

"Trotskyism in Britain: 1931-1937"

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ABSTRACT

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The topic is approached as part of the wider history of the Left in Britain. It draws on hitherto unknown documents, on recollections and biographies of participants, and on a close study of the Press, as well as on the documents already known. It describes the political processes and discussions which led to the formation of the British Section of the International Left Opposition and to the expulsion of its supporters from the Communist Party of Great Britain. The response to its problems of the "Balham Group" and the causes of the split in it at the end of 1933 are analysed. The thesis then describes the "Marxist Group in the I.L.P." (1934 - 1936) and the political reasons for its relative lack of success. It reviews the origins of Labour Party "entrism" and the experiences of those who first undertook the tactic. Parallel studies follow of the "Militant" Group (Harber), the "Marxist League" (Groves - Wicks - Dewar) and the "Marxist Group" (James - Ballard) in 1937. The work ends with the rapprochement of the remnants of the Groves and James groups, which was to produce, in February 1938, the Revolutionary Socialist League, and with the split in the "Militant" Group, in December 1937, which produced the Workers' International League. The evidence has been traced of the international influences on the groups and of the functioning of the "International Secretariat" and of the "Bureau for the Fourth International". Explanatory studies of the "Amsterdam Anti-War Congress" and of the Revolutionary Policy Committee in the I.L.P. are in appendices, with full texts of important documents the originals of which cannot be seen in Britain. The conclusion attempts to evaluate the political contribution of the Trotskyists and to explain their relative weakness.

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Introduction

The objects of this thesis are to investigate the background, organisation and activities of the Trotskyist groups in Britain the years 1931-1937, estimate their significance and draw tentative conclusions. The criteria by which a work of history may be judged have been suggested by G.R. Elton. Is it honest? Is it exhaustive? Has it asked the right questions and are they adequate in the context? Has it found reasonable answers? Has the author learned his trade? To which I would add, has he explained his work's shortcomings?

The value of the subject itself could be questioned. Let us again invoke Elton:

"An eminent scientist has condemned those who crawl upon the fringes of knowledge with a magnifying glass. But what is wrong with taking a magnifying glass to the frontiers of knowledge?"

Can anyone be certain that the details for which we need a magnifying glass today will not one day be a centre of interest? Professor Saville made the point in his preface to Redman's pamphlet, "The Communist Party and the Labour Left", at a time when established opinions were being shaken:

"The time has come for a re-valuation of the history of the Labour Movement during the inter-war years. The Left, inside and outside of the Labour Party, has no reason to congratulate itself on the record of those two decades. We have an analysis which will not fail to question the political assumptions which have served us for so many years..."

This thesis is a contribution to that re-valuation. Whether it is honest may be judged by those who have already sampled the materials which it uses. These materials have been hunted down more ruthlessly than before. Particular acknowledgements are due to the libraries of the Universities of Hull, of Stirling and of Warwick, to Mr. Louis Sinclair, to Mr. George Breitman of Pathfinder Press, New York, to Professor Pierre Broue, to Mr. Groves, Mr. Dewar and Mr. Wicks, for information.

Unknown documents may emerge from the closed sections of the Trotsky or the Birney archives. There may be sensational revelations. But the materials already assembled trace the outline accurately. They tell us the principal things which the leading people said and did, on



established dates at specified places, with certain exceptions noted below. We know what organisations existed, what were their origins and what happened to them.

There are brief quotations in the text or foot-notes of documents which, though rare, can at least be seen in Britain. Only those which both seem to be important and are inaccessible have been reproduced largely or in full. Studies of the "Amsterdam Anti-War Congress" and of the "Revolutionary Policy Committee", necessary to explain what the Trotskyist groups were doing, have been relegated to Appendices.

The thesis ascribes significance to events which others have forgotten or discarded. The writer's method of selection is this. He believes that more sense can be made of what went on among the Left in Britain if we pay more attention to the shifts in Soviet policy and to their influence on those who looked to the Soviet Union as their main source of hope for peace and progress. The thesis is, from one point of view, a test of this hypothesis. I submit that the evidence which this thesis marshalls supports the belief that those policies, transmitted and popularised through the Communist Party and its fellow-travellers, were an important influence on the Left.

It also suggests that the courses of action, which these influences recommended, and which may have seemed to offer less arduous ways of advancing workers' interests, of preserving peace and defeating fascism, may in reality have worked in the long run against those aims and interests.

As Trotsky wrote, in the introduction to Volumes Two and Three of his "History of the Russian Revolution":

"The proof of scientific objectivism is not to be sought in the eyes of the historian or in the tones of his voice, but in the inner logic of the narrative itself. If episodes, testimonies, figures, quotations, fall in with the general pointing of the needle of his social analysis, then the reader has a most weighty guarantee of the scientific solidity of his conclusions".

Throughout, I have tried to keep in mind the general picture which the following statistics suggest:

	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939
EMPLOYMENT (millions)	12.8	12.8	12.9	13.0	13.1	14.3	15.3	15.7	16.9
TRADE UNION MEMBERS (‘000)	4624	4443	4389	4570	4867	5295	5842	6053	6274
LABOUR PARTY Individual Members (‘000)	297	372	366	381	419	431	447	429	409
Total Members (‘000)	2357	2372	2305	2279	2377	2444	2528	2643	2663
Numbers Unemployed and Temporarily stopped (12 months' average)	2630	2745	2521	2159	2036	1755	1484	1791	1514
Days lost through industrial dis- putes (‘000)	6983	6488	1072	959	1955	1830	3413	1334	-

The figures show employment rising and, after 1932, unemployment falling, as the new industries developed and then with the rise of re-armament. They suggest a working-class patiently recovering from 1926 and 1931, expressing itself through its traditional organisations and especially through the trade unions. Days lost through strikes fell to and remained generally at a low level. In the middle years the trade union conferences demanded higher wages and improved conditions, but there was little resistance to the control of the apparatuses, compared, for example, with that in the unofficial strike movements of the 1950's and 1960's. The total membership of the trade unions rose by 29%, while that of the seven largest unions (A.E.U., E.T.U., G. & M.W.U., M.F.G.B., N.U.R., T. & G.W.U. and N.U.D.A.W.) rose by 43%, and from 39% to 42% of that of all unions.

The strikes in 1931 may be regarded as the end of the struggles in the 1920's against the structural decay of the old basic industries. In 1937 the one strike of the London busmen helps to explain why the figure of days lost for that year is somewhat higher than that for 1936 or 1938, which express "settling down" of industrial relations in newly developing industries.

The rise in individual membership of the Labour Party may be interpreted as a response to the approach of the 1935 General Election and to the electoral success of the Party in local government, to interest in the progress of the Left in France and Spain and opposition to Fascism. The decline from the 1937 peak suggests a disappointment of earlier hopes and a feeling that, if the threatening war were to be averted at all, it would not be by the efforts of obscure men and women, but by the ignoble policies of Munich.

Yet trade unionism surged ahead, at the same time as the illusion, persistent in the middle years of the decade in Left-wing circles, that a "great awakening" was just round the corner, was dissipated. The Trotskyist Starkey Jackson wrote in a pamphlet issued in 1939:

"It seemed as if the whole world was watching its fate with the same immobile fascination that the rabbit regards the snake".

The figures may dispose of the "elementary error of vulgar Marxism to infer from economic crisis an automatic revolutionary response from those who were its victims" - or its converse, that rising employment "embourgeoisifies" the working-class. In the 1930's the most widely accepted authority on Marxism was Palme Dutt, who was also the leading interpreter of the policies of the Kremlin and advocate for them. His thought - shot through with "vulgar Marxism" - can now be recognised as more akin to that of Bukharin than that of Marx, Engels or Lenin. Perhaps his elevation to commanding influence needs to be explained in terms of the hopes which the Soviet regime inspired, the immaturity and degeneration of the Communist Party and generally low level of understanding of Marxism in Britain, without overlooking the sustained efforts of the Communist Party, in alliance with reformism and liberalism, to silence the political voice of the Trotskyists.

Trotsky himself wrote widely on this question, notably in "The 'Third Period' of the Errors of the Comintern" (1), in which he suggested that the problem, "What is the Radicalisation of the Working Class?" can be approached by assembling objectively verifiable data.

The writer recognises that this work is not complete. Much has had to be omitted for lack of space, nor have materials discovered since the end of 1977 generally been noticed. Some topics have been less than

thoroughly explored:

- (i) The work of Groves in the Socialist League: Plentiful materials exist for the study of this experience, which ended in May 1937 and deserves separate treatment.
- (ii) International Connections: There is plenty of scattered evidence that the International Secretariat and, after July 1936, the Bureau for the Fourth International, functioned as an effective international leadership and grew in political stature until several of its members were murdered by the G.P.U. We know that the British Trotskyists maintained contact with these bodies and were influenced by them. The archives of these bodies have not, however, yet been recovered. We depend on materials in other archives, such as those of James P. Cannon. Shactman's archives are now in a library in New York, and may be found to contain more international materials. (2)

The writer has tried to provide the means by which the controversies on important matters among the Trotskyists in Britain can be understood. While not ignoring the "irony deep-laid in the very relations of life", he has avoided direct involvement in polemics, with either earlier writers or between one group and another. Others, less personally involved, and with unrestricted space, will deepen the study which this thesis introduces.

The following conclusions are suggested:

- (i) The people whom we study here regarded themselves as in the vanguard of progress, as revolutionary Marxists, and accepted from Trotsky the ideas which they hoped would serve their purposes. They tried to apply the spirit of his ideas, but did not necessarily agree completely with him or fully understand him. For example, the last chapter of this study shows that the Marxist Group and the Marxist League were, despite their own wishes, more under the influence of Brockway than of Trotsky in their ideas about the P.O.U.M. and its role in the civil war in Spain. But they saw Trotsky as the leading survivor of the generation which had led the October Revolution, and they saw that revolution, not as an isolated incident or a historic aberration, but as the first link in the chain of revolutions through which mankind would advance to Socialism. That Trotsky himself

was of Jewish origins was of no significance.

- (ii) Those who devoted themselves to one or another group were in general serious people. Dilettantes could not meet the demands placed upon them. Some of the leaders were from the educated middle-class, but the membership was predominantly working-class, with the characteristic that they tended to be people who consciously suffered a feeling of having been educationally deprived by capitalism.

These people cannot be written off as small or futile circles, or as having failed to influence those with whom they worked in the Labour Movement. Their difficulties may have been less than those of their co-thinkers, for instance, in Spain or in the U.S.S.R., but were not negligible. The Trotskyists in Britain did not have the opportunity to get experience of taking part in great class struggles, simply because such struggles did not take place in Britain and cannot be conjured up.

The apparatus of the Labour Party tried to divert, to silence or to expel them. The Communist Party waged a consistently bitter struggle against them, with methods including personal slander to supplement what the Moscow Trials put into circulation. The Trotskyists resisted and fought back, but the opposition was not without its effect.

In these conditions, a succession of set-backs tended to cut them off from those whom they sought as natural allies, worker-militants. The Marxist group failed to undermine the credibility of Maxton and Brockway; the "Unity Campaign" helped both to destroy the P.O.U.M. in Spain and the Socialist League in Britain. These were components of the process which tended, as the war drew nearer, to surround the Trotskyists with pessimism.

They lacked the guidance of older and more experienced comrades. Those to whom they could turn had themselves been formed in the restricted environment of the Communist Party in the "Third Period". The intellectual and material resources alike of the

Trotskyists were limited. They bore the burden, not only of getting out and selling the paper of their group and of keeping the group going, but also of the day to day work of the mass organisations through which they sought participation in the day to day struggles of the working class.

All these reasons help to explain why they could have only limited success in constructing organisations which could have a stable existence under authoritative and experienced leaderships.

(iii) On the positive side, their movement arose from the struggle against "vulgar" Marxism in the form in which it was expressed in the "Third Period". After 1935, nearly all worked for the return of a Labour majority, trying to do so in such a way that masses of workers would pass through the experience of trying to satisfy their aspirations under their recognised leaders, whose worth they could test in practice. They were for the unity of the workers' movement. They could be attacked as "splitters" only by those who had reason to fear that Trotskyists would draw attention to discrepancies between their words and their deeds.

