

‘The Trojan Horse’: Communist Entrism in the British Labour Party, 1933–43

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Abstract

Entrism – the infiltration of political organisations by competitors – is typically associated with Trotskyism. Large-scale Communist entrism in the British Labour Party has been neglected by historians and reference in the literature is slight and impressionistic. Archival material permits reconstruction of a sustained attempt by the Comintern and British Communists to subvert Labour Party policy between 1933 and 1943. Documenting the development and dimensions of Communist entrism, this article establishes that, by 1937, 10 per cent of Communist Party (CPGB) members were operating secretly inside British Labour, campaigning to change its policy on affiliation and engineer a popular front. Biographies of fifty-five such Communists provide new data and permit a typology of entrism activity. The episode sheds new light on popular front initiatives and the extent of genuine support for them within Labour. It illuminates the conspiratorial side of Stalinist activity at a time when the CPGB presented itself as a conventional British party.

KEYWORDS Entrism; Labour Party; Communist Party of Great Britain; Comintern; Popular Front; Stalinism; Trotskyism

What is entrism?

The contest for the leadership of the British Labour Party in 2016 provoked renewed interest in Trotskyist infiltration (Aitkenhead, Stewart & Elgot, 2016). ‘Entrism’ was a feature of labour movement politics through the twentieth century. The best-known episode involved the expulsion of the Militant Tendency from Labour in the 1980s and 1990s (Callaghan, 1984, pp. 67–81; Crick, 1986, 2016). But it is not a peculiarly British phenomenon. In the 1920s, US Communists operated secretly inside local Labor and Farmer-Labor Parties and, in the 1930s and 1940s, inside the Democratic Party in California, Illinois, North Dakota, Ohio and Pennsylvania.¹ The best documented case is the entry of the Workers’ Party led by James P. Cannon and A.J. Muste into the Socialist Party (SP) (Cannon, 1972, pp. 216–256; Venkataramani, 1964; Alexander, 1991, pp. 779–793). The pervasiveness of the practice is witnessed by the fact that when the Workers’ Party entered the SP, they encountered activists linked to the Communist Party and Jay Lovestone’s Communist Opposition (Alexander, 1981, pp. 109–110). France has provided entrism’s most fertile field, from ‘the French turn’, the entry of Trotsky’s followers into the Socialist Party, the *Section française de l’Internationale ouvrière* (SFIO) in 1934, to the exploits of the *Organisation Communiste Internationale* (OCI) after 1968 (Trotsky, 1974, 1977; Alexander, 1991, pp. 348–354, 384–389; Nick, 2002, pp. 217–264). In 2001 then French prime minister and sometime entrismist, Lionel Jospin, confessed to maintaining close links with the OCI while working his way to the pinnacle of the Socialist Party (Schwartz, 2001; Nick, 2002, pp. 244–265). Entrism has been recorded across Europe, Asia and Australia (Alexander, 1991).

It has been broadly defined as ‘infiltration into a political organisation to change or subvert its policies or objectives’ (*Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 1995). One historian describes

entrism as ‘the infiltration of a mass organisation by a small revolutionary group that hopes thereby to grow at the expense of the larger party’ (Callaghan, 1986, p. 380). Restriction to ‘a small revolutionary group’ may be questioned: the British Communist Party (CPGB) undertook incursions in the Labour Party with a membership of 10,000 in 1926 and 7,500 in 1935 (Thorpe, 2000, p. 284). Although the phenomenon is associated with ‘covert factional activity’ (Callaghan, 1984, p. 380), its initiation, it should be stressed, may be open and consensual. The event from which the term derives, the 1934 ‘French turn’, was negotiated by the Trotskyist leaders and their SFIO counterparts and provided for some factional rights (Alexander, 1991, pp. 348–354).² The passage of the US Trotskyists into Norman Thomas’s party was likewise agreed, although they joined as individuals, forfeited their factional rights and dismantled their press (Cannon, 1972, pp. 216–256; Myers, 1977, pp. 107–142; Venkataramani, 1964, pp. 10–11). In both cases, the inauguration of entrism was transparent and ‘infiltration’ a misnomer. However, the underlying purpose of the project was subversive and factionalism soon surfaced. The intention was to build French and American Trotskyist parties at the expense of the SFIO and SP.

