

National Liberation for Whom? The Postcolonial Question, the Communist Party of Great Britain, and the Party's African and Caribbean Membership*

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ABSTRACT: The Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) had a long tradition of anti-colonial activism since its foundation in 1920 and had been a champion of national liberation within the British Empire. However, the Party also adhered to the idea that Britain's former colonies, once independent, would want to join a trade relationship with their former coloniser, believing that Britain required these forms of relationship to maintain supplies of food and raw materials. This position was maintained into the 1950s until challenged in 1956–1957 by the Party's African and Caribbean membership, seizing the opportunity presented by the fallout of the political crises facing the CPGB in 1956. I argue in this article that this challenge was an important turning point for the Communist Party's view on issues of imperialism and race, and also led to a burst of anti-colonial and anti-racist activism. But this victory by its African and Caribbean members was short-lived, as the political landscape and agenda of the CPGB shifted in the late 1960s.

The 25th Special Congress of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), held in April 1957, is most well-known as the Congress that witnessed the fallout from the events of 1956 that divided the international Communist movement – Khrushchev's Secret Speech outlining the crimes of the Stalin era and the Soviet invasion of Hungary. These events led to over 8,000 people leaving the CPGB between 1956 and 1958 (out of a total

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membership of 33,095 registered in February 1956).¹ However, another controversy played out at the 1957 Special Congress, one that would have a lasting impact upon the Party, but which has been sidelined by the focus on the events of 1956. This Congress saw many of the Party's African and Caribbean members call for the Party programme, *The British Road to Socialism*, to be revised in relation to the CPGB's commitment to anti-colonialism. Prior to this, the programme was non-committal about the postcolonial future of Britain's former colonies and supposed that these colonies would become self-governed entities remaining within the British Commonwealth. At the 1957 Congress, many of the Party's African and Caribbean members pushed for the Party to recognize that national liberation of the colonies would mean that these countries were free to choose their own diplomatic relationships, and would not be automatically tied to the Commonwealth. This rebellion by the African and Caribbean members of the Party demanded that the CPGB leadership should pay more attention to the desires of those seeking independence from Britain and respect the agency of colonial subjects in the decolonization process. Episodes such as this remind us that the Communist Party was, in the words of Richard Cross and Andrew Flinn, "more [...] a collection of individuals and cross-currents, and less [...] an undifferentiated whole undistinguished by levels of commitment, discipline or senses of loyalty and belonging".²

Although highly critical of Labour's post-war imperialist endeavours in places such as Malaya, Burma, and Palestine, the CPGB – just like Labour – assumed that in the wake of the decolonization process and the granting of self-government, these former colonies would be eager to join a mutually beneficial trade network that would utilize previously established imperial links. For Labour, this was the multiracial Commonwealth,³ while for the CPGB, this was the "new, close, fraternal association of the British peoples

1. For accounts of the events of 1956, see: Willie Thompson, *The Good Old Cause: British Communism 1920–1991* (London, 1992), pp. 99–113; Francis Beckett, *Enemy Within: The Rise and Fall of the British Communist Party* (London, 1998), pp. 124–140; David Renton and James Eaden, *The Communist Party of Great Britain since 1920* (Houndmills, 2002), pp. 108–112; John Callaghan, *Cold War, Crisis and Conflict: The CPGB 1951–68* (London, 2003), pp. 61–84; Steve Parsons, "Nineteen Fifty-Six: What Happened in the Communist Party of Great Britain?", *Revolutionary History*, 9:3 (2006), pp. 72–83; Terry Brotherstone, "1956 and the Crisis in the Communist Party of Great Britain", *Critique*, 35:2 (2007), pp. 189–209.

2. Richard Cross and Andrew Flinn, "Biography meets History: Communist Party Lives in International Perspective", *Science & Society*, 70:1 (2006), p. 14.

3. See: Neville Kirk, "Traditionalists and Progressives: Labor, Race, and Immigration in Post-World War II Australia and Britain", *Australian Historical Studies*, 39:1 (2008), pp. 53–71; Kenneth O. Morgan, "Imperialists at Bay: British labour and Decolonization", *Journal of Imperial & Commonwealth History*, 27:2 (2008), pp. 233–254; David Cheesman, "Bustkell and the Empire: The House of Commons Prepares for the Scramble from Africa, 1946–56", *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 47:3 (2009), pp. 248–266.

and the liberated peoples of the Empire”, as outlined in *The British Road to Socialism*.⁴ This idea of informal empire was shared by many within the British labour movement, As Louis and Robinson have argued, a “benign imperial image” was used to “assuage the latent forces of anti-imperial opinion”.⁵ While greatly championing national liberation in the colonies, the CPGB felt that some form of economic relationship needed to continue to maintain standards of living in Britain. It was only in the mid-to-late 1950s that this informally imperialist assumption was challenged, predominantly by those Party members who had travelled to the UK from the colonies.

This article explores how this rebellion by the CPGB’s African and Caribbean members, joined by leading Party figure, R. Palme Dutt, created a turning point for the Party in its relationship with its membership from the colonies and its views on the national liberation movements in the colonial sphere. The rebellious members demanded that the CPGB take the idea of post-colonialism seriously and led the Party to become practically involved in a number of anti-colonial and anti-racist campaigns in the late 1950s and early 1960s, such as joining the Movement for Colonial Freedom (MCF) and the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM), as well as the campaign for legislation against racial discrimination and opposition to immigration controls for Commonwealth citizens.

The article primarily uses the internal party correspondence between the West Indian Committee and the International Department, as well as the published correspondence between various members in the party press, such as the *Daily Worker* newspaper and the weekly *World News*. Before the establishment of the Party’s National Race Relations Committee in the early 1970s, this episode in the mid-1950s is one of the few times that we see the opinions of the ethnic minorities in the CPGB explicitly expressed, in either the archival material or in the party publications.⁶ The papers of the West Indian Committee, alongside the internal Party newsletter the *Colonial Liberator*, which make up a small section of the documents of the Party’s International Department (held within the CPGB Archives in Manchester), provide a rare insight into those African and Caribbean members who joined the Party in the first decade of the post-war period, otherwise missing in the Party’s records. As Ann Stoler has pointed out, we must recognize the

4. CPGB, *The British Road to Socialism* (London, 1951), p. 12.

5. Wm. Roger Louis and Ronald Robinson, “The Imperialism of Decolonization”, *Journal of Imperial & Commonwealth History*, 22:3 (1994), p. 464.

6. Another episode that we see this explicit expression of the viewpoint of the Party’s ethnic minority membership (particularly the Party’s Indian membership) is in the documents relating to the dissolution of the Party’s nationality branches in 1966. See: Andrew Flinn, “Cypriot, Indian and West Indian Branches of the CPGB, 1945–1970: An Experiment on Self-Organisation?”, *Socialist History*, 21 (2002), pp. 47–66.

“silences” in the archival record⁷ and the lack of documents relating to the CPGB’s non-white membership in the Party’s internal records probably reflects their minority position within the Party at the time.

The article will focus on the African and Caribbean members of the Party as it was the West Indian Committee that led the charge to change the wording in *The British Road to Socialism* in 1957–1958, and because most of the Party’s colonial membership in the late 1940s and early 1950s came from West Africa and the Caribbean. It was not until the late 1950s and early 1960s that there was a significant influx of South Asians into the Party, in line with the establishment of the first national Indian Workers Association in 1958.

I will argue that the victory at the 1957 Congress was, nevertheless, short-lived, as international events (such as the Sino-Soviet split and the winding down of the decolonization process) changed the political landscape, as well as the Party seeing its membership dramatically decline in the aftermath of 1956, including its African and Caribbean membership. As Kevin Morgan, Gidon Cohen, and Andrew Flinn have written (citing West Indian CPGB member Trevor Carter), “[t]he end result [...] was that through one cause or another the ‘vast majority’ of the party’s black members left in the decade after 1956”.⁸

THE COMMUNIST PARTY’S ANTI-COLONIAL TRADITIONS

As a number of scholars have discussed, the CPGB had been heavily involved in anti-colonial activism since its foundation in 1920.⁹ As part of the Communist International (Comintern), and as the Communist Party at the epicentre of the largest imperial power at the time, the CPGB attempted to coordinate and promote anti-colonialism and solidarity with national liberation movements throughout the British Empire. Throughout the interwar period, the focus of the Party’s anti-colonial activism was India, with significant resources and personnel sent to India, along with extra assistance from the Soviet Union and the Comintern in Berlin, to help the communist movement on the sub-continent, with the Communist Party of India founded in 1925. At one stage, this led in 1929 to the imprisonment by

7. Ann Laura Stoler, “Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance”, *Archival Science*, 2:1 (2002), p. 100.

8. Kevin Morgan, Gidon Cohen, and Andrew Flinn, *Communists and British Society 1920–1991* (London, 2007), p. 205.

9. John Callaghan, “The Communists and the Colonies: Anti-Imperialism Between the Wars”, in Geoff Andrews, Nina Fishman, and Kevin Morgan, *Opening the Books: Essays on the Social and Cultural History of the British Communist Party* (London, 1995), pp. 4–22; Marika Sherwood, “The Comintern, the CPGB, Colonies and Black Britons, 1920–1938”, *Science & Society*, 60:2 (Summer 1996), pp. 137–163; John Callaghan, “Colonies, Racism, the CPGB and the Comintern in the Inter-War Years”, *Science & Society*, 61:4 (Winter 1997–98), pp. 513–525.

the British authorities of several British and Indian anti-colonial activists, including one CPGB member, in what became known as the Meerut Conspiracy Trial.¹⁰

During the so-called “Third Period” (roughly between 1928 and 1934), when the Comintern encouraged greater working-class militancy and non-cooperation with social democratic parties, it also promoted stronger anti-colonial activism (but not with “bourgeois” elements of the national liberation movements). The rhetoric of the “Class Against Class” position of the Comintern was highly motivating for many communists worldwide – initiatives such as the League Against Imperialism (LAI) and the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (ITUCNW) were established, but the practical effect that it had upon most Communist Parties (including those in the colonies and dominions) was, overall, quite negative.

