

# Essays on the general strike

## Part IV

# The 1926 General Strike

**A**s a workers' organisation the Communist Party was in a class of its own. Before the General Strike, ever since Red Friday it had been issuing warnings and urging the movement to set up councils of action and workers' defence corps. From the start of the strike it posed the question of power and the need to bring down the Baldwin government. The Communist Party stood out as the *only* serious revolutionary force, a fact the authorities were clearly conscious of.

During the course of the struggle out of the 5,000 arrests over a 1,000 of them were CPGB members. Party offices were raided, its papers banned.<sup>1</sup> Because of its role the Party gained enormously in terms of respect and influence, particularly amongst the miners, who made up the bulk of the Party's 5,000 recruits during the General Strike and its immediate aftermath (thus doubling its membership). When on May 13 the general council unanimously took the decision to call off the strike and leave the miners locked out, the Party attacked the lot of them. It fought to maintain the strike through "emergency meetings" of all strike committees and councils of action and a campaign by the Minority Movement to link key sections of the workers to the miners through advancing existing claims.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless although it took some time before the mass of workers were back at work this was due to employers weeding out militants and imposing intolerable terms, not the success of the Communist Party. The workers had been routed and were in no mood to fight on. They had loyally and with a high sense of discipline done as they were asked, including by the Party. They had "trusted the TUC" and had been cruelly betrayed. That said, nothing can take away from our members' dedication, self-sacrifice and unstinting support for the miners throughout their seven-month lockout. Where the TUC and Labour Party accused the miners of wanting to tie them to a "mere slogan", the Party backed the miners and their refusal to accept savage wage cuts. It unhesitatingly took up their fight, demanded moral and financial support from the whole workers' movement and a coal embargo.

The right reformist leaders of the TUC and Labour Party greeted the collapse of the General Strike as a vindication of their parliamentary cretinism. They had glimpsed the terrible prospect of civil war and recoiled. NUR leader CT Cramp summed up the right's collective sigh of relief with his infamous "Never again!" palindrome. Most left reformists experienced a similar Fabian conversion but dared not speak its name. The ever present gap between their ideology and reality became a chasm. Attempting to maintain an anti-capitalist image in the eyes of militants, the left reformist *majority* on the TUC General Council tried to brazen it out. There had been no sell-out! They had *all* voted to call off the strike *unconditionally* and desert the miners. But talk of treachery was, so they said, completely misplaced.

Under the influence of the left reformists the TUC stated the obvious: "The general strike is

ended". Then, using almost the same words as Arthur Scargill in 1985, went on to claim: "It has not failed".<sup>3</sup> Every other section of society might think otherwise - government, BBC, rightwing Labourites, intellectuals, bosses, rank and file workers, etc - then they must all be mad.<sup>4</sup> AA Purcell wrote in the *Sunday Worker* of "more real working class progress" being made in a "few days" than "in as many years previously ... Those who talk about the failure of the General Strike are mentally a generation behind the times in which we live".<sup>5</sup> A similar diagnosis informed the article penned by George Hicks:

**Was the General Strike a victory or defeat? I reply: who has gained the most from it? The working class has gained infinitely more from the General Strike than the capitalist class ... 'A great victory'. Of course the General Strike has been a success - a great victory. Those who talk about the General Strike being a failure and of the uselessness of the General Strike as a weapon must be living in a world of their own imagining.**<sup>6</sup>

One can rightly admire the CPGB of 1926. Yet, however much the class-wide impact of this tiny *Party* contrasts with the ineffectiveness and sectarianism of today's left *groups* (one of which boasts a bigger membership than the CPGB at the beginning of the General Strike), we must never give up our critical faculties. After all, to learn is to lead. Frankly the Communist Party made important mistakes in 1926. This is hardly surprising. The CPGB was still very young and inexperienced. The General Strike period abounds with the contradictory statements, lack of strategic clarity and confusion inevitable in a revolutionary organisation which had learnt its communism in the abstract and is for the first time approaching the infinitely more complex problems of really testing practice. Nowhere is this inexperience more obvious than around the significance of the general strike tactic. As we have argued, through its own logic the general strike poses the question of power. This was the line defended by JT Murphy in September 1925:

**Let us be clear what a general strike means. It can only mean the throwing down of the gauntlet to the capitalist state, and all the powers at its disposal. Either that challenge is only a gesture, in which case the capitalist class will not worry about it; or it must develop its challenge into an actual fight for power, in which case we land into civil war. Any leaders who talk about a general strike without facing this obvious fact are bluffing both themselves and the workers.**<sup>7</sup>

Eight months later and only two days before General Strike the same comrade was perhaps "bluffing both themselves and the workers":

**Those who are leading have no revolutionary perspectives before them. Any revolutionary implication they may perceive will send the majority of them hot on the track of a defeat.**

**Those who do not look for a path along which to retreat are good trade union leaders who have sufficient character to stand firm on the demands of the miners, but they are totally incapable of moving forward to face all the implications of a united working class challenge to the state.**<sup>8</sup>

In other words a middle way between the Scylla of surrender and the Charybdis of revolution was feasible. "Good trade union leaders" could defend the miners through a general strike while not mounting a challenge to the existing social order. This illusory *industrial* use of the general strike was explicitly defended in the CPGB's Executive Committee's statement adopted *after the failure* of the General Strike at its extended meeting of May 29-31 1926. Its agreed resolution urged workers *not* to accept the argument that the general strike must "end either in revolution or the complete defeat of the working class".<sup>9</sup> To suggest otherwise was a "travesty of the facts" (*Workers' Weekly* June 4 1926). There can be a general strike which neither goes forward to revolution nor backwards to defeat. If led "with the necessary courage" there can be the general strike "for definite concessions".<sup>10</sup>

No one should deny the utility of a one-day or limited *protest* general strike. But an indefinite general strike, a real general strike, is another matter entirely. Precisely for the reasons we have explained already it releases latent proletarian energy and creativity. To prosecute the general strike and protect it means rapid and ceaseless advance. Onward, onward, ever onward must be its motto. A head-on clash with the state and its forces is inevitable. So is the creation of bodies of working class administration and violence. A step along the road to power has already been taken. It is not a question of the "complete defeat of the working class" but it has to be either the victory of the existing capitalist state or the victory of the new workers' semi-state. One or the other must triumph. One or the other must lose. Those who suggest otherwise are, yes, "bluffing both themselves and the workers".

Underlying the Party's muddle on the significance of the general strike tactic was a tendency to assume that the basic contradiction in the working class movement revolved round a vague and ill-defined left-right axis, and thus to downgrade or entirely forget about the never ending struggle between revolution and reformism. Following on from this, in an effort to promote "genuine leftwingers", there developed a wrong-headed estimation of the trade union bureaucracy. The Party began to see its task as one of promoting left reformists in the trade unions and even "completely" changing the "policy and leadership of the Labour Party".<sup>11</sup> It hardly needs saying that such naive hopes were smashed on the reefs of reality time and time again. To employ another metaphor, as the "genuine leftwingers" - ie, the left reformists - climbed further and further up the career ladder, they became more and more sociologically and politically aloof and bound up with the right; more

and more prone to vacillation, empty gestures and downright treachery.

