

appear a likely outcome in the short term but, if ex-NF Conservatives do become disgruntled, this is one longer-term possibility. A new Enoch Powell, even if not Enoch Powell himself, or an English Mogens Glistrup, who established the Danish Progress Party—such a leader could reactivate those material dynamics that produced the earlier levels of NF support and that continue to have a structural existence.

The NF itself will doubtless retrench into localised areas where it still retains some modest support within the electorate. Its interest in elections *per se* will almost certainly diminish, but its potential for serious harm by implicitly or explicitly encouraging various types of vigilantism by white youths against black people in the competitive context of the inner city remains serious.<sup>19</sup>

As an organisation the NF faces division and schism; its current internal turmoil is based on differences about doctrine and strategy amid mutual recriminations about the election disaster. However, the argument does seem to be focusing on the

hindrance to any future recovery of the party of Tyndall as Chairman and Webster as National Activities Organiser. There may be a replay of the split of 1975 and early 1976 that produced the short-lived National Party. Tyndall and Webster survived that because they managed to retain control of much of the party machinery and, more important, because they retained the organisational name whose widespread recognition within the electorate during a period of greatly increased public sensitivity to race and immigration gave them a large advantage over the break-away group. However, political circumstances have changed since 1976. Successful survival if a further split occurs may be more than they can manage.

<sup>19</sup> Examples of harassment and vigilantism are documented in Bethnal Green and Stepney Trades Council, *Blood on the Streets: A Report by Bethnal Green and Stepney Trades Council on Racial Attacks in East London* (September 1978).

# Uneven Development: Communist Strategy from the 1940s to the 1970s

Andrew Chester

This article discusses two intriguing questions of communist history. Firstly, when and why was the idea of “Soviet Power” replaced by a “British Road to Socialism”? The answer to this question contains some surprises. Secondly, why is the current edition of the *British Road to Socialism* so different from the first edition of 1951? I will try to illustrate the main forces that have shaped communist strategy over the four editions of the BRS.

These two questions have been written about many times before. But communist writers have frequently explained discontinuities in communist history by changes in “objective” conditions, rather than by contradictions, problems, gaps and mistakes made by communists. In this way the field of communist history has been abandoned often to those who wish to use it maliciously. What is worse,

our own ability to drive forward our understanding is held up by these attempts at justification. It may be true that dishonest practices such as the rewriting of historical documents has been rare in British Communist history.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, it is also true that we don’t yet have a tolerably accurate version of our recent history. In the light of this, what follows is not intended to be a “balanced” account. Given the present state of knowledge in this area, not to mention the limitations of space, it could not

<sup>1</sup> But not absent: see the 1953 edition of the *Selected Speeches of Harry Pollitt, Vol. II*, in which a reference to Soviet Power made in his 1935 speech to the 7th World Congress of the Communist International was deleted. The original text of the speech was published by the Party as a pamphlet in 1935.

be. Instead it stresses the contradictory and uneven development of strategic thinking, attempts to explain it, and draws some critical conclusions.

### Popular Front Strategic Problem

The constant aim of communist strategy from the foundation of the Party until just after the start of WW2 was “the dictatorship of the proletariat in the form of Soviet Power”. In a nutshell it was envisaged that the socialist revolution would take the form of a violent crisis in the course of which Councils or committees based on places of work would become the basis of a working class power which would challenge and abolish parliamentary institutions. After the rise of fascism it was realised that this could not be put forward as a realistic immediate aim.<sup>2</sup> At the 7th World Congress of the Communist International in 1935 it was proclaimed that the first objective of all Communist Parties would be the creation of broad alliances against fascism and international war. A key aim of these “Popular Fronts” was the preservation of democratic political institutions in capitalist countries from destruction by fascism. If successful the Popular Front strategy was expected to yield opportunities for advance to socialism, via the establishment of Soviet Power—i.e. the abolition of existing representative political institutions provided they could first be saved from fascism.