The ITUCNW was able to mobilize many black communists in the United States, the Caribbean, and Africa, but was undermined by a lack of investment by the Comintern in the organization and the general sectarianism of the era. Hakim Adi argues that the ITUCNW pursued a “Pan-Africanist approach” in uniting black workers from across the globe, but, as part of the sectarianism of the Third Period, was wary of other Pan-African groups that followed the teaching of Marcus Garvey.¹¹ Holger Weiss has argued that the ITUCNW attempted to foster a radical transnational solidarity between those of African descent in the Americas and those in Africa, but was hindered by the “class-before-race” ideology of the Comintern that left many of the ITUCNW’s black activists disillusioned.¹² In the relative “success story” of Pan-Africanism in the interwar period, Weiss has written, the ITUCNW can be seen as “a mere episode, even a cul-de-sac”.¹³

Similar problems befell the League Against Imperialism, set up in 1927 to build links between the international communist movement and the anti-colonial movements that were beginning to emerge in the interwar period. Frederik Petersson shows that by 1933, intra-party rivalries and shifting directives from Moscow had derailed the LAI. It was effectively wound up when its base in Berlin was threatened by the installation of the Nazi government (although it existed on paper until 1937).¹⁴

10. See articles on the Meerut trial by Ali Raza, Michele L. Louro, Carolien Stolte, Franziska Roy and Benjamin Zacharia in the special issue of *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 33:3 (2013), pp. 210–377.

11. Hakim Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism: The Communist International, Africa and the Diaspora, 1919–1939* (Trenton, NJ, 2013), pp. xxi–xxii, pp. 77–78.

12. Holger Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic: African American Agency, West African Intellectuals and the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers* (Leiden, 2013), p. 10.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

14. Frederik Petersson, “Hub of the Anti-Imperialist Movement: The League Against Imperialism and Berlin, 1927–1933”, *Interventions*, 16:1 (2014), pp. 49–71.

The sectarianism of the “Third Period” also affected the CPGB, both in its domestic and international work, but as John Callaghan has argued, the Party still managed to have a robust anti-colonial programme during a politically difficult time.¹⁵

In 1935, the Seventh Congress of the Comintern pronounced a new direction for the international communist movement and the position of “Class Against Class” was replaced by the Popular Front, which directed communists to work with other progressive bourgeois and social democratic forces against fascism and war.¹⁶ Some scholars, such as Neil Redfern, have claimed this greatly hindered the anti-colonial movements as the Western Communist Parties, particularly the CPGB, were encouraged to align themselves with the British bourgeoisie, who were predominantly pro-empire. This broke the anti-colonial alliances built during the 1920s.¹⁷ For example, Marika Sherwood has described the history of the Communist Party’s anti-colonial work as “a sorry tale”, alleging that despite “ample information [...] of oppression [of colonial subjects] in Britain and in the colonies”, the Party “as a whole [...] did nothing”.¹⁸ Callaghan, replying to Sherwood’s criticisms, called them “baseless and extremely misleading” and while acknowledging that the Party had “undoubted shortcomings as an anti-imperialist force”, argued that it actually had “its overworked tentacles in every likely field of colonial contacts”, but was just “not very good at recruiting any section of the population in inter-war Britain”.¹⁹ Pointing to the amount of coverage given to colonial matters in the Party press in the 1920s and 1930s, Callaghan’s argument is more persuasive and as Smith has written, small membership numbers and limited resources, along with poor timing, “constituted problems for the Party’s anti-colonial work” in the interwar period, despite the intentions of the CPGB’s activists.²⁰

Better timing presented itself at the end of World War II, when the situation had changed dramatically and the national liberation movements across Africa and Asia were buoyed by the precarious position of the

15. Callaghan, “The Communists and the Colonies”, pp. 18–19.

16. Georgi Dimitrov, *The United Front Against Fascism: Speeches at the Seventh Congress of the Communist International* (Sydney, 1945).

17. Neil Redfern, “British Communists, the British Empire and the Second World War”, *International Labor and Working Class History*, 65 (Spring 2004), pp. 117–135. For an alternative view, see: Noreen Branson, “Myths from Right and Left”, in Jim Fyrrth (ed.), *Britain, Fascism and the Popular Front* (London, 1985), pp. 121–124.

18. Sherwood, “The Comintern, the CPGB, Colonies and Black Britons, 1920–1938”, pp. 137–163.

19. Callaghan, “Colonies, Racism, the CPGB and the Comintern in the Inter-War Years”, pp. 513, 520.

20. Evan Smith, “‘Class Before Race’: British Communism and the Place of Empire in Post-War Race Relations”, *Science & Society*, 72:4, October 2008, p. 459.

European powers in the late 1940s. Despite this, some of the Western Communist Parties still abided by the non-confrontational Popular Front outlook adopted over the last decade, disparagingly referred to as “Browderism” after the position taken by the CPUSA’s General Secretary Earl Browder in the early 1940s.²¹ However, communists in other parts of the world, primarily in Asia, were forging ahead and became heavily involved in national liberation movements in countries, such as China, Korea, India, Indonesia, Indochina, and Malaya. This policy of confrontation was heightened in 1947 when the Soviets announced the “two camps” thesis,²² claiming that there were irreconcilable differences between the imperialist/capitalist Western bloc and the anti-imperialist/communist Soviet bloc. This hostile approach by the Soviets at the outbreak of the Cold War pushed most Communist Parties to the left, even though the CPGB was far less revolutionary in this period (working at this time towards developing the democratic path to socialism thesis outlined in *The British Road to Socialism*) than other Western communists. Some within the national liberation movements in the colonies, such as in India, alongside some other Communist Parties, such as the Australian Communist Party, declared that this approach weakened the British party’s anti-colonial resolve.²³ The CPGB continued to insist that anti-colonial politics was central to its programme and that “as the Party in the ruling centre of the Empire”, it held “the greatest responsibility [...] to combat the vicious and harmful policies of imperialism”.²⁴

LEFT NATIONALISM AND THE POST-WAR CPGB

One of the criticisms made about the Communist Party of Great Britain in the early post-war era, particularly from the left, is that during the Popular Front period and the World War II, the CPGB draped itself too heavily in the Union Jack, with left nationalism overtaking its previous proletarian internationalism.²⁵ With the publication in 1947 of the pamphlet *Looking*

21. See: Noreen Branson, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain 1941–1951* (London, 1997), pp. 85–87; Neil Redfern, “A British Version of ‘Browderism’: British Communists and the Teheran Conference of 1943”, *Science & Society*, 66:3 (Spring 2002), pp. 360–380.

22. See: Andrei Zhdanov, “Report to the Conference of the Nine Parties”, *World News and Views*, 1 November 1947, pp. 493–502.

23. See the correspondence between the Communist Party of Australia and the British Party in the CPGB archives, CP/CENT/INT/34/02, Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Manchester, as well as “Exchange of letters between the Australian and the British Communist Parties”, *World News and Views*, 31 July 1948, pp. 332–339.

24. R. Palme Dutt, “Political Report to the Conference of the Communist Parties of the British Empire”, in CPGB, *We Speak for Freedom* (London, 1947), p. 24.

25. Paul Flewers, “From the Red Flag to the Union Jack: The Rise of Domestic Patriotism in the Communist Party of Great Britain”, *New Interventions* 6:2 (1995), available at: <http://www>.

Ahead by the Party's General Secretary Harry Pollitt,²⁶ it became manifest that in the late 1940s the CPGB had started to envisage a "British road to socialism", to be built upon the democratic and parliamentary structures that were unique to Britain and which culminate in the Party's manifesto in 1951.

During this period, the Party was keen to demonstrate its patriotic credentials. Even before the outbreak of the Cold War, it was eager to show that it was "loyal" to Britain and was not merely an agent of Moscow. It also fed into an emerging anti-Americanism where the Party played up its fight for "independence" from American imperialism.²⁷ In several major Party documents, the subject of "communist patriotism" was discussed. In 1948, J.R. Campbell, editor of the CPGB's *Daily Worker* newspaper, remonstrated with critics for saying that the CPGB was "not a British Party", writing:

It is a queer kind of patriotism that bleats about the British Way of Life, but rejects the possibility of our great people, with their own skill, their own resources, discipline and working-class leadership, working out their own salvation in the modern world.²⁸

To Campbell, patriotism was not about "wrapping the Union Jack around oneself to conceal the dollar sign" or the "desire to oppress others", but a "willingness to work for the freedom, welfare and happiness of the common people of this land", and under this definition of patriotism, the Party claimed "to be the patriotic British Party above all others".²⁹ Harry Pollitt, in a 1952 pamphlet titled *Britain Arise*, made a similar appeal to "all patriots and lovers of peace in Britain" and declared that "Britain can be great, strong and independent once the American shackles are broken and friendly relations established with all peace-loving countries".³⁰ It seemed, as Ian Birchall has argued, that "American – not British – imperialism was the main enemy".³¹

While promoting national liberation in the colonies, this patriotic appeal of Pollitt's late 1940s material and original *The British Road to Socialism* sometimes sent out mixed messages about the Party's allegiances and priorities in building a socialist Britain. In trying to allay the fears of working class Britons who had some attachment to the traditional British Empire, the Communist Party at times downplayed the importance of the

whatnextjournal.co.uk/Pages/Newint/Redflag.htm, last accessed 22 October 2014; Sam Bornstein and Al Richardson, *Two Steps Back: Communists and the Wider Labour Movement 1935–1945* (Monmouth, 2007), pp. 20–56.

26. Harry Pollitt, *Looking Ahead* (London, 1947).

27. See: Derek Kartun, *America – Go Home!* (London, 1951); John Callaghan, *Rajani Palme Dutt: A Study in British Stalinism* (London, 1994), pp. 239–242.