The sincere jumble of revolutionary determination, communist pedagogy and centrist belief that the existing leaders could be made to fight produced violent swings and considerable confusion in the Party's pronouncements. Sometimes the Party was issuing dire warnings about the reformists in general, but at other times it was either arguing that the "good" lefts could be won over or that the bureaucracy as a whole should not be challenged because force of circumstance would see it successfully lead the working class almost despite itself. For example in October 1924, in the immediate after-glow of the formation of the National Minority Movement, JR Campbell was writing that: "It would be a suicidal policy for the CP and the Minority Movement to place too much [sic] reliance on the official leftwing. It is the duty of the Party and the Minority Movement to criticise its weakness relentlessly and endeavour to change the muddled and incompetent leftwing viewpoint of the more progressive leaders into a real revolutionary viewpoint".<sup>12</sup> Almost exactly a year later JT Murphy had taken this wishful thinking policy of *converting* leaders to the point where: "We should ... recognise the General Council as the general staff of the unions directing the unions in the struggle".<sup>13</sup>

Such ideological hermaphroditism led the Party to claim that the miners could be defended "only" by a general strike which would lead to civil war *and* at the same time their wages and hours could be preserved by "concessions" won by "good" left leaders who could get the General Council to "stand firm". True, at the 8th Congress of the CPGB over October 16-17 1926 there was in effect a criticism of this, what had been a Menshevik type reliance on left reformist trade union officials. It was agreed that the "principal lesson" of the general strike was the need to convince the working class:

**that the only way to complete victory is the destruction of the capitalist state and its replacement by a workers' state based on the mass organisations of the workers. The necessities of this developing struggle will compel the working class under the leadership of the Communist Party to struggle for the elimination of the present trade union bureaucracy, and the revolutionising of the trade union and labour movement in outlook, policy, and structure. Without the defeat of the labour bureaucracy, more and more revealing itself as the agent of capitalism in the labour movement, the successful struggle of the workers is impossible.**<sup>14</sup>

Notwithstanding this partial recantation, it is more than a pity that the congenial venality of the trade union bureaucracy was not fully appreciated before the General Strike begun.<sup>15</sup> If it had been, the Party would have actively, systematically and constructively undermined the trust workers had in reformist leaders - crucially the trust they had in *left* reformist leaders - who

had often been presented as *principled allies* by the Party before and during the strike. Lack of correct theoretical orientation must have contributed to the Party's failure at this auspicious and fateful moment to make the decisive leap into mass politics so it could organise an *alternative* centre of authority to the trade union bureaucracy and challenge the Labour Party as the natural party of the working class. At the very least, warnings that left and right reformists were nothing but different sides of the same opportunist coin might have meant a less severe collapse in working class morale after the General Strike debacle.

Exploiting the contradictions between left and right reformism is good politics - if it advances the cause of communism. But the Party actually fostered illusions in the whole body of bureaucratic reformism, a mistake encapsulated in the slogan, 'All Power to the General Council'. Even though the usual slogan carried in Party leaflets, bulletins and manifestos was 'More power to the TUC', the fact that the slogan, 'All power to the General Council', could be used at all shows that the leadership suffered from the syndicalistic notion that the TUC General Council *could* act in a revolutionary way, take state power and provide the paradigm of socialism in Britain. The more modest slogan of "more power" resulted from a legitimate desire to centralise the struggles of the working class. Yet the fact of the matter is that the TUC did and does represent *collective* sectionalism. Unless it is led by communists there is not the remotest chance of it representing the interests of the working class as a whole. As to the 'All power' slogan, it not only smacked of an artificial transplantation of the Russian slogan 'All power to the soviets', but totally misunderstood the real content of Bolshevism.

#### 4.1. The Anglo-Russian controversy

It is all very well placing demands on the left-winging TUC in order to put it to the test, mobilising around demands which allow the working class to learn through its own experience that the TUC is unable and unwilling to lead a consistent fight. That said, facing the intrinsic possibilities contained within the General Strike should have led to emphasis on the new and the flexible, not the old and inflexible. We will never waver in our perspective of "winning the unions", but that does not blind us to the fact that the TUC is a body that by definition can only change with glacial slowness.<sup>16</sup> It is the flabby offspring of social peace, collective bargaining and parliamentary lobbying, not rank and file self-activity and class war.

The councils of action are another matter entirely. These bodies might in most cases have acted as little more than TUC transmission belts in May 1926. But that is to be expected.<sup>17</sup> Russia's soviets began life in organisational chaos and under the political domination of opportunists. Despite that they had the institutional elasticity to expand in influence, democracy and function when events began to move like a waterfall and taking power came within reach. The same applies to the councils of action. Being in essence rank and file bodies, they reflected the mood and aspirations of the rank and file. They had the potential to act as organs of the uprising and future organs of power, not only at a local level, but through a National Council of Action for the country as a whole. The councils of action in May 1926 had the possibility of becoming city-wide, by-passing officialdom and mobilising decisive action. Like the councils of action praised by Lenin in 1920, that made them embryonic soviets.

There was also a distinct whiff of conservatism in the Party's call for a Labour government. As a rule in the 1920s the slogan, 'Formation of a Labour government', was perfectly correct. The fight for a Labour government was a fight to expose Labour. The mass of workers, at least those with a medium level of class consciousness, believed Labour could and would overcome all the problems of capitalism and introduce socialism through parliament and a parliamentary majority.

So when faced with a run of the mill general election it was quite right for the communists to support Labour like a rope supports the hanged man. But it is another matter in the midst of a general strike, when the question of state power is forcibly and unequivocally posed.

As with 'All Power to the TUC', the call for the 'Formation of a Labour government' was to emphasise the old and undynamic, and, in terms of the Labour Party, marginalised.<sup>18</sup> The Communist Party should have reformulated the slogan it employed in the early 1920s, 'All power to the workers'. Here was a correct, though be it a rather angular formulation. The General Strike was the moment to concretise it with the call for a constituent assembly and linking that transitional demand to the perspective of a workers'

government based on the new mass organisations of the workers: ie, 'All power to the councils of action' to bring it about. We do not, and no one should, suffer from the illusion that there would be an immediate communist majority in such bodies - not at a local level, certainly not at a national level. Labourites of one hue or variety would dominate. Communists would have been a small but influential minority. Only with the progress of the struggle would we become a majority.

That the Communist Party made these important mistakes in 1926 can in no way be excused by the enforced absence of the 12 most experienced leaders. Languishing in jail though they were, all the evidence suggests that they were among the principal authors of the Party's tactics put into effect during and after the strike.

Because of its collective confusion, Trotsky argued that the CPGB had acted as a "brake" on the General Strike, a charge which the 8th Congress of the CPGB indignantly rejected: "Without the Communist Party and the Minority Movement, the pressure of the masses on the General Strike would have been weaker and the General Strike would never have taken place".<sup>19</sup> The positive role of the Party cannot be denied. But then Trotsky was not saying things would have been better *without* the Party, only that things would have gone further, given the objective possibilities which existed, if the Party had been guided by a more developed revolutionary theory.

Trotsky's prime criticism was of course the attitude the Party took towards the left reformists, which was undoubtedly wrong. But he was painting from a broader palette. Trotsky, in many ways like Luxemburg, was the personification of the revolution, not the Party. After a brilliant record in the forefront of the 1905 revolution and then a dismal record of anti-Leninism, Trotsky finally joined the Bolsheviks in 1917, on the eve of the second revolution. His almost permanent experience of being in opposition before 1917 and a quick return to that state of affairs after Lenin's death in 1924 drew Trotsky to the conclusion that the Party was 'naturally' conservative, especially in the moment of revolution (as we have seen, experience of the German SDP led Luxemburg to a similar position).

