

THE BRITISH COMMUNIST MOVEMENT AND MOSCOW:

HOW THE DEMISE OF THE SOVIET UNION AFFECTED THE COMMUNIST PARTY AND ITS SUCCESSOR ORGANISATIONS



MIKE MOSBACHER



ABSTRACT

In this paper, the impact upon the British Communist Party and its successor organisations of the demise of the Soviet Union is explained. It first places these parties in their wider political environment. Then it looks at the historical relation, including the financial one, of the Communist Party to the Soviet Union. Conflicts within the Party as to attitudes toward the Soviet Union are examined, as are the tensions which led to the various breakaways. The process of the Party's dissolution, and the role the events in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe of 1989 and 1991 played within it, are examined. The differing analyses of the collapse of communism by the various groups is discussed, as are the recent organisational changes within the communist movement. The paper finishes by pointing out the four basic types of response to the demise of the Soviet Union, which have been evident within the Moscow-aligned communist movement.

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1 Introduction

The Soviet Union and its demise have had a massive impact upon the left in Britain, indeed upon the left worldwide. The Bolshevik seizure of power in 1917 has been seen by many as the start of a new dawn — the start of an age of enlightenment and progress leading to an eventual world wide liberation. A state had for the first time proclaimed itself to be against what the left perceived the old order to be, namely the exploitation of the broad mass — who were forced to live in misery, squalour and grinding poverty — by a small privileged elite who owed their superior position to the very destitution of the rest of society. Thus the Soviet Union in its early days was perceived by much of the left to hold the key to the future (Hobsbawm, 1995). Over time, of course, many differing attitudes emerged within the left towards the Soviet Union. These ranged from total support to outright hostility.

A further impact of the Bolshevik revolution was to crystallise and strengthen the divide between the revolutionary left and the reformist left, or between the Marxist left and those coming from other traditions within the left. While individuals from the non-Marxist left have on occasions been very supportive of the Soviet Union — indeed more so than some revolutionary Marxists, the Webbs are a case in point — they did not define themselves in terms of their attitude towards the Soviet Union. The groups on the revolutionary Marxist left, on the other hand, to a very large extent differentiated and defined themselves from one another according to their attitude to the Soviet Union. Other factors were of course also important, but this was in my view the most significant. The amount of material on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in their literature bears this out. The collapse of the Soviet Union has thus totally altered the environment in which the revolutionary left in Britain has been acting. For them there was not only the problem of coming to terms with the shaking of faith in, indeed discrediting of, socialism apparent in society at large, but also the more specific need to re-evaluate or at the very least restate their analyses of the nature of the Soviet Union. This is true of the groups most critical of the Soviet Union as well as those most slavishly supportive of it.

The purpose of this paper, then, is to look at the attitude of the Communist Party and its successor organisations toward the Soviet Union and how it has changed, or for that matter remained constant, since the events of 1989 and 1991. I will also look at the structural changes that have occurred due to these developments. To understand these developments and to put them into context I will discuss the nature of the various successor organisations more generally as well.

The British revolutionary left is divided into a plethora of organisations, varying massively in size and level of activity. It would thus be very easy for a work such as this to become incomprehensible to someone not *au fait* with the minutiae of the factionalism of the Marxist left in Britain. In order to avoid

this and to keep this paper both manageable and I hope readable I have concentrated entirely upon the Communist Party itself and the significant organisations which have come directly out of it at some stage

The groups which originate from this Moscow-line communist tradition in my view fall into two broad categories.

The first and by far the more important of these consists of the Communist Party itself and its direct successor organisations. These organisations were those most effected by the collapse of the Soviet Union, since they were closest to it. The Communist Party was obviously the major pro-Moscow grouping within the United Kingdom, and had instant name recognition from virtually everyone even remotely interested in politics. Considering this, it was a surprisingly small organisation, especially towards the end. It had declined massively both in terms of influence and membership. The latter had fallen from a peak of 56,000 just after the second world war to 6,000 in 1990 (Bamberg in *International Socialism* 49, 1990). This fell further to 4,600 at the time of the Party's dissolution at the end of 1991. Even this figure is something of an exaggeration as only twenty percent of members were paying their dues by this stage (interview with Nina Temple, 1995). Having said that, the Party retained a significant mystique right up to the end. This explains why its formal dissolution in 1991 was seen as an important event by much of the left. I will look at the role of attitudes toward Moscow historically in some detail, in order to put the recent death agonies of the Communist Party, and the views about the Soviet Union of its successor organisations, into context.

In this category of the Communist Party and its successor organisations I include not only the Democratic Left and the other groups which emerged directly out of the party's membership after its dissolution, but also the Communist Party of Britain and the New Communist Party. The Communist Party of Britain was founded in 1988 by members who had left or who had been expelled from the main Communist Party. This organisation sees itself, however, as being very much in the tradition of, indeed the continuance of, the old Communist Party. The inclusion of the New Communist Party in this category is more debatable. This party broke away from the main Communist Party back in 1977 and has much in common today with the pro-Stalin 'anti-revisionist' organisations of the next category. Historically, however, this party has been far more involved in the communist mainstream than the organisations of 'anti-revisionism'. Indeed the New Communist Party has played a major role in the debate within the communist movement in general, as well as in the debate and conflict on attitudes toward the Soviet Union specifically. The party's outright and open embracement of Joseph Stalin and all he stood for is of recent vintage. For these reasons I feel that this party still belongs within this category.

The second category of organisation which came out of the Communist Party are the so-called 'anti-revisionist' groups. In this category there are a number of now very small and insignificant outfits, who believe that the communist system was derailed with Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and who thus seek a return to orthodox Stalinism. These groups for the most part, although not exclusively, originated out of splits from the main Communist Party in the 1960s and early 1970s, the first breakaway being Michael McCreery's 'Committee to Defeat Revisionism, For Communist Unity' founded in 1963. At this stage they were fairly significant in that they reflected the split in the world communist movement between pro-Soviet and pro-China alignments. Today these groups have widely differing attitudes toward the legacy of Mao, ranging from adulation to viewing him as just another revisionist. Over the years' organisations within this category have embraced both Enver Hoxha's Albania and Kim Il-Sung's North Korea as the one true face of socialism. In many ways these organisations were unaffected by the events of 1989 and 1991, since they were already so isolated from the mainstream of the international communist movement.

I will not examine this latter category further, since the groups within it tend toward the minuscule in terms of membership — by far the largest organisation within this category, the Revolutionary Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist), which was an Albania-aligned organisation, has a membership of under one hundred (interview with Terry Liddle, 1995) and anyway never had anything to do with the main Communist Party — and are very marginalised even within the revolutionary left in terms of outlook and influence. There is a certain esoteric attraction in studying an organisation such as the 'Stalin Society', but there is no academic justification for doing it in any detail. An organisation like this can better be understood as a club for people with an unusual minority interest than as a serious political organisation.

After looking at the Communist Party and its various successor organisations in turn, I will attempt to draw some broader, more general conclusions on what the impact of the events of 1989 and 1991 has been on the communist movement in Britain, and to see where it may be going from here and what its future holds. Before moving on to the main part of the paper, I will however briefly describe what organisations there are on the revolutionary left in Britain apart from the categories outlined here, and what their attitude toward the Soviet Union is. I feel this is vital in that it would not be possible to understand the attitudes of the groups discussed in this paper in more detail without understanding the political environment in which they operate and in relation to which other viewpoints they are espousing theirs. The immediate political environment of, and major competitors to, the mainstream communist movement in Britain is the rest of the revolutionary left. This is borne out by the amount of their literature concerned with attacking and countering other Marxist views.

I will also briefly outline the methodology and means of research used within this dissertation, and what the impact of the approach used has been upon the finished product.

2 Methodology

Upon starting this paper, I very soon realised that there was very little secondary literature published in this area. Paul Mercer's *Directory of British Political Organisations 1994* was very helpful, indeed vital, in identifying the various groups I would have to deal with, and giving a brief outline of their respective positions. Most histories of the Communist Party tend to deal with the pre-war era. Two books have, however, recently been published which take the main Party's history up to its dissolution in 1991. While both were useful, they were

both problematic in their own way. Willie Thompson's *The Good Old Cause, British Communism 1920-1991* (1992) is an academic work, which has been of some interest. It does, however, suffer from a disadvantage in that its author was a member of the party and was strongly aligned to one faction within it, namely the reformist Euro-Communists. The bias this causes is transparent throughout the book. Its title is also somewhat misleading in that it is not a history of British communism, but a history of the Communist Party. Francis Beckett's *The Enemy Within, The Rise and Fall of the British Communist Party* is a livelier, better written and more entertaining work. Since it is written by an outsider, a *Guardian* journalist and Labour Party member, it is also less partisan. It does, however, suffer from a major problem in that it is totally un sourced. On successor parties of the main Communist Party there is simply no secondary literature whatsoever.

