

Why we Left the Communist Party

The following statement has been prepared by members of the Communist Party in Nottingham to elucidate the motives which led them to resign from the Party. These 12 include 4 members of the Area Committee, 3 Branch Secretaries and 2 YCL District Committee members.

KHRUSHCHEV'S SPEECH

We have had doubts about the Party's policy and programme for many years. But it was not until the Khrushchev speech that these doubts began to form a pattern. We started realising that we were not merely fighting a local leader, or even "Pollitt & Co." but that there was something wrong with the international communist movement.

The fact that we had to go to the capitalist press (*The Observer*, *Manchester Guardian*, etc.) to find out about this speech, the fact that the *Daily Worker* did not publish it, was in itself of great significance. Khrushchev's apparent failure to inform the Communist Parties all over the world of his speech, and the lack of frankness adopted by the Party leadership to the rank and file members on this issue, confirmed our doubts about the honesty of the leadership and the democratic character of our Party.

And the contents of Khrushchev's speech were even more frightening than this. Twenty years after the Moscow Trials it became clear that Bukharin and many other leaders of the October Revolution who were executed in the wake of these trials as Nazi spies, were really framed. We were told that thousands of honest Party workers, thousands of army officers, etc., were executed without any justification. We found that Tito did not collaborate with the Gestapo during the war, as we had been told by Klugman in his *From Trotsky to Tito*, we learned that Rajk was not a Franco agent during the Spanish civil war days, nor a Gestapo agent subsequently, and many other things as well.

The terrible shock might perhaps have been mitigated had there been an attempt to explain seriously the causes of this terrible miscarriage of justice. But the only explanation given was the responsibility of Beria and Stalin for all these events. This is too absurd. It is the leader-cult in reverse. Surely it is far beyond the power of any individual or even of small groups of individuals to rule 200 million people (in the USSR) and another 100 million (in the East European People's Democracies) as well as to influence the Communist Parties all over the world?

BRITISH LEADERSHIP IMPLICATED

It was also impossible for us to believe that the leaders of the Communist Party of Great Britain, who so often visited the USSR and Eastern Europe, had not seen the monstrosities of the leader-cult, had not noticed the complete lack of democracy—democracy that would have made such a cult impossible—that these leaders did not know enough about the political past of the many Communist leaders executed as Fascists not to believe in the accusations. There can be no doubt that Harry Pollitt, Palme Dutt, Campbell, and Gollan, to say nothing of Andrew Rothstein the famous Russian scholar, and D. N. Pritt, Q.C., Stalin's counsel before the world court on the Moscow Trial, simply cheated the Party and the people. They covered up monstrous crimes, and in so doing became accessories to them.

THE IMPORTANCE OF POZNAN

We had hardly recovered from the revelations of Khrushchev's speech when we were faced by the Poznan revolt. At first *Pravda* described it as an act of United States spies, and the *Daily Worker* duly followed suit. Suddenly we discovered that it was a mass movement, a general strike of the whole town, something that could not happen unless there were justified grievances and demands. After reading the panegyrics about the excellent conditions of Polish workers in the *Daily Worker*, we were taken by surprise to learn from Gomulka (the Titoist deviationist of yesterday) that the standard of living had not only not risen, but had even declined consistently over the past six years. Miners, he revealed, that section of the working class whom we had thought were the most indulged by the Government, had already for years had to work seven days a week. In six years only 370,000 new rooms were built in the whole country, that is, about 60,000 rooms a year, or something like 20,000 flats, and this in a country whose population is half of Britain's, and in which destruction was so much greater than in Britain. (In Tory Britain some 300,000 dwellings are built a year). He revealed a terrible decline in the productivity of labour, in agriculture, etc. If Stalin had in his day been the only impediment to the truth, why did we not hear this in the three years since his death? Was it necessary for the Poznan workers to go on Strike, risking their lives, in order to bring out the truth? How do we know that tomorrow other horrible truths will not come out?

