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**For Country, For Class: Nationalism, Empire
and Identity in the Communist Party of Great
Britain: 1935-1945.**



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Word Count: 27,959.

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the post-graduate programme MA by Research in History at the University of Huddersfield, 17th January 2019.

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List of Abbreviations:

CPGB – Communist Party of Great Britain

CC – Central Committee

CC – Colonial Committee

CCC – China Campaign Committee

CI - Communist International: Third International (1919–1943)

CPI – Communist Party of India

ILP – Independent Labour Party

INC – Indian National Congress

LAI – League against Imperialism

PB – Political Bureau

PCF – Parti communiste français

PHM - People's History Museum

TUC - Trade Unions Congress

U.S.S.R. - Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

YCL – Young Communist League

WOA - Warwick Online Archives

Abstract:

The Communist Party of Great Britain is mostly understood as a fringe movement in British politics, both on the left and in wider British society. However, during the 'Popular Front', the Party positioned itself as the forerunners of a 'Popular' fight against fascism. It was a pivotal moment in the Party's history, morphing in a matter of years from a fringe leftist group, to an unapologetic, patriotic appendage to the Labour Party. Anti-fascism was a black and white issue, as the Party decried those who had betrayed the British people and its democratic traditions, both at home and abroad. It was during the 'Popular Front' that the CPGB regarded democracy and its institutions, not as something to be overthrown and replaced with a socialist alternative, but to be fought for, enhanced, and brought back from the brink, in the fight against fascism. It viewed the nation in disrepair, as it embraced wider culture, in all its forms - regarding themselves as the embodiment of the working-class, and thus the national – as these two concepts became blurred within a highly localised, oppositional form of patriotism. Their patriotism was placed in direct opposition to what they deemed, the proto-fascist sympathies of Neville Chamberlain and the National Government, who were a cabal of morally degenerate politicians beholden to big money interests. It was they who had betrayed the real spirit of the British nation and tarnished its name, as the CPGB became a fundamentally national Party, whose internationalist ties were increasingly compromised. This uncompromising reformist politics saw the imperial colonies relatively ignored, as the CPGB's previous anti-imperialist credentials were disregarded in favour of mild democratic reform, as well as later, defence of the 'British national interest'. The Party found it increasingly difficult to balance any practical internationalist politics, alongside the defence of the 'first workers' state', as the defeat of the Soviet Union was simply not an option. It was clear that their internationalism became predicated upon loyalty to one state – the Soviet Union. Eurocentrism took centre stage, as both the Comintern and the Party regarded the defence of British imperialist interests as not solely a strategic ploy, but as fundamental to any peaceful post-war, political order. It was this dilemma that the Party fully supported, as they in the name of internationalism, fully abandoned their anti-imperialist credentials in India and the Far-East, post-1941. It was in this melting pot of war, fascism, and the serious prospect of the defeat of

international socialism, that 'national particularities' became the *raison d'être* of the Party post-1935. As crucially, the indigenous national movement in Britain was drawn from the very same well as the Party's international commitments, whose success depended on, the 'Popular Front' policy.

Word Count: 449.

Introduction:

The 'Popular Front' was more than any other line in the Communist Party's history, dictated by political context. The rise of continental fascism, particularly following Hitler's ascension to power in 1933, created an unnerving sense that the Soviet Union was under real threat. Signalled by the entry of the USSR into the League of Nations in 1934, it was clear that a new line was in the midst. The Seventh World Congress of the Comintern in August 1935 established that the 'Popular Front' became the means to protect what was already won, rather than fight for further progress. It was in the words of one eminent Party historian, 'like an army, equipped for the offensive, which suddenly found itself obliged to settle down for a lengthy siege'.¹ Revolution was no longer an immediate demand, but a potential end in the struggle for the defence of democracy. The international and national question became blurred, as constituent Parties were told to adopt a militant anti-fascist line, fighting for firstly, working-class unity, as well as later alongside *all* potential allies, (most notably in the CPGB's case, alongside Winston Churchill in 1938).² The involvement of the PCF (Parti communiste français) in the *Front Populaire* in France, as well as the PCE's involvement in the *Frente Popular* in Spain demonstrated that there was a fundamental shift in international communist policy, as Parties were told to cater towards 'national particularities' to combat fascism. After all, the CPGB, were in the words of Callaghan and Harker, the 'dynamic core' of anti-fascist activity in Britain.³

In Britain, the 'Popular Front' saw a flourishing of a distinct, 'British Road to Socialism', as the CPGB became a social-democratic Party in all but name. It was a bolt to its very core, which led to ripples throughout both the Party's national and international work.⁴ It saw the Party positioning its international loyalty as defence of, above all-else, the Soviet Union - relegating all others matters. Its

¹ Hobsbawm, E.J. Fifty Years of Popular Front's cited in Fyrth, J. (1985). *Britain, Fascism and the Popular Front*. Lawrence and Wishart: London.p.238.

² Ibid: p.241

³ Callaghan, J. & Harker, B. (2016). *British Communism: A Documentary History*. Manchester University Press: Manchester.p.125.

⁴ Whilst the 'British Road to Socialism' was the policy programme for the Party in 1951, the Popular Front laid the foundations for their post-war evolution.

own needs were subordinate to the first Workers State, as Harry Pollitt, leader of the CPGB told the Party in 1936 - 'if the Soviet Union is destroyed as a result of our negligence...it puts back the prospect of socialism being achieved elsewhere'.⁵ Anti-Imperialist politics, as a result, became compromised, haphazardly shifting between enthusiastic support, vague calls for independence, and outright dismissal. As many historians have noted, 'questions of war and fascism' began to take precedence over debates of imperialism.⁶ However, as this dissertation will argue, the Party's distinction between the two was not solely the result of Party policy, but a natural result of their own ideological shift. Anti-imperialism became disconnected from the fight against anti-fascism, entirely because they were regarded as two alternate issues, resulting from differing historical forces. The Party's national policy of 'oppositional patriotism', meant allying with reformist avenues, which decoupled fascism and imperialism from their socio-political forces – as in essence, these were not the results of 'late-stage' capitalism, but moral degenerations. Fascism was not a crisis of capitalism, nor was imperialism its 'highest stage', instead these came to be regarded as political choices, taken by corrupted, morally 'degenerate' politicians. It was this ideological shift that allowed the Party to firmly place defence of the Soviet Union, alongside a lukewarm policy to the colonies.

The prime objective of this research is to examine the relationship between the CPGB's increasingly nationalist shift, where the Party's priorities increasingly became national, alongside the Party's view of imperialism, seeking to analyse their specific attitudes towards India in the light of the changing framework of the Popular Front, fascism and imminent war. The research will examine the Party's rhetoric throughout the 'Popular Front' period and gauge whether the CPGB were merely adapting to international circumstance, or were a Party undergoing fundamental reform.

⁵ PB Minutes, April 1936.

⁶ Kirk, N. (2011). *Labour and the Politics of Empire*. Manchester University Press: Manchester.p.139.

The methodology to be adopted will utilise the Party's own records at the extensive CP archive in Manchester, alongside numerous books, pamphlets and articles found at the Warwick Online Archives and in the Party's mouthpiece, the *Daily Worker*. In addition, as a point of contrast, there has been a conscious usage of non-Communist sources, such as *The Manchester Guardian* and *The Times* newspaper to gauge how the Party's work was regarded in wider society. Two questions arose during my research, that being, firstly, how did the Party seek to present the British nation – what were its methods and motivations to present progressive values as those of solely the working class? And to what extent were they successful in creating a new 'national image'? To internationalise this shift, the second chapter deals with the Party's anti-imperialist activism. Was anti-imperialism still a firm fixture in the Party's work? Or did it increasingly become compromised because of the Popular Front's emphasis on national issues; its prioritising of anti-fascism, and its nods towards reformism, rather than revolution?

Throughout much of the 1920s and early 1930s, many western European parties were berated by the Comintern for a lack of interest in the colonies – particularly during the 'Third Period' – however, the creation of the 'Popular Front' placed anti-imperialist activism firmly within the hands of Parties, who had only a few years previously, been derided as 'white-chauvinist'.⁷ In fact, this extension of responsibility meant the issue, as Kevin Morgan summarised, became 'a take it or leave it' policy.⁸ Instead, individual party members, such as Ben Bradley, Rajani Palme Dutt and Shapuri Saklatvala were left largely as the sole proponents of any remaining anti-imperialist thinking; for whilst numerous nods were made to colonial independence, many of these calls became ritualistic, repeating the same vague demands, that were largely ignored by much of the wider Party. The 'time was not right', was broadly the line expounded by the CP, as whilst it is unfair to state the Comintern

⁷ Callaghan, K. (1993). *Rajani Palme Dutt: A Study in British Stalinism*. Lawrence and Wishart: London. pp.59-60.

⁸ Morgan, K. (1989). *Against Fascism and War*. Manchester University Press: Manchester. p.188

ignored the issue, they did prioritise anti-fascism, and certain anti-imperialist struggles - which only became more pronounced when the issue was left to national parties.

The Party undoubtedly failed in its ambitions of building a sustained Communist movement and were largely a footnote in an electoral sense. However, their cultural impact cannot be understated. There is no doubt, historical work on the Party has exceeded the impact the Party had electorally, as much alike to Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists (BUF), the attention the two parties have received from historians, has in some way been dictated by a child-like fascination of 'extreme parties' in a seemingly plain, political system. Writing about British Communist history is beneficial to historians, as Kevin Morgan summarised in the mid-1990s, because 'Its political and cultural influence was out of proportion to its size', particularly during the 'Popular Front' period.⁹ The CPGB is a fascinating access point to historians, for it was, to varying degrees in different periods, a 'revolutionary party in a non-revolutionary situation', an implant from a foreign Russian system, and an organic apogee of Marxist thinking.¹⁰ The Party's inter-war history is normally separated into three periods: the first being its creation, as part of the Comintern's plea to promote further revolutionary change worldwide. The second being the 'Class against Class' period – where the Party viewed capitalism's collapse as inevitable, viewing social-democratic parties as 'class traitors' and 'social fascists'; whilst the third, the 'Popular Front' era, will be the focus of this study. Described as the 'most fruitful period' of the CPGB by Jim Fyrth, research on the area has been extensive, primarily because of the Party's drastic ideological shift, as well as its somewhat divisive 'about-turn' during the Second World War.¹¹

Historians have been unanimous in concluding that the 'Popular Front' was a decisive break with what came before, with the most significant historical equivalent being the 'social patriot' line taken

⁹ Morgan, K. (1993). The CPGB and the Comintern Archives. *Socialist History*. Autumn 1993. p.19.

¹⁰ Pelling, H. (1958). *The British Communist Party: An Historical Profile*. A & C. Black: London.p.67. & Laybourn, K. & Murphy, D. (1999). *Under the Red Flag. A History of Communism in Britain*. Sutton Publishing: Stroud. & Branson, N. (1985). *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain: 1927-1941*. Lawrence and Wishart: London.

¹¹ Fyrth, J. (1985). *Britain, Fascism and the Popular Front*. Lawrence and Wishart: London.p.15.

by many social democracies during the First World War. It was, according to Samuel, less traumatic than 1928-29, and certainly less remembered than October 1939, however, ideologically it was undoubtedly the 'most momentous'.¹² Keith Laybourn has followed suit, noting that the 'Popular Front' laid the foundation, not just for fighting fascism, but consequently 'Soviet diplomacy until the collapse of the Soviet Union'.¹³ James Eaden and David Renton have both argued much of the same, stating that the 'Popular Front' set a precedent for the nationalist turn in the late 1940s.¹⁴

That said, the discussion of the CPGB's turn towards 'nationalist' or at best 'patriotic sentiments', beginning in the 1930s, has been much less examined, ignoring one small piece by Paul Flowers in 1995.¹⁵ And whilst, many historians have noted that the Party did embrace patriotic language during the 'Popular Front', there is still a lack of literature detailing how, and in what ways, it achieved so.¹⁶ In this sense, this research hopes to offer some further light on the Party's patriotic language and its vision of 'Socialist Britain' within the 'Popular Front' period. There has been a conscious usage, particularly in the first chapter, to cover the CPGB's wider cultural input - whether that be songs, pageants or dramas - as culture became the Party's most obvious 'Popular Front' expression. In this sense, it follows much of the 'history from below' perspective, which has become popular in recent years, emphasising ordinary members' lives and their involvement in daily party activity, creating an image of a much more all-encompassing organisation, than previously thought.¹⁷

Party members are no longer Stalinist apparatchiks, at the whims of every Moscow demand, but *real* people, deeply invested in political struggle. As such, whilst these works do not necessarily deal with

¹² Samuel, R. (2017). *The Lost World of British Communism*. Verso: London.

¹³ Laybourn, K. & Murphy, D. (1999). *Under the Red Flag*.pp.83-85.

¹⁴ Eaden, J. & Renton, D. (2002). *The Communist Party of Great Britain since 1920*. Palgrave: New York.p.106.

¹⁵ Flowers, P. (1995). From the Red Flag to the Union Jack: The Rise of Domestic Patriotism in the Communist Party of Great Britain. *New Interventions*. 6: 2.

¹⁶ Francis Beckett's argument that the "Communists were able to wave the Union Jack with the best of them" is such an example.

Beckett, F. (1995). *Enemy Within: The Rise and Fall of the British Communist Party*. John Murray Ltd: London.p.88.

¹⁷ Linehan, T. (2007). *Communism in Britain: 1920-1939*. Manchester University Press: Manchester & Morgan, K. et al. (2007). *Communists and British Society: People of a Special Mould, 1920-1991*. Rivers Oram Press: London.

the patriotic shift in Party dogma, they do help paint a more colourful picture of the Party's attempts in attempting to be a 'mass party', furthering the *Little Moscow's* Stuart Macintyre described in the 1980s.¹⁸ Ben Harker's work has been a fascinating insight into the Party's cultural output during the 'Popular Front', whilst older research by Andy Croft has illuminated the cultural influence the Left Book Club had on 1930s British society.¹⁹ As will be reiterated throughout, the CPGB's shift towards a patriotic, populist politics is not without precedent, as Paul Ward's work has demonstrated. Ward's study of the British Left's 'socialist patriotism' between 1881-1924 is an insightful look at how the pre-war Left fashioned itself as the forerunners of a new kind of British identity, intimately intertwined within a distinctly 'British socialism'.²⁰

The early British Socialists regarded their socialism as less influenced by the theory of Karl Marx, but what they regarded as the innate radical nature of the British people. It was less a scientific analysis of class struggle, as the orthodox Marxists thought of it, but a gradual move towards a more class harmonious society, outside of violent struggle. As Ward has suggested, a 'continuing current on the British Left justified their socialism as in line with the English/British national character, history and political traditions'.²¹ Their socialism was consequently, British in character, whereas Bolshevism, being a Russian form of socialism, was foreign and against the very root of 'British traditions'.

Therefore, the CPGB from the outset had difficulties in aligning themselves with a labour movement whose traditions, political ideology and moral outlook, differed so widely from their own. Labourism to use Ralph Miliband's description, 'is not like Marxism, an ideology of rupture, but an ideology of adaptation'.²² In this Paper's view, this distinct difference in praxis, along with the Labour movements overall lack of a 'systematic body of thought', allowed Labourism to easily present itself

¹⁸ Macintyre, S. (1980). *Little Moscows: Communism and Working-Class Militancy in Inter-War Britain*. Croon Helm: London.

¹⁹ Harker, B. (2011). 'Communism is English': Edgell Rickword, Jack Lindsay and the Cultural Politics of the Popular Front. *Literature and History*.20:2. & Croft, A. (1998). *A Weapon in the Struggle: The Cultural History of the Communist Party in Britain*. Pluto Press.

²⁰ Ward, P. (1998). *Red Flag and Union Jack: Englishness, Patriotism and the British Left, 1881-1924*. The Royal Historical Society. Boydell Press: Suffolk.

²¹ Ibid: p.5.

²² Miliband, R. (1983). *Class Power and State Power*. Verso: London.pp.292/293.

as coterminous with a British identity, unlike the Communists – whose issue became appearing ‘naturally’ British in character, rather than a ‘foreign’ infiltration.

The CPGB’s turn towards a ‘nationalist’ form of politics is illustrative of the prevailing political culture, not only on the left in the mid-to-late 1930s, but also within wider-British society, as the Party claimed an organicity and sense of self-worth in representing the ‘real’ interests of the British people. However, whether this platform was as influential, and authentic as they presented will be examined during this essay. Indeed, many of the Trotskyist school of historians, most notably represented by Alan Campbell and John McIlroy, have forcefully argued that the CPGB betrayed its revolutionary stature during the ‘Popular Front’ years (1935-onwards) and became nothing more than a ‘Stalinist imprint’ within. According to this view, and whilst not entirely the focus of this study, the Party were at the whims of Moscow’s demands. The Comintern, was therefore a body which through financial and political support, effectively steered the political policies of national parties, such as the CPGB.²³ Their position, is drawn from an understanding that the Soviet Union dominated national Parties, ‘as indigenous factors did not influence policy, they influenced implementation.’²⁴ It is therefore clear in their view, that national particularities were merely a guise, chosen solely for the purpose of following Moscow’s international objectives.

Recently however, a revisionist school of historians, initially led by historians who were sympathetic, or in some way affiliated to the Party, have presented the partnership between the CPGB and the Comintern as an un-equal one. Eric Hobsbawm, has powerfully argued that whilst the ‘Popular Front’ era marked ‘a change of policy deeper than any the Comintern had undergone before’, claims of the Party’s ‘subordination’ to Moscow are hollow, as they understood that ‘the priority of defending and

²³ Campbell, J. & McIlroy, A. (2005). A Peripheral Vision: Communist Historiography in Britain. *American Communist History*. 4:2. p.130. & Eaden, J. & Renton, D. (2002). *The Communist Party of Great Britain since 1920*. Palgrave: New York.

²⁴ Laybourn, K. (2005). A Comment on the Historiography of Communism in Britain. *American Communist History*. 4:2. p.163.

strengthening the USSR was accepted above all else'.²⁵ In-fact, whilst much of the initial history of the CPGB was centred towards portraying the Party as nothing more than a Soviet satellite, historians such as Andrew Thorpe and Matthew Worley, have offered what has become the most nuanced analysis of the Party's relationship with the Comintern.²⁶ Thorpe admits that whilst the Soviet Union ultimately had the final say, the 'lines were often vague and somewhat open to interpretation, as the farther democratic centralism stretched, the harder it became to implement'.²⁷

Much recent research has dealt with this question, as historians have questioned how much autonomy the CPGB enjoyed. John McIlroy has argued that the Comintern steered its constituent parties to 'authentically project patriotism and populism to reflect national interests and traditions, under the guise of more autonomy'.²⁸ And whilst other historians, including both Trotskyists and anti-communists have argued that the Party was effectively told to tow a particular line at any given moment, the Party's autonomy, or lack of, is irrelevant in this case. In this author's view, the relationship between the Comintern and the CPGB is largely a footnote for this study. The rhetoric of all Parties across the globe emphasized their national uniqueness, for even if we take Smith's premise that 'national leaders had limited scope for agency, primarily in adapting the general line to local circumstances', the 'line' in this case became consumed by the national question.²⁹ As whilst, some may argue that this relationship is crucial in understanding the Party's shift towards a form of politics based upon a resurgent national and collective identity, its implementation was carried out

²⁵ Hobsbawm, E.J. (1986). The Moscow Line and International Communist Policy 1933-1947. In Wrigley, C (ed.). *Warfare, Diplomacy and Politics: Essays in Honour of A.J.P. Taylor*. Hamish Hamilton: London.pp.164-168.

²⁶ Callaghan, J. (2001). Laybourn, K. & Murphy, D. (1999). Under the Red Flag. Sutton Publishing: Stroud. *International Review of Social History*. 46.p.274.

²⁷ Thorpe, A. (2000). *The British Communist Party and Moscow 1920-1943*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.p.11.

²⁸ McIlroy, J. (2013). Restoring Stalinism to Communist History. *Critique*. 41:4. p.610.

²⁹ Smith, S. A. Issues in Comintern Historiography cited in Smith, S.A. (2014). *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.p.195.

with the vigour of a Party which was playing to its strengths – meaning any ‘influence’ is disguised at best.

The second chapter of this thesis will follow the CPGB’s relationship with India and the country’s Communist Party, the CPI. Most notably, the historical debate surrounds whether the Party effectively ‘did enough’ on the Indian issue. Alongside secondly, the Party’s ever-evolving view on Empire and imperialism. It has been the focus of vociferous debate, particularly from Marika Sherwood, who claimed that the CPGB were, despite their revolutionary credentials, ‘imbued with the same racist prejudices as the rest of the population’.³⁰ The colonies, nor the colonials were high on the aims of the Party, she continued.³¹ It received much criticism on release, as John Callaghan, author of an autobiography on the CPGB’s most senior Indian figure, Rajani Palme Dutt, responded in a later comment piece.³² That said, most historians have presented the Party’s work in a more positive light. Noreen Branson, one of the above-mentioned Party historians placed the CPGB ‘at the forefront of the battles for colonial freedom’, particularly during a period in which racial prejudices and Eurocentric indifference - including on the left - reigned supreme.³³

More recently, Satnam Virdee’s work has placed the CPGB at the ‘centre of most organised campaigns against imperialism and racism’.³⁴ Whilst internationally, the Comintern has been highlighted as ‘perhaps the era’s sole international white-led movement to adopt an avowedly anti-racist platform’.³⁵ Nonetheless, what has been generally concluded is that the Party’s activism for anti-imperialism ebbed in the mid-1930s. Consequently, much of the Party’s anti-imperialist focus has been placed on the periods either side of the ‘Popular Front’, as this is where their campaigning

³⁰ Sherwood, M. (1996). The CPGB, the Colonial Question and Black Britons, 1920-1938. *Science & Society*. 60:2. p.160.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Callaghan, J. (1997). Colonies, Racism, the CPGB and the Comintern in the Inter-War Years. *Science and Society*. 61: 4.

³³ Branson, N. (1985). *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain: 1927-1941*. p.337.

³⁴ Virdee, S. (2014). *Racism, Class and the Racialized Outsider*. Palgrave Macmillan: London. p.89.

³⁵ Adi, H. (2009). *The Negro Question: The Communist International and Black Liberation in the Interwar Years*. University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill.p.155.

was at its most obvious, as shown by the Meerut Affair and the prevalence of the League against Imperialism (LAI). In-fact, A.J. Mackenzie went so far as to say that after the Seventh World Congress, little attention was paid to anti-imperialism in the Comintern whatsoever, with the direction of the Indian movement largely left in the hands of the CPGB.³⁶ One particularly useful piece of scholarship has been Evan Smith's work on the Party's Afro-Caribbean membership following the Second World War, as well as his recent book, *British Communism: The Politics of Race*.³⁷ Smith proposes that the post-war era was based upon, a one-sided fraternal relationship, which was 'centred on British needs and wants, rather than on what the newly liberated countries would desire'.³⁸ Anti-colonialism he continues, was an important issue for the CPGB, but it was a 'foreign concept to most white members, who were predominantly concerned with immediate domestic matters.'³⁹ His book remains crucial in re-situating the Party's politics within the overarching political atmosphere of race, national identity and class politics, as well as its successes and failures in anti-imperialist activism.

No work on the Party's anti-imperialist activism, or on India would be complete without John Callaghan's research, as it remains indispensable for any looking at the Party's role in forming anti-imperialist bodies and movements.⁴⁰ His perceptive argument remains key in any understanding of the Party's role during the period, as he places its campaigning and overall position within the broader political climate, both at a national, and international level. He writes:

The real context of the Party's anti-colonialism between the wars is better gauged when it is remembered that 'almost all British writers in this period believed that social and economic

³⁶ Mackenzie, A.J. (1978). *British Marxists and Empire: Anti-Imperialist Theory and Practice, 1920-1945*. PhD Thesis. Birkbeck University.p.194.

³⁷ Smith, E. (2018). *British Communism: The Politics of Race*. BRILL: Leiden.

³⁸ Smith, E. (2016). National Liberation for Whom? The Postcolonial Question, the Communist Party of Great Britain. IRSH 61. p.312.

³⁹ Smith, E. (2018). *British Communism: The Politics of Race*.p.9.