This dissertation therefore relies upon two major types of source, the various parties' own literature, and a fairly large number of interviews with the major participants. I feel that this has probably given me a better understanding of the issues concerned than a reliance on secondary literature would have done. The problem with this however has been that the finished work is slanted toward those organisations that were willing and happy to give interviews and supply literature. Virtually all those I asked were happy to do this. A small number of organisations were, however, less forthcoming. The most significant of these was Straight Left, which operated in a clandestine and secretive manner within the Communist Party. The other organisations from which I failed to obtain any usable information were either tiny outfits consisting of two or three people, or ones whose contact person can politely be described as eccentric. One of these individuals even described me as a CIA funded "agent of imperialism" out to destroy his organisation. I do not, however, think that my failure to obtain any literature from a small number of organisations has had a detrimental impact upon the paper as a whole.

I have also tried to stick to the major issues, and not to get bogged down in the minutiae of internal conflict as can so easily happen in this area of research. Many groups on the far left are prone to using jargon that verges on the incomprehensible to an outsider such as myself. This is especially true when one organisation is critiquing another within its own literature. Throughout this paper I have attempted to use terms which are widely understood, instead of relying on the more obscure forms of Marxist terminology.

Having said that, a few terms should be clarified at this stage. Adherents to Trotsky's theories are described as Trotskyist in this dissertation rather than Trotskyite. This is because Trotskyist is the term they themselves always insist upon and indeed make a point of using to describe themselves. The term "Trotskyite" is regarded by them as a term of abuse, as it was used by Moscow-line communists to describe adherents of Trotsky.

Trotskyists in turn termed all Moscow-line Communists, and indeed for that matter all East European regimes, as Stalinist. I do not feel that this is a very helpful use of the term as it explains nothing. It was, and still is, simply used as a term of abuse. In this paper I will therefore only use the term "Stalinist" to refer to those organisations or individuals who I feel have a longing to return to the days of Joseph Stalin. Having said that, with the exception of the "Stalin Society", no organisation would to my knowledge describe itself as Stalinist.

3 The Others on the Revolutionary Left

The purpose of this paper, as outlined, is to look at the response of the Communist Party and its successor organisations to the collapse of communism in the Eastern Bloc. To make

sense of the respective positions of these organisations it is, however, necessary briefly to look at the revolutionary milieu in which they are acting, and at what the attitude of these other groups is toward the Soviet Union.

In my view the British revolutionary left, outside of its Moscow aligned wing coming out of the Communist Party, is divided into three broad categories.

The first of these consists of the Trotskyist organisations. These all adopt Trotsky's critique of the Soviet Union, viewing it as a degenerate workers' state. This has led to the groups in this category all giving the Soviet Union critical support. They have argued that Stalin bureaucratised the Soviet Union and perverted the development of socialism. Their critiques of Stalin, and of the entire Soviet leadership following him, have been fierce. They have, however, nevertheless felt that the Soviet Union could be brought around to the path set by Lenin and Trotsky by a political, rather than social, revolution as it was still a workers' state. They felt that the states of the Eastern Bloc were qualitatively different from, and superior to, those of the West; socialism already existed in the former, albeit in a degenerate form.

Trotskyist organisations have, however, differed greatly in their critical support of the Soviet Union: some, such as Socialist Organiser, have put all the emphasis on the critical element, offering virtually no support; others, such as the Spartacist League, have put all the emphasis on support element, offering virtually no criticism.

On the Trotskyist left in Britain there are a myriad of organisations, varying in size from around 3,000 in the case of Militant to less than one hundred, in the case of literally dozens of organisations each claiming to be the one true bearer of the true faith. These organisations also are very prone to splitting. For example the old Workers' Revolutionary Party has now split into nine distinct separate outfits. (My main sources for this section are the individual papers, too numerous to list one by one, of the revolutionary press, which I have regularly read over the last few years.)

In the second category are those organisations which have adopted the view that the Soviet Union is state capitalist. In this category are Britain's largest Marxist party — the Socialist Workers' Party, with around 10,000 members — and Britain's oldest Marxist party — the Socialist Party of Great Britain founded in 1904, sixteen years before the Communist Party — as well as a number of smaller organisations.

The Socialist Workers' Party is often seen as Trotskyist and it takes on board much of Trotsky's analysis. Its view on the Soviet Union is, however, radically different. It believes that Stalin not only deformed the revolution but totally destroyed it, and in fact restored capitalism in the Soviet Union. It thus welcomed the events of 1989 and 1991 as a defeat of capitalism, indeed a defeat of "capitalism in its most concentrated form" (Harman in the *Socialist Worker Review*, January 1990).

The Socialist Party of Great Britain, on the other hand, takes the view that the Soviet Union never was socialist in the first place. This has been its position since 1917. In a way this party goes further than any other on the revolutionary left in criticising the Soviet Union, in that it views Leninist principles and modes of organisation as non-socialist, indeed anti-socialist (*Socialist Standard*, July 1992).

The third category consists of one organisation, the Revolutionary Communist Party. It views the Soviet Union as neither capitalist nor socialist, but rather as being a new social formation. This new structure is marked by a repressive ruling class which gives subsidies to the working class, in the form of cheap food and housing. It is a unique structure in that property is owned by the state and market mechanisms have

been replaced, but the proletariat has not gained control, or more correctly lost control under Stalin's regime (Furedi, 1986). It is appropriate that the Revolutionary Communist Party should be on its own here too, for most of its views run counter to socialist orthodoxy. It has unique views among the left on everything from Aids and date rape, to the anti roads protesters and environmentalism. Many of these views have more in common with the anti 'political correctness' right than with the left, let alone the far left.

These then are the differing strands of opinion on the Soviet Union among the revolutionary left outside of the Moscow aligned tradition. It is in competition to and in awareness of the views outlined above that the groups I look at in more detail have formulated and stated their respective positions.

4 Relationship of the Communist Party to the Soviet Union: The Early Years

The Communist Party was founded in 1920 three years after the Bolshevik seizure of power, and it dissolved itself in 1991 just months after the Soviet Union was itself dissolved. Throughout the Party's history it was intimately linked to the Soviet Union.

Lenin had himself been instrumental in pushing for the Party's formation. He had "secretly provided at least £55,000 — the equivalent of about £1,000,000 today — to help get the Communist Party off the ground" (Beckett, 1995, p. 12). Lenin had also famously polemicized against Sylvia Pankhurst in *Left-wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*. The point of this publication was to put forward his ideas of how the British Communist Party should campaign, and what its attitude to Parliament and the Labour Party should be. Lenin's views, of course, won through. From the very beginning the Communist Party of Great Britain was thus intricately linked to the Bolsheviks.

The Party also followed every twist and every turn of policy laid down by the Comintern, or the Moscow run Communist International. Whatever change of line Moscow ordered, the Communist Party then soon adopted. There were massive shifts: from a united front policy, trying to form broad alliances of the left, one day; to a class against class policy, refusing to have anything to do with anyone else and going so far as to describe the Labour Party as "social fascists", the next; and then going back to a popular front position, this time on the basis of a broad anti-fascist alliance. The Party was able to rationalise all of these shifts. Moscow was the leading force within the international communist movement, indeed it was seen by the Party members as forging the way ahead into the future. If this or that policy was what Moscow felt was necessary who were the British communists to argue? (Thompson, 1992) The fact that the party received substantial amounts of money from the Soviets in its early days may have contributed to its subservience to Moscow, but it was not the reason for it. As Reuben Falber, a leading member and one time assistant general secretary of the Party, points out, the Party in the 1920s was so sure of the correctness of the Soviet's role that it even boasted about receiving money from them (Falber, in *Changes*, issue 28, 1991).

Any possible dissension within the Party about Moscow's role, or for that matter about anything else, was further minimised by the fact that the Party had adopted the Leninist principle of democratic centralism as its decision making tool in 1922. This was part of a Comintern policy to bolshevise the British Party, imposed sooner than similar policies were on many other parties within the international communist movement. This goes some way towards showing that "the Comintern devoted an attention to its (the British Communist Party's) affairs out of all proportion to its actual size" (p. 35, Thompson, 1992). The

adoption of this mode of decision making meant that discussion was permitted, but once a particular decision had been reached it was binding on all members, regardless on whether they had previously agreed or disagreed with it. Discussion, of course, also often ended up being truncated. This import from the Soviet Bolshevik Party, and democratic centralism itself, continued to have an incisive impact upon the nature of internal Party conflicts right up to the end. Indeed democratic centralism still continues to be used to this day as the decision making mechanism of virtually all revolutionary Marxist parties in Britain.

Perhaps the most notorious and humiliating shift forced upon the party by Moscow occurred at the very beginning of the Second World War. When war broke out the Party at first took a line saying that it was essential to defeat Hitler and the Nazis, and thus backed the British war effort. Indeed this was natural since fascism was the sworn enemy of communism, and the Party had spent much of the thirties combatting Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists. Support for the war by communist parties, however, no longer suited Stalin, due to his non-aggression pact with Hitler. Thus the Comintern directed all its member parties to adopt a line saying that the war was an inter-imperialist conflict and thus that it was the role of the respective communist parties to call for the defeat of their own bourgeoisie. The Comintern argued that there was no difference between Chamberlain and Hitler. Rajani Palme Dutt, the leading theorist of the Communist Party of Great Britain at that time, quickly adopted this position, going so far as to say that the Nazi-Soviet Pact had been a massive and ingenious blow against the Nazis and fascism in general. It must be said that there was significant opposition to adopting this new line within the Party; some felt that Moscow was this time simply asking for too much. The British Communist Party held out longer than many others in the international communist movement, but eventually it too adopted Moscow's new line. As Beckett (1995) puts it "Uncle Joe says stand on your head" and they did.

