Anti-fascist or Imperialist War? The Central Committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain and the Outbreak of War in 1939

by

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Abstract

This thesis aims to explain the motivations which led the leadership of the Communist Party of Great Britain to, at first, give qualified support to the British war effort at the start of World War Two and to give greater insight into the motivations which led members of the Party's Central Committee to abandon this line one month into the war, in favour of a line of opposition to the war based on advocating an immediate peace conference mediated by the Soviet Union. It finds that the Party leaders initially gave a degree of support to the war because they felt that the war was not a simple imperialist war but rather a war of resistance to fascist aggression; an idea based on theoretical concepts adhered to by the Party during the 1930s. The Central Committee felt that supporting the war would allow the Party to prevent German fascism being imposed on Britain through conquest and would provide the opportunity to re-establish democratic rule in states which had already succumbed to Nazism. Furthermore it felt that such a policy would be supported by the British workers and would not conflict with Soviet policy. This thesis also finds that, whilst the intellectual authority of the Comintern and the Soviet Union were the primary trigger for the Party's change in line, the Party leadership were also convinced of its correctness on the basis of pre-existing suspicions of the war aims of the British government as well as a belief that campaigning for peace would allow the Party to safeguard British democracy from its enemies at home and abroad. At the same time it highlights differences between the motivations of the majority of the Central Committee and the Party's secretariat for supporting the new line, specifically in their perceptions of the possibilities of a German victory in the war.

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Acknowledgements

<u>Introduction</u>

At eleven o'clock on the 3rd of September 1939, following the expiration of Britain's ultimatum calling on Germany to withdraw its troops from Poland, the British government declared the outbreak of hostilities between the two nations. The previous day, in anticipation of the expiration of the ultimatum, the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) issued its first manifesto on the war, entitled *War! Communist Policy*. In this document the Party called for the people of Britain to give their support to the war, which the Party characterised as a struggle between fascist and democratic ideologies. The triumph of German fascism over Britain, the Manifesto declared, would lead 'to the forcible destruction of every democratic right and liberty that the working class has fought so bitterly, and at such cost and sacrifice, to win from its class enemies.'[1] As such, the CPGB declared its support for all measures necessary for a British victory, which would not only defend the British people against the horrors of fascist rule but also assist the establishment of democratic governments in Germany and its recent territorial acquisitions, particularly Austria and Czechoslovakia.[2] At the same time however, the Party's manifesto claimed that the war could not be won whilst the Government of Neville Chamberlain still held power. The Party accused the British government of having latent fascist sympathies and pursuing the war for their own, unsupportable imperialist aims. It claimed the government, by its policy of appeasing Hitler, sacrificing democratic nations to fascist expansion and refusing pacts of collective security with the Soviet Union, had paved the path to war itself.[3] Thus the Party called for a war on two fronts which entailed supporting the military fight against Hitler on the one hand, whilst at the same time supporting a political fight to replace the Chamberlain

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[1] War! Communist policy" in Pollitt, Harry, *How to Win the War*, (Communist Party of Great Britain, London, 1939), p. 29.

[2] "War! Communist policy" in Pollitt, *How to Win the War*, pp. 25-6.

[3] "War! Communist policy" in Pollitt, *How to Win the War*, p. 25. and pp. 28-9.

government with a government led by the Labour Party, which would work effectively for a German defeat.[4]

At the outbreak of war the Party's leaders were united in their support of the aims set out by the manifesto. Despite the emergence of some doubts amongst members of the Party's two highest administrative bodies, the Central Committee and the Political Bureau, later in the month, the majority of the Party's leaders remained convinced of the correctness of the Party's War on Two Fronts line, with the majority of the Central Committee reaffirming their support of the line at a meeting on September 24th and only two Party leaders, Rajani Palme Dutt and William Rust, opposing the line. The very next day however, the Party's representative to the Communist International, Douglas Frank (a.k.a. Dave) Springhall, returned to Britain bearing instructions from Moscow which criticised the Party's line, calling on it to oppose the war as an unsupportable imperialist war. The Central Committee adjourned for a week, reconvening on October 2nd to vote on its line. At this October meeting Dutt and Rust, now backed by Springhall again expressed their opposition to the War on Two Fronts line but now they were joined by the majority of the Central Committee. Thirteen of the other sixteen Party leaders recorded as having voted on the Party's line in October voted in opposition to the line of the September manifesto and instead embraced a new line based on the Comintern's position.[5]

On October 7th the Party published a new manifesto explaining the new line in its paper the *Daily Worker*. The new manifesto, entitled *Peace or War?*, declared that the war was an imperialist war, being pursued by the British and French governments purely for extension of their own empires and to plunder their own peoples. It denounced the continuation of the war, calling for the Chamberlain Government to be replaced by a new government which would be prepared to pursue an immediate peace

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[4] "War! Communist policy" in Pollitt, *How to Win the War*, p. 25. and p. 30.
[5] King, Francis and Matthews, George, *About Turn: The British Communist Party and the Second World War*, (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1990), p. 292.

conference mediated by the Soviet Union.[6] Immediately after the publication of the new manifesto the Party held meetings of its District Committees and aggregate meetings of the wider membership, all of which gave their support to the Party's new line.[7] This new line or at least certain elements of it, were espoused by the CPGB until mid-1941. The Party maintained its calls for a negotiated peace with Germany until shortly after the Fall of France in 1940, after which it continued to denounce the war as imperialist but began campaign for a new government which would pursue a truly defensive war.[8] The Party only abandoned the characterisation of the war as imperialist after the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941.

During the two Central Committee meetings held in September and October to discuss the Party's stance on the war, two poles in the Party leadership emerged. On the one hand, Harry Pollitt, the Party's General Secretary at the time of the outbreak of war, along with John Ross Campbell and the Party's only M.P., William Gallacher, were consistent in their support of the Party's War on Two Fronts line in both meetings. On the other hand, a second grouping, comprised of Rajani Palme Dutt, William Rust and Dave Springhall (who formed a three person secretariat to replace Pollitt after the change in line) formed a consistent opposition to the Party's initial line on the war. The motivations which led these groups of leaders to support and oppose the War on Two Fronts line respectively and the arguments which they used to do so have already received some considerable historical study. The work of Historians such as Kevin Morgan, Nina Fishman, John Callaghan and Monty Johnstone have given detailed insight into the different priorities and perspectives which underlay the stances adopted by these leaders during debates on the Party line. The focus placed by Pollitt, Campbell and Gallacher on practical politics, anti-fascist sentiments, the military strength of Germany and the self-preservationist nature of Soviet actions in Eastern Europe, alongside the focus placed by

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[6] 'Peace or War?', *Daily Worker*, October 7th, WMCL
[7] Branson, Noreen, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain*, 192-41, (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1985), p. 271.
[8] Morgan, Kevin, *Against Fascism and War: Ruptures and Continuities in British Communist Politics 1935-41*, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1989), p. 174.

Dutt, Rust and Springhall on ideological conformity with the wider international communist movement, mistrust of British imperialism, the strength of British and French imperialism and the dominance of the Soviet Union in European political affairs go a long way to explaining why these two groups reacted to the clarification of the Comintern's line in the way that they did.[9]

Similarly detailed treatment has been given to the reasons why the Party rank-and-file supported the change in line. In this regard the works of Morgan as well as Noreen Branson are notable. Both historians have provided detailed assessments of the factors which led the Communist rank-and-file to eventually agree to the Imperialist War line. Specifically, Branson suggests that solidarity with the USSR and its desire for peace along with a lack of faith in the Chamberlain Government's claim to be waging a democratic war (based on its treatment of its colonial subjects) were primary factors in the rank and file's decision. Morgan, on the other hand, suggests that the rank and file were convinced by their suspicion that fighting under the Chamberlain government could not be in working class interests and their belief that the USSR's support for peace could mean peace without appeasement of Hitler. Both Morgan and Branson note that the belief that the Chamberlain government could not wage a just, anti-fascist war and the desire to avoid repeating the mistakes of the Second International in 1914 also played an important role in influencing the rank and file's acceptance of the Imperialist war line.[10]

Unfortunately lacking in historical coverage however, is the position of the members of the Central Committee, beyond the groups outlined above, during the change in line. As noted earlier, the members of the

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[9] Morgan, Kevin, *Harry Pollitt*, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1994), p. 106-10. and
Fishman, Nina, *The British Communist Party and the Trade Unions 1933-45*, (Scolarpress, Aldershot, 1996), pp. 254-5. and
Callaghan, John, *Rajani Palme Dutt: A Study in British Stalinism*, (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1993), pp. 181-90. and
King, and Matthews, (eds), *About Turn*, pp. 24-33.
[10] Branson, *History of the Communist Party*, (1985), pp. 271-3. And
Morgan, *Against Fascism and War*, pp. 91-100.

Party's Central Committee were initially, seemingly unanimous in their support for the War on Two Fronts line, reaffirming this support at the September meeting. In October however, thirteen Party leaders who had previously given the Party's initial line at the very least their tacit support now turned against it. Explanations of why these leaders changed their position on the Party's line are scarce in the existing literature. Some accounts of the Party in wartime skip over the wider Central Committee's reasons for supporting the imperialist war line altogether. Neil Redfern, Noreen Branson and Kevin Morgan for example, mention only that the wider Central Committee did, in fact, eventually side with the new line presented by Dutt's interpretation of the war with little to no explanation of the factors that led them to do so.[11] Other historians have given more attention to reasons behind the changes in the wider Central Committee's attitude to the war in October but even these explanations are often still lacking in terms of details.

The Party leadership's decision in October is usually portrayed as simple deference to the Comintern's or the USSR's position on the war. There are differences in the way this deference has been portrayed however. James Eaden, David Renton and Hugo Dewar portray the leadership's acceptance of the Soviet/Comintern line as a purely mechanical action. Eaden and Renton, for example, argue that the Central Committee was swayed to the Imperialist War line by the authority of the Soviet Union suggesting that faith in the Soviet Motherland acted, above all else, as the ideological cement which held the CPGB together during the 'diplomatic and military merry-go-round' ride of Stalin's regime.[12] Dewar also takes a rather cynical view of the process by which the CPGB decided its approach to the war. He suggests that the Nazi-Soviet peace proposal forced the Party leadership to accept that they were out of line with Soviet policy and that

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[11] Redfern, Neil, *Class or Nation: Communists, Imperialism and Two World Wars*, (I.B. Taurus & Co. Ltd, New York, 2012), p. 96. And
Branson, *History of the Communist Party*, p. 268. And
Morgan, *Against Fascism and War*, p. 90.
[12] Eaden, James, and Renton, David, *The Communist Party of Great Britain Since 1920*, (Palgrave, Hampshire, 2002), pp. 82-3.

the Party needed to change its policy on the war. For Dewar in the Party leadership's decision 'Everything depended on how the Soviet Union saw matters'.[13] John Callaghan and Francis Beckett also argue that deference to the Comintern was the key factor influencing the Central Committee but they argue that this deference was sincere rather than mechanical in nature. Beckett argues that by the October meeting the majority of the Central Committee had convinced themselves that the Comintern, Dimitrov, Stalin and the USSR could not all be wrong and that their duty was to support the international line. However, he suggests that they did so not for cynical reasons but because sincere intelligent Communists believed the Soviet Union could do no wrong and that Dimitrov would never go soft on fascism.[14] Callaghan too highlights the belief that the USSR could do no wrong as heavily influencing the Party leadership. He also argues that the Central Committee's decision was made on the basis of their deepest convictions, in particular their belief in the need for international solidarity behind the USSR (the minimum expression of which was the unity of the Comintern behind the leadership of the CPSU). He contends that the Party leadership did what they thought should have been done in 1914 and accepted the International line.[15] Callaghan furthermore, suggests another factor which informed the Central Committee's decision; namely a deep mistrust of the British Government, its democratic credentials and its ability to wage a democratic war.[16] It is difficult to judge which of these interpretations is more accurate however, as few accounts give detailed specifics of how exactly the Comintern and Soviet Union's influence convinced the Party leadership of the correctness of the new line that was to be projected by the Party.

Attempts to understand how exactly the wider Central Committee was convinced to accept the Party's new line are further frustrated by

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[13] Dewar, Hugo, *Communist Politics in Britain: The CPGB from its Origins to the Second World War*, (Pluto Press Limited, London, 1976), pp. 131-2.
[14] Beckett, Francis, *Enemy Within: The Rise and Fall of the British Communist Party*, (John Murray Publishers Ltd., London, 1995), pp. 91-5.
[15] Callaghan, *Dutt*, pp. 185-8.
[16] Callaghan, *Dutt*, p. 188.

divisions amongst historians as to the degree of unanimity with which the CPGB's leaders supported the War on Two Fronts line in September. The majority of historians agree that the War on Two Fronts line was accepted by the entire Party leadership largely as a continuation of the policy of opposing both the British government and the expansion of foreign fascism pursued by the Party from the mid-1930s onward. At the same time historians remain divided over the degree to which the Party's leaders accepted this line. Kevin Morgan, for example, argues that the dual edged approach taken by the Party was largely the result of its failure to make a concrete decision on whether British imperialism or foreign fascism was its main enemy in the run up to war.[17] Morgan suggests that this led to the emergence of less than overt differences between members of the Party in terms of how they saw the purpose of the Party's line. However, whilst he outlines some of the priorities of Pollitt, Campbell and Dutt, helping to explain their respective support of and opposition to the War on Two Fronts line in September and October, Morgan gives little description of the priorities of the rest of the Central Committee members in the run up to the war that might contextualise their more fickle position on the Party line.

The work of Noreen Branson and John Mahon seems to support Morgan's idea that the Party leadership's support of the War on Two Fronts line was accompanied by subtle divisions amongst the Central Committee. Both Branson and Mahon explicitly point out the fact that members of the Central Committee voiced doubts over the Party's existing line at the September meeting but they fail to explain what these doubts were, missing out on an important chance to contextualise the Party's change in line.[18] Others, such as Neil Redfern and Nina Fishman, perceive less ambiguity in the Party's initial line on the war. Redfern claims that any and all ambiguities in the Party line had been resolved in favour of supporting the British war effort by the time the British declaration of war was made. By the outbreak of war, Redfern argues, the Party leadership was 'spoiling for a

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[17] Morgan, *Against Fascism and War*, p. 101.
[18] Branson, *History of the Communist Party*, (1985), p. 267. And Mahon, *Harry Pollitt*, (1976), p. 251.

fight'.[19] Fishman makes a similar argument, suggesting that by mid-1939 the anti-government elements of the CPGB's pre-war line had become little more than a formal veneer with the Party becoming more and more convinced of the need to give qualified support for the British war effort in order to prevent Hitler from dominating Europe.[20] In order to give a more detailed explanation of the wider Central Committee's decision to support the Imperialist War line it is important to contextualise this decision with an understanding of the factors which led them to support the War on Two Fronts line in the first place. Depending on whether the Party leadership was, as Refern and Fishman argue, fully resolved to support the war or, as Morgan, Branson and Mahon suggest, still somewhat divided, their decision to oppose the war in favour of peace may be seen in different lights.

This tendency to overlook or rely on overly simplistic generalisations to explain the decision of the Central Committee is perhaps unsurprising given the tendency for decisions on national policy to be dominated by a few key members of the Party's Political Bureau, with the Central Committee acting merely as a rubber stamp for those decisions; an all too frequent reality which was openly acknowledged by the Central Committee itself (see appendix I). However, in this situation in particular, one must reject the notion that the Central Committee simply deferred to the pre-determined decisions of the Politburo. In October, unlike in other situations requiring a key decision on policy the Central Committee was not confronted with a united and resolved Politburo line but rather a divided Politburo. Whilst, as will be shown later in this thesis, the lines put forward by Pollitt, Campbell and Gallacher on the one hand and Dutt, Rust and Springhall on the other were not diametrically opposed to one another, they were different enough to be mutually exclusive. This left the Central Committee with the responsibility to choose which approach the Party would take. When one takes into account the democratic centralist organisation of the Party in which lower ranking Party authorities were bound to accept the decisions of

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[19] Redfern, *Class or Nation*, pp. 92-4.
[20] Fishman, *British Communist Party*, p. 252.

those above them, then it is clear to see that when it came to the October decision over the Party's approach to the war, the Central Committee really did hold at least a part of the power over the Party's national policy which it was formally meant to exercise (see appendix I).

Despite the unusually prominent position of the Central Committee at this point in the Party's history, little attention has been given to the arguments put forward by individual members of the committee for and against the Party's lines on the war. One of the most detailed accounts of the wider Central Committee's attitude towards war throughout the change in line can be found in Monty Johnstone's introduction to Francis King and George Matthew's *About Turn*. However, even this work is problematic in terms of detail. For example, Johnstone argues that at the September meeting, no member of the Central Committee disputed the imperialist character of either the war or the Chamberlain government's reasons for waging war but, at the same time, practically everyone agreed that the theoretical position developed by the Party during the 1930s, that democratic states should receive the support of the working class when at war with fascist states, either already or potentially applied to Britain's war against Germany.[21] Johnstone does not, however, provide any detail about the other major factors which underwrote the Central Committee's support of the War on Two Fronts line in September, such as the belief that a line of support for the war was the best way to win the Party the support of the working class and would not contradict the policies of other sections of the international communist movement. Johnstone's account of the October meeting suffers from similar problems with details; Johnstone identifies that two of the main points debated by Central Committee members in the course of arguing for or against the Imperialist War line were the character of fascism and the prospects for revolution in Germany. Unfortunately Johnstone fails to highlight any specific examples of how the Party's leaders came to convince themselves of the correctness of Dutt's position in regards to these two points, other than examples of those who did so on the basis of

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[21] King and Matthews, (eds), *About Turn*, p. 26.

blindly following the USSR or Comintern.[22] In this regard Johnstone highlights specifically the examples of Maurice Cornforth and Ted Bramley. Cornforth, he notes, 'had argued as strongly as any the need to work for "the military defeat of fascism"' at the September Central Committee meeting but at the October meeting, inspired by 'the need to constantly follow the Soviet Union', he now argued the case for an immediate peace. Bramley, on the hand, argues Johnstone, was convinced to suppress his doubts and vote for Dutt's line because it represented the line of the Comintern and Dimitrov, both of which 'Bramley' had enormous respect for.[23] These examples fit with Johnstone's overall conclusion that the main reason why the wider leadership accepted the Imperialist war line was its 'ingrained tendency to "blindly follow the International" as "an unrivalled political authority and guide"'.[24] Unfortunately however, Johnstone does not highlight examples of leaders who were able to explain their acceptance of the new line in terms other than blind acceptance of the decisions of the USSR and Comintern. Furthermore Johnstone also fails to note that the majority of the Central Committee's view of the Party's main practical objectives remained the same between September and October and overlooks the arguments put forward by many in the Central Committee in favour of the new line on the basis that it could achieve these practical objectives.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide a detailed analysis of the reasons behind each individual Central Committee member's reasons for, at different times, supporting and opposing the British war effort. This thesis, however, seeks to provide a more detailed explanation of the primary considerations which influenced Party leaders' support for, then rejection of the War on Two Fronts line than is usually found in existing accounts. In order to achieve this goal, the first chapter will, outline the context for the Party's later decisions by exploring the development of the Party leadership's general attitude towards war and the British government in the

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[22] King and Matthews, (eds), *About Turn*, pp. 30-4.
[23] King and Matthews, (eds), *About Turn*, p. 30.
[24] King and Matthews, (eds), *About Turn*, p. 34.

years preceding the war, with a particular focus on explaining changes in the leadership's attitude towards supporting a war led by the Chamberlain government. Chapter two will, via analysis of the speeches given by members in defence of the War on Two Fronts line in September 1939, attempt to show how such changes in the Party's attitude towards war led Party leaders to support a stance of qualified support for the war in September 1939. Chapter three, on the other hand will, using a similar analysis of speeches given by Central Committee members in October, identify the primary factors which led Party leaders to oppose the war and support an immediate peace in October 1939. More specifically it will explore separately the main reasons behind the Party Leadership's decision to revise its estimation of the character war, from an Imperialist War in which it was correct to defend British liberties from fascism to a purely imperialist war, before then considering the factors which convinced the Party to adopt a practical policy of support for the Soviet Union's call for an immediate peace.

By answering these questions this thesis also aims to provide some limited insight into the relationship between the leadership of the CPGB and the USSR and the Comintern; specifically in terms of the role that the policy decisions of the latter two played in influencing the decisions of the former. In addition this thesis seeks to highlight areas of significant disagreement or conflict within the Central Committee which may prove useful for indicating further lines of study.

<u>Chapter 1 – Democracy, Fascism and War</u>

Understanding why the Party initially both supported the war and opposed the National Government in September 1939 is key to understanding its decision to oppose the war in October but to fully understand this decision one must understand the development of the Party's attitude towards war and the National Government between 1935 and 1939. From its inception in 1920 until 1935 the CPGB's attitude towards any war involving Britain was unequivocal: while Britain was still an imperialist power its wars would be imperialist wars, which the Party could not support.[1] Indeed, at the beginning of the 1930s the CPGB adhered to the resolutions on war prescribed by the 6th World Congress of the Comintern. These perceived three main types of war, inter-imperialist wars, counter revolutionary wars and wars of colonial liberation. Only in the case of the latter two was it deemed appropriate to support one side of the conflict and in neither case was this the imperialist side. In the case of a counter-revolutionary war waged by a capitalist nation against a socialist nation it was the duty of all Communist Parties to work for the victory of the socialist nation, and in the case of a war for colonial liberation Communist Parties should support the struggle of the colonised against the colonisers. In inter-imperialist wars, Communist Parties were expected to adopt Lenin's tactics of revolutionary defeatism and fight for the defeat of their own imperialist government and the transformation of the imperialist war into a civil war.[2] Following the Seventh World Congress of the Communist international and its redefinition of the domestic and international tasks of the Communist Parties however, the Party's attitude was to change.

Before Hitler's rise to power in 1933, the Comintern and its national sections acknowledged few differences between bourgeois democratic and

[1] Redfern, Neil, *Class or Nation: Communists, Imperialism and Two World Wars*, (I.B. Taurus & Co. Ltd, New York, 2012), p. 77.
[2] Branson, Noreen, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain*, 192-41, (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1985), p. 134.

fascist regimes. Both were considered dictatorial forms of governance by the ruling classes over the working classes, with bourgeois democracy simply maintaining a democratic façade to veil the dictatorship, whilst Fascism was an open form of capitalist dictatorship.[3] Between 1928 and 1933 the Comintern, perceiving global capitalism to have reached a period of fundamental crisis and believing social revolution to be just around the corner, argued that fascism acted as a prop to maintain the capitalist system.[4] As the working class increasingly came to favour the idea of proletarian revolution, it was argued, the bourgeoisie inevitably turned to fascist methods of direct suppression to prevent revolution and the overthrow of the capitalist system.[5] At the Seventh World Congress of the Comintern the General Secretary of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI), Georgi Dimitrov, redefined fascism's role in domestic politics. Dimitrov's arguments only fundamentally contradicted one of the Comintern's previously outlined assumptions. Dimitrov still argued that the current period was one of capitalist decline and growing revolutionary potential in which the bourgeoisie turned to fascism and fascist methods to prevent a critical build-up of revolutionary forces, but he now sought to differentiate between bourgeois democracy and fascism and the respective elements of the bourgeoisie which represented them.[6] Dimitrov's concept of fascism explicitly rejected the idea that the establishment of a fascist dictatorship was supported by the entire bourgeoisie; instead suggesting that fascism was the distinct policy of 'the most reactionary, most chauvinistic and most imperialist elements of finance capital' and that fascists usually gained power through 'mutual, and

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[3] Branson, *History of the Communist Party*, p. 125. And
King, Francis and Matthews, George, (eds) *About Turn: The British Communist Party and the Second World War*, (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1990), pp. 15.
[4] For a breakdown of theoretical basis for the Comintern's arguments regarding the likelihood of Revolution see Kozlov, Nicholas N., and Weitz, Eric D., "Reflections on the Origins of the 'Third Period': Bukharin, the Comintern, and the political economy of Weimar Germany", *The Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 24, No. 3, (Sage Publications Ltd., July, 1989), pp. 387-410.
[5] Morgan, Kevin, *Against Fascism and War: Ruptures and Continuities in British Communist Politics 1935-41*, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1989), p. 21. And
Branson, *History of the Communist Party*, , p. 125
[6] Dimitrov, Georgi, 'The Fascist Offensive and the Tasks of the Communist International in the Struggle of the Working Class against Fascism',
<http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/dimitrov/works/1935/08_02.htm#s1>, [accessed 03/11/14]

at times severe, struggle against the old bourgeois parties, or a definite section of these parties.'[7] Neither, Dimitrov stated, should the victory of fascism be seen as a simple transition from a veiled to an open dictatorship. Dimitrov and others at the Seventh Congress made it clear that capitalist democracy was not a veiled bourgeois dictatorship but actually offered certain legitimate democratic rights, such as the ability to create working class organisations, which needed to be defended as they made it easier for the working class to defend their interests.[8] Fascism meant the loss of these rights and the establishment of the 'open terrorist dictatorship' of the bourgeoisie, turning the workers into 'pariahs of capitalist society' and the 'factories into barracks where the unbridled arbitrary rule of the capitalist reigns.'[9] This differentiation between regimes, combined with a belief that despite the overall revolutionary character of the period, immediate revolutionary prospects were minimal, led Dimitrov to argue that the immediate task of the Communist Parties was to defend the democratic liberties of the workers from fascism. [10] Practically this meant campaigning for the creation of a Popular Front, a broad political alliance with the reformist socialists of the Social Democratic Parties, the political organisations of the peasantry, the petty bourgeoisie, the intelligentsia and any other elements prepared to resist the growth of fascism, ultimately aiming to elect a 'People's Government' based on the Popular Front.[11]

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[7] Dimitrov, 'The Fascist Offensive', *Marxists*, [accessed 03/11/14]

[8] Marty, André, "For Peace! For the Defence of the Soviet Union!", in *Comintern 7th World Congress Part 12: For Peace and Defence of the Soviet Union*, (Modern Books, London, 1935), p. 6.

[9] Dimitrov, 'The Fascist Offensive', *Marxists*, [accessed 03/11/14]

[10] Attfield, John, and Williams, Stephen, (eds), *1939 The Communist Party and the War*, (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1984), p. 96. And
Murphy, Dylan Lee, *The Communist Party of Great Britain and its struggle against fascism 1933-1939*, (University of Huddersfield repository, 1999), p. 179.

[11] Thorpe, Andrew, *The British Communist Party and Moscow 1920-43*, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2000), p. 10. And
Dimitrov, 'The Fascist Offensive', *Marxists*, [accessed 03/11/14] and
Drachkovitch, Milord M., and Lazitch, Branko, 'The Communist International' in Drachkovitch, Milorad M., (ed.) *The Revolutionary Internationals 1864-1943*, (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1968), pp. 189-90. And
Thorpe, *The British Communist Party*, p. 10. And
Dimitrov, The Fascist Offensive, *Marxists*, [accessed 03/11/14] and
Drachkovitch and Lazitch, 'Communist International' in Drachkovitch, (ed.), *The Revolutionary Internationals*, pp. 189-90. And
Murphy, *The Communist Party and its struggle against fascism*, p. 181.

The Seventh Congress also altered the International Movement's understanding of the role of Fascism in international politics. At the Congress it was argued that the world was on the brink of another global war.[12] This war would, regardless of when it came and the form it took, inevitably transform into a counter-revolutionary war against the Soviet Union.[13] In this situation the Comintern argued that the main task of the Communist Parties in international politics was now 'the struggle for peace and the defence of the USSR'.[14] To achieve these goals their focus should be on opposing the foreign policy of fascist states, for in international politics as in domestic politics; the 7th World Congress identified a division between fascism and bourgeois democracy. If a new world war would inevitably become an anti-Soviet war then it was the fascist states that were most actively pursuing such as war. The fascist states, compelled by the need to find new markets for their expanding economies to stave off economic collapse, were the states most interested in a redivision of the world's territory.[15] Each new territorial acquisition they made acted to reinforce their aggressive actions, heightening the danger of a new world war in the process, thus fascist aggression had to be resisted.[16] Meanwhile, the Comintern now argued that some bourgeois democratic states were no longer interested in waging an imperialist war. It was argued that a number of large imperialist powers, in particular France and the USA, had emerged from the last worldwide imperialist war relatively satiated and were, for now, primarily concerned with maintaining peace and the status-quo for fear that a new imperialist conflict may lead to the loss of the gains made in the previous one.[17] Additionally, a number of smaller states, such as the Baltic States, feared that fascism's imperialist offensive may lead to them

[12] "Extracts from a Resolution of the Seventh Comintern Congress on the Danger of a New World War" in Degras, Jane, (ed), *The Communist International 1919-1943 – Documents Volume 3 1929-43*, (Frank Cass, London, 1971), p. 370.

[13] Myant, Martin, "1935 – The Turning Point", in in Fyrth Jim, (ed), *Britain, Fascism and the Popular Front*, (Lawrence and Wishart Limited, London, 1985),p.48.

[14] Redfern, *Class or Nation*, p. 76.

[15] Marty, "For Peace!", *Comintern 7th World Congress*, p. 2.

[16] "Extracts on the Danger of a New World War", in Degras, (ed), *The Communist International 1919-1943*, p. 370.