⁴⁰ Callaghan, K. (1993). *Rajani Palme Dutt: A Study in British Stalinism*. Lawrence and Wishart: London.

advance [in the colonies] must precede political independence'...as the dominant Eurocentric assumptions of social evolution and racial hierarchy permeated throughout.⁴¹

In relation to India, and the wider international context, the Comintern's numerous shifts in thinking are relevant, and undoubtedly had their effects upon indigenous movements success. However, in the late 1930s, the CPGB did undoubtedly have more autonomy on certain issues; so long as they effectively campaigned for Spain, disseminated anti-fascist propaganda and attempted broader populist alliances. As whereas in 1924, the Comintern complained that the CPGB had 'done as good as nothing' in the colonies, the CI were less inclined to entice the Party to step-up its anti-colonial work in the Popular Front period, given the immediate threat of fascism.⁴² National Parties were largely left on their own, as anti-colonialist activism became an issue engaged with by individual members, as opposed to Parties. In fact, the 'Popular Front' has been largely criticised by many historians for its lack of constructive anti-imperialism. For example, Neil Redfern has argued that whilst there was evidence in party circulars, letters, and meetings of anti-imperial thinking, there was relatively little evidence of anti-imperialist activism in the wider membership following 1935. He goes on to state that anti-imperial work was put on the backburner in favour of all anti-fascist work, which to some degree meant 'subordinating anti-colonial work for the British national interest'.⁴³

It is an assessment this work largely agrees with, however, there are to be found some subtle differences. For example, Redfern places the blame in the hands of the Comintern for initiating this shift. However, this fails to appreciate the indigenous national factors that overwhelmingly dictated much of the Party's language around the nation and the defence of its borders. The CPGB were implementing a policy which they were happy to follow – after all, anti-imperialism was never a dominant concern for much of the Party's membership, whilst nods towards a nascent cultural spirit

⁴¹ Callaghan, J. (1995). *The Communists and the Colonies: Anti-Imperialism between the Wars*. Cited in Andrews, G. Fishman, N. & Morgan, K. (1995). *Opening the Books: Essays on the Social and Cultural History of the British Communist Party*. Pluto Press: London.p.17.

⁴² Callaghan, K. (1993). *Rajani Palme Dutt*.p.996.

⁴³ Redfern, N. (2005). *Class or Nation: Communists, Imperialism and Two World Wars*. International Library of Political Studies: London.p.95.

was where Pollitt and others, not only felt most comfortable, but thrived. That said not all assessments have been negative. For example, Jean Jones has noted that the sheer amount of material brought before the Central Committee ‘testifies to the seriousness with which the work was conducted’.⁴⁴ Whilst, John Callaghan has argued that the Party’s involvement in creating many Indian organisations, shows that the Indian question was of interest in a climate of broader indifference.⁴⁵ Meanwhile, recent scholars, such as Satnam Virdee and Evan Smith have argued that whilst the ‘Popular Front’ meant ‘anti-imperialism and anti-racism was increasingly side-lined’, within the rhetoric of worldwide anti-fascism - the issue did not entirely go away.⁴⁶ Tom Buchanan’s recent article, *The Dark Millions*, analyses the labour movement’s tussles between anti-imperialism and anti-fascism in the Popular Front years, concluding that in-fact, ‘anti-fascism might be thought of as, in a sense, antithetical to anti-imperialism’.⁴⁷ For Buchanan, it was clear that the mainstream Labour movement’s placing of anti-imperialism on the ‘back burner’ did little to address colonial concerns, and in many instances lost much of the good faith built up by organisations such as the LAI.⁴⁸ His analysis demonstrates the pervasiveness of this thinking across the entire British left in the run up to the Second World War, which shows that the CPGB were following a much wider trend towards Eurocentrism.

In addition, individual Party member histories have been a fascinating access point to historians, in particular, John Callaghan’s autobiography of Rajani Palme Dutt, and Kevin Morgan’s *Pollitt*. In Dutt’s case, it is not surprising that India and the ‘colonial question’ figured so prominently in his analysis; he was after all, half-Indian.⁴⁹ Dutt was immensely knowledgeable of the Indian situation, writing numerous pieces in what was essentially his own periodical, the *Labour Monthly*, as well the

⁴⁴ Ibid.p. 93.

⁴⁵ Callaghan, J. (1997). *Colonies, Racism, the CPGB and the Comintern in the Inter-War Years*.p.515. & Callaghan, J. (1993). *Rajani Palme Dutt*.p.98.

⁴⁶ Virdee, S. (2014). *Racism, Class and the Racialized Outsider*.p.96. & Smith, E. British Communism and the Politics of Race - interviewed by Selim Nadi. *Historical Materialism*.

⁴⁷ Buchanan, T. (2016). *‘The Dark Millions in the Colonies are Unavenged’: Anti-Fascism and Anti-Imperialism in the 1930s*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.p.645.

⁴⁸ Ibid: p.665.

⁴⁹ Dutt’s father was Indian and his mother his Swedish.

significant *India Today* in 1940, which offered the first Marxist examination of British imperialist policy in India.⁵⁰ Dutt's ideological stamp on the Party was absolute, and no serious study of the Party's anti-imperialist views would be complete without him.⁵¹ His interest in the Indian situation continued during the 'Popular Front', as Callaghan suggests that Dutt became even more active following his return to Britain in 1936.⁵² After all, he was the President of the Indian Political Conference, and was at the forefront of any Indian commentary, holding a unique and politically astute opinion on Indian self-determination, which his reputation as a 'Stalinist apparatchik' does not entertain. Interestingly, it appears Dutt resembled more autonomy and 'freedom of thought' on India, than he did on any other issue, for he attacked both socialists who opposed 'mere nationalism', as well as nationalists who neglected the social question, positing instead that unless the struggle was directed against both British imperialism, and the Indian domestic class structure, there would be no real independence for India.⁵³

Kevin Morgan's, *Against Fascism and War* has been an excellent source for this study, as he notes the lack of attention paid to imperialism by the Party. For Morgan, imperialism was rarely diffused or elucidated upon, but understood as something which could be ended by 'granting self-determination to all nations, not of a revolutionary commitment'.⁵⁴ Colonial struggles were understood as a set of democratic principles to be won and adhered to, as 'peoples fighting for their national freedom, not as front-line fighters to end the capitalist system'.⁵⁵ It was this particular point that appears most relevant to this study, as the CPGB, following the line of the Comintern, regarded revolutionary struggles within the national scope, rather than as part of a broader internationalist fight to overthrow capitalism. Imperialism became a buzzword, applied when the situation

⁵⁰ R.P. Dutt. (1940). *India Today*. Random House: London.

⁵¹ Morgan. K. (1989). *Against Fascism and War*.pp.11-12.

John Saville's comment that 'there can be no major assessment of Communist history without Dutt's writings' attests to his dominance in Party affairs. (Ibid.)

⁵² Callaghan, K. (1993). *Rajani Palme Dutt*.p.156.

⁵³ Ibid: p.160.

⁵⁴ Morgan, K. (1989). *Against Fascism and War*. p.188.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

necessitated, rather than a conscious ideological category. Baring this in mind, it is no surprise that the Popular Front has been regarded in some circles, as the bedrock for the ultimate abolition of the Comintern in 1943, and with it, international revolution.⁵⁶

In regards to the Comintern and the Party's relation with the Indian Communist Party, Gupta has questioned 'Western scholarship' that the line change was down to 'opportunism' on the part of the Soviet Union, and was a 'virtual betrayal of the national liberation movement in the colonies'.⁵⁷ He instead argues that in the colonies, where the anti-imperialist line was 'most necessary', the Comintern 'was most emphatic on defending proletarian hegemony', most notably in the anti-imperialist united front. He continues that it would be a 'complete travesty' to suggest that the anti-imperialist was 'eclipsed by the struggle against fascism', given that they 'arose out of two entirely different political situations'.⁵⁸ In the colonies, the Popular Front permitted a substantial re-think, following a period of sectarianism and relative marginality. Organisations such as the LAI, long-since discarded by the Labour Party as a 'Communist front', required the creation of 'populist' organisations, which would allow Labour Party members to become involved. According to one historian, working with nationalist forces 'transformed the fortunes of the CPI' from 1935.⁵⁹ The key difference lay in the labour movement, as unlike in Britain, where the established trade union and labour movements were entrenched fixtures, India was relatively weaker, allowing leftists the opportunity to infiltrate the nationalist movements, before becoming their revolutionary vanguard. It was as Wang-Ming expressed at the 1935 congress, 'both within and without the National Congress' the CPI's duty to 'consolidate all the genuine anti-imperialist forces of the country, broadening and leading the struggle of the masses against the imperialist oppressors'.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Carr, E.H. (1982). *The Twilight of the Comintern, 1930-1935*. Macmillan: London.

⁵⁷ Gupta, S.D. (1980). *Comintern, India and the Colonial Question, 1920-1937*. CSSSC Monograph 3. Centre for Studies in Social Science: Calcutta.p.210.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Wood, C. The Communist Party of India: From Leftism to United Front cited in Fyrth, J. (1985). *Britain, Fascism and the Popular Front*. Lawrence and Wishart: London.p.199.

⁶⁰ Branson, N. (1985). *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain: 1927-1941*. p.123.

That said, the Communist colonial policy during the Popular Front years has not been without criticism. For example, numerous historians of the Global South have placed blame on the Comintern for their 'one size fits all policy' on anti-imperialism.⁶¹ For as Gupta has described, the CPI, were as wounded by totalizing line-changes as any:

The Communist Party of India had to suffer too often for failing to take lessons from the experiences of the past and deviating from the above positions, leading to alternate spells of reformism and sectarianism.⁶²

The 'problem with the line was that it was inflexible', according to Prashad, unable to cater towards national demands or particularities, despite the good will the organisation garnered.⁶³ Singer goes further, viewing external pressures from the Comintern, alongside internal disputes, as derailing the Indian left, from undertaking an effective agrarian politics during the 1930s.⁶⁴ Therefore, the hope of this work is to demonstrate that the Indian question was relegated to a post-war phenomenon in much of the CPGB's activity. As whilst there is evidence that the Party campaigned for 'Indian issues', it was certainly not regarded as an immediate issue. Crucially, however, the Party's 'indifference' to the colonies during the Popular Front is only perceived as such, when contrasted with much of the stellar work they did previously – for the Party held lofty ambitions, they could never realistically maintain – particularly, as they were now committed, rightly or wrongly, to a 'Popular Front' programme. Indeed, the lack of comment from the Party is as much 'evidence', as it is if they had produced masses of material, for though absence does not mean apathy, many senior figures, including Pollitt, may not have been as concerned with the 'colonial campaign' in that time and place as Dutt and others would have wished. As Kevin Morgan has suggested, Empire was never a

⁶¹ Prashad, V. (2007). *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World*.pp.28-30.

⁶² Gupta, S.D. (1980). *Comintern, India and the Colonial Question, 1920-1937*. p.241.

⁶³ Prashad, V. (2007). *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World*. The New Press: New York.p.28-30.

⁶⁴ Singer, W. Peasants and the Peoples of the East: Indians and the rhetoric of the Comintern. Rees, T. & Thorpe, A. (1998). *International Communism and the Communist International, 1919-43*. Manchester University Press: Manchester.p.271.

prevailing concern for Pollitt.⁶⁵ Pollitt's key political instincts were after all 'hatred of fascism, devotion to the Soviet Union and leftist patriotism'.⁶⁶ It is worthwhile to remember that both the CPGB's position, as well as the CPI's anxieties were not only driven by the demands of the Comintern and international communist opinion, but also by the personal hopes and desires of the people who ran the Party. For instance, the Party's emphasis on Spain, reflected not only Pollitt's own connection to the issue, but the tangible fascist threat in mainland Europe; whilst his relative apathy on India is reflected, not only in Dutt's campaigning appearing out of the ordinary, but his relative indifference to the colonies, alongside European fascism.

As such, it is in this Paper's view, a task of analysing how the Party attempted to reflect 'national values'; its position in the broader political culture, (and if it at all influenced it), along with finally, whether it was readily accepted, and indeed 'national' in scope - rather than its failure to create a Socialist British Republic. Alongside, internationally, whether the Party's 'anti-imperialism' became an extension of this nationalist outlook at home, putting 'British interests' first, or whether anti-imperialism could co-exist alongside an aggressive, ostensibly English patriotism.

⁶⁵ Morgan, K. (1993). *Pollitt*. Manchester University Press: Manchester.p.160.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*:131.

Chapter I: For Country, For Class: Patriotism and the CPGB.

It is necessary in each country to investigate, study, and ascertain the national peculiarities; the specific national features of fascism and map out accordingly the effective methods and forms of struggle against it...we must not hesitate even to learn from the enemy, if that will help us quickly and more effectively wring his neck.⁶⁷

Dimitrov's speech was a call to arms for Communists to change tack in response to the rise of continental fascism. It was an existential threat to the existence of the Soviet Union, the only socialist state, and an alliance with bourgeois parties was a complete *volte-face* from the militant sectarianism of the 'Third Period'. This chapter will argue that Dimitrov's assertion that all parties should 'ascertain national particularities' was not necessarily a tough prospect for the CPGB to entertain. After all, Harry Pollitt felt that his socialism was distinctly of the English variety, despite his prevailing loyalties to internationalism and the Soviet project. The Party became an unofficial mouthpiece of reformism and progressive social progress. As Noreen Branson has explained, the Party's focus was to 'transform and democratise the state machine, not to replace it.'⁶⁸ The CPGB's relationship with social democracy was tenuous at best. After all, its move towards conciliation with the labour movement was largely due to broader international considerations; specifically, the Soviet Union's policy of 'collective security' with mainland Europe. The Party's shift towards firstly an 'United Front' and soon after a 'Popular Front' was driven by two main factors, one from above, from the Soviet Union – and the other, from the experiences the 'Class against Class' period fostered within.⁶⁹ There was a drive, particularly from Harry Pollitt and others to ally themselves with the Labour Party, and become in-essence, a pressure group to determine Labour policy.

⁶⁷ Georgi Dimitrov at the Seventh World Congress in 1935, which became the benchmark for the 'Popular Front' policy amongst all Communist Parties. *E.C.C.I. Report of the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International*. July-August 1935. Modern Books Limited: London.

⁶⁸ Branson, N. (1985). *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain: 1927-1941*. p.52.

⁶⁹ It was "no sudden 'about-turn', but on the contrary, served as the expression of policy changes long since in operation." Branson, N. Myths from Right and Left cited in Fyrth, J. (1985). *Britain, Fascism and the Popular Front*. Lawrence and Wishart: London.p.118.

The growth of fascism necessitated a re-think in Communist theory, prompting a turn in attitudes towards democracy, the mainstream Labour movement and a reworking of how social progress would occur. R.P.Dutt summed up the position in *Labour Monthly* in 1937, signalling that ‘the whole fight for democracy against fascism has taken on a deeper meaning in present conditions, and has become in unity with the fight for peace, the key expression of the present stage of social struggle.’⁷⁰ Post-1935, the Party claimed to champion a movement which they themselves stood outside of, articulating an innate English radical history with the CP as its logical forerunners. For whilst the Party may not have had any *real* claim to frame themselves as the gatekeepers of ‘English’ working-class history and ideals, these ‘ideals’ are both historically and thematically abstract, transient and open to interpretation. After all, the anxieties the Labour Party had over non-intervention, appeasement, and Nazi Germany meant a Party on the left could easily position itself as the forerunners of a ‘nationalist’ anti-fascist Party.

This view of a ‘nationalist’ CPGB is not a view imposed by historians however, but one entertained by both Party critics and members, questioned most famously by George Orwell. In his words, the ‘Popular Front’ evoked visions of ‘the nauseous spectacle of bishops, communists, duchesses and Labour MPs marching arm in arm to the tune of Rule Britannia’.⁷¹ Unsurprisingly, the Labour Party and the Trade Union movement were visibly irritated by the CPGB’s numerous attempts at affiliation and calls for support in Spanish Republican aid, with Walter Citrine calling for the Party to ‘please let us manage our own affairs’.⁷² They were regarded as a ‘negligible quantity’ and a Party whose motives, quite understandably, seemed up for debate given the Party’s haphazard line changes.⁷³ These seismic changes in party rhetoric did have their successes however, for example, the Party’s membership did quadruple between 1935 and 1939, (peaking at around 56,000 during the war) whilst greater united front initiatives amongst the left, at least at a local level, had a degree of success.⁷⁴ And

⁷⁰ Notes of the Month. *Labour Monthly*. 19. Jan-December 1937. p.7.

⁷¹ Orwell, S. & Angus, I. (1968). *The Collected Essays: Journalism and Letters of George Orwell: Volume I*. London: Secker and Warburg.p.305.

⁷² MSS.292/946/20/1. Walter Citrine. ‘International Conference on Spain Report’. March 1937. p.53.

⁷³ Bevan, E. ‘Help to Spain and Unity against Fascism’. *Speakers Notes*. 1936.

⁷⁴ MSS.15X/2/103/184. *Report of the Central Committee to the 14th National Congress of the CPGB*. 4 June 1937. p.2.

whilst, the Party and the Comintern may have said otherwise, there is no doubt that as war crept closer, the Party did become less typically Communist in rhetoric.

The 'Popular Front' found the CPGB attempting to claim an oppositional 'Englishness' for their own, in contrast to the 'bourgeois' patriotism of the Conservatives, and to a lesser extent the Labour Party. It was not necessarily a radical call, but Pollitt was adamant that for 'too long we have let the rich pretend the country was only theirs, that when we said Britain, we meant them'.⁷⁵ Patriotism was not a value to be sneered at, as Dimitrov emphasised at the Seventh World Congress, but to be catered to.⁷⁶ They were well aware of the political potential in a patriotic, left-wing party, as the CPGB defined patriotism as someone 'who loves their country, who would defend it from attack; who is proud to be a Britisher, and of the history and great traditions of the British people'.⁷⁷ What the country was, and who truly represented it, became a kind of *raison d'être* for the Party in this period, as the battle for Britain had begun. The Party sought to position themselves as the antithesis to the National Government's 'proto-fascism', as they complained that 'all the papers have been telling you for years that the Communists hate their country, that we are the very reverse of patriotic. Yet we do love our country, and we are proud of the British people.'⁷⁸ 'The press has been proved wrong', R.P. Arnot announced.⁷⁹ Instead, the Party were the arbiters of reason, anti-fascism and national (class) interests, drawing bold distinctions between those who were tarnishing Britain's name, and those who fought for it. Of course, this was nothing new, as nations are both inclusive and exclusive political entities, meaning the Party could easily draw boundaries between those imagined as 'British' – and those not. In the case of the CPGB, the National Government and its 'vested interests' became the 'outsider', as

Andrew Thorpe has noted that the Party's increase in membership was due to 'the exceptional conditions of the Second World War'. Thorpe, A. (2000). The Membership of the Communist Part of Great Britain, 1920-1945. *The Historical Journal*. 43:3. p.779.

⁷⁵ MSS.15X/2/103/204. *For Peace and Plenty: Report of the Fifteenth Congress*, Birmingham, September 16th to 19th, 1938.

⁷⁶ *E.C.C.I. Report of the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International*. July-August 1935. Modern Books Limited: London.

Dimitrov proclaimed that Communists should educate the working class in the 'spirit of proletarian internationalism' but should not 'sneer at all the national sentiments of the wide masses of working people'.

⁷⁷ MSS.15X/2/103/180. 'Parade of War', 10 Apr 1937.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ The English Tradition. R.P. Arnot. *Labour Monthly*. November 1936. p.694.

they had abandoned the nation, meaning it was up to the Communists to take up that mantle and fight for its 'real' interests. Yet in a manner illustrative of the Party's evolution, the CPGB's brand of 'patriotism' did not call for an overthrow of the capitalist system; it did not even call for working-class emancipation or representation, rather it sought to present the working class and the British people as one of the same, united in one struggle.

The Power of 'Popular Conviction'⁸⁰

Communism and Early-British radicalism were intimately tied forces, and conveniently, the Party were the torch carriers of this bold 'English tradition'. In this paper's view, the Party successfully presented the two as synonymous, regardless of its historical authenticity— and were very much, using Geoffrey Field's work, a 'social patriot' Party. Field sketches the differences between patriotism's 'social' and 'radical' expressions and posits that 'radical patriotism' delineates clearly between the state and the 'people', meaning the radical patriot sees the prevailing social structure as a politically dead machine, beyond repair and ultimately their 'national loyalty'.⁸¹ In contrast, 'social patriotism' is the belief that a new form of nationhood can be devised given the right conditions, as the state is itself, a vehicle for gradual social transformation. It is as Field notes, 'an inwardly focused patriotism, one that is orientated towards social reform, and implies some kind of new and improved Britain' without revolutionizing its landscape and political structure(s).⁸² Therefore, using Field's framework, this paper has understood the CPGB's move towards patriotic sentiments as an example of 'social patriotism', rather than an attempt to immediately revolutionize the existing social status-quo.

⁸⁰ 'Another proposition of Marx is that a popular conviction often has the same energy as a material force or something of the kind, which is extremely significant.' Gramsci, A. "Solidity of popular beliefs". p. 707.

⁸¹ Ward, P. (1998). *Red Flag and Union Jack: Englishness, Patriotism and the British Left, 1881-1924*. The Royal Historical Society. Boydell Press: Suffolk.p.4.

⁸² Field, G. (1992). Social Patriotism and the British Working Class: Appearance and Disappearance of a Tradition. *International Labor and Working-Class History*. 42.p.36.

Paul Ward's study of the mainstream British Left in the early nineteenth century has demonstrated that 'British socialism must ultimately take its place alongside other invented traditions... as Labour politics revolved around identities of nation as well as class', which were not static but under constant re-definition.⁸³ The type of nationalism which emerged in the late nineteenth century emphasised paradoxically, loyalty not to the 'country' but only to a particular version of that country: to an ideological construct.⁸⁴ After all, Clement Atlee's comment that the Labour Party was 'socialism adapted to British conditions' is an easily expanded view to fit the broader British left, in varying degrees and periods.⁸⁵ For whilst it is conventional to assume that Marxism and nationalism are incompatible - which is a debate that still rages to this day; in this period the distinction was less obvious. Nationalism has provided Marxists 'an uncomfortable anomaly' and has been 'largely elided, rather than confronted' according to Benedict Anderson.⁸⁶ Tom Nairn, has taken a similar view, writing that 'the theory of nationalism represents Marxism's greatest historical failure'.⁸⁷ As Geoffrey Field has summarised, much of historic leftist theory on the nation dealt with the question of whether 'patriotism can be rescued for the left, or if its imperial and class associations must always undermine its positive, democratic aspects'.⁸⁸

It would be hard, given the rise of continental fascism and an understandably hesitant left to disagree with this assessment, for the CPGB attempted to haphazardly co-opt certain historical ideals, which are intrinsic to the national state, and particularly the imagined 'British nation'. If we follow Benedict Anderson's suggestion that the nation is an 'imagined political community', which is to its core, 'both inherently sovereign and politically limited'.⁸⁹ There is consequently, not one totalizing 'British' history, and neither is there an unequivocal sense of 'Britishness', but rather many competing

⁸³ Ward, P. (1998). *Red Flag and Union Jack*. p.203.

It must be noted that I am broadening Paul Ward's phrasing to mean the labour movement as a whole, rather than the Labour Party alone.

⁸⁴ Hobsbawm, E. (1994). *Nations and Nationalism Since 1870: Programme, Myth and Reality*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.p.93.

⁸⁵ Ward, P. (2002) Preparing for the People's War: The Left and Patriotism in the 1930's. *Labour History Review*. 67:2. p.174.

⁸⁶ Anderson, B. (1999). *Imagined Communities*. Verso Books: London.p.13.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*: p.3.

⁸⁸ Field, G. (1992). *Social Patriotism and the British Working Class*.p.20.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*: p.6.

histories; some forgotten, some suppressed and some more prominent than they perhaps deserve. For whilst, national identity is a by-product of nations, national identity is 'sovereign' in of itself, meaning it is also interchangeable with varying political beliefs and ideologies. It is therefore no surprise the CPGB attempted to establish itself firmly in a 'British mode of thinking' when firstly, it had so much political resonance, and secondly, provided the CPGB with an opportunity to, follow Gellner's turn of phrase, do what all nations do, and 'invent nations where they did not previously exist'.⁹⁰ It is worth remembering that nations are continually in a state of flux, being both a theoretical construct and a *real* tangible entity. Hence, there remains the problem, both for nations and political organisations to authentically reflect/and or create what are perceived as national values. As the 19th century Italian, Massimo d'Azeglio infamously stated: 'We have made Italy. Now we must make the Italians'.⁹¹

The study of 'Britishness' has long dealt with this question, as national identity, nor 'Britishness' is an easily identifiable phenomenon. Paul Ward's understanding of Britishness, as something best understood, at the base level - as something individuals collectively identify with, and subsequently reinforce is vital for any understanding of national identity.⁹² Its transient nature, across boundaries of class, race and gender has meant that Britishness has always been a formative creed. Nations are after all, 'caught, uncertainly, in the act of composing' themselves.⁹³ It would be therefore unfair, when discussing the CPGB's own nationalist turn to not place it within our broader understanding of 'Britishness' - particularly as many contemporary observers downplayed the CPGB and the BUF as 'un-British' in character. Though largely discredited, initial historiography dismissed their 'extreme' nature as an outlier to 'traditional British values' of common decency and moderation.⁹⁴ It is correct, as Andrew Thorpe has written, that 'generalisations about the national character are probably best left

⁹⁰ Gellner, E. (1964). *Thoughts and Change*. Weidenfeld and Nicolson: London. p.168.