After the shift had occurred the aforementioned Palme Dutt had the gall to argue that it was an outrage to claim that the British Party had merely followed the instructions of Moscow. They had, he claimed, simply eventually come to the same conclusion as Moscow, that being the only one which Marxist logic could dictate; it just so happened that Soviet communists realised this before British ones did. Ironically once the Soviet Union had entered the war the Communist Party managed to recruit very heavily on the basis of its wholehearted opposition to fascism and its identification with the Soviet Union, Britain's vital ally in the struggle against Nazi Germany (Hobsbawm, 1995).

5 Relationship of the Communist Party to the Soviet Union After 1956

While admiration for the Soviet Union may well have helped the Communist Party in the pre-war era and especially during and just after the second world war, this was certainly not the case after the dramatic events of 1956. Support for the Soviet Union was already waning in Britain before 1956. Then in that year came first Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin in his 'secret speech' to the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union; then there was the Hungarian Revolution and the Soviet invasion of that country.

It was a massive shock to the British Communist Party, as it was to all Moscow line communists, for them to have their great hero, the man for whom they had performed intellectual somersault after intellectual somersault, denounced as a mass murderer, not by people whom they perceived to be anti-communists or 'trotskyites', but by the general secretary of the

Communist Party of the Soviet Union himself at that Party's very congress itself. This was a very disconcerting time to be a Moscow-line communist.

While the implications of this event were still becoming apparent, Soviet tanks were rolling into Budapest to put down the uprising there. This was a popular uprising in which many industrial workers were taking part; whatever the Soviets were saying it was apparent to all honest observers, including many Party members, that this was not some fascist coup attempt, but was in fact a popular revolution. The very proletariat in whose name the so-called workers' states were established were rebelling against them.

The British Communist Party and its press welcomed the Soviet invasion regardless, supporting it in the name of international socialist solidarity. The Party denounced those involved in the Hungarian Revolution as fascists and counter-revolutionaries who were working hand in glove with the so-called imperialist powers. The bizarre situation arose whereby the reports that were filed by the journalist of the Party paper (the *Daily Worker* at that time) in Hungary were suppressed, and the reading of these despatches as they came in to the paper was banned to all but the most senior Party officials. This occurred for one simple reason; the reports being filed from Hungary were a truthful account of what was occurring. This did not suit the Party at all (Beckett, 1995).

The party's support for the Soviet invasion was very costly to it. A major dispute erupted within the Party. A faction, led by the historian Christopher Hill, strongly opposed the support for the Soviets over this. They were pushing for greater internal Party democracy, as well as less slavish support for the Soviet Union. These moves were defeated at the Party congress in 1957. It soon became apparent, however, that certain changes within the Party were necessary, as there had been a massive exodus of members. These individuals had simply had enough, having become disillusioned by the twin events of 1956. According to the Party's own figures, its membership fell from 33,095 in February 1956 to 24,670 in February 1958. Christopher Hill, who left the Party himself after his reform attempts had failed, put the number who had directly left as a result of Hungary at 7,000 (Bamberg in *International Socialism*, 49, 1990).

The party's response to these developments was to build upon *The British Road to Socialism* which had first been adopted in 1951. This document has gone through numerous editions since and remained the Party's official programme until 1989, indeed it still is the programme of the breakaway Communist Party of Britain which I discuss later on. Much of the detail of the various editions of this document is not relevant for the purposes of this discussion, as much of it has nothing to do with attitudes toward the Soviet Union. I will, however, give a brief outline of the central thesis of *The British Road to Socialism*, which remained remarkably constant over the years, and the role of the Soviets envisaged within it.

This programme marked a major shift from the previous one called *For a Soviet Britain*. The latter put far more emphasis on a revolutionary approach; *The British Road to Socialism* envisaged that socialism could come about through parliamentary means. The essential approach of all its editions was that an influential Communist Party could, working within parliament and within the wider trade union movement, push the Labour Party into adopting progressively more socialist policies. The Communist Party putting up candidates for election was an essential part of this strategy, in that their success would make Labour realise that there was a real demand for genuinely socialist policies within the populace at large. The programme envisaged the Communist Party eventually becoming an affiliated integral part of the Labour Party, and then being the driv-

ing force behind a popularly elected left Labour-Communist government, which would adopt something called the 'Alternative Economic and Political Strategy'.

This amounted to a programme of mass nationalisation, confiscatory taxation of the wealthy and a pro-Soviet foreign policy, adopted on the basis of support for peace initiatives spear-headed by the Soviets and the rejection of American war mongering, combined with withdrawal from all Western alliances. The revolution, as it would be, would occur with the defence of this government and what it had achieved, from the perceived inevitable counter attack by the bourgeoisie and the forces of reaction. At this stage the socialist government would rely upon material support from the Soviet bloc for its economic and political survival. This programme, of course, fell at the first hurdle with the Communist Party's abject failure electorally. Far from showing mass support for 'genuine socialism', if anything the Communist Party's electoral performance showed Labour that there was next to no support for such policies.

Nevertheless, after 1956 *The British Road to Socialism* came increasingly to be portrayed as somehow a statement of independence from Moscow by the British Communist Party, and recruitment to the Party was increasingly based upon this programme, rather than on the full Marxist-Leninist argument. It was portrayed as the Party self-consciously proclaiming its own route to socialism and no longer blindly following the edicts of Moscow. This interpretation was underpinned in a strange sort of way by the fact that the increasingly more reformist and open versions of the programme were increasingly being denounced by hardliners within the party. These hardliners felt that the document was not sufficiently revolutionary and was too reformist, indeed perhaps even revisionist.

The self perception of the Party's independence was also highlighted by its criticism of what it termed the 'intervention' in Czechoslovakia in 1969. Even so, as Nina Temple, the Party's last general secretary, put it to me, the Party refused to talk of the "invasion" of Czechoslovakia; in retrospect its statement seems very weak (Interview with Nina Temple, 1995). The Party leadership had supported Dubcek's reforms very strongly, seeing them as being similar in kind to the proposals outlined in *The British Road to Socialism*. With the invasion of Czechoslovakia, the party could not very well change its position. This was especially true if one thinks about what had happened after the Party had supported the invasion of Hungary in terms of membership loss and the decline in the public image of the Party. The Party had also been recruiting fairly heavily on the basis of its opposition to United States policy *vis-à-vis* Vietnam; it could hardly then support what was seen by many on the left as similar bully boy policies by another superpower.

Even so the many hardliners within the party, including Palme Dutt, were furious at what they perceived as this betrayal of the international socialist movement. For them such condemnation of the Soviet Union, however half hearted, was simply an outrage. The diverging attitudes on Czechoslovakia began to entrench factional disputes within the Party between reformers and hardliners. From the late 1970s onward these disputes would become the major concern of many party members (Beckett, 1995).

Before moving on to discuss these disputes as they effected the Party's relationship with Moscow, it is worth considering how real the Party's new independence from the Soviets actually was. As I have said, *The British Road to Socialism* was often portrayed as showing that the party had reached the maturity to discover its own route to socialism and thus to branch out on its own. The reality could, however, not have been more different. The original version of this programme had largely been drafted by the Comintern and had been personally ap-

proved by none other than Joseph Stalin himself. This was revealed quite recently by George Matthews, who had been a long time editor of the Party paper (pp. 122-123, Beckett, 1995). Later versions of the programme were also all approved by Moscow. In 1978, for example, a more liberal and open version of it was adopted. This talked much about forming "broad democratic alliances" and of working with the new protest movements around such issues as feminism, environmentalism, and ethnic minority rights. At the Party congress which adopted these policies — the very policies which were portrayed as being more independent, modernising in nature and influenced by diverse, exciting, new concepts — there was still a large delegation of "grey men from Moscow who gave their nod to these reforms" (interview with Nina Temple, 1995).

The party paper, be it in its *Daily Worker* or *Morning Star* incarnations, relied very heavily on substantial bulk orders from Moscow and the Eastern Bloc. When the Czechoslovak 'intervention' was criticised in the Party paper, the Soviet order fell from 12,000 copies per day to 9,000 (p. 165, Beckett, 1995). This was seen as a warning from Moscow; such criticism was simply not acceptable to the Soviets. As the current editor of the *Morning Star* John Haylett pointed out to me, Moscow never directly told the paper what to say or what not to say; this was not necessary as there was substantial self censorship by the paper's journalists. This continued right up to the point when the Soviet order was finally cancelled in 1990 (interview with John Haylett).