ANTI-SEMITISM IN RUSSIA

A short time before the Poznan riots there came another revelation which shocked us—the fact that for many years the Russian authorities had practised anti-semitism on a wide scale. The need for Professor Levy's protest against the murder of tens of Jewish poets, authors and actors, and the elimination of all Jewish culture (since 1948 there has been no Jewish paper or theatre in Russia although there are two million Jews and there was previously a thriving and famous Jewish culture) shook us profoundly. This clearly connected up with the open anti-semitism that was shown during the Slansky trial. Even after Stalin, one could find cases of clear anti-semitism. The *Manchester Guardian* of April 20, 1956, reported that 20 Jews had been sentenced at a Moscow trial to three to ten years' imprisonment "for possessing and distributing 'illegal' Zionist literature." When Khrushchev came to Poland to try and browbeat Gomulka, he burst out: "We have shed our blood for this country, and now you are trying to hand it over to the Americans and Zionists," (*Times*, October 23).

The attitude to Jews is a barometer of every society, and anti-semitism is a weapon of reaction.

THE LAST STRAW—HUNGARY

The final toppling of our belief in the Party leadership was the attitude taken by the Executive towards the events in Hungary. For the first two days of the Hungarian revolt, the *Daily Worker* pretended that it did not exist. Then it decided to present it as a capitalist counter-revolution by murder gangs strongly resisted by the workers. "Hungarian Workers' Answer" was the title of its streamer heading across eight columns: "Armed Groups Defend Factories Against Wreckers" (*Daily Worker*, October 25). The leading article announced that the Hungarian workers "had rallied around its government and smashed this attempt to put the clock back." They had been able to accomplish this, it was explained, because "Soviet troops joined their Hungarian comrades-in-arms and shed their blood once more helping to save the country and people from reaction." Next day the *Daily Worker's* leading article stated that Soviet troops were "assisting the Hungarian people to retain their independence from Imperialism." (October 26). "What has happened in Hungary these past days has not been a popular uprising against a dictatorial government," but "an organised and planned effort to overthrow by undemocratic and violent means a government in process of carrying through important constructive measures." But a couple of days later the *Daily Worker* quoted approvingly the Hungarian Communist paper *Szabad Nep* which criticised a *Pravda* dispatch headed "Collapse of the Anti-People Adventure in Hungary." It said: "What happened in Budapest was neither anti-people, nor an adventure, and it did not collapse." 'The slogans of Socialist democracy were the loudest, not those of the reactionaries nor of counter-revolutionaries.' 'The revolutionary people of Pest and Buda want freedom, people's freedom, a life without despotism, terror and fear, more bread and national independence. Would this be an "anti-people adventure?"', asks the paper. The first point in the Hungarian revolutionary demands of 1848 was national independence. 'Today also this is the first point.' *Szabad Nep* said that the *Pravda* article was an insult, as the insurrection could not be organised by Anglo-American imperialists, "because the greater part of the Budapest population had taken part in the fighting!" (*Daily Worker*, October 30). The *Daily Worker* of the same day also reported:

"*Szabad Nep* said the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Budapest began on Sunday evening. This was the first step toward their return to their bases and their final evacuation later from Hungarian territory.

"The young people of the universities and the workers had shown themselves worthy heirs of their ancestors of 1848, said *Szabad Nep*.

"Without them and without their collaboration it is impossible to restore order and ensure the future of Hungary.

"These young people have given proof of their political maturity and of their extraordinary feeling of responsibility toward the people and the country . . .

"They have proved that they represent such a political force as is capable of becoming a guiding and irreplaceable force, not only today but also in the future struggles for the development of the country'."

On November 1, the *Daily Worker* stated that "the Soviet Government . . . declared that it had instructed its military command to withdraw Soviet units from Budapest as soon as the Hungarian Government finds it necessary." A couple of days later, the *Daily Worker* said that fascists had taken control of the mass movement, and the intervention of Soviet troops (which according to the *Observer* of 4th November was made up of twelve armoured and mechanised divisions—as against two existing a week earlier in Hungary) was necessary in order to quell the fascist uprising.

How can anyone believe all these shifts? In May 1954 there were 864,607 people in the Hungarian Workers' Party (Communist Party). There were 577,000 in the Young Communist League, 560,000 in the Union of Hungarian Democratic Women (*For a Lasting Peace, For a People's Democracy*, May 28, 1954). Where are they? The factory and office workers made up 59.4 per cent. of the employed population of Hungary in January 1954. (*Ibid*,* July 22, 1955). Where are they during these disturbing events? In the 1949 elections the list of candidates headed by the Hungarian Communists got 95.6 per cent. of the total vote. Where is this mass of people? Where are the 10 army divisions built since the war under the leadership of the Communist Party? With all these forces, and with control over press and radio, how can American agents—and no doubt there are American agents in Hungary—fight the mass of the people? Where ever has it happened that Fascists lead workers in a strike, and in Hungary there has been a prolonged general strike? *