(iv) The Trotskyists were not inherently prone to internal feuding. Groups not only split but fused. They constantly tried to find means to unify, and the thesis illustrates especially three of the practical problems which perennially obstructed unification. First: The difference of principle, transcending all tactical differences, between those who believed that, in Britain, at this historical stage, the basis for a future revolutionary party can be laid only by intervening in the conflicts within the Labour Party, and, on the other hand, those who may intervene episodically in the Labour Party, but who see their main task as being to present their group in the trade unions and to the world at large as "the independent, alternative leadership". The difference is between two totally opposite conceptions of how the foundations of the party are to be laid. A committee which contains representatives of both tendencies will be permanently at loggerheads. It can reach agreement only on propaganda at the

most general level. Every secondary, practical question raises the unresolved difference of principle and an interminable wrangle results.

Secondly: Even if groups agree, in general, that they will, or will not, make the centre of their work their intervention in the conflicts within the Social-Democratic apparatus, there still remain principled, rather than tactical questions to be solved. How is a group to work in the Labour Party? How is it to work as an "open" group? What is the central aim of its work?

Thirdly: The internal life and relations of the groups may be regarded as a constant oscillation between sectarianism and opportunism and of discussion of how to avoid falling into the grip of sectarianism while trying to avoid opportunism and avoid falling into that of opportunism while trying to avoid sectarianism. These problems may well present such practical difficulties as make harmonious collaboration impossible.

- (v) Yet the record discredits the Trotskyists less than the Labour Party, the Communist Party or the I.L.P. They received a potent stimulus in the ideas which came down to them from Lenin's Comintern, by way of the Left Opposition.

They faced the questions which others avoided, and which still raise their heads ... for example, what Socialism means and how it is to be obtained (which Attlee described as "the dominant question of the 20th Century") (3) ... or the question, "What is the U.S.S.R. and Where Is It Going?", which Trotsky posed in "The Revolution Betrayed". They began the theoretical debate about the role of the Labour Party in British politics. Yet their efforts did not save them from being mistakenly condemned as critics hostile to the Labour Movement and the Soviet Union.

- (vi) There were very few renegades from Trotskyism to movements hostile to the working class in this period. No support has been found for allegations that they associated politically with any reactionary forces, and it might be more seemly for those who recently have recommended that Bukharin be "rehabilitated" to recognise that in Britain the Communist Party slandered the Trotskyists when it represented them as collaborators of Hitler

or of Fascism.

- (vii) They rejected any suggestion that the term "Stalinism" can be applied only to the ultra-left aspects of the policies of the "Third Period", as has been suggested more recently, since the rise of "Euro-Communism". Neither the activity of the Trotskyists nor their documents, nor those of the Communist International itself, support the notion that the policies of the "Popular Front", endorsed at the Seventh Congress of the Communist International, represent in some sense an "opposition" to Stalin or a turn away from his essential policies.

The materials collected here, indeed, support the view that we can really speak of a "Stalin era", which began with the "left turn" in the Comintern in 1924, following the defeat of the K.P.D. in 1923; then the "right turn" of 1925-27, the period of the alliance of the Communists with the General Council of the British Trades Union Congress and with the Kuo Min Tang; then, closer to our immediate purpose, the "Third Period", marked by the turn towards forces in Europe opposed to the Versailles settlement; its liquidation in 1934 with the entry of the Soviet Union into the League of Nations; the alliances of Communist Parties with bourgeois parties in Popular Fronts, and the Stalin-Hitler Pact of 1939, and not ending there. All these aspects of Soviet policy were understood by the Trotskyists in the 1930's to flow from the basic conception of "Socialism in a Single Country" and this conception, in turn, to flow from the interests of the epigones of Bolshevism, the ~~Soviet~~ bureaucracy. Consequently, the suppression of the Left Opposition, the defeats of the Comintern, the Moscow Trials and, ultimately, the murder of Trotsky, could be politically explained and not put down to abstract and idealistic notions of human frailty or wickedness.

They therefore rejected the view, fashionable in the 1930's and widely accepted since, that Stalinism is a necessary or inevitable consequence of Bolshevism. On the contrary, they regarded Stalinism as the negation of Bolshevism. They saw in the Russian Revolution, not an isolated historical accident or an aberration, but a gigantic step forward in human history. They believed that the struggle to lay the foundations of the Fourth International was justified by the duty of protecting the achievements of the Russian Revolution, as the foundation for the

extension of Socialism throughout the world. In the 1930's no-one who claimed to be a partisan of Trotsky or in sympathy with him suggested that Russia was "State Capitalist", either that the revolution never laid the basis for a workers' state, or that the fundamentals of its work had already been undone.

The Trotskyists were, therefore, swimming against the tide of pessimism, which began to rise with the Nazi victory in Germany in 1933 and gathered strength from the defeats of the movements led by Popular Fronts in France and Spain and from the devastating political reign of terror in the Soviet Union. They helped to keep alive faith in the very idea of Socialism itself and resisted the spread of reactionary scepticism.

All the activities to which the materials assembled here bear witness present the question to anyone who suggests that the term "the Stalin era" is "too widely" used - precisely to what should the term "Stalin era" be applied.

This work, then, may not only settle old controversies but revive some of them, as well as starting new ones. So be it. As the painter Joan Miro said:

"Ce qui vient au monde pour ne rien troubler ne mérite ni égards ni patience ..."

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J. Archer

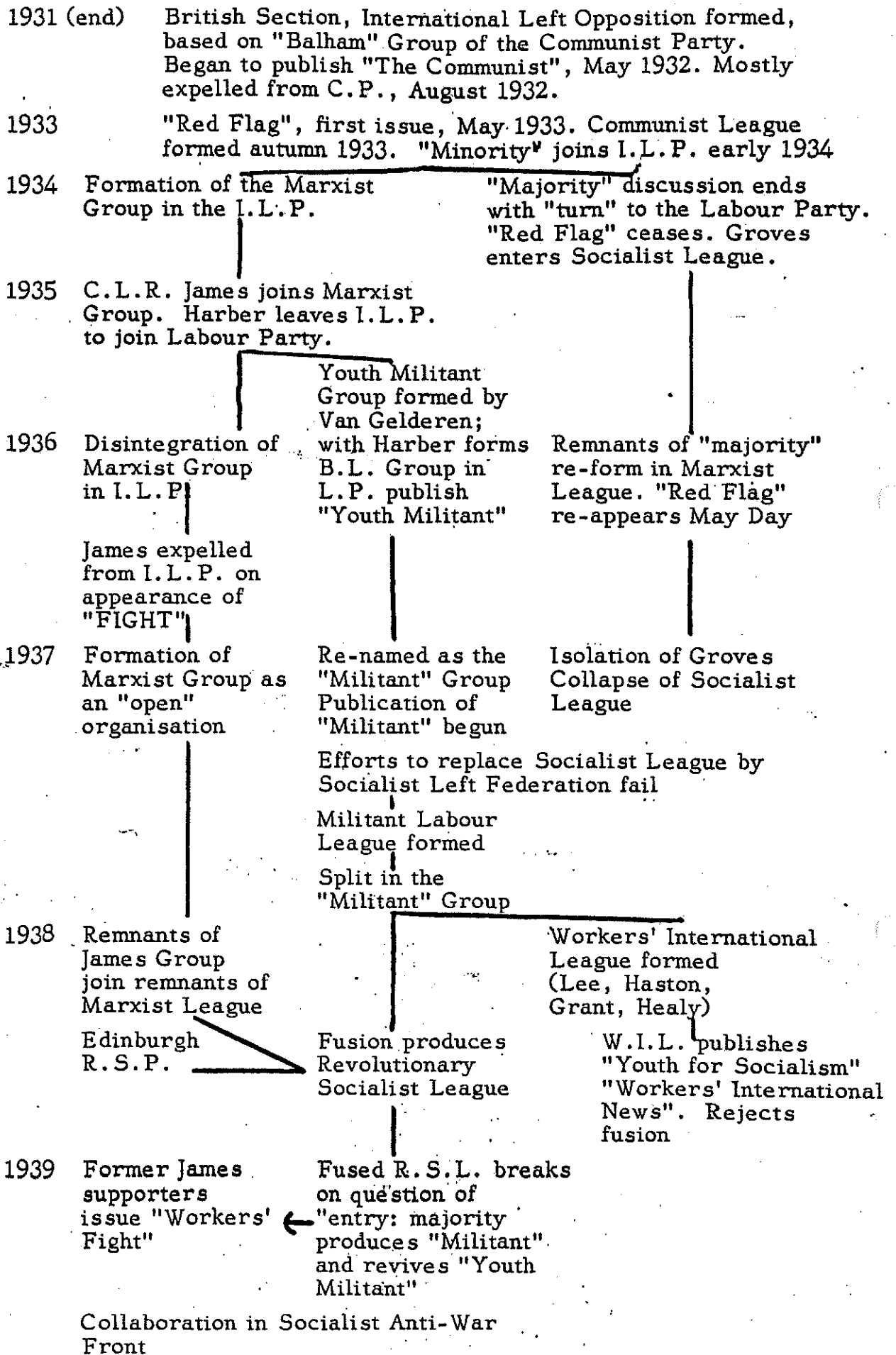
Footnotes to Introduction:

- (1) "Writings of Leon Trotsky: 1930", Pathfinder Press, 1975, p.27
- (2) For example, we know that early in 1935 Trotsky persuaded the majority of the Plenum of the International Communist League to accept Ruth Fischer as a member. He justified his suggestion, partly on the ground of her experience, partly because she would bring new blood into what might become a closed circle and partly because he believed that she knew the English language and the British Labour Movement. Yet we do not know what contribution, if any, she may have made to the movement in Britain. ("Oeuvres", Vol. V., p.62, dated January 31, 1935).
- (3) "The Labour Party in Perspective", p.17

*A proposal to accept Debra into the plenum
with page 34-42 Supplement p 566*

TROTSKYIST GROUPS IN BRITAIN

1931 - 1939



Chapter One

The Origins of the British Section,

International Left Opposition, 1931-32

This chapter describes the origin of the first organised movement of political supporters of Trotsky in Britain, as far as this is possible from the materials which have been traced so far. It reviews the developments which led to the expulsion from the Communist Party of Great Britain, in August 1932, (1) of Dewar, Groves, Purkis, Sara and Wicks, and of their associates.

International Left Opposition, 1931-32

These were the first people in Britain to form and to lead an organisation which was recognised by the International Left Opposition. Their sympathy with its ideas developed as a result of their experience as active members of the Communist Party during the so-called 'Third Period' of the Communist International, which opened early in 1928 and may be said to have lasted until autumn 1934. Several years after the first Trotskyist group was formed, Allen Hutt evoked the atmosphere of the Communist Party of Great Britain in these years: choosing his words, perhaps, with care, he wrote: (2)

"Theoretical understanding remained at a low level ... and so from the end of 1927 there was waged the keenest battle of ideas that the Party had so far known, about the question of its 'new line' ... It also, not unnaturally, opened the door wide to 'ultra-left' tendencies, which turned independence into isolation." (3) The International, which opened early in 1928 and Groves has pointed out (3) that the 'turn' in the Communist Party to the 'Third Period' was popular with its members at first because it seemed to offer the hope of a more aggressive policy than that of the preceding years 1925-1927 and of settling accounts with reformism by direct attack. Groves and Wicks have shown in their reminiscences (4) that their opposition to the Stalin faction which dominated the Comintern apparatus developed from their experiences of the 'Third Period'. Their group had the feature peculiar, it may be, to Britain, that it attracted mainly younger members of the Party, whereas in other countries, such as France, Germany, U.S.A. or China, the Left Opposition also had the support of older and more experienced Communists who could remember the Comintern in its early days. Groves turned with Stewart Purkis to the Communist Party after the General Strike. By 1929 he was a member of the London District Committee and assistant

organiser. 'Labour Monthly' published articles by him and by Stewart Purkis in 1929 and 1930. These are freshly written and generally free from hackneyed jargon.

In 'Chartism and the Present Day', (5) for example, Groves contrasted the vigorous youth of industrial capitalism in Britain ninety years earlier with its languor in the 1920's, and tried to refute what he regarded as the undue optimism of those who looked for a return to prosperity by way of a 'second industrial revolution'. He suggested that the talk of 'rationalisation' which was then in fashion could lead, not to peaceful economic growth but to sharpened class conflict. In a pendant to this article, entitled 'Class Leadership in the Chartist Movement', (6) he briefly examined the decomposition of Chartism in the late 1840's arguing that Ernest Jones and Harney were evolving towards Marxism and that they failed to understand that their principles were incompatible with those of Feargus O'Connor.