Was this a realistic political objective? We can only speculate that it was not, since no section of the Communist International had to face the transition between Popular Front and Soviet Power in practice. The Popular Front of the Spanish Republic came nearest to facing the problem. During the Spanish war, according to the Soviet authors of the *Outline History of the Communist International* (Progress, 1971), “The democratic revolution developing within the country went far beyond the bounds of any previously known bourgeois-democratic revolutions. Its nature and aims became an object of searching scrutiny in the governing bodies of the Comintern . . .” (p. 417). Dimitrov stated at a meeting of the Secretariat of the Executive Committee of the Comintern in 1936 that a Spanish state dominated by the popular front could be theoretically expressed as “a special form of the democratic dictatorship of the working class and peasantry” (*ibid*). Togliatti coined the opaque phrase “New Democracy” to denote the break with previous experience. But there is no evidence that the discussions on the Spanish Popular Front led Comintern leaders to conclude definitely that further

advance to socialism would take place without a Soviet revolution.

The victory of Franco in Spain cut off the most advanced source of experience of Popular Fronts before the relationship of the New Democracy to the stages strategy put forward at the 7th WCCI could become clear. Certainly there was no question of these discussions on the Spanish Popular Front leading to a rejection of the aim of Soviet Power in Britain. In 1939 this aim was reiterated in the *Draft Programme*, consideration of which was ended by the outbreak of war.

### Wartime Change

The Popular Front did not create alliances within and between countries on a wide enough scale to prevent war, let alone to produce opportunities for advance to socialism. It was only *during* the war that the Popular Front strategy came to fruition. The international alliance of the USA, USSR, and Great Britain; broad social co-operation against fascism in occupied and unoccupied countries; the surge of national liberation movements in the colonial empires; all these factors arose during the war and made a successful anti-fascist struggle possible. They combined in complex ways in an immense variety of circumstances. In a number of countries Popular Front-type movements were strong enough by the end of the war or just afterwards to vindicate the idea that a successful anti-fascist struggle would open new opportunities for advance to socialism. It was in these circumstances that the strategic problem of the Popular Front had to be tackled both in theory and practice.

How did the strategic view of the British Party change during the war? References to the aim of Soviet Power ceased in the early part of the war, but no new strategic aim crystallised. This can be illustrated by examining an important pamphlet published in 1944: *How to Win the Peace* by Harry Pollitt. After running through the positive changes in the world balance of forces he concluded that “. . . a new world is being born—not yet a Socialist world, but one that is already a tremendous advance towards Socialism” (p. 16). Reflecting the optimistic view that the international co-operation built up in the war could and should continue into peace he asked “Who really believes the scare stories of the coming domination of the rest of Europe by Anglo-American imperialism . . .?” Instead, “. . . new democracies will be established, in which, at the General Elections which will take place, broad, democratic People’s Governments will be elected all over Europe . . .”. While “In Britain, we are confident that at any General Election that takes place, provided there is Labour and progressive unity, the people will elect a House of Commons in which there will be a majority of Labour, Com-

<sup>2</sup> For details of why Soviet Power was regarded as a more, or less immediate aim at different times see Monty Johnstone’s article in MTD September 1978.

munist and progressive Members of Parliament". Now, although *How to Win the Peace* was not a pamphlet simply about the immediate situation (indeed, the quotations above come from a chapter entitled "The Advance to Socialism") there was no indication of what *form* the transition to Socialism would take. There was no mention of Soviet Power, but nothing to replace it other than the idea that the programme proposed for the Parliamentary alliance envisaged would be a step towards a Socialist Britain, one which would "further change the people" (p. 87).

Although the Party approached the end of the war without a clear idea of the form of transition to Socialism, there was optimism about the future. The membership and influence of the Party had increased enormously during the war, intermingling with the widespread radicalisation of those years. In the General Election of 1945 the Party's poll was its highest ever by far. The Labour Party came to power on a manifesto that was Socialist in tone and content. The immediate task was to push forward the movement, which naturally led to the question: in the event of success (which seemed quite likely at first)—what next?

The specifically British answer to this came in 1947 with the publication of Pollitt's book *Looking Ahead*, as is well known. In a key passage he wrote that

"... in the measure to which the labour movement is united, in the measure to which it presses forward energetically for the fulfilment of its programme, the development of a general economic plan, extended nationalisation, reduction of rent, interest and profit, democratisation of the armed forces, the courts and the state, increased working-class and popular control of industry, new recruitment of personnel from the labour movement for every part of the state machine—to that measure it will succeed in changing conditions in Britain. In that measure it will reduce the power of the capitalist class, increase the power and control of the workers and the people, and carry Britain along a new, British road to socialism in which British democratic institutions will be preserved and strengthened, and which will not necessarily be the road the Russian workers and peasants were compelled to take in 1917" (p. 92).