The definitions quoted above simplify a diverse phenomenon. Entrism can take different forms and dissolution of the invader’s own external organisation with all its members entering the host should be distinguished from partial entry and maintenance of the aggressor’s external organisation. If Callaghan’s formulation is overly restrictive in some aspects, in other ways it appears too broad. The inclusion of trade unions may be questioned. Political parties demand a degree of political homogeneity and discipline. Unions are politically heterodox, open to all workers in specific employment categories, regardless of belief. Revolutionaries should not be classified as interlopers, any more than Catholics or Conservatives, who have

also established factional organisations within trade unions. Limiting the term entrism to political parties enhances precision and clarity.³

Entrism demands reconnaissance. Protagonists may be alerted to its potential by a turn to the left and emergence of tendencies sympathetic to the entrists within the targeted organisation.⁴ Having gained access, entrists endeavour to secretly recruit members of the host, typically insisting they remain within the host as agents of its competitor: success depends on converting indigenous members who will make further converts. Infiltration is a means, not an end. Its scale may differ as some entrism organisations send a fraction of their members into a targeted body while others enter *en masse*. Unpacked, the aim ‘to grow at the expense of the larger party’ (Callaghan, 1986, p. 380) may cover a range of ambitions. In the early 1950s, the International Socialists entered the Labour Party simply because they saw little possibility of development as an open organisation and needed an established political framework to resource even modest growth.⁵ Aspirations ‘to change or subvert policies or objectives’ (*Concise Oxford Dictionary*) may be deemed unrealistic or eschewed on the grounds that they sow illusions in the host. Other entrism groups may press revolutionary demands on reformist leaders as a means of exposing them (Callaghan, 1984, pp. 73–76; Crick, 1986, pp. 70–84). In some cases, such as the CPGB’s suborning of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) or the US Trotskyists’ foray into the SP, the objective may be to take over or, should that prove impossible, decisively weaken a competitor. One leader claimed undermining the SP constituted ‘a great achievement because it was an obstacle in the path of building a revolutionary party ... Every other party is an obstacle’ (Cannon, 1972, pp. 252–253).

The purpose and progress of entrism influence its duration and whether it concentrates on creating a semi-permanent faction or organising a relatively speedy exit. There are tactics

within the tactic and entrism may be conceived and conducted in different ways. In 1926–1929, the CPGB sponsored the National Left-Wing Movement (NLWM) as a bridge between the party and sympathisers inside Labour (Macfarlane, 1966, pp. 189–229, 280–281). Likewise maintaining an open organisation in the 1940s, the Revolutionary Communist Party’s entry fraction handed contacts over to external activists (Bornstein and Richardson, 1986b, pp. 192–194). Gerry Healy’s ‘Club’ in the late 1940s and Sean Matgamna’s International Communist League in the late 1970s, conducted entrism within broader left Labour formations – the Socialist Fellowship and the Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory (Alexander, 1991, pp. 496–498; Jenkins, 1979, pp. 91–112). Others, starting with the Revolutionary Socialist League’s formation of the Militant Labour League in 1937, have established their own fronts (Bornstein and Richardson, 1986a, pp. 272–273). The Militant Tendency, in contrast, operated more directly (Crick, 1986, pp. 84–86).

History is indispensable to any discussion. Commonly associated with Trotskyism and disparaged by official Communists, entrism was an integral part of the Stalinist tradition. Its roots lie in the approach to party-building adopted by the Comintern and its national sections, as well as dissident currents, notably the Trotskyists. The tactic can be traced back to the Bolsheviks, adherence to whose methods was prescribed by Lenin in his *Theses* for the Second Congress of the Comintern:

In every organisation, union or association without exception, beginning with the proletarian ones at first, and afterwards all those of the non-proletarian exploited masses (political, professional, military, cooperative, educational, sporting, etc) must be formed groups or nuclei of Communists, mostly open ones but also secret ones ...

