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'Uncomradely and Un-communist': Breakdown in the Communist Anglosphere? The Communist Party of Great Britain and Communist Party of Australia debate, 1947-1948.

After the Comintern was dissolved in May 1943, Communist Parties were now supposedly 'free' to develop their own 'roads to socialism'. After all, on the thirtieth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, Vyacheslav Molotov, had eagerly anticipated the future, declaring, "we are living in an age in which all roads lead to communism."¹ Crucially however, the Communist Parties of Britain's Empire were notably absent from the establishment of the Cominform in September 1947. In an era of individual 'national roads to socialism', previous hierarchical relationships were less clear, and appeared conducive to building 'autonomous' national movements. Parties remained national bodies of an internationalist movement, but the sense of an impenetrable, faceless whole began to have less and less relevancy, when Parties were told to cater to national circumstances. This article argues that signs of fragmentation in the hierarchies of international communism can be seen as early as 1948, in the aftermath of the Cominform's 'Two Camp' thesis, which stated that the world had been divided into its 'imperialist/anti-democratic' and 'anti-imperialist/democratic' groupings. This was particularly pronounced amongst Parties no longer under the official remit of the newly formed body. As William Booth has suggested, cracks within the monolithic international communist movement were 'bi-directional', as the interaction between 'centre' and 'periphery', and

¹ Vyacheslav Molotov, 'Speech on the Thirtieth Anniversary of Revolution', November 7 1947, *Pravda* in Harry Pollitt, *Communism and Labour: A Call for United Action* (London, 1947), 3.

marginalised and monolithic ideas ‘worked more like a series of inter-related cogs of varying sizes’, where breakdown could see individual ‘cogs’ spin off to form a new ‘machine’.²

Parties were to be given more scope for individuality - so long as it followed the established international directives of the Soviet Union.³ Therefore, whilst the British and Australian Parties did not have the size, nor influence to inspire a ‘break’ with the wider movement, their disagreements suggests that their previous relationship had all but broken down, and was an instance of two Parties, treading differing ideological terrain and shedding the formalities of ‘respectable’ discussion. This dynamic is what the article is primarily interested in, focusing on the evolving complex relationship that existed within the international Communist movement, as well as within the Communist Parties of Britain’s empire. . The latter existed as a sub-division of the former, reflecting a hierarchy that followed existing poles, or hubs, of the wider-international movement. These hierarchies were then repeated within the established British Empire, acting as a mediator between the authoritative final word of Moscow and the colonial networks within British imperialism. However, these hierarchies were by no means static, as the Second World War and subsequent decolonisation signalled a severing of ‘fraternal’ ties with the centre of Anglo-imperialism.

There has been little focus on the exchange beyond covering the overall message of the Australian Party’s criticisms.⁴ Evan Smith is the most notable historian to mention the fiery debate

² William Booth, ‘Mid-Century Communism: A Schematic Approach’, *International Newsletter of Communist Studies*, 18 (2012), 403-410.

³ Ben Harker, *The Chronology of Revolution: Communism, Culture and Civil Society in Twentieth Century Britain* (Toronto, 2021), 84-85.

⁴ Deery and Redfern have described the exchange as ‘symptomatic of the differing degrees to which Cominform perspectives were being pursued’, whilst Tom O’Lincoln has called it a ‘heated exchange of polemics’. Stuart Macintyre’s recent final history of the CPA also briefly covers the exchange. Phillip Deery and Neil Redfern, ‘No Lasting Peace? Labor, Communism and the Cominform: Australia and Great Britain, 1945-50’, *Labour History*, 88 (2005), 81; Tom O’Lincoln, *Into the Mainstream: The Decline of Australian Communism* (Sydney, 1985), 61; Lawrence Parker, *The Kick Inside: Revolutionary Opposition in the CPGB, 1945-1991*

between the two Parties. Smith's article analyses the CPGB's role as an 'organising hub for the Anglophone Communist movement' in the period of decolonisation.⁵ The impassioned debate in 1948 for Smith, was an opportunity for the CPA to "highlight the contrast between its agenda and the 'reformism' of the CPGB, depicting itself as a supporter of emerging anti-colonial movements in Asia."⁶ This argue will seek to build upon Smith's work by broadening our understanding of the exchange itself, situating it within a wider discourse of individual 'roads to socialism'. Furthermore, the exchange will shed light on the complexities within the international communist movement and the shifting allegiances within Britain's crumbling Empire. Relationships between Parties, as well as at the larger international level were shifting, as the movement towards individual national roads brought about segmentation in the place of uniformity. Whilst the new posturing towards the 'nation' may have been driven by Soviet collective security and 'compliant', non-revolutionary national Parties, their ultimate evolution suggests that Parties fully embraced these movements towards 'national-popularisation'.

Breakdown of the Anglosphere?

There has been a long historiographical debate regarding the level of influence the Soviet Union had on national Communist Parties, particularly during the Comintern era. Traditionally, positions tended to veer between constituent Parties being willing appendages to the Soviet system, to more autonomous organisations, who implemented the 'Soviet line' in accordance with national

(London, 2012), 34-35; Stuart Macintyre, *The Party: The Communist Party of Australia from Heyday to Reckoning* (Sydney, 2022), 208-211.

⁵ Evan Smith, 'For Socialist Revolution or National Liberation? Anti-Colonialism and the Communist Parties of Great Britain, Australia, and South Africa in the Era of Decolonisation', in Yann Béliard and Neville Kirk (eds), *Workers of the Empire Unite: Radical and Popular Challenges to British Imperialism, 1910s-1960s* (Liverpool, 2021), 250-251.

⁶ Smith, 'For Socialist Revolution', 257.

circumstances.⁷ However, recent scholarship has tended to move away from these discussions, particularly because of the ‘transnational turn’ in the area. Directives could be negotiated and shaped by transnational connections, as recent work has instead focused on the spread of ideas and people across borders.⁸ The international communist movement was *international* in the most literal sense spanning the entire world and drawing millions to its cause. With the move towards individual ‘national roads’, it is little surprise that the bonds of solidarity and sense of unified purpose began to show increasing signs of wear, as Parties went their own separate ways.

As Kevin Morgan has explained, paradoxically, the dissolution of the Comintern, ‘removed the last of the formal mechanisms by which policy could be queried’.⁹ Therefore, whilst national indigenization, individual Party autonomy, and a greater appreciation of ‘national circumstances’ were clearly at work, the Parties remained committed to a Soviet reading of values and political policy – regardless of their individual ‘national roads’. This phenomenon was neatly summarised by historian and life-long Party member, Eric Hobsbawm, in his later life. Hobsbawm suggested that there was little willingness to bring to the fore any “fundamental or long-term conflict between the interests of a national movement and the international”. It was an “impossibility” in a Party member’s eyes for Parties - which were unquestionably loyal to Moscow - to embroil itself in ‘international controversies’, as the “international”, was deemed the “*real* Party, of which national

⁷ Just a few examples of this extensive debate are: John McIlroy and Alan Campbell, ‘Histories of the British Communist Party: A User’s Guide’, *Labour History Review*, 68:1 (2003), 33-59; Andrew Thorpe, ‘Comintern “Control” of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1920-1943’, *English Historical Review*, 113 (1998), 637-62; Brian Palmer, ‘How Can We Write Better Histories of Communism?’, *Labour*, 83 (2019), 199-232; Brigitte Studer and Berthold Unfried, ‘At the Beginning of a History: Visions of the Comintern After the Opening of the Comintern Archives’, *International Review of Social History*, 42:3 (1997), 419-446.

⁸ For a broad overview see: Oleksa Drachewych, ‘The Communist Transnational? Transnational Studies and the History of the Comintern’, *History Compass*, 17 (2019), 1-12; Sabine Dullin and Brigitte Studer, ‘Communism and Transnational: The Rediscovered Equation of Internationalism in the Comintern Years’, *Twentieth Century Communism*, 14 (2008), 66-95.

⁹ Kevin Morgan, *Harry Pollitt* (Manchester, 1993), 179.

units were no more than disciplined sections.”¹⁰ Historians have tended to take a similar view on the abolition of the Comintern of 1943, viewing it instead through the prism of Soviet foreign policy. The change, in Willy Thompson’s view, ‘made no effective difference’, as loyalty inculcated over many years, alongside the prestige of the Soviet Union, changed little for Communists in their view that ‘leadership’ remained with Moscow.¹¹ Consequently, whilst the CPGB donned shades of pink in its political analysis, its ultimate loyalty remained to the Soviet Union, even if its national policy became grounded in non-revolutionary ideals, such as parliamentarism and gradualism. The same can be said for the Australian Party - who in Stuart Macintyre’s words, ‘did not merely imitate the Soviet model; they projected onto it their own aspirations’.¹² Evidently, whilst both Parties took a decisively different approach to their ‘national road’, their loyalty to the Soviet Union remained unquestioned, even if the correspondence signalled fragmentation on a macro level.

The dispute between the CPGB and CPA, beginning with Lance Sharkey’s critique of Harry Pollitt’s recently published, *Looking Ahead*, started a drawn-out, often fiery exchange over policy, ideological direction, and ultimately, how to best map out the route towards socialism. Therefore, to better gauge the dispute over ideological direction and supposed communist authenticity, a comparative approach allows the claims of exceptionalist behaviour to be situated within a broader internationalist whole. Comparative approaches illuminate the “inherent internationalism” of worldwide communism, which despite its best attempts, always remained wedded to an international view of societal progress – even if Parties claimed *their story* was unique.¹³ Prior to the dispute between the two Parties, the Parties had in the aftermath of the Second World War focused primarily on post-war reconstruction. How this was to be achieved required a delicate balance in

¹⁰ Eric Hobsbawm, *Revolutionaries* (London, 1994), 5-7. (Italics my emphasis)

¹¹ Willie Thompson, ‘British Communists and the Cold War’, *Contemporary British History*, 15:3 (2001), 106.