### Looking Ahead Foreshadowed

What is less well known is the influence of political events in Eastern Europe, ideological developments in the international communist movement and—not least—the personal viewpoint of Stalin, all of which foreshadowed *Looking Ahead*. Bear in mind that as Spain had been briefly the source of the most advanced experience of the Popular Front before the war, the Eastern European countries had the most advanced post-war Popular Front-type governments. The discrediting of colla-

borators with Nazism, the influence of the Soviet Union and the Red Army, and the construction of broad anti-fascist resistance movements all played a role (in varying degrees in different countries) in making this so. Bear in mind also that although the Comintern was dissolved in 1943 communists did not cease to look to Moscow for guidance. And Stalin had greater personal prestige than ever because of the war.

The operation of these factors and their connection with Britain can be illustrated by the following extraordinary quotation from the Minutes of a meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, September 1946. The speaker is Klement Gottwald, General Secretary of the CPC:

"Very likely you have read in the press the news of Comrade Stalin's talk with a delegation of British Labour Party members. It was a discussion with officials of the Labour Party the main subject of which was summed up in the *Daily Herald* by one of the participants, M. Phillips. He says, *inter alia*, there are two roads to socialism, one is the Russian, the other the British, and it is clear that each in its own way intends to achieve its socialist goals. The Russian path is shorter but more difficult and has brought with it bloodletting. Nevertheless it is necessary to keep in mind that the followers of Marx and Lenin do not regard this as the only path leading to socialism. *The Parliamentary path is not one of bloodletting, but it is a longer path.*

This was a conversation in which Comrade Stalin touched on the different paths of socialism. During my last visit to Moscow I had a similar conversation with Stalin. Comrade Stalin said that as experience has shown and as the classics of Marxism-Leninism teach us, there does not exist only one path leading through Soviets and the dictatorship of the proletariat..." (Quoted in *History of Socialism Year-book, Prague 1968*, p. 123.) (Emphasis added—AC.)

Furthermore Gottwald relayed that "Stalin expressly said: Our path was shorter, faster—and it cost much blood and victims. If you can avoid it, then avoid it".

The British Party also had a view on the remarks of Stalin to Morgan Phillips. In 1946 the *Daily Worker* issued a leaflet actually headed in bold lettering "The British Road to Socialism". This rejected Morgan Phillip's conclusion drawn from his talk with Stalin, which was that since Britain could advance along a Parliamentary road the Communist Party should disband! Instead it asserted that "The Communist Party in Britain has always emphasised these historical differences to which Stalin referred; it has always stressed what can be achieved in this country by orderly and peaceful progress through democratic opportunity and the strength of the workers' mass organisations...". In fact, of course, before World War Two

the Party had always stressed how *little* could be so achieved because of the “unreal” nature of bourgeois democracy. The whole argument for Soviet Power was based on the idea that Parliament was a sham democracy which had to be replaced by real democracy based on workers’ Councils or Soviets.

The personal view of Stalin was one factor in changing strategic thinking. Other influences were the political development of Eastern Europe, the interpretation of statements made by communist leaders there, and the comparisons made with Britain. These were pulled together in 1947 by Kitty Cornforth in a piece of writing unique for this period, in which she analysed the change in the British Party’s strategy. She stated that although in the past the Party had envisaged the struggle for power as a violent one leading to the replacement of parliament and the rest of the old state apparatus with new organs of government, it was necessary to study the question again. There was a new favourable balance of class forces in the world. There was the new road to socialism foreseen by the Communist Parties of the new democracies. She quoted Bienkowski’s speech to the 19th Congress of the British Party in which he described the outlook for Poland as “a peaceful and evolutionary advance towards Socialism”. This was not a reformist view, she argued, because Bienkowski did not see the state as neutral: in the new democracies capitalist power in the state *had* been attacked. But herein lay the difference with Britain, where the roots of capitalist power were essentially untouched. “Hence, unlike the new democracies, we still face the question of how state power is to be taken out of the hands of the capitalist class.” The Economic Plan and new foreign policy that the Party was fighting for would raise the question of class power in a new way.