Groves wrote also a pamphlet for the Communist Party, "Four Years of Labour 'Opposition': A Communist Examination of the Labour Party's Record in the House of Commons from 1925 to 1929", the purpose of which was to defend the 'new line' of the Communist Party of putting up as many candidates as it could against the Labour Party in the General Election of 1929. The pamphlet opens:

"The record covered by these four years of 'Labour in Opposition' has been marked by unparalleled oppression of the workers and has witnessed gigantic class conflicts. The record of the Labour Party in relation to the economic struggles of the workers during this period is a damning indictment of the Labour bureaucrats and a justification of the Communist Party's condemnation of them as allies of the employing class ... Our attitude to this Party is best expressed in the words of the Resolution of the 9th Plenum of the E.C.C.I. adopted on Feb. 8, 1928: 'The experience of the MacDonald Government, the betrayal of the General Strike and the miners' fight, the changed attitude of the Labour Party and the trade union leaders towards the question of war and relations with the U. S. S. R., China, India, Egypt, their changed attitude on the principal domestic questions (rationalisation, Anti-Trade Union Bill, industrial peace), all this renders it necessary that the Communist Party of Great Britain should come out more boldly and more clearly as an independent political party, change its attitude towards the Labour Party and the Labour Government, and consequently replace the slogan of 'Labour Government' by the slogan of 'Revolutionary Workers' Government' ... The Communist Party will put forward independently the largest possible number of its own candidates".

Groves also criticised the Labour Party in 1929, in 'The Brighton Labour Party Conference' in language quite consistent with that of the 'Third Period'. (7) He contrasted the pretensions of the Chairman, who 'sounded a note of victory' and whose speech was head-lined in the 'Daily Herald', 'Our Aims a Socialist Commonwealth', with the reality of the mass lock-outs leading to wage-cuts in Lancashire, of the oppression of India and of the Arabs in Palestine under a Labour administration. His language conveys the frustrated feelings of protest of the members of the Communist Party in the earlier years of the 'Third Period' when they felt themselves cut off from the Labour Movement.

Groves wrote:

"The Trade Union leaders are openly working with a Labour Government and are everywhere assisting the bosses to drive down the standards of the workers ... into unemployment, starvation and world war ... This Conference was marked out from previous conferences most clearly by the absence of militant workers sharply attacking the policy of MacDonalld. For the first time since the war, the task of rallying the rank-and-file against the platform fell completely to the I.L.P. The I.L.P. continues to urge that it is still possible to alter the policy of Labour; that the place of militants is inside, accepting the policy and discipline of the Labour Party. (emphasis in original) The meaning of this should be clear to all workers, and in the fight against the Labour Government as the enemy of the working-class, the revolutionary section of the workers must bring its sharpest weapons of all to bear on the so-called Left Wing inside the Labour Party."

Stewart Purkis' article, 'A Side-Light on Mondism' (8) is about how the leadership of the Railway Clerks' Association tried to expel him from the union for producing an unofficial broadsheet, the 'Jogger', addressed to his fellow-clerks in the Railway Clearing House, whose fear of being made redundant led to opposition to the collaboration of their officials with the railway companies in staff economies. He tells how all the leading officials of the union presented themselves at a branch meeting to defend their decision expelling him but were unable to get the members of his branch to agree.

In a more general article, 'Rail Workers and the Revolutionary Struggle', (9) Purkis analysed the arguments of the railway companies and the trade union leaders that staff economies would restore a prosperity in which the railway employees who remained would ultimately share and that 'rationalisation' on the railways would lead to an extension of workers' control. Purkis' language, like that of Groves, was characteristic of

the 'Third Period':

"As soon as possible, in every shop, in every depot and siding, it is the task of every rail and transport worker to strive to create rank-and-file shop, siding and depot committees, that the workers will not turn to the corrupt trade union leadership but meet the crisis with a leadership which will lead the struggle for the real workers' demands and develop the power to carry out the struggle for a revolutionary workers' government."

Groves and Purkis, then, were not yet in opposition in 1929 to the 'new line' in which the Communist Party expressed the central concepts of the 'Third Period' of the Communist International.

The world economic crisis broke out with the Wall Street crash in autumn 1929 and deepened in 1930 and 1931. In Britain the Government was unable to counteract the rise in unemployment, but, as a later historian has written: (10)

"The collapse of the Labour Government (in 1931) provided a model opportunity for the communist advance, but the actual development of events merely served to highlight the isolation and impotence of the Communists."

The 'new line' disappointed some of those who had earlier welcomed it. Hopes had revived briefly when the 'Daily Worker' appeared for the first time on January 1, 1930, but under the editorship of William Rust, a former leader of the Young Communist League who supported Dutt and Pollitt against the Rothstein-Campbell group which was prominent in the Party leadership from 1925 to the end of 1927, the new paper proved to be no more attractive politically than from the standpoint of journalistic technique. The Party made a great effort during the months before April 1931 to attract support for its 'Charter Convention' (11) but this also seemed to have been of no avail. The majority of the workers of Britain appeared to have accepted passively the collapse of the second MacDonal Government and a decline in the living standards of some of the workers and middle class in the years 1930-1932.

Groves and others in the Communist Party began to ask themselves whether the 'new line' of the Communist Party could be isolating it and whether it was losing opportunities by demanding in advance the confidence of those to whom its propaganda was appealing. These ideas were discussed in an administrative unit of the Communist Party called

the 'Balham Group' or the 'Balham Local'. 'Balham Group' was simply the name of the local unit of the Party. At the time the use of the term 'group' had no special or political significance. The expression was not used to designate a separate Trotskyist organisation until August 1932 and even then only as a convenient label.

Before such discussions in Britain had developed to the point that those taking part in them organised themselves into a group which in due course could no longer be tolerated by the Communist Party, an international body expressing the ideas derived from the Left Opposition in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and identified as in political sympathy with Trotsky, had already come into existence, at a meeting in Paris in April 1930. (12) The tradition of the International Left Opposition is based on such questions as the theory of the Permanent Revolution as opposed to that of Socialism in One Country, the meaning of the United Front, the reasons for the defeat of the German working-class in October 1923, the Anglo-Russian Joint Trade Union Committee, the Kuomintang and the attitude of the Communist International to them, as well as the rise of the Soviet bureaucracy. The 'dissidents' in South-West London did not at first know much about these questions. They were in contact with the Communist League of America, which had been founded by Cannon and Shachtman shortly after the Sixth Congress of the Comintern in 1928, and with the French Trotskyist Pierre Naville. Groves recalls (13) that he and his associates were not yet prepared until the end of 1931 to set up a Left Opposition group in Britain. Their arguments suggest that they were still developing a piecemeal criticism of the leadership of the Communist Party of Great Britain and that they had not yet come to terms with the international character and the political basis of Stalinism. Their disagreement with the Communist League of America, accordingly, expressed itself rather in a discussion about tactics than in an overtly political form.

Groves wrote many years later in his 'The Balham Group':

"Uncomfortably, we felt we were being hurried. To become a group of the Left Opposition meant expulsion for 'conspiracy', for breaking the rules; and in circumstances which would incline our party comrades to condemn us unheard, and allow the party leaders to justify absolute repression of discussion by reference to the fabricated but nevertheless widely circulated and believed slanders against the 'Trotskyists'. We all had ties of comradeship with many party members... Our complete commitment was to the revolutionary party, which

for us at that time was the Communist Party ... We went along with them (the Trotskyists of the Communist League of America) on much, such as the full inner-party democracy in the national sections, a diminution of Russian control of the Comintern and a recovery of the communism of the founding fathers. And we were deeply shaken by Trotsky's condemnation of Comintern policy in Germany, based as it was on the formula that social-democracy and National Socialism were 'varieties of fascism' or, in Stalin's words, 'not opposite poles but neighbours', by Trotsky's warnings of the disaster which would follow for workers in Germany, Russia and throughout the world if that policy were persisted in; and by his call for a principled united front of the Social-Democratic Party and the Communist Party to check and defeat the Nazis. All these things we could raise in the Party and fight for, but as members, not outsiders."

In 1931 there were other responses, in addition to that of the members of the 'Balham Group' on the extreme Left of the British Labour Movement, to the ineffectiveness of the Communist Party under the impact of the world economic crisis. According to a report at second hand (14) Pierre Naville, the French Trotskyist, met eight people in London on March 22, 1931, and told the International Secretariat that three were 'still' members of the Communist Party and one was 'a Hindu comrade' and that:

"... the comrades stressed that very important social movements are taking place at the present ... The small London nucleus shows some Right wing and some Leftist tendencies. The trade union question will be the touchstone for our English comrades. 'The trade unions are the pillars of the state. They believe that there will be no revolution in England without a revolution in India. India is the key to the British revolution'. This conception (as well as a certain national hostility) causes the Hindu comrades to organise themselves and work separately. According to the information given by the comrades present at the meeting there are about 150 comrades in all. They have studied Marxism a great deal and read particularly the works of Comrade Trotsky, which led them to the Left Opposition. Part of the comrades have decided to return to their own country shortly, with the intention of forming an Indian Communist Party 'on the basis of the permanent revolution' ..."

There already existed in 1931 a small organisation, the 'Marxist League' (or 'Marxian League'), members of which towards the end of the year were in discussion with the International Left Opposition. Every week in the latter part of 1931 and the early part of 1932 the 'New Leader' carried an advertisement of the Sunday evening meeting of this group. (15) The titles of the addresses range fairly wide but were always

political. On January 30, 1932, for example, 'Professor S.F. Darwin Fox' was billed to speak on 'Catholicism and the Servile State'.

Another Sunday evening, Bonar Thompson, 'the man with the Black Hat', a well-known orator from the open-air platform in Hyde Park, who, like Ridley, made a living from his collections, spoke on 'My Experiences of the Labour Movement'. On February 28 one J. Lane was to speak on 'The Future of the I.L.P.' and on March 20, Ridley was to debate, on behalf of the Marxist League, against a representative of Mosley's 'New Party'.

The Marxist League, then appears to have been one of the more positively political of the groups which arose in the early 1930's, such as the Promethean Society or the 'Federation of Progressive Societies and Individuals'. It appears to have provided a forum for discussion to people who were already members of other organisations, such as the I.L.P.. Its manifesto 'Communism or Chaos', published some time in 1931 had some remarkable features. While it was strongly anti-imperialist in tone, it wrote off the British Trade Unions and Labour Party, describing the British working class as:

"... the product of parasitic and imperialistic conditions to a degree unequalled by any other working class in the world ... its social origins are shown in the imperialism and reactionary policies of the Labour Party, that sorry survival of the Victorian world monopoly, which now strives frantically in unison with the capitalists to continue the colonial exploitation that alone made possible the trade union concessions of the past, and without whose corrupting influence Chartism would have overthrown the bourgeois state and thus made the rise of the Labour Party an impossibility."

Another remarkable feature of this document was that it did not mention at all the Russian Revolution, the Soviet Union or the existence of Communist Parties and the Communist International, let alone the Left Opposition! The manifesto claimed to be inspired by Marxism, but regarded the crisis as one of over-production and 'recognised the impossibility of achieving reforms under a dying capitalism'.

The principal sources of information about the later history of the Marxist League and its relations with the International Left Opposition are an English version of the minutes of a meeting of the International Secretariat on October 13, 1931, the reports in English annexed to these minutes and a later letter from the then American Trotskyist,

Albert Glotzer, to Trotsky about the visit which he and Shachtman made to Britain to visit contacts towards the end of 1931. (17) These documents make clear several points of theoretical importance at issue between the International Left Opposition and the Marxist League, which explain why the latter could not be regarded as a 'Trotskyist' organisation. The latter rejected the struggle for reforms and regarded the trade unions as having exhausted their usefulness to the British workers. It rejected the perspective of the International Left Opposition of working for the regeneration of the Communist International and, in Britain, of directing its propaganda to the members of the Communist Party. But these opinions were derived from the more general opinion of the leaders of the Marxist League, who included Francis Ridley about the class-struggle in Britain, that India would be the first to make a revolution and that British imperialism would then collapse. (18) These documents provide a background to Trotsky's article, "The Tasks of the Left Opposition in Britain and in India: Some Critical Remarks on Unsuccessful Theses". (19) The letter dated December 26, 1931, by Glotzer to Trotsky (20) both stresses the favourable impression which Groves made on Glotzer and brings into the story a third tendency, that associated with the names of Dick Beech and Jack Tanner (21) which, as far as is known, was to contribute nothing to the British Section of the International Left Opposition which came into existence according to a report by Shachtman (who came to Britain with Glotzer) in December 1931. (22) Dewar appears to have become aware of the existence and activity of the 'Balham Group' in the autumn of 1931, and he appears to have left the Marxist League with a number of its other members and joined the British Section of the International Left Opposition. The Marxist League appears then to have broken up, following a discussion based on the difference of principle about the trade unions (23) and, one might expect, about the methods of its leadership.