These nuclei, in close contact with one another and the Communist Party, exchanging

information and experiences, carrying on the work of agitation, propaganda and organising, adjust themselves to all the branches of social life (Callaghan, 1986, pp. 380–382; Lenin, 1920).

Lenin insisted on the centrality of penetrating the Labour Party:

So long as the Labour Party continues to leave its member organisations free to criticise, act, make propaganda, agitate and organise on behalf of the dictatorship of the proletariat and on behalf of Soviet power ... Communists should make every effort and be willing to accept certain compromises in order to have the chance of influencing the great mass of workers, of denouncing their opportunist leaders in public forum where the masses can see and hear them ... so as to rid the masses as soon as possible of their illusions on the subject (Lazitch & Drachkovitch, 1972, p. 361).

Labour was crucial, despite its subordination to the state, because its umbilical connection with the trade unions, its undeveloped programme and rudimentary constitution ensured it possessed widespread working-class support *and* political and organisational malleability. As the revolutionary atmosphere of 1920 dissolved and the differences between Labour and the CPGB hardened, the former moved to isolate the latter: freedom to prosecute revolutionary politics within Labour diminished, concealment increased. Burning his boats with the Comintern, Trotsky maintained some of its methods. He initially applied entrism to small ‘centrist’ formations moving to the left. The tactic continued to be predicated on the open expression of revolutionary politics and envisaged as an episode of limited duration to recruit members rather than change policy. In France and the USA, it lasted around a year (Alexander, 1991, pp. 351–352; Cannon, 1972, pp. 249–252).

But the device was essentially opportunistic: experience and changing circumstances provoked development and adaptation. From the mid-1930s, both Trotskyists and Stalinists concentrated on the reformist Labour Party and adopted subterfuge to deflect detection. Raids mutated into longer-term settlement premised on permeation of the host party's institutions and culture. During the early Cold War this emerged as *entrism sui generis*, total entry, whereby the Trotskyists went into both Communist and Labour parties for an indefinite period on the basis that the international situation and likelihood of war precluded the construction of revolutionary parties (Alexander, 1991, p. 28). From the 1950s, less apocalyptic forms of 'deep entrism' were employed, such as that practised by the Militant Tendency and its co-thinkers around the globe (Crick, 1986; Revolutionary Socialist League, 1959).⁶ Entrism has registered small successes but never transformed the balance of forces within the labour movement. At times it has divided revolutionaries, some of whom have opposed it as an illegitimate and ineffective method of party building, turned disguised revolutionaries into genuine reformists, corrupted the currency of politics and discredited its protagonists.⁷

Comintern entrism: the British case

Entrism is identified in public discourse and historiography with Trotskyism: Stalinist activity has attracted less attention. In distinction to the Trotskyists' predilection for total entry, the official Communists, given their greater numbers, pursued partial entry by means of fractions working inside Labour. Launched by the Communists in 1926 and terminated by them in early 1929, the NLWM has been considered a vehicle for 'systematic entrism activity in the Labour Party' (Callaghan, 1986, p. 385). It would be mistaken to minimise the degree to which the NLWM was directed and resourced by the Comintern and CPGB (Macfarlane, 1966, pp. 189–

229, 280–218; Pearce, 1975). Matters are complicated by the fact that the movement crystallised around the 1925 decision to exclude Communists from individual membership of the Labour Party and opposition not only from Communists but ‘native’ Labour Party members. The main component of the CPGB, the British Socialist Party, had been affiliated to Labour. So many CPGB members possessed and maintained dual membership. They were legitimate Labour Party members and even stood as Labour candidates in elections. Exclusionary measures had been mounting since 1920 and would develop further (Shaw, 1988, pp. 1–31; Howell, 2002, pp. 380–403). But toleration of Communists lingered among a sizeable minority and the NWLM possessed appreciable organic support in Labour’s ranks; it was far from clandestine, publishing a popular weekly newspaper, advocating a socialist programme. The CPGB employed the NLWM to build the CPGB. But a powerful element in the movement’s animating dynamic was resistance within Labour to its leadership’s attempt to finally close the frontier between Labourism and Communism.