¹² Stuart Macintyre, *The Reds: Communist Party of Australia from Origins to Illegality, 1920-40* (Sydney, 1998), 415.

¹³ Philip Deery, ‘Writing about the Left in Australia and the USA: A Short Overview’. *American Communist History*, 10:2 (2011), 115-118.

their relationship with their national Labour Party, the trade-unions, and on industrial action, but the announcement of the 'Two Camps' thesis changed the terrain. In Britain, the 'Two Camps Thesis' was the pigment that set alight the CPGB's criticisms of the Attlee Government, as there was 'little doubt the Party was going on the offensive'.¹⁴ However, the Labour Parties were beginning to harden their resolve too. As Andrew Thorpe has remarked, by 1947, 'even on those on the Left of the Labour Party were beginning to despair' with the nature of Stalin's Soviet Union.¹⁵

Similarly, in Australia, the Labor Party sponsored the Industrial Groups, whose main goals were to 'displace communist union officials with 'trusted' members of the ALP'.¹⁶ The Cominform announcements, in O'Lincoln's view demonstrated an 'interaction of domestic factors and Kremlin directives', which hardened existing left-wards trends in the Australian Party.¹⁷ Deery and Redfern concur, suggesting that the CPA underwent a dramatic shift from 'critical support to outright hostility' towards the Australian Labor Party, which the 'Two Camps Thesis' only 'accelerated'.¹⁸ Meanwhile, following in the vein of *Looking Ahead*, the CPGB did not adjust so quickly, as socialist advance was regarded as one-and-the-same as achieving a Labour Government in a prospective 'Labour-Communist' alliance. Instead, the announcement threw weight on the "Battle of Ideas" between the Soviet East and Capitalist West, which meant emphasising the centrality of culture, where the Party had always been weak.¹⁹ Nevertheless, despite these differences, the Parties maintained an amicable working relationship and Australians attended the CPGB's Empire Conference in the Spring of 1947.

An Anglo 'Road to Socialism'?

¹⁴ Dave Childs, 'The Cold War and the British Road', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 23:4 (1988), 556.

¹⁵ Andrew Thorpe, 'Stalinism and British Politics', *History*, 83:272 (1998), 626.

¹⁶ Neville Kirk, *Labour and the Politics of Empire* (Manchester, 2011), 183.

¹⁷ O'Lincoln, *Into the Mainstream*, 58.

¹⁸ Deery and Redfern, 'No Lasting Peace?', 70-71.

¹⁹ Harker, *The Chronology of Revolution*, 78.

The 'Anglosphere' generally refers to a group of English-speaking nations who share certain characteristics – a parliamentary system, capitalist market economy, Protestant religious heritage, and in the international communist case, similar political influence.²⁰ The concept's ambiguity as a 'transnational imagined community' is of increasing contemporary relevance.²¹ This concept applied to the Communist Parties of Britain's Empire paints a more complex picture than previously thought, highlighting the networks and exchange of ideas within this body of Parties. As the Cold War and imminent decolonisation emerged on the horizon, how the British and Australian CPs re-appraised their roles demonstrates the shifting relationships and ideological re-alignments within the wider international communist movement.

Prior to their dispute, both Parties readily admitted that they shared a "special responsibility" to the colonial Parties to ensure that Labour Governments 'aid the peoples of the colonies to develop their resources in their own interests', and to 'win them as allies in the fight for socialism'.²² Communist Parties believed themselves to be kingmakers, when they themselves held little electoral impact. They were to be the arbiter in bringing about a 'shared outlook' between the Labour Governments in Britain, Australia, and New Zealand, as well as the Liberal Party in Canada. Pollitt suggested that these Parties "must become champions of a new outlook", querying whether it was out of the 'bounds of possibility for these governments to come together to develop a new form of economy'.²³ He proposed a common economic and political union designed to combat the ever-present "spectre of American imperialism." The People of these countries, Pollitt announced, had a duty "to ensure that our lands do not become the "49th, 50th, and 51st states of the U.S.A." ²⁴

²⁰ Michael Kenny and Nick Pearce, *Shadows of Empire: The Anglosphere in British Politics* (Cambridge, 2018).

²¹ Andrew Mycock and Ben Wellings (eds), *The Anglosphere: Past, Present and Future* (Oxford, 2019).

²² Communist Party Archive, Manchester, CP/CENT/INT/47/5, Empire Communist Parties Conference – Information Report to the Conference.

²³ CP/CENT/INT/55/2, Harry Pollitt speech, 26 March 1947.

²⁴ CP/CENT/INT/55/2, Harry Pollitt Speech, 'The Dominions' at Communist Parties of Britain's Empire Conference, 1947.

Pollitt presented this shared heritage as akin to Slavic internationalism. British ties with its Dominions were their Pan-Slavism, which would be the basis for opposing American imperialism.²⁵ Sharing the same language gave these countries an 'indestructible unity', Pollitt declared, which could become the cement for future socialist progress.²⁶ Crucially, the 'imperialist' United States were left out of the equation, as only other English-speaking imperialist powers, such as Australia and Canada were to be included, not the United States' own 'menacing' imperialism. These proto-national unities were to be the basis for developing national autonomy and international co-operation - i.e., 'independence' from American influence and Wall Street. However, the historical justification was thin and obscured Britain's own imperialist activities, instead presenting the countries as mere satellites of a much larger and more powerful imperial power. The spectre of American imperialism dominated the conference, which laid the path for the Parties trajectory throughout the 1950s.

Pollitt's admission that they had a 'shared responsibility' to the colonies was a remark that would rear its head less than a year later, as the CPA sought to contrast its own identity with the British. In 1947, a *Gallup* Poll found that 65 percent of Australians wished to retain their British nationality, rather than establish a separate Australian one.²⁷ Much of the Australian population viewed their identity and values as, first and foremost, British. The adage that Australians were 'more British than the British', was something the CPA wanted to confront. Post-war emigration to Australia was a key ideological tenant of the 'White Australia' policy, as the 'The Australia Free and Assisted Passage Agreements' made clear. Intended to 'maintain the Britishness of Australia', one hundred and forty thousand people emigrated from Britain to Australia between 1947 and 1951.²⁸

²⁵ CP/CENT/INT/55/2, Harry Pollitt Speech, 'The Dominions'.

²⁶ CP/CENT/INT/55/2, Harry Pollitt Speech, 'The Dominions'.

²⁷ Neville Meaney, 'Britishness and Australian Identity: The Problem of Nationalism in Australian History and Historiography', *Australian Historical Societies*, 32: 116 (2001), 80.

²⁸ Wendy Webster, *Englishness and Empire, 1939-1965*, (Oxford, 2005), 78.

The CPA attempted to build an identity in contrast to the established 'colonial' mentality, which they believed the British Party had succumbed to. *Their* active support for the colonial people's armed struggle was unlike the British Party's perceived reformism and hesitancy. One such example is the CPA's view of the 'White Australia' Party. The policy, as the name suggests, was racial segregationist.²⁹ As Mark McKenna has written: "if being Australia meant being of white British stock, then the best way to foster that connection was to maintain the 'fountain of that racial stock'."³⁰ The 'White Australia Policy' was an 'imperialist race superiority policy', which Richard Dixon observed in 1945, was Australia's Monroe Doctrine, which sought for the 'preservation of the British-Australian nationality'.³¹ CPA leader, Lance Sharkey proposed that he had been a victim of the resentment caused by the Australian government's racial discrimination. He wrote:

As far as India is concerned...I myself was a victim of the resentment caused by the White Australia Policy. It seemed peculiar that I was the only one singled out to leave India immediately after the Congress concluded. The delegations from Yugoslavia, Ceylon, Burma, etc., were free to remain in the country after the conclusion of the Congress. I would imagine that politically they would be regarded just as "dangerous" persons as myself. But the Australian Government allows Indians to stay in this country only while they have business to transact.³²

²⁹ The 'White Australia' policy, as Prime Minister Alfred Deakin proclaimed in a rally on October 29, 1903, was "not a surface, but a reasoned policy which goes down to the roots of national life, and by which the whole of our social, industrial, and political organisations is governed".

Election Speeches, <https://electionspeeches.moadoph.gov.au/speeches/1903-alfred-deakin>, Accessed: 13 January 2022.

³⁰ Mark McKenna, *The Captive Republic: A History of Republicanism in Australia, 1788-1996* (Cambridge, 1996), 205-216.

³¹ Richard Dixon, *Immigration and the White Australia Policy* (Sydney, 1945), 12.

³² *Tribune*, 3 April 1948.

Besides Sharkey's odd framing that resentment towards whites was akin to systemic racial discrimination, it does nevertheless suggest that the 'White Australia' policy was something the CPA felt was hampering its 'anti-imperial' reputation, particularly amongst colonial Communist Parties. Their 'oppositional' identity was to fall into the very same traps as the British, as the Australian Communist Party's authenticity and desire for *real*, anti-imperialist activism was being tarnished by their association with the 'White Australia' policy. They had made similar arguments during the Second World War, as the Party declared the policy an "an outrageous insult to our great allies in the people's war against fascism – because it proclaims 'white' superiority".³³ That said, broader national anxieties surrounding the 'influence' of communism on Australian society would have certainly influenced the CPA's position. Whilst Britain's overriding priorities in the post-war period rested on maintaining its great-power status, Australia, 'as an 'exposed' 'white' power in the region was obsessed with the perceived 'advance of communism' and 'threat of invasion' by 'coloured communists'.³⁴ This political atmosphere hardened existing leftwards trends in the CPA and informed their disagreements with the British. It was a means to demonstrate their contrasting identities, as the CPA wished to be perceived as open, tolerant, and progressive, in contrast to the 'backwardness' associated with colonial Britishness. Indeed, the CPGB's anti-imperial role was to become the focus of Sharkey's opening critiques just a few months later.