[17] "Extracts on the Danger of a New World War", in Degras, (ed), *The Communist International 1919-1943*, p. 370-1. And
Marty, "For Peace!", *Comintern 7th World Congress*, p. 10.

losing their national independence and were thus also presently concerned to maintain the status quo.[18] As well as posing a passive threat to the Soviet Union as the chief fomenters of world war the Fascist States were also were seen to be playing an actively threatening role. At the Congress the Comintern argued that the Soviet Union, by its mere existence, provided an example of Socialism in action, which was a powerful inspiration for the workers of other countries to follow its example of proletarian revolution. It was suggested that the fascist states, in particular Germany, were most keenly aware of this and, as a result, were motivated by 'the most savage hatred of the Soviet Union.'[19] This hatred led them to see attacking the Soviet Union as not only a chance to gain new markets but also to ensure the 'destruction of their most dangerous enemy'.[20] The imperialists of the bourgeois democratic states, it was claimed, also saw the Soviet Union as an enemy but for the time being their desire to maintain peace lead them to perceive the USSR as a 'formidable power' which was also interested in peace and therefore a potential short-term ally.[21] The non-aggressive capitalist states were therefore, despite their continued hostility towards the USSR, drawn towards allying with it and its peace policy to protect their own interests.[22]

In this situation the Comintern began to argue that the Soviet Union's relationship with the capitalist world had entered a new phase characterised by the possibility for the workers' state to take advantage of divisions between the aggressive and non-aggressive capitalist states by allying itself with the latter in order to resist aggression of the former and thereby preserve peace. In support of the Soviet Union's conversion to the principles of collective security the Comintern began to argue for the creation of a Peace Front, using sanctions through the League of Nations and pacts of mutual assistance between the USSR and the peace-seeking

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[18] "Extracts on the Danger of a New World War", in Degras, (ed), *The Communist International 1919-1943*, p. 373.

[19] Marty, "For Peace!", *Comintern 7th World Congress*, p. 4.

[20] Marty, "For Peace!", *Comintern 7th World Congress*, pp. 4-5.

[21] Marty, "For Peace!", *Comintern 7th World Congress*, p. 4. and p. 10.

[22] "Extracts on the Danger of a New World War", in Degras, (ed), *The Communist International 1919-1943*, p. 374.

bourgeois democracies to deter fascist aggression.[23] As a result the individual Communist Parties were now expected to use the Popular Front to pressure their existing bourgeois governments to oppose fascist aggression through the League of Nations and to agitate in favour of the Soviet Union's foreign policy and the election of Popular Front governments which would support it.[24]

The CPGB adopted the line of the 7th Congress with great enthusiasm.[25] Indeed as early as 1933 the Party had been calling for co-operation between the Comintern and the Second International against Fascism.[26] Additionally, as Noreen Branson and Nina Fishman note, CPGB policy had been moving relatively smoothly away from the sectarian tactics of the third period since 1933 and the Party officially adopted a policy of building a Working Class United Front in its Trade Union work in response to the rise of fascism in Europe at its 13th Party Congress in February 1935, before the 7th World Congress.[27] The CPGB now saw as its ultimate goal the replacement of the Chamberlain government with a Labour led Popular Front government to pursue a progressive policy at home and collective security abroad. The Party also saw, however, the immediate need to pressure the National Government to actively support collective security and join the mutual assistance pact, signed by France and the Soviet Union in May 1935, to provide immediate resistance to fascist aggression.[28] More importantly however, picking up on the Congress' redefinition of the role of fascism in domestic and international politics the CPGB now argued that there were three differences between the situation faced by the world in 1939 relative to that faced in 1914, which made a changed attitude to war

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[23] King and Matthews, (eds) *About Turn*, pp. 15. And
Branson, *History of the Communist Party*, pp. 135-6.
[24] Redfern, *Class or Nation*, p. 71.
[25] Morgan, *Against Fascism and War*, pp. 20-1.
[26] Haslam, Jonathan, "The Comintern and the Origins of the Popular Front 1934-5", *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 22, No. 3, (Cambridge University Press, September, 1979), p. 675.
[27] Fishman, Nina, *The British Communist Party and the Trade Unions 1933-45*, (Scolarpress, Aldershot, 1996), pp.73-4. and
Branson, *History of the Communist Party*, pp. 112-3.
[28] Horner, Arthur, "Towards a Popular Front", MRC, MSS.15X/2/103/170, p. 2-3. And
Murphy, *The Communist Party and its struggle against fascism*, p. 195.

necessary. Firstly the ability to make a clear division between the aggressive and non-aggressive states, secondly the existence of the Soviet Union and the need to defend it; and finally the fact that the victory of a fascist nation in an imperialist war meant the expansion of fascist domestic policies onto the defeated nations by force.[29] In this changed situation the Party now foresaw two situations in which it would be acceptable for communists to support their own governments in war. Firstly it was argued that the need to defend the Soviet Union from a new counter-revolutionary war meant that rather than remaining aloof from an imperialist war, in countries which allied themselves to the Soviet Union the Communist Party should actively support its government, even if it was still a bourgeois government.[30] Additionally the CPGB now argued that the need to prevent the creation of new fascist regimes by military conquest meant that it was now appropriate for the working classes of democratic countries menaced by fascism to act in defence of their national independence.[31] Indeed the CPGB's decision to provide military support to the Spanish Republic in the Spanish Civil War and its decision in 1938 that it would extend the same support to Czechoslovakia should it find itself embroiled in a war with Germany, were both couched in precisely these terms.[32]

Despite these changes in the Party's attitude towards war it is important to note that the CPGB's approach to defending Britain during the Popular Front Period was never, as Kevin Morgan points out, as simple as for democratic Britain and against fascist Germany.[33] Indeed in the eyes of the CPGB the National Governments of the Popular Front period, under both Stanley Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain, were seen not as democratic governments but rather the main fascist threat in British

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[29] Pollitt, Harry, "A Working Class Peace Policy", *The Labour Monthly*, (May 1936), pp. 299-300. And Morgan, *Against Fascism and War*, pp. 58-9.

[30] Redfern, *Class or Nation*, p. 78.

[31] Minutes of September 24th-25th Central Committee Meeting, Labour History Archive and Study Centre, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 2/4.

[32] "Report of the Central Committee to the 14th National Congress", Modern records Centre, MSS.15X/2/103/284, pp. 8-9. And
"The People Can Speak With Decisive Voice" (May 1938), in "Report of the Central Committee to the 15th Party Congress", MRC, MSS.15X/2/103/203, p. 132.

[33] Morgan, *Against Fascism and War*, p. 57.

politics. At the Seventh Congress Dimitrov informed the CPGB that the main threat of fascism in Britain for the moment was the National government. The main fascist organisation in Britain, British Union of Fascists (BUF) led by Sir Oswald Mosley, had, for now, been pushed into the background by the action of the British Working class. As a result the main fascist danger in Britain now stemmed from the National Government who Dimitrov accused of 'passing a number of reactionary measures directed against the working class' which would make it easier for the creation of a fascist regime in Britain. This was not just a peculiarity of the British situation however, in the same speech Dimitrov argued that, in general,

> 'bourgeois governments usually pass through a number of preliminary stages and adopt a number of reactionary measures which directly facilitate the accession to power of fascism. Whoever does not fight the reactionary measures of the bourgeoisie and the growth of fascism at these preparatory stages *is not in a position to prevent the victory of fascism, but, on the contrary, facilitates that victory.*'[34]

As a result Dimitrov argued that the CPGB's immediate task was to utilise the discontent of the masses to 'repel the reactionary offensive of the "National Government"'.[35] The CPGB's leadership largely agreed with Dimitrov's understanding of the British situation and focused its anti-fascist work on the National Government. As both Dylan Lee Murphy and Kevin Morgan have pointed out, after the Congress the CPGB's leaders saw the BUF as a reserve weapon of the British bourgeoisie which acted to distract the British public from the National Government's more subtle attempts to introduce fascist measures to Britain.[36] Indeed this focus on the National Government is apparent in Arthur Horner's 1936 pamphlet *Towards a Popular Front*, where he argued that when considering fascism in Britain 'I am not thinking of Mosley and his Blackshirts' but rather the British Government, which Horner argued had only not already fully adopted fascism because, as yet, it had not felt the need to.[37] The failure of the BUF

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[34] Dimitrov, 'The Fascist Offensive', *Marxists*, [accessed 03/11/14]
[35] Dimitrov, 'The Fascist Offensive', *Marxists*, [accessed 03/11/14]
[36] Murphy, *The Communist Party and its struggle against fascism*, p. 188 and Morgan, *Against Fascism and War*, pp. 26-7.
[37] Horner, "Towards a Popular Front", MRC, MSS.15X/2/103/170, p. 2-3.

or any other openly fascist party to emerge as a mass movement in Britain however, led the CPGB's leaders to equate the National Government's repressive methods in Britain, Ireland and the colonies (such as the treatment of strikers, the Sedition Act, the Public Order Act and the IRA Bill) with fascism itself.[38] As Kevin Morgan notes, for the CPGB to have concluded from the failure of a self-identifying fascist movement to emerge in Britain that Britain was somehow immune to fascism, would have been at odds with the characterisation of fascism as the inevitable result of capitalist decline.[39] The Party's leading theorists rather turned to Dimitrov's argument at the 7th congress that 'The development of fascism, and the fascist dictatorship itself, assume *different forms* in different countries, according to historical, social and economic conditions and to the national peculiarities... of the given country' to argue that the British National Government represented exactly those groups who desired the establishment of fascism in Britain to advance their interests.[40] Thus could John Ross Campbell argue in a 1938 pamphlet that the National Government was 'the representative of those reactionary circles in Great Britain who in their own way are working for a government similar to those of Germany and Italy.'[41] So great was the Party's belief in the National government's fascist credentials that it even went as far as to compare the Labour leadership's hostility to the idea of the Popular Front movement and its apathy towards the need to remove the National government to the failure of the German Social Democrats to unite with the KPD against the threat of Hitler in 1933.[42]

This understanding of the National Government as a fascist threat proved a serious obstacle to the CPGB entertaining the idea of supporting a

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[38] Morgan, *Against Fascism and War*, p. 27.
"Report of the Central Committee to the 15th Party Congress" (1938), MRC, MSS.15X/2/103/203, pp. 4-5.
[39] Morgan, *Against Fascism and War*, p. 28.
[40] Dimitrov, 'The Fascist Offensive', *Marxists*, [accessed 03/11/14] and
Morgan, *Against Fascism and War*, p. 28.
[41] Campbell, J.R., "How Chamberlain helped Hitler" (1938),Modern records Centre, MSS.15X/103/206
[42] "The People's Front" (1938), in "Report of the Central Committee to the 15th Party Congress" (1938), MRC, MSS.15X/2/103/203, p. 84.

war against fascism or even supporting preparation for such a war under the British Government. Indeed throughout the 1930s the CPGB denounced any action taken by the National Government to prepare for war; from the extension of its rearmaments programme in 1937 to the introduction of conscription in 1939, every preparation the National Government made was denounced as a step towards fascism in Britain.[43] As James Jupp has noted, the only defence measure that received any measure of explicit support from the CPGB was the provision of Air Raid Precautions.[44] Even such purely defensive measures, however, were viewed with suspicion by the CPGB, which even went as far as to suggest that air raid wardens might be used to further suppress British democratic rights in time of war, arguing that, 'if allowed to become the monopoly of the reactionary supporters of the National Government' the Warden Organisation, in combination with the police, would form 'a most dangerous organisation for the suppression of any opposition to the continuance of war.'[45]

It was not only the threat the National Government posed in terms of the imposition of fascism in Britain, that prevented the CPGB from counting Britain amongst the democratic forces of the world however; it also considered the National Government to be a sponsor of foreign fascist regimes and anti-Sovietism. The CP's understanding of the National Government as pro-fascist was based on the belief that, in the circumstances of the post-war world, the capitalists of Britain and those of the fascist states had developed shared interests. International politics in the post-war period, it was argued, was defined by the antagonism between Socialism and Capitalism above all other international antagonisms. In this situation it was believed that rival imperialists, whilst retaining bitter divisions amongst themselves became drawn towards co-operation with one

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[43] "We Stand for Democracy, We Stand for Peace" (1937), in "Report of the Central Committee to the 15th Party Congress" (1938), MRC, MSS.15X/2/103/203, p. 84. And
Morgan, *Against Fascism and War*, p. 29. And
Morgan, Kevin, *Harry Pollitt*, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1994), pp. 103-4. And, p. 103.
[44] Jupp, James, *The Radical Left in Britain 1931-41*, (Frank Cass and Company Limited, London, 1982), pp. 168-9.
[45] "Report of the Central Committee to the 15th Party Congress" (1938), MRC, MSS.15X/2/103/203, pp. 17-8.

another to maintain the capitalist system and the class domination of the bourgeoisie against the rise of socialism. This common imperialist concern was felt most sharply by the oldest and strongest imperialist groups, such as Britain's ruling class, whose relations with other capitalist nations were influenced by a sense of stewardship over the capitalist system.[46] Britain, the CPGB argued, understood that the bourgeoisie in Germany and other fascist nations was in a state of acute crisis (indeed they had turned to fascism in order to overcome this crisis situation) thus British Imperialists were driven by their desire to maintain the Capitalist system across the globe to support the fascist regimes that prevented the fall of capitalism in Germany, Italy, etc. As a result, given the fascist states' reliance on territorial expansion for their survival, the National Government was compelled towards submitting to fascist expansion and rejecting collective resistance to fascism to avoid weakening their class allies.[47] As a political letter issued by the Party leadership on April 25th 1939 explained,

> '[Chamberlain] is the cool, scheming leader of British monopoly capitalism, consciously carrying out a policy which, from his point of view, is necessary for the preservation of capitalism, in spite of the fact that it conflicts with certain British trading interests… and even endangers the British Empire… Chamberlain thinks that these are secondary to the danger to the whole structure of capitalism if German Fascism collapsed and this opened up the way to the Soviet system in Europe… The reactionary British Bourgeoisie… have decide *to co-operate with Fascism*, because they see such co-operation as necessary for their unsavoury class interests'[48]

The CPGB's evaluation of the National Government's actions in the events which led to the signing of the Munich agreement of 1938 is a perfect example of this kind of thinking. In his pamphlet *How to Win the War* (Published September 14th 1939), Harry Pollitt argued that, prior to the Munich agreement, the strength of Czechoslovakia's military and its treaties of mutual assistance with the USSR and France made it from both a military and a political standpoint 'the strongest bastion of democracy

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[46] Morgan, Against Fascism and War, pp. 60-1.
[47] Morgan, Against Fascism and War, p. 61.
[48] CPGB Political Letter September 25th 1939, CP/IND/DUTT/31/05

against the advance of Fascism.'[49] Furthermore, as John Ross Campbell argued shortly after the signing of the agreement, Czechoslovakia had been in a key strategic position, preventing the fascist powers driving a wedge between the Soviet Union and the Western Democracies, blocking Hitler's access to the Oil wells and granaries of Romania and preventing Hitler from creating a group of fascist puppets up to the Soviet border which could provide the raw materials for an attack on the USSR or the Western Democracies.[50] Both Pollitt and Campbell however noted that Germany, fearing a protracted war and the intervention of Czechoslovakia's allies, would not have dared to attack Czechoslovakia to seize the Sudetenland it coveted, thus Pollitt argued that a 'challenge to [German] aggression at that moment could have halted the whole Nazi advance without war.'[51] The National Government's actions in forcing the Czech Government to accept German territorial demands were interpreted then, not as a move to save peace, nor as an action which rewarded the National Government with any personal benefits, instead the CPGB argued that Chamberlain supported the Munich Agreement in order 'to save the face and prestige of Hitler… break the peace front, and open Europe and Britain to fascism and new wars.'[52] The CPGB claimed that the same motivations underlay the British government's policy of non-intervention in Spain, it's refusal to work with America to restrain Japanese aggression in the Pacific, its failure to intervene in the German annexation of Austria, its role in pressuring Poland to reject Soviet military assistance in 1939, with all of these actions being taken as evidence of the National Government's attempts to ally itself with foreign fascism.[53] Furthermore these attempts to aid fascism abroad were seen as evidence of the National Government's attempts to impose fascism on Britain, with CPGB propaganda arguing that the National

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[49] Pollitt, Harry, *How to Win the War*, (Communist Party of Great Britain, London, 1939), p. 9.

[50] Campbell, J.R., "How Chamberlain Helped Hitler" (1938), MRC, MSS.15X/2/103/170, p. 6.

[51] Pollitt, *How to Win the War*, p. 9.

[52] Campbell, "How Chamberlain Helped Hitler" (1938), MRC, MSS.15X/2/103/170, p. 11.

[53] "On the War in China" (1937), in "Report of the Central Committee to the 15th Party Congress" (1938), MRC, MSS.15X/2/103/203, p. 72. and
"Press Statement on Austria" (1938), in "Report of the Central Committee to the 15th Party Congress" (1938), MRC, MSS.15X/2/103/203, p. 116. And
Pollitt, *How to Win the War*, p. 7-12.

government and its supporters, specifically the Cliveden set, were seeking to 'smash democracy in Europe, as a preliminary to smashing it in Britain'.[54] Allowing the National Government to arm itself, the Party believed, would only aid it in its pro-fascist ambitions.[55]

In addition to being seen as pro-fascist the British government was also seen as anti-Soviet. Morgan points out that the principle of class solidarity used to explain the British Government's support of fascist powers was also used to explain its hostility to the Soviet Union. The supremacy of the antagonism between socialism and capitalism in the post-war period, and the concept of international ruling class solidarity that created, not only encouraged Britain to act in support of its ailing imperialist rivals but also encouraged it to lead attempts to create a united front of imperialism against the USSR.[56] CPGB propaganda throughout the Popular Front period regularly argued that Britain aimed to build a reactionary Pact against the Soviet Union which would be spearheaded by German and Italian Fascism who would in turn be supported and protected by Britain.[57] All of the National Government's attempts to appease fascism were perceived by the Party as being deliberate attempts to strengthen the fascist powers and push them towards war with the Soviet Union.[58] Thus the National Governments rearmaments programme and its negotiations with the USSR in the late 1930s were not seen as measures of genuine, principled resistance to Hitler but rather as a method of suggesting to him that westward expansion would be resisted and that he should direct his aggression eastwards towards the Soviet Union.[59]

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[54] Redfern, *Class or Nation*, p. 78. And
"Press Statement – Chamberlain Must Go" (1938), in "Report of the Central Committee to the 15th Party Congress" (1938), MRC, MSS.15X/2/103/203, p. 112. And
"Britain for the People" (1938), in "Report of the Central Committee to the 15th Party Congress" (1938), MRC, MSS.15X/2/103/203, p. 133.
[55] "Labour Party and Opposition to Government Arms Programme" (1937), in "Report of the Central Committee to the 15th Party Congress" (1938), MRC, MSS.15X/2/103/203, pp. 65-6.
[56] Morgan, Against Fascism and War, p. 61.
[57] "Central Committee Resolution on the Soviet Union" (1938), in "Report of the Central Committee to the 15th Party Congress" (1938), MRC, MSS.15X/2/103/203, pp. 115-6.
Morgan, Against Fascism and War, pp. 61-2.
[58] Branson, *History of the Communist Party*, p. 263.
[59] Morgan, Against Fascism and War, pp. 61-2. and

If the CPGB perceived the National Government as anti-Soviet and as pro-fascist at home and abroad then this characterisation did not extend to the British nation as a whole. The Party argued 'Whatever the crimes of our imperialist rulers… the mass of the British people has always been on the side of freedom'.[60] Thus even while the Party refused to support defence measures under the Chamberlain government, it recognised that the British people had democratic rights which needed to be defended against the twin threats of foreign and domestic fascism.[61] From 1938 onwards the Party began to overwhelmingly prioritise this foreign fascist danger over the domestic fascist threat. This shift in priorities can be seen in the Party's extension of the Popular Front to include conservatives who shared no common domestic policies with the CPGB and were only considered progressive because of their anti-Hitler stance.[62] Furthermore as Neil Redfern points out the Party even began to abandon in part its stance on the election of a Popular Front government as a precondition to rearmament. Redfern points out that following the intervention of the Comintern the Party began to change its line on conscription, noting that following this, whilst the party retained its theoretical opposition to conscription under Chamberlain, it abandoned practical opposition by cancelling a planned campaign against conscription.[63] This shift in focus would have only been exacerbated by the statements coming out of Moscow at the time. For example in May 1939 Campbell, when transmitting the Comintern's line on conscription in Britain, noted that the view in Moscow was that the current threat of fascism for the majority of European states lay not in the growth of the fascist mass movement within their own country' but in 'the danger of intervention from without by Nazi Germany, or by fascist Italy.'[64]

Resolution on Manifesto of September 2nd, Sept 24th, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7
[60] "Peace or War – Poverty or Plenty" (1938), in "Report of the Central Committee to the 15th Party Congress" (1938), MRC, MSS.15X/2/103/203, p. 111.
[61] Redfern, *Class or Nation*, p. 87.
[62] Eaden, James, and Renton, David, *The Communist Party of Great Britain Since 1920*, (Palgrave, Hampshire, 2002), p. 67. And
Morgan, *Pollitt*, p. 101. And
Thorpe, *The British Communist Party*, p. 242.
[63] Redfern, *Class or Nation*, p. 85.
[64] Redfern, *Class or Nation*, p. 90.

The perceived connection between the policy of the National Government and the advance of foreign fascism meant that this focus on foreign fascism did not lead the Party to abandon wholesale its opposition to the National Government. Even as the Party prioritised the struggle against foreign fascism it continued to regard the National Government and foreign fascism as mutually reinforcing evils and thus failed to provide a single party-wide understanding of which was the greater enemy.[65] The growing threat of war did nothing to dampen the Party's interpretation of Chamberlain as an ally of Hitler, even as late as September 1939 the Party was still warning of the danger of British-Nazi collaboration.[66] Thus at the same time as it started to focus on the threat posed by foreign fascism, so too did CP propaganda radicalise its anti-Chamberlain propaganda, with Central Committee statements focusing, from February 1938 onwards, less on pressuring the National Government to modify their foreign and domestic policies and more on the idea of working for its immediate removal by a Popular Front Government.[67] This increasing focus on the danger of foreign fascism and resolve to defend the democratic rights of the British people against a German invasion, combined with unrelenting opposition to Chamberlain as an ally of fascism, led the Central Committee issue a statement in the *Daily Worker* on August 30th 1939 in which it declared,

'If, as a result of fascist aggression, the world finds itself embroiled in war, the Communist Party will do all in its power to ensure speedy victory over fascism and the overthrow of the fascist regime. At the same time it will demand and work to achieve the immediate defeat of Chamberlain and a new government in Britain representing the interests of the common people and not the rich friends of fascism.'[68]

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[65] Morgan, Against Fascism and War, pp. 76-9.

[66] Callaghan, John, *Rajani Palme Dutt: A Study in British Stalinism*, (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1993), p. 180.

[67] Based on a review of the articles included in the appendix to "Report of the Central Committee to the 15th Party Congress" (1938), MRC, MSS.15X/2/103/203, pp. 51-143.

[68] Fishman , *The British Communist Party*, p. 252.

Even before War broke out then, the CPGB's leadership had already agreed to adopt the War on Two Fronts line. It is little surprise then that when, three days later, the Party espoused the same line in its first manifesto on the war it received the implicit support of the entire Central Committee.[69] The War on Two Fronts line was, as Dutt was to claim at the October Central Committee meeting, 'the inevitable decision on the basis of the entire line that we had been pursuing as a Party.'[70]

[69] Attfield and Williams, (eds), *1939*, p. 26. And
Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 1/3.
[70] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 2/3.

Chapter 2 – A War on Two Fronts

The outbreak of war then made very little difference to the fundamental assumptions and policies which made up the CPGB's line. The Leadership's united support of the War on Two Fronts line represented its continued adherence to the basic elements of the Popular Front line although adjusted slightly to reflect the reality of war with Germany. The impetus for a re-evaluation of the Party line therefore came not from the outbreak of war itself but rather the first signs of opposition to the Party line emerged, as Kevin Morgan, Monty Johnstone, John Callaghan and Keith Laybourn and Dylan Murphy have all argued, only after the Party received a Soviet press telegram on September 14th, which hinted that the CPGB's conception of the war was out of sync with the USSR's.[1] The Press Telegram, rather than portraying the war as an anti-fascist conflict started primarily by Nazi Germany, as the CPGB had in its September manifesto, claimed that it was 'an Imperialist and predatory War for new redivision of the world… a robber war kindled from all sides by the hands of two Imperialist groups of powers', an interpretation which, as Harry Pollitt noted, seemed 'in absolute contradiction' to the line of the CPGB.[2] Following the receipt of this telegram, Rajani Palme Dutt began to express concerns regarding the Party's line in the Politburo, receiving support from one or two other members of the Politburo who also harboured doubts about the Party's line.[3] These initial doubts were only reinforced by subsequent

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[1] Morgan, Kevin, *Harry Pollitt*, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1994), p. 108. And
Attfield, John, and William, Stephen, (eds), *1939 The Communist Party and the War*, (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1984), p. 26. And
Laybourn, Keith and, Murphy, Dylan, *Under the Red Flag: A history of Communism in Britain*, (Sutton Publishing Limited, Gloucestershire, 1999), p. 105. And
Callaghan, John, *Rajani Palme Dutt: A Study in British Stalinism*, (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1993), pp. 181.-2

[2] "War! Communist policy" in Pollitt, Harry, *How to Win the War*, (Communist Party of Great Britain, London, 1939), p. 28. and
Soviet Press Telegram, Labour History Archive and Study Centre, CP/IND/POLL/2/7 and
Minutes of September 24th-25th Central Committee Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 1/1.

[3] Morgan, *Pollitt*, p. 108.
The minutes of this meeting are missing from the Party archives but the most likely candidates for Dutt's supporters are William Rust who supported Dutt's line of opposition to the war in both the September and October Central Committee meetings and Emile Burns who admitted at the September meeting that he had previously been in support of making revisions to the Party line. Minutes of September Committee Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 12/1.

statements by the American and Belgian Communist Parties which now also denounced the war as imperialist declaring both sides to be equally responsible for its creation, suggesting that the CPGB was not only out of step with the line of the Soviet Union but that of the Comintern as well.[4] As a number of leaders at the meeting itself came to note, it was because of these doubts that the Politburo called the Central Committee together to discuss the War on Two Fronts line on September 24th.[5] At the meeting however, only two of the twelve Party leaders who gave speeches, Dutt and William Rust, spoke in opposition to the Party's established line. This raises the question; if, as a number of historians have suggested, the Party was to eventually adopt its new line on the war in October primarily because of the intervention of the Comintern, why, even after the aforementioned events made it increasingly clear that the Comintern and the Soviet Union were in opposition to the War on Two Fronts line, did the bulk of the Central Committee continued to support that line at the September meeting?

In order to answer this question it is first important to understand the manner in which the opposition argued against the War on Two Fronts line. Both Dutt and Rust saw the war as an imperialist war for which Britain, France and Germany were equally responsible and in which Britain was fighting for its own imperialist interests, to defend its empire against its rival, Germany.[6] Dutt argued that Germany held direct responsibility for the war by virtue of its aggressive acts but he maintained that Britain, by its policy of aiding the rise of Germen fascism and creating the conditions for war through its refusal of the Peace Front, shared equal responsibility.[7] He also pointed out that the National Government's failure to take any practical steps to defend Poland and the fact it had not acted previously to resist fascism, proved that it was not acting out of genuine concern for the liberties of small nations or the anti-fascist will of the British people, but

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[4] Minutes of September 24th-25th Central Committee Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 1/1. And King, Francis and Matthews, George, *About Turn: The British Communist Party and the Second World War*, (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1990), p. 22.

[5] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 1/1. And p. 2/1. And p. 6/2.

[6] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, pp. 2/3-4. And p. 2/4.