Bans on Communists and extensive powers for Labour’s National Executive (NEC) to enforce them became entrenched. With the introduction of the proscribed list in 1930, the dividing line was firmly drawn – a process facilitated by the CPGB’s turn away from Labour in the ultra-left Third Period. In 1929 the NEC reported: ‘practically all difficulties experienced in constituencies in recent years owing to Communist activities have now been overcome’ (Shaw, 1988, p. 15). The classic conditions for entrism now prevailed. Yet the CPGB’s major essay in entrism, which embraced the Popular Front years and beyond, has been neglected. This may be related to the Communists’ subsequent denigration of ‘the cynical, dishonest strategy and tactics of “entryism”’ they had pioneered (*Morning Star*, October 15, 2016).⁸ The tactic was abandoned during the Second World War and the 1950s witnessed the CPGB acting as an

informer in exposing the entrisms of opponents.⁹ The new century found its successor advising Labour's general secretary: 'Should you or your staff have any evidence that Communist Party members have joined the Labour Party without renouncing their CP membership or engaged in any similar subterfuge, please inform me so that action can be taken against them for bringing our party into disrepute' (Wright, 2016).

It is therefore unsurprising that Communist historians who represent Popular Front politics as the apogee of CPGB achievement and respectability omit to reconstruct the insalubrious underbelly of those politics. Branson (1985) deals with entrisms perfunctorily and evasively. She blandly states that from 1935, 'more and more local Labour Party members applied to join the Communist Party. Some of them were encouraged to stay in the Labour Party and work to change it. Indeed, some of them became Communists in secret' (p.157). This process was short-lived, terminating in 1939, when 'they were all asked to come out into the open as Communist Party members ... those who did not ceased to be members of the Communist party' (ibid.). Nothing is said about CPGB members disguising their political allegiance to join the Labour Party; the active agency of the Comintern and CPGB headquarters in King Street in organising entrisms is deleted. The CPGB is cast as little more than a responsive helpmate to Labour Party members coming to Communism of their own volition. As an activist in the CPGB during this period, it beggars belief that Branson was unaware of entrisms as a project to undermine Labour – and indeed she refers to it in a contemporary internal bulletin (Branson, 1936, p. 19). Other accounts by Communists are even less revealing.¹⁰

Academic historians have not greatly advanced matters.¹¹ Like Branson, Morgan (1989) passes favourable judgement on Popular Front politics and his study of the CPGB

1935–1941 disposes of entrism in a paragraph. Like Branson, he portrays an impetus to collaboration originating inside the Labour Party; despite unrelenting efforts by the NEC to define and enforce a dividing line, he depicts flexible frontiers. In short: ‘throughout the late 1930s impetuous spirits within the Labour Party discovered their common cause with the Communists. The dividing line between the CP and the Labour left was virtually indefinable, not least because an unquantifiable number of Communists pursued their Popular Front activities within the Labour Party’ (Morgan, 1989, p. 36). This is less organised entrism than an autonomous meeting of minds across fluid party boundaries. If Branson illustrates the problems with history written by Communists, Morgan exemplifies the difficulty of accepting, without reservation or corroboration, the recollections of Communist officials on controversial matters. Branson’s conclusion is echoed through uncritical rehearsal of the assertion of the CPGB’s London organiser in the 1930s, Ted Bramley: ‘It was not a case of Communists being sent into the Labour Party, according to Bramley, but rather of new recruits to the CP being asked to remain within the Labour Party the more effectively to work for unity’ (ibid.).¹² We now know that Bramley played a leading role in supervising the CPGB’s policy of entry which required Communists to be sent into the Labour Party as well as new recruits being asked to remain as secret Communists.¹³

This is touched on by Thorpe (2000) who alludes to the CPGB Central Committee (CC) discussing ‘sending thousands of [CPGB] members into the Labour Party’ where they would ‘link up with Communists already inside’ (pp. 232–233). Contrary to Bramley’s testimony, this suggests that the CPGB aspired to plant a significant proportion of its then 11,000 members inside its antagonist. Thorpe’s handful of references conclude by following Branson – in 1939