'British Imperialism is already a thing of the past'

In Sharkey's review of Harry Pollitt's, *Looking Ahead*, he poured scorn on Pollitt's use of the phrase, "what was called the Empire".³⁵ In Sharkey's view, this was not in-keeping with the CPGB's responsibility as an anti-imperialist, left-wing Party based in the centre of Empire. Sharkey believed that Pollitt's comments implied that 'British imperialism is already a thing of the past', glossing over

³³ Dixon, *Immigration and the White Australia Policy*, 5.

³⁴ Neville Kirk, *Labour and the Politics of Empire*, 194.

³⁵ Harry Pollitt, *Looking Ahead* (London, 1947), 38.

their commitments to sister-Parties in the Colonies.³⁶ Sharkey continued, "I am sure the African people do not share this view, nor does the Indian Communist Party believe that British imperialism has given up the ghost in India."³⁷ The CPA claimed that the British Party had remarked that Britain under Labour was in "transition to socialism' and had backed the government's attempts to boost exports by producing a slogan of "Produce or Perish". This was a particularly needy issue for the British, as they resented the suggestion that they had thrown workers under the bus.³⁸ Strong drives towards production had been the CPGB's rallying call in their drives to support the war effort, however, post-war, the Party continued unabated, to the dislike of some in the Party.³⁹ Meanwhile, the CPA was an enthusiastic supporter of the post-war strike wave, as remarkably, nine communist-led unions - representing only twenty-six percent of the workforce - were responsible for eighty-four percent of strikes between August 1945 and December 1947.⁴⁰ The CPGB, the Australians believed had "consistently opposed the strikes of the workers" and was guilty of "referring to the British Empire in the past tense", without undertaking 'insufficient struggle' on the behalf of the colonies.⁴¹

Evan Smith has suggested that the CPGB's post-war thinking on Empire became clouded by an emphasis on what was best for Britain, or at the very best, what was deemed mutually beneficial. The so-called 'fraternal relationship' between the centre and periphery, post-Empire, would lead to co-operation marked by 'mutual benefit' on the path to socialism.⁴² In Smith's view, this was symptomatic of the Party's approach, as the Party 'sent out mixed messages about the Party's

³⁶ CP/CENT/INT/34/2, Lance Sharkey, 'Critical Comment on Harry Pollitt's Book, *Looking Ahead*', 25 October 1947.

³⁷ CP/CENT/INT/34/2, Lance Sharkey, 'Critical Comment on Harry Pollitt's Book'.

³⁸ CP/CENT/SEC/1/7, CPGB Executive Committee Response to CPA, 16 July 1948.

³⁹ *Communist Party Eighteenth Congress, November 1945: Resolutions and Agenda* (London, 1945).

⁴⁰ Ross McMullin, *The Light on the Hill: The Australian Labor Party, 1981-1991* (Melbourne, 1991), 241.

The CPA had been similarly pro-production and were reticent to openly call for strikes during the Second World War.

⁴¹ CP/CENT/SEC/01/07, Letter to the CPGB in *Communist Review*, September 1948, 272.

⁴² Evan Smith, *British Communism and the Politics of Race* (Leiden, 2017), 35.

allegiances and priorities', in its attempts to have both 'patriotic appeal' at home, as well as highlight the importance of anti-colonial struggle.⁴³ The CPA were also guilty to a lesser extent of this mixed messaging, most notably on the 'White Australia' policy, as they both openly criticised the content of the policy but echoed much of its language around migration. A 1945 pamphlet on the issue, for instance, alleviated concerns that the Party did not propose to 'flood' the country with 'cheap labour', as the 'control of immigration' would not be taken out of 'Australian hands'.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the Australians were markedly more progressive on these questions than the CPGB, who refused to even consider that the newly enfranchised colonies would contemplate severing ties with the imperial centre. The CPGB were guilty of confirming Dutt's own warnings when discussing anti-colonial policy, noting in November 1948:

"One warning note is here necessary. There is sometimes a tendency to present this positive perspective of mutually beneficial future relations between Britain and the liberated colonies to which we can look forward to with the fullest confidence...as if this implied a project of some specific future economic-political grouping, or "association of nations" to replace the existing Empire...this conception could easily arouse justified questioning on the genuineness of our programme."⁴⁵

The Empire Conference had done this the previous spring, suggesting that a 'new relationship' between Britain and the Dominions would be 'devoid of all taint of imperialism' and would 'in an entirely new and constructive manner' organise the shared usage of 'manufactured goods, raw

⁴³ Smith, *British Communism*, 37.

⁴⁴ Richard Dixon, *Immigration and the White Australia Policy*; *Tribune*, 3 April 1948.

For a more detailed discussion of the CPA's relationship with the policy, see: Jon Piccini and Evan Smith, 'The "White Australia" policy must go': The Communist Party of Australia and Immigration Restriction', in Jon Piccini, Evan Smith and Matthew Worley. (eds) *The Far Left in Australia from 1945* (Oxon, 2019), 77-96.

⁴⁵ CP/CENT/INT/55/2, Rajani Palme Dutt, 'The Crisis of British Imperialism', *World News and Views*, November 6, 1948.

materials and food-stuffs to the mutual benefit of our peoples'.⁴⁶ However, despite the Australian criticisms, the review received no comment, and it was not until the following spring that political differences came to the fore.

The Charge of Browderism?

The CPA's first letter in March 1948 questioned the validity of post-war CPGB policy, declaring 'it mistaken – it is Browderism applied to British conditions'.⁴⁷ 'Browderism' was the philosophy associated with Earl Browder, the Secretary of the CPUSA until mid-1945, who believed that the American Party should voluntarily dissolve itself; change its name, reject the word "Party", and take up a position more in-keeping with "American values".⁴⁸ This was a stinging critique, particularly following Jacques Duclos', Soviet approved, denunciation of Browderism in April 1945. Duclos, the un-official number two in the French Communist Party, resolutely stated: "in truth, nothing justifies the dissolution of the American Communist Party...Browder's analysis of capitalism is not distinguished by a judicious application of Marxism-Leninism."⁴⁹ The decision to dissolve, Duclos presented, 'does not stand up to serious scrutiny - it was in no way necessary'.⁵⁰ In the Australian Party's view, the CPGB had followed the same path, failing to 'correctly estimate the position in Britain and the mood of the masses' on the eve of the Labour Party's election victory in 1945.⁵¹ Echoing his future critical comments, Lance Sharkey told the CPA's Central Committee in March 1946 that the CPGB lacked 'sufficient punch'.⁵² As Harry Pollitt's biographer has put it, the CPGB's ideological purpose in the period after the war was unclear, as 'all the isms, now became wasms'.⁵³

⁴⁶ CP/CENT/55/2, For Release in the Press, 'Britain and the Dominions', 14 April 1947.

⁴⁷ CP/CENT/SEC/01/0, Australian Communist Party Letter to the CPGB, 31 March 1948.

⁴⁸ William Z. Foster, *Marxism-Leninism vs. Revisionism* (New York, 1946), 21-35.

⁴⁹ Foster, *Marxism-Leninism vs Revisionism*, 21-35.

⁵⁰ CP/CENT/INT/7/10, Jacques Duclos: 'On the Dissolution of the Communist Party of the United States', 13.

⁵¹ CPA Letter, 31 March 1948.

⁵² CPA Central Committee, 14– 16 March 1946 in Stuart Macintyre, *The Party* (Sydney, 2022), 210

⁵³ Morgan, *Harry Pollitt*, 143.

The archival sources in the period between Browder's initial remarks and his public denunciation suggest that the CPGB was at best lukewarm in its critique. An Executive Committee Circular in January 1944 did little to separate the two Parties, beyond an admittance that the 'conditions are different' in the two countries. The Party shared the general perspective informed by the Teheran Conference, which they noted 'governs our tasks and path of advance'.⁵⁴ The American Party, the CPGB argued, had shown "unhesitating clearness in their paramount responsibility", as both Parties were fully on-board with the idea of peaceful co-existence, post-war reconstruction, and a 'progressive' capitalism.⁵⁵ However, as the optimism of the post-war dissipated, a CPGB circular signed by Pollitt and Dutt claimed that the CPUSA had made 'an incorrect approach to the Teheran Agreement', in wrongly using it as a long-term policy base. The document ludicrously claimed that they had "emphatically rejected" the policy in January of the previous year, despite admitting that they had not 'raised any public polemic against its theoretical foundations'.⁵⁶

Whilst unsurprising for anyone familiar with the often-debilitating twists and turns of Communist Party policy, it speaks volumes that the CPGB sought to distance themselves from the so-called 'taint' of Browderism – when they had followed a similar trajectory. The Party, particularly in the aftermath of their misreading of the 1945 election - in which they called for a cross-Party alliance as late as March – were increasingly feeling the effects of fermenting rank-and-file discontent in the run up to their Eighteenth Congress that November.⁵⁷ The CPGB with an influx of new members; and desire for radical post-war change had according to the Portsmouth Branch 'under-estimated the deep political change among the people.'⁵⁸ Calls of 'defeatism', 'revisionism', 'inadequate understandings of Marxism', and 'stifling of minority opinion' were issued at the Party leadership in

⁵⁴ CP/CENT/INT/7/10, 'Browderism: CPGB Executive Committee Circular to all Branches', 22 January 1944.

⁵⁵ CP/CENT/INT/7/10, Browderism: CPGB EC Circular, 22 January 1944.

⁵⁶ CP/CENT/INT/7/10, 'The Errors of Browder's Revision of Marxism' CPGB Party Circular, 7 August 1945.

