

## British Communists and the 1932 turn to the trade unions

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*The Comintern's Third Period, 1928-1934, based on Stalin's 'second revolution' in Russia, capitalist crisis and the claim that social democracy and fascism were twins, generated sectarian, ultra-left politics which proved inimical to Communist activity in trade unions. This article sheds new light on that issue by revisiting three connected episodes: the British party's (CPGB) renewed turn to the unions, heralded in the January resolution of 1932; the roles Comintern staff and CPGB leader Harry Pollitt, played in this initiative; and the subsequent attempt by Pollitt to revise the politics of union work. This triptych reviews both primary sources and the recent historiography. It argues that some accounts have overestimated the novelty of the January resolution, blurred its meaning, and exaggerated Pollitt's part in it. The resolution did not attempt to change the line but its application. Its impact was limited. Subsequent bids to go beyond it were muddled and unsuccessful. The 1933 move towards the united front, and the ensuing turn to the popular front, possessed more profound significance in the creation of an effective Communist presence in trade unions than the events of 1931- 1932.*

'Between 1929 and 1931', the official history of the CPGB records, 'the party's former base in the trade union movement faded away'.<sup>1</sup> Academic historians concur: 'By 1932 the Minority Movement's membership had dropped to a mere 700, the total number of Communist trade unionists had dwindled to a mere 1,300. The surviving Communist nucleus was demoralized by the exodus'.<sup>2</sup> In this, as in other fields of activity, 'the CPGB relapsed into impotence'.<sup>3</sup> The 'Class against Class' politics of the Comintern's ultra-left Third Period constituted a major contributory factor. Launched at the Sixth World Congress of the Comintern in 1928, and elaborated at the Tenth Plenum of the executive (ECCI) in July 1929, 'the new line' only changed in substantive terms with moves back towards the united front after March 1933 – in the shadow of Hitler's appointment as German Chancellor. The trajectory of Stalinization in the USSR and the impact of global politics – particularly events in Germany and the anti-Soviet stance of the Social Democrats – on Russian interests ensured Third Period politics tacked this way or that; different aspects of a core repertoire were accentuated at different times.

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The insurgent discourse of 1929 gave way to greater caution in 1930 as Stalin put the brakes on collectivization and the crisis in Germany deepened. Stress on 'the right danger' was superseded by Stalin's 'struggle on two fronts' – against 'right opportunism', which conciliated social democracy and 'left sectarianism', which failed to distinguish between workers moving towards socialism and leaders embracing capitalism. 'Trade union legalism' – operating constitutionally, playing by the bureaucrats' rules – and 'sectarian' desertion of union activity were both condemned.<sup>4</sup> The Comintern called for 'concrete' demands to replace 'revolutionary phrase-mongering' and counselled against 'schematic creation' of red unions.<sup>5</sup> Class against Class, its modulations and nuances, produced intermittent confusion in the national sections and placed a premium on deciphering Moscow's pronouncements. Nonetheless, from 1929 the line remained within ultra-left parameters. Its enduring pillars were capitalist crisis driving alleged radicalization and impending revolution – although phases of temporary stabilisation characterised the conjuncture. A defining feature was the evolution of social democracy into social fascism. The Labour Party's transformation from antipode to twin of fascism was complemented by integration of its base, the trade union bureaucracy, with capital and the state.<sup>6</sup>

'Fascisation' vaccinated the bureaucracy against rank and file pressure; officialdom shed its contradictions and mutated into an apparatus for disciplining and betraying workers. Communists had to create an alternative leadership independent of the bureaucracy. The new line rejected the pre-1928 approach of moving the union apparatus left through making officials fight – or replacing them. It discarded the united front with reformist leaders and permitted only a 'united front from below' with rank and file workers. Independent leadership demanded activity in workplaces and unions at local level – as well as among the radicalising unemployed and the unorganized – to assemble the revolutionary trade union opposition (RTUO). Exposing the bureaucracy in words and deeds, stimulating and leading unofficial strikes, would enable Communists to win workers away from the machine and, in propitious circumstances, establish revolutionary unions.

Mounting failure provoked attempts by the Comintern and its subordinate union counterpart, the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU), to correct the CPGB's misapplication of the line. Anxiety about its inability to benefit from capitalist crisis was lent urgency by the party's parlous performance in the 1931 general election. Discussions in Moscow produced a Comintern restatement unanimously adopted by the CPGB leadership in January 1932.<sup>7</sup> Pioneering historians of the CPGB and Comintern attached limited significance to the January resolution. Pelling referred to it briefly in describing contemporary changes in Communist policy.<sup>8</sup> Carr was dismissive: 'The resolution adopted by the central committee of the CPGB in January 1932, reflecting the current uncertainties in Moscow, was a repetition of formulas no more likely to prove effective than they had been in the past'.<sup>9</sup> Their successors have accorded it greater importance. For one historian, '..the resolution closed a chapter in the party's history...The CI was now prepared to back a move away from ultra-leftism in trade union work..'.<sup>10</sup> Another mused, '..it marked perhaps the real beginnings of an effective Communist presence in this country'.<sup>11</sup>

Recent historiography portrays the January resolution as a turning point. Several accounts represent it as indicating significant change in Third Period policy and furnish innovation with a British provenance. The literature highlights the role of CPGB general secretary, Harry Pollitt, in the initiative.<sup>12</sup> It suggests Pollitt and his supporters had to overcome antagonism from RILU and its secretary Alexander Lozovsky, as well as ultra-left intransigents in the CPGB leadership.<sup>13</sup> Having secured agreement to the resolution, Pollitt, it is claimed, pushed beyond its prescriptions. He sought, purportedly with Comintern support and some success, to steer activists away from Class against Class towards something like the more pragmatic approach to union activity which prevailed in the popular front period.<sup>14</sup>

This narrative displays differences of emphasis. It is not without evidential support but susceptible at several points to exaggeration and inaccuracy. This article re-examines key texts and measures them against primary sources. The next section explores whether the January resolution altered the Comintern line as it applied to Britain and is succeeded by examination of the problems

the resolution aimed to rectify. This is followed by discussion of Pollitt's role. The fourth part of the paper reappraises ensuing debate in the CPGB and the extent to which it represented a project to transcend Third Period policy. The article concludes with reflections on union work in the aftermath of the resolution and the part it played in facilitating the building of a significant Communist base by the later 1930s.

### **The January resolution: revising the new line?**

In their history of the Comintern, McDermott and Agnew note the impact of the Third Period on the CPGB which precipitated decline in membership to 2,555 by November 1930. They continue: 'The lesson drawn by General Secretary Pollitt was that a return to work *within* the unions was required, a return to a more practicable "united front from below." A change of line in this direction was in fact proclaimed following a bad-tempered session of the Profintern's (RILU) Central Council in December 1931..' <sup>15</sup> (original emphasis). In her official history of the CPGB, Branson refers to the British Commission convened by the Comintern in Moscow the same month and observes: 'And, here, at last, Harry Pollitt was able to convince the ECCI that the attitude to the trade unions in Britain must be changed. Thus, the British Party was at last enabled to begin extricating itself from the "independent leadership" trap as laid down at the Leeds Congress'. <sup>16</sup> Eaden and Renton conclude: 'By January 1932, Pollitt had secured agreement from Moscow that "Class against Class" could be modified in respect of the need to win trade union support'. <sup>17</sup> Fuller asserts that Pollitt '...attacked the line at a meeting of the RILU Central Council in Moscow, arguing that the British party needed to mobilise opposition *within* the trade unions, not to form alternatives. As a result of this the CPGB was given dispensation to adopt its own line'. <sup>18</sup> (original emphasis).

I will discuss the roles of Pollitt and RILU in a subsequent section. It is important to emphasise here that the comments quoted above all misunderstand the position in December 1931. There was no need for Pollitt to convince the Comintern to change the line so that party activists could work *within* reformist trade unions: the Comintern had been attempting to convince the CPGB

that its members should work *within* reformist unions throughout the previous two years. Like ‘the united front from below’, such engagement was an integral ingredient of independent leadership and Class against Class. This had been exhaustively explained to Pollitt by the ECCI and RILU. Some of the literature suffers from the further misapprehension that there were two lines. The first, attributed to Pollitt, demanded work inside existing unions and opposed new unions. The second downplayed activity in the reformist unions and favoured breakaway unions: it is ascribed to the RILU leader, Lozovsky, and CPGB ‘ultra-lefts’, notably Bill Rust.<sup>19</sup> The record does not justify this bifurcation. Forming red unions was contingent on activity in reformist unions. The two elements were fused in one line: building independent leadership through working inside existing unions to muster revolutionary forces and then, in specified circumstances, establishing revolutionary unions.