28. J.R. Campbell, *A Socialist Solution for the Crisis* (London, 1948), p. 8.

29. Campbell, *A Socialist Solution for the Crisis*, p. 9.

30. Harry Pollitt, *Britain Arise* (London, 1952), p. 10, 13.

31. Ian Birchall, "Vicarious Pleasure?": The British Far Left and the Third World, 1956–79", in Evan Smith and Matthew Worley (eds), *Against the Grain: The British Far Left from 1956* (Manchester, 2014), p. 191.

anti-colonial struggle, which then disheartened Party members from the colonies. The prime example of this was in the section on national independence in the 1951 edition of Party's post-war programme, *The British Road to Socialism*, which stated:

The enemies of Communism declare that the Communist Party, by underhand subversive means, is aiming at the destruction of Britain and the British Empire. But it is a lie, because it is precisely the Tories and the Labour leaders who are doing this by their policy of armed repression and colonial exploitation.³²

This statement seemed to go against the pronouncements of the Communist Party since the 1920s and despite the practical limitations to the Party's anti-colonial work, it is difficult to dispute that it had campaigned against imperialism for several decades. Dutt, the CPGB's chief theoretician on anti-colonial issues, argued that the Communist Party wanted to "replace the present relations of domination, enslavement and hostility between the peoples of the present Empire" with a relationship built on "friendship, national independence and equal rights".³³ Dutt claimed that their aim was not "to spread disruption and division between the peoples of the Empire",³⁴ but to re-evaluate the relationship on a more equal footing. For Dutt, the policy of the CPGB since the 1920s was not "smash the Empire", but "liberation for all the peoples of the Empire"³⁵ – although this distinction seemed to imply, for many of the Party's members from the colonies, that the CPGB favoured maintaining some form of imperial network after self-government was achieved in the colonial sphere. For Dutt, the Party would not "seek to *impose* any form of association", but believed that the newly independent former colonies would want to enter into "a *voluntary* association" and based on the "Leninist-Stalinist theory of the national question and the right to self-determination", he emphasised that "the principle of the right of secession is not the same thing as the desirability of secession in a given case".³⁶ Although the Party had maintained since the 1930s that some form of relationship between Britain and its former colonies was necessary to provide food and raw materials for the British people, Dutt emphasized in his 1951 article "The Communist Programme and the Empire" that the primary reason for a continued "close fraternal association" was a military one:

The grounds for this proposal lie in the present world situation, with the dominant aggressive role of American imperialism in the world of imperialism [...]

32. CPGB, *The British Road to Socialism* (London, 1951), p. 11.

33. R. Palme Dutt, "The Communist Programme and the Empire", *World News and Views*, 10 March 1951, p. 114.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 114.

35. *Ibid.*

36. *Ibid.*, Italics are in the original text.

This fight [against Anglo-American imperialism] requires close association and co-operation for victory, not only in the winning of national independence, but also *after liberation* in preserving the national independence from American imperialist aggression.³⁷

Many were not convinced by Dutt's argument and were unimpressed with the statement in *The British Road to Socialism*. George Hardy, a prominent anti-colonial activist within the Party who had worked for the Comintern in Canada, Germany, and South Africa,³⁸ wrote in 1957 that this line on not aiming to destroy the British Empire "gave rise to many grave misgivings among many people, including Communists, in ex-colonial and existing colonial countries".³⁹ In response to the position outlined in the Party's manifesto, the International Department's West Indian Committee asserted "we are against Empire, and are for the destruction of the Empire. This is not a lie".⁴⁰ From this point, it can be seen that there was a conflicting approach between the Party leadership, as expressed in *The British Road to Socialism*, and that of its African and Caribbean members, articulated in this case (and in 1957) by the West Indian Committee.

THE COMMUNIST PARTY AND RECEPTION OF POST-WAR MIGRATION

At the end of World War II, Britain faced the massive challenge of post-war reconstruction, which demanded a large increase in labour. The resulting labour shortage was promptly filled by immigration. From June 1948 onwards, Britain experienced large-scale immigration of workers from the British Commonwealth. Immigration from the Commonwealth, first from the West Indies, then complemented by migration from West Africa and the Indian sub-continent, was assisted by the introduction of the 1948 British Nationality Act, which assured that all citizens within the Commonwealth would have British subject status, retaining the legal right to enter, settle, and work in Britain.⁴¹

The docking of the *SS Empire Windrush* on 22 June 1948 at Tilbury with 492 West Indians has become recognized as a symbol for the commencement of large-scale black immigration, described by Mike and

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 114–115. Italics are in the original text.

38. George Hardy, *Those Stormy Years: Memories of the Fight for Freedom on Five Continents* (London, 1956).

39. "Two Views on "The British Road to Socialism"", *Daily Worker*, 18 March 1957.

40. Cited in, Flinn, "Cypriot, Indian and West Indian Branches of the CPGB", p. 59.

41. John Solomos, "The Politics of Immigration Since 1945", in Peter Braham, Ali Rattansi, and Richard Skellington (eds), *Racism and Anti-Racism: Inequalities, Opportunities and Policies* (London, 1992), p. 9.

Trevor Phillips as “the irresistible rise of multi-racial Britain”.⁴² Between 1948 and 1953, 14,000 West Indians entered Britain to fill the labour shortage.⁴³ By the late 1950s, migration from the West Indies had been overtaken by the number of migrants from the Indian sub-continent, before the introduction of immigration controls for Commonwealth subjects in 1962.

The Communist Party was one of the few political organizations that openly welcomed Commonwealth migrants in to Britain in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s, describing them as “brothers in the fight for a better life” (See Fig. 1).⁴⁴ Reporting for the *Daily Worker* on the *Windrush*'s landing, CPGB journalist Peter Fryer wrote, “five hundred pairs of willing hands” had arrived in Britain, “every one of whom was eager to work”.⁴⁵ The Communist Party welcomed these immigrants, emphasizing that the reason they came was “unemployment and low wages” back in the Caribbean.⁴⁶ The reason these immigrants had come to Britain, the Party explained, was “because life has become impossible for them in their own country – after 300 years under British rule”.⁴⁷ In a follow-up article written a fortnight later, Fryer positively wrote that “all but 30 of these [immigrants had] found work”.⁴⁸ Fryer did recognize that ‘some Jamaicans [had] [...] come up against colour prejudice’, although he depicted that it was experienced “from a café proprietor here, a landlady there” and not the widespread prejudice against black people that Fryer wrote of in his later history.⁴⁹ The Communist Party acknowledged that racial discrimination was evident in Britain, but for the most part, this was attributed to a “prejudiced, stupid and sometimes vicious minority”, identified as “fascists”, “Tories and employers”, and “Leaders of the Government”.⁵⁰ This largely absolved the working class from being responsible for acts of racial discrimination as race prejudice was largely seen as “a conscious part of the policy of the most reactionary sections of British capitalism”.⁵¹ However, the Party did admit that “amongst a minority of workers, some racial feelings still exist”.⁵²

42. Mike Phillips and Trevor Phillips, *Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain* (London, 1998).

43. Dilip Hiro, *Black British, White British: The History of Race Relations in Britain* (London, 1992), p. 331.

44. CPGB, *Brothers in the Fight for a Better Life* (London, 1954).

45. *Daily Worker*, 23 June 1948.

46. *Ibid.*

47. Phil Bolsover, *No Colour Bar in Britain* (London, 1955), p. 4.

48. *Daily Worker*, 14 July 1948.

49. *Ibid.*; Fryer, *Staying Power*, p. 374.

50. Bolsover, *No Colour Bar in Britain*, p. 10.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

52. CPGB, *Brothers in the Fight for a Better Life*, p. 11.

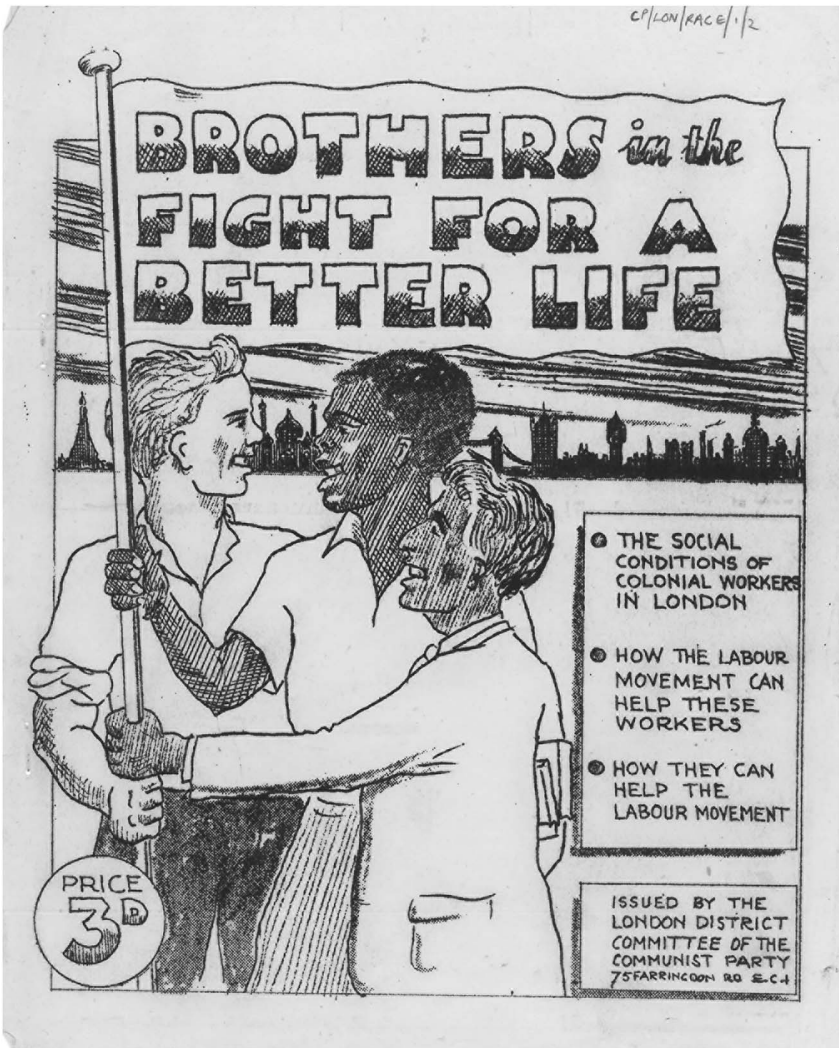


Figure 1. A pamphlet produced by the CPGB's London District Committee in the mid-1950s. Along with the International Department, the LDC was the most enthusiastic section of the Party in engaging with colonial migrants.

People's History Museum, Manchester. Used with permission.