⁹¹ Hobsbawm, E.J. (1992). *Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.p.267.

⁹² Ward, P. (2004). *Britishness since 1870*. Routledge: London. p.3

⁹³ Bhabha, H. Nation and Narration in Perton, E. (1997). '*Englishness: The Narration of Nation*'. *Journal of British Studies*. 36.pp.245-246.

⁹⁴ Henry Pelling – 'many people could maintain that the Labour Party represented the British form of socialism, whereas Communism was the Russian form'. Kirk, N. (2011). *Labour and the Politics of Empire*. Manchester University Press: Manchester.p.164.

out of consideration when discussing the failure of political extremism'.⁹⁵ Nonetheless, it is clear that appearing 'British' and in-tune with the *real* national character has power in its own right, as whilst 'failure did not stem from an innate Britishness that favoured moderation, it does suggest the strength in the construction of Britishness'.⁹⁶ Subsequently, crucial to this study, for all of the CPGB's attempts to create an 'oppositional' patriotism, their efforts did inevitably embrace the very same language and political action as those that regarded their very existence as 'non-British'.

The nation did not initially figure prominently in conventional Marxism, as key figures tended to view the state in the capitalist phase of development as engendering alienation from the broader class-struggle. The orthodox position held that the 'nation' was a bastion against social progress, which harboured 'reactionary' or as Lenin described, inherently 'social chauvinist' values.⁹⁷ For whilst Marx, famously coined that 'the working men have no country', national sentiments still not only existed in the 1930s, but thrived, as 'national differences and antagonisms between peoples' were not as he had hoped, 'vanishing daily'.⁹⁸ Dimitrov's statement at the Seventh World Congress was therefore, not so much a break with historic Communist theory, as many previously thought. Eric Hobsbawm has suggested that whilst the Popular Front was the most divisive 'turn' in Communist history, it did have its own historical foundations, particularly in the 'social patriot' line many European socialists took on the eve of the First World War.⁹⁹ Even in the immediate aftermath of the October Revolution, Lenin noted in June 1920, that it is the Communists' 'duty to make certain concessions' [to the nation] in the hope of 'eradicating the above-mentioned prejudices as quickly as possible', but crucially to not cater to 'national egoism'.¹⁰⁰ Instead he suggested, that the task lay in

⁹⁵ Thorpe, A. (1989). *The Failure of Political Extremism in Inter-War Britain*. Exeter University Press: Exeter.p.10.

⁹⁶ Ward, P. (2004). *Britishness since 1870*. p.105.

⁹⁷ Lenin, V.I. (1969). *British Labour and British Imperialism: A Compilation of Writings by Lenin on Britain*. Lawrence and Wishart: London.pp.64-66.

⁹⁸ Engels, F. & Marx, K. (2015). *The Communist Manifesto*. Penguin Books: London. pp.79/80

⁹⁹ Hobsbawm, E.J. (1986). The Moscow Line and International Communist Policy 1933-1947. In Wrigley, C (ed.). *Warfare, Diplomacy and Politics: Essays in Honour of A.J.P. Taylor*. Hamish Hamilton: London.pp.164-173.

¹⁰⁰ Lenin, V.I. (1969). *British Labour and British Imperialism: A Compilation of Writings by Lenin on Britain*. Lawrence and Wishart: London.p.226.

‘applying the main principles of communism to the peculiar relations between classes, and to the peculiar features...that are obsessed in every country’ which should be studied, found and solved.¹⁰¹

Of course, what these ‘features’ were was entirely up for debate, as were what the ‘nation’ was, or whom it sought to represent. Nations were understood as unique fixtures, which could be utilised as an instrument in the broader social struggle, not simply as an obstruction against broader international class solidarity. Antonio Gramsci, the great Marxist theorist, agreed, commenting in his *Prison Notebooks*, that the ‘internal relations of any nation are the result of a combination which is original and in a certain sense, unique’.¹⁰² In this sense, the prevailing Communist theorists of the period were fully aware of the staying power of the nation-state, and its heightened political relevancy. The idiosyncrasies of each nation were not to be ignored, but accommodated to, and the Comintern followed this line. ‘British exceptionalism’ as it was coined, was just one strand of the supposed ‘free-reign’ national parties had in determining party policy. ‘British particularities’ on the ‘United Front’, was one example of the ‘new autonomy’ constituent parties gained, as the Party complained that ‘regard should be made to our circumstances here’.¹⁰³

As Michael Billig has written, ‘the voice of nationalism’ is hegemonic, claiming an ‘identity of identities’. Consequently, nationalism is not necessarily as inwardly orientated as we are to believe, but all-encompassing too. For example, if we take the CPGB as an example; the Party was attempting to be an authentic Communist Party, but also a populist, reformist, and ‘patriotic’ force too. And whilst political parties are not beholden to one singular ideology, the CPGB’s shift towards representing the ‘nation’ in all of its varying currents and political opinion demonstrates Billig’s presence of a ‘syntax of hegemony’ over identities.¹⁰⁴ As a result, national symbols were open to be ‘reclaimed’ across the continent, just as the working-classes were to re-establish their position within the nation itself. National symbols are perhaps the most striking example of nationhood and national identity, given they are so easily recognisable, especially when accounting for their varying

¹⁰¹ Ibid:258.

¹⁰² Gramsci, A. (1971). *Civil Society*. Lawrence Wishart: London.p.499.

¹⁰³ Thorpe, A. (1998). Comintern ‘Control’ of the Communist Party of Great Britain: 1920-1943. *The English Historical Review*. 113:452. p.652.

¹⁰⁴ Billig, M. (1997). *Banal Nationalism*. Sage Publications: London.p.10.

connotations. Joan of Arc is arguably the greatest example, as she has in various periods been co-opted as a sign of innate 'French spirit'. Her usage, by the proto-fascist Vichy government, the liberal Third Republic, or even the Communist PCF - most usually as an embattled heroine fighting an occupying force, demonstrates the flexibility of political symbols.

In the CPGB's case, one particularly interesting instance was mentioned during a debate in the House of Commons in March 1937, where attention was drawn to a poster in London 'showing the device of the hammer and sickle superimposed upon a crucifix'.¹⁰⁵ Whilst the YCL claimed no responsibility for the poster, calling it 'a complete and clumsy misrepresentation', and a failed smear attempt by the fascists, problems of authenticity are unlikely to detract from the question that the Party needed to broaden its appeal, meaning no potential stone was left untouched.¹⁰⁶ It recognized that religious ideals would resonate with many on the left, as it always had. For example, one appeal for aid to Spain, emphasised that the acts being carried out by Franco's Fascists were not indicative of Catholics based in England, as the Party stressed that 'we are sure this is not YOUR idea of Christianity!'.¹⁰⁷ And whilst at first glance this link between socialism and Christianity appears ludicrous, it is not as absurd as one may think: Philip Snowden in his famous lecture coined the triumph of socialism as *The Christ That Is to Be*, whilst Conrad Noel, better known as the 'Red Vicar of Thaxted', was a founding member of the British Socialist Party, which later became the CPGB.¹⁰⁸ Although, Kenneth Leech has argued that Noel's brand of socialism 'owed more to William Morris and the romantic and utopian traditions than Marx', Noel's strong support of the Soviet Union and communist politics demonstrates a potential overlapping of socialism with both religion and the nation-state, at least on an individual level.¹⁰⁹ In-fact, J.R. Campbell noted in a 1938 *Daily Worker* column that there was no

¹⁰⁵ Hansard Millbank. COMMUNIST POSTER. 04 March 1937 vol. 321.

¹⁰⁶ *Daily Worker* - March 4th, 1937. 'Sacrilege Poster - A Repudiation' Y.C.L. Statement.

¹⁰⁷ MSS.15/3/8/229. Communist Party of Great Britain, Central Committee: leaflet calling for a rally on 6 September, with an appeal by Dolores Ibarruri, known as 'Pasionaria', in support of the democratic Spanish government, Undated [1936-1939].

¹⁰⁸ Snowden, P. (1903). *The Christ That Is to Be*. Independent Labour Party: London.

Snowden's lecture later became an ILP pamphlet which is what I am referring to in this case.

¹⁰⁹ Leech, K. (2004). Noel, Conrad 'Le Despenser Roden'. (1869-1942). *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

reason why a Christian could not join the CP, signifying the Party's broad-church approach to fight fascism.¹¹⁰

In this sense, the CPGB were following the pre-war tradition of socialism, which was based on 'historical precedent', in which social progress was firmly rooted in references to the past.¹¹¹ For it did not matter whether the CPGB had any claim to present themselves as one with Christianity, other than that they claimed to do so – for the fact that they claimed they were, gave them some degree of legitimacy. Gramsci emphasised the necessity of catering to these national particularities in a later piece, noting that 'to be sure, the development is towards internationalism – but the point of departure is national'.¹¹² International Communist policy was unified in the delicate task of understanding the importance of the nation-state, as they dismissed accusations of nationalism if they referred to the perceived, nucleus of the question. Despite regional emphasises, in the cases of Keir Hardie, Philip Snowden, or even Rajani Palme Dutt's connection with India, it must be noted, that 'Britain' and 'England' were largely conflated as one and the same. It was not an uncommon assimilation, and one which purveyed the entire political spectrum, as Conservative Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin let the term 'England' speak for the entirety of Britain.¹¹³ England was the unrivalled source of national identity, both blurring and homogenising, regional and national identities into a whole. Indeed, the Party's emphasis on a national identity predicated on an 'English radical history', showcased the Party's lack of interest in the Scottish and Welsh nationalisms, as scant attention was placed on the Scottish and Welsh questions during this period.¹¹⁴ England, alone, became the focus of their oppositional national identity, as the Party's Englishness was built in opposition to the 'Britishness' of Empire and capital.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ Heinemann, M. The People's Front and the Intellectuals cited in Fyrth, J. (1985). *Britain, Fascism and the Popular Front*. Lawrence and Wishart: London.p.177.

¹¹¹ Ward, P. (1999). Socialists "True" Patriotism in Britain in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries. *National Identities*. 1.

¹¹² Gramsci, A. (1971). *Civil Society*.p.500.

¹¹³ Schwartz, B. (1986). Conservatism, Nationalism and Imperialism. In Hall, D. & S. Hall. *Politics and Ideology*. Open University: Milton Keynes.

¹¹⁴ Douglas, J. (2010). *The Communist Party of Great Britain and the National Question in Wales, 1920-1991*. PhD Thesis. Aberystwyth University.

¹¹⁵ Harker, B. (2011). 'Communism is English': Edgell Rickword, Jack Lindsay and the Cultural Politics of the Popular Front. *Literature and History*.20:2. p.26.

Eternal England.

Nostalgia for an eternal England, where the virtues of freedom, democracy, and social progress would once again prosper, were rife in CPGB thinking. However, the concept of an enduring, ultimately hidden virtue with the possibility of rediscovery is far from unusual, and is by no means unique to England.¹¹⁶ The CPGB understood the importance of collective identity, though crucially, it was not in the vein Stuart Macintyre declared in his pioneering work, *Little Moscow's*.¹¹⁷ Instead, proletarian internationalism was officially placed on the backburner in favour of a populist, working-class patriotism. For the CPGB, they framed that following a period of 'social chauvinism' and bourgeois patriotism, the prospect of building on concealed 'British values' meant the potential for, as Pollitt enthusiastically exclaimed, 'reason to prevail in Britain!'.¹¹⁸ The arrival of 'reason' to Britain would prompt a move towards 'economic security, peace, democracy, and finally socialism'.¹¹⁹ This reworking of the conventional Marxist doctrine of class struggle, towards peaceful co-existence with a new, revitalised form of democracy was a startling example of the party's understanding of history – as the vehicles of social progress had changed substantially. Previously, the working classes alone (give or take the Labour Party's inclusion) were to act in the Leninist vanguardism tradition, however, now the matter relied on creating a 'people's government' formed by a wider range of opinion – who would stem the tide of fascism, and return to society to order, prosperity and liberal values.

Pollitt himself, was the obvious example of this distinctly English stance. 'As English as a Lancashire Rose or oak' was how Rajani Palme Dutt described his sometimes comrade, sometimes adversary, Harry Pollitt.¹²⁰ 'Tough, Lancashire born and bred; downright and without frills' – he was admired by both friends and foes as a terrific public speaker.¹²¹ Even the *Manchester Guardian*, a liberal newspaper, which had no desire to present Pollitt as anything more than a Moscow stooge, commented in a review of his autobiography *Serving My Time* as 'explaining many things, including

¹¹⁶ Aughey, A. (2007). *The Politics of Englishness*. Manchester University Press: Manchester.p.86.

¹¹⁷ Macintyre, S. (1980). *Little Moscows: Communism and Working-Class Militancy in Inter-War Britain*. Croon Helm: London.

¹¹⁸ For Peace and Plenty: Report of the Fifteenth Congress.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Morgan, K. (1993). *Pollitt*. Manchester University Press: Manchester.p.111.

¹²¹ "Mr Pollitt". *Manchester Guardian*. March 29th, 1940.

Mr Pollitt's Englishness in spite of the Soviet Union', describing him as 'the best exponent of British communism'.¹²² To some degree, Pollitt's sense of 'Englishness' can be relayed back to his political upbringing, as well as his own personal style; for as Morgan has suggested, whereas Pollitt relied on 'gut feelings, Dutt relied on doctrinal athleticism'.¹²³ It was an issue of what was best for the working-classes then and now, rather than any strict adherence to Marxism. For he was never overly competent with Marxist theory, and even in his *Labour Monthly* articles, rarely articulated Marxist terms or concepts, other than in passing. Instead, he focused on the 'real' issues of the day, whether that be working conditions, the means test, or the occasional anti-war protest, as opposed to incessant rewording of communist theory. It was where his strengths lay, and his comfortableness with campaigning for Spain and against anti-fascism, at home and abroad, within a distinctly 'English Socialism' meant he thrived, just as the Party's support swelled.

Of course, Pollitt was not alone, as British Communism in general, even by Lenin, was regarded as being less theoretically inclined.¹²⁴ In 1938, this was still evidently a problem, as in a pamphlet to members regarding the Party's work since the Seventh World Congress, Pollitt commented that it was 'urgently necessary to broaden our educational work' to gain a 'better understanding of Marxism-Leninism'. However, he emphasised that it was 'not because we are bookworms, but because we want it form, guide and help lead the masses in a more effective way'.¹²⁵ Precisely because the new period was ideologically the most 'momentous turn' in the Party's history meant a realigning of theory and praxis.¹²⁶ In January 1938, it was deemed essential to 'scrap old ideas and prejudices' in the hope of attracting new blood to the Party, which would 'let in a breath of fresh air and blow away the fog of doubt and despair'.¹²⁷ It was clear that memories of the harsh sectarianism of the 'Third Period' fostered a desire to work within wider civil society, and hopefully transform the Party away from as Rust described, 'a hole in the corner affair'.¹²⁸ This idea penetrated the Party, as Hutt in a review of

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Morgan, K. (1993). *Pollitt*. p.103.

¹²⁴ Newton, K. (1969). *The Sociology of British Communism*. Penguin Press: London.pp.12/13.

¹²⁵ CP/IND/POLL/05/. Harry Pollitt - Three Years Since the 7th Congress.

¹²⁶ Samuel, R. (2017). *The Lost World of British Communism*. Verso: London.

¹²⁷ Harry Pollitt. The Coming General Election. *International Press Correspondence*.18: 3, 22 January 1938.

¹²⁸ *Report of the Central Committee to the 14th National Congress of the CPGB*. 4 June 1937.

Tom Bell's history of the Party, titled *How Not to Write Communist History*, disavowed any thinking that viewed them as against the grain. He wrote:

To isolate the story of CP from that of the British Labour movement as a whole inevitably implies a narrow, sectarian approach at a time when a diametrically opposite attitude is acutely felt to be essential.¹²⁹

Hutt's review signalled the Party's evolving view on both their own history; their position within the broader labour movement, and the role 'authentic' history had to play in any 'Popular Front' success. It was for Hutt, crucial to position the CPGB as one of the same with the British Labour Movement, not just to consolidate their own position, but for the prospects of any successful anti-fascism.

Spain: Fascism and War.

The CPGB's nationalist turn was demonstrated most notably in campaigning for Spain. The *Daily Worker*, forever the boldest and most clear-cut expression of the CPGB, was immediate in its declaration that Britain should 'force the National Government to give assistance to the People's Government of Spain.'¹³⁰ The Party framed the National Government's non-intervention in Spain as both a betrayal of the Spanish people and Britain's name in global affairs. 'Whatever was good in British traditions...the National Government has abandoned and betrayed...they have added new examples of treachery to every infamy that has previously sullied the name of Britain', Pollitt noted to the Party's National Congress in 1937.¹³¹ The Comintern had tread the path for this nationalist thinking at the Seventh World Congress, calling on Parties 'not to sneer at national sentiments', but the response to the Munich Agreement in 1938 laid bare the responsibilities for the working classes. They declared that the bourgeoisie were 'betraying the national interests', and as such, it was the working class and its Communist Party 'which takes over the legacies of the bourgeois revolution; maintains them against the traitors and develops them to a richer and fuller life'.¹³² Nationalism had

¹²⁹ How Not to Write Communist History? The British Communist Party. Thomas Bell. Review by Allen Hutt. *Labour Monthly*, June 1937.

¹³⁰ *Daily Worker*, 27th July 1936.

¹³¹ *Report of the Central Committee to the 14th National Congress of the CPGB*. 4 June 1937.

¹³² Redfern, N. (2017). *The Comintern and Imperialism: A Balance Sheet*.p.50.

swamped the institution, as loyalty to the Soviet Union necessitated an uneasy alliance between patriotism and defence of its institutions at home, alongside internationalism at the state level. For Pollitt, Britain became a nation worth defending, especially as war drew ever closer. It was a matter of unleashing what was lying dormant, awaiting revival, and was crucially, not a revolutionary break. He envisioned a scenario where a 'People's Front' government could become a barricade against continental fascism, just as the Soviet Union had, as Gallacher described the U.S.S.R. as 'a great, powerful country, that stands out as the bulwark of peace in Europe'.¹³³ Many in the Party understood Britain's interests as intimately intertwined with those of the Soviet Union, hoping for an alliance in the pursuit of peace.¹³⁴ The Party hoped that the masses would become aware of the 'betrayals that have taken place' and take up the fight against the likes of the National Government, who had smeared the country's history of radicalism. Gallacher in a speech to the House of Commons called for 'peace forces to be united', outlining that 'if Britain had a government that represented the peaceful and progressive desires of the people...such a government could form a peace block that could stop all aggression'.¹³⁵

The National Government were not alone however, as the trade-unions and Labour Party right came under attack for their perceived hesitancy in assisting Republican Spain.¹³⁶ The Party's approach was symptomatic of their new role in British society; attacking the Labour Party for a lack of interest, but also in the hope that the Party would support their measures for affiliation. This is shown in both Pollitt and Rust's Spanish accounts, where they highlighted the positive impact Labour Party MPs had in Spain. They had created a 'very big impression' on the Battalion, as Pollitt continued, 'there was the upmost eagerness to learn what had been the effect of their visit in Britain'. It is clear that regardless of the Party's efforts on the ground, persuading the Labour Party to change course was

¹³³ Hansard Millbank. 28 February 1939. Vol. 344.

¹³⁴ Hansard Millbank. 03 August 1944. Vol. 402.

"If the Minister had been pro-British, he would have been an Ally of the Soviet Union." – Gallacher in response to Sir James Grigg, Secretary of State for War.

¹³⁵ Hansard Millbank. 21st October 1937. Vol. 327.

¹³⁶ CP/IND/POLL/2/5 – Harry Pollitt, First Visit to Spain, February 1937.

essential.¹³⁷ However, this did not mean that the Labour Party were exempt from blame - in-fact, the CPGB's relationship with the Labour movement over Spain showcased both the Party's new line in action, as well as the lingering partisanship from the 'Third Period'. Hard-line figures of the Labour right came in for the most damage, as they proclaimed that the British Battalion had 'removed the stain from [the labour movements] name placed on it by the Citrines and Bevan's'¹³⁸ Pollitt scolded Walter Citrine, referring to him as a 'knight of the British empire, a man more concerned with capitalists, than the militants in his own union'.¹³⁹ It was a cause, one friend noted, that 'was dearest to his invincible heart'.¹⁴⁰ And he was under no illusions that more could have been done, as Pollitt conceded on his return to Britain in July 1937 - 'I left Republican Spain with the indelible memories of the things I had seen, conscious of how little we have done to help'.¹⁴¹

Republican Spain had fallen, and to compound it all, the Party had lost numerous members and supporters to the cause. It was an issue Pollitt repeatedly quarrelled with, sending numerous letters to families, wives and friends back home, telling the Party's Central Committee that 'it is astonishing how many wives are vehement' with the Party.¹⁴² Pollitt felt that their sacrifices were not as well appreciated as he had hoped, as he asked Dave Springhall, 'how they can say we are not sincere when we have sent our best comrades to fight'.¹⁴³ It is clear that Pollitt was deeply affected by his experience of Spain, which is perhaps what eased him towards the more overt patriotic tones and romanticism he later expressed - in a hope that it would not be replicated. During the Spring of 1939, he emphasised that any support for the Spanish people 'is just as much a question of self-interest and self-defence', as it is of 'humanitarianism and sympathy for a heroic people'.¹⁴⁴ Pollitt argued that an 'independent Britain', would not be possible so long as the country 'allowed Spain to be sacrificed by Mussolini and Hitler', claiming it was as much an attack 'upon your home, your freedom, and your

¹³⁷ CP/IND/POLL/2/5 – Harry Pollitt, Third Visit to Spain, Christmas 1937. & Rust, W. (1939). *Britons in Spain*. Left Book Club Edition. Lawrence and Wishart: London.p.100.

¹³⁸ CP/IND/POLL/2/5 – First Visit, February 1937.

¹³⁹ CP/IND/POL/2/5 – Second Visit, July 1937.

¹⁴⁰ Morgan, K. (1993). *Pollitt*. p.102.

¹⁴¹ CP/IND/POL/2/5 – Second Visit, July 1937.

¹⁴² CC, January 16th, 1937.

¹⁴³ CP/IND/POLL/2/5 – First Visit, February 1937.

¹⁴⁴ 15X/2/103/210. "Defence of the People". 7 February 1939.

peace' as it was theirs.¹⁴⁵ He highlighted the 'will' of the Spanish people numerous times in this period, just as much as he drilled home the image of a truly proletarian army, in the International Brigade. They were idolised almost as immediately as they arrived in Albacete, with Pollitt noting on his first visit in February 1937, that they were 'the flower of the British people' who have 'done things, the like of which has never been heard of before'.¹⁴⁶

The International Brigade had 'enlarged' the Labour tradition, into something greater than its whole, 'into something much bigger', filling it with a 'greater meaning'.¹⁴⁷ They were an inspiration, both to the Party and the country, 'helping us all in our work of guarding the banner of freedom and liberty'.¹⁴⁸ They would not be forgotten, as whilst they were 'unknown, and were not big names from back street and factory, they will live forever.'¹⁴⁹ The Party began to assign a high value to the achievements of 'heroic' volunteers in Spain, placing them as the forerunners of a wide current of English history, such as the Chartist.¹⁵⁰ These historic movements were the bedrock of what the International Brigade would go on to achieve, as even Dimitrov, a Bulgarian, made clear in 1935 that the 'Popular Front' would be based on the 'glorious traditions of the Chartist movement, and the First International of Marx and Engels...in defence of democracy, culture and peace'.¹⁵¹ It provided the catalyst for the British Battalion to, in Rust's words, 'march away to shed their blood in a foreign land, so that we may live in peace'.¹⁵² Following in the example of these national heroes, the 'fiery furnace of Spain', had created a situation where these 'boys' would 'one day become the leaders of our movement', whose actions, were indicative of a new British society.¹⁵³ They were immortal, as

¹⁴⁵ 292/946/18b/2/ - "We Can't Burn Our Fingers", 17 March 1938. & MSS.15/3/8/229. Appeal by Dolores Ibarruri. Undated [1936-1939].

¹⁴⁶ CP/IND/POLL/2/5. First Visit, February 1937.

¹⁴⁷ Britons in Spain, by William Rust. *Labour Monthly*. Review by Walter Cramer. March 1939, p. 180.

¹⁴⁸ Pollitt, H. (1937). In Memory of the British Comrades Who Have Fallen in Spain. The Communist International. February 1937. 15:2.

¹⁴⁹ CP/IND/POLL/2/5/. Fifth Visit, September 1938.

¹⁵⁰ CP/IND/POLL/2/5. Third Visit, Christmas 1937.

¹⁵¹ Dimitrov, G. 1935. *People's Front*.

¹⁵² MSS.15X/2/103/202. Rust, W. *On the Spanish Civil War, the Spanish Republican Army and the International Brigade*.

¹⁵³ CP/IND/POLL/2/5. First Visit, February 1937.