There were also some detached individuals who interested themselves in Trotsky's criticisms of the Comintern in Britain at this time. Aggravall mentioned the name of Worrall at the October 13 meeting of the International Secretariat as a former member of the Marxist League. (24) Worrall's name is remembered also by Mr. Yamanishi of Tokyo, Japan, who stayed in London from March 1931 to the end of 1934 and who remembers (25) also 'two or three young men' and one or two others, who 'formed a group', one of which 'kept in touch with France' and who

sent materials translated from the Japanese press about the development of Manchuria for Trotsky's use. 'Later', says Mr. Yamanishi, 'they joined (the) other group', presumably the Groves group.

Accounts of the discussions which Shachtman had in December 1931 with Groves and his associates about formally setting up a group to be the British Section of the International Left Opposition have been given by Groves and Wicks (26) and they closely agree. Shachtman proposed that someone must appear openly as a supporter of the Left Opposition and be prepared to pay the price of being expelled from the Communist Party in order to release himself from the restraints which membership of the Party imposed on the expression of the ideas of the Left Opposition. In a conversation with the present writer in the late 1930's, Groves expressed the view that 'Shachtman wanted quick results'.

Trotsky wrote to Groves about the same time, (27) hoping perhaps, in the light of his own experience and that of the other sections of the International Left Opposition, to show him the implications of his position and the necessity to be able to explain how and why the Communist International had arrived at its disastrous policies, in order to organise the fight against them. An important passage in Trotsky's letter, which Groves quotes, reads:

"The British Left Opposition must begin systematic work. You must establish our staff centre, though a small one. You must build your own publications, even on a modest scale ... It is necessary to have a steady, uninterrupted activity, analysis, critique and propaganda. It is necessary to educate our cadres, although in the first instance few".

The present writer ventures to interpret the whole letter as a comradely warning to Groves and his group not to regard themselves as just involved in a private fight with the leaders of the Communist Party of Great Britain, in which some of Trotsky's ideas might from time to time come in handy, and not to nurse the illusion that they could attenuate the hostility of their opponents by pretending not to be 'Trotskyists'.

Groves records (28) that about this time the British Trotskyists received a letter from Pierre Frank, writing on behalf of the International Secretariat of the International Left Opposition, dated January 9, 1932, and comments,

"We do not appear to have established any formal relations

with that body - about which we knew little or nothing - for several months."

The British Section of the International Left Opposition was formed in Spring 1932 - 'a group of less than a dozen people', according to Groves. Its birth is certified by a laconic note in the German edition of the International Bulletin of the Left Opposition, 'Internationales Bulletin der Kommunistischen Links-Opposition', No. 14, dated March 1932:

"In England hat sich nunmehr eine fekt organisierte Gruppe der Internationalen Links-Opposition konstituiert, die sich auf den boden der Prinzipien der Internationalen Opposition bestellt hat." (29)

From January 1932 onwards tension heightened between the 'Balham Group' and the London District and national leadership of the Communist Party, despite Groves' anxiety not to force the pace. Upon the preceding, unresolved conflicts arising from the ineffectiveness of the Party two new and important specific sources of dispute were super-imposed.

The first was about the way in which Communist Party members were expected to work in relation to the trade unions. The second was about how the Party could conduct a struggle against war.

The policies of the Communist Party in relation to the reformist trade unions in the two-and-a-half years following the introduction of the 'New Line' have been fairly described in the following terms:

"Not merely was the Minority Movement in its new guise uninterested in winning 100% trade unionism, it declared the trade unions to be cracking up and on their way out, and a good thing too. Not merely did it turn away from the task of winning trade union branches for militant policies, it deliberately sought to exclude branch officers from strike committees and rank-and-file ad hoc committees of all kinds." (30)

Wilhelm Pieck was later to admit, speaking on behalf of the E.C.C.I. and the Seventh Congress of the Communist International in 1935:

"It is only with great difficulty that our British comrades, having realised their mistakes and correspondingly altered their trade union policy, are managing to regain their influence in the trade union movement." (31)

Pieck did not unfortunately, go on to show the origin of the 'mistakes' of the British comrades in the directives of Moscow.

The Fifth World Congress of the Red International of Labour Unions (32) initiated a change of policy in autumn 1931, hoping perhaps to correct those aspects of the policies of the 'Third Period' which isolated the Communist Parties without changing the policies themselves. The first effect in Britain may have been the resolutions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in December 1931, published under the title, 'Coming Strikes Struggles: The Crisis of Capitalism'. These documents employ the language which the preceding couple of years had made familiar:

"The 'Left' reformist line is to work only inside the trade unions. The line of the revolutionary opposition is to work among the unorganised as well as in the trade unions ..." (33)

The resolutions also lay down, however, with a new emphasis:

"Any tendency to neglect the work in the branches of the unions must be resolutely fought as a desertion of the fight and leaving the field open to the bureaucracy",

while it also highlights, with a quotation from the resolution of the Fifth World Congress of the R.I.L.U., that

"the re-organised Minority Movement must be a real mass organisation, based on dues-paying collective and individual membership..." (34)

In the following month, January 1932, the Central Committee produced a second document which alters the policies of the 'Third Period' in relation to trade unions with rather less equivocation than its predecessor. (35) Entitled 'Immediate Tasks before the Party and the Working Class', it contains the following injunctions, in upper case in the original:

"THE GREATEST DEFECT OF THE PARTY'S WORK DURING THE PAST FEW YEARS IS THAT IT HAS NOT CARRIED ON ANY SYSTEMATIC REVOLUTIONARY MASS WORK IN THE REFORMIST TRADE UNIONS. In spite of international resolutions (V Congress of the Red International of Labour Unions, and XI Plenum of the Communist International), not a single step has been taken so far to make the Minority Movement a really wide-spread trade union opposition ... without a determined buckling down TO THE DAILY SYSTEMATIC STRUGGLE FOR THE MASSES against the reformist trade union bureaucracy IN ALL TRADE UNION BRANCHES AND FACTORIES THE COMMUNIST PARTY CAN NEVER BECOME A REAL MASS PARTY ..." (36)

The January resolution also contains a passage which was to play an especially important part in the controversy:

"EVERY PARTY MEMBER AND ALL WORKERS WHO

SYMPATHISE WITH THE PARTY MUST BE MEMBERS OF THE REFORMIST TRADE UNIONS IN ORDER TO CARRY ON THE STRUGGLE AGAINST THE REFORMISTS AND FOR THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE TRADE UNION BRANCHES FROM ORGANS OF CLASS COLLABORATION INTO ORGANS OF CLASS STRUGGLE." (37)

The Balham Group submitted a criticism of the January resolution. (38)

"The whole line of the Party at the Leeds Congress and for some time since has been to maintain that job-organisation alone can be the unit of an 'organ of class-struggle'. That the very structure, limited scope, organisation and constitution and leadership of the unions makes them unsuitable as organs of class-struggle. That their capture is unlikely because of the bureaucracy, and that our principal work lies in the building of the workers' weapons of struggle inside the pits, factories and workshops ... We do not deny the importance of work within the unions, or that the branches can be of great value in building the job organisations, but the emphasis in the resolution is upon the unions. The dangers of such an emphasis are too well-known to need repetition here."

The tone of the Balham Group's remonstrance up to that point suggests that its authors were dumb-founded at the sleight-of-hand by which the 'line' had been changed, but were, at the same time, still thinking of themselves so far as taking part in a dialogue between honest comrades. As we shall see, they perhaps did not, therefore, make the best of their case.

Their criticism of the January resolution did not stop with the trade union question, but raised also the other question which was soon to exacerbate the relations between them and the leadership. This was the general question of the United Front and its specific application in the struggle against war. Their statement included the comment:

"... the two dominating features - the War in the Far East and the approach of political crisis in Germany - are omitted! The resolution was drafted at a time when the dangers in the Far East and the approaching crisis in Germany were clearly visible, and it should have set out the tasks of the Party in relation to both."

The reply of the Party Secretariat was in its own way a technical chef d'oeuvre.

"The resolution of our Balham Local shows very clearly that the comrades have not understood the resolution of the Central Committee. In this resolution there are no changes in the policy and line of the Party, but there are fundamental changes in the method of work and approach

and organisation whereby the policy laid down at the Leeds Congress can be successfully carried through and a mass Communist Party with its roots firmly bedded in the factories and reformist trade unions built up ... There is no change of policy on the trade union question ... work in the unions and factories is not different work in different places, but just as we have to win the workers in the factories, so we have to win them in the unions ... It would have been more helpful and instructive for the Party if the Balham Local had given us some of their experiences in carrying out revolutionary mass-work in the factories and the reformist trade unions - not mass work that is something separate from the whole line of the Party, and only concerned with local issues, but that is bound up with carrying forward of the line of the Party in relation to all the current political issues and the popularisation of the revolutionary way out of the crisis ... In the present situation of the offensive against the conditions of the workers ... to refuse to carry out revolutionary mass work in the trade unions is a criminal neglect of our duty ... Again, it would have been of value to the whole Party if our Balham comrades could have shown in their letter how far they had carried out the Central Committee resolution in fighting against war and intervention",-----

And the reply of the Secretariat went on to talk about

"this country with its powerful trade union traditions and the tremendous role and influence that is held by the trade union leaders."

The resolution of December 1931 and January 1932 constituted a great and inadequately-explained reversal of the policies previously recommended to Communist Party members and Palme Dutt commented in the following delphic terms on a discussion which had taken place in December 1931 at a 'Labour Monthly' Conference: (39)

"The trade unions are the main forms in which the working-class movement has so far developed in Britain. They represent three to four million workers, including the majority of the class-conscious workers. Without revolutionary propaganda in the trade unions, the building of a strong revolutionary trade union opposition, the winning of the large body of trade unionists, there can be no winning of the majority of the working-class for the revolution ... any revolutionary movement which fails to recognise this, more especially in a country like Britain, with a deeply entrenched trade union movement and trade union traditions, condemns itself to isolation and sterility ..."

So far, so good. However, Dutt proceeds:

"Do the trade unions provide the means of mobilising the workers for the present struggle? To say this is to be blind to obvious facts. In the first place, do the trade

unions cover all the workers? No: they only cover a section of the workers, and recent experiences show how great a part the unorganised can play in the struggles ... Do trade unions unite the workers? No: in experience after experience ... they divide the workers. Do trade unions lead the workers' struggles? No: under their present policy and leadership they act increasingly as strike-breaking organisations. Can we then set before ourselves the aim of 'winning the unions', i.e. winning control of the trade union machine ...? No... such a reformist illusion becomes a direct enemy of the fight if it is put forward as an alternative to facing the present problems of the workers' struggles and the capitalist attacks ... The isolation of a tiny revolutionary minority in new unions, without having won the masses, means only increased confusion ... The united front of the workers for struggle can only be built up at the point of struggle ... in the factories and in the workshops, on the basis of the place of work ..."

An un-dated resolution of the 'Working Bureau' of the London District of the Communist Party, (40) evidently issued at about the time of the expulsions in August 1932, justifies that action partly on the ground that:

"Comrades Wicks, Groves and Sara expressed opposition to that section of the January resolution of the C.C. which laid down the line of work in the Trade Unions as being that of fighting to transform the Trade Union branches from organs of class-collaboration into organs of class-struggle ... The attitude of the Balham Group is a barrier against the Party making a sharp turn in the trade union work ... The formal recognition of the importance of trade union work by the Balham Group is of no value while they continue their sectarian opposition to the formulation in the C.C. resolution and raise confusing issues by counterposing the importance of trade union work and activities in the factories."

The controversy is discussed by Pearce (41) who draws attention to the confusion among the Party leaders on the trade union questions, as well as to the way in which the Party apparatus got the Balham Group 'on the wrong foot' in the discussion and made their position look like a left-sectarian resistance to changes which would improve Party work and which other members would regard as necessary and welcome. (42)

So much for the background of the 'trade union' dispute. These differences might not have been enough in themselves to precipitate the expulsion of leading members. The immediate reasons why they were expelled, and, in particular, were expelled in August 1932, must perhaps be sought elsewhere.