Instead, the Party continually presented the arrival of migrants from across the British Commonwealth as a chance to create practical links of solidarity with colonial workers. Maud Rogerson, a member of the Party's Africa Committee, wrote in *World News and Views* in 1949, "Events are demonstrating the identity of interest of British and colonial peoples, and

especially where colonial and British workers and students are thrown together, new solidarity actions are taking place.”⁵³ Furthermore, in the 1955 pamphlet, *No Colour Bar in Britain*, the CPGB welcomed immigration from the Commonwealth, claiming that the arrival of “colonial workers” was a “great opportunity before British working people”.⁵⁴ While the CPGB hoped to welcome migrants from the Commonwealth into the Party and the British labour movement, the two quotes above demonstrate that in the mind of the ordinary party member, there was a dichotomy between the *colonial* worker and the *British* worker – even though both were British subjects. As Satnam Virdee has argued, these migrant workers from the colonies were seen as “racialized outsiders” at the periphery of the labour movement, but were actually an integral and long-standing part of the British working class.⁵⁵

The Party did recruit a considerable number of colonial migrants, unlike the Labour Party, which had problems throughout the 1950s in recruiting any African-Caribbean or South Asian people. Steven Fielding has reported that as late as 1964, a busy inner-city Constituency Labour Party, like Stockwell in London, where a large migrant population resided, could record a “coloured membership” of twenty.⁵⁶ While the CPGB were more successful in recruitment, its migrant membership lingered on the peripheries of the Party, only taking part in the Party’s various committees dedicated to colonial affairs and rarely having a chance to direct policy or influence the Party’s overall strategy. As Fielding and Andrew Geddes have described, the “political marginalisation of black immigrants” in the Labour Party in the post-war period, black migrant workers were treated by the British labour movement, including the Communist Party, “as ‘objects of’ policy”, rather than political actors.⁵⁷

THE PARTY’S ANTI-COLONIAL INTERNATIONALISM IN THE 1950s

While debates raged in the Party over its position on decolonization and post-imperial relations, at the practical level, the Party was heavily involved in anti-colonial activism in the Caribbean, West Africa, Southern/Eastern Africa, and South Asia, linking with national liberation and communist movements in these regions. Without the Comintern providing a direct link to the independence struggles, the CPGB became an influential leader for various anti-colonial organizations across the British Empire.

53. Maud Rogerson, “Colonial and British Workers Stand Together”, *World News and Views*, 9 April 1949, p. 176.

54. Bolsover, *No Colour Bar in Britain*, p. 3.

55. Satnam Virdee, *Racism, Class and the Racialized Outsider* (Houndmills, 2014), pp. 2–3.

56. Steven Fielding, “Brotherhood and the Brothers: Responses to “Coloured” Immigration in the British Labour Party c. 1951–1965”, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 3:1 (1998), p. 92.

57. Steven Fielding and Andrew Geddes, “The British Labour Party and “Ethnic Entryism”: Participation, Integration and the Party Context”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 24:1 (1998), p. 61.

These organizations “acquired the habit of looking to London for guidance” and “in the absence of direct links with Moscow, the CPGB remained the nearest authoritative resource”.⁵⁸ For example, in 1952, the newly reformed South African Communist Party requested discussion for the “establishment of contacts and rendering of support” from the Soviet Union through the CPGB and the Soviet Embassy in London.⁵⁹ In his study of the inter-war League Against Imperialism, Petersson described Moscow and Berlin as the organizational centres of the Comintern’s anti-colonial movement, where policy was developed and communicated to the international communist movement.⁶⁰ In the post-war era, London and Paris replaced Berlin as the imperial metropolises from which Moscow’s solidarity with the anti-colonial and national liberation movements was expressed, although both cities had acted already as hubs for anti-imperialist political activism throughout the inter-war period.⁶¹

In the Caribbean, strong links were formed with the Guyanan People’s Progressive Party (PPP) and when there was a coup in 1953 against the PPP, several of its leading members came to London.⁶² These PPP exiles made connections with the CPGB, but also with other Caribbean people who fled to the United States and had joined the CPUSA.⁶³ These exiles included Frank Bailey, Ranji Chandrasingh, Cleston Taylor, and, most famously, Claudia Jones, a West Indian-American member of the CPUSA, who had been expelled from the United States to Britain in 1955 and had several confrontations with the British Party leadership.⁶⁴ For the rest of the Caribbean, the Communist Party primarily supported the work of the Caribbean Labour Congress (CLC), which pushed for a West Indian Federation and Dominion status in the British Commonwealth.⁶⁵ Many of the CPGB’s West Indian members also joined the London Branch of the CLC, with Billy Strachan serving as secretary for both the CPGB’s West Indian Committee (WIC) and

58. John Callaghan *Rajani Palme Dutt: A Study in British Stalinism* (London, 1993), p. 256.

59. Vladimir Shubin, *ANC: A View from Moscow* (Bellville, 1999), pp. 34–35.

60. Frederik Petersson, *Willi Münzenberg, the League Against Imperialism and the Comintern, 1925–1933* (New York, 2013).

61. Marc Matera, *Black London: The Imperial Metropolis and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century* (Oakland, CA, 2015); Michael Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis: Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third World Nationalism* (Cambridge, 2015).

62. Morgan, Cohen, and Flinn, *Communists and British Society 1920–1991*, pp. 203–204.

63. *Ibid.*, pp. 203–204.

64. See: Marika Sherwood, *Claudia Jones: A Life in Exile* (London, 1999); Bill Schwarz, “Claudia Jones and the *West Indian Gazette*: Reflections on the Emergence of Post-Colonial Britain”, *Twentieth Century British History*, 14:3 (2003), pp. 264–285; Carole Boyce Davies, *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones* (Durham, NC, 2008), pp. 167–189.

65. “Caribbean Federation: Draft Statement”, January 1956, p. 7; ICS 158/14/1, Billy Strachan Papers, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, London.

the CLC's London Branch, and Ranji Chandisingh who was a CPGB member and President of the branch.⁶⁶

In the West African region, the CPGB was also important for training potential communist movement leaders in a region where no Communist Parties previously had existed. As Hakim Adi has shown, the Communist Party's International Department worked closely with members of the West African Students Union in London and started to build a cadre of West Africans, primarily Nigerians, who were supposed to take their Marxist teachings back to their homelands to help build national liberation movements there.⁶⁷ However, Adi shows that despite fostering these links, "British members took little interest in West African affairs, and West Africans little interest in British political life."⁶⁸ While most of the West Africans that came into contact with the CPGB were from Nigeria, Kwame Nkrumah, was also in close contact with the Party (as well as anti-Stalinists C.L.R. James and George Padmore) in the late 1940s while staying in London. Once in power as Prime Minister of independent Ghana (formerly the Gold Coast), he remained in contact with some Party members, such as Emile Burns.⁶⁹ In East Africa, the Party made significant links with the liberation movement in Kenya and the Kenya African Union, showing a strong interest in land reform and highlighting the terror undertaken by the British in the name of counter-insurgency during the 1950s.⁷⁰ From these networks of solidarity formed between the CPGB and national liberation movements across the Empire/Commonwealth, it is important to highlight that the International Department, in many cases, tried not to segregate activists from different regions from cross-collaborating, but attempted to emphasize a sense of internationalism amongst those in came into contact with. An example of this was a statement of solidarity from the CLC's London Branch, signed by Billy Strachan, that declared:

When we West Indians raise our voices in defence of the KENYA Africans, we are only defending a common front that faces the supreme enemy, IMPERIALISM. The people of KENYA need our support and every single action against the open aggressors is another nail in the coffin of a corrupt decadent system that is dying, and the death-throes are dangerous [...]

The British workers will only save their country, IF they UNITE with the colonial liberation movements, and DEMAND independence for KENYA, all British colonies & the WEST INDIES.⁷¹

66. Letterhead of the CLC London Branch, n.d., ICS 158/28/1, Billy Strachan Papers.

67. Hakim Adi, "West Africans and the Communist Party in the 1950s", in Andrews, Fishman and Morgan, *Opening the Books*, pp. 175–194.

68. *Ibid.*, p. 191.

69. Marika Sherwood, "Kwame Nkrumah; The London Years, 1945–47", in David Killingray (ed.) *Africans in Britain* (London, 2012), pp. 164–194.

70. Callaghan, *Cold War, Crisis and Conflict*, p. 135.

71. Billy Strachan, "Statement on Current Events in Kenya, 1952", 27 October 1952, p. 4, ICS 158/28/1, Billy Strachan Papers.

However, this expression of solidarity between national liberation movements across the British Empire, with the Communist Party in Britain as a coordinating force at its centre, was transformed into an assumption that in the post-colonial era, a form of “fraternal association” between (a socialist) Britain and its former colonies would be desirable.

THE CPGB’S PERCEPTION OF POST-IMPERIAL RELATIONS

An issue arose from the assumption by the Party that, in the post-colonial era, Britain’s former colonies would want to retain some form of relationship with their former ruler and agree to the forms of trade suggested by the Communist Party to be “mutually beneficial”. In the era of post-war decolonization, the Communist Party’s policy was that for the “further advance of British industry and standard of living”, Britain, hopefully under a socialist form of government, had to enter a “new, voluntary, fraternal association” with the former colonies, “coming together with equal rights for *their mutual benefit*, exchanging their products on the basis of value for value and without exploitation”.⁷² This was based on the premise, developed during the inter-war period, that Britain, if free of its colonies, would still require raw materials and goods from its former colonial territories and the assumption that these former colonies would want to be involved in trade with its former colonial power and become consumers of British-made goods. A 1938 pamphlet by J.R. Campbell stated that granting self-determination to the colonies “would not deprive the British workers’ government of the possibility of obtaining colonial food-stuffs, and raw materials in exchange for British manufactured products”,⁷³ while a 1933 book by Ralph Fox stated:

Not only would the granting of freedom to the Colonies mean that every factory in England would be kept busy supplying them with textiles and articles of consumption, but it would also mean that the industrialisation of these countries would for many generations keep British heavy industry working to capacity.⁷⁴

When this policy of mutual co-operation was first devised in the “Third Period” during the early 1930s, there was an assumption that the collapse of capitalism was imminent and that socialism was going to be established in Britain and across the newly liberated Empire. This worldwide revolution was, for the Party’s General Secretary Harry Pollitt, the basis of “fraternal comradesly exchange” between Britain and its former

72. John Mahon, “New Perspectives for Unity in the British Labour Movement”, *Modern Quarterly*, 8:4, Autumn 1953, p. 223 (emphasis added).