The latter point requires amplification. Lozovsky’s institutional interest in expanding RILU through large scale extension of red unions was curbed by Stalin and Comintern caution confirmed by Otto Kuusinen at the Fifth RILU Congress in August 1930. There Lozovsky accepted breakaways should be considered only when a mass movement, intense struggle and strong Communist influence pertained. The test was empirical: application remained open to argument – but ultimately to a Comintern veto. This, it should be stressed, was the position of Pollitt and the CPGB leadership: the party would support the creation of red unions, the Leeds Congress of November 1929 decided, where the left was confronted by undemocratic leaders who had forfeited majority support. This stemmed from conviction that the social fascists would split unions rather than permit Communists to capture them. Again, action depended on subjective, practical calculations: Pollitt, for example, disagreed with Lozovsky over a new seamen’s union. But in 1930 Pollitt himself was repudiated by the Comintern over the perspective of a British mineworkers’ union. In 1931-2 he repeatedly registered support for the ECCI’s stance.<sup>20</sup>

Whatever their differences in interpretation and emphasis, all major protagonists accepted Moscow doctrine on establishing new unions and intensifying activity in existing unions. The primary problem regarding reformist unions lay not with Comintern policy but CPGB practice. This is

evident from a survey of the question in the two years preceding the January resolution. The ECCI letter to the Leeds Congress instructed delegates: 'The new line demands that Communist Parties, while not in the least diminishing their activity in the trade unions, initiate and develop independent organs of struggle embracing all the workers – the organised and particularly the unorganised – for the fight against the employers, as well as against the Fascist Labour Party and trade union bureaucracy'.<sup>21</sup> The Congress duly noted: 'The necessity for the independent leadership of all struggles in no way signifies the weakening of our work in the unions'.<sup>22</sup> In January 1930, the ECCI reminded CPGB leaders that activity in the mainstream unions remained indispensable.<sup>23</sup> In February 1930, the ECCI Presidium criticised British efforts in this direction: 'A marked tendency is observed by the Party to drop all work in the reformist trade unions. This is a grave mistake'.<sup>24</sup>

The Comintern became more forceful. In August 1930 Dimitri Manuilsky, who represented the central committee of the Russian Party, lectured CPGB delegates:

You absolutely gave up work in the trade unions without having strengthened yourself in the factories. The Comintern told you to pay attention to the factories. And you drew the conclusion that you could throw up the work in the trade unions. The Comintern told you to build up a Minority Movement in the factories and you interpreted that as "out of the trade unions"...Anyone who looks on the new line as a refusal to manoeuvre in the reformist trade unions or a refusal to work in them does not understand the real essence of the new line.<sup>25</sup>

On Manuilsky's account, CPGB leaders had failed to act on 'clear and exact directives', misinterpreted the united front from below to mean non-Communist militants had to accept party positions and neglected to devise immediate demands based on workers' expressed needs. The Comintern accepted partial blame but the CPGB must replace excuses and apologies with results. He inquired: 'Should we change our line? No... I am talking about rectifying these mistakes...

...the Anglo-American Secretariat has made accusing speeches against the English Communist Party. They have repeated hundreds of times that the English Communist Party does not know how to work...the English comrades should clearly consider...the mobilisation of the masses on the basis of their immediate needs by an extensive adoption of the tactic of the united front from below, by stubborn work in the trade unions, by the formation of a Minority Movement which is broader than the Party.<sup>26</sup>

The resolution which came out of this meeting of the ECCI Political Secretariat was emphatic: the problems lay not with the line or the conjuncture but with the CPGB's failure to implement the line in favourable circumstances:

In practice the new line was frequently interpreted as the abandonment of the tactics of the united front from below...The independent leadership of economic struggles was very often taken to mean the abandonment of persistent organised work in the reformist trade unions...the Minority Movement must make a real turn towards systematic work in the reformist trade unions and must form a mass revolutionary opposition inside and outside the reformist unions...The MM must try to win elected positions in the local unions...<sup>27</sup>

The British Commission convened in December 1930 mandated the Workers' Charter campaign which the ECCI insisted should be based on partial demands attractive to a wide constituency. The Comintern approved basic economic demands but criticised slogans which could alienate workers.<sup>28</sup> The Eleventh Plenum of the ECCI in Spring 1931 witnessed further severe strictures on the MM and CPGB. Party leaders were enjoined to use the Charter campaign to build the RTUO, starting with demands which flowed from dialogue with workers.<sup>29</sup> This was repeated in September 1931. Small, simple slogans centring on opposition to the employers' offensive and 'not a penny off' wages should lie at the heart of agitation. The ECCI noted few signs of 'a drive of the Party towards the factories and trade union branches...The Party should carry through concentration in the factories and in the trade union branches'.<sup>30</sup>

Similar exhortation marked RILU pronouncements. Its Fifth Congress in August 1930 declared that in Britain:

the line of independent leadership and of class against class has been wrongly interpreted as meaning the abandonment of work within the reformist unions, as seen in failure to conduct a fight around our programme in the unions; the non-attendance of MM members at trade union meetings; giving up of the fight for posts in the trade union branches; serious neglect of the struggle against the trade union bureaucrats...failure to select and popularise simple, practical, economic and political demands.<sup>31</sup>

Lozovsky fostered successive initiatives to galvanise the MM, including despatching operatives to Britain.<sup>32</sup> In early 1931 a RILU commission dilated on the importance of work in the

conventional unions. Lozovsky conceived the Charter campaign as a means of regenerating the MM and independent leadership; the RILU Open Letter of April 1931 was extensively discussed at the CC and formed the basis for the last Charter convention. For a time he advocated, and Pollitt accepted, integration of the MM and the unemployed movement.<sup>33</sup> If all this yielded little, it was not because CPGB leaders neglected Lozovsky's directives: they tried to realise them. As early as March 1930, the *Daily Worker* echoed RILU statements:

..there has been a decided falling off in the trade union work of our Party and a feeling that there are no further opportunities for work inside the reformist trade unions. This false theory is the essence of opportunism in practice, for it means the acceptance of the Tenth Plenum decisions but a refusal to carry them out. Today there is a clear understanding of the supreme need of the factory being the basis from which all our work should be carried out but a non-recognition of the necessity of also carrying the same work forward into the trade unions...The idea that we can no longer win workers, particularly in the branches and in the winning of posts...is incorrect.<sup>34</sup>

RILU policy was expounded in the MM paper, *The Worker*, and the party press. Pollitt advised 'the necessity of studying the decision(s) of the 5<sup>th</sup> Congress of the RILU. The leads from the International come from the RILU'.<sup>35</sup> Rust counselled 'extension of our work in the reformist trade unions...popularisation of the decisions of the Fifth Congress of the RILU and the Open Letter'.<sup>36</sup> MM leaders emphasised: '...the resolution of the Fifth Congress of the RILU on "The Tasks of the National Minority Movement" and the recent Open Letter of the RILU contain the whole of the policy and organisational measures which will be taken: every MM member and MM group should therefore continually study and apply both these important international documents to all work'.<sup>37</sup>

There were similar attempts to enforce Comintern edicts. After the August 1930 ECCI, Pollitt directed British leaders: 'What we have to do is to make a sharp turn in another direction, that is our trade union work...We have to take a decisive turn to bring our comrades back into the trade unions'.<sup>38</sup> In the aftermath of the 1930 British Commission he reflected '...we have been isolated from all trade union activity' and reported 'a bulletin has been sent out to all Party bodies outlining the steps which must be taken to raise the agitation in trade unions'.<sup>39</sup> On his return from the April 1931 ECCI Plenum, Pollitt recorded: '...Manuilsky said that the Party had not realised the

danger of its isolation from the workers, this had manifested itself in the desertion of the trade union work'.<sup>40</sup> Rust reiterated: 'every member must be mobilised for the carrying through of the policy of the CI...our inability to carry out mass activity along the lines and policy of the CI is one of the chief causes of the present situation'.<sup>41</sup>

ECCI decisions were incorporated in CPGB resolutions. Yet by autumn 1931, R. W. Robson was complaining, 'our biggest weakness is in regard to trade union work...despite all leads sent out, despite all the work done by the leadership of the Party, there are large sections of the party membership which still do not appreciate the importance of the work in the Unions'.<sup>42</sup> Idris Cox added: 'only a small proportion of members joining the Party are members of trade unions and when they come into the Party no interest is shown by the local Party Committees in seeing that they become members'.<sup>43</sup> The following month the CPGB representative in Moscow, Robin Page Arnot, read a Comintern letter to the PB which stated: 'The situation in regard to the MM was dangerous...the line is not being carried out at all'.<sup>44</sup> His suggestion that 'at the end of the discussion a letter should be drawn up accepting the line of the Comintern...'<sup>45</sup> encapsulated the cycle of vigorous Comintern stimulus and deficient CPGB response – remedying political discourse but not grassroots action - that had prevailed since 1929.

This sketch justifies several conclusions. First, the Comintern insisted that working within the unions - at local level on the basis of workers' demands and the united front from below - was central to Class against Class and independent leadership. Second, this was accepted by CPGB leaders without exception. Third, unremitting pressure from Moscow ensured CPGB leaders were acutely aware of the gap between theory and practice and endeavoured to close it. Fourth, they achieved limited success. Fifth, the idea that the January resolution was the result of CPGB leaders persuading Comintern leaders to change the line and move away from independent leadership, or that Moscow permitted the party to elaborate its own line, is without substance. The perceived difficulty was implementing established policy; the resolution's purpose was clarification not revision. It was only the latest – albeit arguably distinctive in its codification and presentation – in a

long list of attempts to impel the CPGB to practise its policy. So much is evident from the document's emphatic abbreviation of this dismal history:

THE GREATEST DEFECT OF THE PARTY'S WORK DURING THE PAST FEW YEARS IS THAT IT HAS NOT CARRIED ON ANY SYSTEMATIC WORK IN THE REFORMIST TRADE UNIONS. In spite of international resolutions (V congress of the Red International of Labour Unions and the XI Plenum of the Communist International) not a single step has been taken so far to make the MM a really widespread revolutionary trade union opposition.<sup>46</sup> (Capitals in original).

### **Explaining the problem - and the January resolution's solution**

How do we account for discontinuity between the line and its implementation? Two preliminary issues require more research. First, abandonment of union work raises questions about Communists' much-remarked fidelity to trade unions.<sup>47</sup> Second, this falling away may be magnified if the party's implantation in industry before 1928 has been inflated. Quantitative analysis is absent from the literature but a tentative hypothesis would hazard that, despite diffused influence, the CPGB's organized base in the unions was smallscale and fragile.<sup>48</sup> We also need more systematic information about 1929-1933. Nonetheless it is possible to outline certain factors salient to declining involvement.