The struggle for these policies would, she then wrote, require big changes in the state apparatus. To achieve this, new forms of democratic organisation had to be developed “from the factory up”. These would represent accessions of power to the working people. Thus the point of production would still be the focus of the class struggle. But this would not end in the replacement of Parliament by something altogether different. “Power of the working class and all the people who do useful work could be exercised through a new use of Parliament and a purged and democratised State apparatus, backed by new forms of democratic, popular organisation.”<sup>3</sup>

Kitty Cornforth concluded by arguing that this perspective was made possible by the weakened position of the British capitalist class (as shown by

its sell-out to the US), and stronger progressive forces in the world as a whole.

### Effects of Cold War

Communists were influential in many of the governments set up in Europe as a whole immediately after the Second World War, though they tended to be more influential in Eastern Europe. Initially most of these governments reflected a broad spectrum of forces that had resisted the Nazis and helped the Allies. With the onset of the Cold War in 1947-48 the disintegration of these broad-based governments was intertwined with the breakdown of the international alliance. To put it very crudely, communists were pushed out in Western Europe, and non-communists were pushed out in Eastern Europe. At the same time some of the conceptions held by communists in many countries in the previous period were called revisionist and there was a movement towards greater ideological conformity in the international communist movement.

Up to the outbreak of the Cold War it was frequently asserted that advance to socialism could take place without Soviet Power *and* without the dictatorship of the proletariat (see for example *Looking Ahead* p. 90). But as the Eastern European states began to resemble the Soviet Union in that the Communist Parties held absolute power, the necessity of the dictatorship of the proletariat was reasserted. There was also a change of nomenclature: “new democracies” became “People’s Democracies”. It was argued that People’s Democracy was the appropriate form of the dictatorship of the proletariat for the prevailing balance of world forces (which was still held to have changed for the better as a result of the war).

It is not surprising that in the bitter atmosphere of the time a much harsher interpretation of the new possibilities of transition to Socialism was accepted by communists in and out of power. The success of the communists in Eastern Europe in resolving political crises in their favour while in Britain and elsewhere communists were getting a battering only reinforced feelings that there were important lessons to be learned from the experiences of those countries. For example the Czech crisis of 1948 was seen as particularly relevant as an instance of an extra-parliamentary movement defeating the intrigues of reaction in a parliamentary system, but without replacing the democratic institution as such.

In line with these developments the idea of a “British Road to Socialism” became incorporated into a family of People’s Democracies which embraced the existing states of Eastern Europe and a future Socialist Britain in a manner in some ways reminiscent of the period of the Soviet Power strategy.

<sup>3</sup> *The British Road to Socialism, Communist Review*, April 1947, p. 113-18.

### Some Critical Observations

In essence the strategic development discussed so far was a resolution of the Popular Front "problem" by dispensing with Soviet Power. The arguments used to support the new strategic view created further problems, though, because they did not question whether Soviet Power had been a correct aim in British conditions before the Second World War. Sometimes the very existence of the previous strategy was covered up. Even where it was dealt with honestly, as in Kitty Cornforth's article, the need to re-examine the past was obscured by the argument that the new strategy was possible because things had changed as shown by experience in other countries. The capitalist class was said to be *weaker*, the progressive forces were said to be *stronger*.

With hindsight we can see that in Britain at least there were also opposite tendencies. In some ways the changes that took place during the war put the capitalist class in a stronger position. At the same time there were severe weaknesses in the development of working class and socialist forces. The political ideas that captured the radicalisation of the war years were Full Employment, Welfare State and Mixed Economy—not Socialism. Part of the wartime radicalisation was actually the *reconstruction of bourgeois hegemony*, the establishment of new ways of gaining peoples' consent to the continuation of capitalism. This was indeed radical in the sense that it involved the isolation and defeat of the dominant ruling class strategy of the inter-war years, but it was not a sign of weakness.

And where were the forces capable of building new organisations from the factory up that would have represented, in Kitty Cornforth's words, "accessions to working class power"? During the war the Communist Party built up an apparently formidable organisation in the factories but it proved impossible to use this in political action to drive forward the movement in peacetime under the Labour government. Swimming against the tide created by the new form of bourgeois hegemony and the renewed anti-communism and anti-Sovietism was much more difficult than swimming with the tide as had been the case during the war after Germany invaded the Soviet Union.