On occasion it is true that even the best Communist Party can hesitate, can manifest rightist tendencies. That said, it can also display the opposite features. There is no law about it. However, for all the problems with the Old Bolsheviks in March-April 1917 that Trotsky and the Trotskyites make so much of and the open opposition of Kamenev and Zinoviev to the proposed uprising, the Bolshevik Party was quickly and decisively won to Lenin's position of overthrowing the provisional government; far from acting as a brake on the revolution, it was the driving force.

The main problem with Trotskyism though (taking its cue from its founder) is that it consists of convenient pre-1917 amnesia on the one hand and an overdetermined need to demonise Stalin on the other. With this method the undeniable conservatism of the CPGB in 1926 is put down to one man. According to the Trotskyites, the Party, via pressure from the leadership of Comintern, adapted itself to the TUC, above all its left reformist wing, because of the diplomatic needs of Stalin.<sup>20</sup>

Pursuing his strategy of 'socialism in one country', Stalin was meant to have put the preservation of the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee above the prospect of revolution in Britain.<sup>21</sup> That the CPGB did not prepare the working class for the sell-out by the reformist left and placed far too much emphasis on existing bureaucratic institutions instead of the new organs of struggle is all true. But there is nothing to suggest that this was the result of Stalinite dictate or was "intimately bound up with the campaign against Trotsky".<sup>22</sup> After all most of Trotsky's epigones in Britain today take a position far to the right of the 1926 CPGB without the slightest overseas prompting, let alone international discipline.

Frankly the Trotskyite version of history does not stand up to examination. It skips over the role of British national conditions and the centrism, syndicalism and empiricism of those who formed the CPGB (even those industrial militants worshipped by Tony Cliff who had a "tradition of hatred towards the union bureaucracy and an understanding of the need for rank and file independence"<sup>23</sup>). Moscow was never the sole source of opportunism in the world communist movement; there was always a complicated two-way pattern whereby communist parties were affected by international and national conditions. Certainly in 1926 there still existed considerable room for manoeuvre and independent initiative for communist parties.<sup>24</sup>

Then, confounding Trotskyite mythology, there is the awkward but elementary fact that

the Executive Committee of Comintern was not the docile tool of Stalin and the emergent Soviet bureaucracy it was to become. From its foundation till November 1926 its president was Zinoviev. He was never an advocate of 'socialism in one country'. One year before Trotsky publicly joined the fray on this question he was openly polemicising against "national socialism" and insisting that socialism in the Soviet Union could only be built as part of the world revolution. He might have been an ally of Stalin *against* Trotsky in 1924 but in 1925 he led an opposition movement against Stalin and in 1926 he and Trotsky jointly headed the United Opposition.<sup>25</sup>

That goes a long way to explain why the Executive Committee of Comintern was to the *left* of the CPGB during this period. Five days before the General Strike was due to begin Comintern was making it clear that the "strike could not remain an industrial struggle. It is bound to develop into a political struggle ... The fight for wages and conditions will raise before the working class the question of power". Taking a considerably harder position than the CPGB leadership, Comintern noted: "Even the leftwing leaders of the Labour Party and the unions are showing themselves unequal to the situation" and that "the greatest danger" came not from the government but "treacherous leaders". Again in contradistinction to Trotskyite mythology, far from demanding a toning down of CPGB slogans, Comintern was urging that "as the struggle develops, the Party slogans must be carried to a higher level, up to the slogan of the struggle for power".<sup>26</sup>

Immediately after the strike, even though the full extent of the TUC's perfidy was apparent and the connivance of the left reformists had been revealed, the Communist Party's skeleton Central Committee held back from a full scale propaganda barrage against them. No doubt this was in an attempt to secure whatever support could be garnered for the beleaguered miners.<sup>27</sup> Despite the CPGB's on-going attempt to appease the TUC, despite the value placed on the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee, the Soviet trade union leadership - under the future Right Oppositionist Tomsy - denounced the British left reformist trade union leaders for their "treachery" in an "appeal to the international proletariat" published in *Pravda* on June 8 1926. This charge was defended and repeated by Stalin on more than one occasion.<sup>28</sup> The CPGB leadership, showing its position within the world communist movement spectrum, stubbornly declined to print the Soviet trade unions' appeal. In Moscow the CPGB's delegate to Comintern, JT Murphy, forcibly attacked the appeal in localist terms. He regarded the whole thing as "interference" in the internal affairs of the British working class. Only after lengthy argument did Comintern, including Stalin, persuade him that it would have been unprincipled for the Soviet unions to "keep silent" - even if voicing criticism meant "a rupture of the bloc with the general council, in the break-up of the Anglo-Russian Committee".<sup>29</sup>

#### 4.2. Consequences of defeat

Undaunted by all the evidence to the contrary, Tony Cliff and Donny Gluckstein try to make the Anglo-Russian Committee the fulcrum for the degeneration of the 'official' CPGB (of course they are not alone: all Trotskyites claim the same). Ignoring the general lack of clarity displayed by the CPGB since its foundation in 1920, the SWP duo claim that the "decisive shift of the Communist Party to the right" was "spurred on by the establishment of the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee".<sup>30</sup>

The whole project was wrong from start to finish, they say. This was Trotsky's argument - in 1928. Nevertheless when the agreement was being signed and sealed he enthusiastically went along with it. Just a few months before the General Strike he was still waxing lyrical. His speech to Soviet textile workers in January 1926 acclaimed the Anglo-Russian Committee as the "highest expression of the shift in the situation of all Europe and especially Britain, which is taking place before our eyes and will lead to the proletarian revolution".<sup>31</sup>

Ready to take up even a flimsy polemical weapon with which to fend off Stalin, the United Opposition urged a break with the TUC *after* the sell-out of the General Strike. In July 1926, under the signatures of Zinoviev, Kamenev, Krupskaya, Trotsky and Pyatakof, the United Opposition stated that, while it was absolutely correct to form the committee with the TUC, the time had arrived for a "break with them in event of their betrayal".<sup>32</sup> Maintaining the Anglo-Russian Committee allowed the TUC pseudo-lefts to keep their militant image intact, they said. Snubbing them with the maximum publicity would help the workers in Britain make the transition from militancy to communism.

Stalin had little problem parrying such ges-

ture politics with fulsome quotes from Lenin about "arrangements and compromises" with reactionaries. Though they specifically defended the "necessity for communists to work in the most reactionary trade unions", in effect the United Opposition was on this occasion straying into 'left' communist territory: ie, that it was unprincipled for communists to work in international versions of such bodies.<sup>33</sup> For Stalin, as long as the communists in Britain and the Soviet trade unions kept their "freedom to criticise the reformist leaders", then the Anglo-Russian Committee was permissible.<sup>34</sup> Trotsky's attempt to "torpedo" the Anglo-Russian Committee would, he felt, only play "into the hands of the interventionists".<sup>35</sup>

It is quite clear that the argument around the Anglo-Russian Committee was primarily to do with internal struggles in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. In an attempt to expose the atavism of Stalin's theory of 'socialism in one country' the United Opposition tried to show that every international setback or defeat was his personal responsibility. In the conditions of 1926 that was understandable. But that does not mean we in our day have to faithfully follow every twist and turn of past polemics or view every statement as the expression of profound truth to be venerated as doctrine. We can leave that to others.

