

# 50 Years Against Imperialism

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Long before the formation of the Communist Party in August 1920 the British working class movement had a proud record of struggle against capitalist exploitation. More than a century ago it played its part in the 1864 International Working Men's Association, though mainly in relation to trade union solidarity.

With the growth of imperialism towards the end of the 19th century came the formation of the Labour Representation Committee in 1900 (from 1906 known as the Labour Party), but in all its 70 years it made no basic analysis of imperialism. The first Fabian manifesto in 1900 (*Fabianism and the Empire*) accepted the existence of the British Empire as "a matter of fact that must be faced". The Fabian influence on official Labour policy has always ignored the common interests of the British workers with the struggle of the colonial peoples for independence and national liberation.

The Communist Party was the first and only political party in Britain which has always recognised that the struggle of British workers is inseparable from the struggle for national liberation, from the necessity of united action of all those oppressed and exploited by British imperialism.

In Britain, the centre of a vast imperialist system, the battle to win this political recognition is not an easy one. In his classic book *Imperialism*, written in 1916, Lenin emphasised the deep roots of reformism and opportunism within the British Labour movement arising from the monopoly position of Britain in the world market and the ability of imperialism to influence the higher-paid British workers and to corrupt Labour leaders with imperialist ideology.

In the discussion on the "National and Colonial Question" at the 1920 Second Congress of the Communist International it was emphasised by Tom Quelch, one of the founders of the Communist Party in Britain, that even "the rank-and-file English workers would consider it treachery to help the enslaved peoples in their revolt against British rule".

It is largely due to the consistent anti-imperialist activity of the Communist Party over the past 50 years that this attitude has changed beyond recognition, and that the Labour movement (especially during the past two decades) has been won over to a much more clear appreciation for a united struggle against imperialism.

Today, the growing struggle for national liberation in all parts of the world meets with a warm response within the British working class movement, and especially among the students and the youth. The issues arising appear more frequently on the agenda of the annual conferences of the trade unions, the TUC and the Labour Party. The Movement for Colonial Freedom (MCF), formed in April 1954 has won the affiliation of many trade unions on a national and district level, of scores of constituency Labour Parties and trades councils, and the adherence of many Labour MPs who wage a ceaseless fight on anti-imperialist issues.

The growing influence of the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) in Britain was recently expressed in the mighty opposition to racialism in South Africa, and the cancellation earlier this year of its racist cricket tour in Britain—as well as racial discrimination in Britain itself. Many exiled leaders of liberation movements are now centred in this country, and their activity and publications are winning increasing support.

After 50 years the Communist Party is no longer alone in making the struggle against imperialism an outstanding issue in British politics. The anti-imperialist tide is rising to a new level, though it needs to rise higher still, with a deeper and more fundamental recognition that the advance to socialism in Britain is inseparable from the common international struggle to end British imperialism.

The Communist Party has the right to be proud of its record over the past 50 years. The younger generation (and even many of the older generation) may know little of this, and it will possibly be of considerable value for the anti-imperialist struggle which lies ahead to give a brief account of its record.

## Early Years

The Communist Party was born in the course of the growing revolutionary tide after the 1917 Russian socialist revolution and the first world war. British workers expressed their solidarity with the new Soviet state, and their opposition to British threats of intervention, even before the formation of the Communist Party—as well as against the infamous 1918 Versailles Treaty, which was a big factor in creating the conditions which led to the growth of fascism in Germany.

British threats of intervention against the Soviet

Union led to a mighty "Hands off Russia" campaign, reaching the stage when even the Trade Union Congress in September 1919 gave an ultimatum to the Government to withdraw its troops from Russia. The campaign led to the formation of Councils of Action, and reached a new intensity in May 1920 when it became known that the Government intended to ship arms on the "Jolly George" for Poland, for use against Russia. Harry Pollitt was in the forefront to prevent this. London dockers refused to load the vessel and the Government was forced to change its plans.

When the Founding Convention of the Communist Party was taking place in August 1920, the Second Congress of the Communist International was being held in Moscow, devoted mainly to the thesis on the National and Colonial Question. This was a basic document which served as a guide in the rising struggle for colonial liberation, and for the strategy of Communist Parties in imperialist countries in the common struggle.

Six months later it was published in English, with an introduction by the Executive Committee of the newly-formed Communist Party. This described the British Empire as an "inexhaustible field of exploitation for surplus capital" and provided "an inexhaustible supply of cheap labour", and that the "comparative prosperity of the British working class is built upon a hideous foundation". It went on to declare:

"There can, therefore, be no truce with the British Empire for the workers . . . they know it stands for a system that is holding them down in common with the workers of a half-hundred different lands".