I'm not suggesting that communists were blind to these problems. *Looking Ahead* and other works of the period were full of trenchant criticisms of the Labour government, pointing out the limited nature of its policies and the need for the labour movement to change its ideas. But the *scale* of the problems had not been appreciated, because of a failure to look again at the system of class power, a system which had proved its strength by pulling the rug from under the Socialist movement just when advance towards socialism seemed certain. Communists continued to operate with a set of ideas

about "how the capitalist class rules" which was not very different from that used to argue the plausibility and indeed the necessity of a frontal, insurrectionary assault on the capitalist state.

### The British Road—First Edition, 1951

The strengths and limitations of the 1951 *British Road to Socialism* stem from the developments already discussed. The kernel of the strategy can be extracted from a section called "People's Democracy—the Path to Socialism". First, a key passage distinguished the BRS from what many people might have thought the policy of the Party to be:

"The enemies of Communism accuse the Communist Party of aiming to introduce Soviet Power in Britain and abolish Parliament. This is a slanderous misrepresentation of our policy. Experience has shown that in present conditions the advance to Socialism can be made just as well by a different road. For example, through People's Democracy, without establishing Soviet Power, as in the People's Democracies of Eastern Europe."

The next sentence asserted that "Britain will reach Socialism by her own road", and it was declared that:

"the people of Britain can transform capitalist democracy into a real People's Democracy, transforming Parliament, the product of Britain's historic struggle for democracy, into the democratic will of the vast majority of her people". (p. 14).

The political force to achieve this transformation was to be a great "Broad Popular Alliance", which would be the social support of a People's Government. It was envisaged that it would be made up of the working people in industry and agriculture together with their families, plus "the great bulk of the clerical and professional workers, the teachers, technicians and scientists, the working farmers, shopkeepers and small businessmen, whose interests are equally threatened by the big landowning, industrial and financial capitalists, and those whose security and future prospects are closely bound up with those of the industrial working class" (p. 13). The main issues expected to act as motors in the creation of the broad alliance were Peace, National Independence (from the US) and a wide-ranging set of economic and social welfare interests. The People's Government would carry out socialist nationalisation, introduce fundamental economic planning, grant national independence to colonies, pursue a peaceful foreign policy and break the political hold of the capitalist class by democratic reforms of state institutions and the media.

This perspective remained essentially unchanged over the first three editions of the BRS. There were

a large number of elaborations and alterations of points of detail but there is no space to go into them here. In any event the preconditions for a Broad Popular Alliance—social and political struggle on a broad front—were largely absent until the late sixties, early 1970s. True, there was a stream of trade union battles. And there were other social movements, e.g. the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in the late 1950s. But it was never possible to link these up into an embryonic Broad Popular Alliance. The range of radical social movements and activities was very narrow, and some which occupy the centre of the stage today were virtually non-existent—for instance the Women's Movement. It should not be forgotten, either, that public activity by communists as communists (as against public activity by communists as members of other organisations) was limited by extreme anti-communism. All these factors restricted the practical political experience of the whole Party, and they can be added to the critical observations made earlier in order to explain the uneven development of the *British Road to Socialism* as a strategy appropriate to specifically British conditions.

#### Political Democracy under Socialism

The first revision of the BRS was made as a direct result of political crisis in the Socialist countries. The 1951 edition said nothing specific about the nature of political rights under Socialism. In fact, because the path to Socialism was called People's Democracy, readers of the 1951 edition could infer that what was meant was something very similar to the Communist absolutism of the People's Democracies in eastern Europe. After the crises in Poland and Hungary in 1956, following closely on Khrushchev's revelations about violations of Socialist legality under Stalin, such an identification of the *British Road* and People's Democracy became untenable. The term People's Democracy was dropped. The section headed "Socialist Democracy" in the 1957 edition of the BRS made it clear that parties other than the Labour and Communist Parties would retain the right "to maintain their organisations, party publications and propaganda, and to take part in elections . . . provided that these parties conform to the law" (p. 23). The heritage of civil liberties built up in centuries of struggle would not only be preserved but extended. In general, "The institutions of a Socialist Britain need to be such as to encourage and keep alive the democratic spirit, encourage criticism from below, discourage bureaucracy and arbitrary decisions from above." (p. 24).

In retrospect these ideas may not seem so fundamentally significant, but they were in the sense that for the first time a change in communist strategy had been brought about by criticisms of existing

practices in the socialist countries, albeit only after the point of political crisis had been reached. Even then, recognition of their significance was delayed for many people in the Party until the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Those who agreed with the Soviet Union in seeing "counter-revolution" in the stirrings of political pluralism during the Prague Spring also began to see more far-reaching implications in the *British Road* than they had before. It would not be too much of a caricature to say that they desired a return to the international conformity and the ambiguity, not to say vagueness, of the 1951 BRS. This atavistic longing reached its height in the debate over the latest revision of the BRS, but was a delayed reaction to changes made as long ago as 1956-57.

