

battle of ideas

The British Communist Party in Crisis

Members of the Communist Party of Great Britain — at least those who are active — have two important events this month. They will be celebrating the Soviet 'Diamond Jubilee' — how else can one capture the flavour of Moscow's festivities? — and participating in the 35th Congress of their own Party.

The huge columns of marchers crossing Red Square on the 60th anniversary of the Russian revolution will probably be bigger than ever. And the party leadership will be extolling the unbreakable monolithic unity of the mighty soviet state, as the masses pay homage to giant-size icons of Lenin.

This portrait of soviet monolithism is a thing of the past in the CPGB. Even the legacy of Lenin is becoming a point of controversy in the British party. New gods are climbing into the party pantheon. A large number of party members are trying to exorcise the embalmed body of Lenin — by embalming Gramsci as an alternative.

BREZHNEV

From the opposite quarters of the party, the neo-Stalinists are brandishing touched-up pictures of Brezhnev. The middle-of-the-roads come forth with portraits of Dimitrov as a unifying figure. And the brash young ideologues on the right of the Party are busy painting a portrait which bears an unmistakable likeness to Kautsky.

In these circumstances even the anniversary celebrations are becoming a symbol of division within the CPGB. Many members must feel a twinge of nausea when they realise that the demonstrators in Moscow are unable to read a truthful account of the event they are celebrating. They are denied even a half-way accurate history of the Bolshevik Party: just last month the Soviet authorities again informed us that the Bolshevik who led the revolution in Moscow — Nikolai Bukharin — was rightly shot as a mad-dog imperialist agent.

FALSIFICATION

Other members of the British party will be similarly sickened as they realise that their own leaders are paying homage to 1917 while, at the same time, they have completely repudiated the lessons of October. For members who retain the October Revolution as their special historical possession, the greatest irony is that those who reject Stalinist falsification about the Bolsheviks and the revolution, and adhere to the revolution's basic message — soviet power — are outside the CPGB's ranks altogether. These people are in the Fourth International and in other organisations of the revolutionary left.



Photomontage: PETER KENNARD

The Party's Fortunes in Decline

Such dismal thoughts about the Diamond Jubilee are a foretaste of a gloomy Congress. This has been a bad year for the Communist Party. The party's fortunes have continued to decline. An internal crisis has emerged — marked by factionalism, breaches of discipline, and a split.

MEMBERSHIP DOWN

Sid French, leader of the break-away New Communist Party of Stalinist old-timers, estimates that paid-up membership of the CPGB has sunk to 12,000. No more than half are regularly active, according to French. *Morning Star* sales continue to slump with a loss of 2,000 daily copies this year. Editor Tony Chater puts the paper's expected deficit at £187,000.

The Young Communist League is little more than shadow of its former self. Jimmy Reid, John Tocher and other important leaders have left the party recently. The electoral performance of the CP has been striking: 18 candidates polled 30,089 votes in the 1959 general election. But in the last election, 29 candidates could only total 17,426 votes.

Of course all is not woe in the fortunes of the Communist Party. Articles in *Comment*, the party's fortnightly discussion bulletin, have reported the largest number of CP delegates to the TUC this year; the election of three CP members on the TUC General Council, and of Joe Whelan to the position of general secretary in the Nottingham area of the miners' union.

But the influence of the CPGB at the base of the unions has never been

weaker. The 'stop-go' policy pursued — based on a 'waiting for the lefts' strategy — has thrown the Broad Left formations in the unions into deep crisis. Similar problems have met the party in the student field. The challenge of the revolutionary groups has been warded off only through an alliance with the Federation of Conservative Students.

It is true that the party has made important gains amongst intellectuals. To the lasting shame of the revolutionary left, the CP has been able to present a face of theoretical debate, in contrast to the economism of most of the far left. A layer of women from the women's liberation movement has been attracted to this face of the CP. But the new *Draft* to be adopted at the Congress has made clear just how irrelevant the party treats the views of these women. These new recruits have provided little more than a theoretical fig leaf to the reformist thrust of the *Draft*.

LARGER VOTES

The signs of decline in the party appear under conditions where members were led to expect quite the reverse. The supposed allies of the party from the 1960s — Labour and trade union lefts like Foot, Scanlon and Jones — got their hands on strong levers of political power with Labour's election in 1974. The global policies of the Soviet leadership for peaceful co-existence and a European Security Conference have born fruit in Helsinki and Belgrade. The world capitalist system is in crisis — offering the CP a chance to make comparisons with the

life of the masses in Eastern Europe and the USSR. Surely these are the kinds of things that the Party leadership has been saying for years would lead to great advances for the CPGB.

Yet the CPGB has continued to decline — and the far left has continued to grow. Small groups like the International Marxist Group get much larger votes than the CP in local elections and by-elections. The Socialist Workers Party and other revolutionary forces play a leading role in the anti-fascist movement, and are at least as evident as the CP in the Grunwick dispute.

CAPACITY TO MOBILISE

In Southern African solidarity work and in other international campaigns — the far left has proven its almost equal capacity to mobilise. And even in the industrial field there are increasing doubts about the coherence of the party's forces in a number of unions. The tens of thousands of workers who have cast their votes for union candidates with policies to the left of the CP present a growing challenge the traditional hold of the party in industry.

Party members have begun to ask brutal questions. Why does the end of the Cold War and the onset of a deep capitalist crisis find the party plunging into further decline? Why is it that after CP militants played a leading role in almost every single one of the great struggles of the late 60s and early 70s, the policies pursued have brought no overall gains whatsoever? Why have the characters on the Labour left — promoted by the party for years — been ready and able to preside over the biggest cut in living standards since the war?

FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

Why does the long-standing relationship between the Party and the Soviet leadership give nothing but problems for the party? Why does the 'ultra-left' grow while the party stagnates? Why does the party get annihilated at the polls?

In the face of these fundamental questions, no new ideas have been advanced by the party leadership. The same old routinist phrases have appeared in the same enthusiastic and uplifting tone of voice that has become the hall-mark of the executive committee: 'the new, exciting opportunities... build left unity...boost the *Morning Star*...sell the new pamphlet...push forward the price petition...'