The Party became heavily involved in the anti-nuclear protest movement from the 1950s onward. This again was portrayed by some as a new independent departure. Once again, however, this alleged independence simply does not stand up. Anti-nuclear protest in the West was in tune with Soviet aims. Indeed one of the Soviet Union's perhaps most effective front organisations was the 'World Peace Council', which operated within this area (Shipley, 1976). It must be added that there was a high degree of hypocrisy for the Communist Party, a Party so closely aligned to one nuclear superpower, to call for nuclear disarmament by another. After all, the Soviets would never have allowed protests against their nuclear arsenal in their country.

The claimed independence of the British Communist Party from Moscow was thus nothing but a sham. What has finally proven this to be the case are the revelations about 'Moscow Gold', or the covert funding which the party received from the Soviets between 1958 and 1979. I return to this little matter later on.

6 Party Factionalism and Attitudes Towards Moscow

As noted above, factional infighting within the Communist Party used up much of the energy of many Party members from the late 1970s onward. It should be borne in mind that these factions tended to deny being factions. The Party did not allow internal organisations to be formed, arguing they went against the principles of democratic centralism and Marxism-Leninism. This did not, however, change the reality of factional infighting. These conflicts were often complex and can seem confusing to an outsider. I therefore concentrate my discussion on outlining the differing factions' broad outlooks and their diverging attitudes toward the Soviet Union, and have tried to avoid the minutiae of internal conflicts.

In 1977 Sid French, of all things the Surrey organiser of the Communist Party, left the Party and took 700 supporters with him. He had led opposition within the Party to the Party's criticism of the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia, and felt that the Party had become insufficiently supportive of the Soviet Union in general. Perhaps more importantly, he also ob-

jected to what he perceived to be the increasing revisionism of *The British Road to Socialism*. All drafts of this programme were felt by him and his supporters to be objectionable, but the version which was to be adopted in 1978 was simply going too far for them. Thus they left the Party and founded the breakaway 'New Communist Party'. This organisation is discussed later on.

Many Party members with very similar views to Sid French's remained within the main party, however. Some of these people formed themselves into a faction called "Straight Left". This organisation, led by a certain Fergus Nicholson, claimed simply to be a weekly paper aimed at left wing activists within the wider Labour movement. Having looked through many back issues of the paper, I found it frankly an incredibly dull read. The paper combined calls for immediate mass nationalisation and other left Labour demands with slavish drooling support for the Soviet Union. Its back page contained a regular column under the by-line Harry Steel, which was written by Fergus Nicholson. The pseudonym apparently originated to honour both Harry Pollitt, the legendary former general secretary of the Communist Party, on the one hand and Joseph Stalin, the 'man of steel', on the other (interview with Mark Fischer, 1995). This gives one some idea of the nature of this faction; its claims to be just a paper of the wider Labour movement were of course nonsense. It was adopted in order to circumvent the Communist Party's ban on factions. 'Straight Left' had stayed within the main party rather than join the 'New Communist Party' breakaway, because it laid extreme importance upon the principle of democratic centralism. This also stopped it joining the more significant breakaway in 1988, and kept it within the main party right up to the end. Indeed 'Straight Left' still operates as a paper, although exactly what it is now trying to achieve is unclear to me. The paper now harks back to what it perceives as the golden days of the Soviet Union, and combines this with familiar calls for mass nationalisation.

1977 was also an important year for future factional infighting within the Party for one other reason. Martin Jacques, a young academic at Bristol University, was appointed editor of *Marxism Today*, the Party's theoretical journal. He had already been largely responsible for drafting the more open and pluralistic 1978 version of the *British Road to Socialism*, and had before that in 1967, aged twenty two, become the youngest member of the party's executive. Over the fourteen years between 1977 and the Party's dissolution in 1991 Martin Jacques became a hate figure of massive proportions for Party traditionalists.

Increasingly a conflict arose between Martin Jacques and a coterie surrounding him based around *Marxism Today* on the one hand, and a faction based around the party's daily paper, the *Morning Star* led by the paper's editor Tony Chater on the other. Martin Jacques' group wanted to modernise the Party and wanted it to adopt a very euro-communist agenda. He wanted to take the Party further away from its alignment to Moscow and for it to become part of the mainstream of the left. There was the notion of opening up to the new style protest movements and becoming a genuinely fresh, young, forward looking and radical part of the European left. This faction also wanted to turn its back upon Marxist-Leninist dogmatism and drop the democratic centralist decision making procedures, as they perceived them to be outmoded and holding back the Party.

Martin Jacques was incredibly successful in turning *Marxism Today* from "an obscure journal for party intellectuals" (Martin Jacques in *Marxism Today*, December 1991, p. 28) into perhaps the most lively and influential magazine on the British left. It was one of the first publications to discuss the nature of Thatcherism, and indeed was one of the first to use the term. The

magazine was discussing the developing crisis within the Labour Party in the early to mid eighties while others were still doing their best to turn Labour into an ideologically pure but politically irrelevant socialist sect. It also noted the societal change from an era of Fordist mass industrialism to a new looser post-Fordist era, and really launched this discussion in the United Kingdom. This particularly infuriated the traditionalists, since they felt that underlying this analysis lay a wider critique of the old modes of class conflict and a repudiation of the concept of class struggle. The glossy, hip and trendy style of the magazine — which led the *Wall Street Journal* to describe the readers of *Marxism Today* as muppies, or Marxist yuppies — also infuriated the traditionalists. This is perhaps understandable, when Martin Jacques says that his greatest journalistic influence, and what he modelled the style of writing in the magazine on, was the form and the character of the feature article journalism found in the *Financial Times* (Martin Jacques, *ibid*). Interestingly enough the magazine did not have that much to say about the nature of the Soviet Union. This is perhaps understandable in that its analysis of the changing nature of the United Kingdom was causing enough ructions.

The feel and character of the faction around Tony Chater and the *Morning Star* was rather different. This group, unlike Fergus Nicholson's 'Straight Left' faction, was happy with the *British Road to Socialism* and the initial attempts to open up the Party. They felt that changes, however, had now gone far enough and that further changes would be taking things too far away from the founding principles of the Party. They simply wanted to continue on the strategy of the 1960s and 1970s, and laid great importance on industrial organisation and the recruitment of industrial workers. They were the proletariat, which was all important to this faction and much romanticised by it. The *Morning Star*, and the faction surround it, was willing occasionally to offer mild criticism of the Soviet Union on subjects such as the treatment of dissidents or the invasion of the Afghanistan, but always in an ambience of support and encouragement for the 'socialist bloc'. They felt that the group around *Marxism Today* was willing to go far too far in its rejection of the Soviet way of doing things (interview with John Haylett, 1995).

Between these two groups stood Gordon McLennan, the Party's general secretary, and a coterie of his supporters, predominantly from the Scottish wing of the Party. They attempted to keep an uneasy peace between both factions, but increasingly came down on the side of Martin Jacques and his euro-communist supporters. There is some evidence, however, to suggest that McLennan and his group in the very last days of the party came to regret their support for the euro-communists.

The factional dispute became public in 1982. The *Morning Star* openly attacked an article in *Marxism Today* by Tony Lane, a Liverpool University academic, which criticised some trade union shop stewards for being on a gravy train. It had been unheard of for two official Party publications to disagree publicly and openly, let alone in the aggressive manner that they did. Martin Jacques argued that the real objection of the *Morning Star* supporters was to an article he published by Roy Medvedev, the Russian dissident, about the lack of democracy within the Soviet Union.

From this stage onward the dispute became very bitter. What particularly incensed the *Morning Star* coterie was that *Marxism Today* received an annual subsidy of £50,000 from the Party to publish what they regarded as a magazine openly espousing revisionism; while the *Morning Star* received nothing from the Party for upholding the true Marxist faith (interview with John Haylett, 1995). Gordon McLennan supported *Marxism Today* in this dispute as he believed their agenda was the only one which would keep the Party going. It was therefore decided to attempt to remove Tony Chater as editor of the

Morning Star. I have heard it argued that Chater only fully embraced the traditionalist position at this stage in order to gain sufficient support to retain his job. (Interviews with Mark Fischer and Terry Liddle, 1995)

The *Morning Star* was owned by the Peoples' Printing Press Society, which had been founded as a convenient front for the Communist Party in order to make the paper look more independent. This now meant that Tony Chater's removal as editor would have to be approved at a meeting of the full Society. Such a meeting was called in 1984, but instead of removing Chater, it endorsed him. A bizarre situation developed whereby the Communist Party's newspaper was unwilling to publish the Party's statements. The *Morning Star* established its own 'Communist Campaign Group' to fight for its position.

What followed after this was, depending on which side you believe, either the expulsion from the Party of a few of the leaders of the *Morning Star* faction for flouting the principles of democratic centralism (interview with Nina Temple, 1995), or the wholesale expulsion or exclusion from Party membership of thousands (interview with John Haylett, 1995). Whatever the case may be, it was rather hypocritical for the reformists to use infringements of democratic centralism, a principle they claim to deplore, as grounds for removing their opponents from the Party. The end result of these goings on was that the *Morning Star* supporters in 1988 formed a separate Party, the Communist Party of Britain, to uphold their views. I return to this group later.