Labour activists began to ‘emerge openly as Communist sympathisers’ – and contribute to the narrative of normalisation. The notion that entrism was subversive is downplayed:

It seems likely that Communists had joined the Labour Party since the early 1930s. This might have had a sinister aspect – the CP inveigling its members into the larger organisation so that they could be ‘turned’ at the appropriate time. But in many parts of Britain, there was a more prosaic reason. In localities where the CP organisation was very weak or non-existent, it made sense for people to join the existing Labour organisation rather than to form a CP branch with one or two members (ibid.).¹⁴

For whom it made sense and how this related to King Street planning to draft thousands of Communists into the Labour Party is not explained. A later discussion by Morgan and his colleagues (Morgan, Cohen & Flinn, 2007) attempts to further normalise matters:

... the very concept of infiltration ... is freighted with ambiguity. In contemporary polemics, and sometimes academic accounts, it involves the construction of communism as an ‘outside’ presence bringing in alien values and loyalties like a Stalinist version of the Midwiche Cuckoos ... the notion of infiltration, always implicitly from outside, can be positively misleading ... even the clearest cases of factionalism or dissimulation tended to rest on a significant process of internal conversion which the suggestion of externality only obscures (p.130).

No academic – and no academic account is cited to support this contention – needs to construct Communism as an outside presence because in relation to Labour it *was*, politically and organisationally, an outside presence. The CPGB, as we shall demonstrate, sent its members from ‘outside’ to infiltrate Labour with the purpose of winning converts and

influencing Labour policy on affiliation and the Popular Front. It is difficult to see how such infiltration can be considered 'ambiguous' because it depended for success on 'internal conversion'. That the latter is a key objective of the former is common sense and commonplace in the historical record. The notion of infiltration by the CPGB is only 'misleading' if we fail to understand what the Stalinist entrisms of the 1930s was: a process by which the external became internal and the internal external through subterfuge. In contrast with some contemporary Trotskyist initiatives, entrisms equalled external infiltration *plus* secret internal conversion.

Morgan et al. cite no academic account which in any way likens the intervention by Stalinists in the Labour Party to the impregnation of women by aliens in John Wyndham's fantasy.¹⁵ Nor is proper substantiation provided for their claim: 'extensive common ground between the communists and many Labour activists meant that in practice there was little constraint on the expression of current communist policy' (p. 132). Insistence that 'the great majority of the CPGB's undercover members appear to have joined the Labour Party either before or more or less simultaneously with their adhesion to communism' (p. 131) may be true. But no evidence is offered to support an assertion minimising the role of outsiders; or the further claim that active concealment of their affiliation by Communists operating inside Labour was exceptional.¹⁶ What proportion of Communists had been infiltrated into the Labour Party or received secretly into the CPGB after reading its literature and/or encountering Communists working outside or inside the Labour Party is a relevant question; but it is one which requires testing via further research. Estimates based on impressions neither detract from the reality of infiltration as an integral component of entrisms nor render it ambiguous.

This account tells us little about the *policy* of entrisms beyond a claim that 'the sustained campaign dated only from 1937' and a precise statement that the following year 'almost a fifth

of the CPGB's entire membership' operated clandestinely inside the Labour Party (p. 131).¹⁷ Communists operating inside the Labour Party are explained by reference to geographical isolation from fellow CPGB members, migration and local political ecumenism: 'the significance of local factors in shaping political affiliations survived the seemingly formalised divide between the Labour and Communist parties. In certain periods it was even sanctioned and exploited by the CPGB itself' (p. 30). A footnote refers to a study documenting collaboration between Social Democratic Federation (SDF) and ILP branches decades earlier (p. 287, n. 78).¹⁸ The evidence for survival of such impulses permitting dual membership in the 1930s is slight. In Oxford, it is asserted, 'covert membership of the Labour Party was so general and ill-concealed as scarcely to be undercover at all' (Morgan et al., 2007, p. 44). No source is cited and while this was true of the student milieu, evidence is required as to the different situation in the City Labour Party. The claim that Tom Mitchell in Letchworth and Fred Westacott in Hampshire operated without concealing their CPGB membership may again be true. But it derives solely from their memories – in the latter case a sentence – fifty and sixty years respectively after the event (ibid.). By then both had been full-time CPGB officials. Both were reminiscing at a time when entrism had fallen into disrepute among Communists. And both their stories are detached from their political context: the prevailing policy of entrism.