Resentment has bred amongst rank and file party members from this kind of response. The discussion pages of *Comment* tell a story of growing frustration among the more outspoken members. Then — at the beginning of this year — came the straw that broke the backbone of internal unity: the *New Draft* programme.

Looking back, the party leadership's idea of producing a new programme was a major error of judgement. In the first place, the new Draft does not answer any of the basic practical questions posed by the membership. Instead it encourages the membership to translate particular grievances and difficulties into general ideological criticisms. And new programmatic ideas are almost entirely lacking in the Draft.

The text itself is new, and there are some significant changes of formulae: instead of working for a socialist government combining the Labour left and the CP, we now have a perspective of a whole series of less than socialist 'left' governments. Rather than the nationalisation of 'all monopolies in productive industry' the executive committee's wily lawyers now offer 'nationalisation of the key firms among the top firms which dominate the economy'. 'Socialist economic planning' becomes 'effective government control over the operation of the economy'. Such phrases indicate the drift of the Party to the right.

But was it really necessary to produce a draft programme when signals to the social democrats — indicating a rightward drift — could have been made on a day to day basis without nine months of programmatic debate. The party leadership has paid a big price for unveiling a document — that had to be heralded as something new and highly important — in front of the party membership, and the entire left.

TOWARDS THE FUTURE

Perhaps the executive committee thought that the discussion around the programme would avoid a purely negative debate about current difficulties, and turn the membership's eyes towards the future. The discussion has been organised to inhibit such negative criticisms. The debate was made as public as possible — but not to achieve an open, democratic debate.

After all, nobody likes washing dirty linen in front of public platforms occupied by Labour Party members and Trotskyists. The membership has been put in positions where it has had a powerful incentive to defend the party line — and therefore the leadership — from the attacks of political opponents. But that didn't halt the ferment in the party.

A large number of ideological trends and groupings appeared and organised themselves for an internal struggle. In line with traditional Stalinist organisational rules, tendencies and factions are banned inside the CP. The supposed political justification for preventing tendencies is that they encourage factionalism.

But the last months inside the party have shown that bans will not stop opposing groupings within a party rent by strong, and deep, political differences. The only effect of such bans is to make emerging tendencies conspiratorial, to intensify mutual suspicions and organisational manoeuvring, and to ensure that the groupings which do form lack clear-cut positions around which the whole party membership can democratically discuss. This has been the story of the debate within the Communist Party during 1977: a great number of groups, cliques, and diffuse currents jostling and shifting ground as the debate develops. Only the initiated can have a clue as to what is really going on.

WIDESPREAD FRUSTRATION

The executive committee with its new Draft has been caught between a widespread frustration over the party's practical decline on the one side, and on the other, absolutely fundamental questions of world outlook — going far beyond a debate on the strategy for socialism in Britain.

Documents have been written declaring that the new Draft programme is revisionist — welcoming the revisionism, but stating that it does not go far enough. Others call for a return to full-blooded Stalinism, and write the party off as a social-democratic corpse. Between these two extremes a multitude of contradictory opinions have been expressed on almost every important question of political programme.

The international dimension

The origin of this development lies outside the purely national framework of the CPGB. It is rooted in the crisis of what used to be called the 'international communist movement', known in Trotskyist circles as the world Stalinist movement. At one time this movement was a source of unqualified pride for every British Communist. However weak the party in Britain, its members could point to the tremendous strength, unity and achievements of the world movement. What a contrast — the Communists argued — with the weak, split, politically insignificant forces of the Trotskyists and the 'ultra-lefts'.

Today such moods are dying. The strength of the ruling Communist Parties cannot be denied. But what is that strength based on? It

does not come from the solid support of the workers in Eastern Europe, the USSR and China — it is the power of bureaucratic manipulation and repression. The unity of the world movement is gone forever. China and the USSR confront each other militarily. Conflicts are rampant — between Yugoslavia and the USSR, Romania and the USSR, and between Western and Eastern CPs. Splits have torn the CP apart in Austria, Finland, Greece, Spain, Sweden, Norway and many other countries.

MURDEROUS PURGES

Moreover, the supposed unity of the past turns out to have been orchestrated by murderous purges of millions of Communists. The unity model was that of the present Czechoslovak Party: a 'unity' based on half a million Communists being purged.

The achievements of ruling CPs are undoubtedly great. But have they been in the interests of the working class? What kind of achievement was the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia, for example? A brilliant military operation, certainly, but aimed against the entire Czechoslovak people.

One fundamental problem for Communists is at the heart of these questions: what has been going on in the Soviet Union over the last few decades? Is it the case that the CPSU is the shining, democratic expression for working class aspirations? This is argued in the main article in issue No. 2 of the CPGB journal *Socialist Europe*.

Or should we instead treat Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* as an essential work of reference and analysis for historians of the USSR? Issue No. 1 of *Socialist Europe* describes it this way. Such questions as these are no small matter for a world movement whose corner-stone and guiding influence has been the leadership of the CPSU.

STALINIST TRADITIONS

Every political idea and ideological principle of the CPGB is marked — some would say mutilated — by the stamp of the Soviet Stalinist traditions. Yet growing numbers of Communists are coming to question whether the Soviet leadership is today the symbol of everything pure and 'lofty' — as the East European communiques suggest. Instead the leadership is beginning to be viewed as a symptom of what Santiago Carrillo has called the 'bureaucratic degeneration' of the USSR.

These crippling doubts were crystallised by the invasion of Czechoslovakia. The recent polarisation between the Eurocommunist parties have expanded these doubts more clearly. Devastating repercussions have been produced in the British party.

The revolutionary left has been somewhat confused about the significance of Eurocommunist criticisms of the repression in Eastern Europe. Some see this spate of criticism as a lurch to the right by the Western CPs. They say that the bourgeoisie has pushed people like Carrillo to make such criticisms.

These arguments betray muddled thinking. The Western CPs have been moving to the right for well over a decade. In Italy and Spain the trend has quickened in the last couple of years.