In all honesty a break with the TUC in May, June or July 1926 would have had little or no impact on the working class movement in Britain. The working class had already been defeated. The bureaucracy as a whole was moving rapidly to the right. So much indeed that in 1927 left reformist leaders were joining the anti-communist witch hunt. In the climate of reaction the TUC had no compunction in taking the initiative to dissolve the committee. If Soviet unions had pre-empted them it would hardly have caused a political earthquake. Only those whose hearts are ruling their heads could seriously imagine that it would have resulted in workers leaving behind reformist illusions and coming over to communism. We should, except under exceptional circumstances, be the most consistent advocates of trade union unity, including international trade union unity. If that means unity in red unions, brilliant. If it means unity in reactionary unions, so be it. 'Always with the masses' - that is our slogan. To have kept quiet about the role of the TUC in the General Strike would have been unforgivable. But to have unilaterally broken with the TUC would have been unpardonable.

Those who think world history in 1926 danced on events in Moscow not only fail to give due importance to life in Britain but reveal a tenuous grasp of the art of politics. The advanced stratum of the working class can learn through the smooth geometric abstractions of propaganda. Communists in the Britain of 1926 could have done with some didactic guidance on that score when it came to the double sidedness of left reformism.

That said, we should never forget that the masses learn primarily through their own infinitely richer living experiences. What is meant by that needs qualifying. After all it is no good expecting workers to spontaneously come over to us through antibiosis, simply by the negative experience of being misled by trade union bureaucrats. The same goes for experience of Labour governments or capitalism as a system.

Those who think broken promises, unemployment, poverty and wage cuts a good thing because they cause disillusionment with existing ideas and institutions forget just how overarching, how dominant bourgeois ideology is. There is *always* a way out for capitalism - if the workers are prepared to pay for it. The organising and intellectual role of the Party is therefore crucial. Without conscious communist leadership spontaneity ends up dissipated, directionless and disappointed. The Party mediates, channels and enriches the experiences of the masses so as to facilitate revolutionary conclusions, demands and decisive action.

Palme Dutt seems to have clutched at the straw of spontaneity in his analysis of the General Strike. Immediately after it he argued that the General Strike was "not only the greatest revolutionary advance in Britain since the days of Chartism, and a sure prelude of the new revolutionary era, but its defeat is a profound revolutionary lesson and stimulus".<sup>36</sup> Not that the masses were defeated. What had been defeated was "the old leadership" along with its trade unionism, reformism, pacifism and parliamentarianism.<sup>37</sup> In his opinion "the British bourgeoisie has taught the proletariat a lesson of inestimable revolutionary value. The defeat of the General Strike is itself a gigantic piece of revolutionary propaganda".<sup>38</sup> All that remained was for the Communist Party to assume, as it were, its rightful place as the leadership of the whole working class movement. Subsequent events tell us that life did not and does not work in such a generous fashion. The collapse of the General Strike was not the "final collapse" of the

"methods of the old trade union economic struggle".<sup>39</sup> Nor were the workers now face to face with the "legal and armed forces of the state".<sup>40</sup>

It might have been a 162 million strike-days record in terms of statistics, but politically 1926 was a debacle. With it our rulers inflicted a strategic defeat on the working class and overcame the 'direct action' enemy within, which had been challenging the ruling class since 1910. As can be seen from table one, the defeat of the General Strike meant class combativity was sent reeling, not taken to a new, higher stage, as Palme Dutt thought. The number of strike days crashed through the floor and trade union membership was further driven down in an orgy of union bashing.

Table 1<sup>41</sup>**Strike statistics 1924 to 1935**

Year	Number of strikes	Total strike days (thousands)
1924	710	8,420
1925	603	7,950
1926	323	162,230
1927	308	1,170
1928	302	1,390
1929	431	8,290
1930	422	4,400
1931	420	6,980
1932	389	1,070
1933	357	1,070
1934	471	960
1935	553	1,960

Employers refused to take back 'commies' and 'agitators'. They imposed all sorts of onerous terms and conditions. In November 1926 George Spencer led a section of the Notts miners in a UDM-type breakaway from the MFGB. The government introduced the Trades Disputes and Trade Union Act in January 1927; it made all sympathetic strikes, mass picketing and "intimidation" illegal and banned civil service unions from affiliating to the TUC. In other words there was a shift in the balance of class forces.

Instead of backs-against-the-wall resistance, the TUC and Labour Party added fuel to the reactionary fire. Crawling before capitalism, they became red baiting advocates of Mondism, industrial peace and national efficiency.<sup>42</sup> Scabs betray and always find themselves betrayed: having served its purpose, the TUC left found itself ousted by an ungrateful right and consigned to a neither-power-nor-glory purgatory.

Of course British capitalism was still suffering from relative decline. Though the Bank of England would have had it otherwise, Britain could not maintain the gold standard. Despite the strategic defeat inflicted on the working class in 1926, sterling could not recover what Susan Strange calls its position as the *top currency* - the main currency of reserve and transaction in the world market - which it occupied between 1815 and 1918<sup>43</sup>. In point of fact from 1931 the pound was losing its status as a master currency<sup>44</sup>. Nevertheless, there was another side to decline - an ability to manage it. Though losing ground to its imperialist rivals, Britain managed to escape war with Germany till 1939 and keep the US in splendid isolation before the 'arsenal of democracy' entered World War II in 1941 (the war between Britain and the US Trotsky had predicted in the many ways masterful *Where is Britain going?* was fought, but in alliance against Germany).<sup>45</sup> Containment of the Soviet Union also proved successful. Under Stalin the world's revolutionary centre began killing off its own children and seeking permanent coexistence with capitalism. Then there was the division of Ireland. It kept this most troublesome country quiet for nearly fifty years.

So without serious overseas distraction Britain's ruling class had an easy time domesticating the TUC. But there was more to it than that. Not least because it still held the world's largest empire, British capitalism could temper its frontal assault on the working class. It could, while shifting the balance of class forces, strengthen the political role of the labour bureaucracy and most importantly, as can be seen from Table 2, refrain from driving down the *real* wages of those in work (remember this was in a period of falling prices).<sup>46</sup> From within the Tory establishment, even before the General Strike had met its final *dénouement*, Robert Cecil, LS Amery and Lord Percy were warning against further reductions in living standards imposed on vulnerable sections of the working class. With the ending of the strike Baldwin promised that there would be no general cut in wages and even Churchill spent the summer of 1926 trying to persuade the coal owners to moderate their demands on the miners. This flexibility was the result of both continued economic standing and fear of revolution.<sup>47</sup> As it turned out, those who bore the main burden of the reorganisation of capital in

Britain, those who suffered poverty and degradation, as today, were primarily not employed but unemployed workers and those subject to imperialist exploitation.