⁵⁷ Kenneth Newton, *The Sociology of British Communism* (London, 1969), 166.

⁵⁸ *Communist Party Eighteenth Congress in World News and Views*, 27 October 1945.

a rare instance of the Party membership challenging the leadership's policy choices openly and in force.⁵⁹ The Party had inaccurately been 'leading the Party into the slough of social democracy', one excerpt proclaimed.⁶⁰ As Lawrence Parker has suggested, it would not be incorrect to position the Australian Party's initial criticisms as an 'amplification' of existing arguments from 'CPGB opportunists since the end of the Second World War'.⁶¹

Similarly, the CPA attempted to distance themselves from 'Browder's theories'. The Party, as the later exchange demonstrated, appeared to be placing a wedge between its current ultra-left policy, and the remarks made by an Australian comrade on a previous visit to Britain. The CPGB accused the CPA delegate, Ernie Thornton, of 'endeavouring to persuade us of the correctness of Browder's policies'.⁶² The Australians quickly retorted that upon Thornton's return, Browder's theories received no such support in the Party's Central Committee and was 'rejected by the majority of its members'.⁶³ Sharkey was quick to point out that Thornton had now formally denounced the 'considerable evil' of Browderism and had become an "exemplary member."⁶⁴ It was clear that the perception of appearing in-line with a Browderist mindset was akin to a grand betrayal of Marxist theory. Claims of ideological purity were nothing new, but as many of these earlier debates demonstrate, there was a kind of holier than thou attitude towards Marxist authenticity, particularly following Browder's public denunciation.

It would not be unfair to characterise Browderism as an extreme offshoot of the Soviet Union's geo-political manoeuvrings. Browder, for instance, in Phillip Deery's view "embodied the chance to navigate a path towards a national form of communism within the established political

⁵⁹ *Communist Party Eighteenth Congress*.

⁶⁰ *World News and Views*, 17 November 1945, 346.

⁶¹ Lawrence Parker, *The Kick Inside*, 34-35.

⁶² CP/CENT/SEC/1/7, Letter from the Executive Committee of the CPGB to CPA, July 16, 1948.

⁶³ CP/CENT/INT/34/2, Lance Sharkey to Harry Pollitt, 22 October 1948; Lance Sharkey, 'International Situation and Opportunism', *MCP Review*, 25 May 1948.

⁶⁴ Sharkey to Pollitt, 22 October 1948; Lance Sharkey, 'International Situation and Opportunism'.

system.”⁶⁵ Maintaining warm, non-hostile relations with the capitalist West required Communist Parties to undergo an obvious change in emphasis, global politics, and ideas of social progress. Browder’s calls for the disillusion of the American Party were evidently extreme, but his theories of post-war co-operation based upon the ‘spirit’ of Yalta and Teheran were not far removed from the preferences of both Parties, particularly the British. However, once Browder’s ideas fell into political obscurity, the charge of Browderism became a political yoyo to brandish around as one saw fit; an unspoken affront, and clear red flag, like the experience of pre-war Trotskyists, who were labelled “fifth columnists”.⁶⁶

‘The Malayan Emergency’:

There was no response from the British Party until Sharkey’s next critique, which appeared in the theoretical journal of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP). Titled, ‘The International Situation and Opportunism’, Sharkey’s criticism again focused on the British Party’s perceived over-reliance and lack of distinctiveness from the British Labour Party. The CPGB had ‘followed the tail of reformism’, he said, and were wrong to assume that the ‘People’s Front’ automatically demanded a Labour Government.⁶⁷ The Australians were not alone, Sharkey noted, as he suggested that many members of the Malayan Party supported his criticism of the CPGB.⁶⁸ It was a damning indictment of the opposing direction of these two Parties that these issues were aired, not only in the public domain, but in the journal of another CP. The choice appears to be a deliberate one, which would achieve three things. Firstly, the Party would tacitly gain the support of another Party by appearing in their journal – as Sharkey refers to in his article. Secondly, it would suggest that the Party was politically

⁶⁵ Phillip Deery, ‘American Communism’, in Norman Naimark, Silvio Pons; Sophie Quinn-Judge (eds), *Cambridge History of Communism: Volume II – The Socialist Camp and World Power, 1941-1968* (Cambridge, 2017), 652-653.

⁶⁶ Robin Page Arnot, ‘The Trotskyist Trial’, *Labour History* (London, 1937), 179.

⁶⁷ Sharkey, ‘International Situation and Opportunism’.

⁶⁸ Sharkey, ‘International Situation and Opportunism’.

more in-tune with their colonial sister-Parties. And finally, was a means of legitimating their criticisms of the CPGB, by becoming an un-official, *de facto* hub for Asian Communist Parties.

The dispute brought the unfolding 'Malayan Emergency' front and centre, which was the beginning of a twelve-year Communist-led counterinsurgency against British colonial forces. Malaya was not alone, as in the same year there were communist uprisings in Burma, Indonesia, India, and the Philippines.⁶⁹ Britain's chief dollar earning resource was in open rebellion, as the Cold War in South-East Asia increasingly became a reality. This section analyses how the CPA and CPGB's coverage spoke volumes about their differing trajectories, closeness to their anti-imperialist sister-Parties, and their role(s) as mediator between the Soviet Union and Colonial Parties. After attending the Communist Party of India's (CPI) Calcutta conference in late February, Lance Sharkey on his journey back to Australia passed through Singapore and attended the Communist Party of Malaya's (MCP) Central Committee Meeting between 17 and 21 March 1948. Here, Chin Peng, General Secretary of the Party, later claimed that Sharkey had encouraged the MCP to take a more militant, hostile approach against the British – though he was quick to point out that Sharkey himself played no decisive role in the change of policy and was not merely implementing Soviet directives.⁷⁰ Former CPA member, Cecil Sharpley - who left the Party in December 1948 - strongly suggested that Sharkey had been 'commissioned by the Cominform' to direct the Malayan Party to revolt against British colonial rule.⁷¹ Sharpley's account is emblematic of the traditional consensus on the Malayan uprising, which suggested a general inclination towards 'Moscow meddling'.⁷² In these accounts,

⁶⁹ Karl Hack and Geoff Wade, 'The Origins of the Southeast Asian Cold War', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 40:3 (2009), 441-448.

⁷⁰ Carl Chin and Karl Hack (eds), *Dialogues with Chin Peng: New Light on the Malaysian Communist Party* (Singapore, 2005), 119.

⁷¹ Cecil Sharpley, *The Great Delusion: Autobiography of an ex-Communist Leader* (Melbourne, 1952), 110-111.

⁷² Phillip Deery, 'Malaya, 1948: Britain's Asian Cold War?', 29-54.

Sharkey's appearance at the MCP's Central Committee meeting is viewed as an example of international interference by the Soviets - however, recent scholarship has queried this claim.⁷³

Stockwell has suggested that Peng's peripheral relationship within international circles meant that he had little interaction with the 'centres' of communism.⁷⁴ Deery agrees, presenting the MCP's decision to undertake armed struggle as a result of 'international trends and domestic pressures'.⁷⁵ Therefore, it appears unlikely that Sharkey played such a crucial facilitating role, as the MCP's uprising 'arose from its own local dynamics', rather than from external Soviet pressure. Local events appear to have drawn on international developments for their own ideological and practical purposes.⁷⁶ Instead, the driving factor appears to be its failed 'open front activities', which laid the groundwork for armed confrontation.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, the Australian Party appear to have placed more weight on developing closer links with Asia than the British. Sharkey's mere presence at the MCP Central Committee meeting, as well as his active support for Malayan 'national independence' demonstrates the stark contrast between the two Parties on international matters. Indeed, besides Sharkey, the only European delegates at the CPI's Congress in Calcutta were two representatives from the proactive Yugoslavian Party.⁷⁸ At least in rhetoric, the conference was a turning-point for Colonial Parties, as a 'war-like disposition' predominated, and a new insurrectionist agenda came to

⁷³ A.J. Stockwell, 'A widespread and long-concocted plot to overthrow the government in Malaya', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 21: 3 (1993), 66–88; Anthony Stockwell, 'Chin Peng and the Struggle for Malaya', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 6:1 (2006), 279–297.

⁷⁴ Anthony Stockwell, 'Chin Peng and the Struggle for Malaya', 289-290.

⁷⁵ Deery, 'Malaya, 1948: Britain's Asian Cold War?', 48.

⁷⁶ Karl Hack and Geoff Wade, 'The Origins of the Southeast Asian Cold War', 441-448.

⁷⁷ Leon Comber, 'The Origins of the Cold War in Southeast Asia: The Case of the Communist Party of Malaya (1948-1960) A Special Branch Perspective', *ISEAS Working Paper: Politics and Security Series*, 1 (Singapore, 2009), 9.

⁷⁸ *Tribune*, 30 June 1948.

Sharkey attended both Calcutta conferences. The first between 19-25 February 1948, organised by the World Federation of Democratic Youth and International Union of Students, and the second between 28 February–6 March, held by the Indian Communist Party (CPI).

the fore.⁷⁹ A dividing line between the Colonial Parties and the CPGB was beginning to widen, as the British Party's cautious, constitutionalist approach contrasted with the militant rhetoric emanating from the colonial and Australian Parties.