The criticisms of bureaucratic repression in Eastern Europe can also be assimilated within the framework of this social-democratising trend. Social democrats will oppose jailing people for putting forward oppositional views in Eastern Europe.

The bourgeoisie also uses Eastern European repression as a stick to beat the left with. But it is utterly infantile to assume from this that opposition to such repression is therefore right-wing and social democratic.

The bourgeoisie uses this stick for one very elementary reason: namely, that this repression does take place, and the overwhelming majority of working class people — whether they vote Tory, Labour, CP, or IMG — are completely opposed to such repression. They are right.

It is a staggering illustration of the woeful effects of Stalinism on the Marxist left that some people — who regard themselves as Marxists — can still view labour movement protests against the suppression of democratic rights in Eastern Europe as a step to the right.

SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

Furthermore, even the more pronounced right-wing drift of the Western CP leaderships cannot be explained simply as a response to bourgeois pressure. Take, for example, one central feature of the

Eurocommunist turn: the break from what Moscow calls 'proletarian internationalism' and the new insistence on a purely national perspective.

The Eurocommunist leaders move down this road towards social-democratic nationalism not only thanks to bourgeois pressure, but also because a revolutionary return to genuine proletarian internationalism would tend to thoroughly subvert bureaucratic rule in Eastern Europe.

NATIONAL CHAUVINISM

CP members would begin to argue that repression against workers in Poland, Czechoslovakia or the USSR is 'not just a national affair; it is a concern of the working class everywhere. We must take a principled internationalist stand on the side of the rights of the working class in Eastern Europe'. How much better for the Soviet bureaucracy that the CPs move towards national chauvinism.

It helps mask responsibilities towards the working class in the East. And it also leaves the Soviet bureaucracy with the phrase 'proletarian internationalism'. And so left sectarian phrase-worshippers in the West can continue to think the Soviet bureaucracy is quite left-wing!

Others on the revolutionary left see the criticisms made by Western CP leaders as a final break with Stalinism and with Moscow. This is a one-sided view. The leadership of the CPGB still adheres to the basic outlook of Moscow; hails Eastern Europe as socialist; backs the global policy of the Soviet bureaucracy; and refuses to advance any programme whatsoever for the hundreds of millions of working people suffering under bureaucratic repression between Elba and the China Sea. Its drift towards social democratic policies also — paradoxically — helps to keep its frayed links with Moscow intact.

HISTORICAL CATCH 22

In reality, the CP leaderships in Western Europe are caught in the historical Catch 22 of Stalinism. Their parties glorified and worshipped for decades a force that turns out to have been a monstrous apparatus of police violence against the working class. The cadres of the Western CPs remain deeply attached to this apparatus and to the world outlook they have learned from it.

Yet for the great mass of the working class this Stalinist bureaucracy looks repulsive. If the Western CP leaders repudiate their own Stalinist tradition, they threaten to split the party. But if they fail to repudiate their links with Moscow they are threatened without any principled political basis for their own existence.

Nowhere has this dilemma been more acute than in Britain. Here a weak and declining CP has been under growing pressure from both quarters, especially the former.

Factionalism within the party

The executive committee has blundered in producing the new Draft. It has provided a connecting link between the disgruntlement over practical failures felt at the base of the party and the growing political crisis within the world Stalinist movement. The party's ideological currents which stand for the old Stalinist orthodoxy against Eurocommunism were offered a ready-made bridge to the practical frustrations of the membership through their denunciations of the new Draft.

Those who wanted a complete break with the Stalinist traditions of the party in favour of social democratisation are also able to spell out their practical alternative to the vacillating bureaucratic centrism which the executive committee expresses. Neither wing could be denounced for raising general questions in a discussion that was supposed to deal with the party programme.

INTERNAL STRUGGLE

The character of the internal struggle leading up to the 35th Congress is peculiar. The gulf between the two extremes in the party is extraordinarily wide, and the struggle has been extremely bitter. Yet the two main political poles inside the party have not found clear political and organisational expression.

Instead there are many different shades and groupings and none can come forward with a really coherent programme. Finally, the actual voting line-up at the conference is likely to present the issues in an utterly trivialised way: as a polarisation between the supporters of the old programme and those of the new Draft. But the Draft does not differ in essentials from the old programme.

There is a name for such phenomena in working class parties. It is factionalism: a state of affairs where clear, principled debates between different tendencies or factions are replaced by struggles between warring groups, unable or unwilling to work out any principled political basis for their own existence.

The nearest to a principled political



Mass demonstration, 1957. Pro-Bolshevik soldiers carry the banner 'Communism' (above: Vladimir Ilyich Lenin)

A page from the special Socialist Challenge Review, previously unpublished text by Isaac Deutscher superb designs. 50p from Socialist CP

grouping within the party is the trend around Mike Prior and Dave Purdy on the social democratic right. In their privately produced document *Out of the Ghetto* (see excerpts in *Socialist Challenge* No. 12), Prior and Purdy openly acknowledge the revisionism of the new Draft. Only in their view, it falls short. They frankly advocate a gradualist strategy, incomes policy and a thoroughgoing right-wing and social democratic rejection of Stalinism.

Though small in number, supporters of these policies gain confidence and energy from the drift of the party leadership in their direction and from their ability to present a coherent alternative to the vacillating formulae of the leadership. Between Purdie and middle-of-the-roader George Matthews, there are various shades and groupings in the Communist Party wishing to push the party further along the twin paths of social democracy at home, and rejection of the Soviet bureaucracy.

On the other side of the majority — stretching outside the party to Sid French and his followers in the NCP — are various groupings advocating a harder line against social democracy as well as a return to more full-blooded Stalinism. Revolutionary Marxists — who advocate a revolutionary alternative to both Moscow and to Transport House — remain a very weak force indeed within the party at present.

Stalinism's two ideological banners

The two main poles within the CPGB exist in both Western and Eastern European CPs. Such leftist and rightist faces of Stalinism have a long history within the movement. It would be wrong to see either current as a new departure from the ideological traditions of Stalinism. Both are rather expressions of the essential nature of Stalinism itself.