Table 2<sup>48</sup>**Index of Average Real Wages 1924-1935**

1924	111	1930	122
1925	112	1931	129
1926	113	1932	129
1927	117	1933	131
1928	118	1934	130
1929	118	1935	130

Under these unfavourable conditions the Communist Party found itself dangerously isolated from employed workers. Membership fell away in droves. That which remained became increasingly based on students, housewives and above all unemployed workers who, unlike their employed brothers and sisters, maintained an organised opposition to capitalism and a readiness to fight. An indication of the setback suffered by militants and in turn the Communist Party was the decision in 1929 to wind up the National Minority Movement. The main thrust of Party activity became the National Unemployed Workers' Movement and its great hunger marches of the late 1920s and the 1930s.

**4.3. Hinton and Hyman: a false diagnosis**

The limitations of the Party in 1926, loss of membership till the early 1930s and the ideological flip from "social fascism" to "popular fronts" do not in the least prove the thesis of the left academics James Hinton and Richard Hyman that the "basic weakness" of the CPGB in the 1920s lay in its failure to understand that "objective conditions" in Britain made it "impossible" to build a mass Communist Party.<sup>49</sup> Citing Lenin's *What is to be Done?* they claim that Britain in the 1920s was more like Russia 1902 than Russia 1905. "This was not the time to build a mass revolutionary party" they say.<sup>50</sup> Instead what should have been fought for in the 1920s was a "cadre party placing primary emphasis on the quality rather than the quantity of its membership".<sup>51</sup> In "such unfavourable circumstances" this "less ambitious" strategy would, they maintain, have sustained "the British revolutionary tradition".<sup>52</sup>

Let us recapitulate Lenin's answer to the question, *What is to be Done?* It was certainly not the one put forward by Hinton and Hyman. The salient points of Lenin's 1902 pamphlet are as follows.<sup>53</sup>

Firstly, the importance of theory and a theoretical struggle against revisionism, specifically in Russia grouped around the journals *Rabocheye Dyelo*, *Credo* and *Rabochaya Mysl*. Those mesmerised by the bourgeois fads and fashions of the day - crisis free capitalism, class collaboration, slow social reform - should not be allowed to hide their opportunism and legalism under the guise of "freedom of criticism". Marxism was not out of date, as they said; it is the verified, scientific theory of the working class.

Secondly, the need to understand the limitations of spontaneity. Lenin was insistent that the scientific theory of the working class comes from outside the sphere of the spontaneous movement such as economic or trade union struggles. The task of communists was not to rely on trade unionism step by step taking the working class to political maturity. No, communists have to develop the most advanced theory and provide the working class with a fully rounded politics that enables it to become the champion of all oppressed classes, the revolutionary vanguard against tsarism and a future ruling class. There can be no bowing to spontaneity or worship of the trade union activist.

Thirdly, Lenin repeated his plan outlined in 1901 in *Where to begin* for the organisation of communists. There had to be an end to "primitiveness", by which he meant loose propaganda and discussion circles. Against the tsarist secret police, the okhrana, they did not stand a chance. Their average life expectancy was measured in months, sometimes just weeks. Democracy in the Party would have to take second place to the needs of survival. There were too many communists in prison, in Siberian exile or quarantined abroad.

Fourthly, to carry out these tasks there had to be an illegal paper published and directed from abroad. This paper would carry out polemical struggle, provide workers with the most advanced theory and organise revolutionary activity. From distribution and discussion of the paper and fund raising and reporting for it, would arise the Party. Inevitably, given the specific conditions of tsarist Russia, that posed not a Western European mass party, but one made up of professional revolutionaries.

Yet we know when conditions changed in 1905 Lenin was quick to urge, indeed demand,

the opening up of the Party to the worker masses. This, as we have said, in no way entailed an abandonment of *What is to be Done?* Ruthless polemical struggle continued, there was no bowing before spontaneity. What of the organisation of the Party? Changed conditions allowed and required the combination of illegal activity with open activity, a legal press and mass recruitment. For Lenin there was no principle involved here. After all the only 'principle' concerning Party organisation is that there *are* no timeless principles, no fixed set of commandments, no doctrine. The Party is a tool to make revolution and guide the workers towards the goal of communism. Therefore everything about the Party's organisation must be flexible, ready to deal with new circumstances and new problems.

If we approach Hinton and Hyman and their 'cadre' party in this light we can see it is a recipe for posturing inaction and intellectual masturbation. The reason for Lenin's 'cadre' party was dictated not by a wish for the quiet life or snobish elitism, but "objective conditions" of Asiatic despotism and absence of open opportunities.

How do conditions stand on that score in 1920s Britain, or 1990s Britain for that matter? Apart from the most exceptional circumstances we have been able to operate in conditions of wide bourgeois democracy. Communists can freely publish books, pamphlets and papers with only the occasional let or hindrance. We can put forward candidates for parliament and local councils, we can organise public meetings, we can operate in trade unions, we can sell our literature to shoppers on Saturday mornings outside Sainsburys. That is not to forget the numerous prison sentences meted out to our comrades, the banning of the *Daily Worker* at the beginning of World War II or the constant stream of anti-communist propaganda that comes from every orifice and pore of bourgeois society. Nevertheless for our purposes here, Britain was and is just like Russia in 1905. Not that there has been an uninterrupted revolutionary situation throughout the 20th century. Obviously not. But there is relative freedom for communists to openly organise, agitate and propagandise (to pre-empt the pedants: yes, freedom that was won by previous generations, not granted by the state).

Anyway that means we face very different "objective conditions" to Russia 1902. The precondition for communist organisation is not conspiracy, the underground and secret ciphers. The idea that we should self-limit ourselves to a small *high quality* party is in fact a farcical repetition of the amateur circles Lenin railed against in *What is to be Done?* The high quality of communists comes not from their ability to stay true to a metaphysical ideal or keeping their ranks 'pure', but from putting Marxism into practice in the form of mass leadership of workers in economic, political and revolutionary struggle. Those who suggest a "cadre party" was all that was possible condemn the working class vanguard to a life sentence in a tsarist prison of the imagination. The problem for communists in the General Strike was not that the Party aimed too high or was too big but that it aimed too low and was too small.

**4.4. What the CPGB should have done**

James Hinton and Richard Hyman give doctorly advice to the 1926 CPGB on the basis that they know the *object*, the General Strike, was defeated and there was no subsequent revolutionary upheaval. All they really want to do is ease the path to the right by administering retrospective pain killers and asking pity for the long departed patient. Tony Cliff and Donny Gluckstein are from the same school, but prescribe mild stimulants, not morphine. Had Trotsky rather than Stalin been in charge in the Kremlin there would have been a force pushing for more criticism of the left reformists. By following Trotsky the CPGB could have avoided the worst depths of demoralisation after the General Strike was called off. The patient could have lived to 35 instead of pegging out at 25. But no more. Defeat is accepted by Cliff and Gluckstein as one accepts the certainty of one's own death. Perry Anderson also knows "victory" in the General Strike was never "conceivable" because it was defeated.<sup>54</sup> But this professor offers no balms or pills. His is the diagnosis not of the resigned medic, but the mortician.

The methodological approach of most left academics and 'left' revolutionaries is fundamentally flawed in the same way. They never really consider what *should* have been done in 1926 and instead concentrate on what did happen. In this way history is treated scholastically, as an inviolable thing in itself, not as the product of people and their revolutionising practice; yes, of course, within prescribed material circumstances.