For their part, historians of the Labour Party have documented CPGB attempts to engage Labour in collaboration against fascism and its equally unsuccessful endeavours to secure affiliation. The story they tell is of a leadership, apparatus and majority of members not only opposed to welcoming Communists into their party via affiliation but to working with them in a united front. A minority supported co-operation. There is little evidence they shared

CPGB politics or tolerated ‘unconcealed’ CPGB activists operating within their party. Far from the divide being ‘virtually undefined’, by 1934 few leftwing Labour activists could have been unaware that the CPGB was a proscribed outsider.¹⁹ However, standard histories of Labour which cover the period say nothing about entrism.²⁰ Specialist studies contribute little more. Pimlott (1977) makes a couple of vague references (p. 222, n. 12); Callaghan (1987) baldly asserts that the CPGB pursued entrism ‘for the first twenty years of its existence ... But by 1940 the tactic was dropped ... as constituency parties withered away’ (p. 189); Worley (2005) suggests that ‘a number’ of Labour Party members held what he euphemistically terms ‘joint membership’ with the CPGB during the 1930s (p. 210).²¹

Overall, the historiography affords entrism scant attention. *Work on Communism* addresses the phenomenon in sanitised, fragmentary and impressionistic fashion. It contains conflicting estimates of timeline, scale and operation; infiltration, secrecy, dissembling and disguise are minimised. Conclusions light on evidence speak more of symbiosis and a consensual desire for unity on the part of members of two parties, the boundaries between which were virtually indefinable, rather than a manipulative enterprise orchestrated by the Comintern and resisted by a Labour Party which was very clear about what divided it from the CPGB and the latter’s subversive intentions. King Street’s efforts to suppress its past have not been adequately challenged. CPGB general secretary, Harry Pollitt, told the Political Bureau (PB) in 1935 he did ‘not think that in any circumstances, or in any document we should refer to the question of organising the Left wing inside the Labour Party. It becomes a question of the “Trojan Horse”’.²² If the secretive nature of the project renders full recovery hazardous, data from the Russian archives enables us to at least reconstruct its contours and memoirs and manuscript material permit recuperation of some of its protagonists. Politics is frequently an

ignoble pursuit. The tale of political parasitism which follows confirms that the labour movement was not immune to the malaise. It demonstrates that entrism was integral to the Communists' Popular Front strategy which some historians have treated favourably. And it reinstates the conspiratorial, Machiavellian aspects of the CPGB, subdued in recent literature, which, *inter alia*, distinguished it from other British parties.

Popular Front entrism: background, initiation and organisation

In the autumn of 1937, CPGB activists were recording gains garnered from four years of entrism and deliberating future possibilities:

During recent months the Party position in relation to the Labour Party has considerably improved. In Liverpool we now have something like 45 Communist Party members inside the Labour party. One of these comrades is the secretary of the District Labour Party and one is the Secretary of the Ward Association. The reflection of the work which the Party has undertaken inside the Labour Party is shown by the fact that we have [*sic*] six Communist Party members standing as Labour Party candidates in the recent Municipal Elections ... [In Manchester] only 25% of the Trade Union Branches available for affiliation to the Borough Labour Party, are affiliated to it, and if our drive was intensified among the trade unionists in order to secure their affiliation ... this would in all probability enable us to overcome the majority which the right-wing Labour leadership has on the Borough Labour Party and secure the removal of the right-wing leadership itself.²³