It was at this time that the British "Black and Tans" were active in Northern Ireland. The outcome of the British strategy of "divide and rule" (the model later for India and other colonies) was the partition of Ireland by the 1921 Northern Ireland Act—for which a heavy price is being paid in recent years. The Communist Party fought strongly against this, and has ever since maintained close ties with the revolutionary movement in Ireland, North and South—especially in the recent struggles.

In the early 1920's the Communist Party was active in many aspects and fields of international solidarity. On the tenth anniversary of the outbreak of the 1914 world war it organised big meetings and demonstrations in all the main centres of Britain. At the same time it organised big campaigns in support of the revolutionary upsurge in China led by Sun Yat Sen, and mass protests and opposition to British threats of intervention and its backing for Chinese reaction, as part of the world-wide campaign of the Communist International under the slogan "Hands off the Chinese Revolution".

It opposed the imperialist Dawes Plan inflicted upon Germany (designed to extract more reparations), protested against the British bombing of civilians in Iraq, demanded the withdrawal of British troops from Egypt and the Sudan, and won a considerable response from British workers and their trade unions against the political trials in India of Dange, Das Gupta, Usmani, and Muzaffer Ahmed who were sentenced at Cawnpore in April 1924 to four years in prison.

In the same month Negro and Indian workers in Georgetown (British Guiana) who were on strike were shot down by British troops. Twelve were killed and many more wounded. The Communist weekly organ, *Workers Weekly*, voiced strong protests from many Labour organisations. It also condemned the claim of the notorious J. H. Thomas that Kenya was being held "as a trust for the natives", and Ramsay MacDonald's refusal to change the political status of Cyprus. Later in 1924 there were similar protests against the arrest of national leaders in Burma, and against the infamous Bengal Special Ordinances under which Indian national leaders were arrested and their trial by jury suspended.

Within Britain itself the trade union movement was rapidly recovering from the defeat of the miners in the 1921 lock-out, and wage-cuts for engineers and others, and big advances were being made towards close relations with the Soviet trade unions. At the 1924 Hull Trade Union Congress a Soviet trade union delegation was greeted with great enthusiasm, and the British TUC was invited to send a delegation to the Soviet Union. The delegation went, and upon its return published a balanced and favourable report, and relations became still closer with the formation of the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee. This advance was a great tribute to the mass work of the Minority Movement (MM), formed early in 1924 to strive for a militant policy within the British trade union movement, and which had the full support of the Communist Party.

### Sixth and Seventh Congresses of CPGB

At the same time the Communist Party was making great strides in clarifying its policy and strategy in the fight against imperialism. It was one of the outstanding discussions at its 6th Congress in May 1924. The resolution on this subject made clear that the Communist Party stood for the right of self-determination of the colonial peoples of the British Empire, and their full right to secession and independence, and went on to declare:

"The continued enslavement of the colonial peoples makes our own freedom in this country absolutely impossible . . . it is necessary in the interests of our own struggle that assistance should

be rendered to the workers in the colonies . . . This Congress, therefore, renews its pledges of solidarity with the struggling colonial workers, and promises the fullest possible assistance in the development of their own struggle for freedom”.

This theme was further developed at the 7th Congress in Glasgow in May 1925, which adopted a thesis on the “Colonial Question and the Empire”, and also a resolution against Imperialism. Presiding at the opening session, Harry Pollitt pointed out:

“The hold of the bourgeoisie upon the British Empire is rapidly weakening. We see this if we look to the East, to Asia, Africa, and elsewhere. In all these places the working class movement is sweeping forward. Millions in Egypt, Iraq, Palestine and Kenya are undergoing a process of exploitation and slavery perpetrated by British capitalism. To these millions this Congress sends fraternal greetings and says: ‘Your enemies are our enemies; we are of one class. We all fight against the British ruling class. We in our sphere will fight against them here at home, and do our utmost to help you in your revolutionary struggle against them . . .’

“The struggle of the colonial peoples all over the world against British imperialism is also our struggle, and we shall help the colonial workers to the best of our ability and power.”

The thesis stressed the identity of interests of the British workers and “the working and peasant masses throughout all countries oppressed by British Imperialism”, and ended with the warning that:

“. . . ‘independence’ will have no real meaning until it is achieved through the overthrow of Imperialism by a united working class movement embracing the peasantry, and all the exploited peoples of the Empire”.