The issue facing the leadership was how to transform members into a collective actor internalising and articulating successive Comintern scripts. Party managers were firmly committed to the new line. The capitalists, Pollitt explained, 'have the full force of the Trade Union Bureaucracy behind them...control of the machine gave the bureaucracy the power of life and death...it is ten times more difficult to work in the trade unions than it used to be'.<sup>49</sup> 'The policy of the trade union leaders', he maintained, 'is Social Fascism'.<sup>50</sup> Independent leadership remained daunting and activists required education and direction: 'The big difficulty was to get the comrades in the Party clear on how to build the revolutionary trade union opposition'.<sup>51</sup> Unifying factory and branch activity was key: 'The comrades who attended the branches were the leaders of work in the workshop'.<sup>52</sup> J.R. Campbell, once critical of Class against Class, now keenly appreciated ultra-left strategy.<sup>53</sup> Willie Gallacher was another strong advocate, emphasising:

..the very powerful movement of the bureaucracy in the fight to disintegrate the forces of the working class...we could not, no matter how we spoke, over-emphasise the importance of breaking the power of the bureaucracy in the unions and winning the branches away from the support of the bureaucracy and around the support of independent struggle and leadership...in some of the industries we can get the support of the district committees and we must try to use them.<sup>54</sup>

The anathema against miners' leader, Arthur Horner for refusal to recant his reversion to the old line confirmed the party elite's faith in Class against Class. But it also suggested uncertainty about aspects of practice as witnessed by habitual resort to Comintern guidance and visits by Pollitt and Rust during 1931 to consult with the ailing Rajani Palme Dutt, the only party figure who possessed theoretical acumen.<sup>55</sup> Redefining the role of the MM produced proposals from dropping its name to dissolving it. Official bans and proscriptions bolstered hostility from union members who identified the MM with disruption, sectarianism and splitting. An ineffectual, alternative labour movement in miniature, it constituted a barrier to union work. The party itself was tiny, its weaknesses exacerbated by disarticulation between higher party bodies, local committees and industrial activists which hindered effective communication of the line and motivating members to apply it.<sup>56</sup>

It would be mistaken to deduce from documents that dwelt on members' debilities that the leaders always got things right. There were vacillations, for example, over the relationship of local officials to the machine and whether demands should be placed on the bureaucracy – its predictable resistance would illustrate its reactionary nature – or whether demands would encourage illusions in its ability to act in workers' interests.<sup>57</sup> Gallacher's lead to Communist miners in early 1931 – they should attend the official conference but if out-manoeuvred establish their own strike committee - went to the voluntaristic heart of independent leadership.<sup>58</sup> So did some of the sloganizing - 'Strike now...the Communist Party is leading you' - and Salvation Army oratory outside factories as a substitute for contact with workers inside.<sup>59</sup>

Rejecting 'loyal opposition', asserting unions could achieve little, diminished affinity with workers who believed in trade unionism. Exposure of social fascists generated denunciation more

than argument, while independent leadership challenged union democracy. The breakaway unions, the United Mineworkers of Scotland (UMS) and the United Clothing Workers, incarnated disloyalty and impaired united front activity. The line lent itself to conflicting initiatives. It was possible for activists to prioritise factory agitation, union activity, working towards new unions or unemployed struggles – and counterpose one against the other, dissolving theoretical unity in fragmented practice.<sup>60</sup> Russian exhortations to independent leadership could encourage half-hearted attitudes to union intervention and privilege factory and strike committees embracing non-unionists: ‘The masses must be organised and led if necessary *without* the trade union apparatus and against it; no fetish must be made of the trade unions’.<sup>61</sup> British formulations insisting on independent leadership ‘whether inside or outside the unions is a matter of expediency’<sup>62</sup> could legitimise abstention, ‘new union psychology’, and illusions that unemployed and unorganized workers were more radical. Campbell observed dispirited branch activity and attributed it to uncertainty about how far fascisation extended.<sup>63</sup> Confusion and failure bred frustration and disillusion. Through 1931, faults were formally remedied – although some argued their leaders had not done enough to correct misunderstandings. But all members did not read party papers regularly. Only 25% bought the *Communist Review*, where policy was amplified. Difficulties were exacerbated by high membership turnover.<sup>64</sup>

The nub of the problem was more fundamental: the new line was unrealistic in the circumstances. Economic crisis, as contemporary Marxists noted, can produce caution and conservatism rather than radicalisation.<sup>65</sup> The strike rate fell below that of the early 1920s. Unemployment restrained militancy, victimisation curbed activism. By 1931 only 23% of workers remained members of unions which had been in sustained decline since 1921. On one estimate, 58% of CPGB members in London and 75% on Tyneside were unemployed, while 50% of members were recent recruits.<sup>66</sup> Demoralisation, marginalisation or retreat from trade unionism intensified. In June 1931, only 37% of party members were in unions, compared with 53% the previous November.<sup>67</sup> By mid-1931, a Comintern/RILU operative in Britain concluded: ‘Despite all resolutions

and decisions, we have complete confusion among our comrades, even amongst some of the leading Party comrades, about the line, the tasks and the form of the MM...Our opposition inside the reformist unions has not seriously improved'.<sup>68</sup>

Less dogmatic strategists may have changed course. Bound by Russian imperatives, Comintern leaders preferred to believe that recalcitrance was rooted in human fallibility and inadequate understanding. That they opted for emphatic reiteration not replacement is evident from studying the January resolution. All the components of the new line – crisis, radicalisation, social fascism, independent leadership, the united front from below, demands based on immediate needs – remained intact. The text exhorted the CPGB to advance along the line, not retreat to 1928, to distinguish its policy sharply from the reformist approach, not adapt to it, to intensify exposure of the bureaucracy, 'the agents of the enemy', and transform union branches from 'organs of class collaboration into organs of class struggle'. Horner's 'legalism' was brandished as a reminder of the pitfalls of regression to 'the old line'. There was no break with the established position regarding new unions: the resolution proposed development of the UMS and expanded on the urgency of preparing unofficial strikes.<sup>69</sup>

The orientation to developing rank and file movements, such as the Builders' Forward Movement and the Members' Rights Movement which had emerged since 1930 outside the MM, was unquestionably new. But these were oppositional, unconstitutional groups, independent of, and antagonistic to, the bureaucracy. Based on union branches, intervention in them was considered a pathway back into union work, given the MM's marginality. But this was premised on attaining an established end: building independent leadership and the RTUO. Rank and file movements, the resolution insisted, must be led by revolutionaries. The resolution also opened up – but did not decide – the fate of the MM. It could not continue on its current basis: the extent to which the new movements would replenish or supersede it as the main inspiration of the RTUO was left undetermined, to be resolved by future events. The document challenged but did not liquidate the MM. To conclude it did is to read history backwards.

Taken as a whole, the resolution can hardly be characterised as a turn away from Class against Class. It is difficult to accept it represented '...a marked change in the party's trade union line' or that it should be interpreted 'as a major shift to the right'.<sup>70</sup> It was, for the most part, although Carr perhaps put it a little too dismissively, 'a repetition of formulas' disseminated since 1929.<sup>71</sup> As CPGB leaders, such as Gallacher and Robson remarked, there was nothing substantially new. What was novel was conditionality regarding the MM and, as Pollitt stressed, warnings of future accounting from the Comintern leaders, Kuusinen and Igor Piatnitsky. Unless matters improved within six months there would be dire consequences for the MM and the party leaders.<sup>72</sup>

### **Harry Pollitt and the January resolution**

The first more than rudimentary account of the January resolution by a historian was provided by Martin in 1969. It said nothing about the Comintern or its British Commission but read off Pollitt's influence in directing the CPGB towards the new unofficial movements, simply and, as we shall see, questionably, from Pollitt's speech at the RILU council in Moscow.<sup>73</sup> From the 1930s, Communist writing had presented the resolution as purely a British affair and an updated essay in anglicising the episode and constructing Pollitt's agency in the resolution's production came from John Mahon in the 1970s. Mahon had been a leading MM activist since 1929, worked for RILU in Moscow during 1932 and was fully conversant with the facts. Disregarding them, he refurbished party mythology which suppressed the Russian dimension and recorded that after the 1931 election: 'Pollitt initiated a commission of active members to examine the practical activity of the Party branches and to propose what should be done....The resultant resolution of the January 1932 Central Committee dealt in practical terms with the development of workers' movements and Party building; it declared political work in the factories and trade unions to be decisive...'.<sup>74</sup> It was left to Branson, writing a decade later, to re-introduce the Comintern into the story - while maintaining that Pollitt was the decisive influence in what, she implies, had been a protracted campaign to

change the Comintern line. The dearth of supporting evidence is disabling, particularly in view of her insistence that after 1928 '...the approach of those at Comintern headquarters was far more authoritarian, the dealings with affiliated parties more dictatorial...'.<sup>75</sup>

With enhanced access to the Comintern archives, research in the 1990s and the new century tells us more about what happened in Moscow. Fishman explicitly assigns Pollitt the key role:

...he told the Commission in Moscow that the Minority Movement...had become "boxed up in itself". He then executed a brilliant tactical sleight-of-hand by pointing out that other 'independent organisations' existed alongside trade unions, within which Party members were actually working successfully to achieve the goals of Class Against Class...He declared that these 'rank and file movements' were the embodiment of Independent Leadership, which could become the revolutionary trade union opposition. The Comintern Commission's report faithfully reflected Pollitt's submission including his tactical trick.<sup>76</sup>

This resumé cites neither minutes nor reports of the conclave to justify its assertion of a causal link between Pollitt's 'submission' and the final resolution. The only evidence presented to corroborate the claim consists of two sentences urging the need to build the RTUO and the necessity to prepare strikes. Both these sentences are taken from Pollitt's speech to the 12<sup>th</sup> CPGB Congress in November 1932.<sup>77</sup> Neither does anything to substantiate Fishman's account of Pollitt's role in Moscow a year earlier.

Thorpe's reconstruction is more indirect and suggestive. He describes an Anglo-American Secretariat (AAS) meeting 'in early December' 1931 where the single speaker referred to is the German, Gerhardt, who expounds the necessity of CPGB work in unions. The narrative switches to the ECCI Presidium on December 29th. Pollitt, the sole actor accorded a voice on the resolution's substance, emphasises union work, rank and file movements, expanding the UMS and 'concentration districts'. The author continues: 'These ideas which were embodied in the Presidium resolution would be put to the CEC [CC] meeting on 17 January and implemented immediately thereafter'.<sup>78</sup> In the précis of the discussion which followed we hear nothing concerning the content of what became the January resolution from the two Comintern leaders mentioned, Kuusinen and Boris Vassiliev. We are simply informed that they 'backed Pollitt and made helpful suggestions' while Lozovsky 'was highly critical'.<sup>79</sup> The implication is that Pollitt was the major protagonist.