73. J.R. Campbell, *Questions & Answers on Communism* (London, 1938), p. 12.

74. Ralph Fox, *The Colonial Policy of British Imperialism* (London, 1933), p. 118.

colonies – “our socialist coal, railway lines, ships, socialist cotton goods, and machinery, in exchange for socialist raw materials and foodstuffs”.⁷⁵

This assumption, that an informal imperial relationship between Britain and its former colonies would continue after decolonization, was entrenched in the International Department’s outlook throughout the 1940s, even as the decolonization process seemed to be quickening in the post-war era. Dutt wrote in his 1949 book *Britain’s Crisis of Empire*:

the solution for the British people and for the colonial peoples lies through the complete ending of the colonial system, the radical reorganisation of economy on a non-imperialist basis, and *the fullest development of productive resources and mutually beneficial economic relations of Britain and the former colonial countries* [...] (my emphasis)⁷⁶

In the months before the publication of Dutt’s book, he wrote an article for *World News and Views*, in which he acknowledged that this position might be criticized by the Party’s members from the colonies and other Communist Parties within the Empire/Commonwealth. He noted that there was “sometimes a tendency to present this positive perspective of mutually beneficial future relations [...] as if this implied a project of some specific future economic-political grouping” or that this proposed “association of nations” would merely “replace the existing Empire”.⁷⁷ Dutt added that this proposal by the CPGB “could easily arouse justified questioning [...] as to the genuineness of our programme of full liberation” and admitted that this conception could be “actually harmful” to the Party.⁷⁸ However, Dutt downplayed these problems in discussions of the Party’s anti-colonial outlook over the next few years.

Despite the reservations conceded by Dutt, the Party’s position was reiterated in the first version of *The British Road to Socialism* in 1951 and, as mentioned above, Dutt wholeheartedly supported the line in the Party press. *The British Road to Socialism* outlined a proposal for a “new, close, fraternal association of the British peoples and the liberated peoples of the Empire”, in order to “promote mutually beneficial economic exchange and co-operation”.⁷⁹ This exchange would ensure Britain obtained “normal supplies of [...] vital food and raw materials” and, in return, the former colonies would receive “the products of British industry”.⁸⁰ This “somewhat unequal exchange” had been part of the Communist Party’s anti-colonial programme since the early 1930s. Marika Sherwood has

75. Harry Pollitt, *The Road to Victory* (London, 1932), p. 34.

76. R. Palme Dutt, *Britain’s Crisis of Empire* (London, 1949), p. 14.

77. R. Palme Dutt, “The Crisis of British Imperialism (Part II)”, *World News & Views*, 6 November 1948, p. 493.

78. *Ibid.*

79. CPGB, *The British Road to Socialism* (London, 1951), p. 12.

80. *Ibid.*

argued that it was part of the Party's latent imperialism that it had not considered that the "newly-independent countries might choose to purchase their capital and consumer goods elsewhere" or "develop their own industries".⁸¹

Trevor Carter has noted that the "fraternal association" suggested in the 1951 edition of *The British Road to Socialism* was not the most "politically logical kind of relationship" for the colonies, where a "Central or South American country which had become socialist would have greater real links with a socialist West Indies" than Britain.⁸² But Harry Pollitt compared this "fraternal association" to the relationship between the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc countries, stating "you cannot go anywhere in Peoples' China, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Albania, and the German Democratic Republic without being struck by the volume of assistance that has been given to the peoples of all these countries by the Soviet Union".⁸³ This analogy with the Soviet Bloc was used elsewhere in the Party literature, but in one instance, Dutt did state that it would be "incorrect to draw parallels with the USSR since the conditions are basically different", stating that "there is no common geographical basis for maintaining future special associations of the totality of nations comprising the present Empire", unlike that which existed in the Soviet Union.⁸⁴ But like the other reservations acknowledged by Dutt in this particular 1948 article, they were soon put aside as Dutt argued for that "close fraternal association" in the Party press and other publications.

As mentioned previously, Dutt suggested in a 1951 article that the main reason for this "new, close fraternal association" was military and part of maintaining a unified defence against American imperialism. But the decolonization process and the balance of the Cold War shifted greatly between the time of *The British Road to Socialism's* first publication (at the height of the Korean War) and in 1957 (after the Bandung conference and the Suez Crisis). This shift had a huge impact upon the Party's anti-colonial outlook.

THE SPECIAL CONGRESS OF 1957 AND THE REBELLION BY THE WEST INDIAN COMMITTEE

The "special" Twenty Fifth Congress of the CPGB was held from 19–22 April 1957 at Hammersmith Town Hall. Since revelations were made in the Western press of Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev's admission to the crimes of the

81. M. Sherwood, *Claudia Jones*, p. 64.

82. Trevor Carter, *Shattering Illusions: West Indian in British Politics* (London, 1986), pp. 59–60.

83. Harry Pollitt, "The National Independence of the Colonies", *World News*, 10 July 1954, p. 544.

84. Dutt, "The Crisis of British Imperialism (Part II)", p. 493.

Stalin era at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February 1956, a sizeable minority within the Party were in opposition to the CPGB leadership. The Party leadership announced the Special Congress to quell this opposition and channel it into formally organized committees that could be overseen by the Executive Committee. In May 1956, the EC conceded the need for further investigation into the Party's internal democracy and announced the creation of two Commissions – the Commission on *The British Road to Socialism* and the Commission on Inner-Party Democracy. The creation of this commission of *The British Road to Socialism* gave the CPGB's African and Caribbean members, primarily through the West Indian Committee, the opportunity to challenge the imperialist attitudes towards post-colonialism that existed within the Party.

The origins of the West Indian Committee are, as Andrew Flinn has written, difficult to trace,⁸⁵ but it probably emerged out of the Party's Colonial Information Bureau, established after the winding up of the League Against Imperialism. Many of the Party's West Indian membership came in the late 1940s, during the initial wave of post-war migration from the Commonwealth and many had been trade union and political activists in the Caribbean before coming to the UK. Thus, the International Department created the West Indies Committee to promote a wider engagement in West Indian politics amongst the diaspora community in Britain.⁸⁶ The Committee was probably established in 1948 and produced a journal titled the *West Indies Newsletter*,⁸⁷ while the post-war *Colonial Liberator* was produced by a joint Africa and West Indian Sub-Committee.⁸⁸ Trevor Carter explained that the role of the Committee was to “participate in Executive Committee discussions relating to racism or solidarity work on the various independence struggles”, as well as assist the significant number of West Indian students who were joining the Party for both social and political reasons.⁸⁹

As part of the reforms proposed by the Party leadership during the crisis of 1956, a commission was put in charge of redrafting *The British Road to Socialism* to be ratified at the 1957 Special Congress and it was then that the West Indies Committee (WIC) challenged the Party leadership at the *national* level. Hakim Adi notes that the West African (Nigerian) branch of the Communist Party also submitted a resolution to amend *The British Road to Socialism*'s section on the colonies, objecting to “what many saw as

85. Flinn, “Cypriot, Indian and West Indian Branches of the CPGB”, p. 56.

86. Morgan, Cohen, and Flinn, *Communists and British Society 1920–1991*, p. 204.

87. Editions of the journal between January 1949 and November 1950 can be found in the file: CP/CENT/CTTE/20/04, LHASC.

88. See: *Colonial Liberator*, 1/2 (1951), CP/LON/RACE/01/03, LHASC.

89. Carter, *Shattering Illusions*, p. 56.

attempts to propose a kind of ‘socialist commonwealth’, but this was not as successful as the WIC’s resolution.⁹⁰

The WIC challenged the proposal of a “new, close, fraternal association” of Britain and its former colonies as outlined in the manifesto’s 1951 edition. Dutt and other Party members admitted that the 1951 version of *The British Road to Socialism* had not been well received amongst the Party’s African and Caribbean members or by representatives of the CPGB’s sister parties in the Commonwealth. But it is also possible that this controversy over the Party’s manifesto represented wider frustrations that the Party’s African and Caribbean members had with the Communist Party and its broader membership. Several scholars have noted that a number of West Indian and West African members of the CPGB complained about racism within the Party and that traditional imperialist prejudices, which affected most of British society, could also be found amongst white Party members.⁹¹ In the two months before the controversy was publicly played out at the Special Congress, a report was drawn up for the International Affairs Committee on the topic of West Indian migrants in Britain, which was critical of the Party’s approach to these newly arrived migrants. The report was anonymously written, although Marika Sherwood has suggested that it was written by Claudia Jones.⁹² The report claimed that the Party’s anti-racist activity did “not appear to have penetrated deeply into the Party membership” and that outside of London, “political activity in this field is seriously neglected”.⁹³ The result of this inactivity, the report continued, was that “many Party members [...] have ideas about ‘quota schemes’ for coloured workers” and that “no clear stand is being made for equal rights”, which “underline[d] the urgent need for ideological conviction and clarity on this matter”.⁹⁴ The report then declared:

What is equally important is to relate our propaganda for equal rights in Britain with solidarity action with the struggle in the colonies, bringing out that the final solution depends on all colonies achieving national independence and so providing the essential condition to transform their backward economies and provide work in their own countries.⁹⁵

This fractured relationship between the Communist Party leadership and its African and Caribbean members, particularly from the West Indies and West Africa, loomed over the debates about the issue of postcolonial foreign

90. Adi, “West Africans and the Communist Party in the 1950s”, p. 188.

91. Carter, *Shattering Illusions*, pp. 55–63; Sherwood, *Claudia Jones*, pp. 67–71; Hakim Adi, “Forgotten Comrade? Desmond Buckle: An African Communist in Britain”, *Science & Society*, 70:1 (January 2006), p. 34.

92. Sherwood, *Claudia Jones*, p. 74.

93. “West Indians in Britain”, February/March 1957, p. 6. CP/CENT/CTTE/02/04, LHASC.

94. *Ibid.*

95. *Ibid.*

relations in *The British Road to Socialism* and is probably one of the reasons why the issue was subject to such a heated debate, especially compared to the other events of 1956.