This view was repeated at the 8th Congress in Battersea in October 1926, and was a timely warning in light of the experience of the past two decades during which so many colonies have won their political independence, but still remain under the economic and financial grip of imperialism.

### **TUC—Scarborough and Liverpool**

The Communist Party did not remain satisfied with defining its own political attitude, but strove to win support within the organised Labour movement for its policy. A big advance towards this was made at the 1925 Scarborough TUC in a resolution moved by A. A. Purcell, supported by Harry Pollitt, who followed the notorious J. H. Thomas. The resolution, acclaimed by Congress, reads as follows:

“This Trade Union Congress believes that the domination of non-British peoples by the British Government is a form of capitalist exploitation

having for its object the securing for British capitalists (1) of cheap sources of raw materials; (2) the right to exploit cheap and unorganised labour and to use the competition of that labour to degrade the workers’ standards in Great Britain.

“It declares its complete opposition to Imperialism, and resolves: (1) to support the workers in all parts of the British Empire to organise their Trade Unions and political parties in order to further their interests, and (2) to support the right of all peoples in the British Empire to self-determination including the right to choose complete separation from the Empire”.

If the Scarborough TUC was a step forward the 1925 Liverpool Conference of the Labour Party was a serious step backwards. Not only did it take steps to drive Communists out of the Labour Party, but also adopted a resolution “A Labour Policy for the British Commonwealth of Nations”, which was a complete retreat from the standpoint of the Scarborough TUC. Though admitting the “evils of capitalist exploitation” within the Empire, and the need to safeguard “the natives’ right to land” it relied on the then League of Nations (dominated solely by imperialist powers) to frame a code for the protection of “native rights”, and a resolution on similar lines was adopted at the 1926 Margate Conference of the Labour Party.

### **“Hands off China”**

From 1925 onwards the political trend within the right-wing leadership of the Labour Party became more reactionary. In 1926 the General Council of the TUC betrayed the General Strike, and made fierce denunciations against the Minority Movement and encouraged attacks on the rights of Communists and other militants within the trade unions. The Communist Party fought against this reactionary trend, and did not forget to wage its struggle against imperialism. During 1925 and 1926 it waged a mighty “Hands Off China” campaign, supporting the big strike movement in Shanghai in February 1925, which in May 1925 developed into a mass anti-imperialist movement.

Before his untimely death in 1925 Sun Yat Sen had planned a great northern expedition by the Chinese Revolutionary Army, the aim of which was “not only to overthrow the warlords but also to drive out imperialism upon which the warlords in China depend for their existence”. This expedition was launched in mid-1926, and before the end of that year Hankow had fallen to the revolutionaries, and it seemed that victory was within their grasp. It was then that the British Government used its pressure on the right wing of the Kuomintang to strike against the Communists.

Throughout September 1926 the Communist Party intensified its “Hands Off China” campaign, and at the Bournemouth TUC that year Arthur

Horner moved an emergency resolution of solidarity with the Chinese people, stressing that the danger of intervention was not only against China, but also the Soviet Union. So strong was the growing movement of solidarity that even the 1926 Margate Conference of the Labour Party protested against the bombardment of Wanshien by British naval forces, and "welcomed the national and democratic tendencies among the Chinese people".

In November 1926 the *Workers Weekly* exposed the manoeuvres of the British Government in sending Miles Lampson as its new Minister to China. It declared that the British capitalists:

"... have recognised the inevitable in the victory of the Kuomintang... their policy is subtly changing from that of brute force to the wooing over into the imperialist camp of the 'Right' or anti-Communist wing of the Kuomintang Party".

In December 1926 the Communist Party warned that "the danger of military action against the Chinese Revolution is increased rather than diminished by the latest manoeuvres of the British Government". This was unfortunately true, for in 1927 the Kuomintang (with the full backing of British and US imperialism) turned against the Communists, and there was a massive blood-bath of revolutionaries in many key cities. The counter-revolution won a temporary victory, and it took several years for the Chinese Revolution to regain its strength and to advance again towards its objective.

### The Struggle in India

Together with its solidarity with the struggle in China the Communist Party focused its anti-imperialist activity in support of the national movement against British rule in India until independence was achieved in 1947. It sent a fraternal message of greetings in December 1926 to the Indian National Congress, and in the first part of 1927, Shapurji Saklatvala, Communist MP for Battersea, toured India in a big propaganda campaign.