The problem with this account lies less with what it includes than with what it omits. Scrutiny of surviving records produces a different picture. The deliberations of the Commission investigating the CPGB lasted four weeks and involved multiple meetings of the AAS, the EECI Political Secretariat and Political Commission – and the coordination of their work with the RILU Plenum in late November. Kuusinen explained procedure. The British leaders would make a ‘special report’ to the Political Secretariat: ‘I propose that we should attempt in the course of three or four meetings of the Secretariat to come to a definite result. This result can be submitted to the Political Commission which in turn will refer it to the Political Secretariat’.<sup>80</sup> At the 20 December meeting of the AAS – from which Thorpe selects for paraphrase only Gerhardt’s speech – Kuusinen commented:

Comrade Pollitt has formulated the chief results of our discussions in the Secretariat so correctly that I believe I have nothing else to add to it. The only thing left for us to do is to formulate all this in the form of a resolution and it will be the duty of the Bureau of the Anglo-American Secretariat, together with the representatives of the British Party here, to work out such a resolution within the next few days. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of this month the question is to come before the Presidium of the EECI.<sup>81</sup>

The meeting of the Presidium described by Thorpe was the culmination of an extended collective and bureaucratic process; it was designed to consider the outcome of that process. Its resolution was informed by the results of a number of meetings worked up by the Comintern civil service. It was not, in any authorial sense, the property of Pollitt. The representatives of the British Party included – on the record of those who spoke at AAS meetings – Allan, secretary of the MM; Fred Douglas, representing the Young Communist League; Peter Kerrigan, Scottish organiser; Wal Hannington, from the Unemployed Workers Movement; Horner; Trevor Robinson, Lancashire organiser; and Joe Scott of the MM – as well as Peter Zinkin then working for the Comintern.<sup>82</sup> We do not know the extent to which their views influenced the outcome of what Pollitt referred to as “the inner commission.” We do know that his speech to the December 29 Presidium was not a personal statement. He acknowledged that he was delivering the report of the Commission of Inquiry into the British Party: ‘I will therefore endeavour to explain the main results that have come out of the discussions of the Commission as reflected in the resolution’.<sup>83</sup>

There is little here to corroborate claims that Pollitt animated the January resolution. Moreover, the context lends scant plausibility to the proposition. Kuusinen stated that nothing had been decided in advance and that production of the resolution would entail a collaborative exercise. It is improbable that Pollitt rather than Kuusinen, Piatnitsky and Manuilsky – who represented the interests of the Stalinist state, and whose leadership in these deliberations Pollitt lavishly praised – had the final say.<sup>84</sup> Kuusinen's assurance that the Comintern had not summoned the CPGB to replace its leaders but to deepen the project commenced in 1928, and Pollitt's complaint that the Comintern held his party in contempt, evoke the balance of forces.<sup>85</sup> The CPGB was a subordinate section whose leader was a Comintern appointee with a two year record of unredeemed promises and failure in the trade union field. There is insufficient in the evidence or the context to require us to invert the established hierarchy of political power and authority and assign the leading role in events to Pollitt.

It is safe to assume CPGB views found their place in the resolution, particularly with regard to rank and file movements. Discussion of these bodies had taken place earlier in 1931 within the party leadership. It was led by Gallacher and informed by reports of practical experiences from Frank Jackson, Campbell and Ernest Woolley.<sup>86</sup> There is no evidence the rank and file initiative was Pollitt's brainchild, although he certainly favoured it. By December 1931 the relationship of these movements to the MM remained contentious, and incomplete enlightenment was found in Moscow.

This brings us to the RILU council. Branson – highlighting the contribution of one participant, Pollitt – claims it witnessed 'the main battle' of the Commission, which was largely confined to the question of rank and file movements.<sup>87</sup> The debate at the council constituted a subordinate feature of the Commission. The ECCI constituted the crucial terrain. The RILU meeting was significant, not for Pollitt's speech, but for the three-hour peroration of Kuusinen.<sup>88</sup> At issue was not just the question of new movements but the state of the MM. In the record of the discussion published in Britain, Lozovsky rehearsed his well-known deconstruction of the CPGB's union work and repeated the Comintern code on new unions. Allan emphasised the role of rank and file movements in revival

but accepted Lozovsky's critique 'in a true revolutionary spirit'. Lozovsky was backed by the German Fritz Emmerich and Stalin's Armenian friend, Gliraj Kostanian.<sup>89</sup>

Following Allan, Pollitt blamed RILU. It had, he alleged, given the impression union work did not matter. He conceded that had now changed and reinforced Allan's comments on the relevance of rank and file movements in assembling the RTUO. He disputed the belief, which he attributed to RILU, that the new movements were obstacles to renewing the MM – as well as the viability of a red seamen's union, given insufficient assistance from RILU. Kuusinen asserted that the Comintern had inadequately grasped the isolation of the MM and posed liquidation – if a quick campaign of revitalisation faltered – before concluding it deserved another chance. In summation, Lozovsky reiterated RILU's longstanding support for intervention in the reformist unions. He cited earlier resolutions affirming its centrality - and CPGB failures to implement them. He responded to Pollitt: 'It is you who have neglected this work'.<sup>90</sup>

Lozovsky's exasperation was understandable. His view of the MM as 'the weakest link' in RILU had been impressed on CPGB leaders through 1931. Within the Comintern *zeitgeist* it was hard to justify the MM's sustained failure and Pollitt's part in it. He had personally headed the unsuccessful Charter campaign and, in Spring 1931, taken over responsibility for the MM from Gallacher. Lozovsky's estimations of his British affiliate were shared in London. When CPGB leaders winced at RILU criticism, J. T. Murphy wryly remarked: 'But what if they had heard Gallacher's report?'<sup>91</sup> Gallacher had assessed the position of the MM as 'worse than deplorable'.<sup>92</sup> Pollitt evaluated his own stewardship: 'This arrangement has not worked out very well in practice and this has resulted in a breakdown of the work'.<sup>93</sup> Lozovsky would have pondered his agent's appraisal: '...after the decision that Pollitt should be responsible for the MM we have no improvement, but a worsening of the situation....Pollitt dissipates his energies in all directions. When he is in London he visits meetings of the MM. He is too busy with other affairs, with the PB etc to do anything else.'<sup>94</sup> Partisan perhaps – but Pollitt's shot at scapegoating RILU was more problematic. Only that spring he

had counselled, 'if comrades will read carefully the RILU resolutions on the MM, they will find great stress is laid on the question of work inside the unions'.<sup>95</sup>

There was, certainly, evidence of disagreements over the rank and file movements. Emmerich felt they duplicated the MM, were too diffuse, and lacked support.<sup>96</sup> A RILU visitant to Britain, 'MacGregor', considered them no substitute for the MM.<sup>97</sup> RILU had a vested interest in maintaining its British section and a penchant for bureaucratic bodies. The CPGB's more flexible attitude seemed the best bet. The EECI's winning formula – keep the central MM apparatus for now but employ it to strengthen the movements as a means of building the RTUO – represented a compromise which left a lot of practical details to be worked out. Questions about recruiting from the movements into the MM, maintaining MM fractions inside the movements - or abandoning the MM and simply expanding the movements into a new national centre - remained unresolved by the January resolution and would briefly exercise the Comintern, RILU and CPGB in its aftermath. The differences between Lozovsky and Kuusinen hinged on the future. Lozovsky, who further assailed Pollitt at the Presidium, was pessimistic about leaders, prodigal with unfulfilled promises, finally delivering. Kuusinen backed the existing party leadership as the only available agency with any chance of alleviating the problems to which it had contributed – there seemed little alternative.

CPGB leaders – as distinct from members - were united behind the Comintern directives. Nonetheless, historians have detected concealed hostility: 'the unanimous passage of the January resolution by the CC..did not mean that ultra-leftists like Rust were reconciled to a moderation of the party's line. Their acquiescence was tactical..'.<sup>98</sup> It is claimed that, as Pollitt and Campbell set about implementing the resolution, '...the *Daily Worker* under Bill Rust's editorship could not be relied upon to support them'.<sup>99</sup> Moreover, '..Rust's comment that they could not simply rely on the resolution – but would have to work out how to operate it in practice – was a scarcely-veiled hint that the struggle would continue'.<sup>100</sup> These judgements are unsubstantiated and inaccurate: on the evidence Rust was neither singularly ultra-left – the entire leadership purveyed ultra-left policies – nor hostile to the resolution; nor had he engaged in any 'struggle' preceding it.