From this stage onward the Party came to be dominated by the reformists. The 'Straight Left' faction were still active within the party, as was a very small faction around a paper called *The Leninist*. This group had been influenced by a faction within the Turkish Communist Party, and has gained a certain profile since the demise of the main Communist Party. Neither of these factions, however, managed to exert much influence. The reformists, however, did manage to push forward their agenda, with the support of Gordon McLennan.

In December 1989 the Communist Party adopted an entirely new programme, the so called *Manifesto for New Times*. This document was entirely in line with the reformists' agenda and preferred policies, in fact it had largely been drafted by Martin Jacques. Talk of the class struggle went out; in came a new conception of the Communist Party as a progressive radical movement espousing more up-to-date causes and being linked in to the alternative protest movements. Environmentalism, feminism and gay rights are campaigns this programme champions. The end of the mass industrial age is also much discussed within it. There is very little talk of the wider international scene. What there is, however, concentrates on support for Gorbachev and his reforms. The statements within this programme about the Soviet Union then are not very radical, and would have differed little from what the *Morning Star* supporters' Communist Party of Britain would have said at the same time.

In 1990 Nina Temple became the new secretary — she preferred to be called secretary rather than general secretary, feeling that it sounded less Stalinist — of the Communist Party. This was a victory for the modernisers within the Party, as Nina Temple was very much of that tendency. It was her initial aim to modernise the internal Party structures, and in fact transform the party within six months. Although the Party's policies had changed radically, the internal Party structures had not been reformed or even looked at until then. Many reformers felt that this was too much of a hornet's nest. This is borne out by the fact that the *Manifesto for New Times* (pp. 60-61) still extolled the importance of having an independent Communist Party in the United Kingdom, and the necessity for that Party to put up as many candidates as possible in elections. Within months of

this manifesto being approved the agenda had moved on to such a degree that much of the Party membership had come to the realisation that the Party would at the very least change its name, and probably have to change itself into a non-electoral pressure group. What had caused this sudden shift was the emerging general crisis of socialism caused by the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe (interview with Nina Temple, 1995).

The process of reforming the Party into something new took far longer than initially envisaged. This was because once elected, general secretary Nina Temple wanted to take the whole Party with her, not just to impose the agenda of the modernisers. Many of the modernising reformers actually left the party in 1990 due to their disillusionment with the slow process of internal Party transformation, while at the same time events were moving so rapidly in Eastern Europe. These reformers had envisaged that, once 'one of them' had taken over, the process of transformation would be very quick. The perception also grew that saving something out of Marxism was now a lost cause; the information coming out of Eastern Europe at this time showed that the system there had been more rotten than even the most strident anti-communist had previously thought.

The Party would be rocked by one more event before its demise — namely the 'Moscow Gold' affair, or the revelation of how the Party had secretly received payments from the Soviets over many years.

7 Moscow Gold

In November 1991 a *Sunday Times* journalist found evidence of the secret funding of the British Communist Party by the Soviet Union. He had discovered a document in recently opened Soviet files which showed that a certain 'Comrade Falber' had received payments of £14,000 and £15,000 from a KGB agent in London during 1978. Comrade Falber, Reuben Falber, had been deputy general secretary of the Party and had for many years been in charge of the Party's finances.

When Nina Temple was asked about these payments by the press her immediate response was to challenge Reuben Falber about them. His reaction was to say that the matter need not concern her and the new leadership, as the allegations concerned events which were all before their time, and "anyway they did not know about them, did they?" This tacit admission was as far as Falber was willing to go. Eventually however George Matthews, the former editor of the *Daily Worker* and then the *Morning Star*, convinced Falber to reveal all (interview with Nina Temple, 1995). He did this in the Communist Party's new weekly paper *Changes*.

Reuben Falber revealed that he had "from 1958 to 1979 received substantial sums of money from the CPSU via employees of the Soviet Embassy" (Falber in *Changes*, issue 28, 1991). The payments rose to £100,000 per year during the 1960s. This was a significant amount for political campaigning in that era and taking inflation into account still would be. The payments were made in cash, and were then laundered by Reuben Falber to make them look like legitimate contributions. Falber signs off his article by saying "for myself I can only say, like that great singer Edith Piaf 'Non je ne regrette rien'" (Falber, *ibid*).

It is significant to note that the payments started in 1958. As I have already discussed, the Party had lost many members after the Hungarian Revolution and Khrushchev's revelations about Stalin in 1956. Falber notes that those who left included a number of well off business men, some of whom were Jewish. They had made substantial annual contributions to the Party. These people were appalled to hear of Stalin's anti-semitism, as manifested by the Doctors' Plot and the execution of a number

of Jewish community leaders. There was thus a shortfall in funds, which Falber sought to fill with the Soviet contributions.

When the revelations came out, the Communist Party issued a statement condemning the Soviet payments. This was an attempt to repair some of the damage done; the revelations had come as a devastating blow to the reformers within the Party. They had, as I have outlined, tried to recreate the Communist Party as an organisation independent of Moscow, as a genuinely open and radical movement of the democratic left. They were trying to build upon a tradition within the Party which they believed to be independent, separate and different from the Moscow line tradition (Communist Party statement in *Changes*, issue 28, 1991).

What the Moscow Gold disclosures revealed, when they were combined with the revelations by George Matthews about Stalin's role in the drafting of the initial version of *The British Road to Socialism*, was that this independent tradition was a chimera, that it was nothing but a sham. The reformers were trying to build upon an independent tradition which simply did not exist.

Martin Jacques sums up these feelings well: "I and others like me believed that the party could be changed into something different. If only we had known about the Moscow Gold." (Martin Jacques in *Marxism Today*, December 1991) His own response was rapid. He resigned from the Party the day the revelations came out. It is worth noting that Reuben Falber had repeatedly bailed out *Marxism Today* financially (interview with Nina Temple); one can only hazard a guess as to where the money for that came from.

The response of the traditionalists was rather different; a leading member of the breakaway Communist Party of Britain told me that his only regret about Moscow Gold was that there was not enough of it (interview with Brian Denny, 1995).

At the last congress of the Communist Party in 1991 the traditionalist pro-Moscow 'Straight Left' faction — which, as discussed above, was still within the main Party — put forward a mischievous motion calling upon the Party to give back all the money they had received from the Soviets. They argued that if the 'Moscow Gold' really was all that appalling, the only honest thing to do would be to return all the money. Needless to say this motion was heavily defeated. Virtually all the modernisers had voted against returning the money they were so outraged by (interview with Brian Denny, 1995).

An interesting side issue is whether British Intelligence was actually aware of Moscow Gold. Robin Ramsay, the editor of *Lobster* — a magazine which investigates the activities of the 'secret state' — argues that they did. His evidence for this is that right wing authors and research organisations which were close to British Intelligence, had often written about the illicit funding of the Communist Party by the Soviets from the 1960s onward.

The speculation about Moscow Gold was mentioned in Peter Wright, the renegade intelligence agent, in his book *Spycatcher*. This book even mentions Reuben Falber as the presumed link man for this funding. For this reason Falber himself believes that the authorities knew (Falber, *ibid*).

This leads on to the question of why the British authorities did not stop the payments if they knew all about them. Robin Ramsay argues, that, with the mass defections from the Party after the events of 1956, the Party was at the point of collapse. Without Soviet funding, he argues, the Communist Party would either have gone under or, more probably, would have become a minuscule and totally insignificant sect. This would not, Ramsay argues, have been in the interests of the 'secret state'; the Communist Party provided an excellent tool with which to beat the left (Robin Ramsay in *Lobster*, issue 25, 1993).

The truth or otherwise of this theory will probably never be proven conclusively one way or the other, as the necessary evidence will in all likelihood not reach the public domain. If the claims are true, however, the tactics of British Intelligence were ingenious. After all, what organisation has done more to discredit the left in Britain than the Communist Party?

8 The Party's Dissolution — Democratic Left

On the 22nd of November 1991 the Party was finally dissolved, at its 43rd Congress (Mercer, 1994). All the crucial votes here were won by the reformers with two-to-one majorities. Nina Temple believes that she managed to get majorities of this size for her proposals partly due to the Moscow Gold disclosures. As mentioned above, many of her natural supporters had left the Party already. This meant the internal balance within the Party had shifted to those members — generally the older ones — who were not necessarily against reform, but who were emotionally more strongly tied to the Party's traditions. Moscow Gold had nevertheless shown to this type of member that the game was now truly up.

The Congress which dissolved the Communist Party also launched its official successor organisation, the Democratic Left. This organisation is still run by Nina Temple. It is not a political party and does not put up candidates for election. Nina Temple believes that, with the British electoral system, a group such as theirs could be more effective building political alliances and campaigning on issues rather than operating as a fully fledged political party. It has had some success in building political alliances around the issues of anti-Tory tactical voting, with their GROT — "Get Rid Of Them" — campaign and their electoral reform campaign, which has gained the support even of the Conservative MP John Biffen.

The political outlook of the Democratic Left is very much the open radical one envisaged by the modernisers within the old Communist Party. Issues surrounding feminism, ethnic minorities and gay rights are very important to the organisation. It is also very keen on the idea of European federalism, so long as it has a socially aware agenda.