Saklatvala was a symbol of the close relations between the British Communists and the struggle in India. One of the wealthy Tata family of Indian industrialists, he came to Britain in 1907, and was appalled at the poverty and exploitation within the citadel of imperialism. It was not long before he broke off relations with the wealthy Tatas, became a revolutionary and joined the Communist Party. Adopted as the official Labour candidate for North Battersea in 1922 (before Communists were driven out of the Labour Party), he was a powerful spokesman for Communism, not only for Indian freedom, but on all aspects of the struggle against imperialism.

Well known British Communists like George Allison, Ben Bradley, and Percy Glading went to

India to assist the growth of the revolutionary movement. George Allison was active in building the Indian trade union movement, and was elected chairman of the reception committee of the All-India TUC on the eve of his arrest in 1927, and sentenced to 18 months in prison.

In March 1929, while the infamous Simon Commission appointed by the Baldwin Government was still in India, prominent leaders of the growing revolutionary movement (Ben Bradley among them) were arrested and placed on trial at Meerut. The trial dragged on for years, and savage sentences were imposed in January 1933.

During all these years the Communist Party waged a mighty campaign of solidarity with the national struggle in India. Nor was it alone. The India League (with the still surviving Krishna Menon at its head) won a tremendous response within the Labour movement for the release of the Meerut prisoners. Nehru himself spoke at big meetings and rallies in Britain. R. Palme Dutt's book *India Today*, published by the *Left Book Club* in the 1930's helped to make India a big issue in Britain. After the Second World War it was impossible for British imperialism to hold India any longer, and independence was achieved in 1947—though at the price of partition. R. Palme Dutt made a tour of India, as did Harry Pollitt in 1954, and the close relations of the Communist Party with India's fight for freedom have continued in the new situation which has existed since 1947.

One cannot forget the great contribution of the British Section of the International League against Imperialism, formed in April 1927, to the great solidarity campaign in Britain with the struggle in India—though it was active also against British imperialist oppression in Egypt, in support of the revolt in Palestine, and the struggle for freedom in South Africa. At its conferences fraternal messages and delegates came from India, China, Cyprus, Nigeria, Burma and other countries, and its journal *Inside the Empire* made a big impact.

The Communist party was affiliated to the League, and in November 1929 the Labour Party Executive banned League members from the Labour Party, and the Labour and Socialist International took similar action on an international level. At first Fenner Brockway was chairman of the British Section, and was also on the Executive of the Labour and Socialist International, but after this decision felt he had no option but to resign from his position in the League.

### The Fight Against Fascism

While still active in the struggle for colonial freedom, after Hitler came to power in 1933 the Communist Party put its main emphasis on the fight against fascism—for Hitler's expansionist aims

were also a threat to the colonial world. The Communist Party was foremost in opposition to Italian fascism and the invasion of Abyssinia in 1935, and especially against Italian and German fascist intervention in Republican Spain in support of General Franco.

It was the spearhead of the mighty campaign in Britain against the "non-intervention" policy of the British Government, which was fully supported by the right-wing Labour leaders. The Communist Party was the driving force in recruiting volunteers to form the British Battalion of the International Brigade of which Harry Pollitt himself was the main inspirer. Of the 1,500 British volunteers who fought in Spain, about half were Communists, and YCL'ers as were a similar proportion of the 533 who were killed. Many outstanding Communist leaders, like Ralph Fox, Wally Tapsell, John Cornford, David Guest and others gave their lives in defence of Republican Spain.

At the same time, the Communist Party was in the forefront of the opposition to Mosley fascism in Britain. It was the main force behind the big conferences and huge rallies which won tremendous support throughout the Labour movement. In September 1934 the Mosley demonstration in Hyde Park had almost as many police around it, to keep back an anti-fascist rally many times bigger, and in Belle Vue in Manchester in October the voice of Mosley was drowned in a sea of opposition. All over the country Mosley suffered one serious rebuff after another, the high spot being the complete rout of the Mosleyite marchers at Cable Street in the East End of London in October 1936.

### Second World War and After

Long before September 1939 the Communist Party had fought consistently for a peace policy, and urged that Britain and France should join with the Soviet Union in a peace front which could halt the advance of fascism and defeat its aggressive aims. The Chamberlain Government did its utmost to prevent this, and the outcome was the outbreak of the second world war.

After the defeat of France in 1940 Britain was left alone to fight Nazi Germany, but with the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 it won a mighty ally in building a powerful front against Hitler's armed forces. In Churchill's words, the Soviet armed forces "tore the guts" out of the mammoth forces of Nazi Germany, and were extremely popular among the vast majority of the British people and the whole civilised world. The Communist Party threw its whole weight into the war effort, and the alliance with the Soviet Union stimulated war production and breathed a spirit of confidence and enthusiasm into the struggle to defeat fascism.