Rust's condemnation of Communists quitting the reformist unions dated from 1930.<sup>101</sup> Through 1931 he partnered Pollitt at the helm of the party and in 1932 they anchored the Secretariat. Rust's reflections on turning proposals into practice were plausibly directed at determining issues such as the MM's future - in the context of the difficulties CPGB leaders had previously experienced in applying Comintern resolutions to British conditions. The statement quoted can be construed as hinting at antagonism to applying the resolution's prescriptions only by neglecting the accepted rules of interpretation.<sup>102</sup> Here is Pollitt at the British Commission responding to Comintern concern about the *Daily Worker*: 'I would like to say that there is no comrade who has progressed so rapidly as Comrade Rust, who is so sincere in his work and activity and the criticism of the *Daily Worker* is criticism against the Party and not any individual comrade'.<sup>103</sup>

Misreading CPGB leaders stems from artificial schema which segregate them into seasoned realists, Comintern sceptics with union roots, around Pollitt, Campbell, Horner and Hannington; and ultra-left Comintern zealots –inappropriately packaged together as 'Young Turks' – including Rust, Allan, George Allison, Mahon, Robson, Walter Tapsell and Zinkin.<sup>104</sup> The insubstantiality of this fissure and the struggles it allegedly provoked have been demonstrated.<sup>105</sup> Through 1930 and 1931, the entire leadership was loyal to the line; inevitable differences of interpretation were secondary. The only significant conflict flared briefly in autumn 1932. As we will see, it ranged Rust, Campbell and Dutt – who is rarely assigned a faction – against Pollitt and Gallacher, supported by the 'ultra-lefts' Allan and Robson. No leader challenged the January resolution: sporadic complaints came from Maurice Ferguson, Jim Rushton and Wooley. The only opposition came from the nascent Trotskyists of the Balham Group.<sup>106</sup>

### **What's My Line? the trade union controversy of 1932**

The months following the January resolution saw some progress. By summer sectarianism persisted and there was 'slackening off'.<sup>107</sup> Pollitt lamented the handful of Communists attending

the TUC Congress and his party's anti-union image. He estimated that 39% of Communists were trade unionists; only in the engineering, mining, rail, and transport unions were there 100 members. A third of members were trying to implement the resolution and only 13 out of 80 leading cadres were active in unions. The London MM organiser, George Renshaw, reported 'widespread and deep rooted opposition to work in trade unions.'<sup>108</sup> The 12<sup>th</sup> ECCI Plenum scheduled for late August preceded the CPGB Congress. As the six months the Comintern had allowed for improvement expired, Pollitt's continuing disquiet sparked a controversial statement on August 20; it stimulated accusations of erroneous formulations which risked revision of the line. Reiteration stiffened resistance.

Branson contributed an initial account. She outlined Pollitt's August article which urged Communists to transform unions into instruments of class struggle and Dutt's corrective – Pollitt had not meant unions could be captured, only the lower organs, while the party fought for a powerful RTUO, not a united trade unionism. This provoked Pollitt to justify his comments, question the logic of confining activity to branches and districts and register antagonism to the term 'RTUO', because of its divisive implications. Branson cited further contributions from Rust, Mahon and the Tyneside district, supporting Dutt; and Allan, Gallacher, Jimmy Shields and the Scottish district agreeing with Pollitt. As Congress approached, 'Pollitt having made his point deemed it wise to strike a conciliatory note...' 'I made certain unclear formulations that might be used to distort the line of the workers' independent fight.' He had not been trying to revise the line of the Party but "the rotten sectarianism that is paralysing our work in the unions"<sup>109</sup>.

Fishman's version is also based on the *Daily Worker*. She has Dutt championing Mahon against Pollitt and Campbell who were seconded by Gallacher and Shields in a contest 'promoted' by Rust. The polarised argument is about whether Communists should work in reformist unions or form new ones:

Pollitt and Campbell's insistence that Party activity should be channelled inside trade unions assumed that the majority, the unorganised working class, could not be attracted to new revolutionary trade unions and that the "reformist" organized

working class constituted the only potential fighting force...In the event, Pollitt and Campbell scored an easy victory at the Party Congress. They surrendered a small amount of ideological ground to the Young Turks without the slightest intention of allowing them to roll back the practical advances made by Party activists on the ground ...Pollitt and Campbell were magnanimous in victory...<sup>110</sup>

Thorpe's use of PB minutes took things forward. His narrative is handicapped by inadequate elucidation of the controversy's content. Explanation is replaced by imprecise reference to 'ultra-left', 'right', 'Pollitt's line' and 'Dutt's line'. This is particularly problematic as nowhere in his book does Thorpe discuss Third Period union strategy in any detail. After January, he asserts, circumstances '...allowed the trade union line to be taken to the right...'.<sup>111</sup> Pollitt, he claims, had Comintern support for this. On creating new unions, the Comintern hesitated '...to go the whole hog towards Pollitt's position...' but generally:

...the line had drifted surreptitiously to the right...the CI was being coaxed along nicely and the party apparently submitting itself to the full implications of the January resolution. The plenum itself helped Pollitt's line. First, the main resolution stated that in Britain "a sharp turn must be made towards work in the reformist trade unions." Second, Piatnitsky stressed more strongly than in any previous statement of the class against class period that Communists "must fight against...Left tendencies as much as against the Right" ...Pollitt had the Comintern seal of approval firmly in his pocket.<sup>112</sup>

This is presented as the context to a conflict which pitted Pollitt and Gallacher against Dutt and Rust, with Campbell initially critical of Pollitt. The latter, 'emboldened by the encouragement he had received in Moscow said that he would "fight right up to the Congress" to ensure that his own line on the unions won through...Campbell stated his essential agreement with Pollitt and stressed that he had only demurred on issues of detail'.<sup>113</sup> The November Congress '...represented a clear victory for Pollitt and his strategy of moving the Party further away from the extremes of class against class...the trade union line was confirmed...This meant red unions were redundant...'.<sup>114</sup>

These interpretations are contentious and require clarification. On any reading of the sources the main combatants were Pollitt and Gallacher confronting Campbell, Dutt and Rust. Ideas that Campbell was uninvolved (Branson), allied with Pollitt (Fishman) or left Rust 'isolated' by agreeing substantially with Pollitt (Thorpe) are mistaken. Campbell remained a vocal critic of Pollitt's position.<sup>115</sup> There is no convincing evidence that in early 1932 'the line had drifted

surreptitiously to the right.’ Nor was the dispute about whether activists should organise within reformist unions or establish red unions. The January resolution sealed earlier settlement of these questions; in summer 1932 nobody in the leadership reopened them. The *casus belli* was not where but how, the *political basis* on which the work within reformist unions, which all championed, was to be conducted.<sup>116</sup>

When policy demanded winning workers away from an impermeable, bourgeois apparatus, Pollitt’s statement, ‘we carry forward the fight inside the unions so that we can take them out of the hands of the present leaders to transform them into strong instruments and weapons in all our daily struggles’<sup>117</sup> suggested revisionism. Matters deteriorated when Allan pronounced TUC financial assistance for striking Lancashire cotton workers ‘a magnificent display of solidarity’, without locating it in the machinations of the bureaucracy - implying pressure worked and sowing illusions in reformist leaders.<sup>118</sup> Concern was compounded when a Glasgow railwayman, Macmillan, approbated and extended Pollitt’s economism, asserting the Communist was in the unions, ‘...not to proclaim the doctrine of Karl Marx but to take his place beside his fellow workers in the everyday fight against wage cuts, against worsened conditions.’<sup>119</sup>

Pollitt had not communicated what he was trying to do to his fellow leaders, Campbell or Rust – according to Dutt, Pollitt *had* put these views to him but been talked out of them – and was absent in Moscow for the Plenum and then in Lancashire, supervising the party’s strike efforts.<sup>120</sup> When the September PB finally afforded opportunity for enlightenment the climate was further clouded by Gallacher’s intemperate attacks on Dutt and Rust. Nonetheless, Campbell and Rust endeavoured to calm things, hazarding that Pollitt’s preoccupation with union work had fathered clumsy formulations with unintended consequences: ‘...when you wrote this article ... you were saying to yourself there is a weak part of our policy of independent leadership, the trade union work is not being attended to. I write this article to gee them up. But when this article is published comrades who do not know this line read it, in their minds it is something on the lines of back to the old policy...’<sup>121</sup>

Pollitt brushed aside the proffered olive branch and refused to concede all that was involved was maladroit pedagogy:

I wrote an article on July 20 on the trade union question. I wrote with great care and made every formulation as I believe the question should be formulated. I understood very well at the time that it would have repercussions...subsequent experiences have only confirmed me in the correctness of my line. It is necessary to get the masses inside the trade unions, this is the decisive factor. I am not worried because Macmillan says something about Karl Marx...I do not want comrades to think I do not understand the seriousness of the issue...I am absolutely convinced that this is the only line possible in the Party.<sup>122</sup>

Together with Gallacher he argued that activists could force the bureaucracy into action and transform unions. Their opponents were aware of the implications for independent leadership: if Pollitt was taken at his word, ‘...this question is not only of formulation but is the question of the line of the Party...we have reached a decisive conflict of opinion with regard to the line, with regard to trade union work’.<sup>123</sup> As Campbell put it ‘...we are altering the entire union line’.<sup>124</sup> Conviction that line-change, not simply strengthening the union drive, was part of Pollitt’s purpose gained credence from his sustained failure to explain otherwise to the PB, particularly his close collaborators, Campbell, Dutt and Rust whose records on the union campaign were impeccable. Listing his own initiatives on that count since 1930, Dutt pinpointed the question: ‘Not “for” or “against” the trade union drive but whether the present essential trade union drive is to be carried out on the basis of the old line or on the basis of the new line – this is the real issue’.<sup>125</sup> Pollitt was exhibiting ‘a tendency... to revise the line of the Leeds Congress, of the International and of the RILU on the trade union question. We must correct this tendency...’.<sup>126</sup>

The discussion continued through October. The CPGB operated without any developed theory of trade unionism relying on the Comintern model of an insurgent rank and file contained by a bureaucracy, located in the labour aristocracy, and now inclining towards fascism. *What is to be Done?* recently published in Britain was only partly understood.<sup>127</sup> The debates of 1932 reveal neither creative reference to Marxist texts, nor cogent understanding of trade unions. What was on

offer was a choice between Pollitt and Gallacher's economistic impulses and Dutt and Campbell's fidelity to the line.