The fact that they are now at loggerheads with each other inside the CPGB is not a sign that one side or the other has settled accounts finally with Stalinism. It is, rather, an expression of the growing internal contradictions within a Stalinist movement in crisis and disintegration.

Both trends are ideological expressions of the two tactics used by the Soviet bureaucracy

to defend its international interests. For Trotskyists the Soviet leadership does not represent any fundamental class force in world politics. Rather it represents the interests of the party and state bureaucracy, which has risen to power in a state which is neither capitalist nor socialist. The state is transitional between the two systems: in the USSR capitalism has been overthrown but the working class does not exercise political power.

The bureaucratic caste which rules the USSR bases its power both on the nationalised property relations, and on the suppression of working class political rights. Such an historically transitory regime defends its interests internationally by continually manoeuvring between the two class forces on the world arena — the forces of the socialist revolution and the forces of imperialism.

MASS STRUGGLES

At certain times and in certain areas of the world, the Soviet bureaucracy needs to utilise the mass struggles of the working class for its own purposes. Witness the Soviet aid to the Cuban revolution, Vietnam or Angola. At other times in other places its interests require far-reaching accommodations with the bourgeoisie. Take the examples of Greece after the war, Iran, and Indonesia.

The resulting chameleon-like policy shifts and combinations require the maximum ideological flexibility. The Soviet bureaucracy needs a set of left-sounding ideas at hand for some operations. But it also has a set of openly rightist, class collaborationist ideas for others.

The fact that the Soviet bureaucracy is not based on capitalist relations of production means it can denounce the evils of capitalism without fear of domestic repercussions. At the same time, by turning Marxism into an empty dogma it can give its most crude counter-revolutionary manoeuvres a supposedly Marxist ideological cover. This single ideological constant on the part of the Soviet bureaucracy is its resolute hostility to all genuine expressions of workers' democracy and soviet power. These kind of developments present a frontal challenge to bureaucratic power in the USSR itself.

The roots of the social-democratic trend



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within the Western European CPs can be easily traced against this background. These lie in the drive by the Soviet bureaucracy itself to forge alliances with the European bourgeoisies both before and after the Second World War. The 'Popular Front' line of the 1930s was the first impulse towards an accommodation to social democracy. It originated in an attempt by Stalin to subordinate the interests of the workers in the West to the diplomatic manoeuvres of the Soviet State.

Exactly the same policy was tried between 1943 and 1947 in Western Europe. When the Cold War was launched, the Soviet bureaucracy pushed the Western CPs to adopt 'leftist' tactics — to break the European bourgeoisies from the USA. But in the late 1950s the Soviet leadership again returned to a line of thorough-going class collaboration in Western Europe.

The leaderships of the Western CPs have their own particular interests distinct from those of the Soviet bureaucracy to defend. The rightist line in Western Europe was always only a means to an end for the Soviet bureaucracy. But for the leaderships of the Western CPs it became an end in itself.

The Soviet bureaucracy was not interested in the Western CPs winning power. It was concerned to use them to gain leverage with the Western bourgeoisies. And when it began to appear possible that some Western CPs might gain government office this was not a particularly pleasing prospect from the vantage point of Moscow. There is every indication that Moscow can do business with the bourgeoisies better when the latter's own chosen leaders are firmly in power.

POLITICAL INFLUENCE

But the most important question Western CP leaders are concerned with is increasing the political influence of their parties. Moscow's class collaborationist line was pursued by the Italian, French and British parties with that aim in view. During the last few years, the objective interests of the Western CP leaders and the Soviet bureaucracy have therefore diverged.

In pursuit of broader popular support the leaderships of the Western CPs are increasingly convinced that they should not have to remain silent about the violation of

their fundamental ideas about the transition to socialism — must be assessed to answer this question. It is not enough to find isolated points of agreement with revolutionary Marxist politics and hope for the best about the rest. The governing ideas of each current — the ideas that give each particular point an inner coherence with other aspects of their programme — need examination.

The battle-field between the two tendencies where basic ideas are concentrated is the debate around the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Here both tendencies have to give a concentrated expression to their fundamental views on the transition to socialism.

UNBRIDGEABLE GULF

Two inescapable facts appear. First, there is an unbridgeable gulf between the two tendencies: insofar as each maintains its ideological coherence, it must separate completely from the other. Secondly, both tendencies share a common rejection of the fundamental ideas of classical Marxism on the transition to socialism.

The Eurocommunists reject the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Some, who feel uneasy, try to convince themselves that they are rejecting only some rather unattractive terminology. The bolder and more consistent spirits among them know exactly what they are doing. They are replacing the struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat with the struggle for democracy in general.

This is evident in the new Draft. But it is not given rigorous, explicit form. The essence of the matter is expressed when the Draft states that democracy is the 'common thread running through the various struggles'.

The other wing of the party proclaims its support for the term 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. But, it interprets the term to mean a State where a monolithic party holds a monopoly of political power, able to use force arbitrarily against its political opponents. In other words, the dictatorship of the proletariat means the political reality of Eastern Europe and the USSR.

NEW STATE

Both conceptions reject the classical Marxist view of the dictatorship of the proletariat developed by Marx and Lenin, and embraced by revolutionary Marxists today. This means the dictatorship as a proletarian democracy, by definition entailing the destruction of the bureaucratic apparatus of the old state, and its replacement by a new type of state. The nucleus of the new state is the workers council, in which a plurality of political parties can operate.

For the Eurocommunists the nucleus of the socialist state is contained in the old bureaucratic parliamentary state of bourgeois society. For the opponents of the new Draft, the nucleus of the new state is enshrined in the Brezhnev Constitution: the Communist Party.

So both wings reject the idea that the crux of the struggle against capitalism is the fight to make the working class the class which directly rules in society. Both reject the primacy of the self-activity of the working class in the transition to socialism.

Any vision which extends beyond the horizons of bourgeois democracy appears like utopian anarchism to the Eurocommunists.