It takes skill, access to rare documents and a keen mind to contemplate history and accurately describe how and why things turned out as they

did. But Marxism demands more. The idea must become a material force. Theory begins; practical politics completes. Capital enlightens; revolution electrifies. After Hegel, Marx. After Plekhanov, Lenin. History is made by people and should be rigorously cross-examined so that people can draw revolutionary lessons for their own practice today.

We therefore consider one-sided the resigned approach to the past which ignores the active social making of history and the different possibilities different practices *would* have produced.<sup>55</sup> As the famous eleventh thesis on Feuerbach says: "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it".<sup>56</sup> Following thought there must be action.

History would be very easy to make if struggle was undertaken only on condition of infallible certainties. But it is not. It is made by people driven by hope or held back by fear, just as much as the underlying course of development.

When for example we study the October Revolution, we do so not to make banal statements that its victory was inevitable because it was victorious. That tells us nothing. Study of the October Revolution must be done in order to bring all its lessons into the realm of *human practice*. The same goes for our analysis of the much more numerous examples of defeat suffered by our class, not least the 1926 General Strike.

Hence 'what' and 'why' must be combined with 'should'. In the spirit of self-criticism we must ask ourselves what the Communist Party *should* have done to change what turned out as a moment of demoralising defeat into something else. After all the General Strike did not take place at a historic juncture when socialism - the first stage of communism - was materially impossible. Socialism in our era is an objective as well as a subjective phenomenon. Our programme is not heroically doomed, premature or unfulfillable as was the Spartacus slave rebellion, the consumer communism of primitive Christianity, the Hussites, Wat Tyler's great society, Thomas Moore's utopia, the Levellers or Jacques Roux's *enragés*.

Given the dead hand of bureaucracy and government determination to inflict a strategic defeat on the working class, 1926 was far more like a stillborn '1905' than our 'October 1917'. Furthermore, because British imperialism still possessed immense reserves, our '1905' was not followed by our '1912' (the strike wave which allowed the Bolsheviks to capture working class leadership), nor our 'February', nor our 'October'. But what happened and why, as has just been said above, is not enough. We must outline what the CPGB should have done.

As will have been gathered, we fully accept the need for a clear strategic understanding of left reformism. It can never, while remaining left reformism, be a force for socialist revolution. The CPGB was quiet correct to fight for a united front with it in the forms of the National Minority Movement and the Leftwing Movement. But that should have been done in order to reach the masses under the domination of left reformism, not to butter up left reformist leaders and give them an unearned Bolshevik reputation.

The Party should have been aware that such leaders are a danger to the working class. With such leaders the working class is always vulnerable to treachery. Needless to say, being clear about left reformist leaders does not mean denouncing the workers who follow them - that would mean complete impotence. The Party should have done everything to link itself with the masses and win their confidence.

Concretely in 1925 that meant preparing the class as a whole for the General Strike and *changing* the Party. With the General Strike an odds-on certainty from Red Friday, the CPGB should have done more than issue warnings to the working class about the number of weeks that remained before the great moment. The CPGB should have made the transition from a party of revolutionary propaganda to a party of revolutionary action, a fighting organisation which has its sights firmly set on winning working class state power. That would have instilled confidence among militant workers and begun to persuade them that it was in the Party, not in the trade unions, that their ultimate hopes and loyalties should lie.

The General Strike posed the question of power. It was at the very least a pre-revolutionary situation. Government was willing to risk the collapse of social peace in its determination to inflict a strategic defeat on the working class. Workers were quite willing to bring the country to a halt in an attempt to impose their 'proletarian economics' on the capitalist class, first and foremost the coal-owners.

That meant the ruling class could no longer rule in the old way and the organised working class was ready to fight - albeit, to begin with, only with the strike weapon. Faced with such an



opportunity, the Party should have done everything to ensure that the General Strike became a real 'festival of the oppressed and exploited'. The Party should have, at every turn of events, put forward slogans one step in advance of the masses so as to facilitate the 'direct and decisive path'. That, in the first instance, meant the immediate and ruthless upping of the tempo of its work, and fully and unreservedly using the nine-month stand-off to make the self-sacrificing political, technical and organisational preparations for revolution. If that had been done, TA Jackson was convinced that May 1 1926 would have been the beginning of the British revolution. In the second volume of his unpublished autobiography he says:

**It is my considered opinion, in the light of after-happenings, that if the workers of Britain had been equipped with a leadership at all equivalent to their splendid courage, resolution and sense of solidarity, May Day 1926 would have been the opening day of proletarian revolution. Unhappily, history shows us by many examples that, if such a chance is missed, it takes long and many years before it can be induced to return.<sup>57</sup>**

The fact that the Party's *Workers' Daily* came out once, only to be halted by the blinkered printers' unions, says more about the communists than it does about the printers. There should have been a network of *secret* Party presses ready in case of government banning, to say nothing of sectional stupidity. Less than 15 years later this was done.

As Douglas Hyde describes in his apostatic book *I believed*, "preparations" were made for the underground printing and distribution of the *Daily Worker* in the period of 1939-40 in case "legal facility should be denied us".<sup>58</sup> He says a "duplicate Party organisation was created from top to bottom, with a shadow leadership at every level".<sup>59</sup> Hyde goes on to tell how he was instructed to go semi-underground in order to get "printing presses and print workers ready in all parts of the country"; in that way, though the Party might be banned, we could "say illegally what could not be said legally".<sup>60</sup>

It is well worth giving the flavour of Hyde's fascinating description. Having rented a "big warehouse" in Acton, he had installed "two or three linotype machines, a large flat-bed press, one or two smaller ones, a considerable variety of types and a mass of printing paraphernalia".<sup>61</sup> Besides that Hyde established other underground printing shops in and around London, one in the East End, one in North London and two in Surrey. Newsprint was stored in a dozen counties. Given the technology of the day, typesetting was a big difficulty. Papers were made up using hot lead, not neat little PCs. Six typesetting centres were organised, including one in the basement of a large house in "select Kensington" owned by a titled family. Both footman and housekeeper were Party members and they made sure that every Sunday "two print workers, employed in a government print works" could prepare things "in readiness for publishing an illegal revolutionary paper".<sup>62</sup> Similar work was done by Hyde in several provincial towns, including Manchester and Glasgow.

If the Party could carry out such impressive measures in 1939-40 when many top figures were already entertaining notions of a parliamentary road to socialism, then it should have done better in 1926. Of course it did not do better. Nor did it do worse. To all intents and purposes it did nothing. Consequentially not only did it continue to operate as a propaganda party, but it operated as a propaganda party on a smaller, more amateurish scale. It was ridiculous that the Party had to rely on a little duplicated news sheet during the course of the General Strike. It shows that the Party did not regard its paper as its most precious possession, the apple of its eye. If our leaders, primarily the skeleton Central Executive Committee under the acting general secretary Bob Stewart, had been not just committed, but *serious* revolutionaries, they would have done everything to establish a catacomb of illegal presses.

A high quality *Workers' Daily* that was illegal but free would of itself have had an enormous effect. An illegal communist daily that called for a constituent assembly and power to the councils of action, in spite of narrow sectionalism and government bans, would have caught the imagination of the masses. An illegal communist daily that was fearlessly exposing the passivity of the left reformists and fighting for a mass Communist Party would have sent the TUC into an apoplexy and produced many thousands of recruits. An illegal communist paper that was calling for the preparation of an armed uprising and physical attacks on OMS scabs and special constables would have produced entirely different results to the TUC-led damp squib.