The CPGB records on Malaya in this period are sketchy, which is surprising given Britain's reliance on Malayan exports.⁸⁰ Malaya was both an important strategic outpost within Britain's Empire, as well as a key economic resource. A Colonial Office report in 1950, noted that Malaya's rubber and tin were the biggest earners in the Commonwealth.⁸¹ Nevertheless, the CPGB did 'refute' the suggestion that the liberation movement were 'terrorists', and challenged the Colonial Secretary to 'publish any communication' between themselves and the MCP.⁸² In an era of 'national indigenization', the Party were attempting to appear in-tune with 'British values' and 'moral standards', so any potential smears against the Party from the press as fellow conspirators or 'supporters' of terror was quickly nipped in the bud. The CPGB wanted to downplay any suggestion that they were undermining the integrity of the Commonwealth – however, the Australians took a sharper line. In August 1948, Sharkey told *Tribune* that the Malayan struggle for 'national independence' was 'justified' and would be enthusiastically supported.⁸³ The struggle in Malaya was a continuation of anti-imperialist struggle against Japan during the Second World War - only the aggressor had changed. Commenting on his own role in Calcutta, as a Soviet representative, Sharkey retorted that Malaysians require "no instructions from the Kremlin or me, or anyone else, to make

⁷⁹ John Callaghan, *Rajani Palme Dutt: A Study in British Stalinism* (London, 1993), 229.

⁸⁰ Walter Fletcher, Conservative M.P. for Bury summed up the view that losing Malaya would be detrimental to the British economy in a letter to the editor of *The Times* on 1 September 1948. Fletcher stated: "Serious economic effects will result from the dangerous political situation, and if rapid action is not taken the Chancellor will find that within six months his chief dollar earning resource will be drying up." *The Times*, September 1, 1948, 7.

⁸¹ Ben Curtis, *Web of Deceit: Britain's Real World in the World* (London, 2008), 334-335.

⁸² *Manchester Guardian*, 24 July 1948, 6.

⁸³ *Tribune*, 14 August 1948.

them realise the need for struggle for a better life".⁸⁴ Sharkey's comments regarding his visit to Malaysia illuminate the Australian Party's anti-imperialist resolve:

I certainly told them that a struggle for national independence to prevent the old colonial slavery again being imposed upon them was justified, and that such a struggle would be supported by the whole of progressive mankind...Neither the Australian Communist Party, nor myself at any time concealed the fact that we fully support the struggle of the colonial peoples for their freedom...such questions as [to] when they should start an armed insurrection, or whether they should start one at all...is a matter for the Malaysians themselves.⁸⁵

Communists must 'support Malaya and other Asiatic wars of liberation against the imperialists of whatever nationality', Sharkey wrote in a foreword for a book focusing on the Malayan situation.⁸⁶ Imperialism had no national boundaries, as he criticised not only the British Party, but what Sharkey deemed the 'opportunism' of the Indian Party, under the previous leadership of P.C. Joshi.⁸⁷ The British Stalinist apparatchik, Rajani Palme Dutt, was likewise denounced as 'utterly reformist' by the new Indian leadership of B.T. Ranadive, as the CPI shifted towards an insurrectionist strategy in a manner akin to the Malaysians.⁸⁸ *Tribune*, followed suit in March 1948, stipulating that Joshi's leadership was 'handicapped' by a 'right-wing' policy, which had originated with Pollitt and Dutt.⁸⁹ Therefore, Sharkey's criticisms fit within a broader realignment of Communist hierarchies, loyalties, and spheres of influence, as the Australian, Indian, and Malayan Parties' criticisms of the CPGB suggest a shared outlook and emphasis on the 'Asian experience'. Indeed, a Central Intelligence

⁸⁴ *Tribune*, 14 August 1948.

⁸⁵ *Tribune*, 14 August 1948.

⁸⁶ Lance Sharkey, 'Foreword', in Walter Blaschke, *Freedom for Malaya* (Sydney, 1948), 2.

⁸⁷ *For Australia, Prosperous and Independent: The Report of L.L. Sharkey to the Fifteenth Congress of the Australian Communist Party* (Sydney, 1948), 31.

⁸⁸ Callaghan, Rajani Palme Dutt, 224-230.

⁸⁹ *Tribune*, 31 March 1948.

Agency (CIA) report in 1949 noted the financial assistance the CPA provided to Communists in several Asian countries.⁹⁰ Australia's geographical location, as well as the CPA's broader leftwards shift was breeding grounds for a fiery critique of the British Party's anti-resolve. It would not be unreasonable to assume that Sharkey had in mind the British when he highlighted that 'some of the European Parties have, I feel, been weak in their attitude to the colonial struggles.'⁹¹ The Malayan Communist Party also believed as much, signalling out the British Party at the 1947 Empire Conference "to leave no stone unturned in your effort to help us attain democratic rights."⁹² Previous loyalties and hierarchies were no longer a given, as fragmentation on ideological lines became the order of the day.

One notable example was in August 1948, when Sharkey contrasted the CPA's 'active support' for six hundred Malayan seamen, who were deported from the country, to the CPGB's supposed inaction.⁹³ He expressed his frustration that the British had not called for the boycotting of goods destined for Indonesia and other anti-imperial hotspots. 'If these seamen were ready to take action in Australia, why not in Britain?', Sharkey queried.⁹⁴ The CPGB's domestic support for production quotas and exports, had marked their foreign record, he noted, and 'failed the working-class in other countries'.⁹⁵ The CPGB's hesitancy in the opening months of the evolving Malayan situation was in part due to their uneasiness to openly criticise the British Labour Party – particularly

⁹⁰ A CIA document from 1949 suggested that the CPA had strong links with the Chinese, Indian, Indonesian, and Malayan Communist Parties in the region. Found in: National Archives, Washington D.C, USA, Intelligence Files, 1946-1953, 225249501, 'Communist Influence in Australia', Central Intelligence Agency, 11 April 1949. Accessed at: <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/225249501> 13 December 2021. And in Evan Smith, 'For Socialist Revolution', 254.

⁹¹ *For Australia, Prosperous and Independent*, 31.

⁹² CP/CENT/INT/36/9, 'History of the Malayan Communist Party' [undated]. It appears to have been around the time of the Empire Conference in 1947, if not shortly afterwards.

⁹³ *Tribune*, 18 August 1948.

⁹⁴ *Tribune*, 18 August 1948.

⁹⁵ *Tribune*, 18 August 1948.

in the domestic sphere.⁹⁶ The Labour Government had fully committed themselves to the counterinsurgency, as Malaya was just one aspect of what John Newsinger has recently described as ‘the Labour Government’s development of the modern warfare state’, which occurred alongside their domestic reforms.⁹⁷ By contrast, the CPA were quick to point out the Australian Government’s close relationship with the exploitation of Malaya’s national resources. The Labor Party’s support for the war effort, they argued, had shown it was firmly in the ‘camp of imperialism’, demonstrating that they preferred ‘Collins House investments to internationalist principles’.⁹⁸

The above findings suggest that at the beginning of the ‘emergency’, the British Party’s role as co-ordinator had been subsumed by the Australians, as its own anti-imperialist resolve had been shown to be waning. Given that the British were in the post-Comintern period given the responsibility to assist fellow Communist Parties in Britain’s colonies, it appears here, that their legitimacy and capacity to do so was questioned. Far from being a ‘transmission belt’, for which the Moscow line was transmitted and received by the ‘periphery’ - instead the relationship within Britain’s Empire was fluid and horizontal, reflecting wider ideological shifts in the international movement.⁹⁹

A ‘Titoist’ Clique?

The policy of “individual national roads” provided the weaponry for claims of reformism and ‘anti-Marxist’ thinking. Like the previous accusations of Browderism, the recent expulsion of Yugoslavia

⁹⁶ The CPGB were broadly supportive of the Labour Party’s domestic agenda, though this would begin to change as the Labour Government continued to commit to the maintenance of Empire, NATO, and close ties with the United States.

⁹⁷ John Newsinger, ‘War, Empire, and the Attlee Government, 1945-1951’, *Race & Class*, 60:1 (London, 2018), 62.

⁹⁸ *Tribune*, 7 August 1948.

⁹⁹ In the below volume, the editors state their desire to move beyond the conventional ‘transmission-belt’ models of the Comintern. See: Oleksa Drachewych and Ian McKay (eds), *Left Transnationalism: The Communist International and the National, Colonial, and Racial Questions* (Montreal, 2019), 5-6.

from the Cominform was an obvious slight to be made, as “Titoism” became the latest deviation from the accepted line. The first schism within the Communist bloc was signalled by *Pravda’s* June 29 article, “The Situation in the Yugoslav Communist Party”, which accused Yugoslavia of ‘placing themselves outside the family of fellow Communist Parties, outside the united Communist front, and consequently, outside the Cominform’.¹⁰⁰ The reasons for the split do not need to be remarked upon here, but rather, an appreciation that the overarching concept of the Soviet bloc dictated the claims of communist ‘authenticity’. The Cominform announcement escalated claims of ‘deviationism’ and ‘revisionism’ to the Yugoslavian’s outright ‘collapse into fascism and selling out to the United States’.¹⁰¹ Previously, Tito and Yugoslavia had been earmarked as positive examples in communist circles, but, for the Yugoslavs, accusations on this scale had no opportunity for self-reflection. Indeed, there is an argument to be made that the Yugoslav Communists pursued the Popular Front ‘construction of socialism more fanatically than many other Eastern European states’, which only further underlines the abruptness of their sudden exclusion.¹⁰²

Both Parties had remarked positively on the Yugoslavian situation and were now anxiously backtracking. Former members have suggested that this sudden denunciation was not swallowed easily. Margot Heinemann has suggested that Tito’s expulsion and the succession of trials in Eastern Europe caused ‘uneasiness and doubts among members’, whilst Eric Hobsbawm later posited that Party figures were privately frustrated over the debacle, and only publicly followed the Party ‘line’.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Jeronim Perović, ‘The Tito-Stalin Split: A Reassessment in Light of New Evidence’, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 9:2 (2007), 32.

¹⁰¹ Thompson provides a good overview of the CPGB’s position in Thompson, ‘British Communists and the Cold War’, 115-118.