[7] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 2/3.

rather in its own self-interest.[8]   These were not new ideas, indeed the Party's September manifesto spelled out quite clearly that the National Government was pursuing the war for its own imperialist interests and, even if it did not explicitly espouse the idea of equal responsibility, it did blame Chamberlain and his policy of appeasement for creating a situation in which Germany was 'able to plunge Europe into war.'[9] However, in contrast to the Manifesto, Dutt and Rust now claimed that the fact that one of the imperialisms was democratic and the other was fascist should make no difference to the way the Party approached the war. Dutt argued that neither of the two conditions under which the Party and the Comintern had previously agreed to support a bourgeois government in an imperialist war applied to the current war. Firstly, he announced, Britain's failure to secure a Peace Front with the USSR meant that the war could not be seen as just.[10] Dutt reaffirmed the idea that had Britain allied with the USSR, its involvement in the war would have been justified, despite the imperialist aims which would have motivated that involvement, by the defence it would have rendered to the Soviet Union. As Britain has refused the Peace Front, however, the war had to be seen as an imperialist war in the fullest sense.[11] Dutt even denied the applicability of the Party's support for democratic states against the threat of external imposition of fascism arguing that, in all cases in which the Comintern had supported such wars, the country which received that support was a small state in danger of being overrun by a fascist state. Britain, he argued, was a large imperialist power which did not face this problem.[12] Dutt and Rust also argued that the signing of the Nazi-Soviet pact had led to a shift in the balance of international forces although only Rust provided a clear explanation of what was meant by this.[13] Rust argued that Germany's signing the Nazi-Soviet pact represented the culmination of a shift in German foreign policy; fearful of the strength of the Soviet Union, Germany had ceased to pursue aggressive aims at the

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[8] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 2/3.
[9] "War! Communist policy" in Pollitt, *How to Win the War*, pp. 25-8.
[10] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, pp. 2/2-3.
[11] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 2/3.
[12] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 2/4.
[13] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, pp. 2/1-2. And pp. 3/2-4.

expense of the Soviet Union and was thus no longer the main spearhead of anti-Soviet war.[14] By comparison he argued, British imperialism had deliberately chosen war with Germany and had as its main aim the formation of an anti-Soviet front.[15] Thus Rust, using Stalin's speech to the 18th Party congress of the CPSU to reinforce his position, hinted that the Party's previous differentiation between fascist and democratic states, at least in terms of their relationship with the Soviet Union, no longer applied.[16] Thus Dutt and Rust argued that the war had to be seen as imperialist, even if one of the sides involved was fascist. In this situation, Dutt argued, the international line had been clearly defined at the 7th Congress,[17]

> 'Should a new imperialist world war break out, despite all efforts of the working class to prevent it, the communists will strive to lead the opponents of war, organised in the struggle for peace, to the struggle for the transformation of the imperialist war into civil war against the fascist instigators of war, against the bourgeoisie, for the overthrow of capitalism.'[18]

Despite this talk of revolutionary defeatism however, the actual suggestions for modifications to the Party line put forward by Dutt and Rust were rather more conservative. Unwilling to fully commit themselves to the line they had just explained, both argued against making any immediate changes to the Party line, stressing the need to wait for the return of the Party's representative to the Comintern, David Springhall, so that he could clarify the Comintern's position.[19] At the same time both argued the need to refocus the Party's propaganda and activities to emphasize the struggle for a new government. Dutt in particular argued that the Party should call for the election of a People's Government which would issue terms for a democratic

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[14] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, pp. 3/1-2.
[15] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, pp. 3/3-4.
[16] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, pp. 3/2-4.
[17] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 2/4.
[18] "Extracts from a Resolution of the Seventh Comintern Congress on the Danger of a New World War" in Degras, Jane, (ed), *The Communist International 1919-1943 – Documents Volume 3 1929-43*, (Frank Cass, London, 1971), pp. 377-8.
[19] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, pp. 25-6.

peace and only if these were rejected seek alliance with the USSR and USA to fight fascism.[20]

Pollitt, Campbell, Gallacher and the other seven members of the Central Committee who spoke that day remained unconvinced. The other leaders' opposition to Dutt and Rust's line was not based on its portrayal of the war as an imperialist conflict, indeed the majority of the other speakers explicitly agreed with this point. As Campbell pointed out, anyone who 'did not understand that Chamberlain and Daladier were representatives of imperialism as much as Hitler… [and] did not understand that a war between two imperialist systems is an imperialist war… should not be a member of this C.C.'.[21] Rather, they did not agree with Dutt and Rust's suggestions that the fact that one of the imperialist powers conducting the war was fascist should make no difference to the Party's characterisation of the war or its response to it. The majority of speakers instead argued that the distinctions made by the Party throughout the Popular Front period between fascist and bourgeois democratic imperialisms had to determine its response to the war. Firstly the supporters of the War on Two Fronts line rejected Dutt and Rust's claim that Britain and Germany were equally responsible for the war, arguing that the distinction between aggressive fascist states and non-aggressive democratic states made it impossible to see Britain and Germany as equally responsible for the conflict. Whilst none the Central Committee attempted to argue that Britain had no responsibility for the war, a number argued that Germany held primary responsibility. Campbell for example noted that in the last imperialist war in 1914 'there were two sets of imperialist powers each bound by secret treaties having claims on each other's territory'. In the current war however, Campbell argued that there were aggressive and non-aggressive powers, thus even if both were imperialist the Party could not claim that the belligerents in 1939 held equal responsibility for the war in the same way as they had in 1914.[22] Emile Burns too argued that the existence of fascism prevented the Party

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[20] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 2/5.
[21] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 8/2
[22] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 8/1.

from seeing the war in the same way as it had seen the First World War; as imperialist with equal responsibility.[23] Pollitt made a similar argument, claiming that, despite the fact that the war was imperialist and despite Britain's role in creating it, Nazi Germany remained the direct aggressor.[24] Far more important for the Central Committee however, were the differences they had previously made between the internal regimes of fascist and democratic states. As John Campbell pointed out 'the extension of fascism is not the extension of merely an imperialist system, but of a destructive reactionary system, which means the enslavement of the working class'.[25] The other supporters of the War on Two Fronts line argued that the outbreak of imperialist war did nothing to devalue this distinction between bourgeois democracy and fascism. Arthur Horner for example, told the other leaders that 'It is no use now to make the announcement that there are two imperialisms; there is no difference between them. [sic] Germany and Britain exist in a different stage of capitalism', at the present moment German imperialism was fascist whilst British Imperialism was democratic.[26] Harry Pollitt too pointed out that the Party had been arguing since before the outbreak of the war that it was already the period of the Second Imperialist War, noting that this had never previously altered the Party's stance of providing support to 'any resistance on the part of any country or any people to fascist aggression'.[27] Pollitt and Horner along with the other speakers who favoured the War on Two Fronts line argued that the potential for a German victory to spread the fascist stage of capitalism to Britain meant it was impossible for the Party to remain indifferent to the outcome of the war despite its imperialist nature.[28] Peter Kerrigan for example, contended that although the war was 'an imperialist war in its fullest sense', the defeat of German fascism was the 'immediate question' which the Party had to address as the military defeat of Britain would mean the imposition of fascism on the country and the destruction British

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[23] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 12/1.
[24] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 1/4.
[25] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 8/4.
[26] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 4/3.
[27] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, pp. 1/2-3.
[28] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, pp. 4/2-3.

democratic liberties. [29] Maurice Cornforth argued in a similar vein that, despite the imperialist character of the war and the role that British imperialism had played in its instigation by aiding German expansion, the Party was still justified to pursue the War on Two Fronts line to defend British democracy.[30] Reflecting the focus on the defence of British liberties which the Party developed in the late 1930s, the majority of the Party leadership, far from accepting Dutt's idea that only small states were justified to resist fascism, was operating under the assumption that any democratic nation was justified to defend itself from fascism.

This need to defend Britain was keenly felt by the supporters of the Party line. In their speeches the majority, contrary to Dutt, outlined their belief that Britain was at risk of imminent defeat by Germany. For some the danger to Britain stemmed from relative military strength of the war's belligerents. Campbell in particular argued that the difference in military strength between the two sides of the war was not so great that a British defeat was ruled out. All that was needed for Britain to be defeated, he suggested, was 'a little luck here or a little blundering there.'[31] This view seems to have been shared by William Gallacher who questioned Dutt's policy of postponing support for the war until after the election of a People's government on the grounds that Hitler could potentially conquer Britain before a new government could be elected.[32] For Gallacher this potential German victory would not necessarily even require an invasion. He argued that if Germany were to secure a victory on the continent in the early stages of the war, then Hitler could use the forces he would wield and the support he could give to his associates in Britain as a result of that victory, to ensure that everything the Party ever fought for was 'indefinitely destroyed'.[33] Other Party leaders focused more on the policy of the National Government to explain the risk of a British defeat. Cornforth, for example felt that the National Government had no intention of pursuing a complete victory over

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[29] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, pp. 9/1-2.
[30] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 6/1.
[31] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 8/4.
[32] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 10/1.
[33] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 10/2.

German fascism but rather sought only to weaken it so that it could be forced to resume its expansion in the east, at the expense of the Soviet Union. He argued that it was 'precisely because of this double-faced policy the Chamberlain government is pursuing' that the possibility of British democracy being over-run by German fascism was 'a very real thing indeed.'[34] Although only ten of the nineteen Central Committee members who eventually voted on the Party's line in October had the chance to voice their opinion at the September meeting, the speeches delivered by the remaining leaders at the October meeting suggest that the entire Central Committee were largely agreed on the need to defend British democracy from German fascism. Leaders such as Ted Bramley, Marian Jessop and Peter Kerrigan all claimed in October that had they had the chance to speak at the previous meeting they would have opposed Dutt and Rust's position because of the threat that German fascism posed to Britain. They suggested that in September they believed the defeat of Germany was in the interests of the British workers as it would prevent Britain and its colonies being dominated by fascism.[35]

Dutt and Rust did not merely criticise the War on Two Fronts line for espousing support of the British war effort however; in addition they argued that adherence to the line either was already or would be damaging to the Party's struggle for socialism in Britain. Rust argued that the Leadership's focus on the need to defeat Hitler had already led Party activists to abandon the struggle to maintain working conditions in the factories as they felt it necessary to make sacrifices to secure the defeat of Hitler.[36] Dutt on the other hand argued that even simply supporting the war in general would eventually lead to the masses turning away from the Party, arguing that, as the war went on and its human cost increased, the people of Britain would eventually turn against it and all who supported it, regardless of their reasoning for doing so.[37] Furthermore, Dutt suggested that the British and

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[34] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 6/1.
[35] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 232-3. And p. 255. And pp. 249-50.
[36] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 3/3.
[37] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 2/5.

French governments would use the war as an excuse to adopt fascist methods themselves, pointing to the ongoing repression of the French Communist Party as an example of this.[38] The rest of the Central Committee rejected this idea, arguing that the War on two Fronts was the best line to promote socialist advance not only in Britain but also on an international scale.

The supporters of the Party line argued that the predominant attitude amongst the British working class was one of support for the war and resistance to German fascism. Horner pointed out 'In this particular war the Labour movement, trade unions, like ourselves, have been the advocates of standing up to Hitler.'[39] Indeed Horner along with the Party's North East district secretary Hymie Lee (who was not a member of the Central Committee but nevertheless spoke at the September meeting) argued as Pollitt had previously, that the working class' desire to resist Hitler was so strong that it had played a role in compelling the National Government to declare war in the first place.[40] Any leader who suggested that there was any ill-feeling amongst the workers towards the war pointed out that these were based on the way the war was being conducted, in terms of the degradation of working conditions caused by the blackout and other war measures and the lack of military advances, rather than any fundamental opposition to the war itself.[41] Indeed the supporters of the War on Two Fronts line argued that it was precisely by opposing this poor prosecution of the war that the Party was most likely to win the support of the British labour movement. Unsurprisingly Campbell and Pollitt were particularly vocal in their support for this idea. Campbell told the assembled Committee that the pro-fascist stance of the National Government constituted the Party's 'strong weapon' against the British imperialism.[42] Pollitt on the other hand, argued that the Party should pay

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[38] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 2/5.
[39] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 4/3.
[40] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 4/2. And p. 11/1. And
Pollitt, Harry, *How to Win the War*, (Communist Party of Great Britain, London, 1939), p. 6.
[41] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 11/3.
[42] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 8/5.

particular attention in its propaganda to the enthusiasm of the National Government for anti-working class action at home, such as raising hours and lowering wages, in comparison to its enthusiasm for action against Germany. He argued that if the Party fought for the government to pursue the war against Germany 'with the same intensity that British capitalism [is] conducting it against the trade unionists it will find an echo in every factory in this country.'[43] Finlay Hart too suggested that focusing on the National Government's prosecution of the war would win the Party the most popular appeal suggesting that it would be because of Chamberlain's foreign policy rather than his domestic policies 'that large numbers are going to fall out with the government.'[44] Indeed the majority of the Speakers at the September meeting pointed out that if the Party ignored the mood amongst the working class by opposing the war as Dutt and Rust suggested, it would leave the Party separated from the workers. As Horner pointed out, 'If we are the advocates of capitulation in any way before German fascism, we will find ourselves as a group of intellectuals at the top without any masses at the bottom'.[45] Gallacher was even more explicit, if the Party were to issue the line proposed by Dutt and Rust it would be result in its ruin.[46]

On an international scale too the Central Committee also felt that both the struggle against the National Government and the war were useful in promoting Socialist advance. Campbell, for example, suggested that, if the Party were successful in its fight for a People's government, its victory would be a great inspiration for the German workers' struggle against Hitler.[47] Cornforth on the other hand advocated support for the war on the basis that the military defeat of Germany would mean increased revolutionary prospects on a global scale. The defeat of Hitler, he argued, would not only result in the liberation of the German, Austrian and Czech workers from the conditions of fascism but also that the process of liberating the people of Europe would inspire liberation movements in China and

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[43] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 1/6.
[44] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 7/1.
[45] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 4/4.
[46] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 10/1.
[47] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 8/5.

India.[48] Gallacher pointed out in his speech that German, Austrian and Czech communists would likely support a struggle against fascism for their liberation, arguing that all of the CPGB's sister parties in the countries dominated by Germany saw their primary objective as the defeat of German fascism.[49] Campbell went even further, arguing that the defence of Britain itself was in the interests of the international movement and in particular the Soviet Union. The imposition of fascism on Britain by either internal or external forces, he contended, would be a disaster 'from not only the point of view of the people of Britain and France, but from the point of view of the world revolution and the Soviet Union itself.'[50] If Germany was victorious and the British labour movement crushed, Campbell said, the Soviet Union would be robbed of precious allies, thus he argued a British defeat should be seen as a Soviet defeat and the Party should orientate its policy as such.[51]

The proliferation of arguments that the War on Two Fronts line served the best interests of the international movement and the Soviet Union in the speeches at the September meeting might seem strange given the evidence that the Party had received suggesting that both the Comintern and the USSR were moving towards a position of opposition to the war. Those who supported the line however, attempted to argue away this evidence. Although it was now claiming that the war was imperialist, the supporters of the line pointed to the practical actions of the Soviet Union as evidence that, despite this, it was still committed to the fight against fascism. The majority of the speakers in September agreed with Horner's argument that the Soviet Union's actions had only hindered Germany's freedom of action rather than any anyone else's. The Soviet Invasion of Poland was commonly used as an example of this. The CPGB's leaders, having no knowledge of the secret protocols of the Nazi-Soviet pact which allowed for the division of Poland, adopted the USSR's explanation of the invasion perceiving it not as an opportunistic land grab but as a principled

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[48] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 6/2.
[49] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 10/2.
[50] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 8/5.
[51] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 8/5.

attempt to defend the people of Eastern Poland and of the Soviet Union itself from German expansion.[52] Those in favour of the Party line, in particular, Cornforth and Pollitt, used this example to argue that there would be no contradiction between the Party pursuing a line of resisting fascist expansion in the west and the Soviet Union's policy of resisting fascism in Eastern Europe.[53] Other leaders drew upon Campbell's argument that a British defeat was not in the Soviet Union's interests, to argue that the War on two Fronts would not contradict Soviet policy. Kerrigan for example, expressed his disbelief that the Soviet Union would ever support a Germany victory over Britain 'with the achievement of fascism here and its inevitable consequences to us.'[54] Gallacher too pointed out that the progress of the USSR depended on the support of the proletariat of all other countries, and that the best way to ensure that it had this support was for the Communist Parties of other nations to win the support of their workers by adopting policies based on the situation in their country.[55] Given the danger German fascism posed to Britain the independent policy Gallacher had in mind was clear, 'to continue the fight on two fronts'.[56]

The Central Committee also argued that the Comintern had not and did not plan to abandon the fight against fascism and would thus not oppose the War on Two Fronts line. Indeed, excluding the recent statements of the American and Belgian Parties, all other recent statements of both the other National Parties and the Comintern itself suggested that the international movement's interpretation of the war was not dissimilar to the CPGB's. As Pollitt pointed out, at the outbreak of war the entire international movement had supported the same analysis of the war as the CPGB.[57] The Parties of not only of large imperialist nations, such as France and the USA, but also of smaller capitalist countries, such as Belgium, Sweden and Norway, all initially made statements on the war based on Popular Front

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[52] Childs, David, "The British Communist Party and the War, 1939-41: Old Slogans Revived", *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 12, No. 2, (Sage Publications Ltd., April, 1977), p. 238.
[53] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 1/5. And p. 6/2.
[54] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 9/2.
[55] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 10/3.
[56] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 10/2.
[57] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 1/4.

period conceptions of the differences between fascist and democratic states, arguing that Germany was the aggressor and favouring its defeat.[58] The Communist International itself gave no indication of abandoning the Popular Front theories which underpinned the CPGB's decision to support the War on Two Fronts line either. The September issue of *The Communist International* journal included numerous articles which continued to denounce German fascism as 'the worst regime of violence known to history' and pointed out that 'no nation, no country is secure in the face of it'.[59] Furthermore, a number of statements made by the Comintern prior to the outbreak of war suggested a line of support for the defence of Britain. Of particular note in this regard is the Comintern's argument, following the Munich crisis in 1938, that through the extension of the political franchise and the election of working class representatives, the workers had now won a place for themselves within their own nations. As a result of this the Comintern called upon the Communist Parties to support the national independence of their countries, and by extension the workers place in that country, against fascist aggression and any attempt of the national bourgeoisie to betray the nation, thus effectively extending the right to defend bourgeois democratic nations against fascism to other countries beyond the small states stipulated at the 7th Congress.[60] Horner drew particular attention to such ideas in his speech, pointing out that, in conversations he had with Georgi Dimitrov in 1937, Dimitrov had specifically supported the notion of defending Britain's territorial integrity against any fascist attack.[61] However, it was not the case that the leadership argued in favour of the War on two Fronts line solely because it aligned with policy of the rest of the international movement. As Andrew Thorpe has noted; Dimitrov's claims at the Seventh World Congress and

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[58] Statements of various Communist Parties on the war, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7 and
Isserman, Maurice, *Which Side Were You On? The American Communist Party During the Second World War*, (University of Illinois Press, Chicago, 1993), p. 39. And
Mortimer, Edward, *The Rise of the French Communist Party 1920-47*, (Faber and Faber, London, 1984), p. 284.
[59] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, p. 19.
[60] Redfern, Neil, *Class or Nation: Communists, Imperialism and Two World Wars*, (I.B. Taurus & Co. Ltd, New York, 2012), p. 78.
[61] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 4/1.

since, that the Communist Parties must seek to increase their appeal by taking a more active role in working out their own strategies to fit local conditions, had begun to take root within the CPGB.[62] Indeed this can be seen in the emphasis that some members of the Central Committee – in particular Pollitt, Campbell, Cornforth and Gallacher – placed upon the importance of the Party deciding its own line on the war. All four leaders pointed out that such an approach had not only been advocated by the Comintern itself but was also important for ensuring the Party's influence over the British workers in the future.[63]

Overall then the speeches at the September 24th-25th meeting seem to suggest that Campbell was correct when he described his fellow leaders' contributions to the meeting as being ultimately divided by those who took the view 'that fascism raises a fundamentally new problem and that our tactics in relation to this war must be evaluated from that fact', and those 'who are returning to the position held by the Trotskyists in their criticism of the Seventh World Congress, namely, that fascism makes no difference and that all the formulas of 1914 are valued guids [sic] to us in the present situation.'[64] Despite this however, some Party leaders also expressed doubts about the Party's line. Specifically these leaders began to argue that too much of the focus of the Party's statements and propaganda had been on calling for the effective prosecution of the military war against Hitler. The majority of the Central Committee members who spoke at the September meeting, including Pollitt, now argued that the Party had to put greater emphasis on the political war against Chamberlain. For some of the speakers the need for this change was relatively straight forward and had little to do with the character of the war itself. Pollitt, Hart and Kerrigan, for example, all argued that attacks on working conditions and democracy in Britain since the outbreak of a war meant that the Party needed to sharpen its attacks on British capitalism. Potential press censorship, rising prices,

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[62] Thorpe, Andrew, *The British Communist Party and Moscow 1920-43*, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 200), p. 249.

[63] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 1/4. And p. 8/3. And pp. 6/2-3. And p. 10/3.

[64] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7,, p. 8/1.

unemployment, falling wages and increased overtime were all cited as evidence that the Government, in league with British employers, was waging war against the British working class with Pollitt, Hart and Kerrigan arguing that if the Party gave more attention to these issues it would be able to strengthen its support amongst the workers.[65] For Emile Burns, William Gallacher and Idris Cox however, the justification for refocusing the Party's work was very different. All three argued that the fact that the war was being conducted by the Chamberlain government for imperialist aims meant that, whilst it could be converted into a democratic struggle against fascism by the election of a new government led by the Labour movement, it was not one currently. They argued that the Party now needed to focus its propaganda on achieving this new government. Unlike Dutt and Rust however, all three rejected the idea that the Party should abandon its support for the fight against Hitler in the meantime.[66]

Thus it seems that the Party leadership, excluding Dutt and Rust, ended the first day of the September meeting united in its support for the War on Two Fronts line. Despite this however, the party's leaders were not completely uncritical of that line. Those who spoke in favour of the War on Two Fronts at the September meeting did, in general, agree that the differentiation between fascist and bourgeois democratic states expounded by the Party from 1935 onwards justified the Party's decision to give qualified support to the war effort, partly because they prevented Britain bearing equal responsibility for the war but more importantly because they implied the need to defend British democratic rights. There was also general agreement on the idea that the War on Two Fronts line could be supported on the grounds that it would aid Socialist advance at home and abroad and would not run in opposition to the line of authorities such as the Soviet Union and the Comintern. At the same time however, a number of Central Committee members did perceive a need to adjust the Party's line to combat the Chamberlain government's reactionary policy at home and its

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[65] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 1/6. And p. 7/3. And pp. 9/1-2.
[66] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 12/1. And p. 10/2. And pp. 6/1-2.

imperialist aims abroad suggesting that the Party's leaders still harboured mistrust of the British Government. None of the issues which underlay these suggested corrections to the Party's line, however, were enough to encourage any fundamental reassessment of the Party's characterisation of the war, and the Party's decisions in October must be viewed from that perspective.

Chapter 3 – An Imperialist War

On the 25th of September Dave Springhall returned from Moscow carrying details of the Comintern's stance on the war. The Central Committee reconvened to hear his report which detailed the line contained within the Comintern Secretariat's Short Thesis (a document produced on September 10th intended to serve as the basis of the international line on the war), as well as recounting important points taken from discussions held with Georgi Dimitrov and Andre Marty prior to his departure from the Soviet Union.[1] Springhall explained to the Central Committee that the view of the ECCI was that the war was a purely imperialist war. Springhall announced that the Comintern had now abandoned the idea that there was a distinct differentiation between fascist and bourgeois democratic states, noting that the Comintern, and Dimitrov in particular, believed that, by refusing to sign a pact of mutual assistance with the Soviet Union and by their respective roles in Poland's decision to refuse Soviet military access to Polish territory before the outbreak of war, Britain, France and Poland's rulers had all adopted a policy which created the conditions for war.[2] Springhall pointed out that because of this, the Comintern believed 'it was now necessary to see that the differentiation between the fascist and the so-called democratic countries had lost its former significance.'[3] Springhall's report made it relatively clear that, in this regard, the Comintern meant that fascist and bourgeois democratic countries could no longer be described, as they had been since the Seventh Congress, as aggressive and non-aggressive respectively. In response to questioning from other members of the Central Committee he acknowledged that Britain still had more democratic rights than Germany whilst at the same time warning that such rights might yet be taken away.[4] Britain, France, Poland and Germany, Springhall noted, had all pursued the war and had all done so in their own imperialist interests, in particular Germany was pursuing European and

[1] King, Francis and Matthews, George, *About Turn: The British Communist Party and the Second World War*, (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1990), p. 53.
[2] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, pp. 54-9.
[3] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, p. 54.
[4] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, p. 59.

World domination whilst Britain aimed to preserve its European hegemony against its German rivals. Thus, he explained, The Comintern had reached the conclusion that the war had to be 'seen as a war of two imperialist groups with conflicting imperialist aims', a purely imperialist war 'which the working class in no countries can give any support to'.[5] Springhall told the other Party leaders that, in this situation the CPGB must oppose the war and work for the achievement of socialism in Britain, in the immediate period by simply explaining the imperialist nature of the war to the British working class but ultimately by working for a British military defeat in accordance with the Leninist, revolutionary-defeatist approach to imperialist war.[6] Springhall's report threw into sharp question everything that the Central Committee had claimed the previous day regarding the Comintern's position on the war. After a brief questioning session in which Springhall answered questions on the personal input he had had on the drafting of the Short Thesis – which was none – and the content of his report, the Central Committee meeting was briefly interrupted to allow the Politburo time to discuss the Comintern line. When the meeting resumed the Politburo proposed that the Central Committee adjourn until October 3rd to allow its members to consider the line before making a final decision on it.[7] Between the two meetings, although the War on Two Fronts line remained the formal line of the Party, preparations for a change in line began immediately. Evidence of these preparations can be seen in the restructuring of the Party leadership; with Pollitt being replaced as General Secretary of the Party by a new secretariat consisting of Dutt, Rust and Springhall in order to reassure the Comintern that there would be no sabotage of the new line.[8] The changing attitude of the Party was made evident in the pages of the *Daily Worker*. As Kevin Morgan, Keith Laybourn and Dylan Murphy have pointed out there was an immediate change in tone of the articles published in the Party paper with particularly noticeable statements opposing the war budget published in the September 27th

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[5] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, pp. 53-4.
[6] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, p. 55-61.
[7] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, p. 61-4.
[8] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, p. 286.

edition.[9] Between September 25th and 29th these changes in Party policy remained small, the Daily Worker ceased to talk of the need to win the war and began to present social problems in Britain (e.g. unemployment, rising prices and cost of living, falling wages, worsening conditions in British industry, etc.) as issues which needed solving in their own right rather than focusing on the damage these issues did to the war effort as had been the norm before Springhall's return. There was however no overt talk of peace or imperialist war.[10] All of this changed on September 30th. On Friday September 29th the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany issued a joint communique calling for an immediate peace in Western Europe. Printed in the *Daily Worker* on September 30th, the communique explained that a treaty between Germany and the Soviet Union confirming the demarcation of their respective borders in Poland, had 'created a firm foundation for a lasting peace in Eastern Europe' and that both the Soviet and German governments now believed that 'the liquidation of the present war between Germany on the one hand and Great Britain and France on the other would meet the interests of all nations.' In addition, the communique stated that, should Britain and France fail to respond to the peace proposals placed before them, they would 'bear the responsibility for the continuation of the war.'[11] With the Soviet Union now publicly in favour of peace the question of the CPGB's stance on the war became unavoidable and the reaction from the Party was instantaneous. On the same day as the Nazi-Soviet peace proposals were announced Party organisers were informed to work to the Comintern line as explained by Springhall.[12] On September 30th the Politburo issued a statement in the Daily Worker in the name of the paper's editorial board advocating peace and on October 1st William Gallacher, the Party's only Member of Parliament, gave a speech in Glasgow calling for a peace settlement.[13] Despite this there was still division amongst the Party's

[9] Morgan, Kevin, *Against Fascism and War: Ruptures and Continuities in British Communist Politics 1935-41*, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1989), p. 90. And
Laybourn, Keith, and Murphy, Dylan, *Under the Red Flag: A History of Communism in Britain*, (Sutton Publishing Limited, Gloucestershire, 1999), p. 106.
[10] *Daily Worker*, September 2nd-29th, Working Class Movement Library
[11] *Daily Worker*, September 30th, WCML
[12] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, p. 244.
[13] 'A People's Government Could Secure Lasting Peace', *Daily Worker*, September 30th, WCML and

leaders. The statement issued by the Politburo in the *Daily Worker* was an uneasy blend of the War on Two Fronts line and the new line of opposition to the war; it claimed that the Chamberlain government was pursuing the war for imperialist aims but did not claim that the war itself was imperialist, at the same time it called for peace but justified this by claiming that a Soviet-backed peace would be able to halt fascist aggression.[14] The statement, drafted by Gallacher, was supported by only five of the eight members of the Politburo. Dutt, Rust and Springhall argued that the Party had to adopt the Comintern line on the war in full - even though the Central Committee had not met.[15] As a result of the Soviet Union's actions and the divisions within the Politburo the Central Committee was reconvened a day earlier than expected on October 2nd.

The October Central Committee meeting was opened by Dutt, who presented a report written collaboratively by the Party secretariat. Dutt, Rust and Springhall now, in light of the clarification of the Comintern's line on the war and the Soviet-German peace proposals, put forward a much revised and much bolder opposition to the War on Two Fronts line. The Secretariat repeated Dutt and Rust's arguments from the September meeting regarding Britain and France's responsibility for the war and their imperialist aims to explain the war's imperialist nature but they now argued much more forcefully that the fact that Germany was a fascist country should make no difference to the party's stance on the war, in line with the Comintern's latest stance. Specifically, the Secretariat argued that there had been a change in the relative strength, aggressiveness and anti-Soviet ambitions of Germany on the one hand and Britain and France on the other.