Charles Duke of the Municipal Workers later said: "Every day that the strike proceeded the

control and the authority of that dispute was passing out of the hands of responsible executives into the hands of men who had no authority, no control, no responsibility, and was wrecking the movement from one end to the other".<sup>63</sup> That is why he and his ilk sabotaged the whole thing. The problem was that the CPGB was not actively building an alternative leadership before and during the General Strike. CPGB members, especially those on trades councils, councils of action and strike committees, should not have waited for revolution to somehow happen by itself, as if TUC intransigence could lead to 'All power' falling into its hands and a government collapse. The grooves of history have to be greased. Revolutions have to be made. As conscious revolutionaries, the task of communists is to make the revolution. In 1926 they should have done just that. Not by naming a date and attempting some sort of a putsch. But by releasing the creative energy of the masses. Close culturally, geographically and politically, the CPGB could have done well by drawing inspiration from Connolly and the Citizen's Army.

Staging a limited uprising in the midst of general apathy is of course revolutionary suicide. But to have sent contingents of fifty even lightly armed comrades and supporters to occupy OMS headquarters, the stock exchange or even strategically located police stations in the midst of the General Strike would have instantly set the situation aflame. Lessons should have also been taken on board from 1905 Moscow. The government was freely and arrogantly moving goods. What about barricades surrounding the London, Clydeside, Liverpool and Hull docks to stop them? The CPGB had a majority, or enough influence, on sufficient local councils of action to make that an 'official action'. Mass defiance involving the whole community, not just striking trade unionists, should have been organised: a rent and rates strike should have been proclaimed; self-administrating red areas created - not least in mining areas - with taxation of local shops and businesses, expropriation of exploiters, working class justice, social services and order.

Insurrection is a "calculus", said Engels with "very indefinite magnitudes, the value of which may change every day".<sup>64</sup> "You must", he went on, "surprise your antagonists", you must with every day prepare new successes; "rally those vacillating elements to your side which always follow the strongest impulse, and which always look out for the safer side; force your enemies to retreat".<sup>65</sup>

If the police tried to break through the barricades they should have been met with a "surprise", perhaps a combination of the tactics of the 1789 French Revolution and 1936 Cable Street. Huge numbers of men and women behind the barricades, flower pots, bottles, Molotov cocktails and catapults aimed from the houses above and well trained fighting squads ducking and diving through every side street, alley and back yard. If the army was then used in combination with the police, all the better. To make sure social peace was well and truly shattered and the masses kept their sense of defiant courage and class power, small armed workers' defence units should have carried on the class struggle using other means. Hitting and running, equipped with easily hidden weapons - sawn-off shot guns, pistols and bombs - they should have been used to pick off selected officers, sergeants, special constables and government officials, and carry out well chosen acts of sabotage.<sup>66</sup> As the IRA has proved beyond doubt, the idea that guerrilla warfare has to be a rural affair is entirely unfounded. Red fighting units should have been used to facilitate and then sustain the conditions for making revolution.

The TUC would have denounced the CPGB - that is guaranteed. No doubt the left reformist leaders would unconsciously repeat the words of Plekhanov and say, "They should not have taken up arms". Good, if we were in tune with the fast developing needs and aspirations of advanced workers the flow of events would move in our direction. The left reformists would face the choice of either breaking from their programme and fighting with us, trailing behind with tut-tutting criticism, or coming out against us and openly joining the right and the forces of the government.

It is impossible to say exactly what would have happened as a result of such actions - India, Jamaica, Egypt and other unwilling members of the British Empire might have added to the domestic crisis with bids for freedom. Ireland might have decided not to settle for neo-colonial partition. But three things at least are certain.

Firstly, communists would have been able to look back and say we had not been traitors and betrayers of the revolution: We did our utmost, we fought to liberate the working class with all our abilities, with all our might, and did not simply wait on events.

Secondly, the communist tradition would

have become richer, deeper and more enduring.

Thirdly, subsequent British and world history would have been significantly, perhaps very, different •

Jack Conrad

<sup>1</sup>The print unions did not help. Blinded by the narrowest of sectionalism, they refused to give exemption to the pro-TUC *Lansbury's Weekly* and the *Daily Herald*, and the Party's *Workers' Daily*. Only one issue appeared, on May 3 1926. Having made no provision for secret printing, the Party had to make do with the *Workers' Bulletin* - a duplicated news sheet.

<sup>2</sup>*Workers' Bulletin* May 13 1926.

<sup>3</sup>TUC statement quoted in A Hutt *The post-war history of the British working class*, London 1937, p161

<sup>4</sup>John Foster exposed himself as overripe for his later transition from 'official communist' centrism to *Morning Star* right opportunism when he claimed back in 1976 that "the general strike was also an epic victory for the working class - and one which can be said to have changed the course of history" (J Foster 'Imperialism and the labour aristocracy' in J Skelley [ed] *The general strike: 1926*, London 1976, p45).

<sup>5</sup>*Sunday Worker* June 13 1926.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>7</sup>*Communist Review* September 1925.

<sup>8</sup>*Workers' Weekly* May 1 1926.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>11</sup>8th Congress of the Communist Party of Great Britain: reports, theses and resolutions, quoted in J Klugmann *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain* Vol 2, London 1969, p228.

<sup>12</sup>*Communist Review* October 1924.

<sup>13</sup>*Workers' Weekly* October 16 1925.

<sup>14</sup>8th Congress of the Communist Party of Great Britain: reports, theses and resolutions, quoted in J Klugmann *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain*, London 1969, pp223-4.

<sup>15</sup>"Partial" because at the very same 8th Congress of the CPGB the call for "More power to the general council" was still made along with the perspective of putting "pressure on officials" (quoted in J Klugmann *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain* Vol 2, London 1969, pp225,227).

<sup>16</sup>At the 2nd Congress of Comintern in July 1920 Radek optimistically said that "partial struggles will finally lead the masses of workers to a general onslaught on capitalism." With this in mind he advocated that the communists "depose" the trade union bureaucracy. As he admitted, the "possibility of transforming the reactionary trade unions into institutions of the revolution" does not mean "we should close our eyes to the difficulties" (*The Second Congress of the Communist International* Vol 2, 1977, p67).

<sup>17</sup>See T Cliff and D Gluckstein *Marxism and trade union struggle*, London 1986, pp227-229). Here we find fully displayed their economic prejudices in a complete failure to appreciate the significance of councils of action and trades councils because they are geographically based. Our SWPers have a one-way love affair with workplace organisation. But real love always takes two. Workplace organisations are of rather limited use in a general strike. What is needed at the very least is the horizontal organisation of workers as strikers. Soviets in Russia, it should be said, were geographical organisations of the popular classes, at their base made up of delegates elected from workplaces, army units and peasant villages.

<sup>18</sup>Rank and file members of the Labour Party took part in the General Strike only as individual trade unionists. As to its leaders, they did not a thing to take the strike forward. Sidney Webb was not exaggerating when he said: "You must understand that the Labour Party and its parliamentary leaders or representatives had nothing to do with it" (S Webb and B Webb *Letters* Vol 3, London 1978, p264). That is nothing except selling it out.

<sup>19</sup>8th Congress of the Communist Party of Great Britain: reports, theses and resolutions.