The Peter Fryer incident demolished any doubts about the *Daily Worker's* completely false position on Hungary. "We did not publish Peter Fryer's first report because it was an unbalanced estimate of the past 11 years and not an objective account of what he saw and heard" (*Daily Worker*, November 16, 1956). How did they know? On what did they base their charges of 'unbalanced' and 'not objective'? Had the *Daily Worker's* previous reporting on Hungary been balanced and objective? Obviously "objectivity" is a penny that can only be spent at the Russian Embassy.*

"The *Daily Worker* expresses its condemnation of the inhuman treatment of Dr. Edith Bone and our deep sympathy with her in the ordeal to which she has been subjected.

"We have had no knowledge of her throughout all these years, despite many attempts by the Communist Party to elicit information as to her whereabouts."

Why did the *Daily Worker* not openly protest against her arrest? Why was there no reference to her imprisonment until she was released under circumstances which could no longer be hidden from *Daily Worker* readers? Was this silence also Stalin's and Beria's personal responsibility?

We are thus more than ever convinced that the Executive Committee sees its function as one of blindly following the Leader or Leaders in Moscow, and that they are lying to the Party and to the people.

The panels system ensures that practically no change can be made in the leadership except from the top. Full time workers dominate the whole party machine, and consider themselves as the chosen leadership answerable only to their superiors. For them the rank and file is a money-raising pamphlet-selling mass who obey the leaders' orders.

Officially no factions are allowed, but of course, one faction always exists. This is the faction that controls the organisation from the top. The Executive can push its line everywhere, in every branch, but if a member of one branch wants to contact members of other branches with similar views, he immediately breaks Party regulations by doing faction work. How can one influence a national organisation without the right of any and every individual to contact, to discuss and to organise with other comrades of similar views wherever they be?

* The case of Edith Bone is also most instructive. She was the *Daily Worker* correspondent in Hungary and disappeared during the Rajk trial. After seven years of solitary confinement she was freed by the recent popular insurrection. After she was freed and on her way to London, the *Daily Worker* (November 3) wrote:

CAN WE REFORM THE PARTY ?

Coming to this conclusion by itself would not have made us leave the Party after being in it for so many years, if we believed that there were the possibility of democratic struggle for a change in the leadership, a change in method, policies and morals. Experience has shown this is impossible. It is true the Party Constitution speaks of democratic centralism, but while there is a lot of centralism, there is hardly democracy.

Doubting the necessity of the present structure of the Party, we have looked up history books to find out how revolutionary parties were organised in Lenin's time. We found that when the discussion on the question of Brest-Litovsk was taking place, not only was it done in the open on the pages of *Pravda*, but one member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party, Bukharin, was allowed to have a paper of his own, *Kommunist*, to fight against the *Pravda* policies, and no one dreamt of preventing this. Bukharin did not cease to be a member of the Political Bureau. Again, during the famous trade union discussions of 1920, the different protagonists, Trotsky, Bukharin, Zinoviev, Lenin, all wrote openly in *Pravda*, expressing different points of view. Going further back, Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg, both of whom belonged to the revolutionary wing of the Socialist movement, had their differences (on the national question, on the question of Party structure, etc.) threshed out in the open. When did we last have an open discussion between different members of the Executive ?

THE BANE OF SECTARIANISM

With the Party leaders behaving like puppets dangling on the strings manipulated by the Leader or Leaders in Moscow, and practising no democracy inside the Party in Britain, our Party became more and more isolated, more and more despised. In the 1955 general elections the Party put 17 candidates, and the total vote was 33,144. (15 of the 17 forfeited their deposits.) Ten years earlier, in the 1945 elections the Party put 21 candidates and got 102,780 votes. In West Fife, where Gallacher was elected in 1945 with 17,636 votes, the Party candidate got only 5,389 in 1955. (The comparable figures for East Rhondda were 15,761 and 4,544.) And this was the highest figure any candidate of the Party got in the election. If, in the trade union field, our militants succeeded in having considerable influence, it was not because they belonged to the Party, but in spite of their being members of it. Membership of the Party became a stumbling block in their work.