After nearly six long years the war was over. In the 1945 General Election two Communists (William Gallacher and Phil Piratin) were elected to Parliament, with a narrow miss for Harry Pollitt in Rhondda East. Both Gallacher and Piratin did a tremendous job in Parliament on anti-colonial issues. Not only did they intervene in every debate on this subject (especially on China, India, Egypt, Palestine, and South Africa) but put down a multitude of questions on all aspects of British colonial policy. Delegations and individual leaders from the colonies coming to London sought out the two Communist MPs whom they knew would readily support their struggle. Gallacher had first been elected in 1935 and by this time was an experienced Parliamentary fighter.

During 1945 and 1946 the Communist Party strongly attacked British Government policy in relation to Greece, by which British troops were used to prop up the forces of reaction which had supported fascism during the war. It demanded the unconditional withdrawal of troops from Egypt, supported the struggle for independence in Sudan, pressed for free elections in Iraq, and protested against what became known as the "Ghetto Bill" in South Africa.

It welcomed the formation of the Kenya African Union, and the serious efforts being made to encourage the growth of the liberation movement in Tanganyika and Uganda, supported the demand for the right to form African trade unions in north and southern Rhodesia, and strongly attacked the UN decision to place South West Africa under the trusteeship of racialist South Africa.

### International Conference

In the early part of 1947 it organised an international conference of Communist and Workers' Parties in the countries of the British Empire. Delegates came from Australia, Canada, South Africa, India, Burma, Ceylon, Malaya, Cyprus, Palestine, both parts of Ireland, and from West Africa. This is part of the final conference declaration:

"We condemn the continued occupation of Greece, the subjection of Cyprus and Malta, the holding down of Palestine, the bolstering up of reactionary feudal puppet regimes in Iraq and Transjordan, the retention of British troops in Egypt, the categorical refusal to recognise the national independence of India and Burma, and the maintenance and use of British troops in these countries to suppress their freedom movements, and the military aid given by British imperialism to crush the liberation struggle of the peoples of Indonesia and Vietnam . . . We condemn the denial of elementary rights and liberties, the widespread practice of racial and colour discrimination in Africa and other British Empire territories. We

demand the repeal of all oppressive and discriminatory legislation, ordinances and laws; the provision of popular legislative assemblies based on universal suffrage, freedom of speech, movement, association and organisation, and declare our full support to these peoples in their aspirations for freedom and the right of self-determination”.

The conference was almost prophetic in its warning of the consequences of imperialist policy on Palestine when it emphasised:

“We warn all Jewish people that Zionism . . . diverts Jewish people from the real solution of the problem of anti-Semitism . . . and to oppose the Zionist conception which seeks to put them in the position of being an instrument of imperialism in the Middle East”.

### **Solidarity Continues**

From 1948 onwards the Communist Party focused its anti-colonial policy on the freedom struggle in Malaya and in the Gold Coast (now Ghana) for which it strove to win support in Britain. In February 1948 police fired on a peaceful demonstration in the Gold Coast, killing 22 Africans and wounding 228 others. The Communist Party waged a widespread protest campaign in Britain, and two years later the British Government was forced to consider the first steps towards internal self-government in the Gold Coast, and in 1951 Kwame Nkrumah was released from prison to become the first African chief Minister.

The struggle was not confined to the Gold Coast. In November 1949 forty striking coal miners at Enugu in Nigeria were shot and killed, and many more wounded. All they were fighting for was a daily wage of 5/10d. At that time the 21st Congress of the Communist Party was being held in Manchester, and one of its first acts was to adopt an emergency resolution of protest, calling upon the Labour Colonial Secretary to dismiss the British Governor and Chief of Police, grant the miners' demands, and to pay adequate compensation to the wounded and to the dependants of the slaughtered miners.

The resolution called upon the British Government to withdraw British troops from Nigeria, to repeal the anti-democratic and anti-working class legislation, and to take steps for the holding of democratic elections based on universal suffrage to elect a Nigerian constituent assembly.

In October 1949 the Chinese Revolution achieved its great victory. Having failed to crush it US imperialism vented its spleen a year later with its war of aggression against North Korea, with British armed forces being sent to assist. This ferocious attack was fiercely resisted by the heroic North Koreans, who received massive aid from the new China and many thousands of volunteers. The

Communist Party waged a big campaign of solidarity in Britain against a heavy barrage of hostile propaganda and the attempt to shield the actions of the Labour Government, which the Tory Government continued after the 1951 elections.