The former duo groped towards appreciating unions as contradictory organisations and the relative responsiveness of their leaders, citing the Lancashire strike, the Members' Rights Movement and the vote at the TUC – in these cases pressure had paid off. Their opponents dismissed such incidents as transparent manoeuvres mounted to co-opt militancy and maintain legitimacy in the interests of capital. Gallacher's Pauline discovery that the bureaucracy was the same as 20 or 30 years earlier was countered by Campbell's invocations of social fascism, a phenomenon Pollitt unsurprisingly proved unwilling to address – although Gallacher protested that union leaders' integration into the state remained incomplete. Neither expanded on penetrating the higher echelons of unions. Reading from a Comintern document which echoed one of Pollitt's formulations was countered by quotation from the last CPGB Congress at Leeds. A recurring theme was Pollitt's insistence that the union crusade was paramount and the perplexed reply that nobody around the table disagreed. Proceeding in circles, the discussion underlined the political limitations of the CPGB. Campbell remarked the disregard for ideas: 'theoretician has become an expression of contempt.'<sup>128</sup>

The affair remains hard to assess: a stratagem of Pollitt, a gambit to maximise intervention in the unions, an improvised bid to revise the line – or both? There is insufficient evidence to conclude that he employed a calculated ruse. We cannot deduce absence of intention to change the line from his subsequent denial under fire – although scholars should also eschew teleology which transports the Pollitt of the popular front line back to 1932.<sup>129</sup> His problem was generating activity in unions. Experience had taught him the ultra-left line was inimical to that. 'Take the unions out of the hands of their leaders' appeared a superior mobilising slogan to 'unions are becoming part of the state and can achieve little for workers.' His dilemma was that variations on the latter theme had failed; but the former, he knew, unless he grossly misunderstood the Comintern position, to be politically unacceptable and divisive.<sup>130</sup> Historians do not have access to

Pollitt's private thoughts. On the facts we have, what occurred was an attempt to float partial revision of strategy or suppress articulation of the politics of union work – which amounted to the same thing. Pollitt received support, but far from overwhelming approval, in the pre-Congress discussion; and criticism, particularly trenchant from 'George Pennington' and Mahon.<sup>131</sup> Had he persisted, Comintern correction seemed inevitable. Perhaps these factors provoked the dénouement.

Contrary to some accounts, Pollitt climbed down. In November he accepted what had been offered earlier: '...wrong interpretations of the articles show that I did not carefully enough formulate some parts so as to strongly guard against any attempts to make Right distortions of our revolutionary trade union policy... Comrade Macmillan placed an entirely wrong interpretation upon my drive and I was in error in not strongly combatting this'.<sup>132</sup> He claimed – against the grain of the evidence – he had had no intention of revising the line. He wanted a strong RTUO and he had criticised the nomenclature only because it evoked opposition to trade unionism per se. The draft Congress resolutions which reflected his arguments were amended. Dutt informed Pollitt: 'I was very glad to see the considerable change-over from the first draft to the second, as of both from the formulation of the articles'.<sup>133</sup> A few days later he wrote: '...the official line is now fully corrected and has abandoned all the formulations criticised'.<sup>134</sup>

Retreat was in train as Pollitt again embarked for Moscow in mid-October. From there he telegraphed, opposing publication of a further intervention from Dutt.<sup>135</sup> The PB assumed this implied Comintern authorisation. Shields, the Comintern representative, had already disparaged Dutt which some saw as contrived endorsement of Pollitt. But Dutt's conclusion was judicious: the Comintern might sacrifice Dutt, but not the line. That this was brought home to Pollitt, and that he received no encouragement in Moscow, is lent plausibility by his *mea culpa* when he returned. Harmony was restored to a leadership Gallacher had described as 'shattered'.<sup>136</sup> The line remained unchanged. The Congress decisions, fully in accord with the January resolution, envisaged sectional rank and file movements and MM groups working towards developing a replacement national

centre, agitation in union branches, and securing posts as stewards, branch officials and conference delegates to build independent leadership manifested in a qualitatively more powerful RTUO. Pollitt declared war on 'trade union legalism' and members 'choked up with constitutionalism.' He criticised those 'who say that nothing can be done in the unions [and] the right who believe that the union apparatus can do everything and that the leaders can be made to fight.' He commended the UMS and stressed the need to develop it.<sup>137</sup>

This was far from the 'clear' or 'easy victory' in shifting the CPGB from Class against Class certain historians have awarded Pollitt. Even Branson's summation – having made his point he opted for conciliation – glosses over what his point was and whether he had made it, what he accomplished and at what cost. Even if we accept line-change was a ploy and Pollitt's real purpose was concentrating minds on union activity to a greater degree than would otherwise have prevailed, there is little evidence of its attainment. That his individualist, pre-emptive approach and disdain for collective leadership was dysfunctional was affirmed as the discussion took on its own momentum, raised revision of Comintern policy and divided a leadership united since 1929.

It seems an expensive way to make a point. During the debate, an article by T. H. James was headlined: 'To refuse to work in the unions is desertion. Go back to the workers and expose the bureaucrats within the unions.'<sup>138</sup> Suitably expanded, this appears a more straightforward and fruitful way to begin to develop the argument. Pollitt does not come out of things particularly well. Reflecting on the unconstructive unfolding of the controversy, Rust remarked: 'I think Pollitt has a responsibility for this...if Pollitt had not had such immediate personal reactions to the criticism of Dutt, if he had viewed the situation from the standpoint of the entire party and we had had an opportunity in the Secretariat to discuss his article before it was published, I am sure that such an article would not have been written.'<sup>139</sup>

Pollitt's behaviour might be more understandable *had* he possessed Comintern backing. This claim does not stand up. The comments quoted by Thorpe from the Plenum simply underscored the necessity of union activity and avoiding 'left' as well as 'right' errors -statements

made as strongly on other occasions since 1929. They represented no development on the January resolution. They provide no warrant for suggesting that Moscow, 'coaxed along' by Pollitt, supported his initiative. The documents Thorpe cites shed no greater light on the matter but other materials suggest Comintern approval was an issue within the CPGB leadership.<sup>140</sup>

On October 4, Robson reported on the Comintern plenary which he had attended with Pollitt, intimating that the line had moved towards applying pressure on reformist leaders. This was challenged at the PB by Rust – the line of the Plenum with regard to trade union work remained unchanged – and Tapsell: 'the discussion centred around how to conduct communist work, how to try and mobilise the workers...This does not make any change in the line...on the contrary the line which was laid down in various plenums is being challenged now.'<sup>141</sup> Rust stated he had requested Robson rewrite his article on the Plenum. However, Pollitt felt it should appear uncorrected in the *Daily Worker*, for the Comintern meeting had indeed amended the line – an exchange Pollitt denied.<sup>142</sup> The published article gives little indication the line had been revised. Nor do later reports in the party press. The relevant Congress documents disclose nothing that could be construed as altering the *status quo*.<sup>143</sup> Whether Pollitt, who left the Plenum after 'a day or two', misread the runes or was misled by Robson remain matters of conjecture. All available evidence confirms Dutt's verdict: 'The trade union drive is essential and all-important. The Twelfth Plenum has emphasised this. But the Twelfth Plenum does not say there is to be a revision of the trade union line, as laid down in previous congresses'.<sup>144</sup>

### **June in January: laying the foundations of the future?**

This paper has argued that the January resolution, composed by the Comintern Commission and validated by the EECl, cannot be isolated from earlier history; nor should its significance be overestimated. Its *animateurs*, we have demonstrated, were Russian not British. Pollitt's part in it has been magnified. The text represented a turn within the Third Period, an essay in revitalisation

not liquidation. The sources disclose no opposition from CPGB leaders but confirm there were subsequent attempts to go beyond the resolution. Confused and short-lived, they did not survive resistance, culminated in retreat and exercised little discernable impact on union work. The resolution, and the party congress decisions based on it, framed the immediate future. However, the harbinger of change came, not in January 1932, but in March 1933 which witnessed the first moves towards the united front, a process which broadened before and beyond the 1935 Comintern Congress.<sup>145</sup>

Finally, the agency of the resolution in inaugurating an effective Communism in Britain – or more pertinently in British trade unions – can be exaggerated. By 1939, the CPGB had assembled a small but meaningful presence; but on the basis of very different policies from those advocated in the January resolution. The latter enabled progress by crystallising earlier exhortation that Communists become union activists. Subsequent success had more to do with developments after 1934 than with what happened at the turn of 1931. Supervening events exercised their own specific influence. There was no seamless evolution from the January resolution to what its authors would have branded the heretical reformism of the popular front.

The point is reinforced by the resolution's aftermath. The style of union work was more measured. It remained based on the same politics – albeit adumbrated in less frenzied fashion. Recovery remained sluggish. The rank and file movements on the buses and railways provided the first shoots of influence in the transport workers and rail unions. Elsewhere – in tinplate, textiles, ports and print – such movements were marginal. With the exception of aircraft, they never blossomed in engineering or the electrical industries, although a burgeoning Communist presence on district committees facilitated winning official positions in key unions in those sectors.<sup>146</sup> The number of factory cells grew to eighty and in September 1933, the PB was informed of 'a big improvement' in union work; but only 30% of members were engaged in it.<sup>147</sup>

There was no dramatic upturn in 1934. In April, Campbell reported progress on London Transport and the railways. Success in engineering was arguable while in mining, docks, textiles and

among seafarers ‘...we have not advanced since the time of the January resolution’.<sup>148</sup> A Comintern representative in Britain observed that union work remained the responsibility of a handful of functionaries, not the party generally: ‘That is the main reason why the Party is only slowly and hesitatingly carrying out the decisions of the last XII Party Congress’.<sup>149</sup> Party membership is an unsatisfactory index of union activity; nonetheless it declined from 5,600 in November 1932 to 5000 in February 1934.<sup>150</sup>

Take-off was related to foreign policy innovation in Moscow and the serendipitous economic and industrial revival in Britain, 1935-1938, which combined to create a more amenable climate. Social fascism was dropped, pressure on the bureaucracy and winning full-time positions rehabilitated, prohibition of the united front lifted. Political innovation dictated collaboration, compromise and conciliation. The expedient dynamics of trade unionism helped dissipate hostility. Matters should not be magnified. Bevin, Citrine, the TUC general council, and other leaders remained intractable. In a number of unions, notably the Engineers and Miners’, the party achieved a degree of influence. By 1935, the MM and the RTUO had faded away. By 1937, they had been joined by most of the rank and file movements as the CPGB oriented towards the apparatus and the unity demanded by the popular front pitch.<sup>151</sup>

The context was crucial. In January 1932 union membership was declining and continued to fall into 1933. Thereafter it grew from 4.3 million to 6.2 million in 1938. By that date, 30.5% of workers were in unions, compared with 22 % in 1933. There were 357 strikes in 1933 and 940 in 1939. Workplace organisation revived in key industries; shop steward numbers increased. Trends were uneven.<sup>152</sup> But expanding unions needed organisers and Communists were willing to serve and take advantage of a situation more favourable than at any time since the party’s formation. That they grasped their opportunities was related only distantly to events in Moscow in the winter of 1931. Like the MM, the RTUO and social fascism, the January resolution was by 1939 an anachronism, an occasional reminder of a very different time.