In his opening speech, Dutt argued that Germany had never been strong itself, but rather its strength had stemmed from the assistance which British imperialism had given to it. Thus the outbreak of war, with the

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'M.P. Wants Moves to End War', *Daily Worker*, October 2nd, WCML
[14] 'A People's Government Could Secure Lasting Peace', *Daily Worker*, September 30th, WCML
[15] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, p. 286.

resulting loss of British support this brought, had fundamentally weakened Germany.[16] Moreover, the Secretariat argued that the USSR had used its military strength to compel Germany to sign the Nazi-Soviet pact, which had in turn weakened Germany's position by breaking its alliances with Japan and Italy in the anti-Comintern pact and placing limits on its expansionist goals in the East.[17] The Soviet invasion of Poland too was seen by the secretariat as a further check to Germany's power. Dutt pointed out that Germany's economic goals lay not in western Poland but in the wealth of South Eastern Europe (in particular Romania), he argued that the Soviet Union's invasion of Poland had prevented expansion in this direction and left Hitler in control of only the poverty stricken areas of Poland, which, far from strengthening Germany, would only increase its economic burdens.[18] Taking up this argument Rust thus pointed out that, even if Germany had technically won a victory in Poland, overall events in the East had left Germany in a weaker position.[19] The result of all of these Soviet actions, in particular the Soviet invasion of Poland, the Secretariat argued, was the expansion of the prestige of the USSR in the minds of the people of Eastern Europe and Germany, which in turn was encouraging them towards revolution, further weakening the Nazi regime.[20] The Secretariat pointed to the joint Soviet-German peace proposals as open confirmation of Germany's weakness, arguing that, because of its weakened position, Germany was terrified of a prolonged war and that its decision to sue for peace was a desperate bid to avoid such a situation.[21]

Whilst the Secretariat perceived the erosion of German aggression it simultaneously perceived an increase in the aggressiveness of British and French imperialism. The secretariat took up the Comintern's argument that the refusal of the Anglo-Franco-Soviet pact was not the result of mere short-sightedness on Britain's part but rather part of a deliberate decision to

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[16] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, p. 76.
[17] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, p. 75.
[18] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, p. 75.
[19] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, p. 141.
[20] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, p. 75.
[21] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, p. 76.

create the conditions for war with Germany.[22] They argued British imperialism's aim was the destruction of Germany. Germany's weakness meant Britain did not fear its own defeat at all; rather its greatest concern was how to defeat Germany without triggering proletarian revolution. More importantly, the Secretariat also believed that the governments of Britain and France were becoming more reactionary and increasingly antagonistic towards the Soviet Union. Springhall stated that the actions of the Soviet Union in weakening Germany had convinced the bourgeoisie in Britain and France that the Soviet Union was now a far greater threat than Germany.[23] Indeed, despite arguing that Britain and France now primarily desired the defeat of Germany, the secretariat pointed to growing anti-Soviet propaganda in the capitalist press and the repression of the French Communist Party to argue that the imperialists of both countries were both preparing for an attack on socialism and the Soviet Union.[24] The Secretariat argued that Britain and France, in pursuing this goal, had not abandoned the idea of trying to turn Germany against the Soviet Union. Rust pointed out that the possibility of Chamberlain making a deal with Hitler could not be ruled out, but more than this Dutt, Rust and Springhall now argued that Britain and France were committed to the continuation of the war in order to inflict a defeat on Germany which would make it more subservient to their anti-Soviet aims.[25]

Thus the Secretariat argued the international roles of fascism and bourgeois democracy had completely changed. They pointed out that previously Germany had been the spearhead of aggression whilst Britain and France could have played a progressive role by allying themselves with the Soviet Union to prevent war; now, they claimed, Germany's weakness had compelled it to abandon its anti-Soviet aims and to sue for peace, whereas Britain and France had purposely refused to prevent war, and were now continuing the war in the face of Germany's offers of peace in order to

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[22] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, p. 74.
[23] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, p. 182.
[24] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, p. 77.
[25] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, p. 184.

further their anti-Soviet objectives. In light of this they now argued 'it is definitely the French and British Imperialists who are the pacemakers of the war'.[26] The secretariat's argument actually went beyond the Comintern's analysis of the war. Where the Comintern's Short Thesis had simply stated that 'The division of states into fascist and "democratic" states has now lost its former sense', the Secretariat now claimed these roles had been reversed.[27] Despite this the Secretariat did not try to argue that there had been any change in the internal character of fascist and bourgeois democratic regimes, indeed they claimed that there was more need than ever to fight against the development of fascism in Britain. However, they argued that the differences between the domestic policies of fascist and democratic states did not change the fact that their international roles had changed.[28] The Secretariat argued that the Party's failure to recognise these changed roles had led it to embrace a policy of national defencism, which was counter to the interests of the British working class and the international movement as a whole.[29]

The secretariat also reiterated Dutt and Rust's arguments from September that the War on Two Front's line had hindered the work of the Party and its lack of opposition to Chamberlain was paving the way for fascism in Britain.[30] They argued that, contrary to the beliefs of the Central Committee in September, British workers were actually opposed to the war and would become more so if they were given a clear lead from the Party.[31] Far from just benefitting the British Party however, the Secretariat also argued that taking a line of opposition to the war would also benefit revolutionary forces in the rest of the world and particularly in Germany. Perceiving growing revolutionary impetus amongst the German working class, despite the Nazi dictatorship, the secretariat argued supporting the war would discourage German workers from revolution. Continuing the

[26] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, p. 144.
[27] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, p. 69.
[28] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, pp. 76-7.
[29] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, pp. 79-80.
[30] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, p. 79. And, p. 185-6.
[31] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, p. 148.

war, they argued, would leave the German people 'feeling that they are fighting for their lives and existence as a nation' pushing them to support both the German war effort and the Nazi government.[32] Beyond just damaging the revolutionary movement in Germany the secretariat perceived the Party's old line of supporting the war as anti-Soviet. Support for a war waged by British imperialism, Dutt explained, inevitably led to anti-Sovietism because the aims of British imperialism were anti-Soviet.[33]

The secretariat presented its alternative to the War on Two Fronts line to the Central Committee in the form of a resolution almost identical to the Comintern's Short Thesis which was to be voted on by the Party and a draft manifesto which was left open to alteration. The Party, they argued, had to expose the Imperialist character of the war and work to end the war. The secretariat, breaking from the view expressed by Springhall after his return to Britain, made it clear that operating against the war did not mean working for a Germany military victory. Dutt pointed out that it was the Party's duty in imperialist war to oppose British imperialism and its imperialist aims but this did not mean favouring a German victory. 'It is not that we are in favour of Hitler winning anything whatever' Dutt argued, 'But if for that reason we start supporting the imperialist war of Chamberlain, then in practice we are supporting imperialism.'[34] Dutt and Rust both argued against the Party adopting any revolutionary defeatist slogans but rather suggested that the Party's main aim should be to promote the peace proposals of the Soviet Union.[35] Believing that German aggression had already been destroyed by the actions of the Soviet Union the Secretariat argued that the Party should support any peace offer which came as a result of the Nazi-Soviet peace proposals.[36] The Party, they argued should work to create a mass movement to force the Chamberlain government to agree to a peace conference involving the Soviet Union (which would prevent Chamberlain attempting to reach an anti-Soviet

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[32] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, p. 186. And, p. 80.
[33] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, p. 80.
[34] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, p. 288.
[35] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, pp. 81-3. And, p. 146.
[36] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 83-4.

agreement with Hitler) or to replace it with a government which would. Support for this mass movement was to be generated by a political campaign which would show the British people that the war was being waged for unsupportable, imperialist aims and that it was counter to their immediate interests.[37] Fighting for a mass movement for peace on these grounds, the secretariat claimed, would allow the Party to better defend the workers interests in Britain and would allow intensification of the struggle against the Chamberlain government.[38] In addition to this, they argued, achieving such a movement would encourage revolutionary activity in Germany. Dutt explained that whilst supporting the war would push the German workers to support Hitler, seeing British workers fighting their government and forcing it to accept peace it would convince Germans to strengthen their fight against Hitler.[39]

Of the nineteen Central Committee members who voted on the adoption of the new line only Pollitt, Campbell and Gallacher cast their votes in opposition. For Pollitt and Campbell the basis of their opposition was simple, they refused to accept the idea that there was no longer any difference in the international roles played by fascist and bourgeois democratic states. Campbell told the Central Committee, 'I cannot accept this thesis that the difference between fascism and democracy has lost its former significance.'[40] He argued instead that there was no evidence that Germany had abandoned its aggressive aims; he reasoned that Hitler had only signed the Nazi-Soviet pact in order to avoid exposing Germany to a war on two fronts against both Britain and France, and the Soviet Union at once.[41] Where the Secretariat saw Germany as having had its aggressive ambitions curtailed by the strength of the Soviet Union, Campbell argued that the Nazi-Soviet Pact and the war in Poland had worked to strengthen Germany. He told the assembled leaders,

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[37] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 290. And, pp. 82-4. And, p. 148.
[38] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 84. And, p. 144.
[39] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 289.
[40] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 107.
[41] King and Matthews, *About turn*, pp. 104-6.

> 'The fundamental fact that we must face with regard to these proposals is that the Nazi Power has come out of the war in the East aggrandised. It has a larger army than the army of France and Britain combined. It has probably at the present stage a larger air force than the air force of France and Britain combined. Its major aims as an imperialist power are unchanged. It is going along with these major aims. If it can achieve them by peace, it will achieve them by peace. If it can achieve them by purchasing breathing space, which gives it the opportunity for a new lightning strike without the risk of a major war, it will seize that opportunity.'[42]

Campbell saw Britain and France as being firmly on the defensive. He still did not challenge the notion that Chamberlain and Daladier were fighting in defence of their own imperialist interests but argued that by doing so they were 'hindering objectively the spread of the fascist system in Europe.'[43] In this situation he argued, the Party had two possibilities before it; it could either fight to check fascism for a time under Chamberlain whilst working for a new government to cement relations with the Soviet Union or it would face the possibility of a German victory. Communists, he argued, must remain 'the deadly enemies of fascism, resolved not to allow fascism to conquer another foot of territory'.[44] Despite taking this stance Campbell was not opposed to the notion of working for a negotiated peace. His main concern was to ensure that any negotiated peace included guarantees against further Nazi aggression in West, similar to those given to the Soviet Union in the Nazi-Soviet Pact. He argued 'the situation itself is no guarantee that fascist aggression has been checked… [it] is no guarantee that fascism is now going round hand-in-hand under the tutelage of the Soviet Union, and will now henceforth for ever more engage in no new acts of aggression.'[45] Campbell instead put forward the idea that the Party continue to pursue a War on Two Fronts, maintaining its support for the war against Hitler and against Chamberlain until more concrete peace terms emerged whilst making it known that the Party would be for a settlement which gave guarantees against fascist aggression in the West.[46]

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[42] King and Matthews, *About turn*, pp. 106-7.
[43] King and Matthews, *About turn*, pp. 104-5.
[44] King and Matthews, *About turn*, pp. 109-10.
[45] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 110.
[46] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 112. And, p. 117.

Pollitt, like Campbell, rejected the idea that Germany had been weakened by events in Poland.[47] He argued that the failure of the peace front made 'not the slightest difference' to the fundamental characterisation of fascism as aggressive.[48] For him Germany had 'provoked and organised and instigated the war… [and was] incontestably the aggressor', in his mind the war remained an imperialist war 'with a very important distinction, that we were fighting German fascism.'[49] He called on the Central Committee not to base their analysis of the situation on the current state of relations between Germany and the USSR and noted his fear of a situation in which the war continued and was lost because the Party abandoned its support of it.[50] Pollitt, much like Campbell, proposed that the Party continue its support of the war whilst working to replace the Chamberlain government with a new government that would be open to peace proposals but 'that will have the guarantee that if they cannot get the best terms which represent victory for the democratic countries, they will fight and they will win the war.'[51] Both Pollitt and Campbell believed that accepting a peace which did not included some form of guarantee against further fascist aggression was to invite the defeat of Britain. Campbell in particular argued that accepting peace without guarantees would only invite further German aggression whilst simultaneously demoralising the people of Britain and France.[52] Pollitt's definition of an acceptable peace however, went further than Campbell's. Whereas Campbell simply called for guarantees against further fascist aggression in the West and a plebiscite for Poland, Pollitt made clear that he would accept nothing less than a peace which 'cuts Hitler's claws, that gives Mussolini not a single inch of territory other than what he is in possession of at the present time, and affords the basis for the settlement of disputes from some reorganised League of Nations or other'; if peace left Hitler in control of Austria, Czechoslovakia, Danzig and the Nazi occupied

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[47] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 205.
[48] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 201.
[49] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 206.
[50] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 204. And, p. 206.
[51] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 206.
[52] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 111.

areas of Poland, it would be an unsupportable victory for fascist aggression.[53] Such conditions were vigorously opposed by the Secretariat, who argued that to place firm conditions on the peace terms that the Party would accept only gave Chamberlain and other British imperialists an excuse to carry on the war.'[54]

Gallacher's opposition to the line of the secretariat was more similar to Campbell's than Pollitt's. Gallacher accepted the idea that Germany was working from a position of weakness, at least in Eastern Europe, but he argued that, whilst German aggression had been halted in the East by the Soviet Union, this did not mean it had been halted in the West.[55] Thus he argued, peace terms between Britain and Germany would have to act as a guarantee to ensure no further German advances in the West and, as a result, any peace proposals put forward by Hitler must be seen by the Party before it gave them its support.[56] At the same time however, Gallacher said he was prepared, whilst making these criticisms, to give the new line some support. [57] Indeed the majority of his opposition to the new Imperialist War line seemed to be based on personal grievances with the manner in which the Secretariat treated other members of the Politburo and practical issues with the measures (such as the rejection of political co-operation with the entire Labour Party leadership and the reluctance to endorse any specific alternative government to the Chamberlain government) suggested by the Secretariat in their draft manifesto.[58]

Pollitt and Campbell also vigorously opposed the new line on the grounds that it would do nothing to help the advance of Socialism either at home or abroad. On the home front Pollitt, and Campbell argued that the only opportunity for the Party to maintain and advance its position amongst

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[53] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 205. And, p. 209.
[54] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 145.
[55] Gallacher said very little on this matter in his speech at the October meeting, however his views in this regard were revealed in a speech he gave in Glasgow the day before the meeting began, which was described in 'M.P. Wants Moves to End War', *Daily Worker*, October 2nd, WCML
[56] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 119. And, p. 92.
[57] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 96.
[58] King and Matthews, *About turn*, pp. 92-101.

the British workers was to maintain a line of resistance to German fascism. They argued that the British workers still supported the war and resistance to German fascism. The Party had got the majority of its support for the last four years on the basis of appealing to the workers' opposition to fascism, opposing the war a would only separate the party from its allies in the Labour movement.[59] Campbell argued that to the average worker the Secretariat's line of accepting peace proposals regardless of their content would appear to the average worker to be an abandonment of the fight against fascism.[60] Furthermore, Pollitt argued that trying to mobilise the Party for this line would leave a bad taste in the mouths of the Party membership.[61] Campbell suggested that the Party's activists in the workshops would be undermined by the sudden shift from an anti-fascist to an anti-war line.[62] Both argued that the Party would achieve neither peace nor socialist advance in Britain if it was indifferent to the menace of German fascism. Campbell suggested that if the war did create discontent amongst the workers which could be used for socialist advance, then their discontent would be aimed against all those who had aided fascism in the past rather than the war itself. Thus the Party if it abandoned its anti-fascist line would not be able to capitalise on any discontent which might arise amongst the workers.[63] Campbell argued that there was little chance that the Party's new line would be adopted by the workers. There was no likelihood, he claimed that anyone in Britain would accept peace without, at the very least, guarantees against further fascist aggression.[64] The Party would get no support for its line of peace unless it called for a peace which would halt German fascist aggression.[65]

The remaining members of Central Committee, unlike in September, now rejected Pollitt and Campbell's position and sided with the secretariat supporting its espousal of the Comintern's analysis of the changed

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[59] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 207.
[60] King and Matthews, *About turn*, pp. 110-11.
[61] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 205.
[62] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 115.
[63] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 114. And, p. 209.
[64] King and Matthews, *About turn*, pp. 110-11.
[65] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 113.

international roles of fascism and bourgeois democracy and their line of support for the Soviet Union's peace proposals. None of the leaders accepted the Secretariat's radical reinterpretation of the roles of British and French imperialism and German fascism however. Whilst they agreed that the action of the Soviet Union had halted fascist aggression in the East, the majority of Central Committee members who spoke in October rejected the Secretariat's claim that German fascism was so weak that it was on the verge of revolution and no longer posed any threat in the West. Ted Bramley, Emile Burns and James Shields for example, all argued that it would be wrong for the Party to suggest that the Germany was on the verge of revolution. Shields in particular, argued that the Party had to be careful of putting forward any such argument, which he felt 'may do very great harm to the movement.'[66] John Gollan found himself completely unable to come to terms with Dutt's analysis of Germany, arguing that the issue of fascist aggression in the West has not been cleared up.[67] In this Gollan was supported by Ted Bramley and Marian Jessop. Bramley told the Central Committee that despite its calls for peace, Germany remained a menace whilst Jessop noted that Hitler remained the main enemy of the British people.[68] George Crane too stressed that the Party should not assume that Britain had the strength to defeat Germany, arguing that the attempts of some amongst the British bourgeois (such as Churchill) to promote further talks with the Soviet Union was evidence that at least some amongst Britain's ruling classes still felt the need for additional forces.[69]

Despite this the Party's leaders did agree that Britain, France, and Germany were all equally responsible for the war and that there was no longer any discernible difference between the foreign policies of the belligerents, citing the Comintern's argument that Britain and France's failure to conclude a pact of mutual assistance with Soviet Union in 1939 represented a deliberate attempt to foment war and a more aggressive

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[66] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 162. And, pp. 236-7. And, p. 266.
[67] King and Matthews, *About turn*, pp. 216-7.
[68] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 236. And, p. 255.
[69] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 150.

foreign policy meaning they could no longer be seen as non-aggressive powers. As evidence of this the Leadership reiterated the same arguments they had used in September to explain British and German responsibility for the war. In their speeches leaders continued to argue that Germany was the direct aggressor, but as John Gollan pointed out, Britain and France shared responsibility because they had armed Germany, encouraged its aggressive actions with the aim of embroiling it in a war against the Soviet Union and refused a pact of mutual assistance with the USSR which could have restrained Germany and prevented war.[70] Whereas in September the Party's leaders had argued that the uniquely aggressive character of fascism meant that Britain's culpability for the war could not be compared with Germany's the Central Committee now did just that, arguing, in the words of Finlay Hart, that 'whether one is the accessory... or the aggressor, there is very little difference between the two states'.[71] Nevertheless, the Party's leaders rejected the Secretariat's insinuation that Britain had become the driving force of the war. As Emile Burns argued, the differentiation between the international roles of fascism and bourgeois democracy had now 'lost its former sense in relation to the present international situation, inasmuch as both groups are now engaged in a war for their imperialist aims', but he argued that from this, the Party could only conclude that Britain and Germany were equally responsible for the war, chastising the Secretariat for trying to draw a distinction between them in this regard.[72] John Gollan supported Burns, arguing that 'both sides bear equal responsibility. That is so say, Germany, as well as France and Britain are out for European and world domination.'[73] Both Burns and Gollan argued that to suggest that Britain was more responsible for the war, as the Secretariat had, was not in line with the Comintern's analysis of the international situation.[74]

Given that the Party leadership used exactly the same evidence to reach entirely different conclusions in September and October it is difficult

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[70] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 216.

[71] King and Matthews, *About turn*, pp. 119-20.

[72] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 162.

[73] King and Matthews, *About turn*, pp. 216-7.

[74] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 162. And, pp. 216-7.

to see the Central Committee's reinterpretation of the roles of fascist and bourgeois democratic states and responsibility for the war as anything but a reaction to the clarification of the Comintern and the Soviet Union's analyses of the international situation. As Monty Johnstone and Neil Redfern have argued there is little evidence that this dramatic reappraisal was provoked by rank and file criticism of the Party line.[75] There had of course been some opposition to the War on Two Fronts line amongst the Party membership since its introduction and questioning of the line certainly increased after the Soviet Union made its support for a negotiated peace public.[76] Despite this however very few Party leaders mentioned this disquiet amongst the membership, let alone argued that it had had any significant effect on their interpretation of the war.[77] Indeed there were just as many leaders who argued that the Party's members would need to be carefully convinced to accept the new interpretation.[78] Some leaders even made it explicitly clear that their acceptance of the idea that fascist and bourgeois democratic states were now playing an equally aggressive role in international affairs was based largely on the fact that the Comintern and the Soviet Union had adopted it. Maurice Cornforth for example, explained that he only began to question the Party's interpretation of the war after Springhall explained the Comintern line, stating 'the fact that from the International comes a line so contradictory to what we had been saying inevitably shakes one up in the sense of reevaluating [sic] everything which one has been saying and thinking.'[79] Ted Bramley on the other hand, pointed out that, even after the Comintern's line had been explained by Springhall, he was unable to understand the logic of its characterisation of

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[75] Attfield, John, and Williams, Stephen, (eds), *1939 The Communist Party and the War*, (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1984), pp. 28-9. And
Redfern, Neil, *Class or Nation: Communists, Imperialism and Two World Wars*, (I.B. Taurus & Co. Ltd, New York, 2012), p. 95-7.
[76] Eaden, James, and Renton, David, *The Communist Party of Great Britain Since 1920*, (Palgrave, Hampshire, 2002), p. 69-70. And
Thorpe, Andrew, 'The Communist International and the British Communist Party' in Rees, Tim, and Thorpe, Andrew, (eds), *International Communism and Communist International*, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1998), p. 75.
Branson, Noreen, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain*, 192-41, (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1985), p. 270-1.
[77] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 139. And, p. 275.
[78] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 118. And, p. 262.
[79] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 130.

fascism and democracy. It was only after analysing various statements of Soviet policy, in particular Marshall Zhdanov's claim that Britain and France failed to accept the peace front because they wanted to accelerate Nazi aggression against Poland into order to provoke a conflict which would draw the Soviet Union into a war with the Germany, that he came to accept that there was a new international situation.[80]

A similar mind-set was displayed by Party leaders who argued in support of the Comintern's analysis of the war because it seemed to provide a better explanation of soviet policy. Since the outbreak of war the Party leadership had made a number of false predictions regarding Soviet Policy. The August 23rd edition of the *Daily Worker* for example, confidently predicted that the Nazi-Soviet pact would include a saving clause which would release the Soviet Union from the pact if Germany attacked a third party.[81] Similarly on September 16th, the day before Red Army crossed the Polish border, the Party condemned speculation about potential Soviet intervention in Poland.[82] William Cowe and Ted Bramley, along with other Party leaders at the October meeting, argued that the Party's failure to acknowledge the changes in the roles of the fascist and bourgeois democratic states explained why it made such mistakes in its interpretation of Soviet policy.[83] James Roche took this one step further, arguing that unless the Central Committee aligned its policy absolutely with that of the Soviet Union then it would inevitably end up taking an anti-Soviet line. If the Party stuck to the War on Two Fronts line it would continue to misinterpret and misrepresent the Soviet Union's actions to the workers in a way that would arouse their hostility.[84]

The Party's decision to reject its own rationalisation of the character of war in deference to the attitudes of the Comintern and the Soviet Union is far from surprising. As James Jupp has pointed out, the Party's

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[80] King and Matthews, (eds), *About turn*, pp. 235-6.
[81] 'Soviet's Dramatic Peace Move to Halt Aggressors', *Daily Worker*, August 23rd, WCML
[82] 'Soviet Analysis of Poland's War Losses', *Daily Worker*, September 16th, WCML
[83] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 237. And, p. 277.
[84] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 281.

understanding of Marxism in the 1930s was relatively unsophisticated, lacking knowledge of key theoretical texts and concepts. Even the Party's understanding of Leninist theory, upon which it claimed to be founded, was incomplete. The CPGB's lack of ideological development left it in no position to challenge the ideological knowledge of the Soviet Union which was able to exert a largely unchallenged ideological hegemony over most British Marxists, the Communist Party included. To the Leaders of the CPGB Marxism was what the Communist Party of the Soviet Union claimed it was.[85] The Comintern too played a similar role for the Party. This was made clear by William Cowe's speech to the Central Committee in which he explained how he had always considered the Comintern 'an unrivalled political authority and guide' and had often been willing to 'blindly submit to its decisions.'[86] When the Party reviewed its change in line some forty five years later Ted Bramley revealed the importance that such faith in the intellectual superiority of the Comintern and USSR had for him personally. Bramley explained that he was convinced that the Comintern and the Soviet Union would not have turned away from their interpretation of fascism as the main enemy of the workers without unassailable evidence.[87] As Campbell was later to note, the Central Committee was under immense pressure to convince themselves of the correctness of the political lines of the Comintern and the Soviet Union.[88] However, it is important to note that the CPGB's leadership would have had good reason to suspect that the line now espoused by the Comintern was correct. As noted in chapter one the Central Committee had long been convinced that the National Government's foreign policy was aiding fascism for anti-Soviet objectives and, as pointed out in Chapter two, these fears were reiterated by a number of Party leaders in September as a reason to focus more of the Party's propaganda on the fight against Chamberlain. At the October meeting a number of Central Committee members pointed to the Party's mistrust of Chamberlain's motives through the Popular Front period as a justification

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[85] Jupp, James, *The Radical Left in Britain 1931-41*, (Frank Cass and Company Limited, London, 1982), p. 132.
[86] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 275.
[87] Attfield, and Williams, (eds), *1939*, pp. 85.
[88] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 40.

for their acceptance of the Comintern's analysis of the war. George Crane, for example, pointed to an article written by Campbell in June 1939 which claimed that the Chamberlain government was aligning itself with German fascism in opposition to the democratic forces of the world, concluding that, if this were the case, it was impossible to support the Party's initial line on the war as it would therefore be impossible to defend democracy by supporting Chamberlain.[89] Thus it would seem that, as John Callaghan has suggested, the Central Committee's support of the Comintern's interpretation of the war has to be viewed alongside this mistrust of the British government.[90]

Having agreed that Germany, France and Britain were all equally responsible for the war the Central Committee now accepted that the war was therefore a purely imperialist war. As a result they argued that any attempt to support the war would mean supporting the British government and aiding it in the achievement of its imperialist aims. As Idris Cox argued, 'Our old line was for fighting on two fronts, this would now mean supporting the aims of British imperialism and is therefore incorrect.'[91] The Party leaders agreed that in such a situation it was the duty of the Party to oppose the war and work for the overthrow of British Government. The Central Committee now argued that the CPGB, along with all the other parties of the Communist International, now had to adopt the position advocated by Lenin in 1914 and oppose their own governments.[92] Just like the Secretariat however, the other Party leaders did not now embrace the programme of revolutionary defeatism which had been advocated by Lenin but rather argued that the Party should oppose the war by supporting a negotiated peace. As John Gollan pointed out, the Party could not support a war for the final military defeat of Germany as the imperialists did; 'This is clear to the Central Committee. Any peace proposals advanced must receive our consideration, we must advance to the workers that they must consider

[89] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 154.
[90] Callaghan, John, *Rajani Palme Dutt: A Study in British Stalinism*, (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1993), p. 188.
[91] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 246.
[92] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 134.

all proposals advanced.'[93] The other leaders now criticised Campbell, Gallacher and Pollitt for failing to recognise this in their statements. Cornforth criticised the approach taken by Campbell, Gallacher and Pollitt by claiming that they were trying to take a middle course, adopting peace in theory whilst continuing to support the core of the War on Two Fronts line, the military defence of Britain. Cornforth argued that it was impossible to make a distinction between those who supported the war to resist German fascism and those who supported the war for imperialist aims; supporting the war, regardless of the reason, would in practice mean supporting the government and its aims.[94] Finlay Hart too criticised Campbell's arguments as attempt to cover up a line which meant supporting British imperialism.[95]

The belief that aiding the war would lead to support of the aims of British imperialism led the Central Committee to abandon their previous belief that supporting the war might be in line with the interests of the international movement and the Soviet Union. Some members of the Central Committee seem to have shared the secretariats concern that providing support for the British government in its imperialist aims might damage the build-up of revolutionary forces in Germany. A number of the CPGB's leaders including Idris Cox and James Shields now argued that opposing the Chamberlain Government was the best way for the CPGB to aid its German Comrades. [96] This was not a new idea for the Party; even in its September manifesto the Central Committee had argued that the defeat of the Chamberlain government, and its imperialist and pro-fascist aims, would be a signal for the German workers to strengthen their fight against Hitler.[97] Far more importantly however, the Party's leaders were concerned not to give any support to the anti-Soviet aims of the British government. Maurice Cornforth was particularly vocal on this issue. Britain's foreign policy, he reminded the assembled leaders, was unchanged since the 1938

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[93] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 221.
[94] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 134.
[95] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 119.
[96] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 246. And, p. 266.
[97] "War! Communist policy" in Pollitt, Harry, *How to Win the War*, (Communist Party of Great Britain, London, 1939), pp. 25-9.

Munich crisis, during which Britain had aimed not only to appease the fascist powers but also to direct them against the Soviet Union.[98] He now argued, as the secretariat had, that

> 'British imperialism, still with its reactionary motives of domination and attack upon the Soviet Union, is trying now to fight against German fascism with the object of weakening them and of conniving to impose upon the German people, of having that British domination of Europe which they have so long worked for, which will fundamentally be able to turn the war against the Soviet Union.'[99]

Therefore, Cornforth stated, it was obvious that the Party could not support any war, which British imperialism was waging for these anti-Soviet objectives.[100] The majority of the other leaders gave their support to these ideas. Indeed some leaders, in particular Idris Cox, James Roche and William Whittaker, now believed that the Soviet Union's weakening of Germany (as demonstrated by the Nazi-Soviet pact and peace proposals) meant that British and French imperialism now posed the greatest threat to the USSR and were convinced that supporting the war would aid them in their anti-Soviet objectives and increase the threat to the Soviet Union.[101] Only John Gollan provided any direct opposition to this claim. He argued that there were two tendencies at work in the government with some pursuing a more anti-Soviet line than others. He pointed out that some in the government and the press, in particular Churchill, had viewed the Soviet Union's actions in Eastern Europe positively and had even pushed for some further negotiations with the USSR. Nevertheless, Gollan agreed that the fundamental line of the British bourgeoisie was to try to create an anti-Soviet combination.[102]

It was not just consideration of the potential ramifications for supporting an imperialist war that led the Central Committee to support an immediate peace however; some Party leaders argued that the Party should

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[98] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 135.
[99] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 135.
[100] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 135.
[101] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 246. And, pp. 280-1. And, pp. 225-6.
[102] King and Matthews, *About turn*, pp. 220-1.

support peace simply because the Soviet Union opposed the continuation of the war. The contributions of Cornforth, Bramley and Kerrigan are all notable in this regard. Cornforth rejected Campbell, Pollitt and Gallacher's statements on the grounds that they advocated continuing to support the war 'despite the very firm warning which has been given by the Soviet Government and the Communist Party'.[103] In view of the Soviet Government's calls for peace, he suggested, the Party now had to come out 'very, very strongly in favour of peace.'[104] Ted Bramley likewise argued that the most important factor preventing support of the Chamberlain government and the British war effort was that the Soviet Union was against the continuation of the war.[105] Neither Cornforth nor Bramley gave any particular theoretical or practical explanations for these statements of support for the Soviet Union's policy; rather they were seemingly based on the commitment made by the Party at the Seventh Congress to always defend the foreign policy choices of the Soviet Union.[106] Cornforth's speech made this clear stating that the Soviet Union 'can do no wrong, and is doing no wrong… these are the reasons why personally I commenced to turn political somersaults.'[107] Peter Kerrigan gave an equally demonstrative example of this kind of thinking when he told the Central Committee, 'I have always justified the Soviet Union in every action that the Soviet Union has taken… That is why I cannot accept Johnny's [Campbell's] points on peace… That is why I believe it is absolutely necessary for us to say that the peace proposals must be considered… anything that the Soviet Union is involved in means that we must give it support.'[108]

At this point it would seem as if the CPGB's Central Committee accepted the new analysis of the war and the new line presented by the Secretariat purely based on the authority of the Comintern and the Soviet Union and considerations of the interests of these two bodies. Certainly

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[103] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 131.
[104] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 136.
[105] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 235.
[106] Morgan, Kevin, *Harry Pollitt*, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1994), p. 107.
[107] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 131.
[108] King and Matthews, *About turn*, pp. 251-2.

