145, 155  
Citrine, Walter 125, 144  
Class collaboration 87, 101, 104, 143  
Cliff, Tony 130, 133, 182  
Clynes, John Robert 72, 96, 101, 114, 172  
Comintern 12, 89, 99, 102, 130  
Communist Party of Great Britain 40, 95, 100, 104, 116, 117  
Communist Party of India 112, 136  
Conservative party 15, 16, 20, 95, 97, 163, 178  
Corbyn, Jeremy 3, 20, 165

## E

Egypt 113, 117, 142, 150  
Emergency Powers Act 115, 116, 117  
Engels, Friedrich 24, 43–52, 55–59, 64–67

## **F**

France 52, 76, 78, 80–84, 86, 90

## **G**

General strike 1926 14, 119–123

Germany 12, 26, 52, 78, 79, 80, 81, 89, 93, 97, 99, 105, 134, 145

Gluckstein, Donny 130, 133

## **H**

Henderson, Arthur 92, 96–99, 101, 108

Hoare, Sir Samuel 113, 140

Hodges, Frank 102, 103

## **I**

Independent Labour party (ILP) 26, 61–68, 70, 71, 73, 89, 92, 96

India 105–108, 109, 110, 112, 117, 128, 129, 136–140, 142, 143

Ireland 105, 106, 155, 156

## **K**

Kautsky, Karl 30, 48, 56, 79, 169

Keir Hardie, James 61, 63, 64, 68, 73, 89, 91, 169

Kinnock, Neil 16, 36, 160, 191

## **L**

Labour aristocracy 3, 23–26, 30, 32, 34, 43, 54, 55, 57, 58, 72, 73, 75, 90, 152, 159, 163

Labour Representation Committee 26, 68, 69

Leninism 25, 41, 42

Lenin, Vladimir 29, 30, 47, 49, 56–60, 62, 63, 69–72, 76, 77, 79–88, 95–99, 118, 132, 133

Liberal party 26, 44, 45, 61–63, 65, 65–71, 75, 95, 97

Lib-Lab alliance 26, 27, 55, 62, 67–69

Liebknrecht, Wilhelm 45, 46

Lloyd George, David 97, 98, 105

## **M**

MacDonald, Ramsay 63, 64, 74, 89, 91, 101, 108, 109, 116, 117, 127, 128, 130, 134, 137, 141–143, 184

Mann, Tom 49, 127

Marxism-Leninism 25, 40–42

Marx, Karl 35, 45, 46, 47, 48, 52, 56, 66

Maxwell, Robert 161, 163

Middle east 12, 17, 113, 142, 145, 150

Miners' strike 1984–5 15, 36, 37, 159–164



Minority Movement 122–126, 135, 143  
monopoly 17, 25–27, 32, 35, 37, 46–58, 75, 76, 104  
Morrison, Herbert 123, 124, 179  
Murdoch, Rupert 15, 35

## **N**

National government 134, 143  
National Health Service 9, 18, 19, 27, 34, 148  
National Unemployed Workers' Committee Movement 125, 126, 144  
Nato 14, 18, 151, 159, 185

## **O**

October Revolution 12, 41, 81  
Olivier, Sydney 110, 111, 175

## **P**

Palme Dutt, Rajani 129, 137, 141, 174  
Parliamentary democracy 101, 102, 104, 131  
Parliamentary Labour party 71, 135, 144, 183  
Peach, Blair 156  
Pollitt, Harry 93, 129, 132, 181

## **R**

Revisionism 21, 27, 29, 30, 36, 38, 41, 42, 149  
Russia 10, 12, 71, 78, 80, 86, 90, 93, 97, 99, 117, 131

## **S**

Saklatvala, Shapurji 123, 128, 179  
Scargill, Arthur 15, 69, 161–163  
Scheidemann, Phillip 96, 97, 173  
Second International 74, 76, 86, 87, 89, 93, 120, 172  
Snowden, Philip 63, 71, 74, 89, 108, 134  
Soviet Union 12, 13, 15, 16, 40, 120, 144, 145  
Split in the working-class movement 24, 25, 27, 30, 34, 38, 57  
Suez canal 113, 150

## **T**

Thatcher, Margaret 14, 15, 17, 28, 37, 158, 160, 161, 162, 163  
Thomas, James Henry 108, 109, 110, 134, 175  
Trades Union Congress 5, 14, 37, 49, 56, 68, 69, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 125,  
126, 135, 144, 160, 163  
Trotskyism 16, 27, 36, 38, 130, 146, 149  
Turkey 12, 78, 86

## **U**

United States of America 13, 14, 16, 26, 32, 52, 80, 111, 147, 151, 153

## **W**

Webb, Beatrice and Sidney 65, 67, 92, 111, 170

Wilson, James Harold 152, 156, 186



### **Books by Harpal Brar**

Perestroika: The Complete Collapse of Revisionism (1992)

Trotskyism or Leninism? (1993)

Social Democracy: The Enemy Within (1995)

Imperialism: Decadent, Parasitic, Moribund Capitalism (1997)

Bourgeois Nationalism or Proletarian Internationalism? (1998)

Chimurenga! The Liberation Struggle in Zimbabwe (Ed, 2004)

Imperialism: The Eve of the Social Revolution  
of the Proletariat (2007)

Imperialism and War (2008)

Inquilab Zindabad: India's Liberation Struggle (2014)

Socialism with Chinese Characteristics: Marketisation of  
China's Economy (2020)