We have come to the unavoidable conclusion that we cannot continue our membership of the Communist Party for the following three reasons :

(1) The Party leaders are no more than the agents of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

(2) The anti-democratic nature of the Party structure makes it impossible for the rank and file to influence its basic policies or change its leadership.

(3) The Party is a despised sect. It is despised not because it is loyal to the principles of Socialism, but because it has betrayed them.

THE CRISIS IN OUR BROTHER PARTIES

We are not alone in coming to the bitter conclusion that the policies of the Communist Parties are wrong. We are not the only Communists deeply shaken by the brutality of Russia's policy in Hungary. To our sorrow the information about reactions in the Communist Parties the world over to the Hungarian events are scarcely reflected in the *Daily Worker*, and we have had to go to the capitalist press to glean some facts.

But the *Daily Worker* would not suppress that Nenni, the leader of the Left Socialist Party of Italy condemned "Soviet repression" in Hungary. He said that Italian Socialists were convinced that the workers and students who had begun the Hungarian rising "were entirely capable of overcoming any reactionary contraband that might have seeped into their movement." The *Times* of October 31 included the following report :

"In Rome and all over the country Communist Party members and officials are holding protest meetings. While the Stalinist group of the party leadership has demanded that Signor Di Vittorio, secretary-general of the CGIL, the Communist-dominated Confederation of Labour, should be severely reprimanded for issuing a statement on behalf of his organisation sympathising with the Hungarian rebel workers, the anti-Togliatti section demands that he should replace Signor Togliatti as secretary-general of the party.

"*Unita*, the party's official organ, has been flooded for days now by thousands of letters from persons humble and well known, as well as from provincial secretariats and federations, protesting against Signor Togliatti's attitude to the Polish and Hungarian uprisings. Today, 120 intellectuals, the Communist Party's *elite*, addressed a manifesto to *Unita* which the newspaper refused to publish. It was severely critical of Signor Togliatti and the Communist Party's leadership, and condemned Russian intervention in Hungary and Poland; it called for a complete reorganisation of the party's leadership.

"Communist journalists and provincial federations, for instance those of Turin and Milan, protested today against an article by Signor Togliatti in this morning's *Unita*, in which he accused western imperialists of having organised the uprising in Hungary, and in which he approved of Soviet armed intervention to repress the rebels. Even within the editorial staff of *Unita* there is a clash of opinions. Signor Lajolo, editor-in-chief of the Milan edition, was suspended because he published an outspoken criticism of Hungary's Communist Government."

Next day the *Times* reported : "The Communist-dominated Italian trade-union federation (CGIL) has ordered its members to stop work for five minutes at 11.55 a.m. on Saturday to commemorate the 'heroic stand of the Hungarian workers in their recent rising'."

The *Manchester Guardian* of November 6 reported : "The New York *Daily Worker*, organ of the American Communist Party, also sharply criticised the Soviet Union's use of force. Socialism, it said, could not be imposed on a country by these means."

In Britain the protest is smaller, perhaps because the Party is of less consequence, possibly mainly because of the involvement of the Labour movement in demonstrations against the war in Suez, but even here we

find moral indignation is not lacking. When a Communist Party van with a loudspeaker came to the London Docks to speak against the Tory policy in Suez a mass of dockers retorted by shouting about Hungary and overturned the van. We all know that hundreds if not thousands of members have already left the Party over the issue. Also many trade unions and Associations in which the Communist Party had considerable influence, like the Fire Brigade's Union, the Boilermakers, the Socialist Medical Association and others, have come out openly against Russian oppression in Hungary.

WHAT TO DO

The *Reasoner* states :

"The intervention of Soviet troops in Hungary must be condemned by all Communists." Russia, they say, made a criminal blunder in marching on Budapest and they demand the immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops. The journal adds : "If these demands are not met we urge all those who, like ourselves, will dissociate themselves completely from the leadership of the British Communist Party, not to lose faith in Socialism and to find ways of keeping together."

We agree with this. We agree that Marxists should keep together. And to that end we have formed a Marxist group in Nottingham.

But that is not an end in itself. The mass labour movement in Britain is at present showing a rising vitality, expressed in increasing industrial struggles and most recently in the campaign against the Tory imperialist war on Egypt. The militants of the Communist Party who reject the politically and morally bankrupt leaders of the Communist Party will find wide fields of activity in the Labour Movement.

In Preparation—

WHAT NEXT FOR BRITISH MARXISTS ?