Kevin Morgan and Neil Redfern were correct when they argued that the impetus for the Party's change in line came from the intervention of the Comintern and changes in Soviet policy but to suggest however, that policies of the Comintern and the Soviet Union were the only factors which the CPGB considered, a stance oft adopted in older histories of the Party such as those provided by Hugo Dewar and Henry Pelling and still present in more recent works such as those of James Eaden and David Renton, and Keith Laybourn and Dylan Murphy, would be, as Andrew Thorpe has suggested, a mistake.[109] Whilst the acceptance of the Comintern line led to a revolution in the Party's understanding of the interests of the international movement it did not lead to a similar complete reassessment of the Party's own objectives. Indeed, whilst justifying their adoption of the new line, the Central Committee argued not only that it was the best way to advance the interests of the international movement and the USSR but also that it could achieve those objectives identified as most important for their own Party in September, the advance of the working class in Britain and the defence of British democracy, even if the new interpretation of the character of the war led to some changes in the Party leadership's tactical approaches to these objectives.

Notwithstanding their adoption of the changed interpretation of the international roles of fascism and bourgeois democracy the Central Committee remained convinced of the need to defend the British people from German fascism. As noted earlier, other than the Secretariat, the Party's leadership remained unconvinced that Germany no longer posed a threat to Britain. In addition to this, the Central Committee and

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[109] Morgan, *Against Fascism and War*, pp. 90-1. And
Redfern, Neil, *Class or Nation: Communists, Imperialism and Two World Wars*, (I.B. Taurus & Co. Ltd, New York, 2012), p. 95-7. And
Dewar, Hugo, Communist politics in Britain: The CPGB from its Origins to the Second World War, (Pluto Press limitied, London, 1976), pp. 129-33. And
Pelling, Henry, *The British Communist Party: A Historical Profile*, (Adam and Charles Black, London, 1975), p. 109. And
Eaden, and Renton, *The Communist Party*, p. 83. And
Laybourn, Keith and, Murphy, Dylan, *Under the Red Flag: A history of Communism in Britain*, (Sutton Publishing Limited, Gloucestershire, 1999), pp. 106-8. And
Thorpe, Andrew, *The British Communist Party and Moscow 1920-43*, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 200), p. 13.

particularly Maurice Cornforth, John Gollan and Peter Kerrigan, pointed out that, whilst Britain and France's attempts to foment war by refusing the Anglo-Franco-Soviet pact meant there was no difference between the foreign policies of bourgeois democratic states and fascist states there was still a difference between them in terms of the democratic liberties their internal policies afforded to the working class.[110] As Ted Bramley pointed 'I cannot see this [changed situation] as absolutely altering our position of being for the defence of democracy in Britain and France and the other countries and continuing to stand against everything that fascism stands for.'[111] These two factors had led the Central Committee to argue in September that the war should be supported to defend the British people from the loss of their democratic rights and despite its changed stance on supporting the war the Party's leaders retained this desire to defend British democratic rights in October too. Ted Bramley for example, argued that, whilst the Party could no longer support the continuation of the war, it could not overlook the British people's desire for security.[112] Marian Jessop pointed out that the British people 'want the sort of peace which means that fascism can no longer be the aggressor, can no longer imperil them, can no longer open the situation where they feel they are going to be called upon to face the war in a worsened situation.'[113] In September the majority of the Party leadership who spoke in favour of the War on Two Fronts line saw supporting the war as the only way defending British democratic liberties against German aggression. It was the belief of a number of the Central Committee, in particular Pollitt, Hart and Horner, that there was no possibility of getting an acceptable peace with Hitler and that the war would have to be seen through to either a British or German defeat.[114] Campbell especially had argued that the Party should not envision seeking peace before the advance of German fascism had been halted.[115] Only Emile Burns foresaw and supported the idea of a peace settlement negotiated and guaranteed by the

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[110] King and Matthews, *About turn*, pp. 132. And, p. 217. And, p. 250.
[111] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 238.
[112] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 237.
[113] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 257.
[114] Minutes of September 24th-25th Central Committee Meeting, Labour History Archive and Study Centre, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 1/2. And, p. 7/1. And, p. 4/4.
[115] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 8/4.

Soviet Union.[116] Now that such a peace settlement had been publicly endorsed by Germany, and more importantly the Soviet Union, however, the Party saw an alternative way to defend British liberties.

At the same time, the majority of the CPGB's leaders remained convinced, in spite of the Nazi-Soviet peace proposals, that the Soviet Union was still hostile to German fascism. The Central Committee argued that whilst Soviet policy was intended to combat the imperialist aims of Britain and France it was still also directed against German fascism as well. James Shields was direct, he told the Central Committee, 'I don't believe that the Communist International or ourselves or the Soviet Union stands for Nazi aggression or for Nazi domination. I think on the contrary that the biggest blows given against the Nazi aggression [sic] have been given by the Soviet Union.'[117] Marian Jessop and Ted Bramley shared his convictions. Jessop reminded the other leaders that the Soviet Union opposed the plans of all imperialist powers involved in the war. She pointed to the example of the Nazi-Soviet Pact of non-aggression, which, she claimed, had struck a blow 'against Nazi Germany in Eastern Europe and a blow against the plans of British and French imperialism [to engineer a war between Germany and the Soviet Union]'.[118] Bramley argued that this desire to check the imperialist aims of both Britain and France and Germany underlay the Soviet Union's decision to support peace. He claimed, 'If the Soviet Union is for peace now it must be because if peace can be secured, in their opinion it checks Nazi aggression, equally it checks British and French aspirations in Europe'.[119]

The Party's faith in the Soviet Union's opposition to fascism was accompanied by a similar faith in the notion that the Soviet Union was now the dominant power in Europe. They believed that, since the signing of the Nazi-Soviet pact, every new development in Nazi-Soviet relations had

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[116] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 12/1.
[117] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 265.
[118] King and Matthews, *About turn*, pp. 256-7.
[119] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 235.

strengthened the Soviet Union and weakened Germany in relation. For most of the Party's leaders this change in the balance of Soviet and German strength could be measured in terms of their respective military capabilities. Idris Cox in particular embraced this idea. Still unaware of the secret protocols of the Nazi-Soviet pact, he argued that the Soviet Union's invasion of Poland had forced Germany to abandon its goal of dominating the whole of the country. This, he claimed, was not only evidence of the Soviet Union's superior military capabilities but represented a significant blow to Hitler's plans for European domination. 'It is not a question of what Hitler got in Poland but what Hitler failed to get', Cox argued, 'the aims of German Fascism were clearly spelled out in *Mein Kampf* and the plan was to get the whole of Poland. These plans have been destroyed by the Soviet Union and Hitler has failed to achieve what he set out for.'[120] Cox argued that, as a result of Soviet intervention in Poland, Germany no longer had the strength pose a threat to the Soviet Union, concluding that 'As far as military strength is concerned the Soviet Union is the stronger power.'[121] Marian Jessop adopted a similar stance. She argued that the Nazi-Soviet Pact was evidence of the strength of the Soviet Union in relation to Germany and that by signing the pact Hitler had publicly recognised that 'he cannot play the game that British and French imperialism strengthened him to play. He recognises it would be a disaster for fascism to attack the Soviet Union.'[122] The majority of the Central Committee continued to see Germany as an aggressive power but believed that the Soviet Union was immune to this aggression. In this sense Ted Bramley's claim that 'so far the Nazis have strengthened themselves at the expense of British and French imperialism, but the Soviet Union has strengthened itself immeasurably more at the expense of German imperialism and the British and French and Polish reactionary governments', was representative of the views of the wider Central Committee.[123]

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[120] King and Matthews, *About turn*, pp. 245-6.
[121] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 246.
[122] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 256.
[123] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 237.

Others, such as Emile Burns and George Crane saw the Soviet Union's dominance over Germany as stemming from its greater diplomatic power. Burns argued the Party had to view Germany's territorial expansion in Poland alongside shifts in European politics, arguing that Germany had been succeeded by the Soviet Union as the dominant political power in Europe. In reference to Nazi-Soviet talks that resulted in the joint peace proposals, he pointed out that, whereas previously Germany had sent for diplomats from other countries and received them in Germany, now the reverse was the case. In Burns' own words, '[now] the Soviet Union sends for Ribbentrop and he comes – this all expresses a very important weakening of the position of German fascism which I think is of far greater importance for the future than the expansion of territory.'[124] A similar idea was put forward by Crane, who expressed his belief that the Soviet Union was far more skilled in diplomatic manoeuver than Britain, France or Germany.[125]

Regardless of how they perceived the source of the Soviet Union's strength however, the majority of the Central Committee were agreed; in a contest between the USSR and Germany, the Soviet Union was the stronger power. Pollitt and Campbell's arguments that the Soviet Union had signed the Nazi-Soviet pact in order to defend its territory by securing necessary breathing space and that Germany had pursued the pact in order to avoid a war on two fronts could not stand up to the rest of the Central Committee's faith in the USSR.[126] William Whittaker spoke against Pollitt and Campbell's contributions precisely on these grounds, criticising the two for trying the convince him to 'weaken my confidence in the Soviet Union'.[127] In his own mind Whittaker was clear, 'the role of the Soviet Union is not merely one of narrow defence of its own people and not due to the weakness of the Soviet Union, but absolutely due to her strength.[128] This faith in the Soviet Union led the Party's leaders to believe that the Soviets had both the strength and the desire to ensure that any negotiated peace which came out

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[124] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 168.
[125] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 155.
[126] King and Matthews, *About turn*, pp. 105-6. And, p. 202.
[127] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 227.
[128] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 230.

of the Nazi-Soviet peace proposals would include guarantees against the potential for further westward German expansion, which the Party found so worrying. In the *Daily Worker* the Party had previously decried offers of peace from Germany and fascist Italy as an attempt to split Britain and France.[129] The involvement of the Soviet Union in peace proposals however, had led to a dramatic reassessment of Germany's position. The Daily Worker of September 30th announced,

> 'So far as Eastern Europe is concerned the Soviet Union has taken care that the path of Fascism is now blocked. Whatever the Fascists want to do, they have to ask the permission from the Soviet Government.'

The paper announced that the Soviet peace offers represented an attempt on the part of the USSR to help prevent the expansion of Germany in the west.[130] Precisely these views were now expressed amongst the leaders at the October meeting. In his speech, Ted Bramley argued that the Soviet proposals 'can help to stop Nazi aggression in the West as effectively as it has been stopped in the East', with the increased strength of the Soviet Union acting as a guaranteeing factor.[131] Marian Jessop, James Roche, John Gollan and Emile Burns too, all expressed their confidence that the Soviets would be able secure a peace that prevented German aggression and served the best interests of the working people of the world, including the British working class.[132] Pollitt and Campbell had admonished such ideas as being based on an over-reliance on the Soviet Union but of those Central Committee members who were neither part of the Secretariat nor aligned with Pollitt and Campbell only Maurice Cornforth and Peter Kerrigan warned against relying on the Soviet Union to secure an acceptable peace in the West.[133]

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[129] 'Hitler Offers "Peace" to Split Britain and France', *Daily Worker*, September 20th, WCML and 'Italy Makes "Peace Offer"', *Daily Worker*, September 25th, WCML
[130] 'Peace offer to Europe', *Daily Worker*, September 30th, WCML
[131] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 237.
[132] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 112. And, pp. 203-5. And, p. 261. And, p. 281. And, pp. 221-3. And, p. 168.
[133] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 134. And, p. 252.

The need to prevent fascism emerging in Britain had, since 1935, driven the CPGB to oppose not only the expansion of foreign fascist states but also the continued rule of the National Government. In October, just as in September and throughout the Popular Front period, the Party leadership was, in part, driven by the need to defend working conditions and democratic liberties from fascisisation. The Central Committee's continued perception of fascism as a qualitatively worse form of class rule than bourgeois democracy led its members to argue that it was just as important as ever to protect the British working class from the imposition of fascism from within. This kind of thinking was particularly evident in Marian Jessop's speech. There was, she argued, a 'vital difference' between the internal characters of the fascist and bourgeois democratic states; 'we have to see that in this country fascism is not going to be imposed.'[134] Peter Kerrigan too argued that it was one of the most important tasks of the Party 'to fight to defend our liberties in Great Britain'.[135] Likewise, just as it had throughout the Popular Front period, the Central Committee continued to argue that the primary fascist threat in Britain stemmed from the National Government. As Idris Cox pointed out, 'fascism is not likely to develop in Britain as it has on the continent. The main problem in this country is not a fascist party but the National government itself.'[136]

As noted in the previous chapter, in September some of the leadership had already drawn attention to attacks on the workers' economic conditions and liberties, arguing for a strengthening of the Party's line against Chamberlain to combat this, with Pollitt, Hart and Kerrigan in particular arguing for greater focus on this element of the National Government's policy. At this time the Party leadership had thought the best way to move the workers to a position of opposition to the National government was to highlight to them the fact that the government was not prepared to win the war and to call for its replacement with a government that would effectively prosecute the war. In October the Party leadership remained committed to

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[134] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 260.
[135] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 250.
[136] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 247.

defending the liberties and economic conditions of the workers. However, having accepted that the war was purely imperialist, it now abandoned the idea of fighting for a government which would continue the war for, as Maurice Cornforth and Emile Burns both pointed out, any government which advocated the continuation the war would also be advancing Britain's imperialist aims and thus could not be supported.[137] However, whilst fear of promoting British imperialism was an important factor in convincing the Party leadership to oppose the war, this was also accompanied by a fear of promoting British fascism.

Between the September and October meetings the Daily Worker reported on a number of worrying restrictions on civil liberties such as amendments to Defence Regulations allowing for the detainment of individuals with views 'prejudicial' to the government, the Ministry of Information's control of news and information for publication and the introduction of army units to armaments factories 'ostensibly for the protection of the factories'.[138] In addition the Party began to perceive an encroachment on British democratic liberties in the growth of unemployment, price rises and wage cuts which accompanied the outbreak of war. In the Daily Worker these occurrences were blamed on the government's economic policies, portraying them, along with the new tax rates introduced by the war budget, as a deliberate attempt on the part of the national government to prepare Britain for 'a total shift of industry to a "war economy" basis'; a policy which had been perceived by the Party as a clear indication of the development of fascism throughout the Popular Front period.[139]

At the October meeting this perceived intensification of attacks on British democracy led a number of Party leaders to refocus on the domestic fascist threat posed by the National government (which had been secondary

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[137] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 137. And, p. 169.
[138] *Daily Worker*, September 25th - 30th, WCML
[139] 'At Whose Expense?', *Daily Worker*, September 30th, WCML and Morgan, Against Fascism and War, p. 29.

to considerations of the threat posed by Nazi Germany in September) and argue that supporting the war would only lead to the further erosion of British democracy at the hands of the Chamberlain Government. Arguing that the Party could not support a war on two fronts forever, John Gollan told the Party leadership,

> 'The Central Committee has got to note a very big extension of the imperialist front in this war in one month of the war… you can go over every step which has been taken by the Government to prosecute the war and none of these acts are in any way a concession to the people. There has been no relating of democratic influence but on the contrary, the government has more fastened and extended the imperialist hold.'[140]

Ted Bramley too argued that the Central Committee had to recognise the rapid development of fascisisation in Britain whilst stressing that the CPGB could not attempt to justify continuing the war for Czech and Austrian independence and the overthrow of German fascism whilst democratic rights in Britain were being 'rapidly denied'.[141] Finlay Hart too doubted the ability of the Party to act to save the German people from fascism by military means without aiding the establishment of fascism in Britain.[142]

A minority of the leaders, none of whom had spoken in September, even began to overtly argue along the same line that Rust had taken in September, claiming that the War on Two Fronts line had damaged the Party's ability to respond to these attacks on the working class. George Crane criticised the Party machinery for its lax response to what he described as 'one of the greatest offensives that the employing class has ever carried out against the working class'.[143] He accused the Party's Metal bureau (which directed the Party's work in the engineering industry and unions) of giving no guidance to Party activists who were left, as a result of the Party's support of the war, 'unsure of whether to push for higher wages

[140] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 219.
[141] King and Matthews, *About turn*, pp. 234-5.
[142] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 120.
[143] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 152.

in engineering for fear of it being to the detriment of the war effort.'[144] William Whittaker also criticised the Party's response to attacks on the workers arguing, like Crane, that under the War on Two Fronts line the Party had failed to give any lead to the workers to defend their working conditions.[145] Crane and Whittaker along with James Roche all argued that the workers were actively opposed to the policy of sacrificing working conditions in the interests of increasing war production which some members of the Party had adopted under the War on Two Fronts line. Crane recalled how, at an Amalgamated Engineering Union meeting in Birmingham, a movement opposing wage increases for fear of damaging the war effort got no backers and the man who proposed it was shouted down by the crowd.[146] Whittaker pointed out a similar attitude was prevalent amongst Cotton workers. He claimed that the trade union leadership in the cotton industry had supported the idea of making sacrifices for the war whilst the workers, even in badly organised factories, had staged walk outs and threatened to revolt against the leadership of the Amalgamated Weavers' Association in opposition to such sacrifices.[147] Roche gave a more personal account. He claimed that when promoting the Party's line of defending Britain in the factories he had been met with hostility to the point where he felt like he 'could not really argue with the workers' along that line.[148]

Very few leaders were so openly critical of the War on Two Fronts line but the increased offensive at home led the majority of the Party's leaders to re-evaluate their stance on the Working class' opinion of the war. They now argued that, whilst the workers had initially supported the war, the conditions being imposed on them in the name of the war effort were creating an attitude of apathy, if not outright opposition towards the war. Maurice Cornforth for example, argued that originally there was strong support for the war and the people were 'willing to undertake anything, to

[144] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 151.
[145] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 229.
[146] King and Matthews, *About turn*, pp. 151-2.
[147] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 229.
[148] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 280.

stick anything to beat German fascism'. For Cornforth however, the attacks on working conditions and democratic rights in Britain had made it 'clear to the workers that the war was not really against German fascism' and that realisation dampened popular support for the war to the point where the British public were fed up with it.[149] Marian Jessop made a similar claim, noting that the lack of conflict on the Western front in contrast with the attacks on the working class in Britain had lead the workers to reconsider the war. She argued that 'The workers are beginning to consider where it is all going to end, if in one month of the war they have lost so many advantages', claiming to have heard some expressing support for peace.[150] Few were prepared to argue that there was already mass opposition to the war amongst the British people, indeed only Crane made such a claim.[151] However, the majority of the leadership now accepted the Secretariat's position that by campaigning on the issues of immediate relevance to the workers (e.g. wages, working conditions, unemployment, etc.) the Party would be able to win them over to opposing the war. As James Shields pointed out, the imperialist character of the war had to be linked to the social and economic problems faced by the workers; 'The two go hand-in-hand, it is not a case of separating these but a case of these being interconnected, and using this offensive which is taking place against the working class movement in this country in order to show the type of people that are conducting the war and what their aims actually are.'[152] Finlay Hart, Maurice Cornforth, William Whittaker and Idris Cox all gave their support to this, stressing that it was by showing how the war contributed to the immediate concerns of the workers that the Party would gather support for its line of peace.[153] Although, as Sonya Rose has pointed out, the majority of the British working class were generally supportive of the war in its early stages, the CPGB's leaders' identification of potential anti-war

[149] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 136.
[150] King and Matthews, *About turn*, pp. 260-1.
[151] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 156.
[152] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 270.
[153] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 121-2. And, p. 138-9. And, p. 229. And, p. 247.

feeling was not entirely wishful thinking.[154] Some members of the Central Committee were able to give practical evidence of this. Idris Cox for example, pointed to a number of successful meetings held by the Party in South Wales after September 30th on the basis of the new line.[155] Cornforth too noted that a speech at a meeting in Letchworth on September 30th in support of the Soviet peace proposals garnered 'a very big response and very little opposition from quite a large meeting.'[156] These were not simply isolated examples either. As Eaden and Renton have pointed out, the continued growth of the CPGB immediately after its change in line – whilst admittedly exaggerated by the Party itself – can be seen, when viewed alongside growth in other anti-war organisations, as evidence that there was an appreciable amount of anti-war feeling for the Party to draw upon.[157] Indeed it was precisely at the time the Party was changing its line that this anti-war, or at least pro-peace, feeling was becoming particularly noticeable especially amongst the Labour movement. As T.D. Burridge notes, whilst the Labour Party leadership remained entirely opposed to a negotiated peace, the dissolution of Poland and Nazi-Soviet peace proposals led, in particular the Labour left but also a large section of the wider British public, to question the continuation of the war.[158] Burridge's arguments are supported by data gathered by the British Institute of public opinion in October 1939 which found the British public to be split, with 48% of people asked accepting of the idea of a negotiated peace (although admittedly negotiated by Roosevelt not Stalin), 41% opposed and the rest undecided.[159] The extent of opposition to the war should not be overstated however; the same survey of public opinion found that in November 1939 54.9% of the public were satisfied with the Chamberlain government's conduct of the war with only 9.9% calling for an immediate end to the war.[160] Despite this, it

[154] Rose, Sonya O., *Which People's War: National identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain 1939-1945*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003), p. 12.
[155] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 248.
[156] King and Matthews, *About turn*, p. 136.
[157] Eaden, and Renton, *The Communist Party*, p. 75.
[158] Burridge, T.d., *British Labour and Hitler's War*, (Andre Deutsch Limited, London, 1974), pp. 25-32.
[159] British Institute of Public Opinion, "Public Opinion Survey", *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 4, No. 1, (Oxford University Press, March 1940), p. 81.
[160] BIPO, "Public Opinion Survey", p. 82.

would seem that there were at least some credible grounds for the Party believing that its new line of the war might gain some degree of support.

It seems reasonable to argue from all this that the Central Committee's adoption of the Imperialist War line reflects a degree of continuity with the interests they espoused at the September meeting. There can be little doubt that majority of the Central Committee adopted the Comintern's stance on the character of the war based largely on the authority of the Soviet Union and the Comintern itself, even if this was reinforced by suspicions regarding the motives of the National government which the Party had harboured throughout the 1930s. However, the leadership's adoption of the fight for peace was to a large extent motivated by the same factors which motivated the Party's support of the War on Two Fronts line in September, namely the desire to pursue a policy in line with that of the international communist movement, the desire to remove the National Government and the desire to defend British democratic rights from the menace of German fascism. The Party leaders' new understanding of the war as purely imperialist led to a complete reassessment of the needs of the both the Soviet Union and the wider international movement, replacing any hopes that leaders had harboured in September of using the war to liberate Europe from fascism, with fears of aiding the counter-revolutionary and, more importantly, anti-Soviet plans of British capitalism, convincing them of the need for peace. On the home front, evidence of rising discontent amongst the workers, as a result of worsening working conditions – in contrast to Pollitt, Campbell and Gallacher – convinced the majority of the Central Committee that the new line would not only find the ear of the British working class but may even act to better defend their interests against the domestic fascist threat.

In each of these views the wider Central Committee found itself largely in agreement with the secretariat, however, it was not the case that the Central Committee simply swallowed everything that Dutt, Rust and Springhall told them. Indeed the wider Central Committee's understanding

of the war remained remarkably independent to that of the Secretariat and the justifications that the majority of the Central Committee made for their support of the Comintern's line reflects both this separate analysis and the importance which those leaders had placed on the defence of British democratic rights in September. Where the Secretariat argued for an immediate peace claiming that the Soviet Union had weakened Germany to the point where German aggression was no longer a threat to Britain the majority of the Central Committee continued to see Germany as a threat. Unlike Pollitt, Campbell and Gallacher however, they were largely happy to believe that the involvement of the Soviet Union in any potential peace conference would guarantee safeguards against fascist expansion in the West. The Central Committee was convinced that a Soviet backed peace would serve the best interests of the Party and the British working class. The majority, it seems, saw the fight for peace in the same way as Finlay Hart who claimed that the fight for peace was of an 'all-embracing character', giving the Party the opportunity to both prevent further fascist expansion in the West and to challenge the governance of the Chamberlain government.[161] Ultimately, despite these differences of opinion, the Central Committee voted in favour of the secretariat's resolution as all of issues on which they disagreed were contained in either the secretariat's speeches or its draft manifesto, which Dutt claimed were open to discussion and revision, rather than the resolution itself.[162]

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[161] King and Matthews, (eds), *About turn*, p. 122.
[162] King and Matthews, (eds), *About turn*, pp. 186-7.

<u>Conclusion</u>

This thesis finds no reason to challenge the established notion that the Communist Party of Great Britain's stance towards the war and the British war effort in 1939 was initially influenced primarily by the anti-fascist line adopted by the Party since 1935 and was later changed primarily as a result of the intervention of the Comintern. At the same time however, it finds room for elaboration on these points.

Chapter two shows that, primarily, the Party Leadership's acceptance of and support for the War on Two Fronts line rested on their adoption of the Seventh Congress' differentiation between fascism and other types of capitalist rule and between the states that adopted these systems. The Party's acceptance of the Comintern's portrayal of fascist states as inherently expansionist and anti-Soviet compared with the at least temporarily non-aggressive small and democratic nations along with the Comintern's portrayal of the fascist system as the worst environment for class struggle in comparison with the relatively benign environment offered by bourgeois democracy, led it to entertain the notion of supporting Britain in war. Specifically the Party accepted the notion of supporting their country in either a war in which it was allied with the Soviet Union or one in which a democratic Popular Front government was defending Britain's democratic rights against fascist aggression.

Although the Party was eventually to face war with neither an Anglo-Soviet alliance nor a Popular Front government in power, the basic message of the Comintern's Seventh World Congress, that fascism represented an especially aggressive and reactionary form of capitalism were to provide the Party leadership with the justifications it required to give its qualified support to the British war effort. The majority of the CPGB's Central Committee accepted the new line on the basis that, because of the uniquely aggressive character of German fascism, Britain and France could not be held equally responsible for the war, thus preventing the war from being

seen in the same way as the First World War, therefore preventing the formula of revolutionary defeatism Lenin developed in that war from being applied to this new one. More importantly than this, Party leaders pointed to the extreme reactionary nature of the Nazi regime, the danger of that regime being imposed on Britain as a result of military defeat and the Party's history of defending democratic rights from fascist expansion in other countries, to argue that the Party was justified in giving support to the war to defend the British people's democratic rights. Matters were complicated somewhat by the Party's pre-war interpretation of the Chamberlain government as a proto-fascist organisation with pro-fascist and anti-Soviet sympathies but the War on Two Fronts line was able to manage residual distrust of Chamberlain by restricting the Party to qualified support for the war and promising to use the situation to oust the Chamberlain government and replace it with the kind of anti-fascist People's Government the Party had striven to create since 1935. This goal seemed all the more achievable to the Central Committee given the general consensus that the working class supported the war or at least the ideals behind it.

Doubts about the War on Two Fronts line only emerged after the Soviet press telegram and the statements of the American and Belgian Parties began to describe the war as imperialist. At this point however the evidence that the Soviet Union had turned away from the principles of the Popular Front period was not convincing enough to alter the stance of the Central Committee. Despite its claim that the war was imperialist, the Central Committee pointed to Russia's actions to argue that it was still primarily opposed to Germany. The Soviets' apparent prevention of German expansion in Poland in particular served as proof of this. At the same time the stances of the American and Belgian Parties were discounted not only due the fact that numerous other Parties had declared themselves in favour of some form or another of the War on Two Fronts line but also because the Comintern, in the run up to the war, seemed to have been expounding a line of defence against German aggression and showed little sign of changing

this stance in the period from the outbreak of war until September 25th. In addition the Central Committee were able to argue that defeating Germany was in the interest of the whole international movement, as a British victory would liberate European countries from imposed fascism whilst a German victory would mean the destruction of the British and French working classes and their support for the Soviet Union.

The third chapter of this thesis shows that Comintern intervention was the primary reason behind the Party leadership's decision to cease portraying the war as an imperialist war in which Germany's uniquely aggressive and reactionary character made it possible to support a limited line of national defence and to instead portray the war as an imperialist war for which all its belligerents were equally responsible. The Central Committee advanced no new evidence to support this changed stance. Nor is there any evidence of significant pressure from within the Party for the Central Committee to revise its opinion of the war. Rather the Party's leaders simply re-evaluated the significance of the actions of Britain, France, Germany and the Soviet Union on the international stage in accordance with Comintern and Soviet explanations of the significance of those actions. The Central Committee's acceptance of the Comintern and Soviet Union's interpretation of the war was facilitated by two things. Firstly by the Party's own sense of intellectual inferiority when it came to matters of political analysis, which resulted in an over-reliance on and an over-confidence in the correctness of analyses emanating from Moscow. Secondly, by the Central Committee's continuing mistrust of the Chamberlain government's character and motives, which allowed the Party to perceive the Comintern's new interpretation of Britain's role in the war as being aligned with their own beliefs rather than as a complete departure, softening the blow of the change in line.