The vision offered by their opponents is in many respects a regression from the political gains won by the working class under capitalism. Only a formalistic attachment to names could lead one to interpret their basic ideas as 'more revolutionary' than the Eurocommunist conceptions.

Why has the ideological crisis and the re-thinking in recent years in the Western CPs not produced a return to classical Marxist conceptions? Why has the main trend been towards social-democratic ideas on the transition to socialism? This is often explained as a straightforward capitulation to the pressures of bourgeois society. Those pressures have undoubtedly been strong. But other pressures cannot be overlooked.

DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

In its own way, the Eurocommunists' ideological position masks the bureaucratic dictatorship in the USSR. A thoroughly radical break with the bureaucracy is necessary if a classical Marxist approach is to be adopted. All the democratic rights legally available in bourgeois democracy, but so the masses can fully exercise them, is a touchstone of a workers' state. And the state machinery itself would no longer have a hierarchical, bureaucratic form. It would have a popular character — even in the fields of army, police, and the legal apparatus. The state itself would be withering away — along with the other institutions of humanity's pre-history — like the family, the division between mental and manual labour, and so on.

But, by making their goal the struggle for democracy in general, the Eurocommunists avoid the head-on ideological confrontation with the Soviet reality which classical Marxism requires. A return to Marx and Lenin entails blowing the entire ideological ballast of the Soviet bureaucracy out of the water. Nothing would be left of the talk of 'advanced socialism in the USSR'.

The Eurocommunists can presently simply

point to the need for introducing some formal, bourgeois legal rights into the 'socialism' of the USSR. This is certainly an advance on the existing political reality there, but an utterly superficial challenge to Stalinism.

PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY

Views on the dictatorship of the proletariat condition a political current's entire conception of the nature of the struggle against capitalism and the role of the working class. Contemporary social democrats see the capitalist State as it is, as an adequate instrument to introduce socialism. For them, the role of the working class is reduced to voters and activists to gain more voters. That's how the preconditions for socialism — a large parliamentary majority — are achieved according to social democrats.

The Brezhnevites see the work of the transition as being carried out by the Party — not the working class, nor the bourgeois State. All and sundry will be manipulated to carry out the project. The masses are in the service of the bearers of absolute truth, the party.

The party may use violence against the bourgeoisie if need be. It may even use violence against the working class — or, in the terminology of Stalinism — against enemies within the working class. It may engage in bureaucratic manipulation within the bourgeois state apparatus, or even within the mass organisations of the workers' movement.

Whatever form of struggle the party adopts, the role of the working class is never more than an adjunct to the party. The Brezhnevites assign to the workers the dirty work for the great glory of the party and its 'leading role'.

Eurocommunists also reject the idea of the primacy of the creative self-activity of the working masses in the struggle for socialism. Unlike both the social democrats and the Brezhnevites, their formulations do not have a clear, unambiguous character. They talk about two parallel and equivalent struggles: the struggle in and around parliament for a left majority and a left government; and the pressure of the mass movement outside parliament.

Yet all historical experience shows that when capitalism plunges into a revolutionary crisis, the workers' movement is faced with a decisive choice. It will be fighting on both terrains, but it must be clear which is to be dominant. If there is confusion within the working class on this question all is lost.

The parliamentary struggle works within the twin pillars of bourgeois legality and representative democracy. These mean very precise things: the law defends individual property rights against the masses; it takes the capitalist economy out of the political arena and makes working class challenges to private property criminal matters to be crushed by force. Representative democracy excludes the masses from political decision making. The workers can be politically active only under complete subordination to the military-bureaucratic state machine: voting, petitioning, lobbying, parading between two lines of police — all this is the sum total of mass politics — the real struggle must be confined to parliament.

Yet, in every single revolutionary crisis, the mass have directly challenged both these pillars. They have shaken capitalist property with mass strikes, factory occupations, workers' control committees, defence pickets against police attacks, etc. They have also burst through the bureaucratic integument of representative democracy. This is what the mass movement is in a revolutionary crisis.

So bourgeois legality and parliamentary legitimacy stand on one side and the mass movement stands on the other. In this division lies the decisive question of class power. The counter revolution fights with the slogan 'individual freedom and democracy against communism'. What answer must the workers' movement give?

It must give this mass self-activity a definite political form — workers' councils embodying a higher authority than the cramped democracy of capitalism; in order to undermine the dominance of parliamentary authority it must prepare in advance the transitional objective of the mass movement; and it must use its parliamentary strength to develop these twin challenges.

What do the Eurocommunists do? They reject the need to give the mass movement a higher political form than parliament. They reject transitional demands for immediate and democratic ones. They thus make central the fight for a parliamentary left government. The mass movement is subordinated to this task. The logic of this programme is an accommodation to counter-revolution. Neither of the main currents in the CP will evolve in the direction of revolutionary Marxism.

Resurgence of Marxist debate

Many Marxists may be dissatisfied with such an analysis which leaves matters here. And they will be right. The analysis above could have been written ten years ago, without requiring much amendment. Yet over the last decade there has been one very

big change inside the Communist Party: there has been a resurgence of Marxist debate. A great deal of positive theoretical work of value to the revolutionary Marxist left has accompanied this resurgence.

To be frank, the old guard of Stalinist ideologues of the Klagman-Betty Matthews variety cannot be given much credit for this development. It would be more accurate to say that they have been almost swamped by the influx of Marxist ideas from outside the Party. The last decade has seen a tremendous growth of Marxist discussion on the left in Britain — a result of the twin ideological crises of bourgeois thought and Stalinism.

The main organiser of the Marxist intellectual revival has been the journal *New Left Review*. And the Communist Party, much to the dismay of the people like Fergus Nicholson, has opened its door to a very large number of Marxist intellectuals of this new generation.

These intellectuals are not at all attracted by the CP's Stalinist pedigree. Other factors are appealing: the party's apparent openness to discussion, its implantation in the working class, and the unattractiveness of the alternatives. The choice seems to be an utterly philistine Labour left symbolised by the *New Statesman* and *Tribune* or a Trotskyist left still heavily marked by dogmatism and sectarianism. In the late 1960s, Trotskyist groups exhibited genuinely ultra-left tendencies in the prevailing atmosphere of youthful enthusiasm.

WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

Nowhere has the CP's new openness and its link with the working class born more fruit than in the women's movement. The Communist Party has achieved a real breakthrough. In debates on the questions of women's liberation — as well as in some others — the militants of the revolutionary left have much to learn from the militants of the Communist Party. How does this aspect of the ideological life of the Party relate to the governing conceptions of the Eurocommunists?

There are many views in the CP on the question of women's liberation. This is a strength in conditions where so much of the debate on left as a whole is really very new. Within this diversity, one current of opinion has become increasingly pronounced: the view that since the overthrow of capitalism does not necessarily guarantee the liberation of women, the struggle for liberation can be treated largely autonomously from the problems of the struggle for working class power.

The key activity becomes the exposure of the ideological reproduction of male domination in capitalist society. Politically this entails the fight for women's rights and the struggle against reactionary male attitudes in the working class. The need to democratise and reform the division of labour within the family is also included.

Historical experience shows that the conquest of power by the working class does not automatically usher in the liberation of women. There will be a massive and protracted fight against the poisonous ideological baggage of the previous mode of production — not least within the ranks of the workers themselves. Such a battle will have to be led by the mass organisations of the women's movement itself.

SOCIALIST FEMINISTS

This means that socialist feminists should be clearly defined within the present women's liberation movement — respecting its democracy, but nevertheless arguing for the movement to aim its mass actions towards a united fight for women's liberation movement on the part of the working class movement as a whole. The nature of the workers' state for which we are fighting becomes a burning issue for the struggle for women's liberation, according to this approach.

This is where the connection is evident between the discussion on women's liberation and the overall ideological positions of the Eurocommunists. Instead of spelling out the radically new type of workers' state which is the precondition for a victorious struggle against women's oppression, the new Draft offers a vision which does not extend beyond bourgeois right.

The Draft singles out one specific feature of women's oppression — their lack of equality with men. It then implies that the fundamental problems of women can be dealt with through a series of reforms to guarantee formal equality with men, coupled with an ideological struggle against sexism. The Draft mentions the role of women in the family, but it neglects how the patriarchal family structures oppressive relations between men and women.

The objective of abolishing the family — and the social preconditions to do so — are glaringly absent. Instead the perspective is to break down the sexual division of labour within a still existing institution of the family.

REJECTS MARXISM

The ideological root of this evasion lies in rejecting the classical Marxist conception of the transition to socialism through the withering away of the state and the bourgeois family, and replacing it with a conception of the struggle for democracy in general.

The dialectical relationship between the conquest of power by the working class and the struggle for women's liberation is snapped. A reduction of both to the horizons of an abstract democracy is all that remains.

A similar pattern appears when the Draft establishes the relationship between the women's liberation movement and the current struggle against capitalism. This dialectical link is also broken by many CP women who leap from the truth that the liberation of women will not be automatic, to the falsehood that the women's liberation movement should be a broad movement of cultural and ideological struggle — separated from the political problems of the struggle for power.

More ingenious Eurocommunist theorists have utilised the necessary ideological struggle against sexism to perform a deft theoretical trick. They have substituted a part of the whole for the whole itself.

First, the role of the women's liberation movement is reduced to a purely cultural and ideological one. Its political dimension is banned. Then references to Gramsci help to declare that the fundamental struggle in the fight for socialism is not the political struggle, but this ideological struggle.

IDEOLOGICAL POWER

For these Eurocommunists, bourgeois power is not in the end decisively a political, state power, but an ideological power. So the revolutionary, political potential of the women's liberation movement is obscured and the movement is simultaneously assimilated to their neo-reformist project.

There is a double-sided reality in the Marxist debates within the CPGB today. On the one hand, the discussion on such vital questions as the oppression of women and the family raises many new and important issues which revolutionary Marxists outside the Party have not tackled.

On the other side, the closer these debates touch the real ideological backbone of the Eurocommunist outlook, the more they are contained and diluted to fit the pre-conceived gradualist schema. The political implications of this ideological containment are not always obvious in the practice of a small party like the CPGB.

They become a good deal clearer in the operations of the Eurocommunists' mentor, the Italian Communist Party. In Italy the concrete meaning of the struggle for democracy in general has been acutely evident: the PCI is prepared to slaughter the demand for free abortion on the sacrificial altar of 'democratic advance' and unity with the Christian Democracy. It forced PCI women militants to break with the Party on the streets — defying the positions of their party's leaders.

The Line of the CPGB

The real strategic conception of the Eurocommunist inclined leadership of the CPGB, subordinates the mass movement to the struggle for a left government with a parliamentary majority. Everything else fits in with this conception. The CP replaces a set of transitional demands for the mass movement with a mixture: assorted government reforms, and immediate and democratic demands for the mass movement.

The party muddles the issue of class unity in action with political relations with left social democracy. Revolutionary Marxist struggle for united action of the entire class around every issue, however immediate. Only through such united action can the working class advance.

Social democrats of all shades should be pulled into such united action — but an unremitting programmatic struggle must be waged with left social democracy over the aims, and the most appropriate means for carrying the struggle forward.

The CP leadership conflates these two elements into a single concept of 'left unity'. This is an elastic formula to help the leadership hold back mass struggles to a comfortable point for the lefts in the Labour Party. The trade union bureaucracy — with its own interests — is ignored by the Draft. The political struggle in the trade

unions becomes one-dimensional — between left and right. And programmatic ideas on the struggle for workers' democracy within the mass organisations — and in the course of the mass struggle of the working class — get short shrift in the Draft.

STRATEGIC CONCEPTS

However, strategic concepts can be applied in different ways tactically. Where has the CPGB put the emphasis during the last few years in Britain? Has it given the party some leeway in its relations with the Labour and trade union leaderships? What has been the executive committee's interpretation of the strategic line?

The answers to these questions are found in the trade union field — the locus of the CP's political muscle. Nothing that the CP does on the electoral front or in its general political work puts to the test its politics in the same way that its operations do in the trade unions.