#### From Crisis of Socialism to Crisis of Capitalism

The 1967 edition of the BRS did not represent any watershed in communist strategic thinking in the way the other three editions have done. Rather, it was an elaboration of the changes discussed so far. However, it was important for other reasons. It became the focus not only of the inner-Party controversy over Socialist democracy, but also the criticisms of the ultra-left which grew so explosively from 1968. More significant still, for the first time since the BRS strategy was formally adopted in 1951 it was possible to assess its relevance to actual political practice amid the social crisis of the early 1970s industrial militancy, and the rise of new radical social movements. Finally, it was this edition that was measured against the insights gained from the regeneration of marxist political theory which made its main impact on the Party after 1967. In dealing with the development between the 1967 and 1977 BRS I will focus on the two areas where the biggest changes took place—the nature of the broad alliance and the nature of capitalist power.

These two areas are linked. The forces that can be gathered for political change have to be matched to the power to be challenged. How was this done in the 1967 BRS? It was argued that the potential for a Broad Alliance lay among "all those whose lives are immediately affected by policies framed to perpetuate and uphold monopoly capitalism". Who were "all those"? Answer: "workers in factories, offices, professions, working farmers, producers and consumers, owner-occupiers and tenants, housewives, young people and students, pensioners, workers in the peace movement and those active in defence of democracy" (p. 28). This vast array of social forces was prevented from overturning capitalism by the immense powers of the monopoly capitalists, who *controlled* or *conditioned* economic, political and ideological institutions. Every facet of support for the capitalist order

could be traced back to the "same small group" of capitalist puppetmasters. The impression one gets from the 1967 BRS (and even more so from the two earlier editions) is that a vast movement could come into being which would, after sweeping aside the right wing of the labour movement, come face to face with a tiny group of monopoly capitalists. Given that the Broad Popular Alliance could thwart attempts to resort to repression the outcome would be a Socialist parliamentary government, carrying through socialist nationalisation, planning, a peaceful foreign policy and so on.

The development of new social movements whose aims and historical significance could not be reduced to "fighting against the monopolies" created doubts about the sort of Broad Popular Alliance specified above. On the one hand there were some in the Party who resolved their doubts by adopting an "economic" class approach, crystallising the idea of an Anti-Monopoly Alliance as the class essence of the Broad Popular Alliance. On the other hand there were those who realised that the specification of the Broad Popular Alliance in the 1967 edition was ambiguous, but wanted to resolve the problem by defining more clearly the relationships that could exist between class forces and other social movements, such as the women's movement, which are not class-based. Naturally it was also necessary to review the definition of the *aim* of the Broad Popular Alliance (given that, as with the Popular Fronts, it would not arise in the first instance as a purely Socialist movement). The outcome of discussions about the strategic "broad alliance" can be summed up in the fact that the Broad Popular Alliance of 1951-67 was replaced by a Broad Democratic Alliance, not an Anti-Monopoly Alliance, in the 1977 revision.

The second area of major change between 1967 and 1977 BRS's concerns the nature of capitalist power. The view in which this power derives from the abilities of a tiny group of capitalists to *control* and *condition* a huge variety of institutions can be compared with that in which the capitalist class directs or steers society by gaining the *active consent* of other classes (and social groups not based on classes). Capitalist power then becomes a matter of constructing and maintaining social alliances through an ensemble of voluntary institutions such as political parties, trade unions, churches, youth organisations, women's organisations and so on. The capitalist class is connected with such "civil society" institutions in many ways, which cannot be simply summed up as "control", but rather as the leader and organiser of a social alliance. It is this process which produces "rule by consent" in the foreground of a parliamentary democracy such as Britain, though this is always combined with a system of coercion in the background.

Such a view of capitalist power has profound consequences for revolutionary strategy, because it poses the task of defeating capitalist leadership in civil society institutions as well as challenging its state power. It is true that in the first three editions of the BRS *one facet* of this task was present—namely the defeat of the right-wing in the labour movement—but there is far more to the capitalist "broad alliance" than that. Perhaps if the Party had analysed more closely the reasons for the defeat of the 1945-51 Labour Government it would have realised that the right-wing sell-out was only the tip of an iceberg of obstacles created by the reconstructed capitalist leadership in that period. It would have recognised the full measure of the strengths of capitalist power as well as its weaknesses.