It is true that during spring and summer 1932 the 'Balham Group' was hardening its attitude. May Day 1932 saw the appearance of the first issue of 'The Communist'. This was a well-duplicated bulletin, which was clandestinely sent through the post to selected members of the Communist Party personally. The first issue advocated that the German Communist Party should try to form a United Front with the Social-Democratic Party as a whole, and thereby place itself in the position of offering leadership to large numbers of workers who wanted to resist the advance of the Nazis. Some of the group, however, still had misgivings about sharpening the struggle against the Party leadership. Groves writes: (43)

"... a reluctant, uncertain gesture indeed, and the response to it was a loud, disconcerting silence. Not all of us were convinced of the wisdom of it ..."

An unknown writer declared, in his preface to the article on the 'United Front', which was by Trotsky:

"The Communist International is unable to gain the leadership of the world proletariat. It is, at this critical moment, unable, unready and unfit to lead the world revolution, and there is no possible alternative. The Left Opposition, led by Comrade Trotsky, is fighting to win back the Communist International to its task of leading the world revolution: the British group begins its work by the issue of this bulletin."

We do not know whose drive carried the group to this point. The publication of the 'Communist' no doubt infuriated the Party leadership, whose standing with Moscow, like that of every other functionary of a Communist Party, depended on the energy displayed in eradicating Trotskyists. However, they had difficulty in pinning down those responsible for it. Their difficulty was solved by the controversy about the United Front which the 'Communist' raised, for the question of the United Front was bound up, not only with 'Social-Fascism', but with that of the 'anti-war movement' and ultimately with that of how best to defend the Soviet Union, whether as a self-sufficient Socialist country or as an incidental gain in the World Revolution.

United 'anti-war' activity then was the second of the principled questions which divided the 'Balham Group' from the London and national leaderships of the Communist Party in summer 1932, and the controversy was to provide the occasion for the expulsion of the Group and its supporters. Like the trade union controversy, the controversy on how best to prevent

war and defend the Soviet Union raises general theoretical questions of great importance and well deserves study in some detail. Anti-war activity might well have seemed to be urgently desirable at the time. In September 1931 Japanese armies had invaded Manchuria and established strategic points in what was formally Chinese territory. (44) In February 1932 Japan set up a puppet state under the name of Manchukuo. China appealed to the League of Nations. That body appointed a Commission, headed by the Earl of Lytton which reported in the autumn of 1932 in the main unfavourably to Japan. No steps were taken, however, to discourage the Japanese aggression. Japan withdrew from the League of Nations.

There was considerable suspicion in Left circles in Britain that there had been collusion between the British 'National' Government and the Japanese militarists. They had taken advantage of the pre-occupation of the great capitalist powers with their economic crises and of the Soviet Union with the First Five-Year Plan. Many feared, in addition, that the Foreign Office had encouraged Japan to seek satisfaction at the expense of American and Chinese rather than British interests in the Far East, and that there might result a danger of war in the Far East between Britain and America, with the further possibility that Japanese troops, standing on the border of the Soviet Far Eastern Republic, might invade the Soviet Union.

The 'New Leader' and the 'Daily Worker' (45) provide reports on the 'anti-war' activities of the period. These consisted of appeals to the working-class to prevent the 'National' Government from assisting the Japanese war effort. There is no evidence that the 'Balham Group' made any special contribution to these activities before the end of July 1932. The general character of them may be judged from a resolution passed by a Conference of the Lancashire Division of the I.L.P., (46) urging that workers in every district form Councils of Action (as in 1920) to prevent Britain from being 'dragged into war' over Japanese aggression on China. (The same conference, we may note, decided by a fairly large majority against the disaffiliation of I.L.P. from the Labour Party.) There are other reports of a 'Hands Off Russia!' campaign, also based on the denial of materials of war to Japan. They strengthen the impression that the forces of the 'Balham Group' in South-West London were associating themselves, effectively no doubt,

with activities which would probably have gone on in substantially the same way without them. This conclusion would be nearly but not entirely true. The 'Balham Group' made a contribution to the 'anti-war' work in South-West London such as has not been noticed elsewhere.

The National Administrative Council of the I.L.P. issued a declaration in February 1932, (47) in which it called upon:

"All branches to take immediate action to exert all possible pressure on the Trade Unions and the Labour Party to create an effective working class demand for an embargo to be put on credit supplies and on the export of munitions and war materials in any form to Japan, and to demand that the General Council of the Trade Union Congress shall make it clear to the Government that, if an embargo is refused, the first act of war by Japan against Socialist Russia shall be met in this country by Trade Union action to stop the manufacture and despatch of munitions and war materials to Japan." (48)

These proposals are worth noting. On the one hand, they hark back to the Councils of Action of 1920 and the wide-spread agitation, which included the official leaderships of the Trade Unions and the Labour Party, against helping the Polish Government to make war on Soviet Russia; on the other hand, they are so different from those which the Communist Party was to advocate three years later, in 1935, when Italy invaded Abyssinia and the Communist Party advocated reliance on the League of Nations. In 1932 no-one seems to have asked the question which became important inside the I.L.P. in 1935:

"Having called upon the T.U.C. to apply an embargo if the Government refuses to do so, what do you do if the T.U.C. also refuses to do so, on the ground that the League of Nations will apply 'sanctions'? Do you or do you not try to organise unofficial action in the unions?"

Even before the Manchurian crisis had become serious, the 'Balham Group' had been holding joint open-air meetings in the parks of South London in collaboration with I.L.P. branches in the area. These meetings began, it appears from Groves' account, during the political crisis of autumn 1931. They called for opposition to 'economy cuts' in earnings and welfare payments, and for Socialist solutions to the crisis. (49) A local Council of Action was set up and drew support in trade union branches as well as among the unemployed. The Council of Action developed into the Joint May-Day Committee for the area in 1932.

The Clapham Branch of the I.L.P. held indoor public meetings in the New Morris Hall, in Bedford Road, Clapham. Advertisements in the 'New Leader' at this time show that V.K. Krishna Menon, Jomo Kényatta and Dr. C.K. Cullen were among the speakers, the last on 'The Inevitable Revolution'. Groves says:

"The District leadership was uneasy about our collaboration with the I.L.P. and sharply critical when we joined the I.L.P. in establishing a committee to organise the May Day demonstration." (50)

The London District leadership was possibly in a quandary. On the one hand, under pressure from Moscow to show results, they can hardly have been sorry to see the joint open-air meetings at which their literature was sold and members of other working-class parties or of no party approved of Communist Party policies. What was this but success for the policy of the 'United Front from Below'? On the other hand, little or none of it could have happened without the consent and co-operation of the I.L.P. leadership, which, together with most of its membership, was placed by the dominant theory of the 'Third Period' in the category of 'left reformists, the most dangerous enemies of the workers'.

Efforts were made in other places to arrange joint demonstrations against the government to denounce its social policies at home as well as the Japanese aggression on China and the tolerant attitude of the government to it. Such activities were not always as harmonious as those in South and South-West London. The 'New Leader' and the 'Daily Worker' both refer about this time to friction in Glasgow between Maxton and members of the Communist Party in the National Unemployed Workers' Movement. The central May Day open-air gathering in London in 1932 was also a scene of conflict. According to the 'New Leader':

"The Communist leaders' conception of a united front permitted them to accept all the very considerable services rendered by the I.L.P. and then endeavour to vilify it by a mixture of flat untruths and spiteful irrelevances. It was pleasing to observe the general resentment expressed by the audience against these tactics." (51)

The 'New Leader' made no such complaint, however, when a few weeks later (52)

"As part of the 'Hands off Russia' campaign, there was a big joint demonstration last Sunday on Clapham Common, in which the Clapham I.L.P. took a prominent part. The

speakers were drawn from both the C.P. and the I.L.P. and the demonstration attracted a large crowd."

The Clapham I.L.P. went on to call a delegate conference on July 2, 1932. It attracted seventy delegates from thirty local working-class organisations, including the 'Balham Group' of the Communist Party, and led to the foundation of the South-West London Anti-War Committee shortly afterwards. This was probably not the only such committee in London; we know that there was at least one other one, that in Hendon, which carried out propaganda against the Air Display.

The Communist Party was encouraging 'Anti-War Committees' as part of its general campaign, initiated by the Comintern, to popularise the forthcoming World Anti-War Congress, to be held in Amsterdam on August 27 - 30, 1932. Andre Marty explained in his obituary on Henri Barbusse three years later (53) how the Comintern envisaged 'anti-war' activity at this time.

"... together with Romain Rolland, he announced on 27th of May, 1932, the idea of a great international rally against war. Our party, our international supported this initiative with all their power... It was this Amsterdam movement, also, which laid the first foundations for the setting-up of the mighty People's Front in France."

Rolland wrote in Barbusse's literary journal, *Le Monde*, (June 4, 1932):

"I am wholly of the opinion that the congress should be open to all parties and non-partisans on a common basis of sincere and determined struggle against war."

The Comintern stated its official view in 'Guide to the XIIth Plenum of the E.C.C.I.': (54)

"The XIIth Plenum pointed out that, despite a series of positive achievements in anti-war work, the main weakness, common to all, consists in the Communist Parties still being unable to mobilise broad masses for concrete revolutionary acts against war. The International Day against Imperialist War, August 1, developed this year into gigantic international demonstrations, which attracted millions of participants in all the more important centres of all capitalist countries. A very significant sign of the growing anti-war mood, not only among workers and peasants, but also among certain strata of the advanced intelligentsia, is the International Anti-War Congress in Amsterdam ... Despite police repression and the drive and counter-agitation of the Second International, the Congress was held and was attended by about 2,000 delegates ... An International committee of struggle against imperialist war and for the defence of the U.S.S.R. was set up at the Amsterdam Congress. It consists of representatives of manual and mental workers and the revolutionary intelligentsia and is based on a broad united front."

The International Left Opposition and the Comintern differed sharply about this Congress. Their difference, like that between the 'Balham Group' and the leadership of the Communist Party of Great Britain on the trade union question, involved important questions of theory which would lead, in turn, to quite different courses of practical activity, and it precipitated the expulsion of the 'Balham Group' and its sympathisers from the Communist Party. Groves borrows the Comintern's own jargon to put the point at issue neatly: (55)

"Britain and the other imperialist powers were supporting Japanese aggression against Russia and China, and the workers had to take militant action against their own imperialist governments; the Social-Democrats, the Left Socialists and the Pacifists had to be exposed as the allies of the imperialists. 'Pacifism is the twin ally of the bloodiest imperialism', wrote R.P. Dutt, calling for 'neither imperialist patriotism nor pacifism, but the active mass fight for the destruction of imperialism and the victory of socialism'. ('Labour Monthly', May 1932, pp 267-8) Hardly had these words appeared in print when... a Comintern-backed campaign was launched for a spectacular world congress against war, the public appeal being made by the French pacifist, Henri Barbusse, and addressed to progressives, liberals, pacifists as well as to the working-class."

Trotsky does not seem to have made up his mind quickly about the Congress. A demonstration confined to pacifists and directed to the middle class would not call for the intervention of the Bolshevik-Leninists. His first reaction, therefore, was to denounce the proposal as a 'treacherous and pernicious masquerade', pointing out that:

"while in Germany the united front is altogether prohibited, on the international arena the united front is from the beginning given the decorative covering of a deliberately deceptive and rotten character ... With hat in hand the Soviet bureaucracy is now begging alms from the petty-bourgeois pacifists." (56a)

Some days later, however, he wrote:

"The question of the war congress undertaken on the formal initiative of Rolland and Barbusse acquires a significance more important than I thought last week for lack of sufficient information. Articles in 'Vie Ouvriere', the weekly of the C.G.T.U., leave no doubt that behind the backs of Barbusse and Rolland stands the C.I.." (56b)

The Trotskyists in France as well as Britain were trying to get into the conference in order to put their viewpoint to workers who might be there as delegates from mass-organisations controlled by the Communist Parties, such as the G.C.T.U.. Pierre Frank sent out a circular addressed 'Aux camarades de la Ligue en Province' stating:

"It is indispensable that we have at the war congress delegates other than those delegates whom we can send directly from the Ligue. We must aim at delegates from trade unions or from groups of workers." (56c)

Trotsky drafted a declaration which was distributed at the Congress, signed on behalf of twelve sections of the International Left Opposition, including the British. (57) He remarked:

"we see, on the one hand, a refusal in principle to carry through any policy of agreements, whatever they may be, with the German Social-Democracy, and, on the other hand, we witness the anti-war congress, called together through agreements with bourgeois and petty bourgeois pacifists, French Radicals, Freemasons, or with pretentious individuals of the Barbusse type, who consider it their particular mission to 'unite the Second and Third Internationals'".