In the mid-1960s the leadership of Britain's two biggest unions swung to the left. Scanlon and Jones rose to power. The Labour Government attempted to qualitatively weaken the trade union movement with the *In Place of Strife* uproar.

In the end, Labour had to drop it — thanks to opposition from the TUC, and a section of its cabinet. The Tory government returned with a concerted attack on the rights of trade unionists.

Great battles followed — the miners' strike, the fight to free the Pentonville Five, the entire campaign against the Industrial Relations Act, and the fight against the conspiracy laws used to jail Shrewsbury building workers' pickets.

In every one of these struggles, CP militants played a leading part, and in many, they played the leading part. The Communist Party created a rank and file co-ordinating body called 'The Liaison Committee for the Defence of the Trade Unions'. Its conferences at the end of the 1960s and in the early part of the Tory government won considerable support from the shop floor leaders throughout the trade union movement.

LACK OF MILITANCY?

The CP is sometimes criticised for lack of militancy by the revolutionary left. This charge does not apply to CP members involved in the struggle against the Tory government. These attacks rightly produce a good deal of contempt when they reach the ears of Communist shop-floor militants (although these same militants have seen all too many ex-Communists pass through the party on the way to soft seats at the top).

The real issue is not the militancy of the CP trade unionists, but the direction they were given by King Street. How did the Communist Party leadership seek to transform the victories won in mass struggle into long term gains for the entire left? How did it link these mass struggles to the overall strategy for socialism?

The Communist Party leadership presents the history of this period as if a single course existed for the Party to follow — namely the one laid down by itself. This is never the case. There are always options, and real tensions seemed to have developed over the choices made, between the Party leadership and sections of the industrial wing of the Party.

The Party had two broad choices. It could have developed the LCDTU into a structured rank and file movement throughout the unions — not substituting for the official structures, but fighting within them for a definite programme of measures to defend trade union rights and working class living standards. Alternatively, it could have used the mass movement against the Tories, to encourage CP militants within it to push open the doors into the full-time apparatuses of the unions and into the union leaderships. The CP leadership decisively chose the latter course.

LEFT BUREAUCRACY

These two alternatives are not totally counter-posed to each other. It is, in principle, possible to do both. But in the conditions in the unions then, these alternatives tended to contradict each other.

One simple reason explains why: the attitude of the left bureaucracy, including the stance adopted by Scanlon and Jones.

Both these figures played a role in the struggle against the Industrial Relations Act. In its initial stages they were happy to see the LCDTU stick its neck out and start the mobilisations. Such lefts were also prepared to help ease the restrictions on CP members occupying leading positions in many unions. And they were also quite happy to write for the *Morning Star* on occasions, and to say a few kind words about the party — no political price was involved and they put themselves in good stead with the militants.

They were not, however, prepared to accept an open, structured rank and file movement within their union — campaigning for a definite, unambiguous political programme. Such rank and file movements that recruit new supporters and extend their base become an independent power-centre. Easy backstage manoeuvres and political accommodations become more difficult. And the lefts can quite quickly find their relations with their militant base turned upside-down.

Instead of left leaders using militants as levers, they could be forced to become accountable to their militant base. Today several constituency parties have begun to make their MPs accountable to the membership or face less support in elections. Rank and file movements in the unions could acquire this same power to

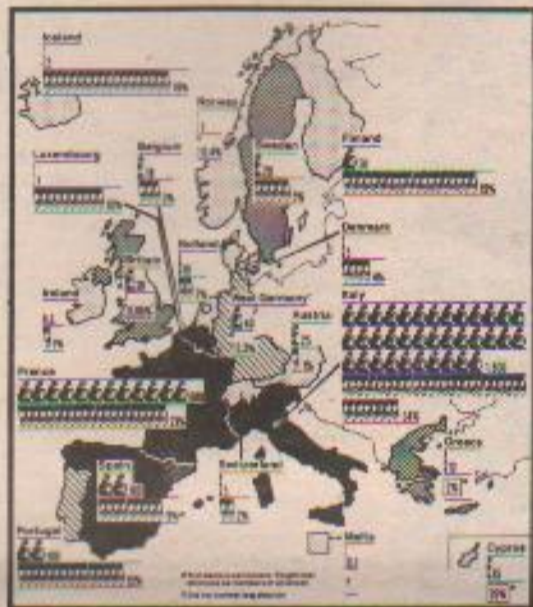
the leadership could have at least presented an intransigent face on such elementary issues as international solidarity, and defence of the right of the Irish people to self-determination.

The Party could have organised a movement for the withdrawal of British troops. But no. With a concern for being 'responsible and practical' the Party leadership abandoned all pretence at a class attitude. Its role remains to give advice to the British imperialist state as to how best to conduct its affairs in Ireland.

Little wonder that the Soviet bureaucracy criticised the Party leadership for its lack of class solidarity on the Irish question. It's not just another betrayal. It's the utter fatuity of the leadership's attitude. What is the point of a Party which is tiny in national political terms showing how 'responsible' it is to the leaders of British capitalism? What will it gain out of its 'practical' proposals about troops' barracks, a Bill of Rights, and above all support for the Peace movement? Little more than contempt from all sides.

The Future of the Party

The New Draft programme and the 35th Congress of the Communist Party do not represent anything fundamentally new. But the open polarisation within the membership, and the increased aggressiveness of both the Eurocommunist wing and the Brezhnevites is new.



The Eurocommunist spread

drop members of union leaderships from their slates — especially if these lefts ran rough-shod over the democratically agreed programme of the movement.

The work of Communist Party militants in building up the LCDTU gave the party the opportunity to construct such a rank and file movement on the model of the old Minority Movement created by the CPGB back in the 1920s. If constructed, such a movement could have won the backing of hundreds of thousands of workers.

The CP has been quite capable of building just such rank and file movements around a definite programme when engaged in a fight against the right wing in the unions. The Building Workers' Charter which prepared the early 1970s building workers' strike in the teeth of a right-wing leadership is a case in point.