One of the most sordid actions of the Labour Government in January 1950 was to invite Seretse Khama, acclaimed as king by the tribal kgotla of the Bamangwato people in Bechuanaland (now Botswana) to come to London for discussions. An attempt was made to bribe him with an annuity of £1,100 to stay out of his country for five years. His sole “crime” was his marriage to a white woman, falsely alleged to be resented by the Bamangwato people, but in reality the objection came from Dr. Malan, then Prime Minister of racist South Africa.

This aroused a mass protest movement in Britain in which the Communist Party was extremely active. Seretse Khama refused the bribe, and messages of support for the campaign from a host of Labour and progressive organisations in Britain, and from the whole colonial world. The pressure for the return of Seretse Khama “without strings” went on for nearly three years, when he and his wife were allowed to return, and he is now President of independent Botswana.

From 1948 onwards the Communist Party was most active against the shameful war in Malaya. Early this year some British soldiers confessed they had been ordered to shoot innocent civilians in the Bawang and Batang Kali areas of North Selangor, and the British press and TV treated this as a great revelation. The fact is that the *Daily Worker* gave it full publicity at the time.

The Communist Party and the *Daily Worker* waged a consistent campaign for many years against this gruesome war, against the bombing of villages and revolting massacres of Malaysians, distributed hundreds of thousands of leaflets, published pamphlets “STOP THE WAR IN MALAYA”, and succeeded in getting thousands of protest resolutions from the Labour and progressive movement.

### **Africa on the March**

From 1952 onwards the liberation movement advanced with increasing speed, and spread from Asia throughout the Middle East, extended to the whole continent of Africa, and over to the Caribbean and the whole of Latin America. Africa was in the forefront, and during the next decade most African countries won their independence.

In racist South Africa the “Suppression of Communism Act” was applied more ruthlessly, and all who opposed *apartheid* were labelled Communists. Many hundreds (later mounting to thousands) were put on the banned list. African

trade unions were suppressed, together with white trade union leaders who tried to organise Africans. Progressive journals were banned, and pass laws more rigidly enforced.

This led to the Sharpeville massacre of March 1960 when 56 Africans (including women and children) were killed and 162 wounded. Within a few days the Communist Party produced an AFRICAN SPECIAL which soon had a mass sale, and throughout Britain there was an enormous protest campaign, leading later to the formation of the "Anti-Apartheid Movement", which for many years has had the full support of the Communist Party—as well as the South African Communist Party which has waged such an heroic struggle.

Before its defeat in the 1951 General Election the Labour Government had prepared the way for the formation of a Central African Federation in which Africans in North and South Rhodesia and in Nyasaland would be brought more firmly under white minority rule, and the Tory Government went ahead with this project. The Communist Party waged a big campaign against this, supporting the African demand for "one man one vote", equal democratic rights, and for political independence.

In October 1952 more than 37,000 African copper miners in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) waged a massive strike for an increase of 2/6d. in the daily wage. After several weeks they won a substantial increase, but in later years further strikes took place, closely associated with the demand of the African National Congress for an end to the Central African Federation. Further strikes in 1955 won new concessions. The Communist Party was active in winning solidarity in Britain. The Scottish and Welsh miners sent £1,000 to the strike fund, as did the National Executive of the NUM.

The liberation struggle in Egypt reached a new stage with the victory of the national revolution in July 1952, led by the "Free Officers' Committee", headed by Neguib and Nasser, when King Farouk was forced to abdicate. In the first stages the situation was somewhat confused, and later Neguib was replaced by Nasser as the leading figure. The Communist Party (though critical of some of its features, especially the persecution of Communists) welcomed this great change.

A new situation arose in October 1956 when Britain and France joined with Israel in an aggressive war launched against Egypt after the nationalisation of the Suez Canal. The MCF had taken the initiative in booking Trafalgar Square for a protest demonstration, and the pressure upon the Labour Party became so strong that it agreed to co-operate in the protest, in which the most applauded speech was from an Egyptian Communist, then studying in Britain.

In September 1952 the British Government struck its blow against the Kenya African Union, arrested Jomo Kenyatta and other leaders, and waged a ferocious attack against what was described as the "Mau Mau" movement—in reality an armed struggle which expressed the determination of the Africans to fight for land and against white minority rule. The Communist Party initiated the formation of a Kenya Defence Committee, which waged a widespread campaign of solidarity and won considerable support throughout Britain for the African struggle in Kenya.

Kenya remained in the forefront of the Communist anti-colonial campaign in Britain for some years. Protests were made against the sentences on Kenyatta and other leaders, with a strong demand for the withdrawal of British troops and an end to the terror. There was a national day of protest on December 9, 1953 and many thousands of leaflets, together with a pamphlet "The Truth about Kenya" were distributed.