Bill Rust, the reporter for the *Daily Worker* in Spain placed the International Brigade forever in the collective memory, stating that they will ‘shine for ever in the annals of history’.¹⁵⁴

They are our people, flesh of our flesh, blood of our blood, bound to us by a thousand living ties of living and friendship, and we have the right to be proud of them and to shout their achievements bravely to the skies.¹⁵⁵

It was during this period that the memorialization of the International Brigade reached its zenith. Tom Buchanan’s work on the subject has delved into the lengths the Party went to firmly entrench the Battalion in the national collective memory. He describes the events of remembrance as ‘increasingly planned and choreographed to create the maximum emotional impact’.¹⁵⁶ Indeed, a series of National Memorial Meetings held between September 1938 and January the following year, highlighted the Party’s indebtedness to the volunteers. Attracting large audiences, ‘the meetings took on ‘a mournful, liturgical character, as the names of working-class heroes were slowly chanted’.¹⁵⁷ However, the remembrance of the fighters was not purely instrumental, but directly underpinned the Party’s later efforts at ‘mass politics’. It according to one historian, allowed the Party to promote a ‘Popular Front’ politics, more powerfully, precisely because Britain faced the imminent threat of war. They continue that ‘elegy to the heroism and sacrifice in Spain spoke to qualities soon to be called upon again’.¹⁵⁸

The International Brigade was placed at the centre of all propaganda, for ‘the British labour movements must learn to treasure the men of the International Brigade and to fire the youth of the country with their mighty story’.¹⁵⁹ It was not an uncommon comparison, as Tom Wintringham made this same assessment in *English Captain*, describing the volunteers as the ‘inheritors of a long-standing English tradition’.¹⁶⁰ However, many in the Party understood that the Battalion’s deeds may

¹⁵⁴ Rust, W. *On the Spanish Civil War*. pp.11-16.

¹⁵⁵ Unity and the People's Front. Harry Pollitt. *Labour Monthly*. July 1938. p.414.

¹⁵⁶ Buchanan, T. (2007). *The Impact of the Spanish Civil War on Britain: War, Loss and Memory*. Sussex Academic Press: Eastbourne. p.123.

¹⁵⁷ Mottram, D. (2017). *Shaping the Inheritance of the Spanish Civil War on the British Left, 1939-1945*. PhD Thesis. Manchester University.p.36.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid:37.

¹⁵⁹ MSS.15X/2/103/202. Rust, W. ‘Spain Fights for Victory’, 4 Aug 1938.

¹⁶⁰ Wintringham, T. (2011). *English Captain*. Faber: London.p.16.

not be as readily appreciated as soon as the Party wished, meaning it was their duty to popularize their efforts and ensure that the 'real Britain' was well-known. For example, the CC convened in October 1937, and proposed that greater emphasis was needed on 'popularizing England's great traditions' to establish that the British Battalion 'stimulate us in our propaganda' and ensure it is 'more sentimental and touching'.¹⁶¹ They were adamant that their good work must not be squandered, as the P.B agreed to 'initiate a mass service that will ensure closer contact between ourselves and the Battalion' to guarantee, despite all their populist pretences, that the Battalion was a Communist led initiative.¹⁶² As the name 'Popular Front' suggests, it was a populist line change, meaning the working-class were not their sole target, but the middle-classes too. Pollitt articulated this view during his speech at the Seventh World Congress in 1935, claiming that the United Front gives 'opportunities for advancing the whole line of the Communist Party amongst people with whom we have had little personal contact and who are generally hostile to communism'¹⁶³

It was necessary to ensure it was perceived as a mass-movement, even if it was only initially unity among socialist groups. As Horner suggested, if the Party was to have any success 'drawing liberal and middle-class sections of the population', the left must not be in dispute, for 'who wishes to enter a house divided against itself?'¹⁶⁴ Around this time, the CPGB were focussing on a potential alliance with the ILP and Socialist League, in the form of the 'Unity Campaign'. Dutt explained the Party's position in his monthly periodical, *Labour Monthly*, describing the aim of the campaign as 'specifically directed to oppose and to prevent tendencies to breakaways on the left, no less than disruptive measures on the right.'¹⁶⁵ Despite initial progress, the campaign ultimately failed, mostly over disagreements on the Soviet Union, Spain and the ongoing Moscow Trials. It demonstrated that the Party were entertaining ideas of unity, and whilst there were red lines, Pollitt's comment that the

¹⁶¹ CC Minutes. October 1937.

¹⁶² P.B. 25th March 1937.

¹⁶³ *E.C.C.I. Report of the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International*. July-August 1935. Modern Books Limited: London.

¹⁶⁴ 15X/2/103/170. "Towards a Popular Front". Arthur Horner. 1936.

¹⁶⁵ Notes of the Month. Dutt, R.P. *Labour Monthly*. January - December 1937: London.

Party should ‘work on issues *they* are particularly interested in’ showed that the Party had ceded the ideological battle.¹⁶⁶

A New Landscape for A Revitalised Britain.

The CPGB’s vision for a new Britain was constructed upon the back of its progressive ideals, seeking to build on the country’s already existing institutions, people, and landscape. The Party began to decry the seizure of English lands and principles by the rich, at the expense of the poor, with Pollitt instead commanding, ‘the long struggle of the workers and peasants, this is the real history of Britain; it needs no recital, it belongs to us!’¹⁶⁷ It was a psychological issue for Pollitt, and one of taking back ownership. He wanted reform and ‘a grip on our land’ - for he questioned who it was who enjoyed the countryside ‘from which our fathers were driven’.¹⁶⁸ How could the working class be patriotic, if they did not have the means to travel the full breadth of its terrain? It was a pertinent question proposed by Pollitt, as he questioned how many workers ‘children ever see their country; especially if they have just seen a few miles from their street’.¹⁶⁹ Pollitt’s tone undertook a rural romanticism, possibly because of his own Lancashire background, as he directed his fury towards those ‘who control our press, our milk, our tin, our steel, and every other produce we use; they keep us off our own land and countryside’.¹⁷⁰ Again, in almost Tolkien-esque fashion, Pollitt declared that ‘Britain has the loveliest natural country in the world’, emphasizing its ‘hills and dales, and its mountains and seas’. The landscape was indicative of the political world surrounding it, as he continued that ‘in uniting common forces’, Britain could become ‘a paradise of joy on which the sun will never set’.¹⁷¹ He nodded at an idyllic Britain on numerous occasions, positing that the emergence of a Popular Front government ‘could transform Britain into a green and pleasant land’.¹⁷² It was an issue of harnessing the progressive will of the people, as the Party called upon ‘every democrat, peace-lover and friend of

¹⁶⁶ *E.C.C.I. Report of the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International*. July-August 1935. Modern Books Limited: London.

¹⁶⁷ For Peace and Plenty: Report of the Fifteenth Congress.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ MSS.15X/2/103/180. ‘Parade of War’, 10 Apr 1937.

¹⁷⁰ For Peace and Plenty: Report of the Fifteenth Congress.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² “Defence of the People”. February 7th, 1939.

freedom...to change the whole situation at home and abroad from anxiety, to the hope and brightness of a May morning.’¹⁷³

The prospect of a ‘People’s Government’ would remedy what had occurred in the ‘derelict areas, and the countryside’, whilst peace was on the horizon if the country ceded to the U.S.S.R’s desire for collective security, providing the opportunity to ‘build on what all of us desire above all else – homes, health, and happiness for the people of this country’.¹⁷⁴ One such article in *Labour Monthly*, directly contrasted the defeat of ‘privilege and reaction’, with the ‘return of a government which will defend peace...and the interests of the people in town and the countryside’.¹⁷⁵ The emphasis became on returning to the peaceful times of old, removing the class context. Indeed, the *Daily Worker* questioned whether Britain’s admission into war would mean the destruction of the countryside itself.

¹⁷⁶ For just as ‘eternal British values’ were being betrayed, the landscape itself became a source of attachment in Pollitt’s sense of national identity. As Smith has proposed, ‘some notion of the eternal may necessarily attach to all identities...as the characteristics of a people find their metaphorical reference in the features of the landscape.’¹⁷⁷ It is not unusual for identities to imagine an innate distinctiveness, whether that be by landscape, culture, heritage or geographical border, and the CPGB were nothing new. Gramsci, seemingly ahead of the curve, posed that the problem the left had regarding nationhood and the nation-state was in maintaining their position as ‘popular-representatives’, and as forerunners of the ‘national-popular-collective will’.¹⁷⁸

The French Communist Party (PCF) made similar observations to the CPGB in this respect, stating that the ‘nation represents a factor in human liberation for the closer co-operation of the peoples under conditions of equal rights’.¹⁷⁹ The PCF declared itself as ‘the Party of the people, of the disinherited, of the oppressed; it is the Party of all progressive Frenchmen — that is, of the great mass of the

¹⁷³ CP/IND/DUTT/31/04. ‘Make it a United Crusade for Peace and Plenty!’ January 15th, 1938.

¹⁷⁴ For Peace and Plenty: Report of the Fifteenth Congress.

¹⁷⁵ The Labour Movement and the Countryside. Maurice Cornforth. *Labour Monthly*, December 1937. p.750.

¹⁷⁶ *Daily Worker*. July 29, 1939.

¹⁷⁷ Aughey, A. (2007). *The Politics of Englishness*.p.86.

¹⁷⁸ Billig, M. (1995). *Banal Nationalism*. Sage Publications: London. p.104.

¹⁷⁹ 15X/2/103/303 - *The Communist Party of France: Manifesto / with an introduction by Harry Pollitt*. January 1944.

nation.’¹⁸⁰ National communisms were rife, sweeping across the continent, as Parties were given free lead in contrasting *their* patriotism, with that of the national bourgeoisie, as in essence, the national question had become a class question. Perhaps, this is why the Party positioned itself as representatives of a populist, ultimately progressive Britain - they were the embodiment of ‘the national’, and given the Party’s disastrous turn during the ‘Class against Class’ period, as well as the emergence of Mosley’s fascists, a rightwards turn is not surprising.

Chamberlain vs The People.

Britain was regarded as the manifestation of monopoly capital. Fascism, according to Dimitrov at the Seventh World Congress, was the synthesis of the ‘most reactionary, most chauvinist and most imperialist elements of finance capital’.¹⁸¹ It was the final hurrah for the bourgeoisie to maintain their class interests, meaning fascism was not modernistic, but archaic, antithetical to the national interests, and simply capitalism re-defined.¹⁸² Chamberlain’s government was ‘proto-fascist’, being led by a ‘vested gang’ of ‘elites’ who had betrayed the national interest. It was placed within a long-running historical battle, between the English working and ruling classes. They were the ‘descendants of the tyrants’, ‘the enemies of progress’, whom the British people have ‘fought bitterly for hundreds of years.’¹⁸³ The English working classes, which on many occasions went far beyond class boundaries, were indicative of the country’s ‘finest traditions’ who fought far and wide ‘in struggles against oppression and tyranny’.¹⁸⁴ To be truly British, or more likely English, was to be pro-democracy, a fighter for freedom, and above-all, working class. On numerous occasions, Pollitt framed the National Government as ‘lowering Britain’s prestige in the eyes of the world’, contrasting their Britain with his own – ‘we cannot allow the Chamberlain government to be looked upon as representative of the

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ *E.C.C.I. Report of the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International*. July-August 1935. Modern Books Limited: London.

¹⁸² Dutt, R.P. (1935). *Fascism and Social Revolution*.

¹⁸³ “Defence of the People”. 7th February 1939.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

British people. For it has betrayed our past, as it will more cruelly and decisively betray us unless we defeat them.’¹⁸⁵

Pollitt, in typical bellicose fashion, speaking at an event in Manchester, told comrades to ‘never allow yourselves to be kidded into shooting for Chamberlain. If you shoot for this National Government, you are shooting for Fascism.’¹⁸⁶ His ‘ruling gang’ were enemies of Britain and democracy, and the ‘natural friends of fascism’ and reaction.¹⁸⁷ The Party viewed Chamberlain as seceding to fascist, anti-British policies at home, as Dutt proposed that ‘there must be no artificial separation between foreign policy and home questions’.¹⁸⁸ ‘He wants to transplant the Hitler system to Britain, to crush political opposition and end democratic rights’, Dutt asserted.¹⁸⁹ The Party began to peddle a distorted version of class war, as class and nation became blurred concepts. Instead, their analysis was less a systematic examination of capitalism, but a deep moral assessment. Chamberlain was a ‘monster’, ‘a foul reactionary’ who was throwing the nation into disrepair.¹⁹⁰ The problem became individualised, presenting Chamberlain not as an actor of social forces, but as the sole enemy of ‘everything progressive and democratic in Britain’.¹⁹¹ It was something the Party furthered in 1944, condemning the entire German people as Nazis: ‘millions of youths behave worse than beasts and the entire nation must take responsibility for crimes committed in its name’.¹⁹² As Field has succinctly summarised:

The new vocabulary was both unifying and levelling: an exclusive and conflictual class discourse directed against the ‘old gang’ of ‘vested interests’...coupled with more inclusive

¹⁸⁵ Report of the Fifteenth Congress.

¹⁸⁶ “Manchester’s Centenary: A Marxist Pageant Youth Tribute to Tom Mann”. *Manchester Guardian*. 20th June. 1938.

¹⁸⁷ The Communist Crusade. Harry Pollitt. *Labour Monthly*. February 1939, p. 68.

¹⁸⁸ CP/IND/DUTT/31/05. The Crusade for The Defence of the British People, 16th Jan 1939.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ “We Can’t Burn Our Fingers”, 17 March 1938. & R. P. Arnot. Crusade for Defence of the British People. *Labour Monthly*. January 1939. p.21.

¹⁹¹ Ibid:21.

¹⁹² William Rust, ‘Speaking for the Germans’. *Daily Worker* 21st July 1944, cited in Laybourn, K. (1999). *Under the Red Flag*.p.115.

and conciliatory populist messages about a common national heritage, shared loyalties, and traditions.¹⁹³

It is what allowed the Party to make inroads into the political mainstream, standing alongside figures of all colours, including Winston Churchill and David Lloyd George. During one event with the latter in April 1939, Lloyd George addressed 10,000 members of the LBC in London at Earl's Court, alongside Pollitt, Stafford Cripps and Gollancz, questioning, 'why the government had betrayed Britain's great and honoured trust so ignominiously'.¹⁹⁴ Britain had been betrayed, whilst the democratic system was being usurped by outside forces, unable to fulfil its historic role, as Pollitt made clear: 'in Britain it is not the democratic system that is at fault, but the trouble lies in the strangle-hold on democracy by big business and the ruling families'.¹⁹⁵ It was statements such as these, so dissimilar in character to those made by liberal progressives that showcased the Party's new politics. This was not an issue to be taken lightly however, as the Party were aware that there were dangers in becoming what McIlroy has described as a 'pressure group on the Labour Party, the unions and the British state'.¹⁹⁶ Campbell confirmed this at the 1937 congress: 'Let our comrades be under no illusions. They are going into one of the outstanding breeding grounds of reformism and we hope they will go in as communists and remain in as communists'.¹⁹⁷ Whilst, a year later in Birmingham, Pollitt responded to Party critics, saying 'No one is proposing a love match or permanent marriage with Liberalism or any other creed whose basic principles differ from our own.'¹⁹⁸ Instead, it was communism adapted to the current political conditions. However, despite Pollitt's comments, there was no doubt, in the short-term at least, that the Party was invested in liberal democracy, as reformist tendencies ran rampant throughout the Party, the further the Party entrenched itself within the 'Popular Front' line.

¹⁹³ Field, G. (1992). *Social Patriotism*.p.24.

¹⁹⁴ "Britain's Trust Betrayed". *The Times*. April 25th, 1939.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid*.

¹⁹⁶ McIlroy, J. (2013). Restoring Stalinism to Communist History. *Critique*. 41:4. p.600.

¹⁹⁷ *It Can Be Done: Fourteenth Congress of the CPGB*.p.61.

¹⁹⁸ Branson, N. *Myths from Right*. pp.120-121.

‘Democratise the Machine’

Its various calls for democratisation of the British army was one startling instance of the CPGB’s shift, highlighting the Party’s move towards conciliation with prevalent power structures, such as the armed forces, and Empire, rather than actively fighting against it. Previously, there is no doubt the army was viewed as a constituent part of both the British Empire and imperialism, meaning critiques of its hierarchical make-up were common. The Party’s stance on war, conscription, ‘National Service’ and the military changed fundamentally in a very short period. In 1936, the Party told the YCL that there must be an increase in ‘militant, intense anti-military propoganda, which must sweep throughout the youth movement’.¹⁹⁹ The Party was thoroughly committed, much like the rest of the Labour movement to an anti-war stance. Dictated by the Soviet Union’s collective security pacts, the Party reiterated that defence of the Soviet Union was crucial, as the Party claimed that they were means of ‘determining who is a supporter and who an opponent of democracy and peace’.²⁰⁰ The mistakes of the post-war period were not to be replicated, as peace became the ultimate goal of the movement.²⁰¹ Pollitt emphasised this in a *Daily Worker* column in February 1936, stating that ‘Never Again’ must take on an organised form, ‘that will confront the National Government with such a formidable challenge it dare not ignore’.²⁰² It affected the Party’s cross-party unity attempts also, as during the ‘Unity Campaign’, the CPGB advocated greater international unity between Great Britain, the Soviet Union and France - positing the potential of a British-Soviet pact, like the French equivalent signed in 1935.²⁰³

The Spanish Civil War, and the heightened militarism of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy changed everything. The Party’s 1937 National Congress called to nationalise the arms industry, to remove

¹⁹⁹ *Daily Worker*. February 21st, 1936.

²⁰⁰ Harry Pollitt. ‘Trial of the Group of Conspirators of the ‘Bloc of Rights and Trotskyists’: The Crushing of the Traitors – A Triumph for Peace and Socialism. *International Press Correspondence*.18:14, 19 March 1938.

²⁰¹ “It is this unity of purpose that alone can guarantee a peace of fulfilment and not a betrayal as was the case in 1918” - The Communist Party and the Fight for Unity. Harry Pollitt. *Labour Monthly*. January 1942, pp. 13-16.

²⁰² *Daily Worker*, February 21st, 1936.

²⁰³ PB. 11 June 1936.

‘reactionary pro-fascist elements’ and abolish the hierarchical military boundaries of servitude.²⁰⁴ Meanwhile, Pollitt writing in the *Daily Worker* in June 1939, called for the government to ‘make the Army democratic...and open the way to officer’s rank to men from the common people’.²⁰⁵ He returned to this point on numerous occasions, highlighting in 1942, a class discrimination in the war effort. How was it in the name of national unity possible, he questioned, for officer pilots and sergeant pilots who risk death together, but cannot eat together!’.²⁰⁶ Willy Gallacher, Communist MP for West Fife, furthered this line, questioning during a Parliamentary debate in March 1938, how he could ‘advise young Communists, who are very keen, active and capable young fellows, to join the Army’. Instead, he posited that, ‘if there were real democracy in the Army, I could provide you with any amount of capable potential leaders. As it is, they would not get in; they are too lively, too energetic, there is too much spirit in them’.²⁰⁷

Much of the Party’s ‘working-class resistance’ was formed within the ideological confines of the ‘nation’, seeking not to overthrow it, but merely reform it - expanding the boundaries of the nation to become inclusive of working-class actors. Conscription was an example of this new shift. In May 1939, Pollitt stated that ‘the army is a class army officered by men who are our class enemies, who are hostile to everything the Labour movement stands for’.²⁰⁸ Yet typically of the period, this did not mean that it was something that should dissuade them, so long as it came under ‘democratic control’, as Dutt a month later said that the Party were ‘in favour of whatever measures...which are necessary for the victory of democratic rights and the defeat of reaction and fascism.’²⁰⁹ The concept of a citizens ‘National Service’ was also mentioned the same year, which Gallacher fully supported given the ‘right government’ being in power.²¹⁰ It was not so much a quantitative problem, but a qualitative one – for so long as a Labour-led, Popular Front government was in power, support for the nation in its military endeavours was to be supported.

²⁰⁴ ‘It Can Be Done’: Report of the 14th National Congress.

²⁰⁵ *Daily Worker*, June 28th, 1939

²⁰⁶ TAPE/174B, 1942, WCML.

²⁰⁷ Hansard Millbank. 10 March 1938. Vol. 332.

²⁰⁸ CP/IND/DUTT/31/05 - ‘Can Conscription Save Peace’. May 6th, 1939.

²⁰⁹ CP/IND/DUTT/31/05 - Conscription – For What? *Daily Worker*. April 3rd, 1939.

²¹⁰ Hansard Millbank. 08 March 1939. Vol. 344.

‘The question of defence is not only a question of guns. It is also a question of who controls them’, Pollitt explained at the Party’s 1937 Congress.²¹¹

They were essentially following Dimitrov’s commandment from 1935 that Communist Parties should ‘defend every inch of the democratic gains which the working class has wrested in years of struggle’.²¹² Fighting for the country’s current institutions presided over all else, as the Party became one of democracy’s loudest defenders. Democracy was for the people of Britain, something that goes back to their very ‘origins and root’ – a struggle between the common people and their rulers for freedom.²¹³ ‘Democracy in Britain has always been a bread-and-butter question’, declared Pollitt, its ‘great traditions of freedom won from the teeth of Britain’s rulers’.²¹⁴ It was the overriding objective, as Dutt professed in April 1938, that the immediate issue is not socialism, but to defeat the National Government.²¹⁵ A letter to the CP membership in April 1939, spelled out the CP’s position, as it called for diligence in the quest for socialism, noting ‘it is absolutely necessary for the working-class to close its ranks and fight with determination against every attempt to restrict the rights it has won – and fight fascism’.²¹⁶ It was a case of battening down the hatches and fighting for what was already won, rather than pursuing a revolutionary advance. The Party claimed that ‘fascism can only be fought by democracy. It is the most urgent task of the whole Labour movement and all British democrats.’²¹⁷

Fascism was not a juncture in the evolution of capitalism, but a small elite faction of corrupt politicians who had abandoned the national interest. It was as simple as harnessing the levers of power already in place and allowing the popular political instinct to come to the fore, as Gallacher was in no doubt that ‘the people of this country will be aroused to a feeling of wrath against the betrayals that have taken place and will drive this Government out of office.’²¹⁸ Britishness was under attack, and it

²¹¹ ‘It Can Be Done’: Report of the 14th National Congress.

²¹² Democracy: A Handbook of Freedom, by Jack Lindsay and Edgell Rickword – review, by Allen Hutt. *Labour Monthly*.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ For Peace and Plenty: Report of the Fifteenth Congress of the Communist Party of Great Britain.

²¹⁵ *Daily Worker*, 16th April 1938.

²¹⁶ CP/IND/DUTT/31/05 - ‘Political Letter to the CP Membership, April 25th, 1939.

²¹⁷ CP/IND/DUTT/31/05. - ‘Can Conscription Save Peace’, May 6th, 1939,

²¹⁸ Hansard Millbank. 28 February 1939. Vol. 344.

was the CPGB's job to ensure it remained untarnished. One such example was articulated by Gallacher in the House of Commons. He inquired 'why there is such fierce indignation against Soviet propaganda directed against capitalism, and such a placid attitude with regard to anti-British propaganda?'²¹⁹ It was clear for Gallacher, Pollitt and much of the CPGB that Britain had gone weak in the face of continental fascism and was acceding to its every demand. The country needed to be stronger, and the CPGB filled the vacuum.

A Working-Class British History.

One such example of the new and improved Britain was the Party's view on the monarchy. In 1937, the Party described the monarchy as a bulwark against social progress and democracy, whose existence implicitly saw the build-up of the army.²²⁰ The Party emphasised its ulterior political element, declaring it a 'state circus...in order to beat the war drum and to work up an unbalanced jingoistic fervour'.²²¹ They viewed jingoism as easily substituted for 'fascist-leader worship', which was why it was crucial to place opposition to the monarchy, within the struggle for democracy itself.²²² So, whilst Taylor is correct to state that the Party equated patriotism centred around the monarchy with jingoism, the evidence suggests that hostility to jingoism, was not hostility to patriotism in of itself.²²³ For the CPGB, the Monarchy represented 'all that is bad in the past history and traditions of the British people'.²²⁴ Asserting its position at the National Congress in Battersea in 1937, the Party declared - 'there is no room for the monarchy in the twentieth century. We are against the monarchy, because we are against privilege and reaction, because we stand for democracy'.²²⁵ Although the Party had always been critical of the Monarchy, the nature of its argument was what had changed. The Party was for the abolition of the Monarchy because it was antithetical to democracy and a betrayal of the 'True Britain'. Instead, the Party declared that the working classes had their own

²¹⁹ Hansard Millbank. 02 February 1938. Vol. 331.

²²⁰ 'Parade of War'. 10 April 1937.

²²¹ 'It Can Be Done': Report of the 14th National Congress.