The CP could have constructed a powerful rank and file force ready to lay an open, organised challenge to the turn-about of the lefts when Labour came to power. It could have prepared the ground for clear opposition to the Social Contract wage controls, the millions of unemployed, and the biggest cuts in workers' living standards which have taken place since the war. And, not least, it could have greatly swelled the ranks of the CP itself in industry.

Such a left turn would not necessarily have implied a strategic break with the Party's programme. It could simply have involved a decision by the leadership to make a tactical left turn, strengthen its base in the unions and then reconsolidate its alliances with the lefts from a new position of strength. The French CP leadership is currently demonstrating flexibility enough for such tactical turns.

Bert Ramelson and his colleagues on the executive of the CPGB were totally lacking in the nerve necessary for such an operation. What has been the result? The CP has certainly strengthened its number of leading officials in the higher councils of the trade union movement.

But the Party been not able to block the sharp right turn by the lefts. And its real political influence amongst the mass of workers has not been transformed since the victories against the Tories — at least if membership figures and *Morning Star* sales are anything to go by. The industrial militants of the party have paid a heavy price for the narrow routinism and lack of imagination of King Street.

The depths of the leadership's conservatism and lack of revolutionary strategy extends even where the cherished relationship with the union bureaucracy is not so directly expressed: the Irish question. Even if it ruled out a tactical left turn on issues centrally affecting relations with the lefts,

There can be little doubt that the Brezhnevites will be soundly defeated. This can create a profound disequilibrium within the party. The entire operation of the Party leadership since the invasion of Czechoslovakia has been to hold both wings in line. Each have been warned of the dire threat from the other.

The significance of the 35th Congress may well be that the Eurocommunist wing may call the leadership's bluff — and go for a fight to the finish with those who are for rejection of the Draft. This would be the principled course for the leadership to follow. But without a Brezhnevite threat, how could one prevent a Pandora's box opening up within the membership?

The real stake at this Congress is not the words that are enshrined in the programme and those that are rejected. The crisis is whether the leadership will be able to re-establish a temporary new equilibrium after the Congress, or whether the Party crisis will proceed apace. This is, of course, a matter of great concern not only to the Party membership, but to the entire British left.

The British Communist Party is a product of 50 years of Stalinism, and its steady decline has been a product of that historical tradition. But it is also an organisation into which many of the most dedicated Marxist militants in Britain have devoted their lives over many decades.

In the absence of a stronger practical revolutionary alternative to the CPGB, that organisation's disintegration would produce demoralisation — and a drift to the right among many present members of the Party. Such a prospect pleases only ultra-left sectarians and social democrats.

A double tragedy faces CP militants: a leadership bent on progressive liquidation into social democracy, and an opposition to that leadership which offers nothing but the dead-end of unregenerate Stalinism.

The CPGB has no prospect of becoming a mass party like its counter-parts on the continent. It is a small cadre organisation of equivalent strength to the organisations on the revolutionary left in France, Spain or Italy. The CPGB has members in more prominent positions within the trade unions, but its trade union forces have an increasingly tenuous relationship to the real political life of the party.

And outside the trade union field, the CPGB has a weaker political capacity than many revolutionary organisations on the continent. Like the French section of the Fourth International, the CPGB has a daily paper. But both its voting strength and its mobilising ability on the streets is weaker.

If Sid French is to be believed the CPGB's active militants are about the same

number as the militants of the Spanish section of the Fourth International. And unlike such organisations, the CPGB is on the decline. And while these revolutionary organisations offer a global alternative to the programme and strategy of the mass parties, the CPGB leadership presents the Party as nothing more than an adjunct to the Labour Party.

The Party possesses all the disadvantages of its smallness, without any of the advantages of a genuine political alternative to reformism enjoyed by the revolutionary left. In addition, it carried the burden of its continued attachment to the East European bureaucracies.

Temporary successes for the Italian and French Communist parties may provide momentary relief for the CPGB. Problems may also be eased by an electoral defeat for Labour. At last that would take some of the strain out of the Party's relationship with the left bureaucracy.

ROUTINIST FIGURES

Another stop-gap measure might be a tactical turn to the left by the Party leadership. But an Executive Committee composed of such routinist figures as Tony Chater, Bert Ramelson and George Matthews seems to be incapable of even such limited tactical manoeuvres. All these are only short-term palliatives.

The most hopeful sign for the future is the new openness of the party to discussion with groups on the revolutionary left. As far as the party membership is concerned, the old Stalinist sectarianism holds less and less sway.

In our view, the task of Marxists in Britain is to work towards the construction of a new, unified revolutionary Marxist organisation, with real roots in the working class, a principled agreement on fundamental programmatic issues, and an internal regime so the party membership can correct mistakes, learn from them and debate out policy choices.

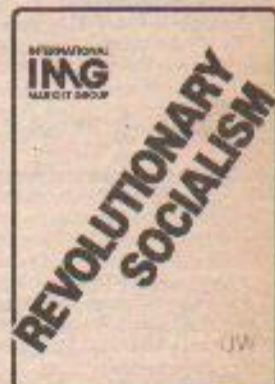
No such party exists at present, and the IMG will certainly not become it through arithmetical recruitment of ever larger numbers of individuals. A really revolutionary party will be constructed through a process of joint action, political clarification and realignment of forces that draws together forces at present in the Labour Party, along with those around the CPGB, the SWP and the IMG.

PARTY OF THE FUTURE

British left groups traditionally proclaim themselves the party of the future. But a very large number of socialists today are only too well aware that this is pure bluff at the present time. The current internal crisis of the CPGB is whether forces arise within the party desiring to pull its membership away from the leadership's rightward course and away from the dead-end offered by the neo-Stalinists.

Such forces have started to appear in the Swedish Communist Party after that organisation split earlier this year along the Eurocommunist, Neo-Stalinist line. If they emerge within the British Party the prospects for a principled regroupment of the Marxist left on the road to a new revolutionary Marxist party will be immeasurably brighter than they have been for decades.

If they do not, our tasks will be much more arduous. This is the challenge facing those members of the CPGB who consider themselves anti-Stalinist revolutionary Marxists and Leninists during and after the 35th Party Congress.



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