One can see the extent to which the modernisers have tried to distance themselves from the other currents within the old Party by the fact that the Democratic Left's constitution does not even mention Marxism. There is a 'Marxist-Leninist Forum' within the Democratic Left — it is not clear to me if this is a splinter of the old 'Straight Left' faction, but this does seem likely — which is, however, very much marginalised within and in no way represents the mainstream of the Democratic Left. Even an attempt to put a commitment in the organisation's constitution to public ownership was defeated; this occurred nearly four years before a similar commitment was ditched by the Labour Party. Democratic Left talks much today about its commitment to 'radical democracy' both within its internal structures and also within society at large. All in all these are extraordinary changes for a group with its origins (interview with Nina Temple, 1995).

Democratic Left is a far smaller organisation than the Communist Party ever was. It has 1,370 members according to its own figures, while the Communist Party had 4,600 members at its very end. Organisationally it has also declined. Democratic Left has a permanent staff of three and small modern offices near King's Cross station; when Nina Temple took over as general secretary in 1990, the party had fifty full-time staff and large offices in Covent Garden (Temple, *ibid*).

Financially the organisation survives on the income from the assets it inherited from the old party. The value of these assets have been put to me at variously £2,500,000 by Nina Temple and £4,000,000 by Brian Denny, the national organiser of the Communist Party of Britain. Indeed many of the detractors of

the Democratic Left argue that the only reason for its continued existence is to keep its hands on these assets. It is even felt that the modernisers only stayed within the Party in order to control the Party's money and kept it out of the hands of the traditionalists (interviews with John Haylett, Brian Denny and Andy Brooks, 1995).

The modernising faction of the old Communist Party thus responded to the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe by abandoning their remaining commitment to Marxism. The only vestige of the old days which is still their is the involvement of some of the leading members of the Democratic Left in pro-Cuba campaigns.

As noted before the 'Straight Left' faction had stayed within the main Communist Party to the bitter end. After that they formed themselves into various local holding organisations, grouped around something called 'Communist Liaison'. This is currently being dissolved, and its members are now joining the Communist Party of Britain (interview with Brian Denny, 1995). To some degree joining up with this Party is a defeat for the 'Straight Left' supporters, as they had always opposed *The British Road to Socialism*, while this is the programme of the Communist Party of Britain.

Before moving on to the other successor organisations, it is worth looking at the career of Martin Jacques since leaving the Communist Party in 1991. *Marxism Today* ceased publication in December 1991, arguing that it had outlived its usefulness. In 1993 Jacques established a new non-partisan think tank, called Demos, committed to modernising Britain's government structures as well as the structures of society at large. This think tank is funded by many large city firms, including British Gas and ICI (*Demos Prospectus*, 1993). In September 1994 Martin Jacques became deputy editor of *The Independent*. It has been said of Martin Jacques that he is the only person for whom joining the British Communist Party was a good career move (Beckett, 1995).

9 Communist Party of Britain

As already noted, the Communist Party of Britain is the organisation founded in 1988 by supporters of the *Morning Star* and its then editor, Tony Chater. It represents the traditionalist pro-Moscow wing of the old Communist Party. This is being reinforced by the fact that many of the traditionalists who remained within the party until the end are now joining this organisation. The Communist Party of Britain now has around 1,500 members (interview with John Haylett, 1995); while this is relatively large for an organisation coming out of the old Party, indeed it is probably the largest, many of its members, however, are old or ageing (interview with Terry Liddle, 1995).

Politically the Communist Party of Britain also very much continues the strategy of the main Communist Party, as it was before the modernisers pushed through their full agenda. *The British Road to Socialism* remains the programme of this party. They still hope a left Labour-Communist government will come to power electorally and then implement full socialism along the lines of the 'Alternative Economic and Political Strategy' outlined earlier. Putting forward candidates for election is also still part of the strategy to push the Labour Party leftward. No lessons seem to have been drawn from the failure of this strategy over the last forty years.

The Party also continued with a very pro-Soviet policy right up to the very demise of that state. This led it to fully support *glasnost* and *perestroika*, even though one would have imagined that these traditionalists would have balked at such reforms.

The allegiance to Gorbachev can partly be explained by the fact that the *Morning Star* heavily relied upon bulk orders from

the Soviet Union, which took 12,000 copies daily up till 1989 and 7,000 copies daily for another year before finally cancelling their order. This compares with total current daily sales of 7,000 for the *Morning Star* (interview with John Haylett, editor of *Morning Star*, 1995). The bulk order was not, however, the sole reason for the Party's support for Gorbachev since it continued after the order was cancelled. The Party has only become more critical of developments in the Soviet Union after the collapse of that state.

The party regards the demise of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc as a massive defeat for the forces of progress. The most basic reason for this is that the Soviet Union was regarded by them as a model to emulate. It was the first state to proclaim itself to be against capitalism, and to move toward what the Party regards as a non-exploitative, indeed anti-exploitative, structure of society. The defeat of such a state is regarded as a defeat of all those who believe in improving the condition of humanity and those who believe that there is a better way of doing things than capitalism (interview with John Haylett, 1995).

Perhaps an even more important impact of the collapse of socialism, for the Party, is that it is also a victory for the forces of reaction and imperialism, in other words that it has strengthened the United States. If the Soviet Union still existed as a countervailing force to the United States the invasion of Panama, the Gulf War, and the collapse of Yugoslavia with its resulting war, could none of them ever have happened. The Party sees the Yugoslav war as clear evidence of what happens when western imperialists are able to align themselves with local reactionaries, in this case Croatian separatists and fascists, and there is no-one powerful enough internationally to stop them from running amok (interview with Brian Denny, the national organiser of the Party, 1995).

The major source of arms and finance for 'national liberation struggles' has also gone with the demise of the Soviet Union. Both Brian Denny and John Haylett were very keen to point out that the Soviet Union was the major financial backer of the African National Congress, and also gave military and political training to its cadres. Cuba, a particular darling of the Party and indeed of much of the far left, has now become a political orphan and can no longer rely on economic support from Comecon. It now has to face what the Party regards as the barbaric American blockade on its own.

Moves to cut welfare spending in Britain and the United States are even put down to the demise of the Soviet Union; it is no longer necessary for the ruling class to appease the working class with the provision of public welfare since the threat of Soviet inspired and supported proletarian rebellion has gone (interview with John Haylett, 1995).

The Labour Party's abandonment of its Clause Four commitment to public ownership can be put down to very similar reasons. Clause Four was passed by the Labour leadership in 1918 just after the Bolshevik Revolution in order, or so the argument goes, to distract the workers from the momentous example of what was going on in Russia and from realising their true revolutionary potential by dangling the carrot of reformism in front of them. Clause Four could be jettisoned by the leadership like so much old window dressing, which indeed it was for them, once the alternative way of doing things, the socialist way, could convincingly be portrayed as a failure (interview with Brian Denny, 1995).

So in the current analysis of the Communist Party of Britain — in other words the analysis developed since the collapse of the Soviet Union — why did the Soviet Union collapse, if it was such a successful system? The party now argues that certain problems had arisen by 1985. There was too little democracy and popular participation within the system was too limited.

The Soviet Communist Party did not repeatedly have to reclaim its vanguard position, as it ought to have done. This was because the position of the Communist Party was constitutionally entrenched in the Soviet Union, and thus the Party did not have the need to go out and mobilise support among the workers. In the analysis of the Communist Party of Britain, this fact led to a certain ossification within the Soviet Union as fresh influences and ideas did not enter the system.

The Party also accepts that corruption among the political elite became a very real and significant problem. This is also put down to their being no effective checking mechanisms upon the political leadership due to the lack of mass workers' participation within the system. The fact that many people in the Soviet Union came to believe what, the Party would argue, were the lies of imperialism is given as proof of the non-participatory nature of the system; if the workers' had been actively involved they would have known the superiority of the Soviet system and the true nature of the American threat to it. This partial critique of the Soviet system has, however, only been espoused by the Party since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Spiraling defence expenditure was also draining the system. Here the blame is squarely put upon the United States. Its military threat to the Soviet Union forced the Soviets to protect themselves; even the lack of popular participation is put down to the need of the Soviets to constantly protect themselves from the ever aggressive 'forces of imperialism'. This forced the Soviets to be ever watchful of their system being undermined internally by counter-revolutionaries and fifth columnists. Much of the internal decay in the Soviet Union is then also blamed on the United States.

Gorbachev's reforms, they believe, were an attempt to resolve these problems by building upon and attempting to renew Leninist principles. In the Party's view his major aims were to fight corruption and increase popular participation; this was vitally necessary in order to maintain and strengthen the system.

Problems, however, began to arise when old structures and mechanisms were removed and nothing was set up to replace them. An example the Party gives of this was the removal of the old system of political control of the press and no effective mechanism being put in its place. This allowed material to be published which could be seen to be running counter to the aims of the socialist system. The Party believes that sudden changes of this kind led to an ideological and political vacuum. A pro-capitalist ideology, supported by sections of the Party machine intent on personal profit, was enabled to move into this vacuum.