¹⁰² Perović, ‘The Tito-Stalin Split’, 32.

¹⁰³ Eric Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times: A Twentieth-Century Life* (London, 2002), 192-196; Richard Evans, *Eric Hobsbawm: A Life in History* (London, 2020), 303; Margot Heinemann, ‘1956 and the Communist Party’, *Socialist Register* (London, 1976), 44.

According to Hobsbawm’s biographer, Hobsbawm was ‘frequently at odds with the Party’ in the late 1940s and did not want to believe the sudden switch in ‘line’ on Tito and Yugoslavia.

In Dave Childs' view, the split was 'the biggest single embarrassment' in the post-war period for British Communists until 1953.¹⁰⁴ The shifting twists and turns of international communist policy, alongside the ever-expanding list of Stalin's enemies allowed a figure like Josip Tito to shift from heroic leader in the fight against fascism, to a heretic and 'traitor' of communist principles.¹⁰⁵ For both Parties, they were under no illusion that Tito was now a 'traitor', who was to be used as a lesson to their Party and others.¹⁰⁶ The iron fist of democratic centralism both within the Central Committee, as well as within individual Party branches meant that marginalisation was endemic to the Stalinist political structure, as self-policing became inevitable within Parties.¹⁰⁷

It is therefore little surprise that Yugoslavia became a focal point in the two Parties discussion. Sharkey's reply in early August to the CPGB's first letter was to be one such example. Fanning the flames further, Sharkey stated that "we have no desire to go behind your back, but on the contrary desire to challenge your policy before the international movement."¹⁰⁸ He once again added that the Malayan CP held the same criticisms after 'studying your official publications', whilst 'Indian comrades indicated agreement', particularly on the perceived 'misguidance of colonial CPs'.¹⁰⁹ That same month, the CPA warmly invited Communist Parties in India, Malaya, Ceylon, South Africa, and New Zealand to attend its Fifteen Congress the following May, whilst letters were sent with the full correspondence to the Cominform and other Communist Parties.¹¹⁰ These internal

¹⁰⁴ Dave Childs, 'The Cold War and the British Road', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 23:4 (1988), 561.

¹⁰⁵ John Callaghan, *Cold War, Crisis, and Conflict: The CPGB 1951-68* (London, 2003), 51.

¹⁰⁶ Letter from Lance Sharkey to Harry Pollitt, 22 October 1948.

The Yugoslav Party had 'deserted the path of socialism', Willy Gallacher, *The Case for Communism* (London, 1949), 207-208.

¹⁰⁷ The hostility towards Trotskyism, most notably expressed during the Spanish Civil War is illustrated by the CPGB's Fifteenth Congress Report, 'For Peace and Plenty', 16-19 September 1938.

¹⁰⁸ CP/CENT/INT/34/2, Letter from Sharkey to Pollitt, 2 August 1948.

¹⁰⁹ Letter from Sharkey to Pollitt, 2 August 1948.

¹¹⁰ *Communist Review*, September 1948, 274-283; *The Workers Star*, 9 April 1948, 5. (The newspaper was an organ of the CPA in Western Australia).

groupings provided the weaponry for claims that the CPA had become 'Titoist'. Brian Pearce was one such example, suggesting in a letter to the Central Committee that this new-found 'friendship' between the CPA and Tito may have been formed at the Communist Party of India's (CPI) congress in Calcutta, where Sharkey and the Yugoslavian delegate were the only two non-colonial representatives. Pearce posited that the CPA, 'warmly supported' the "frenzied leftist thesis" which became CPI policy and proposed that the "pro-Tito" sentiments in the Australian letter was recognition of the similarity in their Parties policy.¹¹¹ These differences in emphasis were not missed by Harry Pollitt either, remarking on the 5 October, in a letter to Jacques Duclos, PCF (*Parti communiste français*) and Palmiro Togliatti, PCI (*Partido Comunista Italiano*) that the recent debacle "clearly indicated how strongly they have come under the influence of the Yugoslav CP".¹¹² According to Pollitt, the Party could 'very easily puncture some of their efforts', as it was quite clear that the Australians "were very strongly under the influence of the Yugoslav Party and insist upon us doing the same."¹¹³

In this moment, the CPGB rummaged through reams of Party records to illustrate the CPA's 'closeness' to the recently denounced Tito. One such finding was when Richard Dixon, member of the CPA Executive Committee boldly expressed his admiration for the work of the Party in January 1948. "It is very valuable, so far as we are concerned...the Yugoslav experience here is of first-rate importance for us."¹¹⁴ The timing of these remarks was unfortunate, but it made little difference. For Dixon, the British CP held policies which 'ran counter to the views set forward by Marshal Tito', as they had neglected the importance of developing a mass movement from below in favour of

¹¹¹ CP/CENT/INT/34/2, Letter from Brian Pearce to Executive Committee, 7 August 1948.

¹¹² CP/CENT/INT/34/2, Letter from Harry Pollitt to Jacques Duclos (PCF) and Palmiro Togliatti (PCI), 5 October 1948.

¹¹³ CP/CENT/INT/34/2, Letter from Harry Pollitt to Bill (last name unclear), 14 September 1948.

¹¹⁴ CP/CENT/INT/34/2, Extracts from a speech by Richard Dixon to CPA Political Committee, 10-11 January 1948.

maintaining a Labour government.¹¹⁵ The British, just as the Australians had done earlier, suggested an ideological and factional divide in the international Communist movement. The Australians supported Tito, and they had in-turn supported the "frenzied" leftism of the Indian Party. Therefore, the responsibility fell to the CPGB to quash these grumblings to maintain ideological orthodoxy and uniformity - particularly, as the legitimacy of their own 'mediative' role was questioned.

Leadership Challenge?

The Australians, the CPGB believed, had cast their hostilities in the open in the hope of causing internal political strife, and hopefully, change at the top of the leadership.¹¹⁶ Pollitt's letter to the French and Italian Parties suggested as much, stating: "we have known for some time that the Australian comrades were very critical of the policy of our Party, and in particular, my own role in the leadership of the Party."¹¹⁷ The Australian Party's criticisms, Pollitt wrote to Sharkey in July 1948, were "uncomradely and un-communist", which 'have nothing in common with international practice among Communist Parties and between CP leaders'.¹¹⁸ The CPA had given the green light to an 'entirely false representation of our Party to be published, without any prior consultation with us'. Not only was this a betrayal of expected 'communist action' and civility, but the impression they had created was 'deliberately misleading'.¹¹⁹ For Pollitt, the Australian's methods were a black and white issue, which could only be described as "openly factional activity against our Party leadership, which simply cannot be tolerated."¹²⁰ The CPA had gone to the left, and the CPGB, to the right, but what really mattered was less the content of the criticisms, but the fact the hostilities occurred at all, and certainly, for such a long period of time. The criticisms the CPA made, could as the CPGB were

¹¹⁵ Richard Dixon to CPA Political Committee, 10-11 January 1948.

¹¹⁶ CP/CENT/INT/34/2, Executive Committee Meeting, 11 September 1948.

¹¹⁷ Letter from Pollitt to PCF & PCI, 5 October 1948.

¹¹⁸ CP/CENT/INT/34/2, Letter from Harry Pollitt to Lance Sharkey, 16 July 1948.

¹¹⁹ Pollitt to Sharkey, 16 July 1948.

¹²⁰ Letter from Harry Pollitt to Bill (last name unclear), 14 September 1948.

aware, have caused more internal dissent than the Party wished, particularly, on the issue of self-criticism and censorship. Tom O'Lincoln has made a similar analysis, highlighting that the 'spectacle of the Australians delivering the British a lecture on militancy and class struggle' is illustrative of the Party's differing ideological destinations.¹²¹ Betty Matthews, the CPGB's East Midlands organiser, called it a 'hell of a nerve' to start circulating copies of Sharkey's second letter to British CP branches without their knowledge.¹²² They had chosen, according to Assistant General Secretary John Gollan, to ferment conflict in the British Party, proven 'by sending their last letter to a number of selected comrades'.¹²³

Internal agreement with the content of the CPA's criticisms was depicted as damaging Party discipline. According to the British leadership, the inter-Party correspondence 'found no echo in the main sections of the Party, apart from where the Party is sectarian and weak', the Executive Committee noted. Lancashire, Leeds, Cambridge, and Peckham were highlighted as hotbeds of 'sectarianism'.¹²⁴ In-fact, there were calls from some individual Party branches to use the debate as an opportunity to interrogate policy direction and instigate wider rank-and-file involvement. Camberwell Green Branch were one such example, who asked the E.C. on the 15 September to publish the second Australian letter to 'stimulate further theoretical discussion throughout the Party'.¹²⁵ Similarly, Edward and Hilda Upward from Dulwich remembered being 'electrified' by the letter from the Australian Party.¹²⁶ Indeed, in one letter to the editor of *World New Views*, they suggested that there are 'at least some rank-and-file members who are in full agreement' with the

¹²¹ O'Lincoln, *Into the Mainstream*, 61.

¹²² CP/CENT/INT/34/2, Betty Matthews Letter to John Gollan, 24 August 1948.

¹²³ CP/CENT/INT/34/2, Gollan's Notes for Australian Letter, Executive Committee, 11 September 1948.

¹²⁴ John Gollan's Notes for Australian Letter, 11 September 1948.

¹²⁵ CP/CENT/INT/34/2, Letter from Camberwell Green Branch to Executive Committee, 15 September 1948.

¹²⁶ Raphael Samuel, 'The Lost World of British Communism: two texts', *New Left Review*, January-February 1986, 119-124.