²²² The Monarchy Fetish. T.A. Jackson. *Labour Monthly*. May 1937, pp. 283-286.

²²³ Taylor, M. (1990). Patriotism, History and the Left in Twentieth-Century Britain. *The Historical Journal*. 33:4. p.980.

²²⁴ 'Parade of War'. 10 April 1937.

²²⁵ 'It Can Be Done': Report of the 14th National Congress.

history, ‘we have our Tolpuddle martyrs, our Chartists, our John MacLeans, our Meerut prisoners, and our Taff Merthyr fighters.’²²⁶ It was a working-class history, but one which they hoped could resonate with all. The aim was to make it national in both name and substance. One such example was in a passage in the *Daily Worker* in May 1936:

WE Communists are the true patriots. We love our language and our country. And that is why we, more than anybody, are grieved to see to what disgrace our rulers, the capitalist class, have brought it.²²⁷

For just as pre-war socialism had sought to legitimate their socialism as falling within a British tradition, the CPGB followed suit.²²⁸ The CPGB drew upon issues which the left highlighted decades earlier, as the left has long contested their own brand of patriotism. Their version of ‘Britishness’ demonstrating the ease in which ‘British’, as a political identification, is under constant refinement. Robert Blatchford, one of the key exponents of early socialist Englishness, noted that ‘at present Britain does not belong to the British: it belongs to a few of the British...it is because Britain does not belong to the British that a few are very rich and the many are very poor’.²²⁹ This view had staying power, as after all, the best-selling socialist book of the late nineteenth century was Blatchford’s own *Merrie England*.²³⁰

Undeniably, the Communists were not the only force on the left hoping to meld socialism with patriotism. Walter Citrine and the TUC in 1934, on the one hundredth anniversary of the ‘Tolpuddle Martyrs’, essentially dug the six Dorset labourers from the archives of history, presenting it as a forbearer to the current socialist movement, highlighting working-class ‘heroes’ who were, in their view, ancestors to a long-running socialist tradition.²³¹ As Clare Griffins has discovered, ‘much of

²²⁶ *Daily Worker*, May 23rd, 1936.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

²²⁸ Ward, P. (1999). Socialists "True" Patriotism in Britain in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries. *National Identities*. 1.p.3.

²²⁹ Blatchford, R. (1910). *Britain for the British*. London.

²³⁰ Cannon, J. & Crowcroft, R. (2015). *Robert Blatchford - A Dictionary of British History*. Oxford University Press.

²³¹ Griffins, C. From ‘Dorchester Labourers’ to ‘Tolpuddle Martyrs’: Celebrating Radicalism in the English Countryside cited in Outram, Q. & Laybourn, K. (2018). *Secular Martyrdom in Britain and Ireland: From Peterloo to the Present*. Palgrave Macmillan: London.

their enduring fame rests on the fact that in 1934, the TUC honoured these pioneers with a tribute on a scale bestowed on no other trade-union heroes before or since.²³² Even the CP were aware of this martyrism, as Allen Hutt in 1934, penned a sarcastic retort to the TUC's event, querying that, 'the working class is always ready to honour its heroes and martyrs...but let us ask ourselves just why the Trades Union Congress is making these exceptional efforts to put over the Tolpuddle centenary in such a big way.'²³³ The CP's reversal on the issue, in a matter of years, showcased the Party's lack of distinctiveness, and echoing of the larger labour movement.

However, this is not a stick to beat the Party with, as they were merely following a long-running precedent of remembering key figures within the working-class movement, albeit, in an entirely different manner. The 'March for English History' on September 20th, 1936, much derided by historians, is the most obvious example of this linkage between the historical past and the present.

England! A word of power. A name deeply engraved on the minds of men...THE PEOPLE OF ENGLAND! A great nation...a people with a great history, great achievements, great traditions. And with even greater aspirations, not yet fulfilled, but which shall be. ²³⁴

The Party's usage of history was complex – for it sought to both emphasize its past triumphs, as well as look forward towards the future - seeking to offer something new and distinct, as well as build on the country's already existing history and institutions. They were reflective of a unique national culture, but also its logical forerunners. It was as London District Organiser, Ted Bramley reported in the march's aftermath:

The Communist Party is learning to speak to the English workers in a language they understand. It is beginning to grasp the great and glorious tradition of the English people...It [communism] is revealing itself as the legitimate heir of generations of great English fighters

²³² Griffins, C. (1997). Remembering Tolpuddle: Rural History and Commemoration in the Inter-War Labour Movement. *History Workshop Journal*. 44.p.146.

²³³ Allen Hutt. *Class against Class: Tolpuddle & Today, A historical comment on the T.U.C. Tolpuddle Centenary Campaign 1834-1934* cited in Ball, R. (2014). Tolpuddle, Hutt and the Meerut Conspiracy. British Radical History Group.

²³⁴ The English Tradition. R.P. Arnot. *Labour Monthly*. November 1936. p.693.

for freedom and progress. It is preparing and will lead the people to a free and Merrie England.²³⁵

As Benedict Anderson has underlined, national identity enables us to transcend our innate mortality by linking us to something whose existence is beyond what is conceivable, as well as forwards into the indefinite future.²³⁶ As such, Communists were not just carrying the torch for a socialist future; they were also the descendants of a historic legacy of radicalism, distinctly of the English kind – offering a highly localised sense of past, present and future. The CP were a natural result of England's 'great traditions', from England *itself*, from 'England's soil'.²³⁷ It was a message that permeated throughout the Party, and one which benefited from their embrace of new forms of propaganda. Culture was no longer bourgeois and antithetical to the working-classes real, every-day lives, but something pervasive, which the working-classes both enjoyed and could potentially re-align alongside progressive values. It was not far-removed from the lives of workers, as culture, Edgell Rickword explained, is 'not only music, science and philosophy, it is games, dancing and popular songs.'²³⁸

The 'Popular Front' in Action

Songs, pageants, dramas and the like became the means for creating the 'new Britain'. The *Daily Worker's* call to action in January 1938 for 'every form of propaganda and agitation to be fully utilised', did not go unheard.²³⁹ In a circular to Party members in January 1938, it noted that 'for the first time, a special crusade song was written'. It was clear that the 'Popular Front' opened the floodgates to modes of activity that had previously been either ignored or were downright impossible. As whilst, the document admitted that 'the majority of branches had failed to understand how valuable it is in getting the Party line over to the audience'.²⁴⁰ The Party continued unabated, quoting

²³⁵ Ted Bramley. *International Press Correspondence*. 16:44. 29 September 1936, cited in Callaghan, J. & Harker, B. (2016). *British Communism: A Documentary History*.p.134.

²³⁶ Kymlicka, W. (2000). *Modernity and National Identity in Ben-Ami, S. (2000). Ethnic Challenges to the Modern State*. Macmillan Press Ltd: London.p.25.

²³⁷ Ted Bramley. *International Press Correspondence*. 16:44. 29 September 1936, cited in Callaghan, J. & Harker, B. (2016). *British Communism: A Documentary History*.p.134.

²³⁸ Heinemann, M. *The People's Front and the Intellectuals* cited in Fyrth, J. (1985). *Britain, Fascism and the Popular Front*. Lawrence and Wishart: London.p.168.

²³⁹ CP/IND/DUTT/31/04. 'Make it a United Crusade for Peace and Plenty! 15th January 1938.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid*.

both old material and new. One such example, was Ernest Jones at the Party's Congress in 1938 - in keeping with the parallels between the CP and the Chartist movement.

They think us dull, they think us dead,

But we shall rise again.

A trumpet through the land shall ring,

A heaving through the mass.

A trampling through their palaces,

Until they break like glass.²⁴¹

Song became a means of communicating the Party line, in a tongue which the common worker understood. Numerous attempts were made to connect the struggle against the National Government, alongside the creation of a 'People's Government'. One such ballad, found in the *Daily Worker*, presented the nation as in disrepair, as an 'old beast dying', requiring collective action to remove Chamberlain and return to 'Old England's glory'.

Says I: "You've seen Old England's glory",

Says he: "That's just a bed-time story",

Says I: "What price the British lion"?",

Says he: "The poor old beast is dying",

Now landsmen who're loyal to Britain,

it's time that Chamberlain was quittin'.

So, drop your tiffs and heave together,

We'll end this dirty work for ever.²⁴²

²⁴¹ For Peace and Plenty: Report of the Fifteenth Congress of the Communist Party of Great Britain.

²⁴² *Daily Worker*, July 20, 1939.

Only a year previously, songs were viewed as a dead vehicle for popular culture, unhelpful in the wider struggle. In-fact, A.L. Lloyd went so far as to write in the *Daily Worker* that ‘capitalism has put an end to folk-art, for the time being’.²⁴³ For Lloyd, ‘present-day culture’ was a means of undermining the ‘self-confidence of the working-class’.²⁴⁴ Folk-art was being strangled by the miseries of capitalist industrialism’, as modernity had ‘artificially’ presented workers as ‘inartistic’. This was all a façade for Lloyd however, as folk song, or the ‘People’s Poetry’, showcased ‘what wonderful poetry the workers were capable of!’, which would only prosper when the English people are ‘free’.²⁴⁵ The popular element of the ‘Popular Front’ lent itself enormously to this creed, depicting a common comradeship, a shared belief in something new, and crucially were readily replicated. Two such examples shown below, showcased the Party’s usage of folksong in the era, alluding to a strident defence of democracy and the prospect of a People’s Government.

Forging Ahead:

From the workshop, the mine and the factory,

From the city and village, we throng,

At the call, workers all,

Swell the strain of democracy’s song.

Chorus:

We belong to the People’s Crusade,

To the anti-fascist brigade,

We stand for security, peace and bread,

With ranks united, we’ll forge ahead

²⁴³ A.L. Lloyd. *Daily Worker*. 10th February 1937.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

We can drive the wolf from the door:

Save the world from the menace of war,

And the National Government will be broken, not just bent:

If we struggle as never before.

Verse:

For the workless and starving we struggle,

To the homeless we reach out a hand,

Comrades all, here the call,

Marching on to a happier land.²⁴⁶

For Peace and Right:

Verse:

In China, Spain and Austria,

By tyrants' power betrayed,

The people call democracy,

To rally to their aid:

Chorus:

To friends of peace throughout the world,

We give our pledge this day,

That Britain in the cause of peace,

Her rightful part shall play:

²⁴⁶ CP/IND/DUTT/31/04 - 'The Song of the Crusade'. 17 February 1938.

United for security, against aggressions might

Democracy shall, in this hour,

Stand fast for peace and right –

Democracy shall, in this hour,

Stand fast for peace and right.

Verse:

Through war's dark cloud hangs over us,

Through doubts and fears assail:

The will to peace in every land.

United shall prevail.²⁴⁷

Pageantry – A Mass Movement?

Songs were not the only form of Party propaganda unleashed during the Popular Front. The historical Pageant utilised extensively post-1935, 'has become an important feature in the Party's propaganda' claimed the Party's 1938 manifesto.²⁴⁸ They were a key feature in Party publications, as often they were the most vivid expressions of Party ideals. One significant example in Sunderland utilised former International Brigaders as the model 'British' radical.²⁴⁹ Whilst, in the summer of 1939, a 'Chartist Pageant', held at the Empress Stadium; produced in conjunction with the London Arts Committee, involved over 1000 actors, and attracted over 10,000 attendees.²⁵⁰ The Party's aims were two-fold, seeking to accentuate working-class history first and foremost, before eventually, making what it saw as pertinent links to the current political situation. The successes and failures of the Chartists were not just crucial in the 1800s, but to the present day. Pageants were a successful avenue

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ For Peace and Plenty: Report of the Fifteenth Congress.

²⁴⁹ Mates, L. (2007). *The Spanish Civil War and the British Left: Political Activism and the Popular Front*. Tauris Academic Studies: London. p.51

²⁵⁰ *Daily Worker*. July 24th, 1939. & *Daily Worker*. July 17th, 1939.

of Party propaganda precisely because it placed them both within and outside of popular memory, seeking both to protect it, and take it forward into the future. The Party legitimated their actions by solidifying themselves within a long-running tradition, however, this is nothing unusual. As Eric Hobsbawm's seminal book, the *Invention of Tradition* argued, what have often been 'selected, written, popularized and institutionalized' are often 'deliberate and always innovative, if only because their historical novelty implies innovation'.²⁵¹

Pageants allowed the CPGB to cherry-pick selected episodes of history and neatly tie them within their own historical narrative. It was such a device that allowed the Party to create an image of the 'Hands off Russia' movement as one of the same with 'the heroic story of Chartism' - tying solidarity to the Soviet Union alongside radical British history.²⁵² Following the performance, it ended with a keynote speech from Harry Pollitt, who declared that the fight was ever-present; 'we are proud to know that these ideals, which began to be realised 100 years ago, will be full realised here tomorrow.'²⁵³ The People's Charter, which Party historian Allen Hutt described as 'the six points that roused a nation', were the democratic prelude to social revolution.²⁵⁴ The Party were the defenders of what the Chartists had fought for in their 'epic struggle', announcing in the *Daily Worker*, a day of remembrance for the Chartist movement in February 1939.²⁵⁵ Their struggles were a direct prequel to the struggles of today, for they were who had 'blazed the trail, which it is the pride and privilege of their descendants to carry forward to victory'.²⁵⁶ It was irrelevant that the Chartist movement had ultimately failed, as the historical insights they offered were only now being understood; they were 'the first internationalists', as Salme Dutt asserted, 'the great richness of the Chartist struggle...is only now being restored'.²⁵⁷

²⁵¹ Hobsbawm, E.J. & Ranger, T. (1992). *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.pp.12-13.

²⁵² *Daily Worker*. June 15th, 1939.

²⁵³ *Daily Worker*. July 24th, 1939.

²⁵⁴ *Daily Worker*. May 7th, 1938.

²⁵⁵ *Daily Worker*. February 4th, 1939.

²⁵⁶ Chartism and the Fight for Peace, by Salme A. Dutt. *Labour Monthly*, June 1939, pp. 367-374.

²⁵⁷ Chartism - When England Arose, by Salme A. Dutt. Review by R.P. Arnot. *Labour Monthly*, July 1939. p.448.

Manchester, the site of much industrial struggle, was the focus of many pageants. Highlighting episodes from ‘the early times of the English people for industrial and political liberty’, pageants emphasised that the sacrifices of prior generations were for nil if the working-classes did not take up the mantle.²⁵⁸ In a tribute to Tom Mann, one speaker quoted Shelley, calling on the people to ‘rise like brave lions’.²⁵⁹ It was history rich in working-class activism, from Peterloo to the Chartists, as Pollitt declared that ‘Manchester belongs to its people’.²⁶⁰ Peterloo became, one of the Party’s main examples of political martyrdom; a struggle between capital and labour, and a theme touched upon for many decades.²⁶¹

The *Communist Crusade for Defence of the People* was one of the Party’s most overt attempts at appealing to a submerged nationhood. It sought to ‘defend the lives and livelihood of the British people’, emphatically declaring that ‘the British people have a glorious record in the struggle for freedom.’²⁶² The campaign demonstrated, the Party’s implantation in wider society, resulting in by March 1938, 180 meetings and 62,000 attendants across the country.²⁶³ It was the ‘greatest campaign ever organised by the Party’ according to one summary document sent to Party districts.²⁶⁴ And yet, it was conducted in a manner that was completely alien to the Party, only a few years previously. Pageants were crucial means of popularizing a ‘popular history’, instrumentalizing a particular version of history to ensure that its attendees truly felt a sense of ‘time and place’. Historical pageants, according to Heinemann were ‘impressive because they not only spoke to great audiences, but actively involved literally thousands.’²⁶⁵ Pageants greatly aided attempts to construct a competing Englishness, as the Party gradually moved away from large marches and towards mass-gatherings and rallies. Its participatory element was essential, as Wallis has described, ‘turning the audience into

²⁵⁸ “Fight for Liberty: Communist Pageant in Manchester”. *Manchester Guardian*. 12 July 1937.

²⁵⁹ “Manchester’s Centenary: A Marxist Pageant Youth Tribute to Tom Mann”. *Manchester Guardian*. 20th June 1938.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Cozens, J. *The Making of the Peterloo Martyrs, 1819 to the Present* cited in Outram, Q. & Laybourn, K. (2018). *Secular Martyrdom in Britain and Ireland: From Peterloo to the Present*.p.42.

²⁶² CP/IND/DUTT/31/05 - The Crusade for the Defence of the British People, January 16th, 1939.

²⁶³ PB, 5th May 1938.

²⁶⁴ CP/IND/DUTT/31/05 - The Crusade for the Defence of the British People, January 16th, 1939.

²⁶⁵ Heinemann, M. *The People’s Front and the Intellectuals*.p.179.

historical agents'.²⁶⁶ It legitimised a particular version of history, and the Party's role as its current manifestation – for if the Party led a march for English history, it could claim to be its current forerunners, as well as the gatekeepers of its historic legacy. Undoubtedly, the 'Englishing of Communism' achieved moments of 'organic celebration, however, overwhelmingly, that organicity was itself manufactured.'²⁶⁷ Raphael Samuel, has delved deeper into this issue:

A great deal of Party activity—like that of any organization—was less instrumental than expressive, a way of building up symbolic capital rather than (or as well as) attaining practical ends. In many cases it served a consolatory function. The rallies and meetings displayed what was often an imaginary strength; the big turnouts...compensated for the absence of a real popular following.²⁶⁸

The Party achieved this because of its calls to 'all sane people', 'progressives', and 'men and women of all creeds', rather than the industrial working-class.²⁶⁹ It was populist to its very core, as the class contingent was empty. Nationalism became the framework to conceal class relations, in favour of a national unity, which supposedly quashed 'national differences'. The problem for the CPGB lay when they tied their socialist ideals to a nationalist framework that was conducted in the same language, terms and ideological boundaries as those they sought to unseat. In a period of hostile fascism at home and abroad, alongside a fragmented left, the Party's purpose was no longer clear. This lack of clarity was also shown in the Party's paper, *The Daily Worker*. It was clear that the Party vision was contradictory, and in a state of flux, unsure whom, or what it was supposed to represent. This was demonstrated by the paper's decision to remove the hammer and sickle, as well as the classic Marx dictum, 'workers of the world unite' from its head mast in 1938. Given the Paper's role was as Dutt summarised, to be a 'communist paper, in every single column, item and headline', and above-all, to 'express the Party', this change is damning.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁶ Wallis, M. Heirs to the Pageant: Mass Spectacle and the Popular Front. In Croft, A. (1998). *Weapons in the Struggle: The Cultural History of the British Communist Party*. Pluto Press.p.50.

²⁶⁷ Ibid: p.65.

²⁶⁸ Samuel, R. (2017). *The Lost World of British Communism*. Verso: London.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Morgan, K. (1989). *Against Fascism and War*.p.10.

Many key Party figures were aware that its facade of a 'huge, popular Party' was not as successful as it let-on, as Rust complained to the Party's National Congress in 1937 that 'the new member does not get the feeling that this is a big popular Party connected with the workers. He gets the impression that it is some conspiratorial, hole-in-the-corner affair'.²⁷¹ It was a view that permeated throughout the Party, as Hymie Lee, district leader in the North East questioned why, 'in all mass activity we are hiding the face of the Party. Communists are working everywhere, but they don't show they are communists...there is no feeling the Party is growing.'²⁷² It is evident that despite the Party's pretences, it was not readily accepted in populist initiatives either, whether that be at a local or national level – and very few of its members believed it. The Party's emphasis was geared towards its critics; the progressive left, liberals - those outside the Party, rather than those already in it.

Communism – An English Creed?

During the 'Popular Front', the Party began to put much more emphasis on the individual. During the spring of 1939, The *Daily Worker* held an 'Our Ancestors' competition, offering a prize of 10s. to the 'best description of Chartist activity collected from family records'.²⁷³ The emphasis was on the micro level, as the Paper accentuated the small, individualised, family cases within the broader 'national' struggle – as the nation was to be a sum of its collective, ultimately radical parts. Parallels were drawn with the Russian Revolution, as Ness Edwards, member of the Executive Committee of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, declared Chartism a 'blind, unsuccessful attempt to perform in Britain, what at a similar juncture of political development, was successfully performed in Russia', as in essence, 'Chartism was a premature dress rehearsal of the social revolution'.²⁷⁴ 'The People's Charter' was regarded as a pre-requisite to revolution, and one firmly in the Russian model, as native English history and Russian history were not only one of the same, but needed to be intertwined. Debate raged in the CC, as the Party acknowledged more emphasis needed to be placed on the successes of the Soviet Union. After all, the Party was a constituent part of an international movement, and its duty

²⁷¹ 'It Can Be Done': Report of the Fourteenth Congress.

²⁷² Mates, L. (2007). *Spanish Civil War and the Left*.p.201.

²⁷³ *Daily Worker*, May 25th, 1939.

²⁷⁴ *Daily Worker*, November 8th, 1938.

was to effectively defend the legacy of the Soviet Union, as much as it was to entice the working-class in Britain to communist ideals. In fact, the Party's role in articulating Soviet successes, was not solely a gesture, but appealed to a wide range of opinion. As John Saville has described, 'the literature favourable to the Soviet Union was quite remarkable in its volume, and much of it emanated from non-Communist sources'.²⁷⁵ The successes of the Soviet Union would speak for themselves, and in a climate of Russophilia for many on the left (notably on economic planning and increasing living standards), Pollitt proclaimed that the Soviet Union, 'is today the strongest weapon in our hands.'²⁷⁶ It was a widespread phenomenon, as in the words of one historian, 'the efficacy of Soviet central planning captivated the world after 1929'.²⁷⁷ For even potential critics and non-socialists found the Soviet system something new; as a utopia.²⁷⁸ And yet, despite this wider climate sympathetic to the USSR, the Party had doubts about its success in 'popularizing' its history 'and its achievements'.²⁷⁹ It was an ever-running problem in the Party's CC, as J.R. Campbell - amid the Moscow Trials debacle - emphasised there had not been enough work done in the 'popularization' of the U.S.S.R.²⁸⁰

The Bolshevik model was to be drawn upon just as vigorously as indigenous working-class English history – and it was attempts to make these *histories* intertwined, that encapsulated the CPGB in the late 1930s. That said, the wider left did not agree with this assessment, as the Russian Revolution was regarded 'not as a model to be emulated, but an embarrassment from which they wanted to distance themselves'.²⁸¹ And yet, nonetheless, many within the Party were perplexed by the wider Labour movement's attacks, situating loyalty to the U.S.S.R as loyalty to the nation itself. Allen Hutt, in one

²⁷⁵ Rose, S.O. (2006). *Which People's War?: National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain, 1939-1945*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.p.45.

²⁷⁶ Pollitt, H. (1935). The Influence of Socialist Construction in the U.S.S.R. on Workers in Capitalist Countries. *The Communist International*. 15:12. August 5, 1935.

Russophilia was a widespread phenomenon, most notably demonstrated by Sidney and Beatrice Webb's 1935 book, *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation?*

²⁷⁷ Callaghan, J. (2001). Laybourn, K. & Murphy, D. (1999). Under the Red Flag. Sutton Publishing: Stroud. *International Review of Social History*. 46.p.274.

²⁷⁸ Flewers, P. (2008). *The New Civilisation? Understanding Stalin's Soviet Union 1929–1941*. Francis and Taylor Publishers: London.pp.66-68.

²⁷⁹ PB Minutes. 11th February 1937. & October 1937.

²⁸⁰ PB Minutes. 9th July 1937.

²⁸¹ Ward, P. (1998). *Red Flag and Union Jack*. p.197.

column, wrote: ‘as a patriotic Englishman I am incensed to find...those who carry on unhelpful propaganda...of our first great ally, the Soviet Union, and in effect, disrupt the nation’s solid front’.²⁸² The Party continued in this vein, as they proclaimed that ‘Marxism is rooted in British soil’, just as ‘class struggle and class-consciousness are a native British product’.²⁸³ ‘Revolution is native to its soil’, R.P. Arnot declared.²⁸⁴ Englishness and Communism were one of the same, as one event claimed that ‘Communism grows from England’s soil...it is natural to England as the green grass and hedges.’²⁸⁵ In an obituary to Tom Mann, Allen Hutt presented Mann as both a ‘lifelong revolutionary and an Englishman...these are his two fundamental attributes, inextricably intertwined’.²⁸⁶ He was a product of both the working class - which was by its nature, international – as well as fundamentally English. In typically fiery passion, Hutt questioned ‘anyone who sought to abstract Tom the revolutionary from his national background’ as not understanding the ‘real man’.²⁸⁷

Marxism became pliable, able to offer guidance to demonstrate that current methods were in keeping with typical Communist practice, tying nationalism to their internationalism to the U.S.S.R. For the CPGB, the Chartists demonstrated that there was something innately British about rebellion and class-consciousness, and it was their duty to follow suit. For the Party, it became as simple as awakening a sleeping beast, as English radicalism had taken the appearance of the appendix, intrinsic to a forgotten past. A.L. Morton, a historian, wrote in the Paper that ‘the movement of today, and above all the Communist Party, is their lawful heir. If we can add to their fighting spirit a fuller political understanding, no power on earth can defeat us’.²⁸⁸ It was spoken in maximalist terms, as the international political situation brought about an urgency to firstly, re-take national symbols and figures, before eventually laying claim to the nation itself. In-fact, his book, *A People’s History of England*, alongside a series of others such as, Christopher Hill’s *The English Revolution 1640* and Hymie Fagan’s *Nine Days That Shook England*, ‘showed English history as a complex process of

²⁸² Notes of a Patriot by G. Allen Hutt. *Labour Monthly*, February 1942.