The African liberation struggle was now foremost in the solidarity campaigns being organised in Britain. In May 1953 the Communist Party published a manifesto for mass distribution in the factories and streets, ending with the demands:

*Withdraw British Troops from Kenya.*

*Oppose Central African Federation.*

*End the Ban on Seretse.*

*Protest against Fascism in South Africa.*

*Support the Nigerian Fight for Independence.*

Ghana independence was achieved in 1957, Senegal, Guinea, Mali and most ex-French colonies in 1958 and later, then Nigeria in 1960, the ex-Belgian Congo, and then Tanganyika, Uganda, Kenya, Malawi—so that by the mid-1960's only the southern part of Africa remained under white minority rule. After the great "Congress of the People" in South Africa in 1955 (which brought the liberation movements into one front with a united programme) came the infamous Treason Trial in 1956 in which 152 prominent men and women were charged. The trial went on into 1957, and in the end had to be abandoned, and the prisoners released.

The sweeping tide of the liberation struggle made 1960 the "Africa Year". At the 26th Congress during Easter 1959 R. Palme Dutt moved an emergency resolution of solidarity with the heroic struggle being waged. There had been a mass upsurge in Nyasaland (now Malawi), Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) and in Southern Rhodesia against the Central African Federation, and for "one man one vote".

In Nyasaland 49 Africans were shot and killed, over 100 wounded and 600 put in prison without trial. More than 500 in Southern Rhodesia were put in prison and about 100 in Northern Rhodesia. The Congress resolution made a strong call to:

*End the Emergency—Withdraw the Troops.*

*Release all African Prisoners.*

*Withdraw the Fascist Laws.*

*Universal Franchise for all Africans.*

*Recognise the Right to Independence.*

In January 1960 African liberation was the main subject at an Executive meeting of the Communist Party. The report was published in full in *World News*, and gave a strong impetus to the solidarity campaign in support of Patrice Lumumba and Congo independence, for the dissolution of the Central African Federation, the withdrawal of charges in the Treason Trial in South Africa, and support for the struggle in Kenya.

### **Guyana**

Early in 1953 the Peoples Progressive Party, then led by Cheddi Jagan and Forbes Burnham, won an outstanding victory in the first democratic elections in British Guiana. After 133 days in office the British Government sent warships and troops and deposed the new Government. This gave rise to a tremendous mass movement of protest throughout Britain, involving many national trade unions, scores of Labour MPs, and protests even by the TUC and Labour Party.

Two years before, I had become secretary of the International Department, and I well remember the morning the news came of the despatch of British troops and warships. Harry Pollitt was always first in the office, and when I arrived had already prepared a draft statement for next day's *Daily Worker*. Harry took a keen interest in the protest campaign, and the Communist Party responded in a mighty solidarity campaign. Soon, Burnham broke away from the PPP, but the PPP won in the two succeeding elections until British fraudulent manoeuvres enabled Burnham to drive the PPP from office.

At this time also, British imperialism was striving to impose a Caribbean Federation for the separate territories, which would enable it to strengthen its grip. The "Caribbean Labour Congress", which was also active in Britain urged independence for the separate territories as an essential condition before there could be a real democratic federation. The Communist Party supported this view, and within a couple of years the much-vaunted Federation broke down, largely due to Jamaican opposition.

### **Middle East**

Together with its support for the struggle in Egypt the Communist Party strongly opposed the repression in Iraq, and in May 1953 made a call for protest resolutions against the arrest and subsequent secret execution of four Communist leaders in Iraq. In July 1958 came the Iraqi national revolution, when the dictatorship of Nuri Said

and King Faisal was overthrown by the progressive armed forces led by General Kassem. For a time the masses of workers and peasants rejoiced in a new-found freedom, but the Communist Party was denied legal recognition. Step by step the situation worsened, until in 1963 there was a Baathist coup in which Kassem was killed, after which there was even greater persecution of the Communists.

The Communist Party has always had close ties with Iraq, and has consistently organised solidarity actions in Britain with its Communist Party and the liberation struggle. Iraqi students in Britain have always been an active force in these campaigns.

### **1954 Conferences**

The consistent efforts to strengthen the international front against imperialism reached a new stage in April 1954 when Communist and Workers' Parties within the sphere of British imperialism met in London. Delegates came from Australia, Canada, Cyprus, Northern Ireland, the Irish Republic, and from other countries (Malaya, Jamaica, India, Trinidad, Ceylon, Nigeria, Mauritius and British Guiana) there were students and workers then residing in Britain.