The Central Committee's decision to campaign for an immediate peace was not entirely an original idea either. Here too the CPGB leadership wedded itself to a policy already put forward by the Soviet Union.

In part the Central Committee's decision was the inevitable result of its acceptance of the Comintern's characterisation of the war as purely imperialist. Having accepted this stance it was no longer tenable for the Party to support the British war effort, even in a limited degree; the threat of aiding the imperialist aims of the Chamberlain government by doing so (particularly its anti-Soviet aims) was too great to risk. Furthermore the fact that the Soviet Union was now actively supporting an immediate peace forced the Party to re-evaluate its understanding of Soviet interests. The Central Committee's decision was in part motivated by its recognition that an immediate peace was in the USSR's direct interest and of its own continued desire to uphold those interests.

The Central Committee's new approach to tactics was not however, solely decided by the position of the Comintern and USSR. Indeed the Central Committee's decision to change its line in this regard was considerably influenced by a consideration of its own best interests. Support for an immediate peace actually seemed to offer a practical way of achieving the Party's immediate goals of defending British democratic rights and working conditions from both domestic and foreign fascist threats and of building the Party's support amongst the working class. The Chamberlain government's continued attacks against democratic rights and working conditions led to a resurgence of fears of the Chamberlain government's fascist objectives at home and convinced the Party leadership that supporting the war effort might assist the growth of domestic fascism. At the same time the emergence of a degree of anti-war feeling amongst certain sections of the working class and labour movement convinced many of the Party's leaders that the new line, if carefully applied, could win the support of these and other workers; support which could be used to resist attacks on workers' conditions and democracy in Britain and defeat the primary domestic fascist threat, the Chamberlain government.

An immediate peace also seemed to provide an opportunity for the CPGB to safeguard Britain from foreign fascism. Although the Central

Committee was now operating under the assumption that Britain and Germany were pursuing equally aggressive foreign policies and were equally responsible for the war, the majority of its members continued to hold an unabated fear of a Germany military victory and the fascist regime that victory would impose on Britain. Furthermore, despite the fact that the Soviet Union was officially operating under the same assumptions, the majority of the Central Committee remained convinced that the Soviet Union had not made its peace with fascism. Faith in the Soviet Union's continued antipathy to fascism and in its military and diplomatic strength led the Central Committee to believe that Soviet involvement in any peace deal guaranteed the inclusion of Soviet-backed guarantees which would preclude further German expansion in Western Europe.

The actions of the Central Committee in both September and October 1939 can provide a great deal of insight into the relationship between the CPGB on the one hand and the Comintern and the USSR on the other, both in this specific situation and in general. In particular, the analysis of the factors that led the majority of the Party's Central Committee to accept that the war was purely imperialist highlights the degree of leverage which the Comintern and USSR had over the CPGB's line. This leverage was particularly pervasive in questions of political analysis. Here the Central Committee's generally imperfect grasp of Marxist philosophy, combined with its simultaneous faith in the theoretical capabilities of the Comintern and USSR left Party leaders particularly accepting of political analyses of the war emanating from Moscow as they had little faith in their own abilities to provide an accurate counter-analysis. The example of October 1939 also reinforces arguments that Moscow's influence over the CPGB was largely voluntary.[1] There is little evidence of any attempt on the Comintern or USSR's part to try to coerce the Party leadership to accept the new line in October. The closest that either the Soviet Union or the Comintern came to using threats to force the CPGB to change its line was the Comintern's overt

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[1] Thorpe, Andrew, "Comintern 'Control' of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1920-43", *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 113, No 452, (Oxford University Press, June, 1998) pp. 642-8. And p. 657

statement in the short thesis, that the British Party and all other parties which had taken a line of support for the war 'must now immediately correct their policy'.[2]

This thesis also highlights the limitations of Moscow's influence in October 1939, namely the lesser influence it was able to wield over the tactical line the CPGB adopted. Admittedly the Central Committee's decision to support the USSR's call for an immediate peace was influenced by the Political line it adopted from the Comintern and the fact that the USSR supported such an approach. While adopting the idea of supporting an immediate peace however, the Party simultaneously rejected the Comintern's line of gradual advance to revolutionary defeatism (as explained by Springhall). Due to the fact that so many of the Central Committee's members couched their support for a Soviet backed peace in terms of its ability to achieve the Party's immediate objectives of safeguarding Britain from German fascism and providing a line which could rally the workers against the Chamberlain government and its policies, it seems reasonable to suggest that consideration of these immediate objectives played an extremely important role in the Central Committee's decision on the tactical line to be taken by the Party. Ultimately all of this strengthens the case proposed by historians who, like Andrew Thorpe, have argued that, whilst both the USSR and the Comintern inevitably played a significant role in shaping CPGB policy, international factors were not the only considerations influencing the decisions of the British Party's leadership.[3] Rather the Central Committee factored considerations of both the Party's domestic position and the position of the international movement into its decision making.

The general position of the Central Committee identified in this thesis also provides an answer to the question of whether the Party's

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[2] King, Francis and Matthews, George, *About Turn: The British Communist Party and the Second World War*, (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1990), p. 69.
[3] Thorpe, Andrew, *The British Communist Party and Moscow 1920-43*, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2000), p. 13.

acceptance of the Imperialist War line was the result of mechanical and unquestioning acceptance of the Comintern line or a sincere belief in the correctness of the Comintern's position. This thesis shows that, whilst the direct and unambiguous statement of opposition to the British line provided by Springhall's explanation of the Short Thesis in October (as opposed to the more ambiguous statements the Party had received in September) did lead the Party to make some immediate modifications to its public stance in the *Daily Worker* and the composition of its leadership to show the Comintern that the CPGB would not try to undermine the new line, the receipt of the Comintern's line did not result in an immediate, total acceptance of that line. Indeed, whilst the Comintern and USSR's arguments that the war was purely imperialist were to play a major role in the Party leadership's eventual acceptance of the correctness of the Comintern's political analysis of the war, the majority were convinced to accept that analysis after studying those arguments, not simply because it was the Comintern's analysis. To give a specific example, the arguments of Marshal Zhdanov might have been the primary factor which convinced Ted Bramley to accept the Comintern's interpretation of the war but he accepted that interpretation only after he read and accepted Zhdanov's arguments, not simply because it was the Comintern's position. When one looks at the tactical stance adopted by the Party the idea that the Party's Imperialist War line was adopted via a process of mechanical acceptance becomes even more untenable. Rather it would seem that the fact that the Party's consideration of its own immediate interests led it to reject the Comintern's call to move gradually to a position of revolutionary defeatism and instead give its support to a Soviet backed peace, would conclusively disprove such an idea.

All of this then helps us to establish a general interpretation of the main factors which impacted the Central Committee's attitude towards the Second World War at its outbreak but, whilst the general interpretation might provide a more accurate picture of the Party leadership in 1939 than other, shorter, less detailed but more common accounts, it itself still does

not provide a true representation of the Central Committee. Whilst trying to derive this general interpretation, this thesis has also exposed a number of differences of opinion within the Party leadership which often contradict the conclusion made above. Some of these divisions amongst Party leaders are obvious and already fairly well documented, for example, the division in interpretation of the character of the war in September between Dutt and Rust and the rest of the Central Committee, or the division between Pollitt, Campbell and Gallacher and the rest of the Central Committee on the question of whether continuing to support the British War effort was justifiable in October. This thesis, however, also draws attention to a number of other divisions amongst the Party's leadership, which are less well documented. The most apparent of these differences is visible in the different analyses of the relative strength of British and German imperialism made by the Secretariat and the majority of the Central Committee. Other examples are evident in the variances in the justifications for intensifying the struggle against Chamberlain put forward by Central Committee members in September; in the attitude taken by Central Committee members towards the significance of the Nazi-Soviet Pact; in the stances adopted by members on how the working class would react to the Party's Imperialist War line and in the reasons which led party members to support the USSR's call for peace.

Developing an understanding of why these differences emerged is key to painting a truly representative picture of the Central Committee's decisions in September and October 1939. One route to achieving this understanding is through studying the background of those individuals whose stance did not fit with that of the rest of their comrades with a view to building a contextual understanding of the events, experiences and pre-conceptions which influenced their position. In this endeavour biographical research has obvious value; however, the existing biographical literature on the leaders of British Communism in the 1930s is relatively sparse. This is due not only to the fact that historians have only relatively recently begun to give serious attention to biographical study of key communist figures in

the wider international movement outside of Russia, but also to a lack of sources and to the strict discipline to which Party members held themselves when discussing the Party or their comrades within it, which makes finding accurate information for biographical studies difficult.[4] Despite this relative paucity of readily available biographical information on the Central Committee of 1939, it is possible, with the aid of the short biographies compiled for this thesis (see Appendix II) to begin to suggest some reasons for some of the aforementioned divisions amongst the Central Committee.

To explain Dutt and Rust's early decision that the war was unsupportable, for example, we might point to the reputation for adherence to Comintern/Soviet orthodoxy that characterised both men. Whilst this tendency to align themselves with the prevailing opinion in Moscow stemmed from different roots (a belief in the infallibility of Bolshevik doctrine in the case of Dutt and considerations of career advancement in Rust's case), it could perhaps explain why both men were so quick to denounce the war as unsupportable, whilst simultaneously making no solid statement on how the Party should modify its policy in response, after similar sentiments emerged in Moscow and amongst other international parties. Similar considerations may have influenced not only Dutt and Rust's but also Springhall's decision to portray Britain and France as the driving force of the war in October. As a Soviet agent Springhall had just as much reason as Dutt and Rust to align himself with the position adopted in Moscow and it seems possible that a desire to align themselves with Soviet statements regarding responsibility for the war may have motivated their position in September.[5]

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[4] Morgan, Kevin, "Parts of People and Communist Lives" in in McIlroy, John, Morgan, Kevin and Campbell, Alan (eds), *Party People Communist Lives, Explorations in Biography*, (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 2001), pp. 10-4.

[5] In conjunction with the Nazi-Soviet peace proposals the Soviet government issued a statement in which it declared that failure to secure peace would 'demonstrate the fact that England and France are responsible for the continuation of the war' See Isserman, Maurice, *Which Side Were You On? The American Communist Party During the Second World War*, (University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 1993), p. 44.

For Dutt in particular there is another factor which must be considered when assessing his stance in September and October 1939 and that is his extreme hatred of British Imperialism. The majority of the Central Committee were aided in overcoming their overwhelming fear of German victory by their mistrust of Chamberlain. For Dutt however, this mistrust had always been paramount; throughout the Popular Front period his understanding of the goals of British Imperialism led him to continually argue that Britain, not Germany, was the real driving force behind the advance to global conflict. Thus for Dutt, unlike the majority of the Central Committee, it would seem that the Comintern's analysis of the war was not a sudden change which seemed contrary to his own beliefs, but rather something that fitted entirely with his own estimation of the war and its belligerents.

That Pollitt and Campbell were to so adamantly oppose Dutt, Rust and Springhall's analysis of the war and to continue to portray Chamberlain's Britain as waging a defensive war, even after the Comintern's intervention in October, is similarly understandable when one considers the stance adopted by both men during the Popular Front period. Throughout this period both Pollitt and Campbell placed increasing emphasis on the danger posed by the spread of foreign fascism, a view that was only sharpened by their involvement with the Spanish Civil War and the British Battalion of the International Brigade. Pollitt and Campbell's stance was also influenced by their characteristic focus on pursuing practical policies which would receive the support of the working class, as can be seen in their warnings in October that the Imperialist War line would seem to the average worker as an abandonment of the fight against fascism. Pollitt and Gallacher's stance in October might further be explained by the concerns which both leaders came to harbour in connection with Soviet Union, the Comintern and their intervention in the affairs of the British Party. The belief that the Comintern and Soviet Union might no longer be acting in the interests of the wider international movement but rather in the pursuit of more selfish goals, which both men developed during

the late 1930s, explains why, in both in September and October, they stressed the ability and need of the Party to consider its own interests and set its own policy in accordance with them.

We might also look to biography to help explain the attitude of members of the Central Committee towards the Party's anti-Chamberlain activities in September. For example, Emile Burns argued in favour of intensifying the Party's attacks on the British government based on the need to remove the government in order to make the war truly supportable. One might argue – considering that Burns, like Dutt, had developed a certain hostility to the British imperial system and an affinity for national independence movements as a result of his experiences with British imperialism in his youth – that Burns' position on the Comintern's analysis of the war was likewise influenced by an untypical mistrust of British imperialism, albeit to a far lesser degree than Dutt. A desire not to unnecessarily aid the spread of the British Empire might also help explain why Burns was the only Party leader besides Dutt and Rust to suggest the possibility of a Soviet-backed, negotiated peace in September. Idris Cox's support for a greater focus on the fight against Chamberlain for similar reasons may suggest a tendency towards alignment with Moscow (similar to Rust or Springhall) when one compares this situation with his decision in the Class Against Class period to align himself with the Comintern-backed left, a position which he only modified in the final year before the Comintern openly back Popular Front tactics.

The fact that Pollitt was to suggest a greater focus on Chamberlain for entirely different reasons is perfectly understandable when one considers the strength of his antipathy towards German fascism. Considering the particular determination to resist German invasion which this antipathy imbued Pollitt with, it is unlikely that he should be overly concerned with the need to transform the character of the war. Similarly, Pollitt's tendency to interpret events through the lens of his own gut feelings, rather than through Marxist analysis, further reinforces why questions regarding the

character of the war were of so little consequence to him and why it took tangible attacks on British working class rights to compel him to refocus on domestic problems. That Peter Kerrigan was likewise inspired by events at home rather than considerations of the character of the war to support refocusing on Chamberlain may seem strange considering the fact that he had a similar background to Rust and Springhall – with all three being schooled in Soviet orthodoxy at the International Lenin School in Moscow and all three developing a reputation for rigid discipline as political commissars in Spain. At the same time however, Kerrigan's heroism in Spain and his close connections with Pollitt in the latter half of the 1930s might suggest that he internalised the politics of the Popular Front line to a much greater degree than his fellow international school graduates. This in turn may help explain why he was less troubled by the character of the war than either Burns or Cox. At the same time however, we might point to Kerrigan's Moscow connections and tendency towards discipline to explain why he had particularly servile reasons for supporting the Soviet Union's peace proposals. Of course the issue of scope affects the ability of this thesis to portray the divisions within the leadership. There are still a number of divisions which existed in the Central Committee which are not mentioned here nor highlighted in the rest of the thesis. By conducting a larger, more detailed study it would be possible to evaluate the stance of each individual Central Committee member in greater detail and give greater exposure to many of the smaller differences in opinion which existed between them, which in turn would help direct studies into the factors which influenced individuals to take different stances.

Whilst this thesis has attempted to expand historical understanding of the Party Leadership's reaction to the outbreak of war by discussing the wider Central Committee, its definition of the wider Central Committee is still limited. This thesis purposefully focused on those Central Committee members who voted on the Party's line in October and therefore had a degree of responsibility for the adoption of the Imperialist War line on a national scale. There were however, a number of other Central Committee

members who did not attend the October meeting but whose position should nevertheless be evaluated in the pursuit of a truly accurate and all inclusive picture of the CPGB's central leadership. Take for example Arthur Horner whose importance in the Party arguably derived far more from his role as president of the South Wales Miner's Federation than it did from his involvement in the decisions of the Central Committee. As noted in Appendix II, a review of Horner's activities between 1939 and 1941 clearly shows that he opposed the Imperialist War line. As Horner did not attend the October meeting and therefore did not register a vote however, his stance on the war is often overlooked by histories which explain the stance of the Central Committee by quoting the results of the October vote. Other similar studies of the war time activities of other leaders not present in October, such as Will Paynter and Tom Mann, could be equally revealing as studies of Horner and could therefore provide an even wider more inclusive picture of the Central Committee's response to the war. Furthermore such an approach could be used to expand our understanding of those who voted in October and provide insight into how the Central Committee's attitude towards the Imperialist War line changed as a result of having to implement it. Thus, by augmenting the general analysis provided by this thesis with more detailed studies along the same lines and further biographical research into the experiences and preconceptions which influenced individual members of CPGB's leadership in September and October 1939 and the actions they took afterwards; it should be possible to create a fuller, more nuanced and above all more accurate assessment of the factors which motivated the Central Committee at the outbreak of the war.

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Appendix I – The Role of the Central Committee in the Organisation of the CPGB

The most basic organisational units of the CPGB were the groups, of which there were three different types, factory, street and area groups. Factory groups brought together Party members employed in the same workplace so that they could organise their political activities, which included factories but also any other place of work (mills, building sites, offices, etc.).[1] Those members who could not be organised according to their place of work (i.e. housewives, the unemployed and the self-employed) were organised into the Party's street groups which brought together members who lived on the same or immediately adjacent streets. From the start of 1936 onwards street groups with less than six members were dissolved. Those who were, as a result, left isolated without a factory or street group to attend were organised into broader-reaching area groups to connect them with other members in a similar position.[2] Of these groups, the factory groups were most important to the Party. Believing that class antagonisms were most palpable within the workplace and that therefore political organisation there would be the most beneficial, the Party prioritised the growth of factory groups above that of street or area groups. For example, Party members could not join a street group if a factory group was available and even in cases where there were too few members within a given workplace to form a factory group, members would be directed to join another nearby factory group in their industry, rather than join a street group.[3]

All of the Party groups within a given area, regardless of type, came together to form a single Party branch and were responsible to a local Branch Committee.[4] Above the Branch Committees were the District

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[1] Branson, Noreen, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain*, 192-41, (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1985), pp. 172-3.

[2] Branson, *History of the Communist Party*, (1985), p. 189.

[3] Branson, *History of the Communist Party*, (1985), pp. 172-3. And
Grainger, G.W., "Oligarchy in the British Communist Party", *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 9, No. 2, (Wiley, June, 1958), p. 143.

[4] Branson, *History of the Communist Party*, (1985), pp. 172-4.

Committees. The CPGB was divided into eighteen districts; sixteen of which were in England, with Scotland and Wales each counting as a single district. In the smaller districts the various Branch Committees within the district were responsible to the District Committee directly. Larger districts (e.g. Scotland, Wales and London) on the other hand, were divided into several different areas organised by Area Committees appointed by the District Committee. In these cases the Branch Committees were responsible to their Area Committee, which was in turn responsible to its District Committee.[5] The CPGB's pyramidal structure was reinforced by its adherence to the principles of democratic centralism. According to these principles, decisions on Party policy were decided by majority vote and flowed down through the Party with lower Committees being bound to accept the decisions of those higher than themselves, i.e. the Area Committees were bound to accept the decisions of the District Committees.[6] Those who disagreed with Party policy could raise their criticisms with their Party organisation, which if accepted by the majority would be passed up to the next highest Committee for voting, but they could not make their doubts known to any lower organisational unit.[7]

At the top of the Party's hierarchy of Committees was the Central Committee (also known as the Executive Committee). Formally the Central Committee was only responsible to one higher authority, the Party's National Congress, which convened every two years to set Party Policy on a national scale and was attended by representatives from the District Committees and the branches. However, the role that Congress played in setting Party policy was in reality rather limited, as the agenda and discussions at Party Congresses were frequently set and dominated by the Central Committee itself.[8]

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[5] Callaghan, John, *Cold War, Crisis and Conflict: The CPGB 1951-69*, (I.B. Taurus & Co. Ltd, London, 2003), p. 10.
[6] Callaghan, *Cold War, Crisis and Conflict*, p. 7. And
Grainger, G.W., "Oligarchy", *The British Journal of Sociology*, p. 143.
[7] Grainger, G.W., "Oligarchy", *The British Journal of Sociology*, p. 146. And p. 151.
[8] Callaghan, *Cold War, Crisis and Conflict*, p. 10.

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                                 │
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                        ┌──────────────────┐
                        │ Central Committee │
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                                 │
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          │   District   │       │        │  Politburo   │
          └──────────────┘       │        └──────────────┘
                    │            ▼
                 ┌────────────────────────┐
                 │  District Committees   │
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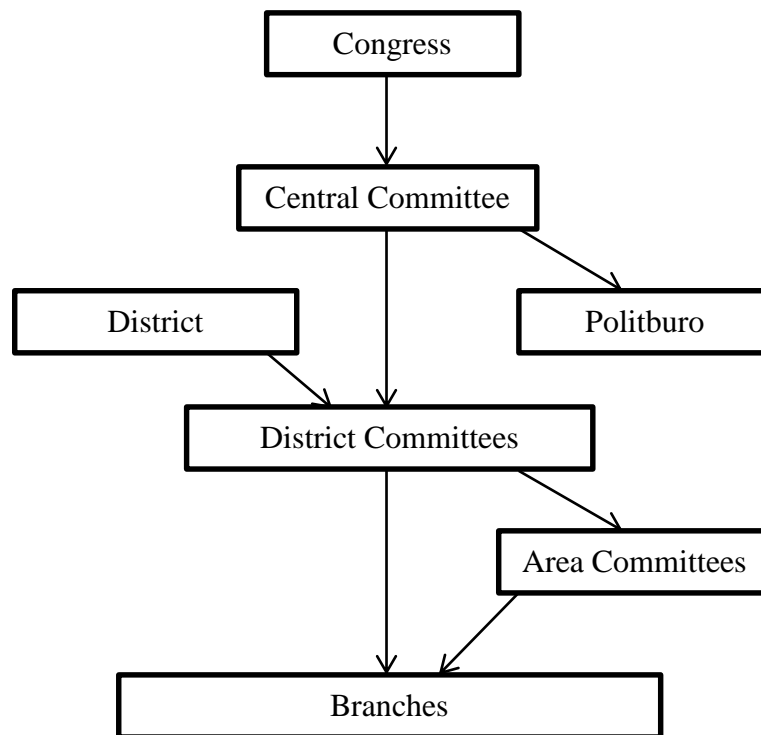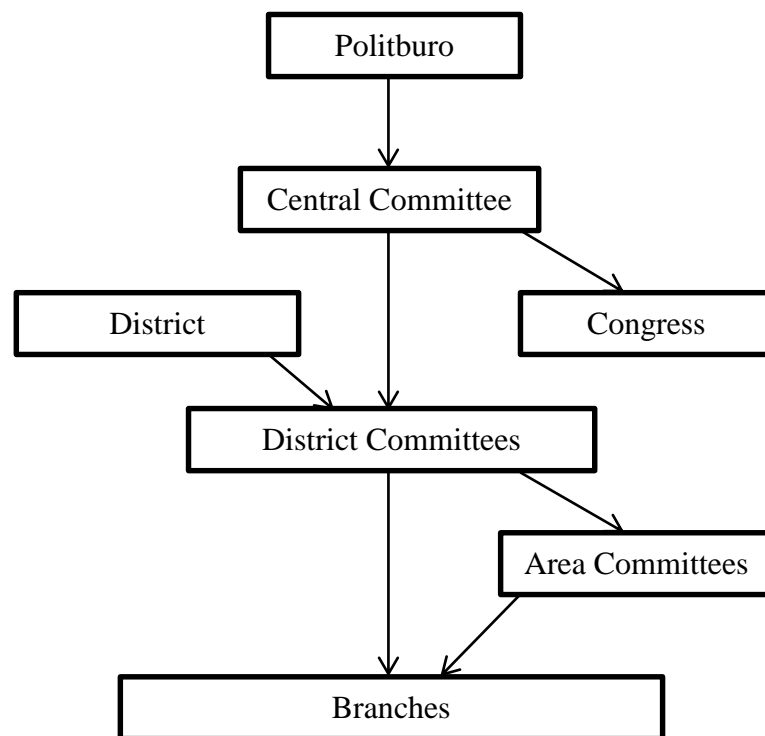
Formal Party Structure: Arrows point from responsible bodies to subordinate ones.[9]

Regardless of the formal structure of the CPGB, in terms of practical organisation the power of the Central Committee was in fact extremely limited. Indeed, the Party organisation with the most effective authority was the Party's Political Bureau (Politburo for short). Officially the Political Bureau was only a sub-committee of the Central Committee, which was elected from and by the Central Committee's members and was intended to decide on questions too urgent to wait on the decisions of the Central Committee, however its responsibilities and powers were poorly defined in the Party's rules.[10] Despite, or more likely because of, this lack of a formal definition regarding its role in the Party organisation, the Politburo was often the principle exerciser of power when it came to decisions on Party policy. Just as the Central Committee came to dominate the National Congress, the Politburo dominated the Central Committee. Every Central Committee meeting began with a report from the Politburo which set the agenda for the discussion to follow and any material which was required for the discussion was also provided by the Politburo. At a meeting on July 3rd

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[9] Adapted from Grainger, G.W., "Oligarchy", *The British Journal of Sociology*, p. 144.

[10] Grainger, G.W., "Oligarchy", *The British Journal of Sociology*, p. 153.

1938 members of the Central Committee were invited by the Political Bureau to offer reflections on the role of the Central Committee. A significant proportion of the members who spoke deplored the lack of authority held by the Central Committee, with several, especially William Gallacher and Finlay Hart, claiming that the body only acted as a rubber stamp for decisions already made by the Political Bureau.[11] The Central Committee was consulted on policies but their recommendations were often ignored. In July a number of members noted how frequently Central Committee members would raise alternative points of view on a policy which were then never addressed or resolved.[12] The perfunctory role of the Central Committee in comparison to the Politburo is further highlighted by the fact that the Politburo also frequently issued policy in the name of the Central Committee without consulting it at all.[13]

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     │ District Committees│
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           │    │Area Committees│
           │    └──────┬───────┘
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       │     Branches     │
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Practical Party Structure: Arrows point from responsible bodies to subordinate ones.

[11] Minutes of July 3rd Central Committee Meeting, Labour History Archive and Study Centre, CPGB Microfilm Collection, pp. 1-2.
[12] Minutes of July 3rd Meeting, LHASC, CPGB Microfilm Collection, p. 4.
[13] Minutes of July 3rd Meeting, LHASC, CPGB Microfilm Collection, p. 7.

According to the Central Committee's own testimony the body's lack of authority was in part the result of practical problems. In particular Central Committee members pointed out that late delivery of materials for Committee meetings (which were often only distributed on the day of the meeting itself) resulted in members being unable to prepare themselves sufficiently to conduct a useful or valuable discussion.[14] By far the most common complaint amongst members of the Central Committee however, was that the Committee's ability to contribute to decisions was crippled by a sense of inferiority felt by the majority of its members in comparison to members of the Political Bureau.[15] Members argued that there was a vast gap between the political capabilities of the majority of the Central Committee and those of the Politburo, which often discouraged these less capable members from contributing to discussions. Finlay Hart pointed out 'it is always with a great deal of timidity I rise to speak due to the fact that… there are a number of very capable comrades in our party able to make a very detailed political statement…the rest of us are feeling our way when we are speaking'. As a result of this there existed two types of leader within the Central Committee, 'the outstanding comrades and the others [who] have not the boldness to put in a suggestion'.[16] This sense of inferiority was particularly acute for Committee members with other commitments outside the Party's HQ in London. William Allan for example noted how difficult it was for such members to prepare properly for a meeting whilst juggling their other work, whilst those at the very heart of the Party's leadership had weeks to prepare themselves.[17] Such commitments, argued Arthur Horner, left half of the Central Committee essentially acting as spectators, rather than leaders.[18]

The ability of Central Committee members to speak effectively was also compromised by the format of Central Committee meetings. As noted earlier, these meetings began with a lengthy report from the Politburo; this

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[14] Minutes of July 3rd Meeting, LHASC, CPGB Microfilm Collection, p. 8-9. And p. 11.
[15] Minutes of July 3rd Meeting, LHASC, CPGB Microfilm Collection, pp. 5-6. And p. 11.
[16] Minutes of July 3rd Meeting, LHASC, CPGB Microfilm Collection, p. 5.
[17] Minutes of July 3rd Meeting, LHASC, CPGB Microfilm Collection, p. 9.
[18] Minutes of July 3rd Meeting, LHASC, CPGB Microfilm Collection, p. 10.

was then usually followed by similarly lengthy speeches from other Politburo members.[19] This led to less experienced Central Committee members feeling that there was little of value left which they could add to the debate.[20] Even if individuals felt that they had something to add to the discussion, these initial presentations were often so detailed that less experienced Committee members felt that they did not know enough to speak up.[21] Horner pointed out that the length and detail of speeches made the rest of the Central Committee feel that the speakers knew so much about the topic that 'it would be an impertinence on their part to interfere'.[22] When they did speak up members were immediately put on the spot. The seating at meetings was not arranged in a way which encouraged free discussion and fluid debate, such as around a single table, but rather in the manner of a classroom, with members seated in rows behind one another. This made small interjections difficult and forced members to make all their points in one long speech; a task which Douglas Springhall noted often represented 'something in the nature of an ordeal' for many comrades.[23] If members' feelings of political and intellectual inferiority were exacerbated by the way in which they had to make statements at meetings then it was likely to be further intensified by the fact that all contributions were recorded, introducing yet another layer of formality to meetings.[24]

The primacy of the Politburo over the Central Committee was further reinforced by their roles outside of Central Committee meetings. For example, Central Committee members were never empowered to make consultative visits to other sections of the Party's organisation as representatives of the Party's central leadership. This function was almost always performed by Politburo Members operating from the Party's headquarters.[25] The main role of the Central Committee was therefore, in effect, to explain the decisions of the Political Bureau to members of the

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[19] Minutes of July 3ʳᵈ Meeting, LHASC, CPGB Microfilm Collection, p. 4. And, p. 9.
[20] Minutes of July 3ʳᵈ Meeting, LHASC, CPGB Microfilm Collection, p. 9.
[21] Minutes of July 3ʳᵈ Meeting, LHASC, CPGB Microfilm Collection, p. 10.
[22] Minutes of July 3ʳᵈ Meeting, LHASC, CPGB Microfilm Collection, p. 10.
[23] Minutes of July 3ʳᵈ Meeting, LHASC, CPGB Microfilm Collection, p. 4.
[24] Minutes of July 3ʳᵈ Meeting, LHASC, CPGB Microfilm Collection, p. 10.
[25] Minutes of July 3ʳᵈ Meeting, LHASC, CPGB Microfilm Collection, p. 6.