Trotsky's declaration warned that such a gathering would prove futile in preventing war:

"The imperialists know in advance that the pacifism of the Social-Democracy at the first roar of the cannon will be transformed into the most servile patriotism and become the most important reserve for militarism. That is why the most intransigent struggle against pacifism, unmasking its treacherous character, is the very first step on the road toward a revolutionary struggle against war."

The first issue of 'Communist', with its emphasis on the struggle for a United Front of the Social-Democratic and Communist Parties in Germany against Nazism, had already called into question the usefulness of gatherings of the Amsterdam type and raised the central question of what the word 'unity' was supposed to mean in the practical work of Communists.

On a superficial reading the differences on the question of the united front and its special application in the struggle against war may seem unimportant and difficult to grasp, because at first sight the declarations of both sides appear not to be dissimilar. The pamphlet in English (58) which reported on the Amsterdam Congress states that each of the 2,196 delegates from 21 countries took the following 'pledge':

"We swear that we will never allow the formidable unity which has been established here among the exploited and victimised masses to be broken up. We swear to fight with all our force and with all the means at our command against imperialist war, that purveyor of the slaughter-house. We swear to dedicate ourselves with all our forces and all our resources to our immediate and pressing tasks, taking our stand:

Against armaments, against war preparations and, in

consequence, against the governments ruling us, against chauvinism, jingo national incitements and fascism, the police army of imperialism, which leads to imperialist war and provokes civil war against the working class. Against war budgets, a vote for which is a dishonour and a crime. Against the loans and taxes which rob the masses to build armaments. Against the campaign of propaganda and slander aimed at the Soviet Union, the country of socialist construction which we will not allow to be touched. Against the dismemberment of China, of which each imperialist power covets a portion. Against the exploitation, the oppression and massacre of the colonial people. For the support of the national minorities and the peoples fighting for their national and social independence. For the effective support of the Japanese workers who have raised the standard of struggle against their own imperialist government."

The position of the British Section of the International Left Opposition is embodied in a resolution carried by a meeting of the South-West London Anti-War Committee. The text here is reproduced in full from the 'Daily Worker', the sub-editor of which seems to have found the differences between it and the official viewpoint too subtle for him.

**"Militant Mandate for Delegate
Attitude Towards World Congress Defined**

At the meeting of the South-West London Anti-War Committee held last Monday (5th August), Comrade Wild of the A. E. U. was elected as delegate of the Committee for the World Anti-War Congress. The delegate was instructed to 'give full support to any resolution, group or section of congress that stand for the following points:

- (1) Unmasking of the League of Nations and its pacifist trickery, and the exposure of all capitalist disarmament proposals;
- (2) Refusal to support capitalist war budgets;
- (3) To explain that in all wars waged by the capitalists the workers should fight, not for the defence of their country, but for the defeat and overthrow of their own ruling class;
- (4) Development of an agitation among the workers for full credit and trading relations with the U. S. S. R.;
- (5) Anti-war agitation and the building of revolutionary groups in the war industries and armed forces;
- (6) Systematic education of the workers in the fact that the U. S. S. R. is their country and that the Red Army is their army, ready to do battle on behalf of the workers of any country;
- (7) At the same time, untiring explanation that the only guarantee of victory for the workers of Russia lies in the development of the world revolution.

Comrade Wild was instructed as above, only one vote being cast against and 28 for."

The tenor of this resolution, with its emphasis on the international and

class-character of the struggle for peace and for the defence of the U.S.S.R., would have been taken for granted by members of the Communist Party in the days of the First Four Congresses of the Communist International. In 1932, however, it was completely unacceptable to the leaders of the Communist Party of Great Britain, and J.R. Campbell dealt with it in the following issue but one in a long article head-lined: 'The Anti-War Congress and Its Tasks - a South-West London Resolution that is not Militant but Mischievous'. (60)

Campbell's article declares open war on the British Trotskyists, and its method represents a stage in the development of the polemical style which he made peculiarly his own in such later works as 'Soviet Policy and Its Critics', that of distorting his opponents' views by snipping bits out of their argument and quoting them out of context.

The patience of the Communist Party leadership might have been stretched to tolerate the argumentativeness of the 'Balham Group' on the trade union question and even about the United Front in Germany, but could not permit Stalinism to be attacked at its corner-stone, the theory of 'Socialism in a Single Country', even by implication. Immediately, on August 17, 1932. Groves and Wicks were expelled. Sara was suspended. The 'Balham Group' was dissolved. Sara, Purkis and Williams, another railway worker, were expelled shortly afterwards. The turn of Dewar came on September 8. The following letter, signed by R.W. Robson as London District Organiser of the Communist Party, was addressed to him: (61)

"Dear Comrade,
We have received from the Wandsworth Local Party Committee a recommendation for your expulsion from the Party on the grounds of disruptive activity, attacking the Party before non-Party workers and for engaging in fractional activity in pursuance of a political line hostile to that of the Party. The Working Bureau of the District Committee has decided unanimously to support this recommendation, and we therefore desire to formally notify you that you stand expelled from the ranks of the Party on these grounds. We would add, that if you desire to appeal against this decision, the course of action open to you is to make a written appeal to the Central Committee. Yours fraternally."

What a pity that we have no account of the proceedings of the Wandsworth Local Party Committee! It would be interesting to know what happened later to those who voted for Dewar's expulsion, and how they shaped up

to the great changes through which the Communist Party was soon to pass. He did not lodge an appeal.

Stewart Purkis later gave an independent account of one aspect of these developments: (62)

"We came together in 1930, brought together by agreement on the need for propaganda for the United Front. At that time any idea of united action by the working-class organisations was condemned throughout the Comintern. But Trotsky's case for the United Front of the Workers' organisations as the only means of stopping Hitler's rise to power so impressed us that we broke through C.P.G.B. discipline, translated and published Trotsky's 'Open Letter to a German Worker' and 'The Only Road' and circulated them amongst the party membership. For this offence we were expelled from the Party. Willie Gallacher designed this 'political epitaph' for us. It can be read in the files of the 'Daily Worker'. He declared that those who propose an agreement with social-democratic organisations were guilty of treachery to the working-class."

Challenged by Pollitt to say how far he went with the 'Communist', he replied with an 'Open Letter to Harry Pollitt', (63) in which he wrote: "All the way". He expressed his solidarity with Trotsky as the means to strengthen the Communist Party, and drew a parallel to his expulsion from the Railway Clerks' Association:

"... the R.C.A. leadership saw and condemned my action as the course which loyalty to the working-class demanded. I know that I may be condemned by you and many valued comrades for breaking rules by circulating this material on Germany. But we who do this hold that loyalty to the Party's cause is more important than keeping rules which ban vital discussion in the Party."

Purkis' reference to Gallacher in 1937 brings out the interesting point that the official attitude of the Communist Parties to Trotskyism was presented in the early 1930's in quite a different light from that of the years after Hitler's victory and especially after 1935. In 1932 the publicists of the Comintern in Britain were presenting Groves and his associates as a "Right-Wing" deviation, a deviation towards capitulation to reformism and Social-Democracy. Later, however, Trotskyists have been equated with ultra-leftism, in a literature of which the work of Mrs. Betty Reid is a fair sample, while the "unity" advances of the Communist Parties have been directed towards Social-Democracy and bourgeois parties.

What Trotsky was writing at the time about the Labour Party and its

future stands up better today than the views which the Communist Party was freely expressing to the effect that the Labour Party was permanently discredited. In a survey of the impact of the crisis in different countries, written about May 1932, he wrote: (64)

"The situation in Britain can likewise be termed, with a certain degree of justification, pre-revolutionary, provided that it is strictly agreed that a period covering several years of partial ebbs and tides can elapse between a pre-revolutionary and a directly revolutionary situation. The economic situation in Britain has become extremely acute. Still, the political super-structure of this arch-conservative country lags extraordinarily behind the changes in the economic base. Before resorting to new political forms and methods, all the classes of the British nation are attempting, time and time again, to ransack the old store-rooms, to turn the old clothes of their grandfathers and their grandmothers inside out. The fact remains that, despite the dreadful national decline, there does not exist in Britain as yet either a revolutionary party of any significance or its antipode - a fascist party. Thanks to these circumstances, the bourgeoisie has had the opportunity to mobilise the majority of the people under the 'national' banner, that is, under the most hollow of all possible slogans. In the pre-revolutionary situation, the most obtuse conservatism has acquired tremendous political predominance. It will in all probability take more than a month, perhaps more than a year, for the political super-structure to become adapted to the real economic and international situation of the country."

"There is no ground for assuming that the collapse of the 'national bloc' - and such a collapse is inevitable in the relatively near future - will lead directly either to the proletarian revolution (it is a matter of course that there can be no other revolution in Britain) or to the triumph of 'fascism'. On the contrary, it may be assumed with much greater probability that on her path to the revolutionary solution, Britain will go through a lengthy period of radical-democratic and social-pacifist demagogy of Lloyd-George-ism and of Labourism. There can therefore be no doubt that Britain's historical development will grant British Communism ample time to transform itself into the genuine party of the proletariat at the moment it will be confronted with the solution. From this, however, it does not at all follow that we can afford losing time with disastrous experiments and centrist zig-zags. In the present world situation, time is the most precious of raw materials."

The 'Balham Group' was collaborating with the local branches of the I.L.P. in South London during the autumn of 1931 and the spring and summer of 1932 in open-air propaganda and there is nothing in the 'Daily Worker' to suggest that these activities were ill-regarded by the Communist Party leaders. (65)

- (1) This chapter investigates the political considerations which led to the formation of the first Trotskyist organisation in Britain, the British section of the International Left Opposition, and the political problems with which its founders tried to deal.

The materials are not yet available for a thorough account of the first contacts between the Communists and their sympathisers who were critical of the Communist International in this period, with Trotsky and his supporters in France and U.S.A. Much new light will probably be shed on the international contacts which preceded the formation of the British section of the International Left Opposition, when the "closed" section of the Trotsky archives is opened in 1980.

A few incidents in the 1920's may be noticed here, as it were anticipations of Trotskyism, in the sense that they reveal members of the Communist Party either hesitating to follow the line dictated by the Party apparatus in support of Stalin against Trotsky, or divided on such questions. These incidents are of no more than peripheral interest because they did not result in any systematic body of ideas or in any effective organised activity.

MacFarlane and Wicks have both mentioned a meeting of the enlarged Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain in January 1925, which endorsed the decision of the Executive Committee of the Communist International to condemn Trotsky for the publication of his book, "The Lessons of October". (See MacFarlane, "History of the British Communist Party", pp 140-141 and Wicks in "International", Vol. I, No. 4, p. 26).

The London District Committee of the Communist Party questioned the decision of the enlarged Executive. At an aggregate meeting of Party members in the London District, Rothstein and Murphy moved that the decision of the enlarged Executive be endorsed. Murphy called Trotsky's book, "an open attack on the present leadership of the E.C.C.I.". A.E.R. Reade, a member of the London District Committee, moved an amendment to the Rothstein-Murphy proposal:

"This meeting of the London District membership joins with the London District Committee in regretting the hasty vote of the Party Council in condemning Comrade Trotsky without full information; and the meeting at the same time takes the opportunity to express the London membership's emphatic support, both of the left-wing minority's fight in the Russian Party against bureaucracy, and equally of the Comintern's struggle against right-wing divergences from Leninism in the French, Bulgarian and German sections".

The amendment was heavily defeated, but at one stage of the debate a motion to adjourn for further information about Trotsky's case received 65 votes against 81.

A.E.R. Reade had already published in "Labour Monthly" a sympathetic review of Albert Rhys Williams' book, "Through the Russian Revolution" ("Labour Monthly", June 1923, p. 381). He also wrote a piece of dramatic criticism for the June 1925 issue

(p.369), entitled "Idealism versus History", in which he drew a comparison between Shaw's "Saint Joan" and Toller's "Masses and Man". He suggested that in both plays the woman is the heroine of an epic struggle and that, in both, her fate is to be dutifully executed by quite polite state officials. He concludes that the failure of idealism, even though it is directed against the state, to satisfy the historic need of the masses, "is a fact to be faced and not a problem to be solved". Several of Trotsky's books, and especially "Where is Britain Going?", aroused a good deal of discussion in Britain in the mid-1920's. Palme Dutt published an enthusiastic appreciation of it, in which he caustically reviewed its bourgeois and reformist reviewers ("Labour Monthly", April 1926, p.223.) In "Trotsky on Britain", translated and edited by R. Chappell and published by New Park Publications, there are included reviews by such writers as Bertrand Russell.