Australian Party's criticisms and questioned why their letter was not published and circulated at the recent Party Congress in 1948.¹²⁷

In their unpublished letter, they suggested, that the Party's understanding of the role of the state in the transition to socialism was a revision of Lenin's teachings, which was unnecessary and invalidated by 'post-war developments'.¹²⁸ They continued, 'in no country do we find a transition to socialism...why should Britain be an exception?'. Self-criticism was in keeping with Leninist traditions, they argued, and Congress 'must admit mistakes openly – there must be no attempt to suggest that the new line is merely a 'development'. In turn, they proposed an 'immediate withdrawal of *Looking Ahead*' and an intensification of study by all Party members, along with the right to exercise 'critical faculties' when developing policy.¹²⁹ Both the editor and the E.C. predictably responded that discussion was permitted and that "full facilities exist within our own Party for raising any questions."¹³⁰ Unsurprisingly, it appears that the Australian Party were in contact with the Upward's and potentially other sympathetic members of the CPGB - which Edward Upward later novelised in *The Rotten Elements*.¹³¹ Their attempts to undermine the CPGB from within can be seen by the CPA's newspaper, *Tribune*, role in continuing the spat. *Tribune* saw an opportunity and published the Upward's letters instead, describing their remarks as 'heartened and stimulated'.¹³² The Australian challenge was 'timely and urgently needed' they noted, and called on Party members to contact friends or relatives in the British Party to 'not hesitate in saying what they think' in branch meetings and in letters to Party HQ.¹³³ The controversy further illustrates what Ben

¹²⁷ CP/CENT/INT/34/02, Letter from Edward and Hilda Upward to the editor of *World News and Views*, 8 August 1948.

¹²⁸ CP/CENT/INT/34/2, 'For Congress Discussion', Hilda and Edward Upward to *World News and Views*, 8 August 1948 [unpublished].

¹²⁹ 'For Congress Discussion', Hilda and Edward Upward to *World News and Views*.

¹³⁰ CP/CENT/INT/34/2, *World News and Views* reply to Edward and Hilda Upward, 16 August 1948.

¹³¹ Edward Upward, *The Rotten Elements* (London, 1969)

¹³² *Tribune*, 21 August 1948.

¹³³ *Tribune*, 8 September 1948.

Harker has described as a period 'rich in letters and diaries of British Communists dissatisfied with the leadership', which showed the CPGB's 'inability to think independently about the national road'.¹³⁴ This article would agree with this assessment, as the Party not only failed to adequately discuss its new roadmap to socialism, but consequently, resigned themselves to marginalise 'uncomfortable' perspectives, particularly those from on the Party's left.

"We Do Not Claim to be Magicians, even if We Claim to be Marxists"

Debate within the CPGB's Executive Committee was unanimous on the best approach to the CPA's second letter in October 1948. They were strongly in favour of not replying, suggesting that both Parties were following differing and irreconcilable ideological trends.¹³⁵ The CPA's criticisms represented 'both a non-Marxist and sectarian approach', which was not in keeping with Molotov's "all roads to Communism" analysis.¹³⁶ The CPA had failed to appreciate that Molotov's speech was "not a platitude or a peroration, but an accurate and Marxist diagnosis of the present situation."¹³⁷ Both Parties lent weight towards their supposed consistency and ideological purity in following established "Marxist thinking", however, their analysis of what this entailed differed immensely. One of the CPA's most forthright criticisms was that the British Party had failed to consider the strength of the Labour Party's 1945 victory in the months preceding the election. For the British, the swing towards the Labour Party was an event "which took all political movements in every country by surprise."¹³⁸ The CPGB were not 'disposing of basic mistakes' via 'back-door methods' as the Australians accused them.¹³⁹ For John Gollan, the Party could not be blamed on this matter, as he stated in an Executive Committee shortly afterwards, "we do not claim to be magicians, even if we

¹³⁴ Ben Harker, *The Chronology of Revolution*, 72.

¹³⁵ CP/CENT/INT/34/2, Executive Committee Meeting. 'First Rough Draft on Australian Letter', 9 October 1948.

[unsent]

¹³⁶ 'First Rough Draft on Australian Letter'.

¹³⁷ 'First Rough Draft on Australian Letter'.

¹³⁸ 'First Rough Draft on Australian Letter'.

¹³⁹ *Communist Review*, September 1948, 278-283.

believe we are Marxists.”¹⁴⁰ The CPGB reaffirmed their commitment to their present programme of allying to the Labour Party, which would be ‘composed of the best fighters from within the British Labour movement’. The headline being, again, in-keeping with the new international policy, that this would be created locally – and must ‘correspond with British conditions’.¹⁴¹

In a letter to the CPA’s national newspaper, *Tribune*, in early October, Pollitt expressed “some surprise” at the way in which the newspaper had ‘handled this business’.¹⁴² Signposting his dislike for the method of the Australian Party’s critiques, he noted that similar relations did not exist with other Parties, with whom they had more frequent contact, and strongly suggested that the public disagreement was causing uproar in the capitalist press. The ‘class enemies of communism’ are ‘utilising one Party against another’ and “the most dangerous in British journalism are making use of your criticisms”, Pollitt exclaimed.¹⁴³ The formal conventions of debate had all but evaporated, as both Parties believed themselves to be correct and regarded the other as breaking the accepted conventions of debate. The CPGB no doubt irked by the unrelenting criticism from their sister-Party sent their final letter, in which they announced that the E.C. had agreed not to publish the Australian’s second letter and regarded the discussion as over.¹⁴⁴ In the letter, Pollitt expressed his “amazement” at the CPA’s decision to circulate their letter of August 12 to British Party members and branches, without waiting for a reply.¹⁴⁵ According to Pollitt, it had sowed friction and curiosity within the rank-and-file, prompting wider discussion on the critiques the Australian Party had presented, which the British did not want to entertain, nor embolden. This choice was a political

¹⁴⁰ CP/CENT/INT/34/2, Executive Committee Meeting, 9 October 1948.

¹⁴¹ Executive Committee Meeting, 9 October 1948.

¹⁴² CP/CENT/INT/34/2, Letter from Harry Pollitt to ‘Comrade Donald’, 5 October 1948.

¹⁴³ Letter from Pollitt to ‘Comrade Donald’, 5 October 1948.

¹⁴⁴ CP/CENT/INT/34/2, Letter from Harry Pollitt to Lance Sharkey, 11 October 1948.

¹⁴⁵ Letter from Pollitt to Sharkey, 11 October 1948.

one, Pollitt believed, and was a “course which could only be regarded as expressing the aim to promote factionalism”.¹⁴⁶

The matter was over in the minds of the CPGB. However, Sharkey did not see it as such, prompting his harshest and most critical letter yet. Pollitt had “evaded the fundamental issues” and his latest letter was dismissed as ‘unworthy of a comrade holding the position of Secretary of the British Communist Party’.¹⁴⁷ Sharkey was on the offensive and left little to the imagination, focusing directly on Pollitt’s leadership of the Party. He plainly disregarded the established pleasantries of so-called “communist behaviour”, which Pollitt had earlier criticised him for, instead, ‘demanding Pollitt to cease evading and face up to’ their criticisms. Browderism and a perceived closeness to social-democracy was again the focus point – “maybe you think your opposition to Browderism at that time proves that you have been immune from Browderism since...[however] your own post-war policy presents marked Browderite features.”¹⁴⁸ The CPGB’s lean towards a ‘transition to socialism’ was the ‘crassest expression’ of their ‘meaningless, opportunist slogan’ of fighting for a ‘Left Labour Government’, which is unsurprising given his own Party’s hostility to working with the ALP. So-called “deviationist” and “opportunist” viewpoints, including Pollitt’s *Looking Ahead*, were not in-keeping with established Communist Party theory, to such an extent that Sharkey queried whether Pollitt had found ‘something superior to this Leninist-Stalinist principle?’¹⁴⁹ Sharkey ended the letter in typically fiery language, stating:

“Your decisions are not at all binding on our Party, and we will continue with our criticism as long as our Central Committee deems it necessary. No doubt Tito considers criticism by

¹⁴⁶ Letter from Pollitt to Sharkey, 11 October 1948.

¹⁴⁷ CP/CENT/INT/34/2, Letter from Lance Sharkey to Harry Pollitt, 22 October 1948.

¹⁴⁸ Letter from Sharkey to Pollitt, 22 October 1948.

¹⁴⁹ Letter from Sharkey to Pollitt, 22 October 1948.

other Parties as ‘factionalism’ also. Nor will we assist you to set up a censorship over the British Party.”¹⁵⁰

The passage summed up the irreconcilable differences between the two Parties. The bonds of mutual respect had been broken, and the once unshakable sense of ‘horizontal comradeship’ lay in tatters.¹⁵¹ Sharkey’s final paragraph is best understood less as petty words spoken between two, small, seemingly insignificant Communist Parties, but rather as an example of the shifting frameworks of Communist identity. Communists were ‘people of a special mould’, Stalin once proclaimed.¹⁵² This meant that the boundaries of ‘authentic’ Communist identity often rallied against imagined counter-identities. Whether that be Trotskyism in the 1930s or the less pronounced Titoism and Browderism expressed here, there remained an ingrained policing of Communist identity underpinned by the strong militaristic organisational discipline of the Party. After 1943, the Comintern no longer existed to establish unity and a sense of collective purpose, rather these were ostensibly national Parties operating within an international context. Sharkey’s refusal to cease criticism until he saw it necessary to do so, is as much an example of differing political trajectories – whether left or right – as it is about hierarchy between the Dominion and the British Imperial centre. In 1947, the CPGB oversaw the ‘Communist Parties of Empire Conference’, where the British Party acted as host and mediator for the Dominion and Colonial Parties within Britain’s Empire. The CPGB, alongside the Dominions, understood that they had a “special responsibility” to the colonies. Pollitt said as much in his opening speech, regretfully admitting that

¹⁵⁰ Letter from Sharkey to Pollitt, 22 October 1948.