## Notes on contributor

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Branson, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain*, 83.

<sup>2</sup> Martin, *Communism and the British Trade Unions*, 190. The Minority Movement (MM) was established by the CPGB in 1924 as a broad oppositional body affiliated to RILU. By 1930 it had subsided into the diminutive industrial arm of the party – *ibid.*, *passim*.

<sup>3</sup> Carr, *Twilight*, 213.

<sup>4</sup> Carr, *Foundations of A Planned Economy, Vol 3* and *Idem, Twilight* remain indispensable guides. See also, McDermott and Agnew, *The Comintern*, 81-119.

<sup>5</sup> Carr, *Twilight*, 21.

<sup>6</sup> Draper, “Ghost of Social-Fascism”, 29-42.

<sup>7</sup> CPGB, “Immediate Tasks.”

<sup>8</sup> Pelling, *British Communist Party*, 71 n3. Pelling, 69, shared some of the confusion of more recent historians over the meaning of ‘independent leadership’ in relation to trade unions, an issue I examine in the next section. See also Martin, 170-171. Martin counterposes work in the reformist unions to independent leadership and dates the demise of the latter to the Charter Campaign of 1930-1931 – *ibid.*, 149, 155-156, 162.

<sup>9</sup> Carr, *Twilight*, 215.

<sup>10</sup> Thorpe, *British Communist Party*, 185.

<sup>11</sup> Morgan, *Harry Pollitt*, 77; see also, Worley, *Class Against Class*, 286.

<sup>12</sup> Branson, 88-90; Fishman, *British Communist Party*, 36-40; Thorpe, 183-185; Laybourn and Murphy, *Under the Red Flag*, 70-71.

<sup>13</sup> Branson, 88; Fishman, 36-40; Thorpe, 185, 193.

<sup>14</sup> Branson, 91-92; Fishman, 48-61; Thorpe, 197-201.

<sup>15</sup> McDermott and Agnew, 106.

<sup>16</sup> Branson, 88.

<sup>17</sup> Eaden and Renton, *Communist Party*, 48.

- <sup>18</sup> Fuller, *Radical Aristocrats*, 104.
- <sup>19</sup> This is the burden of the account of the Third Period in Fishman, 4-82 and it also informs Thorpe, 135-219.
- <sup>20</sup> Carr, *Twilight*, 8, 20, 23, 48, 209; MacFarlane, *British Communist Party*, 256-257; Campbell, *Scottish Miners*, 334-338; People's History Museum Manchester, Communist Party Archive (CPA) Reel 25, ECCI Presidium 29 December 1931 where Pollitt stated: 'There are well-defined conditions which the Plenum of the ECCI has laid down for the establishment of new unions and when these conditions exist we will endeavour to fulfil those tasks'; CPA, Reel 13, CPGB Political Bureau (PB) 9 January 1932.
- <sup>21</sup> Reel 30, To the Congress of the CPGB 28 November 1929.
- <sup>22</sup> CPGB, *Report of the 11<sup>th</sup> Congress*; Russian State Archive of Social and Political History, Moscow (RGASPI) 495/100/664, J. R. Campbell to CPGB n.d 1930.
- <sup>23</sup> RGASPI 495/100/648, Comintern to CC CPGB 2 January 1930.
- <sup>24</sup> RGASPI 495/100/675, Resolution of the Enlarged Presidium of the ECCI March 1930; CPGB, "Resolution of the Central Committee CPGB, March 1930."
- <sup>25</sup> Reel 28, ECCI Political Secretariat 16 August 1930.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>27</sup> Reel 29, Resolution of Political Secretariat of the ECCI on the Tasks of the CPGB 30 September 1930.
- <sup>28</sup> Reel 24, ECCI Presidium 12 December 1930.
- <sup>29</sup> Reel 12, PB 23 April 1931; CPGB, "Resolution of the Central Committee of the CPGB on the 11<sup>th</sup> Plenum of the ECCI".
- <sup>30</sup> Reel 30, Political Secretariat ECCI 28 September 1931.
- <sup>31</sup> National Minority Movement, *Resolutions of the Fifth World Congress*, 108-9.
- <sup>32</sup> In 1930-32 these included Butler; Doris; L; MacGregor; Mills; Rodney; and Tappi – although some of these pseudonyms may denote the same agent.
- <sup>33</sup> Reel 12, PB 12 March 9 April 1931; Reel 2, CPGB Central Committee (CC) 30-31 May 1931.
- <sup>34</sup> *Daily Worker (DW)*, 31 March 1930. Martin, *Communism*, 151-152.
- <sup>35</sup> See, for example, *The Worker*, 19 December 1930, January 3, 10, 1931; Glading, "Decisions". CC 18 March, 31 May 1931.
- <sup>36</sup> PB 23 April 1931.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>38</sup> Reel 1, CC 13 September 1930.
- <sup>39</sup> PB 29 January 1931; CC 14 March 1931.
- <sup>40</sup> CC 30 May 1931.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid; CPGB, "...11th Plenum of the ECCI."
- <sup>42</sup> CC 19-20 September 1931; CPGB, "Turn to Mass Work."
- <sup>43</sup> CC 19-20 September 1931.
- <sup>44</sup> PB 8 October 1931.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>46</sup> CPGB, "Immediate Tasks", 59-60.
- <sup>47</sup> CPGB activists' primary loyalty to trade unionism, as opposed to Comintern policy, is a theme of Fishman's work.
- <sup>48</sup> MacFarlane and Martin both contain valuable analytic description of union work and provide a good starting point.
- <sup>49</sup> CC 14 March 1931; PB 4 June 1931.
- <sup>50</sup> Pollitt, "Our Party", 187-195. *DW*, 26 September 1932.
- <sup>51</sup> PB 17 September 1931.
- <sup>52</sup> PB 4 June 1931.
- <sup>53</sup> Carr, *Twilight*, 208; PB 9 January 1932.
- <sup>54</sup> CC 31 May 1931.
- <sup>55</sup> McIlroy and Campbell, "Heresy of Arthur Horner"; PB 6 March, 14 May 1931.
- <sup>56</sup> See Martin, 162-166. '...not only is the Party isolated from the masses but the leadership is isolated from the members.' - PB 14 January 1932. PB 17 September, 8 October 1931; CC 31 May, 19-20 September 1931.
- <sup>57</sup> PB 29 January 1931.
- <sup>58</sup> CC 30 May 1931.
- <sup>59</sup> CC 18 March, 30 May 1931.
- <sup>60</sup> Martin, 150-151.
- <sup>61</sup> Quoted *ibid*, 109.

- <sup>62</sup> *The Worker*, 18 October 1929.
- <sup>63</sup> CC 14 March, 31 May 1931.
- <sup>64</sup> CC 14 March 1931; PB 17 December 1931; *DW* 3 October 1932.
- <sup>65</sup> Trotsky, "The Third Period", 27-68.
- <sup>66</sup> Mcllroy and Campbell, "For A Revolutionary Workers' Government", 552-3. PB 30 April 1931; CC 19-20 September 1931.
- <sup>67</sup> RGASPI 495/100/731, Holmberg, Factory and Trade Union Work of the CPGB and MM 28.XI.31.
- <sup>68</sup> RGASPI 495/100/737, Letter from Tappi n.d Summer 1931.
- <sup>69</sup> CPGB, "Immediate Tasks".
- <sup>70</sup> Thorpe, 156, 197.
- <sup>71</sup> Carr, *Twilight*, 215. The point is reiterated in Mcllroy and Campbell, "For A Revolutionary Workers' Government", 553 and Worley, 287.
- <sup>72</sup> Reel 13, PB 9 January 1932 Reel 3, CC 16-17 January 1932. PB 9 January 1932.
- <sup>73</sup> Martin, 170-171, quotes from Pollitt's speech at the RILU meeting. On p. 171 he refers impersonally to: 'The plan elaborated in Moscow in December 1931...'. Six pages on, and without attempting to establish any causative connection between Pollitt's RILU speech and the January resolution, Martin makes the isolated remark: '...following RILU's acceptance of Pollitt's plan...' 177.
- <sup>74</sup> Mahon, *Harry Pollitt*, 163. An earlier version by the veteran Communist, Tom Bell, *British Communist Party*, 149-150, mentions 'a special commission' but omits all reference to the Comintern, Moscow, RILU and Russia.
- <sup>75</sup> Branson, 30.
- <sup>76</sup> Fishman, 40. There is no evidence that Pollitt conceived rank and file movements as 'a tactical trick' or as anything other than a means to revitalise independent leadership.
- <sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, 40, 46 n38.
- <sup>78</sup> Thorpe, 183-184.
- <sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 184.
- <sup>80</sup> Reel 32 B, AAS 2 December 1931.
- <sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, AAS 20 December 1931.
- <sup>82</sup> *Ibid*. The files of AAS staff and specialists contain a draft of the resolution from early December: RGASPI 495/100/732, Draft Line on the Trade Union Question in England ii/XII/31.
- <sup>83</sup> Reel 25, ECCI Presidium 29 December 1931. Assigning *rapporteur* tasks to a national leader identified him with responsibility for decisions and might be thought to provide some surety they would be carried out.
- <sup>84</sup> ECCI Presidium 29 December 1931; PB 9 January 1932. Pollitt stressed their leading role: 'Kuusinen put in a report to the Commission...The two big speeches were the speeches of comrades Kuusinen and Manuilsky...the work of this Commission has been extraordinarily helpful, very critical, very sharp...I have certainly not participated in any discussion myself in which the leading comrades of the International have been so concrete, so anxious to really get to grips with the problem' – *ibid*.
- <sup>85</sup> AAS 2 December 1931.
- <sup>86</sup> CC 19-20 September 1931, where Pollitt mentioned he and Rust 'would be sent to Moscow' in November and take draft resolutions.
- <sup>87</sup> Branson, 88-89. No full record was published. Branson relies, perforce, on the incomplete account in *RILU Magazine* – c.f. Carr, *Twilight*, 48 n.15.
- <sup>88</sup> PB 9 January 1932. Pollitt claimed Kuusinen spoke on the same lines as Pollitt was speaking to the PB and that the Communist fraction of RILU disowned Lozovsky's attacks on him. Carr, *Twilight*, 215 n33, interprets the absence of Pollitt's speech from the reports in *Internationale Press – Korrespondenz* as 'a sign of disapproval'.
- <sup>89</sup> *RILU Magazine* 2, nos 1-2, 19-251; Carr, *Twilight*, 48.
- <sup>90</sup> *RILU Magazine*, 251. In Carr's estimation, *Twilight*, 215, 'The British delegates...were severely mauled.'
- <sup>91</sup> For example, Lozovsky's scathing address to the April ECCI Plenum was reprinted in *Communist Review* August, September, October 1931. CC 30 May 1931.
- <sup>92</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>93</sup> CC 19-20 September 1931.
- <sup>94</sup> RGASPI 495/100/737, Tappi Letter n.d August 1931.
- <sup>95</sup> CC 14 March 1931; PB 9 April 1931. The main criticism of RILU came from George Allison – *ibid*.
- <sup>96</sup> *RILU Magazine*, 66.
- <sup>97</sup> CC 19-20 September 1931.
- <sup>98</sup> Thorpe, 192.