²⁸³ *Daily Worker*. May 7th, 1938

²⁸⁴ The English Tradition. R.P. Arnot. *Labour Monthly*. November 1936. pp.695-696.

²⁸⁵ Buchanan, T. (1997). *Britain and The Spanish Civil War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.p.69.

²⁸⁶ Tom Mann. Allen Hutt. *Labour Monthly*. April 1936.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ *Daily Worker*, March 30, 1939

struggle - often tragic, and yet potentially hopeful'.²⁸⁹ It was both sentimental and dialectical, accentuating traumatic episodes from history - which often ended in failure - alongside a resurgent political working-class who would continue in these movements' steps and ensure that their 'dream would become reality'.²⁹⁰

Creating the Model Communist: Writers and Education.

The Party's new populist position came to be reflected in its education policy. Again, the CP's attempts centred on homogenising a national Party around a progressive identity. The Educational Workers International (EWI) published a pamphlet entitled *Schools at the Cross Roads*, which stated that 'English education is at the crossroads...we are free to choose which way we shall lead it; the way of fascism, the way of reaction, or the way of progress and a new society?'²⁹¹ Differentiating between 'Education under Fascism', 'Education under the Soviet Union' and 'English Schools in the Crisis', it emphasised that education was of paramount importance.²⁹² Schooling became a popular battleground in the wake of fascism's emphasis on militarism, ethno-nationalism, and its penchant for the 'perversion of culture'. However, interestingly, the CPGB wanted to ensure that the object of teaching remained 'enlightenment' and the application of reason and criticism, rather than an authentic 'Socialist education'.²⁹³ The document was symptomatic of the Party's new approach, being a defence of existing institutions and the liberal vision, rather than a promotion of a socialist alternative. This was evident in their referencing of a Japanese fascist journal, that professed to 'rid the school spirit of free inquiry'.²⁹⁴ In the words of one recent study, the Party began to 'maximise international teacher unity against fascism by focussing upon the political freedoms the profession enjoyed under liberal democracy'.²⁹⁵ Fascism was pervasive, and its effect upon the youth was

²⁸⁹ Heinemann, M. *The People's Front and the Intellectuals*. p.178.

²⁹⁰ *The Peasant's Revolt*. Nine Days that Shook England, Review by H. Fagan. *Labour Monthly*. December 1938.

²⁹¹ EWI (Educational Workers' International) – British Section. *Schools at the Cross Roads*. London, Martin Lawrence, 1935.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Kavanagh, K. (2014). *Against Fascism, War and Economies: the CPGB schoolteachers during the popular front, 1935-1939*. *History of Education*. 43:2. p.214.

²⁹⁴ *An Education Contrast: Schools at the Cross-Roads*. *Labour Monthly*. January 1936, p. 57

²⁹⁵ Kavanagh, K. (2014). *Against Fascism, War and Economies': the CPGB schoolteachers during the popular front, 1935-1939*. *History of Education*. 43:2. p.74.

unprecedented, confronting them with, in Pollitt's view, 'the menace of a new war, which will wipe out the flower of the youth of the country.'²⁹⁶ This existential threat required that the new policy of the CPGB would be 'to teach the British youth love of country', as a means of neglecting fascism's allures.²⁹⁷

The Party's own educational life was also an area in which the 'Popular Front' had a significant effect. It was only a year prior to the Seventh World Congress that Bradley complained that there was a serious lack of books and pamphlets produced by the Party.²⁹⁸ And yet, the Party's affiliated organisation, the Left Book Club, became a crucial means of distributing propaganda in a swell of activity. The avenue, led by Victor Gollancz, John Strachey and Stafford Cripps, enticed many writers across the left, and has been described as the 'Popular Front's greatest success according to one historian.'²⁹⁹ Contemporary observers were also positive, as George Orwell remarked that the 'Popular Front' was the 'heyday of the Left Book Club'.³⁰⁰ The venture was unapologetic in its objectives, declaring that it would 'devote all efforts to the explanation and advocacy of a Popular Front', which in Ben Pimlott's view, 'created a firm association in the minds of most people between Communism and the Popular Front'.³⁰¹ *The Daily Worker* followed the LBC's lead, promoting the activities of the 'Communist Progressive Rambling Club', where Communist poets such as C. Day Lewis concluded that 'socialism alone', could rescue England. It was not untypical to see writers such as May conclude that 'we Marxists declare that the English tradition has passed into our hands'.³⁰² Meanwhile, Hymie Fagan's *Nine Days That Shook England*, situated the Peasant Revolt, as a long-running prequel to the Russian Revolution, placing indigenous English history firmly alongside the Soviet Union. As Ben

²⁹⁶ *Liberalism and Communism: Forward from Liberalism*. Stephen Spender. Review by Harry Pollitt. *Labour Monthly*. March 1937. p.187.

²⁹⁷ "Mr. Pollitt on the New Communism". *The Manchester Guardian*. August 9th, 1935.

²⁹⁸ CC Jan 6th, 1934.

²⁹⁹ Beckett, F. (1995). *Enemy Within: The Rise and Fall of the British Communist Party*. pp.65-66.

³⁰⁰ Orwell, G. (1940). *Inside the Whale and Other Essays*. Victor Gollancz: London.

³⁰¹ Pimlott, B. (1977). *Labour and the Left in the 1930s*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge. p.155.

³⁰² K, Gustav. & Cunningham, V. (2012). *Ecology and the Literature of the British Left: The Red and the Green*. Routledge: Oxon.p.285.

Harker has underlined, the parallels to John Reed's account of the October Revolution are unmistakable.³⁰³ 'Never was a book so timely as this', Pollitt excitedly pronounced in August 1938.

Shining like a jewel through it all is the heroism and incorruptibility of the common people, *our* people, *your* people, which has revealed itself again and again, especially in the last few years... We have a right to be proud of our British heritage... we have the duty to learn from our own history – a glorious history of struggle and sacrifice.³⁰⁴

Labour Monthly, followed much of the same line, commenting that 'Fagan has succeeded better than any of his predecessors who have attempted to write history for the people... he has a living sense of the revolutionary traditions of the English people'.³⁰⁵ It was clear that contemporary literary culture and historical writing could be fine-tuned to current conditions, highlighting past failures and successes, in keeping with the country's *real* 'revolutionary past'. It continued:

Let that lesson of the revolutionary past of the English people come home to-day. Once again wide sections of the people are being drawn into action against a ruling oligarchy; they are waiting for a lead that can come only from the working class, because there is to-day, as there was not in 1381, a dominant class that can take the leadership in the struggle. Let the leaders of the labour movement have faith in the labouring class that the dream of John Ball may become at last reality.³⁰⁶

The Young Communist League's (YCL) newspaper *Challenge*, followed the same line, declaring that following a London meeting in March 1937, that the Party's recruits were to follow in the steps 'of the traditions of Wat Tyler and John Ball'.³⁰⁷ Jack Lindsay's *Who are the English?* was much of the same, re-locating Englishness with the dissidence of class struggle, for the Popular Front's cultural

³⁰³ Fagan, H. (1938). *Nine Days that Shook England: An Account of the English People's Uprising in 1381*: London. & Harker, B. (2011). 'Communism is English': Edgell Rickword, Jack Lindsay and the cultural politics of the popular front. *Literature and History*.20:2. p.26.

³⁰⁴ Italics, my emphasis – Harry Pollitt, 'Lessons of 1381 Still Thrill Today'. *Daily Worker*, 10th August 1938.

³⁰⁵ Harry Pollitt. Review: The Peasant's Revolt: Nine Days that Shook England. H. Fagan. *Labour Monthly*. December 1938.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ 15X/1/34/1 – "Challenge". 3:11. Young Communist League (Great Britain).

output represented ‘life rather than death, the future for the nation, rather than its destruction.’³⁰⁸ It was a moment of tension, between the forces of reaction and progress, as the CPGB positioned itself at the helm in the battle for the nation’s future.

Culture was at the wheel of this national rejuvenation, as the ‘Popular Front’ permitted a ‘flowering’ of national communism, allowing writers to write on behalf of the Party, as Communists. However, throughout the Party’s life, culture in the Party was constantly under tension, unsure whether it was something to be ‘endured or enjoyed, an unpredictable source of pleasure or a political weapon’. As Andy Croft has posited, ‘much of the Party’s history was a creative tension – to be at the same time both a part of British society and apart from it’.³⁰⁹ He continues, when the Party took writers ‘seriously’, it was able to play a part in contemporary cultural life, but, when it dismissed mainstream culture as bourgeois, ‘it remained isolated, talking only to itself’.³¹⁰ The ‘Popular Front’ therefore allowed a significant opening in cultural life. The bureaucracy of the ‘Third Period’ eased, whilst the Comintern became no longer interested in the ‘day to day activities’ of the Party, allowing a more vibrant Party culture to take root.³¹¹ Party literature no longer decried popular culture as bourgeois and removed from the average worker, but authentically or not, viewed its own output as *the realm of real national culture*. As Linehan has expanded, the effort to shape and provide a culture for proletarians encouraged ‘expression’ within their own language and cultural codes, according workers a ‘voice which gave dignity to their modes of expression and life experiences’.³¹²

Conclusion:

During the ‘Popular Front’ period, The Communist Party of Great Britain became dictated by the demands of the nation – and the fight for its traditions, its history, and ultimately, its preservation. The

³⁰⁸ Harker, B. (2011). ‘Communism is English’. pp.24-26.

³⁰⁹ Croft, A. *Authors Take Sides: Writers and the Communist Party 1920-1956*. Cited in Andrews, G. Fishman, N. & Morgan, K. (1995). *Opening the Books: Essays on the Social and Cultural History of the British Communist Party*. Pluto Press: London.p.91.

³¹⁰ Ibid: p.92.

³¹¹ Thorpe, A. (1998). Comintern ‘Control’ of the Communist Party of Great Britain: 1920:43. *The English Historical Review*. 113:452. p.662. & ‘It Can Be Done’: Report of the 14th National Congress.

³¹² Linehan, T. (2007). *Communism in Britain: 1920-1939*. Manchester University Press: Manchester.pp.178-179.

CPGB fashioned an avenue where an image of Britain, not without its historical preludes, triumphed. Patriotism for the Party was essentially a working-class phenomenon. It was tied to the land, to the workers, to the ideals of progress and rebellion, and above-all community. The Party were undoubtedly still internationalists in theory, however gaining national representation meant internationalist considerations were secondary. The balance in rhetoric shifted enormously from a revolutionary, internationalist, class-based analysis, to a nationalistic, pragmatic, and evolutionary one. However, it is crucial to emphasize that the Party must not be judged as a revolutionary party, but as a social-democratic one, for in 1935, following the Seventh World Congress, it ceased to be a revolutionary party. Instead, the international demands of the Comintern, along with the defence of the Soviet Union, necessitated a substantial re-think in International Communist policy, which the Party were willing to follow.

As the following chapter shall show, both the Party and the Comintern's framing of Empire and Imperialism differed immensely to conventional Leninist tradition. The Party were undoubtedly affected by anxieties in any potential blurring and obfuscation of any anti-fascist/anti-imperialist struggle. Placing this in mind, the Party's national emphasis was dictated by the broader concerns of anti-fascism, contesting imperialisms and nascent war – as the macro and micro became one. Therefore, to conclude, the Party in the 'Popular Front' years became an unofficial mouthpiece of a 'Workers Britain', which was endemic of many other Communist Parties world-wide, for their growth in influence and members was primarily down to their shift towards a 'Popular Front' politics; conciliation with the broader Labour movement, and benefiting from the real fear of fascism, both at home and abroad.

Chapter II: Empire, Eurocentrism and Internationalism – The CPGB and India, 1935-1945

A central theme of the previous chapter was that the Party became fixated by a ‘nationalised’ communism, which as a result, also saw its international priorities evolve. A sense of collective identity based upon English working-class history, saw increasingly a lack of room for other international struggles and movements, unless of course, they originated in the Soviet Union. As whilst, the Party did still campaign for many international campaigns during the Popular Front - the international question became consumed by the national. India, as will be discussed at length in this chapter, was the chief casualty of this shift. For whilst it would be unfair to state that the Party ‘abandoned’ India or its anti-imperialism, it certainly did not fit snugly within the Party’s new image, becoming, a square peg in a round shaped hole. The Party’s unquestioning support for the war-effort meant the Party took on a wholly atomised approach to imperialism, contrasting the British ‘form’ with its fascist counterparts, as well as arguing that revolutionary colonial advance was a distraction; a false dawn, that only emboldened the Fascist movement. The fixation for the period became alliances with other socialist groups and the progressive bourgeoisie, as the previous insistence of the Comintern to develop an autonomous ‘communist bloc’ was now downplayed. Undoubtedly, the failure of the ‘Third Period’ (namely, the Class against Class policy) had a profound effect upon the position of many Communist Parties within their national movements. This seismic change, on an international level, was due to the Soviet Union’s policy of collective security, and later conciliation with the main political powers, namely the United States, Great Britain and France. That said, the change in emphasis also nodded towards a nascent tendency towards Eurocentrism both in the Comintern, and in constituent parties, which became increasingly obvious following the Seventh World Congress in 1935.

The CPGB’s position on India fell into three distinct phases between 1935 and the end of the Second World War. From the Seventh World Congress to the German invasion of Poland, the Party prioritised a platform of reform, national alliance with the INC, and the extension of democratic rights. It had its permutations, as will be discussed, but more-or-less, the Party’s critique of

imperialism and the British Imperial State was, is what I have termed, a *soft critique*. In-fact, even considering the ‘imperialist war’ narrative between September 1939 and June 1941, the Party’s activism did not reflect their language. Dubbed the ‘phony war’ period by historians, the Party called on all ‘Communist Parties in the belligerent countries... to unmask the war’s imperialist character’.³¹³ Emanating from the highest levels of the Comintern, the Central Committee met on the 2nd October 1939, during which Rajani Palme Dutt declared the new line:

If you start fighting the enemy imperialists during a war, in practice, you are supporting your own imperialists. That does not mean we are in favour of Hitler winning anything whatsoever. But if for that reason we start supporting the imperialist war of Chamberlain, then in practice, we are supporting imperialism.³¹⁴

The Party changed line again, however, following the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, as the Party became the most sterling defenders of Empire and nation – calling for a ‘war on two fronts’. It was here that anti-fascism took precedence over anti-imperialism, and that colonial liberation was irrespective of broader concerns. It continued, to a greater degree, the pre-war line of the ‘Popular Front’, as Communist policy became nationalized, deferring socialism until the win of democracy. It was within this current of Russophilic feeling, that the Party had its most successful period in its history -quadrupling its membership -as it disavowed industrial action, enthusiastically supported the war effort and became the forerunners for the new allied obsession with the Soviet Union.

It cannot be understated that there were significant differences in the implementation of the ‘Popular Front’ line across the globe. In Britain, the ‘Popular Front’ became a means to exert considerable pressure on the Labour Party. However, in the case of India, the Indian Communist Party were told to work within the National Congress, and other reformist organisations, but ultimately remain independent. The CPI had a somewhat interesting relationship with the INC, as they veered between outright ‘battle with Congress’ (as the primary agent of bourgeois nationalism in India) and open

³¹³ National Archives. CAB 66/35/9.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

embrace with Congress, in the battle against British imperialism.³¹⁵ Their policy was overwhelmingly dictated by the ideological ‘goal’ of the movement itself. For instance, if the Comintern had viewed the downfall of capitalism as ‘imminent’, as it did in the aftermath of the Wall Street Crash in 1929, the Party worked tirelessly for the dismantling of British imperialism, and its active proxies, the ‘bourgeois nationalists’.

On the eve of Fascist aggression, the Party undertook a more conciliatory tone – viewing its membership of the INC with great warmth, making grand statements that it was their ‘birth right to remain inside our great patriotic organisation’.³¹⁶ That said, these various ‘turns’ were decisively different to the Leninist tradition of acting within these unions, so long as Communists were at the spearhead of these organisations, as Lenin enthused the communist movement in Britain to engage with the Labour Party ‘as the rope supports a hanged man’.³¹⁷ Even in 1935, the job was to infiltrate these movements, and work within the system, before ultimately becoming its revolutionary vanguard. Wang Ming, delegate at the Seventh World Congress for Indo-China, summed up the Indian position:

Without the active participation of the communists in the general people’s and national struggle against imperialist oppression, it is inconceivable that the Communist (Party) can be transformed into a real mass party, and without this the hegemony of the proletariat and Soviet power in their country is not to be thought of.³¹⁸

It was crucial for Indian Communists to be actively involved in the national anti-imperialist struggle, both as a means of establishing working-class power within these organisations, but also to potentially become their vanguard. For too long, the Party had drawn a chasm between ‘class’ and ‘nation’, and now they had to ensure they presented these two strands as united in one struggle against British imperialism.

³¹⁵ Windmiller, M. & Overstreet, G. (1959). *Communism in India*. University of California Press: Los Angeles.p.529.

³¹⁶ Ibid: p.212.

³¹⁷ Lenin, V. (1920). *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*.

³¹⁸ Ming, W. (1935). *Seventh World Congress: The Revolutionary Movement in the Colonial Countries*.p.38.

The Party's Anti-Imperial History:

The CPGB's anti-imperialist credentials were as many scholars have noted, at its height between 1928 and 1935. The League against Imperialism (LAI) became a particularly strong avenue for anti-imperialist activism, developing strong internationalist ties between the capitalist core and the colonial peripheral states. The Party had during these years, firmly inculcated itself within the liberation of the colonies. Shapuri Saklatvala, M.P. for Battersea and the two Dutt brothers were both of Indian origin, allowing real practical ties to the policies of Empire. In-fact, whether that be R. P. Dutt's *India Today*, or Saklatvala's depth of political contacts, the two figures had a tremendous impact on the Indian labour movement.³¹⁹ During the Third Period, the Party had been involved in the formation of the CPI, and the creation of the Colonial Committee in 1925, as well as infamously, the Meerut trial in 1929.³²⁰ This debacle was the focus of much Party work, leading to the imprisonment of two British communists, Ben Bradley and Phillip Spratt. In-fact, following the Seventh World Congress, the ECCI placed Ben Bradley in charge of the affairs of the CPI, demonstrating both the Comintern's appreciation of Bradley's knowledge of Indian domestic politics and their inherent Eurocentrism.³²¹ However, as Neil Redfern has recently argued, the Party failed to maintain a 'sustained and practical solidarity with anti-colonial struggles', which suggests that the 'Meerut Conspiracy' was somewhat of an exception in CPGB colonial activism.³²² The Meerut affair was undoubtedly the Party's most obvious example of anti-imperialist activity – and was in many ways, the standard by which all subsequent activity was measured.

As Callaghan has explained, 'for the Communists, it was not enough to support pious resolutions for colonial independence...the centrality of India in the Party's anti-colonial work was evident from the beginning.'³²³ British Communists were in a unique situation, as they had the job of disseminating

³¹⁹ Novara Media. (2018). *Vijay Prashad: Neoliberalism, Global Capital and the Indian Left*.

³²⁰ Eadon, J. & Renton, D. (2002). *The Communist Party of Great Britain since 1920*. Palgrave: Basingstoke.p.21 & Callaghan, J. (1997). *Colonies, Racism, the CPGB and the Comintern in the Inter-War Years*.p.515.

³²¹ Bradley was Vice-President of the Bombay Textile Union and the Great India Peninsular Railwaymen's Union, as well as Vice-President of the All India Trade Union Congress in 1926. Bradley, B. (1942). *What Must Be Done? Labour Monthly*. September 1942.

³²² Redfern, N. (2017). *The Comintern and Imperialism: A Balance Sheet* p.47.

³²³ Callaghan, J. (1993). *Rajani Palme Dutt*.p.98.

information on the oppressive nature of the British state, along with the British workers' lack of solidarity with their colonial comrades. It was an issue which the CPGB battled with throughout its early history, as Walter Hannington lucidly expressed in 1925:

Seldom does the British worker discuss such places as India and Egypt although they are British colonies. It is only with some crisis or sensational happening in these countries that he is aroused to a realisation that these countries are under British rule... We must show our solidarity with our Colonial brothers—victims of British imperialism. It is essentially the duty of the British workers to stand up in their defence. These crimes are committed in the name of the British nation, and unless the British workers manifest their opposition, our Egyptian and Indian comrades will for ever be entitled to point to us as hypocrites whenever we speak of International working-class solidarity.³²⁴

Lenin termed this phenomenon, 'white chauvinism', which he understood as having deeply 'infected' British workers with a sense of paternalism, and at worst, a total disregard for colonial workers. The problem was that the working classes had become 'completely merged with bourgeois policy', he wrote in 1915.³²⁵ It is an 'established fact' that a 'minority are 'enjoying' crumbs from colonial advantages, from privileges.'³²⁶ As a 1937 document from the CPGB explained, Empire had created a false sense of identity among the working classes, offering 'a nice, warm, comfortable feeling inside that you are part of one, big, happy family, all having a great time'.³²⁷ It was clear that Empire was a firm fixture in the mind of the British worker, as Dutt accused both the left and right of having a 'largely unconscious, deeply ingrained... imperialist outlook'.³²⁸ It was the 'unspoken premise of all labour and trade union politics', Dutt later expanded.³²⁹ As the above document continued, 'some workers will begin to feel that they actually own a piece of the British Empire. That's the idea. It is

³²⁴ Walter Hannington. (1925). *British Terror in India and Egypt*. Workers Weekly. January 16th 1925.

³²⁵ Lenin, V. *Imperialism*.

³²⁶ Lenin, V.I. (1969). *British Labour and British Imperialism: A Compilation of Writings by Lenin on Britain*. Lawrence and Wishart: London.p.67.

³²⁷ MSS.15X/2/103/181. "One Happy Family", 14th April 1937.

³²⁸ Bush, B. (1999). *Imperialism, Race and Resistance: Africa and Britain, 1919-1945*. Routledge: London.p.241.

³²⁹ Young, J.D. (1989). *Socialism and the English Working Class: A History of English Labour, 1883-1939*. Harvester Wheatsheaf: London.p.156.

our Empire. We must defend it. Defend the family property.’³³⁰ The profits of Empire were maintaining the existence of Empire abroad, as British workers were indebted to the same exploitative system that undermined them at home.

As many have noted, in the absence of a major anti-imperialist tradition, racism and Empire long clouded the thinking of British politics, even amongst the left.³³¹ As Macintyre has suggested, ‘the impact of Empire on the British proletarian consciousness was immensely powerful...for they considered the imperial question to lie outside the ambit of Labour politics’.³³² The Party, to its credit, attempted to critique this long-running identification with Empire, though they were largely unsuccessful. John Callaghan has gone as far to suggest that beyond Saklatvala and Rajani Palme Dutt, they were the only figures in the British Communist Party who placed the same emphasis on anti-imperialism as Lenin, noting that most others had to be formally taught the policy.³³³ Many were aware it was an uphill battle, as Bill Rust highlighted the endurance of racialist theories of white supremacy, commenting that they ‘have been soaked into the minds of British workers since childhood, [which is] why so many are workers are indifferent to the struggle of the Indian people.’³³⁴ Nonetheless, the Party claimed they had successfully distanced themselves from this kind of ‘backward’ thinking, as Pollitt claimed that the CPGB was ‘the only party that had broken down race and colour distinction’.³³⁵ It would not be wrong to assume this was the case, at least in theory, however, whether it filtered down to much practical solidarity is another matter.

Democracy Now, Independence Later.

The CPGB’s policy on India was geared towards the ‘granting’ of autonomy, with the key inclusion being that the British state was allowing India independence, at their own behest, rather than the

³³⁰ “One Happy Family”, 14th April 1937.

³³¹ Young, J.D. (1989). *Socialism and the English Working Class*; Macintyre, S. (1975). *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement*; Howe, S. (1993). *Anticolonialism in British Politics: The Left and the End of Empire &*

³³² *Ibid*:4.

³³³ Callaghan, J. (1995). *The Communists and the Colonies: Anti-Imperialism between the Wars*. Cited in Andrews, G. Fishman, N. & Morgan, K. (1995). *Opening the Books: Essays on the Social and Cultural History of the British Communist Party*. Pluto Press: London.pp.30-31.

³³⁴ CP/328.521 – William Rust. *India’s Fight for Separation and Independence*. [undated document]

³³⁵ “Communism’s New Recruits”. *The Manchester Guardian*. December 19th, 1936.