Groves has suggested that Dutt published Trotsky's work in 1926, apparently indifferent to the attacks to which the Joint Opposition was already being subjected in Soviet Russia, because he felt that he needed Trotsky's arguments against the Right-ist tendencies in the leadership of the Communist Party of Great Britain at the time ("Red Flag", Vol.1, No.10, August 1934: "Fascism, Labour and the Communist Party", a review of Dutt's "Fascism and Social Revolution", and "The Balham Group", p.14).

The struggle of the bloc of the Stalinist and Bukharinist factions against the Joint Opposition of Zinoviev and Trotsky was of decisive importance to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, but had hardly any reflection at the time in the Communist Party of Great Britain or its periphery. There were sweeping changes in the cadre of the Russian, Chinese, German and French Parties, but the British Party leadership was far more stable. There is in "International Press Correspondence", 1927, No.57, dated October 13, 1927, a short note date-lined "Moscow, October 6": "The Secretariat of the E.C. of the C.I. has received a telegram from the Sheffield District Conference of the C.P.G.B. unanimously approving of the disciplinary measures taken against the leaders of the Opposition, and demanding that speedy organisational measures be taken against the Opposition, in particular against Comrades Trotsky and Zinoviev, in order to further the struggle against the danger of war and to assist the work of Socialist construction in the Soviet Union".

Margaret McCarthy, "Generation in Revolt", p.122, says that at the 5th Congress of the Young Communist League at Bethnal Green Town Hall, on March 31, 1928: "The Stepney Y.C.L. delegates showed themselves absolutely in line with the Trotskyist Opposition in Russia, China, Germany and elsewhere in their condemnation of the Russian Trade Unions for not having withdrawn from the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Unity Committee immediately on the collapse of the General Strike. They also castigated the Comintern for its insistence on the Chinese Communist Party's disastrous and tragic alliance with the Kuomintang which had permitted Chiang Kai Shek to choke in blood the flower of the Chinese working-class movement."

At the Ninth Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist

International, which was held in Moscow on February 9 to 25, 1928, Rust reported, as delegate from the Young Communist League in England:

"We have no supporters of the Trotskyist Opposition in the ranks of the British Party and I think that it is sufficient to make here a brief declaration that we completely agree with and support the characterisation made by Comrade Bukharin yesterday of the counter-revolutionary activities of the Trotskyist Opposition.

The Central Committee of the Party and the last National Congress unanimously denounced the counter-revolutionary activities of Trotsky and even many of the representatives at this Congress expressed the view that the action taken against Trotsky had not been of a sufficiently drastic character.

From where does the support for Trotsky come? It comes from the leadership of the Independent Labour Party, particularly from the worst renegades from the Communist Party of the character of Postgate and Price who have been shedding tears over the fate of Trotsky because he has been exiled. They say that it is necessary to struggle against bureaucracy to imitate the method of the British bourgeoisie. They want to have the two Party system (Liberal and Tory Parties) as in England. And on similar lines there should be in the Soviet Union one party in office and one party in opposition. But in the ranks of the working class, in the ranks of the active conscious sections of the workers there is no support for these ideas.

Everybody knows the sympathy which exists in the minds of the British workers towards the Russian workers and peasants. And this sympathy exists, despite all the activities of Trotsky and the renegades in Great Britain - this sympathy is growing and developing. The great support amongst the conscious workers for the newly-formed Friends of Soviet Russia is an example of this sympathy which exists in the minds of the workers in Great Britain.

The Communist Party of Great Britain, small though it be, has tremendous responsibilities to carry in connection with this struggle against the Trotskyist Opposition, particularly because of the fact that the Baldwin Government stands at the head of the anti-Soviet bloc. The Communist Party of Great Britain is of the opinion that this ideological struggle against Trotskyism must be carried out in a very strong manner and essentially internationally co-ordinated."

The sources are: "International Press Correspondence" Vol. VIII, No. 10, dated February 25, 1928, and De Gras, "Documents of the Communist International", Vol. II, p. 423ff.

There is also evidence of another revolt like that in 1925, to be found in "Communist Review", October 1929. The Central Committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain on that occasion submitted to an aggregate meeting of the members in London, on July 20, 1929, a draft resolution for the special conference of

the Party which was to be held at Leeds at the end of November 1929. The draft contains a reference to the removal from the E.C.C.I. of Bukharin, which, coming so soon after the Sixth Congress at which he had been the President and at which he had played a leading role, in alliance with Stalin, in hounding the Trotsky-Zinoviev Opposition, had stimulated some members of the Party to ask what was really going on. The draft reads: "We completely endorse the measures which have been taken by the E.C.C.I. on the struggles against Right-Wingers and Conciliationists in its own ranks and in the parties." The London aggregate resisted this formulation, declaring that the draft pre-supposed that the Party as a whole had a fair knowledge of the inner-Party situation of the sections. "This information the Party has not got, and for the Party to understand this statement, it must have in its possession more complete information." An important source of political help to the people in the Communist Party and the Marxian League was provided by the "Militant", the organ, usually published weekly, of the Communist League of America, the Trotskyist organisation which Cannon, Shachtman and Abern set up in U.S.A. after being expelled in autumn 1928 from the Communist Party of U.S.A., following their publication in English of documents submitted by Trotsky to the Sixth Congress of the Communist-International. There is a file of the "Militant" on microfilm at Colindale. The circumstances in which Cannon and the other two came to read the document which Trotsky managed to get into the Congress from his exile in Alma Ata after being expelled from the C.P.S.U. are described in the introduction (written by Shachtman) to "The Third International after Lenin", by Trotsky, and in Cannon's "History of American Trotskyism". We do not know just how many copies reached Britain but it cannot have been more than a few dozen. Groves tells how he first bought the paper at Henderson's book-shop, the so-called "Bomb Shop" in Charing Cross Road. Jay Lovestone's "Revolutionary Age" was also on sale there, but Groves says that he thought the "Militant" "a more interesting publication", though he has not recorded his reasons for preferring it in greater detail. Short political biographies of Dewar, Groves, Purkis, Sara and Wicks are in the Appendix to this chapter.

(2) G. Allen Hutt: "Post-War History of the British Working-Class", Left Book Club ed. p.193.

(3) Groves, "The Balham Group", p.19.

L.J. Macfarlane quotes (in "The British Communist Party", p.308):

"The district party conferences showed that the party members were more prepared for a change in the line than was the central committee before and during the Ninth Plenum of the E.C.C.I.". The sentence comes from the "Closed Letter to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain from the Presidium of the E.C.C.I."

(4) Groves says in several places that opposition to aspects of the policy of the Communist Party grew out of party work and experience. (See early pages of "The Balham Group"). Wicks says, in more general terms: "Like the Bolsheviki-Leninists in

the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the Opposition developed out of a struggle within the Communist Party".

There is, however, another aspect of the Trotskyist movement in Britain, in which it differs from that in certain other countries, notably U.S.A., Germany and China, and Groves and Wicks do not mention this. In Britain the leading participants in the struggles of 1931 and 1932 against the Party leadership included hardly anyone whose mature experience went back before the opening of the "Third Period" in 1928. The struggle of the Opposition in the Communist International in the years 1924 to 1927 found little or no reflection in the Party in Britain. Wicks took part in the General Strike as a young railwayman, but he was away in Moscow at the Lenin School from 1927 to 1930, and we have no report of any "oppositional" activities by him before 1927; indeed, he would hardly have been offered to chance to study in Moscow if there had been any. George Weston had Comintern experience before 1928, but he did not play an important role in 1931 and 1932 and all that the author has been able to find out about him has been that he was at one time, perhaps in the mid-1920's, a Comintern courier and that he appeared in the fused R. S. L. in autumn 1938.

Consequently the opponents of the Party leadership during the "Third Period" had little opportunity to learn about the period which preceded it, that of the Anglo-Russian Joint Trade Union Committee, of the admission of the Kuomintang into the Communist International, of the rise of the Stalin-Bukharin faction into the leadership of the organisation and of the struggle against the "Joint" Opposition of Trotsky and Zinoviev in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which ended with their expulsion in December 1927.

- (5) "Labour Monthly", January 1929, p.47, "Chartism and the Present Day", by Groves.
- (6) "Labour Monthly", April 1929, p.240, "Class Leadership and the Chartist Movement", by Groves.
- (7) "Labour Monthly", November 1929, p.678, "The Brighton Labour Party Conference", by Groves.
- (8) "Labour Monthly", April 1929, p.229, "A Side-Light on Mondism", by Purkis.
- (9) "Labour Monthly", October 1929, p.592, "Rail-Workers and the Revolutionary Struggle", by Purkis, who also wrote, in the same vein, "Danger Ahead: Some Arguments on the Railway Position", in "Labour Monthly", November 1930, p.663.
- (10) Pearce: "Some Rank and File Movements", reprinted in "Essays on the History of Communism in Britain", Woodhouse and Pearce, p.125. See also "Communist International", 1934, p.727, "The U.S.S.R. and the League of Nations":

"The Party was still unable to win decisive sections of the reformist workers, we were still unable to convincingly prove that there was an alternative both to the

National Government and the propaganda for a Third Labour Government. This fact was brought out in an alarming manner by the General Election results of 1931. The National Government swept the country, the Labour vote declined very heavily, but the Communist vote remained stagnant".

- (11) "Labour Monthly", May 1931, "The Workers' Charter Convention", by John A. Mahon, p.283. The problems which the campaign for this meeting presented to the organisers and members of the Communist Party deserve a study which they have not yet received, but which is outside the scope of the present work. The leadership of the Communist Party does not seem to have been clear whether it was trying to present the full programme of the Party or to rally support for a limited programme of specific demands: it may have felt the dilemma that a campaign for limited, immediate demands might attract support, but that at the same time they might be criticised for "concealing the face of the party" if they did not widen their list of demands to the point that it became their full programme. The dilemma is discussed generally in the Thesis on Tactics of the Third Congress of the Communist International in 1921, and in the Thesis on the Unity of the Proletarian Front of the Fourth Congress in 1922, where the concept of transitional demands is evolved. There is no sign that the leaders of the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1931 knew anything of these documents. The problem of the relation between "minimum" and "maximum" programme forms the theme of the document of the Founding Congress of the Fourth International in 1938, "The Death-Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International", popularly known as "The Transitional Programme", drafted by Trotsky.
- (12) "Documents of the Fourth International", Pathfinder Press, New York, 1973, p.7:

"By 1930 the Left Opposition groups in a number of countries had advanced to the point where they felt the need to co-ordinate their activities in a better, more organised form. On April 6, 1930, representatives of the French, United States, German, Belgian, Spanish, Italian, Czechoslovak and Hungarian Oppositions, and of a Jewish oppositional group in France, met in Paris and decided to establish the International Left Opposition as a faction of the Comintern. Their main action was to elect a Provisional International Secretariat, which was instructed to begin publishing an International Bulletin through which the various sections could exchange information and debate questions, thus preparing the way for the holding of an international conference as soon as possible. The Russian, Chinese, Austrian, Mexican, Argentine and Greek Oppositions, which were not able to attend the Paris meeting, endorsed the steps taken."

There is a contemporary source of information about the formation of the International Left Opposition in the first issue of the "Bulletin International de l'Opposition Communiste de Gauche",

which is in the possession of the Bibliotheque de Documenta-
tion International Contemporaine, Universites de Paris,
Nanterre. The document, which is printed and bears the date
"in about 1930", lists seventeen organisations as supporting the
Conference (meeting) of April 1930.

Trotsky's letter: "A Letter to the National Sections", dated
December 22, 1931, does not mention a British Section (See
"Writings: 1930-31", p.365).

- (13) Groves, "The Balham Group", p.48-49.
- (14) An English version of the minutes of a meeting of the International Secretariat of the International Left Opposition on March 31, 1931, contains a summary of Naville's verbal report. The original is in the papers of the late James P. Cannon in the Library of Social History in New York, and a photo-copy has been supplied by Mr. George Breitman of Pathfinder Press, New York.
- (15) The advertisements of the meetings of the Marxist (or "Marxian") League invited people to come to premises at 12 Archer Street, Soho, London, W.1. Dewar says that meetings were held also in Carnaby Street nearby, but no other evidence of these has yet come to hand. The address in Archer Street has its niche in Labour History. The premises were rented by the Transport & General Workers' Union. They had originally been leased to the Workers' Union, and following the absorption of the Workers' Union by the Transport and General Workers' Union in 1929, they were used to house the officials who serviced the union's members in catering and entertainment who worked in the West End of London. Rooms were used during the day-time by dancers for rehearsals and for some years, according to the Post Office Directory, there was a club and a cafe there. The Westminster City Council rating records confirm that for all of 1930 and 1931 the occupier was Charles Duncan, on behalf of the Transport & General Workers' Union; they describe the premises as "club house and premises" and the club was called the 1930 Labour Club at the time. The club folded up and left in August 1932 and the connection of the union with the place ceased when their lease expired at the end of September 1932.