The August coup is still condemned by the Party for being undemocratic, adventurist and, in the final analysis, also in support of capitalist restoration. For it to have been a positive move, the Party argues, it would have to have been rooted in Leninist principles; instead it was simply a desperate measure with no clear or thought out aims except the immediate one of stopping the new union treaty. The defeat of the coup enabled all the growing contradictions to come to the fore. It let the counter-revolutionary forces, led by Yeltsin, take control. Only at this stage did Gorbachev betray communism. He did this by refusing to stand up for the Russian Communist Party, indeed in acquiescing to its banning. (Interviews with Brian Denny and John Haylett, 1995, and documents of the 1992 Congress — the so-called 41st Congress, the numbering including all the Congresses of the main Communist Party up to the split in 1988 — of the Communist Party of Britain)

This is the official position of the Party, but many individual members reject the whole process of glasnost and perestroika as counter-revolutionary. Some indeed look back to the days of Joseph Stalin with a certain degree of fondness (interview with Terry Liddle, 1995).

The leadership's line on Joseph Stalin is, however, supportive of Khrushchev's denunciation of him at the 20th Congress of the CPSU. There is an acceptance that Stalin's policies led to the death of millions, although this was put to me at two or three million rather than the twenty million more generally accepted today. It is also felt by the Party that Stalin's crimes are rather countervailed by his successes, namely the rapid industrialisation of the Soviet Union, the expansion of socialism to Eastern Europe and the defeat of the Nazis (interview with John Haylett, 1995).

The Party, however, believes that the communist movement internationally lives on after the demise of the Soviet Union. This is borne out, they believe, by the election of a communist led government in Nepal, a communist president in Guyana, and a government with many communists within it in South Africa.

Support for Cuba remains a central aim for the Party, indeed it sends an annual work brigade out there. The Party is supportive as well, in some cases critically so, of the other remaining 'socialist states'. It criticises China's treatment of its dissidents, and the cult of personality and dynastic tendencies evident in North Korea. The Party is also very close to, and is heartened by, the re-emergence of strong communist parties in Russia and Eastern Europe. The rise of Zuzanov's Communist Party of Russia, apparently the largest party in Russia, is especially welcomed (interview with Brian Denny, 1995).

In my view the Communist Party of Britain is rather lost for a role today. It saw itself as representing the Moscow axis of international socialism, since the main Communist Party had abandoned this role through its ever increasing reformism. With the collapse of the father figure of the Soviet Union, the Party must ask itself what its role now is.

10 Communist Party of Scotland

The Communist Party of Scotland was founded in January 1992. After the dissolution of the main Communist Party, many Scottish members of it were unhappy to join the Democratic Left. They wanted to be in a solidly Marxist organisation, which the Democratic Left clearly was not.

The founders of the Communist Party of Scotland were many of the people closest to Gordon McLennan when he was general secretary of the Communist Party. They had thus supported all the reforms, including the *Manifesto for New Times*, up to his retirement in 1989, but felt that what followed was simply going too far (interview with Andy Brooks, 1995).

This party sees itself as a force for the re-alignment of the Scottish left. It hopes a broader party will emerge, which will include the Labour left and the socialists within the Scottish Nationalist Party. The Scottish Communist Party thinks this realignment could well happen after devolution, of which it is a firm supporter, has been put into place. The Party also supports eventual Scottish independence.

Its response to the collapse of communism in the Eastern Bloc is to build upon what it perceives to be the independent Marxist tradition existing within Scotland. There is also the aim of putting Marxism into a context where it is more appropriate for today, while maintaining its traditions. As a move toward this the Party has abandoned democratic centralism as its decision making tool.

The Communist Party of Britain, with all its talk of the halcyon days of the Soviet Union, is portrayed by the Communist Party of Scotland as living in the past. In the Scottish party's quest to be modern it has largely avoided writing about what went wrong in Russia, as it sees other traditions closer to home as being more important. The Party feels that in this it is in the main stream of the West European communist movement.

(Personal communication with Bill Bonner — a leading member of the Scottish Communist Party — 1995).

11 Communist Party of Great Britain (Provisional Central Committee)

This organisation originated out of 'The Leninist', a small faction within the main Communist Party. 'The Leninist' had been heavily influenced by the theories of a section of the Turkish Communist Party. It was very critical of what it perceived to be the reformist path that the Communist Party had taken throughout its history, and thought that this Party had far too high expectations of Labour. 'The Leninist' thought that, when it came down to it, Labour was little different from the Tories.

With the dissolution of the main Communist Party, or in fact just before that, 'The Leninist' proclaimed itself to be the embryo — hence the 'provisional central committee' rather than the central committee — of a new truly revolutionary Communist Party. It still sees itself as building upon this task and thus welcomes revolutionary groups and individuals who may have conflicting views to join up with them. This party allows these groups within it to organise as factions.

This has led to an interesting development in that for the first time avowedly Trotskyist organisations, even one — the Revolutionary Democratic Group — which viewed the Soviet Union as state capitalist, have joined up with an organisation whose origins lie within Moscow line communism. This would have been completely unthinkable before the collapse of the Soviet Union; each group had then viewed the other as the enemy (interview with Mark Fischer, National Organiser of the CPGB-PCC, 1995).

So how does party view the Soviet Union? There are two distinct phases in the development of its analysis of the Soviet Union. While still 'The Leninist', it had adopted a position which argued that what existed in the Soviet Union was 'formal socialism'. This meant that the Soviet Union was in their view socialist, but its leadership had been following the wrong policies since the death of Lenin.

What followed from this was that the 'Leninist' faction consistently supported the Soviet Union as the 'world revolutionary centre', but that the Soviet leadership was consistently criticised for following a highly bureaucratised path and for being insufficiently revolutionary. It also criticised the lack of workers' participation in the Soviet Union; unlike the Communist Party of Britain it did this while the Soviet Union was still around.

'The Leninist' was also highly critical of Gorbachev and of the whole concept of glasnost and perestroika. It regarded these reforms as anti-socialist in their perceived reliance on the mechanisms of the market, and thus as a step backward for the Soviet Union (Jack Conrad, 1992).

This party also felt that Gorbachev was largely to blame for the collapse of communism throughout Eastern Europe in 1989, and indeed accused him of deliberately undermining these regimes. From this stage on 'The Leninist' saw Gorbachev as a counter-revolutionary. Thus this organisation welcomed the August coup against Gorbachev.

The coup was supported because it removed Gorbachev, the man they regarded as the greatest traitor in Soviet history, and because it was condemned with such passion by all the Western leaders. The reasoning here went that if the 'leaders of imperialism' hated something so much it could not be all bad. The fact that world stock markets fell heavily at the news of Gorbachev's removal made this group even more supportive of the coup.

This support for the coup did not, however, extend to any enthusiasm for the coup leaders. The organisation regarded them as people who would only delay, rather than stop or turn back, the implementation of capitalism. They thus supported the coup not for what it did, but rather for whom it was against and for whom it upset (Jack Conrad, 1992).

Today the Party as a whole has no official position regarding the Soviet Union. Most of its members have, however, become far more critical of the Soviet Union than they were before. The general opinion within the party now is that the Soviet Union ceased to be socialist in any meaningful sense after the start of the first 'Five Year Plan' and Stalin's consolidation of power in 1928 (interview with Mark Fischer, 1995).

This Party remains a small but very active organisation. It demands a massive commitment from its members both in terms of time and money; the absolute minimum membership contribution is 10% of income, members are expected to give up their jobs and work for the party if it is demanded of them.

A central element of this party's propaganda strategy is to put up candidates for election. It sees this as an effective and cheap method of it getting its message across. Mark Fischer pointed out what a bargain the party was getting in return for a £500 election deposit; namely the direct mailing of their propaganda to 50,000 people. What amazed him was that the 'bourgeoisie' was foolish enough to pay for it.

The party's propaganda and 'political education' seems to be very effective; it even convinced the Labour leader of Dundee Council to leave that party and join up with them (Fischer, *ibid*).

I believe this is an organisation of which much more will be heard in future. It also shows that the old divide between a Moscow aligned communist movement and a Trotskyist movement may gradually be coming to an end. Jack Conrad's (1992) book was highly contemptuous of 'Trotskyites'; just a few years later he is sitting on the same central committee as trotskyists. Will the end of this divide eventually be seen as the major impact upon the British left of the collapse of the Soviet Union?

12 New Communist Party

This organisation, as discussed, was set up in 1977 by members who had left the main Communist Party, due to their opposition to what they perceived as the increasingly reformist nature of the main party as exemplified by the then new draft of the *British Road to Socialism*. A factor contributing to their defection was that they perceived the main party to be insufficiently pro-Soviet. This, they felt, was borne out by what they saw as the disgraceful criticism of the Soviet Union for its invasion of Czechoslovakia.

The New Communist Party spent much of the 1980s engaged in attacking the main Communist Party, to the virtual exclusion of all else. The main Party were portrayed as hopelessly revisionists; the New Communist Party in turn were described as 'tankies' in 'honour' of their support for the Soviet tanks in Czechoslovakia.