District Committees, either directly (as some members of the Central Committee were also district secretaries, which were to the District Committees as the Politburo was to the Central Committee) or through the reports sent by the Central Committee to comrades in the districts.[26]

[26] Minutes of July 3rd Meeting, LHASC, CPGB Microfilm Collection, p. 7.

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Appendix II – Biographical notes on select Central Committee Members.[1]

Emile Burns

Emile Burns was born in 1889 in St Kitts in the British West Indies.[2] He joined the CPGB from the Left Wing Committee of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) 1921.[3] He was made a member of the Central Committee and the Politburo in 1935.[4]

A product of the Oxbridge system, Burns was one of the Party's few intellectual leaders.[5] During his time in the CPGB Burns put his academic skills to good use and developed a reputation as a prolific theorist, propagandist and writer. As a result of his skills in these areas Burns was elevated to head of the CPGB Propaganda Department. At the same time Burns produced a number of influential books on Marxism (for example *What is Marxism?*) and worked as a Marxist educator for the CPGB.[6] Burns also played a significant role in a number of Communist aligned organisations. In particular Burns was involved with the foundation of the Friends of the Soviet Union organisation and was a leading member of the Labour Research Department, serving on its executive for much of the 1920s and 30s except for in 1926 when he became involved in the St. Pancras

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[1] This appendix focuses on providing biographical details which identify significant character traits, political opinions or formative experiences which may help to contextual the position of the leader in question in September and October 1939. As such Party leaders for whom such information is not readily available have been omitted. Basic biographical details for omitted leaders can be found in King and Mathews' *About Turn*.

[2] British Empire Endorsement – Omission and Cancellation, National Archives, KV-2-1760_2, Emile Burns file, p. 1.

[3] The Left Wing Committee was a loosely organised group within the ILP set up to agitate for the Party to affiliate itself with the Third International, other members included Rajani Palme Dutt and the CPGB's first MP Shapurji Saklatvala, Klugmann, James, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain: Volume One: Formation and Early Years, 1919-24*, (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1968), p. 26-7.

[4] King, Francis and Matthews, George, *About Turn: The British Communist Party and the Second World War*, (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1990), p. 300.

[5] Callaghan, John, *Rajani Palme Dutt: A Study in British Stalinism*, (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1993), p. 17.

[6] Branson, Noreen, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain*, 192-41, (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1985), p. 214.

Strike Committee during the General Strike.[7] In 1936 Burns also worked with Harry Pollitt and Victor Gollancz to develop the Left Book Club which helped expose elements of Party policy to a wider left wing audience.[8]

Burns' intellectual skills also had a downside. In a Party mostly dominated by those with working class roots Burns' intellectualism, and as a result Burns himself, could often be seen negatively by others. It has been suggested by John McIlory that one of the ways in which Burns attempted to overcome this prejudice was by dedicating himself to conformity and proletarian discipline.[9] Having said this however, Burns was at the same time amongst the ranks of those who supported Harry Pollitt's practical politics during the Class Against Class period. During this time Burns provided theoretical justifications for Pollitt's policies and used the *Busmens' Punch*, which he edited, as a platform to expound them.[10] As a result Burns has also been portrayed as a staunch ally of Pollitt.[11]

Throughout his time in the Party, Burns had a particular interest in the advancement of national liberation struggles in the colonies, a result of his early experiences of British colonialism in St Kitt's, where his father was part of the colonial administration.[12]   He was involved in the Colonial Department of the CPGB during the 1930s, later becoming chair of the Party's National Cultural Committee, and was instrumental in spread of socialist ideas to the colonies.[13]

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[7] Report on Executive of Labour Research Department dated 15/10/1926, National Archives, KV-2-1760_1, Emile Burns file, p. 100. And
Untitled report dated 27.7.1934, National Archives, KV-2-1760_1, Emile Burns file, p. 48. And
Metropolitan police Report on Burns dated 29/10/1926, National Archives, KV-2-1760_1, Emile Burns file, p. 144. And
Morning Star, February 9th 1972, Working Class Movement Library
[8] Morgan, Kevin, *Against Fascism and War: Ruptures and Continuities in British Communist Politics 1935-41*, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1989), p. 257.
[9] McIlory, John, "The Establishment of Intellectual Orthodoxy and the Stalinization of British Communism 1928-33, *Past & Present*, No. 192, (Oxford University Press, August, 2006), p. 224.
[10] Fishman, Nina, *The British Communist Party and the Trade Unions 1933-45*, (Scolarpress, Aldershot, 1996), p. 81. And pp. 108-10.
[11] Fishman, *British Communist Party*, p. 255.
[12] *Morning Star*, February 9th 1972, WCML
[13] Undated Report on Burns, National Archives, KV-2-1760_1, Emile Burns file, p. 71. And
King and Matthews, *About Turn*, p. 300.

John Ross Campbell (a.k.a. Johnny or J. R. Campbell)

John Ross Campbell was born in Paisley, Renfrewshire, Scotland in 1894.[14] Campbell held a number of positions of responsibility within the Party and spent the vast majority of his adult life working for it.[15] Campbell joined Central Committee in 1923 and the Politburo in 1924 remaining on both committees until 1965, although he was absent from the politburo between 1939 and 1941. Campbell was also briefly editor of the *Daily Worker* in 1939. In addition to his role in the leadership of the British Party, Campbell also played a role in the leadership of the Communist International, serving as a member of its Executive Committee from 1925 to 1935 and as a candidate member of the same committee from 1935 onwards. [16] Campbell also provided, at times, a direct link between the Party and the International through his role as the CPGB representative to the Comintern, which he held on two separate occasions, once in 1930 and once between 1938 and 1939.[17]

Campbell was a foundation member of the CPGB but like many of the other key Party leaders in the 1930s (e.g. Pollitt, Gallacher, etc.) he had become attracted to socialist politics, and Marxism in particular, prior to the Party's creation. Campbell joined the British Socialist Party in 1912 whilst he was still a teenager. Prior to the First World War he worked as a clerk at a Cooperative Society but in 1914 he voluntarily enlisted to fight (a decision which would be used against him by his opponents later in his life). He was later discharged after he lost a foot at Galipoli whilst rescuing a fellow soldier under fire.[18] After this Campbell became involved in the shop

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[14] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, p. 300.

[15] McIlroy, John, and Campbell, Alan, "The British and French Representatives to the Communist International, 1920-1939: A Comparitive Study", *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 50, No. 2, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005), p. 219.

[16] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, p. 300.

[17] McIlroy, and Campbell, "Representatives to the Communist International", *International Review of Social History*, pp. 206-7.

[18] McIlroy, and Campbell, "Representatives to the Communist International", *International Review of Social History*, pp. 219. And

Mcleod, Allison, *the Death of Uncle Joe*, (Merlin Press, Woodbridge, 2007), p. 19. And

stewards' Clyde Workers' Committee, where he showed his talents as a propagandist.[19]

During his time in the CPGB Campbell developed a close working relationship with Harry Pollitt. Pollitt and Campbell came from somewhat similar backgrounds; both had, for example, acquired their belief in the inevitability and desirability of proletarian revolution through former membership of the BSP and both had gained significant experience of trade union militancy during the war.[20] Both men also shared a belief in the necessity of a pragmatic approach to politics which would allow the Party to expand its influence amongst the workers, and particularly within the trade unions which they thought would form the foundations of the proletarian forces in any future revolution.[21] Nevertheless, Campbell and Pollitt brought different skills to their alliance; Pollitt brought his charisma, passion and common sense politics, whilst Campbell supplied the understanding of Bolshevik and Marxist doctrine which Pollitt lacked. Campbell's clear grasp of Marxist dialectics allowed him to translate and recast Pollitt's common sense policies into revolutionary language which would be acceptable both to other members of the Party and to Moscow.[22] This partnership was particularly evident during the late 1920s and early 30s when Campbell and Pollitt worked together to push the Party away from the Class Against Class policy of forming independent 'red' unions in opposition to existing trade unions and back towards a policy of trying to build the Party's influence amongst the workers from within the unions.[23] By carefully moderating the language of their arguments and remaining, on the surface at least, loyal to the Class Against Class line Campbell and Pollitt were able to maintain their position in the Party leadership from which they could provide support to those who took an approach of passive resistance to the line. Later as the Comintern moved away from such

Fishman, *British Communist Party*, p. 22.

[19] Fishman, *British Communist Party*, p. 22.

[20] Fishman, *British Communist Party*, p. 6.

[21] Fishman, *British Communist Party*, pp. 6-7.

[22] Fishman, *British Communist Party*, pp. 5-6.

[23] For a detailed account of Pollitt and Campbell's partnership in this period see Fishman, *British Communist Party*, p. 30-61.

sectarian approaches Campbell and Pollitt were able to use their leadership position to launch a counter attack against supporters of Class Against Class and slowly push the Party to adopt a more and more practical approach to the unions.[24]

This partnership between Campbell and Pollitt was also evident during the Popular Front period. In particular from 1937 onwards, Campbell and Pollitt both became increasingly focused on the need to combat the expansion of foreign fascism and the ever growing threat of war.[25] Both men were equally active in promoting the cause of the Republican Forces and the International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War and campaigning for the creation of an Anglo-Franco-Soviet peace front, and encouraged Party members to focus their energies on these issues too.[26] In mid-1939 as the war drew ever closer and the Party still refused to address the issue of whether it considered Hitler or Chamberlain the greater threat, Campbell and Pollitt at least seemed to have made up their minds. Campbell believed the Party should decide its stance on a war between Britain and Germany with Chamberlain in power and wrote to Pollitt outlining the War on Two Fronts policy which the Party was to adopt in September.[27] Campbell's priorities prior to the war are particularly well shown in the *Daily Worker*'s coverage of the war up until September 24th and the jingoistic tone which the paper adopted under Campbell's editorship in this period, which earned a certain degree of criticism from party members.[28]

Understanding the importance Campbell placed on the danger posed by foreign fascism throughout the Popular Front period, his focus on practical politics and his personal role in cdeveloping the War on Two Fronts policy perhaps helps to explain his reluctance to accept the new

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[24] Fishman, *British Communist Party*, p. 34-8.
[25] Fishman, *British Communist Party*, p. 230.
[26] Fishman, *British Communist Party*, p. 230.
[27] Morgan, Kevin, *Harry Pollitt*, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1993), p. 106.
[28] Minutes of September 24th-25th Central Committee Meeting, Labour History Archive and Study Centre, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, p. 1/3.

Imperialist War line in 1939, whilst his history of modifying his own stance in order to resist a strict application of Comintern diktat explains his attempts to modify the War on Two Fronts line in response to the International's intervention.

Idris Cox

Idris Cox was born in 1899 in Maesteg, South Wales, and grew up in the neighbouring village of Cwmfelin.[29] He joined the CPGB in 1924 and served as organiser for the South Wales district from 1927 until 1930 at which point he was appointed as the Party's national organiser. Cox joined the Central Committee of the Party in 1929 and remained a member until 1952.[30]

As a boy Cox worked at the local colliery. He became interested in politics in his teenage years and at the age of 18 became involved with the Garth Miners' Institute. Three years later in 1920 Cox attended his first Marxist classes. Between 1923 and 1925 he studied at the Labour College in London on a scholarship from the South Wales Miners' Federation. Upon his return to Maesteg, Cox joined the local Communist Party branch and, after experiencing unemployment first hand, helped to establish a branch of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement (NUWM).[31] Cox continued to play a role in the organisation of the NUWM and its hunger marches throughout the 1930s.[32]

During the Class Against Class period, Cox aligned himself firmly with William Rust and other proponents of sectarian tactics, joining with them in their attacks on the more pragmatically minded members of the

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[29] http://www.archiveswales.org.uk/anw/get_collection.php?inst_id=35&coll_id=11328&expand=, (last accessed, 20.05.15)
[30] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, p. 301.
[31] http://www.archiveswales.org.uk/anw/get_collection.php?inst_id=35&coll_id=11328&expand= , (last accessed, 20.05.15)
[32] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, p. 301.

Party leadership.[33] Despite this, as the Comintern's Seventh World Congress approached, Cox's stance began to move to the right. In 1934 he began to support the idea of differentiating between 'good' and 'bad' elements within reformist parties and by the end of the year was openly in favour the Party's line of supporting Labour candidates in that year's municipal elections.[34]

During the Popular Front period Cox briefly served as editor of the *Daily Worker* from 1935-6.[35] Following this he was appointed as the Communist representative on the Hunger Marches Council in Wales.[36]

Rajani Palme Dutt

Born in 1896 in Cambridge to an Indian father and a Swedish mother, Rajani Palme Dutt joined the CPGB in its founding year of 1920 from the Independent Labour Party and very quickly rose to a position of leadership within the Party, joining the Central Committee in 1922 and the Politburo soon thereafter. An Oxford educated scholar, Dutt was one of the CPGB's few intellectual leaders and one of its most capable theoreticians. He played a key role in the Party's propaganda machine producing numerous pamphlets, editing the *Daily Worker* between 1936 and 1938 and producing a large quantity of works on various topics including, Marxism, imperialism, India, fascism and general politics. Dutt is also notable for having founded the Party's theoretical journal *Labour Monthly* in 1921, a publication for which he wrote a regular column 'Notes of the Week' and of which he remained editor until his death in 1974.[37]

[33] Thorpe, Andrew, *The British Communist Party and Moscow 1920-43*, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2000), p. 147. and p. 157
[34] Thorpe, *The British Communist Party*, p. 213-5.
[35] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, p. 301.
[36] *Morning Star*, July 27th 1989, WCML
[37] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, p. 302.

Dutt was an early initiate to British working class politics. As a result of his father's connections to the labour movement, Dutt's childhood home in Cambridge was often visited by prominent Socialist and Marxist figures (e.g. H.M. Hyndman, Philip Snowden and Tom Mann). Such visits served to introduce Dutt to socialist ideology and the divisions within the wider Labour movement.[38] Upon leaving home Dutt was quick to politicise himself. When he arrived at University just weeks after the outbreak of the First World War, Dutt quickly joined the ILP, which was the largest anti-War Party of the time.[39] Deeply troubled by the collapse of the Second International, Dutt made few attempts to align himself with the Labour mainstream, despite the opportunities which presented themselves to him in the form of Oxford University's Socialist Federation.[40] The Bolshevik revolution was a source of inspiration for Dutt, as it was for many other Party Leaders, and served to vindicate both his anti-war stance and his decision to adopt Marxism in 1915. Indeed, the revolution strengthened these alignments. The subsequent creation of the Communist Third International also seemed to promise to rectify the failings of the Second International.[41]

One thing in particular which attracted Dutt to the fledgling Soviet State and its newly created Third International was its stance on ideological pluralism. Even prior to his association with the CPGB, Dutt had always taken an uncompromising approach to politics and he was critical of the inconsistency of British Marxism. The organisational method of Democratic Centralism espoused by the Bolsheviks appeared to spell the end of such inconsistencies and Dutt was quick to accept it as central to the success of the revolutionary working class. He held that there could only be one line for the revolutionary workers, one party and no third roads.[42] After joining the Party, Dutt's vision of Marxism as an exact science monopolised by the Communist Party, which held the answers to all of life's burning questions,

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[38] Callaghan, *Dutt*, p. 12.
[39] Callaghan, *Dutt*, p. 14.
[40] Callaghan, *Dutt*, pp. 15-6.
[41] Callaghan, *Dutt*, p. 15.
[42] Callaghan, *Dutt*, p. 15. And, pp. 30-4. And, p. 141.

led him to distrust those outside the Party and those within it who deviated from established theory. Dutt worked hard within the Party to limit the occurrences of such deviations, he personally attempted never to allow the peculiarities of the British Party's position to affect his political judgements and attempted to ensure that others did the same. He frequently dispensed patronising and sometimes even threatening advice to other Party leaders and set himself up as the Comintern's unofficial watchdog within the Party to ensure the principles of democratic centralism were enforced.[43]

Another feature of Dutt's politics which developed throughout his life was his extreme hostility towards imperialism and the British Empire in particular. Hostility to British colonialism and support for Indian nationalism was common amongst members of Dutt's family. As a result, during his younger years, Dutt's family home received frequent visits from Indian nationalists which helped to further expose him to and develop his own antipathy towards British Imperialism.[44] Indeed the role Britain played as an imperial power was perhaps the factor which had the greatest influence on Dutt's opposition to the British ruling class.[45] Dutt's anti-Imperialist views only served to deepen the attraction which the Bolshevik revolution and Marxist-Leninism held for him; the October Revolution was the first anti-imperialist revolution and Leninist doctrine laid a heavy focus on the imperialist nature of modern capitalism, which resonated with Dutt's existing beliefs.[46] Indeed the leading role which British Imperialism played in attempts to intervene on the behalf of anti-Bolshevik forces during the Russian Civil War served to strengthen Dutt's negative attitude towards it.[47]

This then perhaps explains why, during the Popular Front period, Dutt took a particularly negative attitude towards the British Government and its aims both at home and abroad. Throughout the thirties Dutt saw the

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[43] Callaghan, *Dutt*, pp. 143-7. And, p. 130.
[44] Callaghan, *Dutt*, pp. 10-2.
[45] Callaghan, *Dutt*, p. 174.
[46] Callaghan, *Dutt*, pp. 30-1.
[47] Callaghan, *Dutt*, p. 174.

Party's main fight as being directed against British Imperialism, identifying it as the driving force behind the ever increasing danger of war.[48] He pointed out that, whilst Britain's involvement in a collective security agreement would guarantee the ability of that pact to prevent war, there was little chance of this happening whilst Britain was still under the governance of representatives of British imperialism.[49] Dutt pointed out that the class solidarity between the ruling class of Britain and other capitalist states combined with the class antagonisms between Britain's rulers and the Soviet Union made Britain a natural ally of fascism and the natural enemy of the Soviet Union. He warned that the consistent policy of British Imperialism since the end of the First World War was the creation of a four-power pact of British, German, French and Italian Imperialisms against the Soviet Union.[50] Throughout the 1930s and even in the last few years before the war Dutt sought use the domestic and foreign policy manoeuvres of the Chamberlain government as evidence to justify his analysis of the anti-Soviet goals of British Imperialism. The Munich agreement, for example, was presented as evidence of the beginnings of a larger agreement between the four Western Imperialisms, whilst Anglo-Soviet negotiations in 1939 were perceived as an attempt on the part of British imperialism to coerce Hitler into Eastward expansion. Even Chamberlain's belated attempts at rearmament were dismissed by Dutt as simply a smokescreen to conceal Chamberlain's pro-fascist alignment from his critics.[51] Thus despite his official agreement with the Seventh World Congress' analysis of the colony-hungry fascist powers as the primary forces preparing for war, Dutt's hatred of British imperialism led him to perceive it, rather than German fascism, as the 'real incendiary of the threatening world war' and this belief almost certainly played a role in his actions following the outbreak of war.[52]

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[48] Callaghan, *Dutt*, p. 146.
[49] Callaghan, *Dutt*, pp. 164-6.
[50] Morgan, *Against Fascism and War*, pp. 61-2.
[51] Callaghan, *Dutt*, pp. 174-5.
[52] Morgan, *Against Fascism and War*, p. 90.

William Gallacher

William Gallacher was born in 1881 in, Paisley, Renfrewshire, Scotland. Gallacher is notable for being one of the most publicly recognisable communists of his time, a position accounted to him by his role as Member of Parliament for West Fife between 1935 and 1950. Gallacher's position as one of the Party's few successful MPs helped him to become one of its longest serving leaders. He joined the Central Committee in 1922 and the Political Bureau in the same year. He remained in the latter position until 1945 and held the former until 1963.[53] Gallacher was able to navigate early purges of the Party leadership by careful moderation whilst his MP status gave him a continued relevance which, as Andrew Thorpe has noted, gave him an influence beyond the confines of the Party membership which could not be matched by other CPGB leaders like Dutt and Campbell. Indeed the only Party leader who exceeded Gallacher in terms of public influence was Pollitt.[54]

Gallacher was well acquainted with radical left wing politics long before he was influenced by the Bolshevik Revolution. He rejected parliamentary action as futile and ineffective early in his political development and as a result held a certain contempt for the Labour Party. Prior to the outbreak of the First World War Gallacher was involved with numerous left wing groups. During the war itself, Gallacher was a member of the British Socialist Party, aligning himself with the anti-war stance of his political mentor, Scottish revolutionary Marxist John Maclean, against the line of the Party leadership.[55] The war provided Gallacher with the opportunity to put his beliefs regarding direct action into practice in order to

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[53] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, p. 302.

[54] Thorpe, Andrew, "Communist MP: Willie Gallacher", in Morgan, Kevin, Cohen, Gidon and Flinn, Andrew (eds), *Agents of the Revolution, New Biographical Approaches to the History of International Communism in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*, (Peter Lang, Oxford, 2005), p. 134.

[55] Thorpe, "Communist MP: Willie Gallacher", in Morgan, Cohen and Flinn (eds), *Agents of the Revolution*, pp. 135-6. And
Kenefick, William, *Red Scotland! The Rise and Fall of the Radical Left, c. 1872 to1932*, (Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2007), p. 135.

promote his anti-war line. Through his actions as chairman of the Clyde Workers' Committee between 1915 and 1919 Gallacher gained a reputation as a leader of British shop-floor militancy.[56]

Where others amongst the CPGB's leadership were drawn to the Party by the success of the Bolshevik revolution, the reputation that Gallacher earned during the war and his position in the Scottish socialist movement led to his being courted by the Soviet State. As a result of their desire to create a single united British Communist Party, the Bolsheviks invited Gallacher to attend the second world congress of the Comintern in order to help convince him of the need for such a Party. The Soviet Union's ideas regarding the tactics the CPGB should follow proved to be a hurdle for Gallacher as they included using parliamentary action to spread propaganda and affiliation to the Labour Party to weaken its reformist leadership from within. Whilst in Moscow Gallacher had the chance to talk with Lenin who convinced him of the value of such tactics. Gallacher was further convinced that these tactics were valid by the simultaneous decline of extra-parliamentary politics and the rise of the Labour Party following the end of the First World War.[57] As a result Gallacher joined the Party at its Second Unity convention in 1921 along with other members of the provisional Scottish Communist Party, the Communist Labour Party, and was immediately co-opted into the leadership of the CPGB by being made vice president of the Party.[58]

In terms of his day-to-day political conduct Gallacher was by-and-large loyal to Moscow but, unlike more strictly obedient figures like Rust, he was also prepared to object to Moscow's line when it conflicted with his own

[56] Thorpe, "Communist MP: Willie Gallacher", in Morgan, Cohen and Flinn (eds), *Agents of the Revolution*, p. 135. And
Laybourn, Keith, and Murphy, Dylan, *Under the Red Flag: A History of Communism in Britain*, (Sutton Publishing Limited, Gloucestershire, 1999), p. 191.
[57] Thorpe, "Communist MP: Willie Gallacher", in Morgan, Cohen and Flinn (eds), Agents of the Revolution, pp. 135-8.
[58] Thorpe, "Communist MP: Willie Gallacher", in Morgan, Cohen and Flinn (eds), *Agents of the Revolution*, p. 138. and
King and Matthews, *About Turn*, p. 302.

thoughts.[59] Such was the case during the Party's Class Against Class period; Gallacher initially strongly resisted pressure for a leftwards swing in policy both from within the Party and from the Comintern, instead espousing continued support for the united front tactics hitherto followed by the Party. Gallacher was only convinced to accept the new line when it received the influential backing of figures like Stalin and Bukharin but even after this he was slow to support Class Against Class fully and even made attempts to revive the old line. Gallacher did however, eventually totally accept the new line (a decision which kept him on the Politburo of the Party) but he subsequently found the new line impractical and, in light of this, began to move back towards supporting more effective policies.[60]

Another notable feature of Gallacher's approach to politics was the emotionally charged nature of the stances he adopted. Gallacher did not fight his political battles with elegant theories or careful strategic manoeuvres but with passion.[61] This often led to emotional outbursts which resulted in Gallacher refusing to associate with other Party leaders or to attend specific meetings; for example he refused to associate with Dutt following changes to the Party leadership in the 1920s and refused to attend the Central Committee meeting where the Party officially renounced opposition to conscription in 1939.[62] Such tendencies were particularly visible during major changes of line. In his resistance to Class Against Class for example, Gallacher made no secret of his hatred for its proponents, an attitude which later reappeared in his decision to devote almost all his time at the October 1939 Central Committee criticising Dutt, Rust and Springhall and their conduct rather than the line they espoused.[63]

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[59] Thorpe, "Communist MP: Willie Gallacher", in Morgan, Cohen and Flinn (eds), *Agents of the Revolution*, p. 135.

[60] Thorpe, "Communist MP: Willie Gallacher", in Morgan, Cohen and Flinn (eds), *Agents of the Revolution*, pp. 140-4.

[61] Thorpe, "Communist MP: Willie Gallacher", in Morgan, Cohen and Flinn (eds), *Agents of the Revolution*, pp. 135.

[62] Thorpe, "Communist MP: Willie Gallacher", in Morgan, Cohen and Flinn (eds), *Agents of the Revolution*, p. 139. and, pp. 148.

[63] Thorpe, "Communist MP: Willie Gallacher", in Morgan, Cohen and Flinn (eds), *Agents of the Revolution*, p. 141.

During the Popular Front period, Gallacher continued along the rightwards trend that began after his brief affair with Class Against Class. He took a stance of strong support for United Front initiatives after Hitler's rise to power and for Popular Front tactics after the Comintern's Seventh World Congress.[64] Despite his support for the Comintern's new approach to politics however, Gallacher began to develop a number of private concerns regarding the USSR and Comintern. These were fuelled by the feeling that neither body was giving the CPGB the respect owed to it. This feeling was particularly influenced by the purges in the Soviet Union (which also affected some British Communists whom Gallacher knew personally) and the Comintern's successful attempts to force the CPGB to reverse its line of opposition to conscription in 1939. This compromised Gallacher in particular due to his prior public opposition to conscription in the House of Commons.[65] Whilst Gallacher did not make such mistrust public knowledge, Andrew Thorpe has suggested that it may have played a role in his decision to oppose the Comintern's line on the war, or at least its proponents, in 1939.[66]

Ultimately it was Gallacher's position as the Party's only MP which was to save him from being ejected from the leadership along with Pollitt and Campbell in 1939. His opposition to the line was written off as a result of his 'temperament' and he remained on the Central Committee and Politburo. After the change of line Gallacher said little about the Imperialist War line, which made his appearances in Parliament rather awkward. Following the fall of France Gallacher was quick to return to a more anti-fascist and defencist position, even going as far as to attempt to organise a visit to Moscow to petition Stalin himself.[67]

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[64] Thorpe, "Communist MP: Willie Gallacher", in Morgan, Cohen and Flinn (eds), *Agents of the Revolution*, pp. 145.
[65] Thorpe, "Communist MP: Willie Gallacher", in Morgan, Cohen and Flinn (eds), *Agents of the Revolution*, pp. 148.
[66] Thorpe, "Communist MP: Willie Gallacher", in Morgan, Cohen and Flinn (eds), *Agents of the Revolution*, pp. 145.
[67] Thorpe, "Communist MP: Willie Gallacher", in Morgan, Cohen and Flinn (eds), *Agents of the Revolution*, pp. 149-50.

John Gollan

John Gollan was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1911.[68] A painter by trade, Gollan was inspired to join the Party in 1927 whilst still an apprentice after hearing the speeches of William Gallacher.[69] He was appointed to the Central Committee in 1935.[70] After the change of line in October 1939 Gollan was elevated further by being made a member of the Party's new Politburo.[71] Eventually Gollan, after a number of years of careful guidance and grooming from Harry Pollitt, was chosen to be his successor as General Secretary of the Party in 1956.[72]

Gollan developed his early interest in Socialism though his parents, both of whom were working class socialists. He quickly became involved in political activism, taking part in the 1926 general strike by selling strike bulletins produced by the Council of Action.[73] After the general strike Gollan remained politically active, particularly in the anti-war movement.[74] When he joined the CPGB he simultaneously joined the Young Communist League (YCL).[75] In late 1931, following a six month period of imprisonment for distributing anti-war material to soldiers in Edinburgh; Gollan became editor of the YCL's paper the *Young Worker*. In 1935 he was appointed general secretary of the YCL and spoke as its representative at the Comintern's Seventh World Congress. His speech placed particular emphasis on the need for the YCL to abandon sectarianism and unite the British youth in opposition to war. These were not empty words; over the next four years Gollan was to play a key role through his position as YCL

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[68] Johnstone, Monty "Gollan, John (1911–1977)", in Matthew, H.C.G. and Harrison, Brian (eds), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford University Press, 2004; online edition, Jan 2011), http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/65950, (last accessed 08.05.15)

[69] Beckett, Francis, *Enemy Within, The Rise and Fall of the British Communist Party*, (The Merlin Press, Woodbridge, 1998), p. 146.

[70] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, pp. 302-3.