Seen in this light, the recent discussion in the Party which led to the 1977 BRS, informed by the experience of the social crisis of the early 1970s, industrial militancy, the rise of new social movements, and the regeneration of Marxist political theory, represents a break in Communist Party history at least as important as the changeover from Soviet Power to BRS after the Second World War. It is now possible to build on a more realistic view of the nature of capitalist power and how it is maintained, and also a better understanding of the nature of the forces that can be brought together to challenge that power.

#### Uneven Development—Conclusions

There have been three main turning points in the development of communist strategy since the early 1940s. The first was the dropping of Soviet Power, which resolved a crucial strategic problem of the Popular Front period. But no-one asked the question of British history that Gramsci asked of Italian history, namely—was there something about the nature of capitalist power in Britain that made Soviet Power unrealistic in the first place? Instead the new strategy was justified by allusions to international experience and the weakness of the capitalist class after the Second World War. The significance of the reconstruction of bourgeois hegemony during the war as a factor offsetting this weakness was not recognised.

The second turning point was a result of political crisis in the Socialist countries in the mid-1950s. The nature of socialist democracy was clarified, and the idea of political pluralism and extended civil rights under Socialism were introduced in the 1957 BRS. The full significance of these changes became apparent to the whole Party only after the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Apart from the changes concerning socialist democracy the first three editions of the BRS contained a similar strategic view, differing in details and degree of elaboration.

The third turning point came in the discussions leading up to the 1977 BRS, when the ambiguity of the specifications of the Broad Popular Alliance and the inadequacy of the notion of capitalist power in the first three editions came under scrutiny.

I hope I have shown that the present BRS can be seen in perspective as the result of a long and complex process which has been contradictory and uneven. This isn't surprising, because the Communist Party is neither monolithic nor omniscient, and history does not pose questions according to the

logical progression of a theoretical scheme. Nevertheless if the Party had been more determined to understand the lessons of British history and less concerned to justify its own past the process might have been less drawn out. The Party might have been less a victim of a lack of relevant political experience if it had asked itself a couple of key questions two or three decades ago! And who's to say that the key questions have all been asked even now? Having said that, the *British Road to Socialism* clearly represents an important historical achievement for the Party and the left.

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## Review:

# “Beyond the Fragments”—what does it offer the left?

Caroline Rowan

The Tory victory in the General Election and the development of a new popular right wing consensus have shown clearly that the left needs to relate its politics more closely to people's everyday lives. The ability of the Tories to do this was largely responsible for their success. The women's movement can play an important part in developing a socialist politics and culture that can counter this because it has always been concerned with lived experience, so *Beyond the Fragments—feminism and the making of socialism* could not have appeared at a more opportune moment.

It is a collection of three essays by Hilary Wainright, Lynne Segal and Sheila Rowbotham, about the relationship between the women's movement and the left. The Introduction by Hilary Wainright and the concluding piece “A local experience” by Lynne Segal, raise general questions in the context of the author's own experience. These questions are discussed at greater length and in a more theoretical way in Sheila Rowbotham's piece “The women's movement and organising for socialism”. For reasons of limited space, I shall concentrate on the latter piece.

While it clearly starts from the need for an alliance between feminism and the left, and the belief that women's liberation can only exist as part of a wider struggle for socialism, the book stresses that this

does not mean the subordination of the Women's Liberation Movement to the left: “The exchange must be between equals and the learning process two-way.” It therefore challenges the assumption which is implicit, sometimes even explicit in socialist politics, that the women's movement needs the left more than the left needs the women's movement. It opens up the debate on socialist organisation and strategy in a way that questions many aspects of traditional socialist politics. Although it does not provide all the answers—and indeed does not claim to—it represents the first substantive statement of what the left can learn from the women's movement.

### Learning from experience

A major contribution of the WLM to left politics has been its insistence on the validity of personal experience, summed up in the now well-worn slogan “The personal is political”. Sheila Rowbotham claims that:

“Our views are valid because they come from within us, and not because we hold a received correctness.” (p 19).

This has broadened the scope of socialism to include far more centrally the quality of life and human relationships.