It was the term “close fraternal association” that the WIC objected to. The Committee asserted that it was objectionable to people in the colonies because it:

- (a) Does not take into consideration that the freed colonies may wish to *associate* more *closely* with other countries for geographical and other reasons, e.g. Malaya.
- (b) Smacks of imperialism in a new way [...] It is necessary to recognise the acute distrust which colonials have of British imperialism and the feeling which exists that *no* British Government can be trusted to treat colonials or coloured people fairly.⁹⁶

“Instead of proposing a *close alliance*”, the WIC stated, “we should think in terms of *fraternal relations*, which the former colonies could enter into with any and all countries which respect their equal rights”.⁹⁷ Whilst a long-standing member of the Party leadership and agreeing with the majority position on most issues during the debates in the lead-up to the Special Congress, Dutt supported this amendment suggested by the WIC and advocated for a change in the wording of *The British Road to Socialism*. As Raphael Samuel wrote in the 1980s, in many instances the ideal of democratic centralism overrode the inner-party democracy of the Communist Party with “[r]esolutions at Party Congress [...] adopted unanimously” and “key decisions [...] settled beforehand”,⁹⁸ but in this case, the WIC was probably more successful because Dutt championed their argument.

In a document outlining his position, written in August 1956, Dutt said that the “fraternal association” proposed in 1951 was based on the assumption of “a parallel victory of the British working people and the colonial peoples and the carrying forward of the common victory to forms of co-operation following the victory”, referring to Stalin’s statement of “the victory of one is impossible without the victory of the other”.⁹⁹ But now, Dutt argued, the “liberation of the colonial peoples has been achieved over the greater part of the colonial area in front of any victory of the working class in Britain”¹⁰⁰ and could now pursue their own way forward without waiting for the socialist revolution to occur in Britain.

96. West Indies Committee, “Recommendations of West Indies Committee on The British Road to Socialism”, n.d., p. 1, CP/IND/DUTT/07/05, LHASC.

97. WIC, “Recommendations of West Indies Committee on The British Road to Socialism”, p. 3.

98. Raphael Samuel, *The Lost World of British Communism* (London, 2006), p. 80.

99. R. Palme Dutt, “Programme Commission Points for Consideration on Revision of Part II”, 29 August 1956, p. 2, CP/IND/DUTT/07/05, LHASC.

100. *Ibid.*,

The majority of the commission charged with the task of rewriting the Party's manifesto rejected Dutt's arguments, although a significant minority supported Dutt and the WIC, and a debate was played out in the pages of the *Daily Worker* and the *World News*. The majority position, publicly put forward by Emile Burns, promoted keeping the wording the same, arguing that economic and military concerns, as well as historical ties, would be reasons for maintaining fraternal relations between Britain and its former colonies, using the pre-existing template of Labour's multiracial Commonwealth. Burns argued that "many formerly subject countries have won independence", but had chosen to remain in the Commonwealth for "economic and political reasons, even though Britain is imperialist".¹⁰¹ Burns wrote:

It is one thing to end the present association based on domination and exploitation; it is another thing to reject association on a new basis, for this would not only create difficulties for all the peoples concerned, but it would check the future development particularly of the more backward countries.¹⁰²

Dutt replied to the majority position by declaring that the economic reasons put forward "inevitably creates the impression that we envisage the continuance of the role of the countries of the Empire as an agrarian hinterland for an industrial Britain", reminding readers that this was "the very system against which the colonial and dependent peoples whose economic development has been retarded by imperialism are in revolt".¹⁰³ Elsewhere, Dutt replied that the world situation had changed dramatically since 1951, with "the emergence, alongside the socialist world, of the new international alignment of former colonial states, revealed at Bandung in 1955, transforming the whole character of international relations"¹⁰⁴ and ending the military need for such a close fraternal association. As Vijay Prashad has written, the Non-Aligned Movement conference at Bandung in April 1955 demonstrated that "the colonized world had now emerged to claim its space in world affairs, not just as an adjunct of the First or Second Worlds but as a player in its own right".¹⁰⁵ This caused a significant rethinking in the international communist movement towards the decolonization process in the Khrushchev period. Dutt further added that the concept, as outlined in 1951, had "caused disquiet and dissatisfaction" amongst "all colonial comrades" and returning to something he had mentioned in late 1948, this needed to be taken into account,

101. Emile Burns, Contribution to "From a Discussion", *World News*, 18 May 1957, p. 316.

102. Idem, "The Case for Fraternal Association", *World News Discussion Supplement*, p. 15.

103. R. Palme Dutt, "Future Relations of Countries of the Present British Empire", *World News Discussion Supplement*, p. 18.

104. Idem, Contribution to "From a Discussion", *World News*, 18 May 1957, p. 315.

105. Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York, 2007) p. 45.

“rather than proceed [...] by lecturing colonial comrades on their backwardness”.¹⁰⁶

In the *Daily Worker*, Burns said that a socialist Britain would allow the former colonies the right of self-determination, which could have meant “cutting themselves completely adrift from Britain if they so desired”.¹⁰⁷ But returning back to the aforementioned “Leninist-Stalinist theory of the national question”, Burns qualified, “to give them the right to cut themselves off does not mean insisting on cutting them off”.¹⁰⁸ As Pollitt had previously alluded to, Burns described any post-colonial cooperation between Britain and its former colonies on the basis that the newly liberated colonies “would be invited to become autonomous parts of a ‘British Soviet Union’”.¹⁰⁹ However, as Dutt noted, many of Britain’s former colonies had gained independence and it did not look foreseeable in the near future that Britain would have a socialist government.

C. Desmond Greaves, the Communist Party’s foremost authority on Irish affairs, wrote in the *Daily Worker* that he agreed with the minority viewpoint promoted by Dutt and the WIC that there was “no foreseeable basis for a fresh international organisation, or association”, although he acknowledged that some form of rapprochement would be needed in the future between Britain and the “nations which have come to loathe the very name of Britain”.¹¹⁰ Greaves criticized the majority position held by Burns and other members of the Party leadership that they had worked for years for the right of separation of the colonies from the British Empire and now effectively wanted to reverse this. Admitting that this was not motivated by imperialism, Greaves said that their desire to “rebuild an international organisation of States, of undefined character, out of the shreds and clippings of the former Empire” was “vague and Utopian” and it was likely that “colonial peoples will suspect them of cloaking a desire to ‘drag their feet’ on the issue of self-determination, including the right of secession now”.¹¹¹ Contributing to the debate, John Williamson, a Scottish-American member of the CPGB, agreed with Dutt, claiming that “there are still some remaining formulations which could give the impression of a paternalistic relationship, with a socialist Britain still being the ‘Big Brother’ that must look out for the welfare of the peoples of the former colonies”.¹¹² George

106. Dutt, ‘Future Relations of Countries of the Present British Empire’, p. 18.

107. Emile Burns, “What Will Happen to the Colonies?”, *Daily Worker*, 25 May 1957.

108. *Ibid.*

109. *Ibid.*

110. C. Desmond Greaves, “Don’t Be Utopian!”, *Daily Worker*, 22 February 1957.

111. *Ibid.*

112. John Williamson, letter to discussion on *The British Road to Socialism*, *World News Discussion Supplement*, 26 January 1957, p. 14.

Hardy reiterated that Britain's colonies were probably likely to achieve national liberation before the emergence of a socialist Britain and asked:

After the peoples have achieved national liberation, are they to await for a benevolent British Socialist Government to hand over, or are they, by revolutionary decrees and action, to take back their natural and rightful possessions, stolen from them by plundering imperialists?¹¹³

At the 25th Congress, the majority and minority positions were allowed to make their cases before being put to a vote by the Congress delegates. Dutt declared:

Our Colonial comrades, including the West Indian and West African branches, in the overwhelming majority support the minority formulation [...] We should not lightly ignore their opinion.

Since 1951 no Communist Party in the Empire has accepted or taken up our formulation of fraternal association. If the Communist Parties of the Empire were putting forward this proposal, that would be a different matter.

But if only the British Party, at the centre of imperialism, is putting it forward and all our brother Parties are turning away from it, then we should think twice.¹¹⁴

Burns answered that “[t]his is not big brotherism any more than the Soviet industrialisation of Asia was big brotherism”. After both positions were presented to the Congress, the majority position was eventually defeated by 298 votes to 210.¹¹⁵

The 1958 edition of *The British Road to Socialism* thus stated that the CPGB would recognize the “complete independence and right of self-determination” of former colonies and that a socialist Britain would “seek to promote close voluntary fraternal relations [...] between Britain and [those countries] willing to develop such relations”.¹¹⁶ This rebellion by the CPGB's African and Caribbean members, predominantly in the West Indian Committee, demanded that the CPGB leadership pay more attention to the desires of those seeking independence from Britain and respect the agency of the colonial citizens in the decolonisation process. With the support of Dutt, the subsequent edition of the Party programme included a much stronger commitment to anti-colonialism and should be remembered as a rare victory of rank-and-file CPGB members in changing party policy from the grassroots level. It was of particular importance because it was a distinct section of the Party's rank-and-file membership, its African and Caribbean members, which campaigned strongly for the policy change. However, in the tumultuous days of 1956, a number of the Party's

113. “Two Views on ‘The British Road to Socialism’”, *Daily Worker*, 18 March 1957.

114. Cited in *Daily Worker*, 22 April 1957.

115. *Ibid.*

116. CPGB, *The British Road to Socialism* (London, 1958), p. 25.

West Indian members had departed and had not witnessed the change that they had long felt necessary, with long-term West Indian Party member Trevor Carter writing that “sadly [...] many of Dutt’s West Indian comrades had not prepared to wait for 1957 and had left the party”.¹¹⁷

ISSUES OF “RACE” AND ANTI-COLONIALISM/ IMPERIALISM IN THE 1960s

Traditionally, the Communist Party’s anti-racist activism had been closely associated with the anti-colonial struggle and seen through the lens of racism and the “colour bar” being an international issue that was increasingly becoming an issue in Britain. While the Communist Party was one of the first organizations within the British labour movement to have an explicit anti-racist agenda, it is questionable how successful the Party was in convincing other sections of the labour movement to take up the anti-racist struggle. The CPGB were constantly in a balancing act between looking to the trade unions and other labour organizations to spearhead the anti-racist movement, making white workers aware of the fight against racism, and working more closely with the black communities at the grassroots level, where there was increasing scepticism over the eagerness of the trade unions to combat racism.