When the New Communist Party found the time to publish material on the Soviet Union it was slavishly supportive. Things began to change, however, with Gorbachev's accession. When glasnost and perestroika got underway in earnest, the party saw Gorbachev first as a negative influence, then as an all out counter-revolutionary.

It is widely suggested among the left that this party was funded throughout the 1980s by Czechoslovak intelligence, and thus got its political line from them. This theory suggests that the New Communist Party, and the other West European party's

similar in character to it, could voice criticisms of Gorbachev of which the Czechoslovaks approved, but which they could not voice themselves (interviews with Mark Fischer, Terry Liddle and John Haylett, 1995). It has also been rumoured that the New Communist Party gathered information, on behalf of Czechoslovak intelligence, on those among the left critical of the Eastern Bloc (interview with Terry Liddle, 1995). The Party itself of course denies all this, but admits that it printed English language material for the Czechoslovaks, for which it was paid at a commercial rate (interview with Ann Rogers, National Organiser of the New Communist Party, 1995).

The Party blamed the collapse of the regimes in Eastern Europe in 1989 on the lack of Soviet support. This of course only strengthened its opposition to Gorbachev. Thus the New Communist Party gave uncritical support to the August Coup of 1991. In its statement on the coup, the party said that "with his removal the morale of genuine communists throughout the world has risen. The perspectives for an effective anti-imperialist struggle are brighter. Confidence in the socialist alternative has gained strength." (*New Worker*, issue 679, 23rd of August 1991) The failure of the coup was thus a major setback for this party. The New Communist Party has since had a major rethink of its attitude toward the former Soviet Union. It is about to adopt a new analysis of these issues at its forthcoming congress.

The nature of this new analysis is immediately apparent on entering the Party's offices; there are pictures of Joseph Stalin everywhere. Within minutes of speaking to Ann Rogers, the Party's National Organiser, I was told that "Stalin's only crime was being successful ... Those convicted at the so called show trials were all counter-revolutionaries, who deserved everything they got ... Trotsky was a menace and he had to be dealt with." She went on to deny that the Soviets were responsible for the Katyn Massacre, claimed that the Doctor's Plot was genuine and that Solszhenitsyn's works were all CIA funded frauds (interview with Ann Rogers, 1995).

The Party's new analysis, if it can be called that, is based upon the speeches of Nina Andreyeva, the leader of the 'All Soviet Bolshevik Party'. Her views are heavily peddled by the *New Worker*, the Party's weekly paper, and by its editor Andy Brooks.

It is alleged that a considerable degree of counter-revolutionary activity continued in the Soviet Union long after the end of the civil war. Nina Andreyeva argues this was led by the kulaks, or rich peasants. This is what Stalin had to counter, and what his purges were attempting to root out. According to this theory some excesses did occur, but they are blamed on Yezhov and Yagoda. Andy Brooks then told me in all seriousness that these two were in fact kulaks out to discredit the achievements of the revolution. They had apparently infiltrated the party and the security services in order to settle old scores. When Stalin discovered what they were really up to, he promptly 'dealt with' them as he did with other agent provocateurs.

When Khrushchev denounced Stalin, the argument goes on, and proclaimed that the Soviet Union was on the way to full socialism, he was effectively proclaiming the end of the dictatorship of the proletariat and therefore the end of the class war. This enabled many kulaks to enter the Party, and to embark upon the counter-revolutionary. Nina Andreyeva sees Khrushchev's motive for denouncing Stalin as being simply a matter of greed; if he need not fight the class war he would have more time to line his own pockets. There is also dark talk of Khrushchev receiving money from the kulaks.

Gradually the kulaks, Andy Brooks told me, took control of the Party. Their next strategy was deliberately to sabotage the Soviet economy and to promote corruption within the Party. This was done in order to discredit the Party in the eyes of the So-

viet public and to discredit socialism more generally. The argument here is ingenious; after all, the failures in central planning had nothing to do with inherent problems within the system, but with the machinations of the counter-revolutionaries.

With Gorbachev's accession, the theory goes on, the kulaks were firmly in control. It is claimed that this is proved by looking at the family backgrounds of many of Gorbachev's supporters, including Sheverdnadze and Gaidar. All that was now left for Gorbachev and his fellow kulak counter-revolutionaries to do was deliberately to collapse the Soviet Union in on itself and hand Eastern Europe over to the West. Before they did this, however, they tried to discredit Stalin further by publicising forged evidence against him. This was a measure to try to ensure the truth would not come out (interview with Andy Brooks, 1995).

The views of the New Communist Party on Stalin have, in my view, much in common with the denial of the holocaust by neo-nazis. This party denies all the known facts about Stalin's crimes, just like today's neo-nazis deny what is known for certain about Adolf Hitler. Both groups are willing to adopt bizarre conspiracy theories rather than to accept reality; what the 'Jews' are to one, the 'kulaks' are to the other. Both groups also share the habit of presenting incredibly dubious 'evidence'. For example the BBC was going to make a documentary which would have presented the New Communist Party's analysis of Stalin, followed by a debate on the subject. When the BBC discovered exactly what the Party's views were they, in my view quite understandably, pulled out. Andy Brooks, however, presented this as proof of the correctness of his analysis, arguing that the 'bourgeoisie' obviously could not counter his arguments (interview with Andy Brooks, 1995).

The New Communist Party is also very supportive of the remaining socialist regimes, especially North Korea. Glowing puff pieces often appear in the Party paper, which describe North Korea as a flourishing wonderland (for example *New Worker*, issue 820, 15th July 1995). Its support for North Korea goes far further than any other British party is willing to go. This has led to claims among others on the left that the New Communist Party is funded by North Korea (interviews with John Haylett and Mark Fischer, 1995); the Party of course denies them (interview with Ann Rogers, 1995).

Whatever the truth or otherwise of these claims, this party does seem to specialise in having unsavoury friends. This extends even to the area of Yugoslavia. The *New Worker* has given space to Misha Gavrilovic of the so-called 'Serbian Information Centre', which is the London based propaganda centre for Karadzic and his outfit (*New Worker*, issue 873, 1st September, 1995).

The New Communist Party is becoming an increasingly backward looking and isolated organisation. It glorifies a Stalinist past as an era to be emulated, while most of society regards it as an era of horrific suffering. In the arena of British politics it denies that Stalin could have had anything to do with the *British Road to Socialism*, a great Marxist would not have drafted that revisionist tract (Andy Brooks, *ibid*). Instead of moving on to new issues, it continues to attack all the other communist parties for their hopeless reformism as opposed to its own truly revolutionary nature, whilst itself at the same time supporting the Labour Party in each and every election (New Communist Party, 1992).

13 Conclusion

To sum up, what do the various responses to the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe amount to?

In my view, the responses have fallen into four basic categories.

The modernisers and reformists within the communist movement, the first category, have abandoned the old faith in its entirety. Before 1989 it had been their hope and belief, indeed their very reason for being within the communist movement, that it was possible to salvage something positive and honourable out of this tradition; they hoped to build upon what they saw as the increasingly independent and open modes of the British Party. Revelations about Moscow Gold and Stalin's role in drafting the original version of *The British Road to Socialism* showed this independent tradition to be a sham and thus dashed all the hopes of the modernisers. They realised that a radical departure from even their palest pink allegiance to Moscow-aligned communism was necessary. For some this was the Democratic Left; for others it meant severing all connections to the old party.

The second category of response is exemplified by the Communist Party of Britain and the myriad small organisations that are increasingly joining up with it. They are willing to re-evaluate certain faults which emerged within the Soviet Union, such as excessive bureaucratic control and insufficient popular participation. Defence of the Soviet Union and all it stood for has, however, remained central to the Communist Party of Britain and the organisations with a similar outlook. Indeed this backward looking glorification of the Soviet Union and the hankering for the past in many way seems to be the very factor which keeps them going; there seems very little which is in any way new or original in their thought.

Then one comes to the New Communist Party. To explain the collapse of the Soviet Union it has adopted what can, in my view, only be described as a bizarre and totally ludicrous conspiracy theory. With it this party has descended into historical denial and falsification on a par with the neo-nazis who deny the holocaust.

Finally, there are those organisations which somehow have gained a new potency and strength from the collapse of the rest of the Moscow line communist movement. The Communist Party of Great Britain (Provisional Central Committee) and the Communist Party of Scotland, to my mind, in their very different ways, fall into this category. The former has managed to adopt the name of the main party for its small but ultra-active and committed band of supporters, who still seem to have a real belief — which somehow was missing from the other self-professed revolutionaries I interviewed — that revolution will occur in Britain; the latter seem to be playing a fairly significant role in the future re-alignment of the Scottish left, and do not seem as isolated in their own cocoon as many other communist organisations are.

So what does the future hold for these organisations?

In my view, those harking back to the 'glory days' of the Soviet Union will gradually come together in the Communist Party of Britain; the Democratic Left will further adopt an environmentalist and vogueish agenda, possibly being a nucleus of such a party or, more probably, 'electoral alliance' if proportional representation is introduced; the New Communist Party will become even more of a Stalin adoring sect; and the Communist Party of Great Britain (Provisional Central Committee) will make much noise campaigning and standing at elections. Time will tell.

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