Indian people taking it themselves. Whilst a subtle difference, it demonstrates the Party's belief that at least in the short-term, working within the established trade-union movement was far more likely than calling for immediate revolution. As Edmonds' work has presented, 'the political focus centred upon European and white colonial workers as agents of revolutionary change.'³³⁶ The Party was no doubt committed to a 'free Indian state', but how it was to be achieved, and what this entailed, was up for debate.

The 'Popular Front' led to the Party lending its support for various democratic initiatives, proposed by both the British state and the Indian National Congress. There were drives for the establishment of a Constituent Assembly; support for the INC's 'All-India' involvement in the Indian National Elections in 1937, and from 1942 onwards, the granting of post-war Indian independence, *if* there was support for the war effort. Consequently, the colonial question became a democratic question, not an imperialist one. National self-determination would be achieved through the 'Popular Front', with the INC as its vanguard. It was clear, for instance, that if any attempts at a Left Book Club were to be a success, it would have to be under the provision that 'it gets the support of the whole congress', Nehru declared. He continued, that 'I think it will be advisable not to call it a LEFT Book Club, but Congress or Nationalist', highlighting the CPI's indebtedness to the broader national movement.³³⁷ The CPGB's role was therefore to 'fully appreciate our own tremendous responsibility in relation to the struggle for the liberation of the Indian people', which broadly meant campaigning for greater democratic rights.³³⁸ The British Government, who the Party repeatedly claimed had besmirched the country's democratic image, was still held, at least in theory, as a positive political body. The British State was no-longer imperialist per-se, but one acting dishonestly, as Gallacher, in one Commons debate called upon the 'Mother of Parliaments, a democratic institution... [to go] to the limit in the use of democratic institutions, before it brings in the bayonet and the bomb'.³³⁹ It pervaded all

³³⁶ Edmonds, D. (2017). *Unpacking 'Chauvinism': The Interrelationship of Race, Internationalism, and Anti-Imperialism amongst Marxists in Britain, 1899-1933*. PhD Thesis: Manchester University.p.170.

³³⁷ CP/IND/BRAD/6/9 – Left Book Club in India.

³³⁸ On the Eve of the Indian National Congress. Ben Bradley; R. Palme Dutt and Harry Pollitt. *Labour Monthly*. March 1938.

³³⁹ Hansard Millbank. 22 February 1937. Vol.320.

colonial activism, as in the case of Palestine, the problem lay in the Palestinians not being provided ‘with the opportunity of having a Legislative Assembly’.³⁴⁰ Again, on numerous occasions, Gallacher in Parliament called upon the Government to consider amending the 1935 Government of India Act, which showcased the CP’s position as that of extending democratic liberty, rather than ending British imperialism.³⁴¹

However, not all believed the Party’s position was as authentic as they presented, as Henry N. Brailsford, the influential left-wing journalist, most well known as an associate of the ILP and the Communist-led *Left Book Club*, wrote in a review of R.P. Dutt’s ‘*India Today*’, that whilst ‘a useful contribution to history’, Dutt’s work was still dictated by the needs ‘of his party to smile on Congress, viewing its reformist programme with qualified approval’.³⁴² Brailsford, much like Dutt, was regarded as an eminent authority on Indian issues, with the two more-or-less singing from the same hymn sheet. However, in this case, Brailsford’s comments nod towards Dutt’s own transformation on India during the ‘Popular Front’ period, as whilst he was undoubtedly the most prolific in the British Party regarding colonial issues; the question lies in whether he reflected the Party line on India - or was an exception. Dutt, in Callaghan’s view, became more involved in colonial work on his return to Britain in 1936, becoming ‘more dependent on Dutt’s personal input than at any other time – the Soviet Union having devolved all-day-to-day to constituent parties.’³⁴³ Dutt in-fact, led many of the Party’s attempts at a ‘Popular Front’ anti-imperialism, becoming heavily involved in the India League, the publication *Inside the Empire*, as well as writing regular columns in *Labour Monthly* on India, becoming the Party’s spokesperson on imperial issues.

He was not alone in appreciating the Indian issue, as Ben Bradley oversaw much of the Party’s Central Committee discussion on the country. These reports were often based upon promoting further work in the membership, or providing updates on the CPI’s relationship with the INC. As Bradley stated in April 1936: ‘our demands are a demand for all political persons; the freedom of press,

³⁴⁰ Hansard Millbank. 17 November 1937. Vol 329.

³⁴¹ Hansard Millbank. 09 February 1938. Vol 331.

³⁴² HNB/30. 24th August 1940 – Review of R.P. Dutt’s ‘*India To-Day*’.

³⁴³ Callaghan, J. (1993). *Rajani Palme Dutt*.p.156.

organisation and better housing and education...such a demand could be built upon and strengthened by the national liberation movement.’³⁴⁴ The INC was the vehicle of the national liberation movement and strengthening it from below was the object for the Party. Bradley pressed that, ‘it is essential that this question be more fully discussed in the Party lower organs...with the idea of threshing and clarifying the Party’s policy on the colonial question.’³⁴⁵ A year later, Bradley proposed once again that a ‘new letter go out to the Districts on the importance of colonial work’, whilst adding that the monthly bulletin, *Colonial Information*, should be ‘sent to every branch of the Party’.³⁴⁶

Democracy, was the means to not only establish greater working-class representation, but also for them to fulfil their internationalist obligations, as it ‘cuts the ground from beneath fascisms feet and draws [them] into the system of collective security.’³⁴⁷ The Charter of Rights, they emphasised, was ‘not an alternative to national self-determination’, but merely the ‘best path’ in the ‘immediate conditions’ to ‘meet the grave dangers of the fascist menace’.³⁴⁸ That said, they did regard the ‘New Constitution’ as a sham, regarding it as another vestige of imperial rule.³⁴⁹ It was the ‘greatest fraud ever perpetuated on a nation’, according to Bradley, presenting, ‘not even the shadow of self-government’.³⁵⁰ Democracy was regarded as a revolutionary advance, if it stemmed the advance of fascism, as it did in much of the West, however, in India, democracy was regarded more as a potential stopgap, rather than an immediate end, as we shall see in later years. Democracy was predicated on international obligations, rather than any innate desire for Indian self-governance, as the Party still overwhelmingly viewed its own role as more paramount in forging any ‘democratic progress’ than domestic factors.

³⁴⁴ PB, 16th April 1936.

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ PB, 10th June 1937

³⁴⁷ Colonies and Fascism. [untitled]. *Labour Monthly*. August 1939. p.474.

³⁴⁸ Ibid:475.

³⁴⁹ Ben Bradley. The Indian Election. *Labour Monthly*. March 1937.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

Cracks Begin to Emerge - Outsiders Once Again?

The failure of the 'Cripps Mission' in 1942, demonstrated that the Party were not alone in failing to appreciate the desires of the INC or wider Indian opinion. As Yasmin Khan's recent work has underlined, the Cripps Mission reflected the divergence in British and Indian opinion, as its 'rationale and failure can be explained by the daily drama of war in India in early 1942'.³⁵¹ The mission, to quote a national paper, was '30 months too late'.³⁵² However, the CPGB's explanation for its failure, was because it failed to undertake the 'one issue that mattered – the establishment of a responsible National Government with effective powers for Indian participation in the war'.³⁵³ The Cripps Mission, Dutt proposed was as simple as 'plainly recognising the principle of Indian independence; and by establishing, a representative National Government'.³⁵⁴ Supporting the war effort was paramount, as the Party wholeheartedly believed that the time was not right for Indian independence. Ben Bradley, drew an equivalence between not supporting the war effort and a failing national movement, fearing that 'to crush the Indian national movement is to ensure that there will be no national resistance to the fascist aggressors'.³⁵⁵ The mission failed not because it failed to cater towards a growing current of pro-independence opinion, but because, 'under cover of the dubious post-war plan, it rejected out of hand the one issue that mattered – the establishment of a responsible National Government with effective powers for Indian participation in the war.'³⁵⁶

Most Indians discredited the Cripps Mission for entirely different reasons however, as the mission was regarded by much of Indian opinion as 'a post-date cheque on a bank which is already crashing'.³⁵⁷ This was not the only instance of the CPGB misunderstanding the Indian political climate, as the Party's support for the CPI position on the 'Quit India' campaign demonstrated the Party's chasm with the mainstream anti-colonial movement. They were, once again, outsiders, as the

³⁵¹ Khan, Y. (2015). *The Raj at War: A People's History of India's Second World War*. Penguin: London.p.134.

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ India – What Must Be Done. R.P. Dutt. *Labour Monthly*. September 1942, pp..259-268.

³⁵⁴ Notes of the Month. The Choice Before Us. R.P. Dutt. *Labour Monthly*. April 1942. p.104.

³⁵⁵ 328.521: 1907-1940 - 'India's Problems' with foreword by Ben Bradley.

³⁵⁶ India – What Must Be Done. R.P. Dutt. *Labour Monthly*. September 1942.

³⁵⁷ Quote by Gandhi.

Freedom. Clemens Dutt. *Labour Monthly*. August 1942.

campaign 'shattered left unity in India'.³⁵⁸ The CPI gained traction whilst most Congress leaders were imprisoned, as their very legality was due to their enthusiastic support for the British war effort. In a moment of political chaos, it was ironic that the CPI, a Communist Party, came to be regarded 'with unprecedented favour in government circles'.³⁵⁹

R.P. Dutt's editorial in *Labour Monthly*, summarised the Party's view on the movement, denouncing both the British government and the Congress Leaders as benefiting fascism. He wrote that they were 'the two halves of reactionary policy', which 'fit one another like the two hands of a pair of gloves.'³⁶⁰ Dutt reimagined the 'Quit India' movement as a nation striving for 'equal access' in the worldwide anti-fascist struggle, rather than as a desire for national independence. Gandhi was a 'pacifist, evil genius', whose policy of non-co-operation was stemming the *real* anti-fascism of Nehru and the INC. In an act of severe miscalculation, Dutt squared the acts of civil obedience as a reaction to the arrests, rather than as means of civil disobedience in of themselves. The arrests had 'precipitated the open conflict and disorders...for it was the arrests which provoked the disorders, not disorders which provoked the arrests.'³⁶¹ The decision to threaten civil obedience was a 'disastrous step for the fate of India' according to Clemens Dutt in August 1942.³⁶² Although the CPGB continually called for the release of the Congress leaders, their motivation was based upon support in the war effort, not on any ideological solidarity. In-fact, a letter sent from Pollitt to Churchill noted that:

We deplore this threat of civil disobedience and believe that any such policy, inevitably leading to division and internal struggle in the face of Fascist aggression, and thus playing into the hands of fascism, would be suicidal from the standpoints of the interests of Indian freedom - no less than of the world cause of freedom against Fascism...we urge that the

³⁵⁸ Owen, N. (2007). *The British Left and India: Metropolitan Anti-Imperialism, 1885-1947*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.p.264.

³⁵⁹ Windmiller, M. & Overstreet, G. (1959). *Communism in India*. p.205.

³⁶⁰ India – What Must Be Done. R.P. Dutt. *Labour Monthly*. September 1942.

³⁶¹ Ibid.

³⁶² Freedom. Clemens Dutt. *Labour Monthly*. August 1942.

government immediately and without preliminary conditions re-open negotiations with the INC.³⁶³

Their settlement proposed recognition of Indian independence and the creation of a provisional national government, however, none of these vague hypotheticals would realistically satisfy Indian political opinion, so heavily swayed towards immediate independence. As Nehru responded, the same month:

Without recognition of our basic standpoint of an immediate declaration of independence, any round-table conference would be going back to the old method...the whole conception of having us sit at the feet of power is repugnant to us.³⁶⁴

Nehru, a figure ultimately sympathetic to communism, contextualised the British's continued support for war and Empire, and its refusal to grant the Indian National Congress self-autonomy.³⁶⁵ He argued, that the British could not hope for India's support in the fight against fascism, and for democracy, if it refused to allow the Indian people to democratise their own system.³⁶⁶ Whilst, Nehru's sympathies were undoubtedly anti-fascist, he did regard fascism as merely an intensification of imperialism, claiming that it would be 'illogical and absurd' to fail to condemn both.³⁶⁷

Interestingly, the 'calibre' of many Indian politicians was judged on the authenticity of their 'anti-fascism', which increasingly became a yardstick to judge the Party's support for anti-imperialist politics. On numerous occasions, Pollitt and others emphasised the anti-fascism of the Indian people, whilst The *Daily Worker* remarked positively on an 'Aid to Spain' meeting in London in March 1937, led by Shapurji Saklatavala's wife.³⁶⁸ Even R.P.Dutt based support for India on a shared anti-fascist solidarity, as he emphasised the Indian's own nascent anti-fascist activism: "today they are organising

³⁶³ "Gulf Between the Indian Parties". *The Times*. August 24, 1942.

³⁶⁴ "Indian Opinions: A Warning to Congress". *Manchester Guardian*. August 1st, 1942.

³⁶⁵ Dutt, R.P. (1936). Left Nationalism in India. *Labour Monthly*. Book Review: Jawaharlal Nehru: An Autobiography.pp.635-638.

³⁶⁶ CP. 328.521 – 1907-1940 (Box 72). Britain's Prisoner', published Jan 26th, 1941 by the India League: London.p.31.

³⁶⁷ Buchanan, T. Dark Millions.p.651.

³⁶⁸ *Daily Worker*. March 11, 1937 – "Indians in London to hold Aid to Spain Meeting".

support for Spain; they have Indian doctors, Indian medical aid in Spain, and in the streets of Bombay collections are being taken for Spanish democracy.”³⁶⁹ Whilst this was not an assessment removed from reality, as the INC condemned fascism in Spain; expressed solidarity with the Republicans, and raised food, funds and medical assistance for the Spanish cause, the Party based support on India on a perceived anti-fascist solidarity, rather than as one overtly anti-imperial.³⁷⁰ Ultimately for the CPGB, the Indian domestic position was irrelevant, as European Fascism must be stopped, even if it meant defending British imperial interests. In the Party’s view, imperialism was a creed which must be fought, but after the defeat of fascism, not before. As such, the Party repeatedly reiterated that Indian involvement in the war was crucial, as Ben Bradley spelled out in May 1943:

We must bring pressure on the government to end immediately the policy of repression; release all political prisoners, and reopen negotiations with Congress leaders, and leaders of other political organisations on the question of the immediate establishment of a composite Provisional Government for India.³⁷¹

Instead of mass civil disobedience, the correct response was to call for a ‘People’s War’, where the Indian worker would ‘rise to his full height, realising that he is producing goods for the war of his people’. The CPI declared that the war ‘opens a straight and simple path for the Indian revolution’ asserting that ‘patriotic instinct’ would allow unity and victory.³⁷² However, this line was largely against the grain of Indian opinion, as most Indians were understandably disinterested in European fascism, as their immediate enemy was the British imperial state and Empire. The change to the ‘People’s War line’, as Windmiller and Overstreet have suggested, ‘became only in touch with reality with the Japanese invasion of Indian territory’.³⁷³

³⁶⁹ 1937 Congress.

³⁷⁰ Louro, M. (2018). *Comrades against Imperialism: Nehru, India, and Interwar Internationalism*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge. p.214.

³⁷¹ Indian Crisis. by Ben Bradley. *Labour Monthly*. May 1943. p.157.

³⁷² CP/328.521 – 1907-1940 (Box 72). Communist Party of India Leaflet. Introduction by Harry Pollitt. September 1942.

³⁷³ Windmiller, M. & Overstreet, G. (1959). *Communism in India*. p.98.

Redefining Imperialism:

The Party's definition of 'imperialism' was perhaps the most obvious example of the Party's shift in thinking. As whilst it always understood imperialism in the same manner, its application became a kind of buzz-word, used when the situation suited, rather than as a conscious ideological category.³⁷⁴ Imperialism in Leninist terms was the pinnacle of capitalism, as it followed Marx's dictum that, capitalism 'planted the seeds for its own destruction'.³⁷⁵ In Lenin's view, capital could not circumvent the problem of falling levels of profit in the core capitalist countries, meaning to survive, capitalism would have to expand into areas of the world where it had previously been scarce.³⁷⁶ Capital in the core countries, such as Great Britain, had become 'over-ripe', exhausting its potential for expansion because of the impoverishment of the masses. As a result, capital's potential for expansion in these 'new markets' led to increasingly higher profits, as well as a division between 'developed' and 'undeveloped' nations. Imperialism was not necessarily intrinsic to capitalism, as Luxemburg thought, but was the result of inter-imperialist rivalry.³⁷⁷ It was certainly something the Comintern should critique, and yet with the arrival of European fascism, Western Communists took a wholly atomised approach to imperialism.

Imperialism became, not the most barbaric expression of capitalism, but something certain nations engaged in more heavily than others. Britain, particularly with its colonies in India and much of Africa, seemingly undertook a more benevolent form than its fascist counterparts. Much of this ambiguity is because the CPGB's anti-imperialism was drawn from two conflicting avenues. The Party, much alike to the British Labour movement had not undergone a fundamental reimagining along anti-imperialist lines. Rather, the Party balanced between being an authentic 'anti-imperialist'

³⁷⁴ Much of the debate surrounding Trotskyism declared them in conjunction with fascism and foreign regimes, as Stalin declared in 1938 that they were an 'unprincipled band of wreckers, diversionists, spies and murderers' who were in line with foreign regimes'.

- MSS.15X/1/132/25. Communist International. *Trotskyists in Spain – Open Agents of International Fascism*. p.548.

³⁷⁵ Engels, F. & Marx, K. Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League, London, March 1850.

³⁷⁶ Lenin, V.I. (1969). *British Labour and British Imperialism*. p.66.

³⁷⁷ Macintyre, S. (1975). *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement*. pp.6-10.

Party, alongside a nascent trend of ‘white labourism’. As Satnam Virdee’s recent work has demonstrated, the English working class has often harboured racist sentiments, as well as simultaneously, a working-class anti-racism, noting that these expressions are ‘not necessarily artefacts of two different parts of the working class...but rather, on occasion entwined’.³⁷⁸ Baring this in mind, the CPGB’s position on imperialism, in the absence of any theoretical solidity, fluctuated between these two competing currents of thought at any one moment - much to the annoyance of the Comintern and seasoned members such as Saklatvala. Imperialism, ignoring a few exceptions, was mostly understood as primarily an economic relationship, one of violent suppression, but also an opportunity to emphasize the inherent paternalism of much of the British left. The argument went that the most industrialised nations were those whose opportunities were ripest for revolution, whereas those who bore the brunt of the imperial system, were not yet sufficiently ‘ripe’ for revolutionary agitation. As such, workers in the Global North, were given the responsibility of handing freedom and independence to the colonial workers, after they themselves had been liberated.

Much of the CPGB’s message, other than what were at times, ritualistic demands for independence, were geared towards the economic arguments of Empire. On numerous occasions, the ‘problems’ of Empire were talked of not in terms of exploitation or brutality, but rather in its effect on wages here at home in the Imperial country. Even during the Class against Class period, it was an argument repeatedly made – Shapurji Saklatvala for example in the House of Commons in 1929. decried the maintenance of possessions of Empire in India, China and Africa, ‘as the undoing of the standard of labour not only for the British people, but for European and Western peoples also’.³⁷⁹ *For Soviet Britain*, the Party’s first proto ‘Popular Front’ document declared that ‘it is the plunder of India and the other colonies that enables the ruling class to wage class struggle in this country’.³⁸⁰ ‘It is this

³⁷⁸ Virdee, S. (2015). Opening a Dialogue on Race, Class and National Belonging. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*. 38:13. p.261.

Virdee largely elucidates on Young’s work in the late eighties, where he noted that “in the absence of a major anti-imperialist tradition, racism inevitably influenced the consciousness and thinking of English socialists and communists” - Young, J.D. (1989). *Socialism and the English Working Class*.p.155.

³⁷⁹ Hansard Millbank. 09 May 1929.

³⁸⁰ *For Soviet Britain*. The Programme of the Communist Party adopted at the XIII Congress. February 2nd, 1935.

reason why the struggle of British workers must be bound up with the struggle of the colonial masses – it is a common fight against a common enemy’.³⁸¹ The Party’s emphasis may have been dictated by the need to prioritise domestic issues, as Labourism always had. For many involved in the wider-Labour movement, international issues were relegated to the periphery, as ‘people wanted to know more about the unemployed and things that concerned them’.³⁸²

It was something the Party battled with throughout the inter-war years, as the majority population were imbued with a deeply ingrained racial prejudice that aligned their thinking to the colonial model. In this sense, Malika Sherwood’s assessment that the Party reflected the attitudes of the era are correct, however, senior Party figures largely fought an uphill battle against mainstream indifference, which at times bordered on blatant ignorance of international issues. In 1930, Idris Cox suggested that communists had placed too much emphasis on politicising worldwide struggle, as the Party accepted that slogans such as ‘Defend the Soviet Union’ or ‘Hands off India’ were of ‘minor relevance’ to workers in Shipley or Huddersfield battling wage reductions.³⁸³ It was a tightrope the Party delicately balanced for many years, as they had to appease those who dismissed them solely as a ‘foreign policy Party’, but also maintain their internationalist credentials, both to satisfy the demands of the Comintern, and members in their sister parties, such as the CPI.

Japanese Fascism: The Revival of Orientalist Narratives

The onset of war itself was viewed as a means of driving down the supply for British goods, and thus reducing wages at home. Following the Japanese invasion of China, the CPGB made various attempts to organise solidarity based on boycotts. Boycotts, alongside various others humanitarian aid drives were evidence of the Party’s continuing evolution, as the Party’s activism in the late thirties was based on maintaining respectability. It was something most evident in the Party’s work during the Spanish Civil War, as Lewis Mates’ research in the North East has reached much of the same conclusion, noting that many Party members ‘were likely to have achieved respectability as a result of their party

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² P.B, 13 November 1936.

³⁸³ Worley, M. (2001). *Class against Class: The Communist Party in Britain between the Wars*. I.B Tauris: London. p.172.

membership not being widely known'.³⁸⁴ In-fact, the Party's initiatives on China were founded on a belief that to do any differently would 'frighten away the progressive forces to the right of the CPGB'.³⁸⁵ The 'China Campaign Committee', was indicative of the 'Popular Front' era initiative, seeking broad, populist support. For example, the CCC enticed all branches to make 'patient approaches to local Labour Parties to secure their co-operation on China...especially in regard to the boycott, sanctions and the unloading of Japanese ships in British ports'.³⁸⁶ The CCC connected British consumer demand as abetting Japanese fascism, as the Party were horrified that British pounds were 'financing raids of death'.³⁸⁷ Presumably, they were only following the lead of international Comintern directives, which regarded Japanese imperialism as a direct threat to the USSR, stating that:

The peoples of Asia are menaced by Japanese imperialism. From both the West and East, the fascist cut-throats are preparing an onslaught on the great land of socialism, the fatherland of all working people.³⁸⁸

The *Daily Worker* later followed suit, calling for all dockers and seamen to resist loading Japanese boats.³⁸⁹ The Party policy was linked to workers at home, as Pollitt bemoaned that 'skilled workers in Lancashire are driven into unemployment because the National Government's policy of encouraging Japanese aggression has practically destroyed the China market for British goods'.³⁹⁰ Britain were being excluded from the global imperial supply chain, as one CPGB leaflet, called for a boycott of Japanese silk, arguing that 'just as the aggressor in Europe plans to dominate the Western world, so Japan aims to rule over the East, completely excluding Britain'³⁹¹

³⁸⁴ Mates, L. (2007). *Spanish Civil War*.p.201.

³⁸⁵ Virdee, S. (2014). *Racism, Class and the Racialized Outsider*.p.96.

³⁸⁶ PB, 1st October 1937.

³⁸⁷ CP/ORG/MISC/2/14. "Innocent Purchasers Finance Raids of Death" – leaflet.

³⁸⁸ Extracts from an ECCI Manifesto on the Twentieth Anniversary of the Russian Revolution, 6th November 1937 cited in Degras, J. (2005). *The Communist International 1919-1943: Documents*. Volume III, 1929-1943. Frank Cass & Co: London.p.416.

³⁸⁹ "Defence of the People". Harry Pollitt. 7th February 1939.

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

³⁹¹ Redfern, N. (2017). *The Comintern and Imperialism*. p.52.

However, in-keeping with much of the Party work on the colonies, the issue was not carried through with the readiness the Political Bureau had hoped. The PB declared on October 1st that ‘some sections of the Party have been very slow to respond to the measures sent to them and should take the matter up immediately’.³⁹² That said, the Party membership cannot be blamed for a lack of practical solidarity with the colonies, if the Party’s own circulation on the subject was limited. Ignoring the Party’s own theoretical problems, which was regularly alluded to; the Party’s own learning material featured a meagre two lines on imperialism, with 5 of the 8 points directed towards fascism and/or defence of the Soviet Union.³⁹³ Bearing in mind this theoretical ambiguity, it is unsurprising that imperialism came to be thought of as a kind of moral degeneration - an infection within the national psyche - rather than a *real* political ideology. As early as 1935, this thinking was prevalent in the CPGB, as Idris Cox regarded imperialism as something intrinsic to a people’s national make-up, noting ‘we have to recognise that the strongest force in the government is pro-German’.³⁹⁴ It was the very-same rhetoric that allowed the Chamberlain government to become ‘proto-fascist’, in its drive to lead the country away from its ‘real history’.