[71] Branson, *History of the Communist Party*, p. 273.

[72] Beckett, *Enemy Within*, p. 144. And
Laybourn and Murphy, *Under the Red Flag*, p. 192.

[73] Johnstone, "Gollan", in Matthew and Harrison (eds), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/65950, (last accessed 08.05.15) and
Morning Star, September 6th 1977, WCML

[74] *Morning Star*, September 6th 1977, WCML

[75] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, p. 303.

general secretary in the formation of the British Youth Peace Assembly, a coalition of over forty youth organisations united by a common desire for a system of collective security to deter fascist aggression.[76] Gollan was also one of the Party leaders who made visits to volunteers of the British Battalion in Spain during the Civil War.[77]

Arthur Horner

Born 1894 in Merthyr Tydfil in South Wales, Arthur Horner was one of the CPGB's key trade union figures holding a number of prominent posts in various mining unions throughout his life, such as his role from 1926 on the Executive of the South Wales Miners' Federation, of which he was president between 1936 and 1946, and the National Mineworkers' Union, of which he was general secretary from 1946 to 1959.[78] It was as a result of his role in the trade unions that he was originally accepted into the CPGB's Central Committee and Politburo in 1923. He was removed from both positions in 1929 but regained his role in the Central Committee in 1935.[79]

Horner was introduced to socialism relatively early his youth through his environment. He grew up in an area of Britain in which public participation in and discussion of politics was particularly intense and found himself inspired by the speeches of Keir Hardie the ILP, and subsequently Labour, MP for Merthyr.[80] In his youth Horner was associated with the Christian sect The Churches of Christ, a group which attempted to prove

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[76] Johnstone, "Gollan", in Matthew and Harrison (eds), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/65950, (last accessed 08.05.15) and
Mates, Lewis, *The Spanish Civil War and the British Left: Political Activism and the Popular Front*, (Tauris Academic Studies, London, 207), p. 4.
[77] Branson, *History of the Communist Party*, p. 234.
[78] Fishman, Nina, "Horner and Honerism", in McIlroy, John, Morgan, Kevin and Campbell, Alan (eds), *Party People Communist Lives, Explorations in Biography*, (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 2001), p. 123. And
Fishman, Nina, The British Communist Party and the Trade Unions 1933-45, (Scolar Press, Aldershot, 1995), p. 13. And
Laybourn and Murphy, *Under the Red Flag*, p. 192.
[79] Branson, *History of the Communist Party*, pp. 339-341.
[80] Fishman, "Horner and Honerism", in McIlroy, Morgan, and Campbell (eds), *Party People Communist Lives*, p. 124.

the truth of Christianity with logic and reason. Horner's time with the church taught him many of the skills he would later go on to use in his trade union work but he began to become removed from his Christian beliefs after moving to the Rhondda coalfield and starting work at the Standard Colliery.[81] There he was to meet the militant miner-intellectual Noah Ablett who introduced Horner to Marxism. Horner gradually replaced his theological faith with this new political ideology; his final break with Christianity came after the outbreak of the First World War which Horner resisted, not with the religiously based pacifist notions of other members of The Churches of Christ but with the claim that it was a capitalist war being waged for Capitalist ends.[82] Horner worked at the Colliery through the war until January 1918 when he fled to Ireland to avoid being conscripted. He was imprisoned following his return to Britain in the summer of 1918 and was only released in April 1919 after being elected in absentia as the checkweighman for the Mardy Colliery.[83]

Horner became a founding member of the CPGB in 1920 as a result of his prior membership of the Rhondda Socialist Society but he remained preoccupied with daily economic struggles at the Colliery and struggles between the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, Coalfield owners and the government.[84] Horner's activism over the next few years brought him to the attention of the Secretary of the British Bureau of the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU), Nat Watkins, and Horner was chosen to attend a conference of the RILU in Moscow in 1923. The conference coincided with the Comintern's attempts to Bolshevise the CPGB. As a part of this it was recommended that a greater number of comrades with significant experience of work in industry should be brought into the leadership of the

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[81] Fishman, "Horner and Honerism", in McIlroy, Morgan, and Campbell (eds), *Party People Communist Lives*, p. 124.

[82] Fishman, "Horner and Honerism", in McIlroy, Morgan, and Campbell (eds), *Party People Communist Lives*, pp. 124-5.

[83] Fishman, "Horner and Honerism", in McIlroy, Morgan, and Campbell (eds), *Party People Communist Lives*, pp. 125-6.

[84] Fishman, "Horner and Honerism", in McIlroy, Morgan, and Campbell (eds), *Party People Communist Lives*, p. 126.

Party. Horner was, as a result, promoted to not only the Central Committee but also the Politburo.[85]

Like Pollitt and Campbell, Horner was driven by a desire to capture the support of the working class by working inside existing trade unions. Despite his elevation to the Party leadership Horner continued to focus his efforts on the economic struggles of the miners, attempting to sustain and revitalise the rank-and-file activism that had emerged in the trade unions through the war and bolster support for revolutionary tactics amongst such activists through the Miners' Minority Movement.[86] A focus on union work at the expense of engagement with Party politics, which would later be dubbed 'Hornerism' by Horner's critics, stayed with Horner throughout the left-wards swing initiated, first by the Party following the failure of the general strike, and then pushed to extremes by the Comintern after the Sixth World Congress.[87] Horner rejected the aspects of the Class Against Class line, which called for the Party to encourage workers to leave established unions and join new revolutionary replacements.[88] Unlike other members of the Party leadership who learnt to moderate their political position to accommodate the Comintern to better guard against the wholesale adoption of undesirable elements of the Comintern line (for example, John Campbell and William Gallacher), Horner made little or no attempt to hide his opposition to the new sectarian line and those who espoused it.[89] His open defiance resulted in his removal from the Party leadership in 1929. Horner's continued resistance to the line and the ascendance of its supporters to the leadership of the Party in 1929 might

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[85] Fishman, "Horner and Honerism", in McIlroy, Morgan, and Campbell (eds), *Party People Communist Lives*, pp. 126-7.

[86] Fishman, "Horner and Honerism", in McIlroy, Morgan, and Campbell (eds), *Party People Communist Lives*, p. 127. And

Martin, Roderick, *Communism & the British Trade Unions 1924-1933, A Study of the National Minority Movement*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1969), p.53.

[87] Laybourn and Murphy, *Under the Red Flag*, p. 67.

[88] Fishman, "Horner and Honerism", in McIlroy, Morgan, and Campbell (eds), *Party People Communist Lives*, p. 130.

[89] Fishman, "Horner and Honerism", in McIlroy, Morgan, and Campbell (eds), *Party People Communist Lives*, p. 130. And

Thorpe, "Communist MP: Willie Gallacher", in Morgan, Cohen and Flinn (eds), *Agents of the Revolution*, pp.140-1. And

Fishman, *British Communist Party*, p. 31-4.

have led to a more serious break with the Party were it not for the actions of Campbell, who sent Horner to work in Moscow for the RILU to remove him from potential conflicts.[90] Horner had similar problems with speaking his mind in 1931 when he was criticised for not pushing the rank-and-file of the South Wales Miners' Federation to continue a strike begun on New Year's Day that year when it was ended by the union leadership after only two weeks. He heavily criticised the Party leadership for not giving enough support to the strike and despite the efforts of those who sympathised with Horner's position to defuse the conflict, Horner was, as a result, pushed out of the leadership of the Miners' Minority Movement.[91] Horner refused to accept the charges laid against him but eventually recanted after being sent to Moscow to defend his position against the Comintern.[92]

Horner eventually returned to the leadership of the Party in 1935 but found himself once again in opposition to the Party leadership following the change of line on the war in 1939. Horner was both an enthusiastic supporter of the Popular Front line and a firm believer in the need to resist foreign fascism, as evidenced by his speech in September 1939 and his material written in the inter-war period.[93] Had Horner attended the October Central Committee meeting it is almost certain that the results would have recorded four in opposition to the new line and Horner's defence of the War on Two Fronts line in September shows that he would have voted against the new line for largely the same reasons as Pollitt and Campbell.[94] At the time of the change in line Horner was working on the South Wales District Committee and it is likely that the one abstention in that committee's vote on the line was Horner's.[95] Horner did on this occasion show some deference

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[90] Fishman, "Horner and Honerism", in McIlroy, Morgan, and Campbell (eds), *Party People Communist Lives*, p. 131.
[91] Fishman, "Horner and Honerism", in McIlroy, Morgan, and Campbell (eds), *Party People Communist Lives*, pp. 132-5. And
Martin, *Communism & the British Trade Unions*, p.120.
[92] Fishman, "Horner and Honerism", in McIlroy, Morgan, and Campbell (eds), *Party People Communist Lives*, p. 138.
[93] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, pp. 4/1-4. And
Horner, Arthur, *Towards a Popular Front*, (Communist Party of Great Britain, London, 1936), p. 10-3.
[94] Minutes of September Meeting, LHASC, CP/IND/POLL/2/7, pp. 4/1-4.
[95] Fishman, *British Communist Party*, p. 267.

to the Party line, but he seems to have been unable to promote it unreservedly. In discussions on the war Horner would only condemn war in general rather than making criticisms of the actual war.[96] Horner's continued agreement with the War on Two Fronts was obvious but in this instance he was saved from any serious repercussions by his position as President of the South Wales Miners' Federation. Despite initial attempts by Dutt and Rust to use anti-war feeling amongst the union's rank-and-file to attack Horner, he was able to use majority support for the War on Two Fronts line at a coalfield conference in February 1940 and his responsibility as President of the SWMF to uphold the majority decision, to gain a degree of freedom from working according to the Party's new line. [97]

Peter Kerrigan

Peter Kerrigan was born in 1899 in the Gorbals district of Glasgow in Scotland.[98] He was perhaps unique amongst the Party leadership of the 1930s in that he joined the Party, not once, but twice. He originally joined in 1921 but soon left as a result of his disagreement with the Party's decision not to field candidates against Labour in the 1922 general election.[99] Kerrigan returned to the Party in 1924 however, and rose to a position of leadership relatively quickly, being appointed Scottish district secretary in 1930.[100] Kerrigan served two periods on the Central Committee, once between 1927 and 1929 and again between 1932 and 1953. He became a member of the Politburo after the change of line in October 1939.[101]

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[96] Fishman, *British Communist Party*, p. 267.
[97] Fishman, *British Communist Party*, pp. 268-9. And
Laybourn and, Murphy, *Under the Red Flag*, p. 109.
[98] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, p. 303. And
Morning Star, December 17th 1977, WCML
[99] McIlroy, John, "Kerrigan, Peter (1899–1977)", in Matthew, H.C.G. and Harrison, Brian (eds), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford University Press, 2004; online edition, Jan 2011), http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/65950, (last accessed 18.05.15)
[100] McIlroy, "Kerrigan", in Matthew and Harrison (eds), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/65950, (last accessed 18.05.15) and
King and Matthews, *About Turn*, p. 303.
[101] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, p. 303.

Kerrigan was an engineering worker by trade. He left school at the age of fifteen and undertook an apprenticeship at the North British Loco Company in Springburn, Glasgow. Between 1918 and 1920 Kerrigan served in Palestine with the Royal Scots Regiment.[102] Between 1923 and 1925 Kerrigan found work as an iron-turner back in Glasgow at Parkhead Forge. Kerrigan was well acquainted with industrial militancy and trade unionism. He played a significant role in the Amalgamated Engineering Union and during the 1926 general strike he sat as chair of the central strike co-ordinating committee.[103]

During his time in the CPGB Kerrigan began to develop a number of links with Moscow, particularly after his invitation to the Third Congress of the Red International of Labour Unions and the Fifth Congress of the Communist International in 1924. In 1929 Kerrigan was chosen to study at the International Lenin School, and like fellow Lenin School students, William Rust and Douglas Frank Springhall, developed a reputation for conformity and discipline.[104]

In 1935 Kerrigan was chosen to become the CPGB's representative to Moscow and as a result was invited to participate in the Seventh World Congress of the Comintern. Despite being initially surprised by the Party's return to united front policies in the early thirties, Kerrigan took the change, and the later adoption of the Popular Front line, well, establishing himself as one of Harry Pollitt's more reliable allies after 1935.[105] During the Popular Front period Kerrigan was particularly active in his role as Scottish district organiser, during which time his skills contributed to the election of William Gallacher as M.P. for West Fife and the near trebling of

[102] *Morning Star*, December 17th 1977, WCML
[103] McIlroy, "Kerrigan", in Matthew and Harrison (eds), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/65950, (last accessed 18.05.15)
[104] McIlroy, "Kerrigan", in Matthew and Harrison (eds), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/65950, (last accessed 18.05.15)
[105] Branson, *History of the Communist Party*, p. 273. And Morgan, *Pollitt*, p. 151.

the Scottish district membership.[106] At the same time Kerrigan was very active in the Spanish Civil War. Like Rust and Springhall he served as a political commissar attached to the British Battalion between December 1937 and April 1938, a role in which he further cemented his reputation for discipline.[107] Through his exploits on the battlefield Kerrigan won the respect of his comrades in arms, becoming known for his courage under fire and leadership skills.[108] He returned to Spain in May 1938 as a correspondent for the *Daily Worker*, remaining in the country until November that year.[109]

Harry Pollitt

Harry Pollitt was born in 1890 to a relatively poor working class family in the textile village of Droylsden, Manchester in Northwest England.[110] Initially a boilermaker by trade, Pollitt became a foundation member of the CPGB in 1920 and joined its Central Committee and Politburo in 1922, remaining in both bodies until his death in 1960 except for in the years 1939-41. Pollitt was a gifted orator, inter-party diplomat and leader and was elected general secretary of the Party in 1929. He held this post until his expulsion from the Party leadership in October 1939 but resumed it once again following the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941.[111]

Pollitt was introduced to Socialist politics at a young age through his parents and in particular his mother. It was through her that Pollitt began attending socialist meetings at the age of thirteen and became a member of

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[106] McIlroy, "Kerrigan", in Matthew and Harrison (eds), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/65950, (last accessed 18.05.15)
[107] McIlroy, "Kerrigan", in Matthew and Harrison (eds), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/65950, (last accessed 18.05.15)
[108] *Morning Star*, December 17th 1977, WCML
[109] McIlroy, "Kerrigan", in Matthew and Harrison (eds), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/65950, (last accessed 18.05.15)
[110] Morgan, *Pollitt*, pp. 1-2.
[111] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, p. 304.

the Openshaw branch of the ILP (which later defected to be become the Openshaw branch of the British Socialist Party).[112] Pollitt took up an auto-didactical study of Marxism and his politics quickly took a militant edge to which his desire to pay back the exploitative bosses for the hardships suffered by his family contributed.[113] Pollitt's commitment to revolutionary politics was further strengthened by his membership of the BSP and his experience of anti-war work and industrial conflict as a trade unionist during the First World War.[114]

Pollitt fervently identified with the victory of Lenin's Party in Russia and was quick to involve himself in the 'Hands off Russia' movement (which formed to oppose British intervention in the Russian Civil War and later the Polish-Soviet war of 1919-21) of which he became national organiser.[115] The inspiration which the Bolsheviks' victory held for Pollitt was not based on the particular theoretical or doctrinal aspects of Bolshevism however, but rather on the simple fact that they had achieved a successful revolution. Pollitt later wrote of his feelings at the time of the revolution, 'All I was concerned about was that power was in the hands of lads like me, and whatever conception of politics had made that possible was the one for me.'[116] Pollitt had similar reasons for joining the fledgling CPGB, being attracted to the Party by a sense that by joining it he would be involved in the ending of capitalism on a global scale.[117]

Pollitt's indifference towards theory continued, along with a similar indifference towards Marxist analysis, throughout his time in the CPGB. His actions within the Party were driven more by his gut instinct and a desire for practical results than by considerations of abstract theory. Indeed, in order to offset his relatively poor understanding of Marxism, Pollitt, at various different points in his career, partnered himself with more

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[112] Morgan, *Pollitt*, p. 4.
[113] Morgan, *Pollitt*, pp. 3-10.
[114] Fishman, *British Communist Party*, p. 6.
[115] Morgan, *Pollitt*, pp. 16-20.
[116] Morgan, *Pollitt*, p. 19.
[117] Morgan, *Pollitt*, p. 21-3.

intellectually minded members of the Party (notably Rajani Palme Dutt, Emile Burns and John Ross Campbell) allowing them to create theoretical justifications for his pragmatic policies which would make them acceptable both in terms of Marxist theory and Comintern tactics.[118]

One of the primary concerns which drove Pollitt's desire to implement practical policies was his desire to never allow the Party to become isolated from the wider British working class. With his upbringing in the heart of industrial Britain and his early political involvement in the trade unions Pollitt identified closely with Britain's indigenous working class and had a particularly good understanding of how to appeal to it.[119] This prioritising of the Party's standing amongst the working class led Pollitt to spearhead resistance against the worst excesses of the Party's sectarian attempts to create its own independent trade unions in the late 1920s and early 1930s, a move which secured his position as leader of the Party.[120] The Popular Front policy, with its focus on making the Party popular to the widest base of the workers and the relaxation Comintern controls and greater scope for observance of local conditions that came with it, was particularly popular with Pollitt as it resonated with this desire to implement practical policies to expand the Party's membership and political influence.

Pollitt did not simply embrace Popular Front tactics because of their usefulness in extending the Party's influence amongst the British left however; he also embraced them because the influence they could generate could be used to combat the rise of fascism. Pollitt's anti-fascist stance was not a matter of tactics but rather was sincere and deeply felt, and his desire to strike against it and those who supported it, either directly or indirectly, informed the rationale for many of his decisions in the Popular Front period.[121] For Pollitt the fight against fascism became the primary issue

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[118] Morgan, *Pollitt*, p. 123. And
Fishman, *British Communist Party*, p. 252.
[119] Morgan, *Pollitt*, p. 1. And pp. 6-7. And
Fishman, *British Communist Party*, p. 10.
[120] Fishman, *British Communist Party*, p. 32-42.
[121] Morgan, *Pollitt*, pp. 95-6.

with which the Party had to concern itself. In particular it was the fight against foreign fascism which came to dominate his thoughts. The vast majority of Pollitt's writing in the period focused on the worsening international situation, to the point where purely domestic issues, though important, became secondary concerns. Whilst Pollitt, like all other Party leaders, focused his attacks on the National Government, his criticisms were overwhelmingly concerned with what he considered the crime of appeasement rather than the government's domestic policy.[122]

Pollitt's hostility towards fascism was further fuelled by his experience of the Spanish Civil War. His role in promoting the International Brigades gave him a sense of responsibility for the fate of its volunteers which was only reinforced by his visits to Spain in 1936 and 1937. The destruction he witnessed on these visits, particularly in the town of Tortosa impassioned his hatred of and desire for revenge against Hitler to the point where there were few with a greater antipathy towards fascism within the Party leadership.[123] Both this antagonism towards fascism and his desire not to separate the Party from the anti-fascist feeling of the British working class featured prominently in his opposition to the new Imperialist War line in October 1939.[124]

It is also important to note that, despite his agreement with the Popular Front line, the outbreak of the war was not the first time in the 1930s in which Pollitt had come into conflict with Moscow. The Comintern's intervention in the Party's line on conscription earlier in 1939 left Pollitt so disgusted he attempted to resign his post. Similarly when the Soviet Union signed the Nazi-Soviet pact that Autumn it further reinforced Pollitt's existing suspicions that Soviet Policy was becoming more and more influenced by national rather than international interests.[125] Understanding

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[122] Morgan, *Pollitt*, pp. 95-6.
[123] Morgan, *Pollitt*, pp. 96-8.
[124] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, p. 200-10.
[125] Morgan, *Pollitt*, pp. 105-7.

this existing tension between Pollitt and Moscow is important for understanding his position in September and October.

William Rust

William Rust was born in the working class district of Camberwell, South London in 1903. The exact circumstances of his early family life are unclear but he appears to have come from either a working class or at least lower middle class family. The early inspirations for Rust's adoption of left wing politics are also unclear but regardless of the reasons he found work as a clerk at an early age. From the age of sixteen he was both a member of the Labour Party and active in the clerks' union, later even becoming briefly involved with Sylvia Pankhurst's Workers Socialist Federation.[126]

Following the success of the Bolshevik Revolution, Rust decided to place his faith and loyalty in the newly formed workers state and joined the CPGB mere months after its formation in 1920. In the same year Rust lost his job. He spent long periods of time in subsequent years unemployed, focusing his efforts on full time political activism, particularly in the National Unemployed Workers' Movement. At the same time Rust began to rise quickly through the ranks of the CPGB becoming the secretary of his local branch before going on to serve on the London District Committee.[127] In October 1923 Rust was chosen by the Young Communist International (YCI) (possibly on the recommendation of Andrew Rothstein) to become the Secretary of the CPGB's youth organisation the Young Communist League in a Moscow-initiated reorganisation of the League.[128] From this position Rust was able to make connections with other decidedly pro-Moscow figures, in particular Rajani Palme Dutt, to whom Rust would become something of

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[126] Finn, Andrew, "William Rust: the Comintern's Blue Eyed Boy?" in McIlory, John, Morgan, Kevin and Campbell, Alan (eds), *Party People Communist Lives, Explorations in Biography*, (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 2001), pp. 81-2.
[127] Finn, "William Rust" in McIlory, Morgan, and Campbell, (eds), *Party People Communist Lives*, p. 82.
[128] Finn, "William Rust" in McIlory, Morgan, and Campbell, (eds), *Party People Communist Lives*, pp. 82-3.

a protégé.[129] In addition to this, the appointment allowed Rust to strengthen his ties with the machinery of the international movement.[130] In his capacity as YCL secretary Rust became a regular delegate to the congresses and plenums of the YCI (and even sometimes the plenums of the Executive Committee of the Communist International) and was able to travel extensively through Europe and the USA to participate in Comintern meetings.[131] By the end of 1929 Rust had begun to work full time for the YCI and was elected as its representative to the ECCI.[132] Such travels, particularly in Moscow, only served to deepen his enthusiasm for and loyalty to the Comintern.[133]

Rust's position in the YCL also enhanced his importance in the CPGB itself, leading to his election as a full member of the Central Committee in 1926 and sitting on Politburo meetings from 1924.[134] Rust used this position and his role as a leading Comintern official to apply pressure to the other leaders of the CPGB to conform to Comintern Orthodoxy. In 1929 Rust was to lead the charge of other young, likeminded party activists to force the Party to adopt the Comintern's sectarian Class Against Class policies. Actively encouraged and supported by the Comintern, Rust was able play a key role in pressuring the Party leadership to accept a leftward turn. He was rewarded for his efforts by being made editor of the Party's new daily newspaper, the *Daily Worker*.[135]

The Comintern's shift away from ultra-left policies in the early 1930s saw Rust fall from favour. In 1932 he was removed as editor of the *Daily Worker* and was appointed as the CPGB's representative to the ECCI, a role

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[129] Finn, "William Rust" in McIlory, Morgan, and Campbell, (eds), *Party People Communist Lives*, p. 83.
[130] Finn, "William Rust" in McIlory, Morgan, and Campbell, (eds), *Party People Communist Lives*, p. 84.
[131] Cohen, Gidon, and Finn, Andrew, "In Search of the Typical Communist" in Morgan Kevin, Cohen, Gidon, and Finn, Andrew (eds), *Agents of the Revolution, New Biographical Approaches to the History of International Communism in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*, (Peter lang, Oxford, 2005), p. 46. And
Finn, "William Rust" in McIlory, Morgan, and Campbell, (eds), *Party People Communist Lives*, p. 85.
[132] Finn, "William Rust" in McIlory, Morgan, and Campbell, (eds), *Party People Communist Lives*, p. 85.
[133] Finn, "William Rust" in McIlory, Morgan, and Campbell, (eds), *Party People Communist Lives*, p. 84.
[134] Finn, "William Rust" in McIlory, Morgan, and Campbell, (eds), *Party People Communist Lives*, p. 84.
[135] Cohen and Finn, "In Search of the Typical Communist" in Morgan, Cohen and Finn (eds), *Agents of the Revolution*, p. 46.
Finn, "William Rust" in McIlory, Morgan, and Campbell, (eds), *Party People Communist Lives*, p. 85-8.

which was probably intended to pressure him to come to terms with the Comintern's new tactics and which prevented him from having any immediate influence in the governance of the CPGB.[136] For his part Rust dutifully took up the new Popular Fronts tactics espoused by Moscow after 1935, effectively promoting anti-fascism and left-wing unity in Lancashire in his brief role as district secretary and aiding the suppression of those who dissented from Popular Front politics amongst Republican forces in the Spanish Civil War, in which he served as a political commissar between November 1937 and June 1938.[137] Alongside this demonstration of his acceptance of the Popular Front however, Rust continued to seek out opportunities to increase his influence within the Party, especially by campaigning amongst Communist representatives to have himself installed as assistant general secretary of the British Party.[138]

In light of his persistent loyalty to the Comintern line, regardless of how drastically it changed, and the benefits that this approach had for his career in the CPGB, it is easy to understand why Rust has been portrayed as being primarily motivated by a desire for career advancement. Ex-party member Douglas Hyde for example argued that, for Rust, obedience to Moscow was not only the best way of achieving political advance but also the best way of securing a position of influence for himself and the privileges that such a position would bring after the triumph of Communism.[139] Indeed Rust's sudden adoption of the Comintern's new interpretation of the war (despite his previous support of the War on Two Fronts) and his subsequent elevation to the highest echelons of the Party leadership and return as editor of the *Daily Worker* can be seen in precisely this context.[140]

Douglas Frank Springhall (a.k.a. Dave Springhall)

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[136] Finn, "William Rust" in McIlory, Morgan, and Campbell, (eds), *Party People Communist Lives*, p. 90.

[137] Finn, "William Rust" in McIlory, Morgan, and Campbell, (eds), *Party People Communist Lives*, pp. 91-3.

[138] Finn, "William Rust" in McIlory, Morgan, and Campbell, (eds), *Party People Communist Lives*, p. 94.

[139] Finn, "William Rust" in McIlory, Morgan, and Campbell, (eds), *Party People Communist Lives*, p. 98.

[140] Finn, "William Rust" in McIlory, Morgan, and Campbell, (eds), *Party People Communist Lives*, p. 94.

Douglas Frank Springhall was born in 1901 in Kensal Green, London. After briefly serving in the Navy between 1916 and 1920 Springhall joined the CPGB as a founding member. Springhall was placed on the executive of the Young Communist League during its reorganisation in 1923. He, along with other like-minded individuals such as William Rust, was responsible for transforming the previously naïve and idealistic YCL into a disciplined, ultra-orthodox organisation.[141] Springhall studied at the International Lenin School in Moscow between 1928 and 1931, after which he was elected to the Central Committee of the CPGB in 1932.[142] Springhall also held a number of other posts in the Party becoming the CPGB representative to the Comintern following the Conscription controversy in 1939 and its National District organiser after October 1939.[143]

Like Rust, Springhall was particularly active in steering the CPGB to uphold the decisions and general Political line of the Comintern. As part of the left wing YCL group within the leadership he tried to force through acceptance of the Class Against Class line in the 1920s and resisted its decline into the 1930s.[144] Springhall like the other proponents of Class Against Class eventually accepted its decline and the rise of the new Popular Front line. During the Popular Front period Springhall became the Party's London district organiser and he briefly edited the *Daily Worker* in 1938. Springhall also took part in the Spanish Civil War. In 1936 he was the first Briton to be appointed as a political commissar of the British battalion of the International Brigade and he was tasked with improving the morale, discipline and behaviour of the British recruits.[145] Despite this however Springhall remained committed to enforcing Comintern orthodoxy within

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[141] Finn, "William Rust" in McIlory, Morgan, and Campbell, (eds), *Party People Communist Lives*, p. 83.
[142] http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C11190779, (last accessed, 16.05.15)
[143] Morgan, Kevin, *Harry Pollitt*, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1994), pp. 106-8. And King, Francis and Matthews, George, *About Turn: The British Communist Party and the Second World War*, (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1990), p. 305.
[144] Finn, "William Rust" in McIlory, Morgan, and Campbell, (eds), *Party People Communist Lives*, p. 86. And
Beckett, *Enemy Within*, p. 40.
King and Matthews, *About Turn*, p. 305. And
Thorpe, *The British Communist Party*, p. 241.

the Party. In 1935 he acted to delay the assimilation of a group of 200 defectors from the Independent Labour Party due to his suspicions regarding their ideological purity.[146]

As the Party's Comintern representative it fell to Springhall to communicate the content of the Comintern's short thesis to the leadership of the CPGB in 1939. Springhall himself played no part in the drafting of the Short Thesis, which was drawn up by a closed session on the 9th and 10th of September restricted to members of the Comintern's Secretariat, of which Springhall was not a part. The only opportunity that Springhall had to put forward the position of the British party was at a discussion with Georgi Dimitrov and André Marty after the Short Thesis had been adopted by the Comintern. His own account of this discussion gives little impression that he attempted to seriously challenge the line of the Short Thesis in any way.[147]

Further evidence of Springhall's close affinity for and loyalty to Moscow emerged in 1943 when he was exposed as a Soviet spy after being caught attempting to pass information to the Soviet Union regarding a top secret British radar jamming device, which he received from a secret group of Party supporters within the Ministry of Air. Springhall was expelled from the Party immediately and the Central Committee denied knowledge of his activities.[148] He was sentenced to seven years imprisonment, although he served only five. He lived the last years of his life mostly in China before dying in 1953 in Moscow.[149]

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[146] Beckett, *Enemy Within*, p. 86.
[147] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, pp. 58-60.
[148] Thorpe, *The British Communist Party*, p. 269.
[149] King and Matthews, *About Turn*, p. 305.