### **Books by Harpal Brar and Ella Rule**

Imperialism in the middle east (2002)

Imperialism and the Worst-Ever Crisis of  
Overproduction (2013)

### **Books by Ella Rule**

Marxism and the Emancipation of Women (Ed, 2000)

### **Books by Giles Shorter**

Neo-nazi Nato's Proxy War Against Russia (2023)

## **CPGB-ML pamphlets**

H Brar, Nato's Predatory War Against Yugoslavia (2009)

H Brar, The 1926 British General Strike (2009)

H Brar, Revisionism and the Demise of the USSR (2011)

Various, World War One: An Interimperialist War  
to Redivide the World (2015)

H Brar, The Soviet Victory Over Fascism (second edition, 2016)

E Rule, Claudia Jones, Communist (2017)

J Brar, The Drive to War Against Russia and China (2017)

E Rule, A Class Analysis of British Society at the Start  
of the 21st Century (2017)

H Brar, Zionism: A Racist, Antisemitic and Reactionary  
Tool of Imperialism (2017)

CPGB-ML Party Programme and Rules (revised 2018)

Various, Identity Politics and the Transgender Trend (2019)

Various, The Rise and Fall of Project Corbyn (2020)

Eighth Congress of the CPGB-ML, 2018 (2021)

H Brar, Capitalism and Immigration (second edition, 2022)

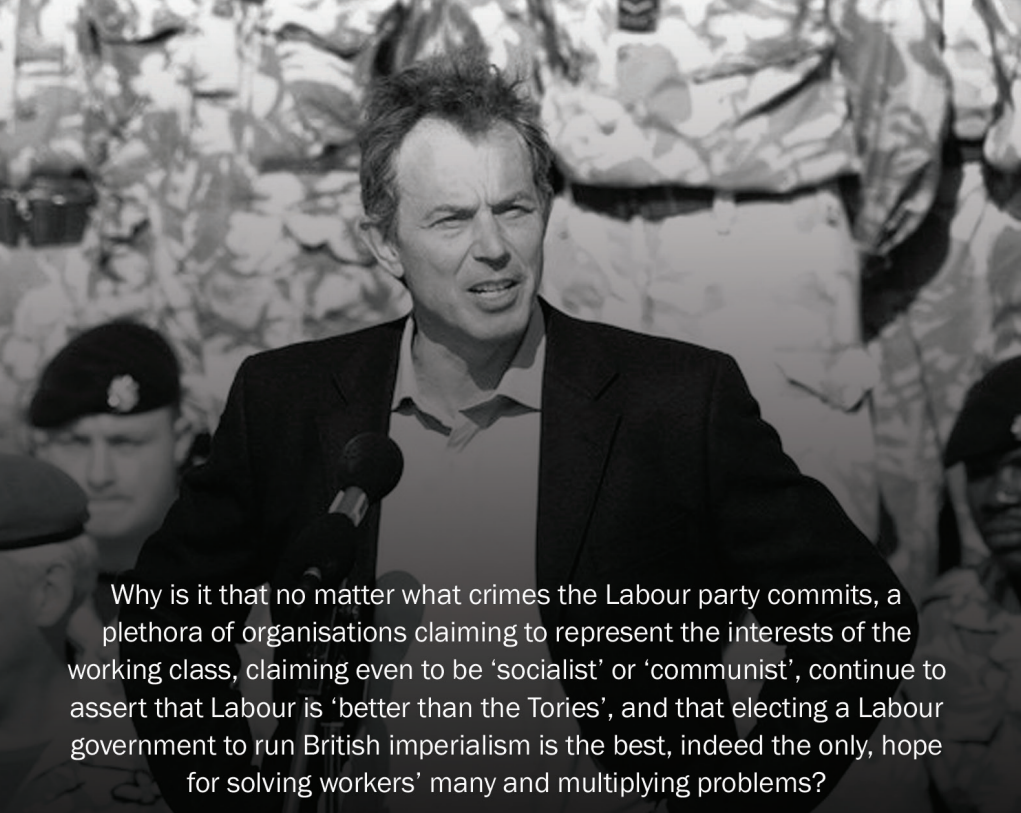
R Brar, Britain's Road to Socialism? (2022)

Various, Manifesto for the Crisis (2023)

H Brar, Britain's Perfidious Labour Party (2023)

Contact the CPGB-ML for further copies and a list of publications.  
PO Box 78900, London, SW16 9PQ





Why is it that no matter what crimes the Labour party commits, a plethora of organisations claiming to represent the interests of the working class, claiming even to be 'socialist' or 'communist', continue to assert that Labour is 'better than the Tories', and that electing a Labour government to run British imperialism is the best, indeed the only, hope for solving workers' many and multiplying problems?

Where did the myth of Labour's 'golden era' and 'socialist roots' originate? Who propagates these fairy tales, and why?

Was the establishment of the National Health Service in 1948 proof of Labour's socialist credentials? What about the minimum wage brought in under the government of Tony Blair?

This pamphlet aims to set the record straight on the roots, history and true purpose of Britain's Labour party, the leader of world social democracy, cheerleader of every imperialist war, and loyal servant of British finance capital.

This is an essential history for every worker to understand as the present and deepest-ever economic crisis of capitalism bites ever deeper. If we are to build a party and a movement capable of serving our real interests, we must learn the lessons of the past and avoid falling into the same traps. Our future depends on it!

ISBN: 978-1-913286-11-8

**thecommunists.org**

**Communist Party of Great Britain (Marxist-Leninist)**