Since the reformation of factory branches during World War II, and particularly as the 1958 version of the Party’s post-war programme *The British Road to Socialism* saw them as key to any influence upon the Labour Party,¹¹⁸ the trade unions were central to the CPGB’s agenda, including in the fight against racism. The Party may have been attracting a number of black workers, activists, and students from across the Commonwealth in the 1950s, but its literature focused on attempts to convince trade unionists to welcome these fellow workers and campaign against “colour bars” in the labour movement and the workplace. In the pages of the *Daily Worker* in the late 1950s, Kay Beauchamp stressed “the need for the whole Labour movement to take up the fight against colour discrimination, for the trade unions to champion the rights of coloured workers and to make a special appeal to them to join the unions”.¹¹⁹ Although the trade unions supported campaigns, such as the Movement for Colonial Freedom, at bloc level, getting individual trade unionists to take part in anti-racist activities was a much more difficult task.

117. Carter, *Shattering Illusions*, p. 60.

118. The 1958 version of the manifesto described the trade unions as “the decisive force in the Labour Party”, adding “every progressive step in the trade union movement strengthens the Left and progressive tendencies in the Labour Party”. CPGB, *The British to Socialism* (London, 1958), p. 29.

119. Kay Beauchamp, “Democracy v Racial Prejudice”, *Daily Worker*, 16 May 1957.

As a report into the Party's fortunes in the 1964 general election noted, "Many Labour supporters and even people sympathetic to our policies were opposed to immigrants coming to Britain [...] It is clear that on this very difficult problem our Party's policy made very little impact."¹²⁰ Until the 1970s, trade unionists favoured a "colour blind" approach that promoted no "special treatment" for people based on ethnicity or nationality, but at the same time offered little assistance to those who needed help in overcoming racial discrimination in the workplace.

The period between the late 1950s and the mid-1960s was a particular high point for the Party's anti-colonial and anti-racist activists. Leading from the stance taken at the 1957 Congress, more African and Caribbean (as well as South Asian) members of the Party were given voice in the Party press and representation within the Party's International Department – although Jack Woddis, Idris Cox, Kay Beauchamp, and Joan Bellamy (all white) were still the predominant figures in the Party at this stage on issues of "race" and anti-colonialism. Kevin Morgan has shown that, at its heights between the 1930s and 1960s, the Communist Party offered many of its (white) working-class trade unionists opportunities of social and professional "mobility",¹²¹ but these opportunities were not available for the Party's migrant membership.

That said, the thinking about the issues of "race" and anti-colonialism (transforming into anti-imperialism in the era of decolonization/neo-colonialism) underwent massive changes in the Communist Party between the late 1950s and the early 1970s. For example, the rapid process of decolonization that occurred in Africa and Asia in the late 1950s and early 1960s meant that it was an issue that needed to be considered by all members of the Party, and not just those within the International Department. The 1958 riots in Notting Hill and Nottingham brought further attention to the issues of racism within British society and became a topic that the British labour movement felt necessary to tackle.¹²² The Communist Party, as a traditional anti-fascist and anti-colonial force within the labour movement, increasingly featured articles in the *Daily Worker*, *World News*, and *Labour Monthly* with an anti-racist message, and was one of the only groups to consistently combat the fascist groups that descended on Notting Hill and Kensington after the 1958 riots, although this was usually limited to a handful of African, Caribbean, and Jewish members.¹²³ In the broader movement,

120. "The General Election 1964", p. 37, CP/CENT/EC/10/04, LHASC.

121. Kevin Morgan, "Socialists and 'Mobility' in Twentieth-Century Britain: Images and Experiences in the Life Histories of British Communists", *Social History*, 36:2 (2011), pp. 143–168.

122. Robert Miles and Annie Phizacklea, *The TUC, Black Workers and New Commonwealth Immigration, 1954–1973* (Bristol, 1977).

123. Dave Hann, *Physical Resistance: A Hundred Years of Anti-Fascism* (London, 2013), pp. 201–207.

Communist Party members were also heavily involved in building the Movement for Colonial Freedom (MCF) and the Anti-Apartheid Movement, as well as attempting to attract trade union support for these pressure groups.¹²⁴

The MCF became the focus of the Party's anti-colonial/anti-imperial efforts in the 1960s because of the Movement's strong influence in the British labour movement, with 3,050,431 affiliated union members by 1964–1965.¹²⁵ Despite the different intellectual origins of the CPGB's Marxist-Leninist and the MCF's liberal anti-colonialism, in practical terms, there was little divergence between the aims of the MCF and the Communist Party. The Communist Party asserted that there was general consensus, "at least on all the immediate issues", between the CPGB, the left of the Labour Party, and many trade union organizations on the issue of colonial freedom, meaning that there was "an agreed programme on which wide sections [could] co-operate".¹²⁶ This consensus on the immediate issues of decolonization amongst sections of the labour movement was at the basis of the MCF.

The Party was also involved in the campaign against the introduction of immigration controls for Commonwealth citizens and in the lead up to 1962, CPGB routinely opposed the introduction of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act, arguing that the aim of the Act was "to bring in a scheme of indentured cheap labour for immigrants with the tap being turned on and off to suit the needs of British big business".¹²⁷ In an article written in 1964, Claudia Jones wrote that "all [...] political parties have capitulated in one way or another way to this racist immigration measure".¹²⁸ The only exception was the Communist Party, with Jones listing at length the Party's stance on racism and immigration:

A recent statement of the Executive Committee of the British Communist Party declared its opposition to all forms of restrictions on coloured immigration; declared its readiness to contest every case of discrimination; urged repeal of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act; and called for equality of access for employment, rates of wages, promotion to skilled jobs, and opportunities for apprenticeship and vocational

124. See: David Widgery, *The Left in Britain: 1956–1968* (Harmondsworth, 1976), pp. 412–415; Tariq Ali, *Street Fighting Years: An Autobiography of the Sixties* (Glasgow, 1987), p. 129; Christabel Gurney, "'A Great Cause': The Origins of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, June 1959–March 1960", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 26:1 (March 2000), pp. 123–144; Roger Fieldhouse, *Anti-Apartheid: A History of the Movement in Britain* (London, 2005), pp. 214–218. 125. Stephen Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics: The Left and the End of Empire, 1918–1964* (Oxford, 1993), p. 241.

126. Kay Beauchamp, "The Common Struggle of the British and Colonial Peoples", *Marxism Today*, March 1960, p. 77.

127. John Moss, *Together Say No Discrimination* (London, 1961), p. 4.

128. Claudia Jones, "The Caribbean Community in Britain", in Buzz Johnson, *I Think of My Mother: Notes on the Life and Times of Claudia Jones* (London, 1985), p. 144.

training. It gave full support to the Bill to Outlaw Racial Discrimination and pledged its readiness to support every progressive measure to combat discrimination in Britain. It also projected the launching of an ideological campaign to combat racialism, which it noted, infects wide sections of the British working class.¹²⁹

But while African, Caribbean, and Asian members in the CPGB were making some headway in the Party press and within the International Department, organizationally they were also being compartmentalized into specific branches arranged by nationality, rather than by district or workplace. As Andrew Flinn has described, in the late 1940s, specific branches were set up for West Indian, West African, Indian, and Cypriot members under the watch of the International Department and the London District Committee, existing until the mid-1960s.¹³⁰ Although these branches eased communication with other African and Caribbean members within the Party, with the Cypriot group producing a long-running Greek language newspaper *Vema* (with links to its Cypriot counterpart AKEL), it also meant that other sections of the Party could dismiss anti-racism and anti-colonialism/imperialism as something handled by the International Department and these African and Caribbean branches. As Hakim Adi has written, some African members of the Party “argued that the national branches were attempts to segregate them from other British members” and allowed “patronizing and chauvinistic attitudes within the Party” to remain unchallenged.¹³¹ These branches were abolished in 1966 and replaced by Advisory Committees, but it was really the West Indian (later Caribbean) and Cypriot Advisory Committees that lasted,¹³² with their members also significantly represented on the Race Relations Sub-Committee established in the mid-1970s, as well as on the London Area Council of the Movement for Colonial Freedom/Liberation.¹³³

Even within these nationality branches, records of how many members of the CPGB were colonial migrants were not kept with any regularity and from the existing London District Committee files, it seems as though records of this nature were maintained on an ad hoc basis, varying from branch to branch. In his sociology study of the CPGB from the mid-1960s, Kenneth Newton did report that in 1961, there were 752 Cypriots within

129. C. Jones, “The Caribbean Community in Britain”, p. 145.

130. Hakim Adi, *West Africans in Britain 1900–1960: Nationalism, Pan-Africanism and Communism* (London, 1998), pp. 161–162; Flinn, “Cypriot, Indian and West Indian Branches of the CPGB, 1945–1970”, pp. 47–66.

131. Adi, “Forgotten Comrade?”, p. 34.

132. See: “Minutes of Meeting of the Caribbean Committee of the London District Committee”, 6 July 1976, CP/LON/RACE/02/05, LHASC; Kenneth Newton, *The Sociology of British Communism* (London, 1969), p. 78.

133. Josiah Brownell, “The Taint of Communism: The Movement for Colonial Freedom, the Labour Party, and the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1954–70”, *Canadian Journal of History*, Autumn 2007, p. 256; Movement for Colonial Freedom, *AGM Report*, February 1970, CP/IND/KAY/01/04, LHASC.

the London District of the CPGB, out of a total 6,692 members, which had risen from 435 out of 7,186 members in 1957.¹³⁴ However, similar figures for the other nationality branches do not seem to have been kept by the Party.

The break-up of the African and Caribbean branches coincided with a shift in the Party's anti-racist and anti-colonial/imperial activism. Although in 1958 *The British Road to Socialism* advocated a more comprehensive anti-colonial outlook and the issue of decolonization and national liberation was given greater prominence by the Party, by the mid-1960s, the decolonization process was almost complete. Although this had not (yet) ushered in a series of socialist states in Africa and Asia – which the Party, using the theories of Kwame Nkrumah, argued was due to a form of neo-colonialism¹³⁵ – enthusiasm for anti-colonial activism began to wane amongst the wider labour movement and even within sections of the CPGB. The Party's African, Caribbean and Asian members were also affected by the Sino-Soviet split of the early 1960s, with China being seen as “the beacon of Third World revolution” and an inspiration to people of colour across the globe.¹³⁶ As Andrew Flinn wrote, “Chinese support for colonial liberation struggles and opposition to peaceful co-existence attracted many whose interests were international rather than British.”¹³⁷

CONCLUSION

1956 was a watershed moment in the history of the Communist Party of Great Britain, when a large section of the membership challenged the Party leadership over its uncritical support for the Soviet Union (in the past and during the invasion of Hungary) and its attempts to stifle any debate about this support, with the leadership relying on the rules of democratic centralism to control how far the criticism went. This led to the exodus of over 8,000 people from the Party and helped creating the first new left in Britain.¹³⁸ However, the Party and international communist movement as a whole was undergoing a wider change throughout the

134. Newton, *The Sociology of British Communism*, p. 78.

135. Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (London, 1965); Jack Woddis, *Introduction to Neo-Colonialism: The New Imperialism in Asia, Africa & Latin America* (New York, 1967).