Charles Duncan was in his time an important figure in the Trade Union and Labour Movement. He was the first President of the Workers' Union, later became its General Secretary, and was absorbed into the staff of the Transport and General Workers' Union at the merger. He won Barrow-in-Furness as a Labour candidate sponsored by the Associated Society of Engineers in the General Election of 1906 and held the seat until the General Election of 1918. In 1922 he got back into Parliament as Labour M.P. for Clay Cross. His death in 1933 is reported in the Report of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party for that year and he was followed as M.P. for Clay Cross by Arthur Henderson. I am grateful to the librarian of the Transport & General Workers' Union, Mr. A.G. Willis, who provided much of the detail about 12 Archer Street in a letter to the writer dated August 20, 1974. There is an advertisement in "New Leader", June 3, 1932, for a meeting called by the Friends of the Soviet Union at the 1930 Labour Club, to discuss "the defence of the workers' fatherland".

- (16) For a political biography of F. A. Ridley, see Appendix, Document F. There is information about Bonar Thompson in a review of his autobiography, "Hyde Park Orator" in "New Leader", April 6, 1934, signed with the initials "R.M.F." (doubtless R.M. Fox), which described the book as:

"Mr. Bonar Thompson's Odyssey. • He tells of his early days in Antrim, of bleak Calvinism and rough field work. At fourteen he went to Manchester and got work as a greaser on the railway. The turning-point in his career came when he took part in the venture of breaking plate-glass windows in the principal shopping street to call attention to the plight of the unemployed. For this he was given a year in prison. After his imprisonment Thompson became a rebel orator. He was well known in London as a Socialist speaker and took part in the anti-war struggle, going to prison in the conscription days. Thompson writes well - as he speaks - and there are many passages of beauty and feeling in his book. In his later years, however, he has developed a grouch against the Labour Movement. A sensitive vagabond, kicking about like a piece of orange peel in the gutter, Thompson has blamed the Labour Movement for his plight - an attitude which, as Sean O'Casey indicates in the preface, is all wrong. However, if due allowance is made for all this, the reader will find Bonar Thompson's book a moving and human story."

Bonar Thompson was a well-known speaker in Hyde Park in the early and middle 1930's, living, according to rumour, on his collections. He was known as "the man in the black hat."

- (17) The English version of the minutes says that the meeting of October 13, 1931 was attended by "Glotzer of the American League", and Aggravall of the Marxian League "in London", and that the reports by Aggravall and the comments on them by Glotzer, which were originally in English and accompanied the English text of the minutes, were attached to the original French text. Glotzer was expelled from the Communist Party of U.S.A. towards the end of 1928. He left the S.W.P. with Shachtman in 1940. No information has been obtained about "Aggravall".
- (18) This view appears to anticipate that developed in the Fourth International during the 1950's about "epicentres" of the world revolution.
- (19) "Writings: 1930-31", p.337, "Tasks of the Left Opposition in Britain and India", dated November 7, 1931. The document by Ridley and Ram has not come to light.
- (20) See Appendix for the full texts of the minutes of the meeting of the International Secretariat on March 31 and October 13, 1931. of Glotzer's letter to Trotsky of December 26, 1931 and of "Communism or Chaos".
- (21) For political biographies of Beech and Tanner, see Appendix.
- (22) "Writings: 1930-31", in a note on page 430.

- (23) This information is derived from an undated private letter received by the writer from Hugo Dewar in 1977.
- (24) For biography of Worrall, see Appendix.
- (25) Extract from a personal letter to the writer from Mr. Yamanishi dated May 27, 1977.
- (26) Groves, "The Balham Group", p.49, and Wicks, "International", Vol.I, No.4, 1970.
- (27) "Writings: 1930-31", "The British Elections and the Communists", p.344.
- (28) Groves, op. cit., p.49.
- (29) At the Bibliotheque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine, Universites de Paris, Nanterre, where early documents of the Trotskyist movement collected by Pierre Frank are deposited.
- (30) Pearce, op. cit., p.123.
- (31) "International Press Correspondence", Vol. XV, August 15, 1935 reports verbatim the speech by Pieck: the quoted extract is on p.898.
- (32) On the Red International of Labour Unions, see E.H. Carr, "The Bolshevik Revolution", Vol.III, pp.395-396 and 454-456.
- (33) Central Committee Resolution, p.3, in the pamphlet issued by the C.P.G.B. The resolution was accepted in December 1931.
- (34) *ibid.*, p.8.
- (35) Resolution of the Central Committee, January 1932 (pamphlet). In "Communist International", 1934, p.175, William Rust wrote that the January 1932 resolution was drawn up by the Central Committee "under the guidance of the E.C.C.I."
- (36) *ibid.*, p.7.
- (37) *ibid.*, p.9 L.J. Macfarlane, in "The British Communist Party", deals with the conflicting ways in which the general "turn" to the "Third Period" was interpreted in the Communist Party of Great Britain in relation to trade union work (Ch.XI and especially pp.247-249). He sums up the position of the Party in autumn 1929 thus: "The Communist Party's industrial policy had now taken the form of an anti-trade union policy." There is contemporary evidence in the article by J.A. Mahon, "Revolutionary Work in the Trade Unions", in "Labour Monthly", June 1929. Writing on behalf of the Party leadership, Mahon discusses the application of the new general line of the "Third Period" to the Minority Movement, and sums up the conclusions to be drawn from the Ninth Plenum of the E.C.C.I. as follows:

"... the reformist leadership of the official Labour movement definitely and irrevocably became part of the state apparatus, consolidated itself into an

organised and disciplined party and set to work to ... begin to transform the trade unions into organisations indistinguishable from company unions. These developments made it essential for a revolutionary party to openly challenge the reformist leadership and go straight to the masses, proclaiming itself the only revolutionary leadership and leading the masses against both capitalism and reformism".

Mahon did not state unequivocally that Communists should not be members of trade unions led by reformists, but he raised the question:

"Is it any longer a revolutionary tactic to try to lead the masses who are looking for a militant trade unionism into the organisational channels of those unions which are already committed definitely to Mondism, led by bureaucrats entrenched against all possible attacks, exercising a dictatorship over the lower organs of the unions, in fact governing the members by fascist methods?"

Brian Pearce wrote in "Past Rank and File Movements" (reprinted in Pearce and Woodhouse, "Essays in the History of British Communism"):

"Not merely did it (the Minority Movement) turn away from the task of winning trade union branches for militant policies, it deliberately sought to exclude branch officials from strike committees and rank and file ad hoc committees of all kinds. Special "red" trade unions were created and then launched by their communist leaders into 'prestige' strikes, the need for which was not understood by the members (though these affairs looked impressive in the periodical reports to Moscow) ..."

Pearce recommended as additional reading, in the original publication of "Past Rank and File Movements", in "Labour Review", April-May 1959, his own pamphlet, "The Communist Party and the Labour Left, 1925-1929", a "Reasoner" publication published under the nom-du-guerre J. Redman. Perhaps the articles by Purkis mentioned above were efforts to make some practical sense of the policies which a worker-member of the Communist Party was supposed to try to put into effect.

- (38) "Daily Worker", April 14, 1932.
- (39) "Labour Monthly", February 1932, p.76.
- (40) "Resolution on the Standpoint and Activities of the Balham Group", in the archives of the Workers' Revolutionary Party (Britain).

Rusts's report on the XIIth Congress of the Communist Party of Great Britain, in "International Press Correspondence", Vol. XII, November 24, 1932, p.1125, lays great emphasis on the need to overcome "sectarianism", and quotes from the resolution of the conference on trade union work:

"The greatest defect of the Communist Party's work

during the last few years is that it has not carried out any systematic revolutionary mass work in reformist trade unions and has not developed the discontent of the trade union masses into an organised union opposition."

The XIIth Congress of the Communist Party of Great Britain was held in London from November 12-15, 1932. Before the XIIIth Congress, which was held at Manchester at the beginning of February 1935, Willie Gallacher wrote in "International Press Correspondence", Vol. XIV, December 22, 1934, p.1726:

"We overcame this sectarianism and a considerable improvement in our trade union work followed from it."

- (41) Pearce, op.cit., p.126-7.
- (42) See "Daily Worker", April 14, May 27, June 10, September 14, 19 and 20, 1932, for contributions to the trade union discussion.
- (43) Groves, op.cit., p.58.
- (44) "Writings: 1930-31", "On the Japanese Invasion of Manchuria", p.356.
- (45) For one example, see "New Leader", May 27, 1932, on the "Hands Off Russia" campaign.
- (46) "New Leader", February 5, 1932.
- (47) "New Leader", April 22, 1932.
- (48) "New Leader", April 29, 1932 and, for a fuller report, "New Leader", May 13, 1932.
- (49) Groves, op.cit., pp.40-1.
- (50) ibid., p.61, where a footnote states that this information is based on unpublished minutes of the "Balham Group".
- (51) "New Leader", May 6, 1932. The article is attributed to C.A. Smith, a Scottish intellectual and schoolmaster, who was a leading member of the London and Southern Counties Division of the I.L.P. in the 1930's.
- (52) "New Leader", June 17, 1932.
- (53) "Labour Monthly", December 1935, p.750. See Appendix, Document F.
- (54) "Guide to the XIIth Plenum", publ. Modern Books Ltd., p.87.
- (55) Groves, op. cit., p.62.
- (56) (a) "Writings: 1932", "The Coming Congress Against War", p.113.
(b) Trotsky's letter, dated June 20, 1932, is in the Mougeot archive in the Musee Sociale, rue Las Cases, Paris, VIIme.

(c) The Frank circular, dated June 26, 1932, is also in the Mougeot archive.

- (57) "Declaration to the Anti-War Congress at Amsterdam", in "Writings: 1932", p.148, dated July 25, 1932.
- (58) Reproduced in "The British Anti-War Movement", a pamphlet dated 1933 and attributed to John Strachey.
- (59) "Daily Worker", August 13, 1932.
- (60) "Daily Worker", August 16, 1932.
This study is not directly concerned with the internal life of the Communist Party, but it is relevant to note that, at a specially convened aggregate meeting of its members in London on July 20, 1932, one of the several contentious questions was the state of affairs in Germany. The "Communist" and the ideas of the "Balham Group" may not have been known to a large number of the members, but Campbell may have taken warning from opinions expressed by some who were uneasy about the Party's policy and had nothing to do with the "Balham Group", and have decided to remove a possible centre of disaffection, at the same time re-assuring the Kremlin that the British Party was not "soft" on Trotskyism and that it was not going to allow awkward questions to be raised at Amsterdam.
- (61) From the archives of the Workers' Revolutionary Party. Dewar recalls that Springhall came to a meeting of the Tooting "local" of the Communist Party to denounce him and that David Kapper and his wife, Nan Macmillan, were among those present.
- (62) "Red Flag", new series, No.5, January 1937.
- (63) Reproduced in Groves, op.cit., p.86.
- (64) Trotsky: "Germany: The Key to the International Situation", in "The Struggle Against German Fascism", Pathfinder Press, New York, p.116. See also "Daily Worker", July 16, 17, 22 and 25, 1932, for examples of reports on joint activities between the Communist Party and the I.L.P. For example, "Daily Worker", July 17 reports four open-air meetings in South London, addressed by speakers from Trade Unions, Labour Party branches, and the Communist Party, which was represented by Saklatvala, the former M.P. for Battersea, by Groves and by Purkis. The terms of the resolution which was put to these meetings included the formulation that "... a victory for the Nazis in Germany would intensify the war situation", an expression more characteristic of the Left Opposition than of the "official" line of the Comintern at the time.

Favourable as these reports are, they cannot be taken to suggest that the leadership of the Communist Party was favourably regarding the "Balham Group" which was playing an important part in them. There has survived in the Sara-Maitland papers a copy of a letter which Groves wrote to the Secretariat of the London District of the Party on June 13, 1932. The letter of the Secretariat to which it is a reply is

not available, but Groves' reply reads as if he were being engaged in correspondence in the expectation that sooner or later he would let fall something which could justify action being taken against him, as if the leadership had already made up their minds that he and his associates must be either suppressed or expelled. The expulsions followed so quickly after the resolution of the South-West London Anti-War Committee as to suggest that the leadership was ready to take advantage of whatever pretext offered itself.