The ‘Old’ and ‘New’ Imperialism:

Increasingly, the Party became marred by a theoretical distinction between the past and present, as J.R. Campbell reported in 1938 that there was a clear difference between the ‘old’ and ‘new imperialisms’. He stated that ‘under the old Imperialism there was – in time of peace – a measure of liberty and of conscience’. It was a complete re-writing of the Party’s understanding of imperialism, as the Party declared that this new fascist brand ‘is out to wipe Parliamentary democracy from the face of the Earth – it is out to exterminate socialism and trade unionism by fire and sword’.³⁹⁵

However, it was not a view the Party took to immediately following Hitler’s ascension to power.

Rajani Palme Dutt in January 1935 warned in *Labour Monthly* that ‘we need more than ever to warn the workers to become entangled in the lines of imperialist policies’ citing alertness to any potential

³⁹² PB, 1st October 1937.

³⁹³ Communist Theory Series, No. 1. Four Lesson Course: For the Use of Communist Party Branches and Training Groups. 1937.

³⁹⁴ PB, May 30th, 1935.

³⁹⁵ For Peace and Plenty: Report of the Fifteenth Congress.

refurbishing of imperialist ‘national defence’.³⁹⁶ Krishna Menon made much of the same analysis in 1938, explicitly stating that:

In the event of such a world war taking place there is a grave danger of Indian man power and resources being utilised for the purposes of British imperialism, and it is therefore necessary for the Congress to warn the country again against this and prepare it to resist such exploitation of India and her people. No credits must be voted for such a war and voluntary subscriptions and war loans must not be supported, and all other war preparations resisted.³⁹⁷

Dutt’s comments demonstrate the theoretical uncertainty which coursed through much of the Comintern’s line during this period. It was confused, at times haphazard and most notably, inconsistent. Despite many of the articles that claimed the contrary, the Party were unsure how to cope with an increasingly prevalent fascist international, alongside their long-running theory on imperialism. It presented a dilemma for the Comintern - how would they remain ‘anti-imperialist’, if defence of the Soviet Union necessitated allying with the original imperialist states, to stall the ‘new’ Germanic, fascist imperialism? It was a tight-rope for the CPGB - a minor distinction and one they failed to differentiate between - as instead, their analysis as Morgan maintains, became a ‘take it or leave it’ type policy, as ‘they saw not new revolutionary opportunities but a threat to positions already won.’³⁹⁸

Fascism was, as a letter to the Party’s membership described, the collusion of ‘the most reactionary, most imperialist and aggressive section of monopoly capitalism’.³⁹⁹ Whilst, ‘fascist aggression’ was according to a 1937 document, ‘the struggle for new markets and spheres of cheap colonial labour; for raw materials and more profitable outlets for capital investment’.⁴⁰⁰ Yet, the above description was exactly the same as the one Lenin outlined as ‘imperialistic’ in 1916.⁴⁰¹ Imperialism had modelled its methods on fascism, with its disregard for colonial peoples and use of violence, rather than the other

³⁹⁶ Pearce, B & Woodhouse, M. (1995). *A History of Communism in Britain*. Bookmarks: London.p.216.

³⁹⁷ India and World Peace. V. Krishna Menon. *Labour Monthly*. June 1938.

³⁹⁸ Morgan, K. (1989). *Against Fascism and War*.p.49.

³⁹⁹ CP/IND/POLL/05/ What is Fascism? Political letter to CPGB membership, April 25th, 1939.

⁴⁰⁰ Lenin, V. (2010). *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*. Penguin: London.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

way around. It is what allowed the Abyssinian situation to be regarded, not solely as an imperialist attack, but a fascist one.⁴⁰² The Party became thoroughly involved in the ‘Hands off Abyssinia’ campaign, viewing the League of Nations as an arbiter of peace - denouncing the British Government for ‘emasculating’ the League and ‘wrecking collective security’.⁴⁰³ The PB appreciated its formative role, detailing that the Party must ‘hold as many meetings as possible and try to get the Trade Councils to convene working class conferences to discuss the Abyssinian situation’.⁴⁰⁴

The Welsh stalwart, Arthur Horner in a document from 1936, reflected much of this theoretical ambiguity, as he showed little distinction between British imperialism and Fascism, stating that ‘their treatment of the peoples of Ireland, India, and the Crown Colonies, all prove that they will use Fascist methods just as readily as their Italian, German, Austrian, and Spanish friends.’⁴⁰⁵ Fascism was a trick, and an act of deception used by the capitalist elites to maintain their vested interests, as the German people had been ‘tricked and deceived at the end of the war; tricked and deceived all the years that followed’.⁴⁰⁶ And whilst the Party undoubtedly regarded British imperialism as a malevolent force, Horner’s comments demonstrate that there was a degree of amnesia about imperialism’s past, and its continued operations in the present.

This was the line until September 1939, as in an article titled, *Colonies and Fascism*, the document declared that only the ‘crushing of Fascist influence will clear the way for development of the struggle with greater vigour against their imperial masters.’⁴⁰⁷ It made evidently clear that the fight against fascism took precedence over the fight against imperialism, as fascism was increasingly understood as an obstacle to any colonial democratic aspirations. The Party’s statement at the National Peace Congress in Bristol in May 1938 outlined this view, stating that they should not defend British imperialism, but that any ‘sharing of the spoils’ among the Fascist powers would be ‘no solution to the evils of British imperialism’. Instead, it suggested, that ‘the character of fascist domination, would

⁴⁰² Branson, N. (1985). *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain: 1927-1941*. p.139.

⁴⁰³ British Foreign Policy. R.P. Arnot. *Labour Monthly*. December 1935. p.734.

⁴⁰⁴ PB, 20th September 1935.

⁴⁰⁵ “Towards a Popular Front”. Arthur Horner. 1936.

⁴⁰⁶ Victory and the German People. Willy Gallacher. *Labour Monthly*. May 1942. p.151.

⁴⁰⁷ Colonies and Fascism. [untitled]. *Labour Monthly*. August 1939. p.471.

mean the destruction of even the limited rights...that have been precariously won by the colonial people's'.⁴⁰⁸ Imperialism was an evil, but a necessary evil in this moment, as it became viewed as a more discernible and manageable enemy than fascism. However, it was a significant reworking of conventional Leninist doctrine, as Lenin in *Imperialism*, denounced those who sought to:

Simply to compare colonies with non-colonies, one imperialism with another imperialism - one semi-colony or colony with all other countries is to evade and to obscure the very essence of the question.⁴⁰⁹

As Neil Redfern has suggested, the Party saw 'in the developing crisis of imperialism, not new revolutionary opportunities, but a threat to positions already won'.⁴¹⁰ Defence of the nation meant the defence of its imperial borders. It was the potential for alliance, and the placing of Britain alongside the interests of the Soviet Union, that led Dutt to state that:

'Fascism is now faced by a non-imperialist coalition of states and peoples, uniting the democratic aspirations of the peoples of the world, combining its leadership with the two democratic imperialist powers, with the socialist power and the national republic which is the vanguard of the colonial peoples'.⁴¹¹

Ben Bradley, one of the Party's stalwarts on anti-imperialist thinking took leave of his senses in mid-1943, as he called for urgent action, as the Japanese are 'battering at India's gates'. He continued, 'Hong Kong, Malaya, Singapore, Borneo, Java: one after the other, the enemy seemed to walk through our defences as a knife goes through butter.'⁴¹² It may be difficult, Bradley conceded, to 'convince all the Indian people' that the Japanese do not come as 'saviours to India, to rescue its people from its English rulers'. The answer was to offer more than empty promises, and to seek the establishment of a Provisional War Government in India.⁴¹³ The Party became progressively less

⁴⁰⁸ Peace and the Colonial Question – Text of a Statement submitted by the CP to the National Peace Congress in Bristol on May 28-29, 1938. *Labour Monthly*. June 1938, pp. 384-389.

⁴⁰⁹ Lenin, V. (2010). *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*. Penguin: London.p.114.

⁴¹⁰ Redfern, N. (2017). *The Comintern and Imperialism*.p.49.

⁴¹¹ Notes of the Month. World Battle. by R.P. Dutt. *Labour Monthly*. January 1942, pp. 3-10.

⁴¹² *India— What We Must Do*. Ben Bradley. April 1942.

⁴¹³ *Ibid*.

interested in anti-imperialist work, and in-turn, more subordinate to the British national interest. Pollitt's letter to Nehru on 27th July 1942, stated that 'everything else in life is subordinate to the USSR: 'I assure you, Comrade Nehru, that I hate British imperialism as deeply as you yourself do...but at this moment when socialism is being butchered and battered as it is in the Soviet Union...I am ready to co-operate with ALL who are prepared to fight against fascism.'⁴¹⁴ It was clear, that even victims of colonialism should not directly confront their oppressors at this moment. Dutt, in *Labour Monthly*, bluntly dispelled any such criticism, 'whoever, whether English or Indian, places obstacles in the way of such co-operation, is in-fact...assisting Hitler and Japan, and therefore acting against the interests of both the Indian people and the people of this country.'⁴¹⁵

Pollitt went further in the aftermath of the Japanese invasion of Malaya and the Far-East, demanding that 'whoever tries in any way to support the enemy brands himself a traitor who should be shout out of hand'.⁴¹⁶ Full mobilisation was necessary, as the British government had failed to utilise the 'millions of peoples in the British Empire' whose 'profound anti-fascist sympathies' could be used in the war.⁴¹⁷ 'Only 0.25% of men had been recruited to the army', Dutt scorned, and yet 'the authorities wring their hands over the problems of man-power'.⁴¹⁸ 'For too long the battle for production has been fought with kids gloves on', Pollitt declared in typical fashion, highlighting the Party's role as enthusiastic defenders of British manufacturing.⁴¹⁹ It was clear the Party had fully nationalized their communism, so long as their internationalism was loyalty to the Soviet Union.

Britain and India: A Socialist New World Order?

The Party's view of India and the post-war settlement was in many ways dictated by its changing view of the post-war world. It was geared towards fraternal relationships, mutual co-operation and collective security, in which the Soviet Union was an equal player. The Party policy on the colonies,

⁴¹⁴ Pollitt letter to Nehru, 27th July 1942 quoted in Morgan, K. (1993). *Pollitt*. Manchester University Press: Manchester.p.130.

⁴¹⁵ Notes of the Month. World Battle. R.P. Dutt. *Labour Monthly*. January 1942.p.6

⁴¹⁶ CP.IND/DUTT/29/12 – Pollitt Speech.

⁴¹⁷ For Peace and Plenty: Report of the Fifteenth Congress. & Notes of the Month. World Battle. R.P. Dutt. *Labour Monthly*. January 1942. pp.3-8.

⁴¹⁸ Notes of the Month. World Battle. R.P. Dutt. *Labour Monthly*. January 1942. pp.3-8.

⁴¹⁹ "The Beginning of the End": Mr. Pollitt on Russia. *Manchester Guardian*. December 1941.

was not a hazy miscalculation of the post-war order, but a reflection of, what appeared, *real* allied promises of colonial freedom and international co-operation. This meant that a progressive, socially attune Britain could engage in trade relationships with its former colonies. It was not a Socialist Empire, as many in the 1920s had envisioned, but a democratic, ‘post-Empire’ with socialism in the embryo. Free trade, fraternal relations and post-war peace were the bedrock to these new agreements – which a ‘People’s Front’ government would lead. Orientalist conceptions of imperialism and the perceived benefits for western workers, meant that ideas of a post-capitalist, post-war society conveniently figured a form of ‘socialist commonwealth’, rather than any immediate self-determination.

In 1937, Pollitt spoke to the Party’s Congress, noting with a presumptuous attitude that ‘unity with the colonial peoples not only corresponds to our common interests...it also assists in securing the overthrow of British Imperialism and the building of Socialism by the fraternal exchange, and use of our common resources’.⁴²⁰ In a pamphlet entitled, *The Plain Man’s Guide to the Coronation*, the Party proposed that through class solidarity and the extension of ‘democratic liberties’, the Party would be able to ‘join our colonial brothers and sisters in the Socialist Commonwealth’.⁴²¹ This was represented in Dutt’s later comments that the British wanted a ‘durable friendship’ with the colonial people’s based ‘upon equal rights’ amounting to a ‘new, close fraternal association’.⁴²² It is clear that the idea of a ‘Socialist Commonwealth’ penetrated the Party in the late 1930s, largely because the Party abandoned any overtly anti-imperialist line, which could affect its broader populist base. Instead, its application would occur organically, without harm and disagreement - as it was certainly not a revolutionary struggle, but more a ‘realisation’ of being, or ‘full-nation consciousness’ (to flip the Marxist understanding). As an article in the *Daily Worker* in 1937 proclaimed:

⁴²⁰ ‘It Can Be Done’: Report of the Fourteenth Congress.

⁴²¹ MSS.15X/2/103/182. “*How is the Empire: The Plain Man’s Guide to the Coronation?*”

⁴²² Callaghan, J. (1993). *Rajani Palme Dutt*.p.241.

This Britain will conquer. And on that day, the workers, in all their majesty, dignity and power, will so organise the resources of this country, in fraternal alliance with the freed peoples of present subject colonial countries.⁴²³

The Party believed that the old order was in decay. Fascism would be defeated and a new world order - one of international co-operation - would allow the Soviet Union to thrive alongside the capitalist powers. The League of Nations would be the arbiter of this new peace, inaugurating a 'new era of equal and friendly relations, entirely favourable to the fullest development of international trading and co-operation.'⁴²⁴ It was an international alliance, which 'all presumed newly liberated nations will desire to enter', provided, their rights were recognised.⁴²⁵ The League would provide the opportunity for a new international order, empty of imperialism and exploitation, as the post-war world would create an 'immense export market' where India, 'liberated from the yoke of British imperialism', will 'at last be able to build their own economy and develop their own industry.'⁴²⁶ And whilst, this rhetoric was present during the 'Class against Class' period, the difference lay in its application. The post-war, 'mutually beneficial' relationships were framed within the Party's new understanding of social progress - whereas previously, any socialist fraternal relationship would occur following the imminent collapse of capitalism.

Much of the CPGB's language became clouded by Eurocentric assumptions of what was best for the colonial people, as whilst the formal mechanisms of imperialism melted away, the colonies were still thought of in terms, of what benefited the Global North, first and foremost. It was, what Edward Said, and post-colonial scholars have termed *orientalism*; of a positional superiority, 'which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient, without ever losing him the

⁴²³ *Daily Worker*. 'Coronation and the People', May 12th, 1937.

⁴²⁴ Colonies and War: Today's Big Issue. Reginald Bridgeman. *Labour Monthly*. January 1938, pp. 44-53.

⁴²⁵ Peace and the Colonial Question. *Labour Monthly*, June 1938.

⁴²⁶ *For Soviet Britain*: The Programme of the Communist Party adopted at the XIII Congress. February 2nd, 1935.

relative upper hand'.⁴²⁷ Said continues, that many ideologies of potential liberation became tainted, however implicit, by the assumptions of superiority— for they were the 'children of imperialism'.⁴²⁸

The Party became imbued with this type of thinking, balancing calls for self-determination, alongside arguments that the British workers would not be economically disadvantaged. D.N. Pritt, a Labour M.P., long a friend of the Communist Party and regular contributor to *Labour Monthly* announced that a 'new India', will not see any material losses to the British electorate – as he evoked the long-running argument that freedom for the colonies would not be detrimental to British income. Instead, it would lead to an 'immense increase in productivity', and a 'better customer'.⁴²⁹ In fact, it was 'sober realism' to imagine a world order built on the tenants of 'tranquillity and progress' in which all the peoples and nations in Asia 'can take their share'.⁴³⁰ A 1938 pamphlet by J.R. Campbell, made much of the same argument, declaring that self-determination, 'would not deprive the British workers' government of the possibility of obtaining colonial food-stuffs, and raw materials in exchange for British manufactured products.'⁴³¹ In spite of what the CPGB said, much Indian opinion, made substantially clear that any post-war connection would be based on the renouncing of imperialist thinking. As Jawaharlal Nehru, declared in March 1937:

Independence means national freedom in the fullest sense of the word; it means, as our pledge has stated, a severance of the British connection. It means anti-imperialism and no compromise with Empire... We shall have close contacts, with all progressive countries, including England, IF she sheds her imperialism.⁴³²

However, the Party to its detriment, never allied post-war construction with a systematic shedding of imperialism. It was only briefly, and normally from Dutt's pen, that any anti-imperialist thinking occurred, as the Party later followed what the document *The Empire and the War*, argued against:

⁴²⁷ Said, E. (2003). *Orientalism*. Penguin Books: London. p.7.

⁴²⁸ Ibid: p.8.

⁴²⁹ D.N. Pritt. India. *Labour Monthly*, April 1942.

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ Smith, E. (2016). National Liberation for Whom? The Postcolonial Question, the Communist Party of Great Britain. *International Review of Social History*. 61:2. p.298.

⁴³² *Daily Worker*, March 20th, 1937.

All this vague talk about improving the mandate system, of reforming imperialism or making the resources of the colonial countries available to all-comers, is purely reactive and deceptive.⁴³³

Whilst many members were undoubtedly anti-imperialists, they viewed the post-war order as one of natural change, in which all nations were given equal rights and participation. As Redfern has outlined, they believed that 'imperialism was suffering a strategic defeat by 'progressive' forces and that colonial freedom would follow the defeat of fascism'.⁴³⁴ Dutt said so much in April 1942, proposing that any questions of the post-war order 'cannot be separated from the governing questions of action and participation in the war', going so far as to state that those who refused to fight against fascism, would revoke their right from any involvement in post-war reconstruction.⁴³⁵ Dutt was no doubt irked on by the policy of the Soviet Union, as he welcomed the 'international economic collaboration' in the Breton Woods Agreement in 1944,⁴³⁶ whilst *A Guide to the Problems of India*, summarised that Indian national interests cannot be regarded in isolation, but 'must coincide, as they can and do in truth coincide, with the common interests of all nations, and specifically of the UN, of victory over fascism'.⁴³⁷ As Evan Smith's work has presented, the literature of the Popular Front shaped the Party's post-war colonial relations in situating its argument on the colonies, around what was in the interest of both independent nations. However, much of this was predicated on a 'presumed shared imperial history which would mean that the former colonies would want to deal with Britain exclusively', rather than on the basis of any authentic anti-imperialism.⁴³⁸

Conclusion:

To conclude, the CPGB was essentially pedalling the anti-colonialist line within the broader, global fight against fascism. It was not an issue they ignored, nor one they did not effectively campaign for,

⁴³³ *The Empire and the War*, War Library. 1940.CPGB. p.14.

⁴³⁴ Redfern, N. (2004). British Communists, the British Empire and the Second World War. *International Labor and Working-Class History*.65. p.117.

⁴³⁵ Notes of the Month. The Choice Before Us. R.P. Dutt. *Labour Monthly*. April 1942. pp.100-104.

⁴³⁶ Callaghan, J. (1993). *Rajani Palme Dutt*.p.211.

⁴³⁷ Redfern, N. (2005). *Class or Nation: Communists, Imperialism and Two World Wars*.p.148.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid*: p.312.

but rather, one conveniently overlooked as an afterthought, and campaigned for ceremoniously. It became a highly individualised concept, something adopted or disregarded, according to the situation, and engaged with more seriously by some than others. Even seasoned members, such as R.P. Dutt and Ben Bradley, were who were very much exceptions to the rule in the beginning, began to bang the same drum as many of the Party's more nationally attuned comrades. Internationalism became defence of the Soviet Union, overriding all other considerations, and when this required becoming one of the nation's most sterling defenders, the Party played the tune. The Party became imbued with a kind of post-colonial paternalism where they assumed that a fraternal relationship, in which the colonies would voluntarily align themselves with a Socialist Britain, was inevitable. Crucially, it was the shift to the 'Popular Front' line that brought this thinking into question, as Pollitt resolutely believed that it was an international struggle against Nazism, not a European one. Nazi Germany could only be defeated with the help of the colonies, not without them. The fight against fascism was the immediate struggle, and the fight for democratic liberties would follow suit. Anti-imperialism, could wait, for anti-fascism was the Party's bread and butter.

Conclusion:

The CPGB in the ‘Popular Front’ period became a Party which viewed its preoccupations nationally. It was a change which they situated, both as a means of social advance and democratic defence. Fighting fascism was to be emphasised above all considerations, as the national and international questions became blurred. As laid out in the introduction, this dissertation regards the CPGB during the ‘Popular Front’ years as a ‘social patriot’ Party, which viewed Britain’s demise, as well as its ultimate progression, as one of identity and working-class representation. The National Government led by Chamberlain, had failed the British people precisely because he had abandoned what the Party viewed as its moral foundations. The solution became a cosmetic one, as the Party sought to remove Chamberlain from office and elect the Labour Party in its place. In this sense, the CPGB became a pressure group upon the Labour Party, whose new-found influence, both at a local and national level was overwhelmingly due to its language of betrayal and calls for a revitalised culture. The Communists, as many Trotskyist historians have maintained, betrayed its revolutionary stature during this period, veering away from their original credentials. However, it is unfair to berate the Party for this ideological shift, given that all Communist Parties across the globe were doing the same. National particularities were not simply another change in Party line, but a natural result of the Party’s disastrous policies during the Third Period. As such, the Party must be situated within a national context, as ‘for all of its cross-class national unity, the Second World War was a period when considerations of class permeated every aspect of social and political debate – and where debates about the working-class inevitably implied claims about its position in the nation’.⁴³⁹

Within this broader context, the ‘Popular Front’ gave the Party a new-found legitimacy, as they very much set the cultural agenda through their affiliated organisations, such as the Left Book Club. And whilst these do not paint the Party as one with national scope, as it remained a largely small electoral force, its success on the left, as arbiters of this new ‘left’ national culture meant it was ‘*national*’ in scope, so much as, the working-classes were understood as *the* bedrock of the nation. That said, as

⁴³⁹ Field, G. (2011). *Blood, Sweat, and Toil: Remaking the British Working Class, 1939-1945*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.p.126.

established in the second chapter, the Party's success on the national level during the Popular Front, cannot be said to be replicated on the international scene. The Party began to pedal a distorted revision of Marxist theories of imperialism, which situated the Party's role as defenders of *all* the British nation, including its colonial territories. In many ways, the Party's policy on the imperialist question can be understood as representative for the Party's overall 'Popular Front' stance – being contradictory, haphazard, and disjointed, unsure whether to commit to fully, or repeat clichés of democratic rights and 'full-independence'. Many of the Party's stalwarts on India, found themselves in a minority, fighting against a largely apathetic - no doubt theoretically on-board - stream of anti-imperialist politics. Dutt, alongside his brother Clemens and a few others, were largely left on their own regarding Indian self-determination, however, even R.P. Dutt and Ben Bradley increasingly began to reflect the Party's rugged patriotic line, as the war reached its closing stages. That said, the Party's anti-imperialist efforts, whilst undoubtedly found wanting in comparison to their sterling work in the late 1920s, must be viewed within the Party's broader focus.

For the CPGB, anti-fascism was a black and white issue. It was paramount, as 'everything else is secondary to this', Pollitt remarked.⁴⁴⁰ It was a 'life-and-death struggle', for which the working class must 'stand out as the most determined upholder of national and international unity', Dutt declared in 1942.⁴⁴¹ Internationally, this line left no possible space for any anti-imperialist element between June 1941-1945, as to do so would damage the fight against fascism, whilst nationally, a politics of Englishness, echoing a forgotten English past, became harder to stand alongside, an authentic workers internationalism. Consequently, it is unsurprising that the Party and its leaders began to prioritise certain issues over others, despite their best intentions. As whilst the Party undoubtedly did not do 'enough' on the issue, many individual Party members were more overtly anti-imperialist than the dominant stream of opinion in the country and failed precisely because their lofty ambitions were incapable of being realised - rather than for their lack of commitment. Conclusively, their success, between 1935-1939, was built on the adoption of an anti-war, reformist programme, whilst from

⁴⁴⁰ The Communist Crusade, Harry Pollitt. *Labour Monthly*. February 1939. p.70.

⁴⁴¹ The Labour Movement and the War. R. Palme Dutt. *Labour Monthly*. June 1942. p.166.

1942, through to the end of the war, they capitalised on a nascent, national collective spirit, created in the melting pot of war. For the Party were re-imagined in the 'Popular Front', becoming consumed by questions of national identity, war, and fascism, alongside above-all, the defence of the USSR.

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