136. Robin D.G. Kelley and Betsy Esch, “Black Like Mao: Red China and Black Revolution”, *Souls* (Fall 1999), p. 8; Bill V. Mullen, “By the Book: Quotations From Chairman Mao and the Making of Afro-Asian Radicalism, 1966–1975”, in Alexander C. Cook (ed.), *Mao's Little Red Book: A Global History* (Cambridge, 2014), pp. 245–265.

137. Flinn, “Cypriot, Indian and West Indian Branches of the CPGB, 1945–1970”, p. 60.

138. See: Michael Kenny, *The First New Left: British Intellectuals After Stalin* (London, 1995); Michael Newman, *Ralph Miliband and the Politics of the New Left* (London, 2002).

late 1950s that began with the Bandung Conference in April 1955 and ended with the Sino-Soviet split of 1960. The anti-colonial movements across Asia, Africa and the Middle East had redefined the contours of the Cold War and had thrown up rivals to Moscow within the communist world. In the postcolonial era, many of these newly liberated countries were eager to demonstrate their own agency and not rely solely on assistance from the Western or Soviet blocs. Amongst communists, Maoism and the “Cultural Revolution” even became a source of inspiration and support for many who were sceptical about the direction of the Soviet Union after the death of Stalin.

As the decolonization process intensified, these shifts were reflected inside the CP GB. The changing nature of the “Third World” affected many of the Party’s African and Caribbean members, primarily from the (former) British colonies in the West Indies and West Africa. The CPGB had a long history of anti-colonial activism, beginning in the 1920s, but its vision of what a postcolonial world would look like was centred on British needs and wants, rather than concentrating very much on what the newly liberated countries would desire. From the 1930s onwards, Party literature featured reassurances that British society could maintain its standards of living without the colonies and part of this reassurance was based on the assumption that the former colonies would enter into trade agreements with a socialist Britain to exchange raw materials and food stuffs for industrial technology and assistance. Although it admitted that the former colonies had the right to choose their own political and economic relationships, it was presumed that a shared imperial history would mean that the former colonies would want to deal with Britain exclusively.

This assumption, alongside a left-wing nationalism and acceptance of a “British” and peaceful road to socialism instilled by the Popular Front era and World War II, led the Party to present an unclear programme for post-colonial relations in the British Empire/Commonwealth after decolonization in its post-war manifesto. Released in 1951, the first version of *The British Road to Socialism* proposed that in the postcolonial era, “close fraternal associations” would be established between (presumably a people’s) Britain and its former colonies, asserting that maintaining these post-imperial links were “vital” for the British economy and its standards of living. However, many of those Party members from the colonies felt that the Party leadership were hoping for a similar imperial relationship with its former colonial possessions.

The fallout after the events of 1956 and the promise of the Party leadership to rewrite *The British Road to Socialism* allowed the Party’s African and Caribbean members to challenge the Party’s policy statement on national liberation and the anti-colonial struggle, who had been overlooked and sidelined by the Party in many ways until this point.

This challenge, instigated by the West Indies Committee of the International Department, allowed these members to vocalize their frustration with the marginalisation they felt within the Party and to attempt to readdress the Party's anti-colonial programme. This challenge attempted to make support for the national liberation movements across the British Empire/Commonwealth a central part of the Party's platform and ensure that the Party recognized the importance of allowing the newly liberated countries to make their own decisions about future foreign relations. Supported by the CPGB's leading authority on anti-colonial matters, R. Palme Dutt, as well as several other prominent members from the International Department, the text of *The British Road to Socialism* was altered to remove any mentioning of "close fraternal association", which was replaced with "close *voluntary* fraternal relations" (my emphasis). This new phrasing demonstrated that the Party was officially recognizing the agency of the former colonies to determine their own relationship with Britain and that postcolonial political-economic relations had to be desired by both parties, rather than on the quasi-imperialist basis outlined in the 1951 manifesto.

While this new version was a victory for the Party's African and Caribbean membership, it was also a short-lived victory, with many of the Party's West Indian and West African membership leaving the Party over the next few years for a variety of reasons, including continued discontent about the treatment of African and Caribbean members and the local effect of the Sino-Soviet split. After an initial flurry of support amongst the influx of Commonwealth migrants, the Party's reputation began to wane amongst migrant activists by the early 1960s (especially those attracted to early Maoism). The Party redeveloped its anti-racist and anti-imperialist outlook over the next two decades. By the end of the 1960s, the Party had turned its attention primarily to domestic anti-racist matters and as the decolonisation process had successfully brought independence or self-government to most former colonies across Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, its anti-colonial/anti-imperial activism was limited to support for the Movement for Colonial Freedom (Liberation after 1970), as well as the campaigns against the Vietnam War and against apartheid in South Africa. For nearly fifty years, some form of anti-colonialism and/or anti-imperialism has been part of the Communist Party's programme and its relationship with its non-white membership had been viewed through this prism. The push for greater recognition of its ethnic minority membership began with rebellion by its African and Caribbean members in 1956–1957, and while many of these original colonial members resigned over the next few years, the African, Caribbean, and South Asian members that entered the Party in the 1960s slowly built upon this, helping to forge a more pluralist and anti-racist party in the 1970s and 1980s.

TRANSLATED ABSTRACTS
FRENCH – GERMAN – SPANISH

Evan Smith. *Libération nationale – pour qui? La question post-coloniale, le Parti communiste de Grande-Bretagne et l'affiliation africaine et caribéenne au parti.*

Le Parti communiste de Grande-Bretagne (CPGB) eut une longue tradition d'activisme anti-colonial depuis sa fondation en 1920 et fut un champion de la libération nationale dans l'Empire britannique. Cependant, le parti adhéra également à l'idée que les anciennes colonies de la Grande-Bretagne, lorsqu'elles seraient indépendantes, voudraient ouvrir une relation commerciale avec leur ancien colonisateur, pensant que la Grande-Bretagne avait besoin de ces formes de relation pour maintenir les approvisionnements en denrées alimentaires et matières premières. Cette position fut maintenue jusque dans les années 1950, lorsqu'elle fut remise en question en 1956-1957 par l'affiliation africaine et caribéenne au parti, qui saisit l'occasion présentée par les répercussions des crises politiques auxquelles le CPGB fut confronté en 1956. Dans cet article, je soutiens que ce défi fut un tournant important pour l'opinion du CPGB sur les questions d'impérialisme et de race, et qu'il conduisit également à une explosion d'activisme anti-colonialiste et anti-raciste. Mais cette victoire remportée par ses membres africains et caribéens fut de courte durée, car le paysage politique et l'ordre du jour du CPGB changèrent à la fin des années 1960.

Traduction: *Christine Plard*

Evan Smith. *Nationale Befreiung – für wen? Die postkoloniale Frage, die Kommunistische Partei Großbritanniens und deren afrikanische und karibische Parteimitglieder.*

Die kommunistische Partei Großbritanniens (CPGB) zeichnete sich seit ihrer Gründung im Jahr 1920 durch eine lange Tradition des antikolonialen Aktivismus aus und war eine Verfechterin der nationalen Befreiung innerhalb des britischen Empire. Die Partei vertrat jedoch auch die Vorstellung, die ehemaligen Kolonien Großbritanniens würden nach der Unabhängigkeit Handelsbeziehungen zu ihrem früheren Kolonisator aufnehmen wollen. Großbritannien benötige solche Handelsbeziehungen zur Sicherung seines Bedarfs an Lebensmitteln und Rohstoffen. An dieser Position wurde bis in die 1950er Jahre hinein festgehalten. 1956/57 wurde sie von afrikanischen und karibischen Parteimitgliedern infrage gestellt. Diese sahen die Gelegenheit dazu im Gefolge der politischen Krisen gekommen, mit denen die CPGB 1956 konfrontiert war. In dem Beitrag wird die These verfochten, diese Infragestellung habe für die Sichtweise der Partei auf Fragen des Imperialismus und der "Rasse" einen bedeutenden Wendepunkt dargestellt und darüber hinaus eine plötzliche Zunahme des antikolonialen und antirassistischen Aktivismus zur Folge gehabt. Der Triumph der afrikanischen und karibischen Parteimitglieder war jedoch kurzlebig, da sich die politische Landschaft und das Programm der CPGB in den 1960er Jahren wieder änderten.

Übersetzung: *Max Henninger*

Evan Smith. *Liberación nacional – para quién? La cuestión postcolonial, el Partido Comunista de Gran Bretaña y los miembros africanos y caribeños del partido.*

El Partido Comunista de Gran Bretaña (PCGB) ha tenido una larga tradición de activismo anticolonial desde su fundación en 1920 y ha sido un referente en la liberación nacional en el imperio británico. Sin embargo, el Partido también se adhirió a la idea de que las hasta ese momento colonias británicas, una vez independientes, querrían vincularse mediante una relación comercial a la que era su colonizadora hasta entonces, considerando que Gran Bretaña necesitaba de esta forma de relación para mantener el suministro de alimentos y de materias primas. Esta posición se mantuvo a lo largo de la década de 1950 hasta que en 1956-1957 los militantes africanos y caribeños del partido la pusieron en cuestión, aprovechando la oportunidad presentada por la ruptura como consecuencia de la crisis política que atravesó la formación en 1956. En este artículo se plantea que este desafío fue un momento decisivo para la perspectiva del Partido Comunista sobre los aspectos del imperialismo y lo racial, al tiempo que implicó un giro hacia el activismo anticolonial y antirracista. Pero esta victoria de los militantes africanos y caribeños fue efímero, ya que el paisaje político y la agenda del PCGB se transformó al final de la década de 1960.

Traducción: *Vicent Sanz Rozalén*