¹⁵¹ I am using Alison Drew’s phrase, “horizontal comradeship” to best describe the mutual bonds of solidarity and shared purpose, which dominated international communist discourse – Alison Drew, *We Are No Longer in France: Communists in Colonial Algeria* (Manchester, 2014), 270.

¹⁵² Joseph Stalin, ‘On the Death of Lenin’, Speech Delivered at the Second All-Union Congress of Soviets, *Pravda*, 30 January 1924. Accessed at:

<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1924/01/30.htm>

the Party were 'painfully conscious of how *little* we have done to help'.¹⁵³ Therefore, Sharkey's comments are an example of individual national Parties not only openly disagreeing with the imperial centre but breaking the established norms of communication. Referring to Tito, who had recently broken with the Soviets, was not only a slight to the British, but an indication that the CPA would not be bullied into submission and eventual silence.¹⁵⁴

The CPA's overall tactics are, therefore, best described as deliberately inflammatory and hostile, seeking to enlarge the debate beyond the narrow confines of private correspondence. Whether that be sending letters to individual Party branches, without the prior consent of the CPGB, or, suggesting issues of censorship and omission, it was clear Sharkey wanted the CPGB to not only change policy, but equally, to demonstrate the Australian Party's individuality. In some sense, they could say they had succeeded. In November, a month after Sharkey's final letter to the Party, Dutt wrote in a piece for the Cominform mouthpiece *For a Lasting Peace, For A People's Democracy*, that the struggle of Dutch and Australian dockers in relation to the wars in Indonesia and Malaya 'have set an example of solidarity and practical assistance.'¹⁵⁵ The British had fell well below 'what the situation required', he acknowledged, and posited that 'slower moving conditions in Britain' were the explanation for their inactivity.¹⁵⁶ Dutt continued:

It is urgent to intensify the campaign in the imperialist countries, especially in Britain, in order to strengthen solidarity with the national liberation struggle of the colonial peoples."¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ CP/CENT/INT/55/2, Harry Pollitt Opening Speech to Empire Conference, 26 March 1947. Italics my emphasis.

¹⁵⁴ Letter from Sharkey to Pollitt, 22 October 1948.

¹⁵⁵ Rajani Palme Dutt, 'Struggle of Colonial People's Against Imperialism', *For A Lasting Peace, For A People's Democracy*, November 1, 1948.

¹⁵⁶ Dutt, 'Struggle of Colonial People'

¹⁵⁷ Dutt, 'Struggle of Colonial People'.

Whether the Australian Party can take credit for this shift is debatable. However, given that the Australia, Indian and Malayan Parties were collectively calling for increased action from the CPGB, suggests that Parties under the thumb of British imperialism were eager to change the direction of the British Party. Similarly, the fact these comments originated in the official Cominform journal – published in fourteen different languages – clearly intended for a wider-readership, as well as from Dutt, the un-official mouthpiece of British Party policy, suggests that the article may have been intended for the very same Parties that had openly criticised them.

The Aftermath – Rank-and-file disquiet?

There is little evidence in the CPGB’s archives of any further mention of the Australian controversy, apart from a handful of responses to individual Party branches, who asked for the second letter to be circulated to the membership, which the leadership swiftly rejected.¹⁵⁸ Interestingly, John Gollan, in a letter to the Camberwell Green Branch informed them that “no comment of any kind has been sent from any Party in Europe”, which is most likely what the CPGB desired, given that the Indian and Malayan Parties had previously indicated agreement with the CPA.¹⁵⁹ In-fact, Harry Pollitt’s letters to the French and Italian CPs in early October appears to have received no reply. It is indicative that the larger European Parties either did not regard the issue as worth commenting on, or more likely, did not want to appear to ‘take sides’, particularly on ‘peripheral’ Parties outside of the Cominform.¹⁶⁰ John Gollan’s notes for the Executive Committee’s discussion on the second “Australian Letter”, explain as much. Gollan believed that the Party were at a crossroads with their Australian comrades and suggested two alternatives, one being another response, which would

¹⁵⁸ CP/CENT/INT/34/2, Letter from John Gollan to Camberwell Green Branch, 10 February 1949.

¹⁵⁹ CP/CENT/INT/34/2, Letter from John Gollan to Camberwell Green Branch, 19 January 1949.

¹⁶⁰ I have so far been unable to travel to Australia to view the CPA’s internal documentation. However, Stuart Macintyre’s recent book on the CPA similarly alludes to this dynamic on the Australian side. He notes that ‘Richard Dixon raised the errors of the CPGB with the PCF and PCI in 1949...admitting that whilst they shared the Australian Party’s criticisms, they were unable to intervene because the CPGB was not a member of the Cominform’, CPA Central Committee, 14-16 October 1949 in Macintyre, *The Party*, 210.

‘have to be a sharp political answer’, and the second, ending the debate by ignoring the letter. The Executive Committee decided it was best to do the latter, as another answer “would lead to continued political controversy, which, willy nilly, would have to go through the entire Party.”¹⁶¹

The final remark is the most important here as the membership, like on most matters of this kind, were largely irrelevant. The Australian Party’s criticisms were deemed contrarian and “factional” - which the CPGB refused to engage with - even if, ironically, the CPA demanded more internal Party debate and self-criticism from the British. The correspondence, for John Gollan, was conducted in a ‘entirely unsuitable basis, which we cannot permit’.¹⁶² Therefore, any such debate on their wider significance was quickly silenced. The below showcases the all-encompassing effects of democratic centralism at the local level. In mid-September 1948, the Dulwich Village Branch questioned the content of the Australian second letter, indicating that the wider rank-and-file were aware of the potential division if the debate was allowed to continue. Jean Shapiro, the branch’s Secretary, wrote to the Executive Committee that there are ‘rumours that allege there is a split in the Executive Committee over the question of the Australian criticism’ - however, who these figures were remains unclear.¹⁶³ Shapiro urged the Party leadership to remain vigilant against any ‘backstairs manoeuvring’ by members who believed the Party line to be incorrect. The Party, she emphasised, should be wary of any potential opposition or rumour, ‘which can in any way weaken the confidence of comrades in the Party, should it be allowed to circulate unchallenged’. These rumours, Shapiro continued, have already “succeeded in sowing doubt and confusion in the minds of members of our branch”.¹⁶⁴ How widespread this feeling was is unclear, and it cannot be discounted that Shapiro overexaggerated these ‘doubts’ to maintain Party uniformity. However, given that

¹⁶¹ CP/CENT/INT/34/2, CPGB Executive Committee Meeting, John Gollan’s Notes on the ‘Australian Letter’, 11 September 1948.

¹⁶² John Gollan’s Notes on the ‘Australian Letter’.

¹⁶³ CP/CENT/INT/34/02, Letter from the Dulwich Village Branch to Executive Committee, 21 September 1948.

¹⁶⁴ Letter from the Dulwich Village Branch, 21 September 1948.

these reports were emanating from individual Party branches, it is little surprise that the CPGB leadership wanted to quell any potential grumblings of discontent in the bud. The matter would not be resolved easily, as the leadership reiterated that the dispute would be better solved 'if it was discussed in a meeting, rather than by correspondence'.¹⁶⁵

Conclusion:

To conclude, the fractious debate between the British and Australian Communist Parties is illustrative of a wider sharpening of ideological indigenization. In previous years, under the remit of the Comintern, constituent Parties looked to the Soviet Union for ultimate guidance. However, with the dissolution of the body in 1943, the debate between the CPA and CPGB demonstrated the lack of international hierarchy and the breakdown of 'friendly' criticism and debate. As the CPA's regional newspaper, *The Workers Star* put it in November 1948: "the Communist Parties of Britain and Australia have fallen out on matters of higher policy."¹⁶⁶ The bonds of mutual comradeship, as well as the hierarchical relationship between Parties of Empire were severed, as the Australian Party sought to articulate its newly found position by readily, and at times, unremittingly criticising its sister Party. It is indicative that the relationship was not repaired until both Pollitt and Sharkey were replaced as leaders of the Parties, that they once again grew closer.¹⁶⁷ As Phillip Deery has written, Pollitt's visit to Australia in June 1960 - which was to be his last before a sudden stroke on the return journey - had 'consolidated and deepened the fraternal relationship [between the CPA and CPGB], which twelve years earlier had been badly fractured'.¹⁶⁸

Overall, whilst the exchange often became dominated by accusations of Marxist impurity and sectarianism, what perhaps could be perceived as pettiness illustrates the wider-international

¹⁶⁵ 'First Rough Drafts on Australian Letter'.

¹⁶⁶ *The Workers Star*, 20 November 1948, 6.

¹⁶⁷ Smith, 'For Socialist Revolution or National Liberation?', 271.

¹⁶⁸ Phillip Deery, 'Dark red subject has arrived': a British Communist visits Australia', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, 86:1 (Sydney, 2000), 46.

shifts in communist discourse. The 'charges' of Browderism and Titoism - themselves 'discredited' ideas – demonstrates both the inherent marginalisation of international communist debate, as well as the embryonic 'national roads' policy. The CPA's frosty reply, likening the British to the now renounced Tito showed that the Party had no reason to explain its own policy choices and would not be forced into silence, thereby abandoning the established hierarchy of Empire Parties, from the Metropole to Dominion. The CPA's relentless criticism and abandonment of expected 'respectable discussion' is as much an example of the Party's steadiness in its own beliefs, as it is an example of international segmentation. The exchange went beyond the confines of internal Party debate, involving other Communist Parties, and signalled the shifting relationships both within the British Commonwealth and the international communist movement. Disagreements highlighted international rupture, instead of continuity; complexity, not loyal subservience, as the movement drifted apart under the weight of decolonisation and the Cold War.