From Sudan and Iraq there were official delegates who found their way illegally into Britain but were unable to speak in the open sessions, and their speeches were read out for them. There were also fraternal messages from the Communist Parties in India, Ceylon and Pakistan, and the veteran Wallace-Johnson was present to extend greetings from West Africa. There was also a young British soldier who gave a vivid account of the methods of British mass slaughter in Kenya.

R. Palme Dutt made a powerful opening statement, and veterans like J. B. Miles (Australia), Tim Buck (Canada), Andrew Rothstein, Ben Bradley, and Bob Stewart took part in the discussion. There were emergency resolutions on Malaya, Kenya, and British Guiana, and Harry Pollitt made a rousing closing speech, moving a manifesto on the theme of building "the mighty alliance of our peoples against the reactionary alliance of American and British imperialism".

Another big event in 1954 was the formation of the "Movement for Colonial Freedom" (MCF), inspired mainly by the untiring work and initiative of Fenner Brockway. It was a new departure in united front movements in Britain insofar as it was based mainly on the affiliation of trade unions, trades councils, and constituency Labour Parties, together with the sponsorship of many scores of Labour MPs, trade union and other progressive leaders. It has always been open to members of all political parties, and individual Communists have always been active in its ranks, and in recent years



within its leadership. Though based on affiliations it is the individual membership which is the driving force in its activity and campaigns.

During the past decade the national liberation movement has made enormous strides forward in all parts of the world. One cannot hope to give an adequate account of the vastly increased activity for solidarity in Britain during this period. It had now reached a higher level than at any time in the past 50 years. With the achievement of political independence on so vast a scale the forms and methods of solidarity action have changed in many respects, but the armed struggle is still going on in southern Africa and other parts of the world, not to mention the heroic struggle being waged in Vietnam.

In my position as Secretary of the International Department for 18 years (1951-69) I know from my own experience of the long-standing close relations between the Communist Party and leaders of liberation movements in all parts of the world. Before political independence they made contact with us during visits to London, and when on delegations to discuss constitutions for political independence.

The Communist Party since its formation has always expressed its solidarity with the liberation struggle in Vietnam. It was among the first to condemn, early in 1955, the preliminary stages of United States intervention, in violation of the 1954 Geneva conference decisions.

### Support for Vietnam

In recent years the expansion of the United States war of aggression has aroused nationwide opposition. In reaching this stage the Communist Party and Young Communist League have been to the forefront—in demonstrations, mass meetings, petitions, lobbies to Parliament, and raising money for the medical fund. From 1965 onwards solidarity with the liberation struggle in Vietnam has been a prominent feature in all the National Congresses of the Communist Party, and in 1965 John Gollan Bill Alexander and John Mahon made a fraternal visit to North Vietnam.

The Communist Party has co-operated with the Movement for Colonial Freedom, British Peace Committee, CND, British-Vietnam Committee, and all progressive forces in the Labour and Co-operative Movement in arousing opposition to United States aggression and winning solidarity for the liberation struggle in Vietnam. This rising mass pressure has been successful in getting the annual conferences of the TUC and the Labour Party to support the demand for the complete withdrawal of United States armed forces as the first essential step towards peace in Vietnam.

The *Morning Star* preserves the splendid record

of the former *Daily Worker* in voicing solidarity with all aspects of the liberation struggle, supplemented by the weekly journal *Comment*, the monthly journal *Marxism Today* and the *Labour Monthly*. Moreover, in our educational work, schools and seminars on imperialism and the liberation struggle have been a prominent feature.

Today, the Communist Party has close relations with Communist Parties which exist in the newly-independent states, and with liberation movements where they do not exist. In recent years fraternal delegates have spoken at our Congresses from the African National Congress of South Africa, the Zimbabwe African Peoples Union, and the South West African Peoples Organisation. All of them pay tribute to the scope and character of our activity to organise solidarity in Britain.

Within the present world-wide struggle for liberation there are three main sectors—the heroic struggle in Vietnam, the Arab struggle for liberation, and the fight for liberation in southern Africa. On all three fronts the Communist Party strives to win solidarity in Britain.

This does not mean we can be satisfied. Britain is still the centre of a vast imperialist system, and we cannot advance on the British road to socialism unless there are stronger bonds with the liberation struggle in all parts of the world. There is still an urgent need throughout the Party for a higher level of political understanding and conviction on the need for this united struggle, and this is still the big lesson for us on this 50th anniversary.

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