<sup>99</sup> Fishman, 49.

<sup>100</sup> Thorpe, 185.

<sup>101</sup> Martin, 153-156.

<sup>102</sup> PB 9 January, 14 March 1932.

<sup>103</sup> AAS 20 December 1931.

<sup>104</sup> Fishman, 30-43, 45, n26. Thorpe, 145, states that despite Pollitt's advocacy of the new line from early 1928, he '...was by no means an "ultra-left" ...'. Thorpe justifies this with three pieces of evidence: in 1928 Pollitt opposed a red seamen's union, was 'rather unenthusiastic' about the clothing workers' breakaway and was criticised in 1929 for non-advocacy of independent leadership in a strike – criticism he accepted. These may seem insufficient grounds for setting aside Pollitt's established role in bringing the ultra-left line to Britain and support for it thereafter. The CPGB leadership's collective adherence to ultra-leftism is decentred by distinctive application of the epithet to specific individuals on unconvincing grounds; for example, Gallacher, for 'premature support' for a new British miners' union – which Pollitt shared (161-2, 165), Arnot, Rust and Tapsell for reasons which go unexplained (165); Ferguson for demanding more election candidates (172); Rust and Arnot for a position on Horner which Pollitt shared (178-9). For a case study see McIlroy and Campbell, "Heresy".

<sup>105</sup> McIlroy, "Restoring Stalinism", 606-607.

<sup>106</sup> Groves, *Balham Group*, 51-58. These complaints centred on the role of the MM – see, for example, PB 28 April 1932.

<sup>107</sup> PB 14 May, 25 June, 4, 10 October 1932; *DW*, 29 July 1932.

<sup>108</sup> *DW*, 28 October 1932; PB 6 August, 4, 10 October 1932; Pollitt, *Road to Victory*, 45.

<sup>109</sup> Branson, 92, 90-91. Little more was heard of the six months allotted for improving union work - but see the summer 1932 visitation of Comintern agent, Richard Krebs, to inspect the CPGB: Thorpe, 198; Valtin, *Out of the Night*, 285-92, 680-691.

<sup>110</sup> Fishman, 54-56.

<sup>111</sup> Thorpe, 194. There are similar problems with Fishman who describes Pollitt and Campbell as 'centrists': 63 n 32.

<sup>112</sup> Thorpe, 193, 197, 199.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>115</sup> PB 17 September, 4, 10-11 October 1932. See also Campbell in *DW*, 15 September 1932, overlooked in these texts. Nothing resembling the statement that he essentially agreed with Pollitt, which Thorpe imputes to Campbell, is to be found in the source cited – PB 10-11 October – or the minutes of previous or succeeding PBs. Worley, 294, provides no evidence for his claim that Campbell '...sympathised with Pollitt's general line...', a conclusion entirely at odds with the PB minutes.

<sup>116</sup> The sole example Thorpe, 192-193, offers of a Pollitt - engineered move to the right – failure to establish a new union at Lucas-involved applying *existing* policy. That these matters should be decided 'on their merits' was not, as Thorpe suggests, simply the position of Dutt and Lozovsky – it was also the position of the Comintern. RGASPI 495/100/836, Dutt, A Reply to the Trade Union Discussion.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> *DW*, 8 September 1932.

<sup>119</sup> *DW*, 26 August 1932.

<sup>120</sup> RGASPI 495/100/836, Dutt to Pollitt, 17.10.32.

<sup>121</sup> PB 17 September 1932 (Campbell).

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.* Pollitt was mistaken: no such article appeared on July 20. The mistake is compounded in Worley, 292-3, which quotes from the non-existent article. The quotes come from a relatively innocuous piece by Pollitt – *DW*, 29 July – noting the success of the Members' Rights campaign and opposing the belief that union leaders took no notice of pressure. The article which caused the furore was in *DW*, 20 August 1932.

<sup>123</sup> Dutt, Reply. PB 17 September 1932 (Rust).

<sup>124</sup> PB 4 October 1932.

<sup>125</sup> Dutt, Reply.

<sup>126</sup> RGASPI 495/100/836, Dutt, The Revolutionary Line and the Trade Union Question 17 September 1932, *DW* 19 September 1932.

<sup>127</sup> McIntyre, *A Proletarian Science*, 69, 211-218; Hinton and Hyman, *Trade Unions and Revolution*, 64-71; McIlroy, "Marxism and the Trade Unions", 497-526. Lenin was typically employed "biblically" to legitimise agitation in the workplace and reactionary unions – for example, CC 16-17 January 1932 (Pollitt).

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<sup>128</sup> PB 17 September 4, 10-11 October, 29 October 1932.

<sup>129</sup> Morgan, 78, asserts, '...Pollitt decided to clear the air once and for all. He did so by means of a calculated deviation and provocation...'. No documentation supports this surmise and it is difficult to see why Pollitt believed 'deviation' could clear the air. Predictably, it stimulated opposition, soured the atmosphere and achieved little. For Fishman, 38-41, it is one skirmish in Pollitt and Campbell's long-term and *successful* battle to change the line towards union pragmatism. Thorpe's framework, 192-201, is similar, while emphasising Pollitt.

<sup>130</sup> In Moscow Pollitt had been accused of misinterpreting the line of the RILU council as 'back to 1924', back to the united front, and pressure politics: AAS 20 December 1931, PB 9 January 1932.

<sup>131</sup> *DW*, 5, 20 October 1932.

<sup>132</sup> *DW*, 7 November 1932; RGASPI 495/100/822, CC 9 November 1932, where Pollitt stated the article '...represented the opinions of the majority of members of the PB...'.  
<sup>133</sup> RGASPI/495/100/836, Dutt to Pollitt 13.10.32.

<sup>133</sup> RGASPI/495/100/836, Dutt to Pollitt 13.10.32.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, Dutt to Pollitt 17.10.32.

<sup>135</sup> PB 29 October 1932.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*; PB 10 October; CP/Ind/Poll/3/5, Dutt to Pollitt 26.9.32; *DW* 30 September 1932; PB 4 October 1932.

<sup>137</sup> CPA CP/Cent/Cong/3/01, Resolutions Adopted by the 12<sup>th</sup> Congress of the CPGB; Pollitt, *Road to Victory*, 45-47, 76-77. Carr's conclusion that 'order was restored' at the Congress, *Twilight*, 222, fits the facts far better than the illusory victory for Pollitt.

<sup>138</sup> *DW*, 8 September 1932.

<sup>139</sup> PB October 10-11 1932.

<sup>140</sup> Thorpe, 199, 221 notes 54-56.

<sup>141</sup> PB 4, 10 October 1932.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.* Pollitt called the comment 'an unmitigated lie' amended to 'a gross misrepresentation' after Rust noted such personal remarks were not helping discussion.

<sup>143</sup> *DW*, 6 October 1932. Kuusinen's statement that using union democracy to replace bureaucrats should not be confused with legalism – *DW* 10 October – provided a glimmer of flexibility. The Plenum resolution's condemnation of parties 'which still in practice oppose the existence of Red Trade Unions and the RTUO...and who as a substitute for them support the slogan "Make the leaders fight..." – *ibid.*, 17 October 1932 – affirmed continuity. CP/Cent/Cong/03/01, 12<sup>th</sup> Plenum ECCI, The International Situation and the Tasks of the Sections of the Communist International.

<sup>144</sup> Dutt, Reply.

<sup>145</sup> Carr, *Twilight*, 64-155, remains a good introduction to these developments. See also McDermott and Agnew, 120-157.

<sup>146</sup> Hyman, "Rank and File Movements", 129-158.

<sup>147</sup> Reel 13, PB 8 September 1933; Shields, 'One Year'.

<sup>148</sup> Reel 6, CC 7 April 1934.

<sup>149</sup> Reel 15, PB 1934 untitled, unsigned n.d. May 1934?

<sup>150</sup> Thorpe, Appendix 2.

<sup>151</sup> Woodhouse and Pearce, *Essays*, 125-135 and Croucher, *Engineers at War*, 1-66 are seminal outlines.

<sup>152</sup> Clegg, *History*, 430, 1-164, Fraser, *History*, 177-185.

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