<sup>20</sup>See M Woodhouse and B Pearce *Essays on the history of communism in Britain*, 1975.

<sup>21</sup>The Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee was formed in 1925 at the initiative of the TUC. It fitted in with the broad drive by the international communist movement to secure trade union unity and undermine the Amsterdam Trade Union International. The committee's aim was to "promote cooperation between the British TUC General Council and the All-Russian Trade Union Council in every way". It was greeted with a furore by the British capitalist press (quotes that follow are cited by James Klugmann in his *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain* Vol 2, London 1969). *The Times* warned that it opened the way for the "westward spread of communism among the workers" (April 22 1925), the *Daily Telegraph* damned the TUC for having "sold the pass" (May 12 1925), and the *Daily Chronicle* considered it a "breakaway from the saner trade unionism of this country" (April 8 1925). Nor did the anti-communist wing of opportunism like it. Ramsay MacDonald considered the committee as a step "towards international disunity" (*Daily Herald* May 4 1925), and the Polish Socialist Party, led by the original Lech Walesa, Josef Pilsudski, dismissed the leaders of the TUC as "Bolshevik followers and sympathisers" (*Robotnik* April 21 1925).

<sup>22</sup>M Woodhouse and B Pearce *Essays on the history of communism in Britain*, 1975, p75.

<sup>23</sup>Quoted in T Cliff and D Gluckstein *Marxism and trade union struggle*, London 1986, p125. Trapped in a fragile dogma not of their own making, Tony Cliff and Donny Gluckstein are forced to argue in effect that the syndicalistic origins of some of the comrades who formed the CPGB guaranteed a healthy tradition. On this most tenuous basis it is, or so they say, "wrong" to argue that the majority in Comintern was to the left of the Party in Britain.

<sup>24</sup>In their introduction to Gramsci's *Prison notebooks*, Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith argue that only by 1927 did "Russian developments become the determining factor" in Comintern policies. The period from 1924 to 1926 was, they say, a "transitional phase" in which "it is extremely important to stress the room for manoeuvre still remaining ... to an individual party".

After outlining the complex internal relationships in Comintern, they make the point that "it was possible for 'leftist' policies in countries like Germany and Italy to coexist with 'rightist' policies in countries like China, the United States, Britain or Yugoslavia. In each case, the determining factors were national rather than international" (*A Gramsci Prison notebooks*, London 1973, ppvii, xviii).

<sup>25</sup>See J Conrad *From October to August*, London 1992, pp34-38.

<sup>26</sup>J Degras (ed) *The Communist International, 1919-1943* Vol 2, London 1971, p299.

<sup>27</sup>In the same compromising spirit the MFGB general secretary, AJ Cook, withdrew *The nine days*, his damning indictment of the TUC's role during the General Strike.

<sup>28</sup>In a widely reported speech on June 8 1926, Stalin described TUC leaders as either "downright traitors" or "spineless fellow travellers of these traitors" (JV Stalin *Works* Vol 8, Moscow 1954, p170). He also argued that because the TUC "had no intention of raising the question of power", the General Strike was "doomed" to "inevitable failure": a general strike "which is not turned into a political struggle must inevitably fail" (*Ibid* p171).

<sup>29</sup>JV Stalin *Works* Vol 8, Moscow 1954, pp205-214

<sup>30</sup>T Cliff, D Gluckstein *Marxism and trade union struggle*, London 1986, pp125-26.

<sup>31</sup>L Trotsky *Writings on Britain* Vol 2, London 1974, p149.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>34</sup>JV Stalin *Works* Vol 8, Moscow 1954, p197.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>36</sup>Quoted in R Page Arnot *Twenty years*, London, no date, p31.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid* p31.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid* p31.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid* p32.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid* p32.

<sup>41</sup>Source H Pelling *A history of British trade unionism*, London 1963, pp262-3.

<sup>42</sup>In November 1928 Sir Alfred Mond, chair of ICI, together with 21 other industrialists, wrote to the TUC suggesting cooperation. Their letter argued that "the prosperity of industry can, in our view, be fully attained only by full and frank recognition of the facts as they exist and an equally full and frank determination to increase the competitive power of British industries in the world's markets, coupled with free discussion of the essentials upon which that can be based. That can be achieved most usefully by direct negotiation with the twin objects of restoration of industrial prosperity and the corresponding improvement in the standard of living of the population" (*TUC Annual Congress Report*, London 1928, p220). The TUC accepted the invitation. The first discussion took place at Burlington House on January 12 1928 with Mond and the TUC's Ben Turner alternatively taking the chair. The meetings became known as the Mond-Turner talks.

<sup>43</sup>See S Strange *Sterling and British policy*, 1971.

<sup>44</sup>The master currency is the dominant currency in a particular currency area: eg, the Overseas Sterling Area.

<sup>45</sup>See L Trotsky *Writings on Britain* Vol 2, London 1974, pp5, 9.

<sup>46</sup>While union membership fell from a high of 8.3 million in 1920 to a low point of 4.4 million in 1933, the number of trade union officials seems to have increased throughout this period (see HA Clegg, AJ Killick and R Adams *Trade union officers*, London 1961, p38).

<sup>47</sup>Six days after the general strike Lord Salisbury wrote the following cabinet memorandum: "I will not dwell on the familiar history of industrial suspicion and its disastrous effect ... [It] is not only widespread but has gradually grown in power, if not intensity, and has now developed into a settled determination to have a change. And this determination to secure a change has since the war assumed a dangerous and therefore urgent character. Up to that date the workers sought their ends in parliament ... It is, however, clear that they are beginning to lose faith in that road to relief. The favourite method is now direct action, which is, in its logical development, revolution ... Unless government and parliament bestir themselves, the change of method may become stereotyped: revolution may become a conviction. The worst of it is that unconstitutional pressure and direct action have been proved to be effective and the present triumph of the forces of order is an exception ... If we look at the attitude of the workers and at their intentions - no doubt largely subconscious but nonetheless formidable for that reason - the situation is essentially unstable" (quoted in J Foster 'Imperialism and the labour aristocracy' in J Skelley *The general strike: 1926*, London 1976, p49).

<sup>48</sup>B Mitchell, P Deane *Abstract of British historical statistics*, London 1962, pp332,345.

<sup>49</sup>J Hinton and R Hyman *Trade unions and revolution*, London 1975, pp50-51.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid* p51.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid* p73.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid* p73.

<sup>53</sup>See VI Lenin *CW* Vol 5, Moscow 1977, pp347-528.

<sup>54</sup>P Anderson *English questions*, London 1992, p32.

<sup>55</sup>Within the natural sciences chaos theory has given us an insight into the myriad possibilities contained within nature given the slightest 'butterfly effect'. The Marxist influenced Stephen Jay Gould has also explored the role of accident in biological 'history' in his fascinating book *Wonderful life*.

<sup>56</sup>K Marx *MECW* Vol 5, Moscow 1976, p8.

<sup>57</sup>Quoted in M Woodhouse, B Pearce *Essays on the history of communism in Britain*, London 1975, p144.

<sup>58</sup>D Hyde *I believed*, London 1950, p90.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid* p91.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid* p99.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid* p99.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid* p101.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>64</sup>F Engels *Germany: revolution and counterrevolution*, Moscow 1933, p100.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>66</sup>See E Guevara *Guerrilla warfare*, London 1969, p40.