The 'drive' dated from 1934. However, the previous year, Labour's NEC, documenting the proliferation of CPGB 'fronts', had observed: 'Communists in disguise are now at work in Labour Party and Trade Union and Cooperative Societies'.²⁴ By early 1934, London Communists were beavering away 'to get a political foothold in the Ward Committees of the LP ... there are members of the Executive of the Labour Party and Socialist League who have expressed a desire to join the Party, but our comrades advise them to remain in to penetrate further with their work'.²⁵ Comintern directives called for extension of reconnaissance and small-scale initiatives. In April 1934, Moscow instructed British Communists 'to establish connections and close comradely association with the Labour Party workers, drawing them into the United Front fight'; compile lists of sympathisers within Labour; and pave the path for 'Party fraction comrades to be invited to speak at Labour Party Branches'.²⁶ A month later, Pollitt pondered 'how can we develop the opposition movement inside the Labour Party', while R.W. Robson reflected uncertainty in the ranks: 'I think that there is an underestimation by the Party comrades of the work that can be done inside the Labour Party.'²⁷

The following year, party minutes recorded a measure of success. Pollitt informed the CC:

We have got two Party members adopted as Labour Party candidates in places where as Communist candidates we could not get a look in ... In one of the newer districts we are in a position where everyone is a member of our Party. It has been done by very careful consistent work, by choosing the right people who would work in closest conjunction with the Party ... what has been done in these places can be done in other places ... we carefully choose Party members who are 100 per cent trustworthy, not open to reformist persuasion, and

deliberately send these comrades into local Labour Parties to develop that opposition. Under no circumstances [must they] speak about Communism.²⁸

Thus, by 1937 entrism already constituted a significant aspect of CPGB activity. It was not left to isolated individuals, a side line innocent of collective agency and purpose; nor did policy commence with existing Labour Party members converting to Communism. To achieve that aim, CPGB members were infiltrated into the Labour Party. That they were ‘100 per cent trustworthy’ suggests they were not invariably recent recruits to the CPGB. Communists undoubtedly exploited areas where Labour organisation was rudimentary and their own affiliations unknown. Evidence of CPGB activity in London, Liverpool and Manchester indicates that this was not always the case. Pollitt’s insistence on *omerta* concerning Communism is redolent of ‘deep entrism’; but entry was far from total and the CPGB maintained its external apparatus.

The developments prompting entrism require emphasis. Before 1933 there *were* cases when a Communist joined Labour where the CPGB was weakly organised, ‘as a means of taking my communism inside the enemy camp’.²⁹ The policy of ‘Class Against Class’, which characterised Labour as a third capitalist party, precluded entrism of any significance. Hitler’s accession to power in January 1933 stimulated a return to proposing a united front with working-class parties to combat the threat to the Soviet Union.³⁰ The second factor was the divide between the parties and Labour’s refusal to countenance collaboration. As entrism gathered momentum in 1934, Labour’s NEC declared that any united action or ‘loose association’ with Communists or their front organisations was incompatible with Labour Party membership – a decision overwhelmingly endorsed at that year’s annual conference. Labour leaders perceived the CPGB as devious, ruthless and purveying ideas alien to its own

philosophy. Successive overtures were rejected in the knowledge that the united front was ‘a tactical manoeuvre devised to bring [Labour] members into touch with the Communist intelligentsia and ultimately under their leadership’.³¹ The CPGB was ‘a secret society’ employing ‘conspiratorial methods’ and subterfuge: ‘A denial by a person that he is a Communist may be true, or it may unfortunately not be true’.³²

The third consideration was the CPGB’s inability to influence Labour by conventional means. It had 5,800 members at the end of 1934; Labour’s individual membership (as distinct from its affiliated trade union membership) was over 400,000 (Thorpe, 2000, p. 287). Lacking leverage to change Labour’s policy from outside, the Communists moved inside. A fourth factor was a small but vocal Labour left, disaffected by party leaders’ failure to take effective action against the National government or address a deteriorating international situation. The left was open to working with the Communists but weak – the Socialist League (SL), a remnant of the ILP which had disaffiliated from Labour in 1932, had fewer than 3,000 members (Corthorn, 2006, p. 1 and *passim*; Pimlott, 1977, pp. 41–76). Its fragility suggested an opening Communists might exploit to develop internal opposition under CPGB hegemony. A pincer movement from outside and inside stood a better chance of propelling Labour towards unity than external pressure alone.³³

The Seventh Comintern Congress in August 1935 marked a new stage in promotion of anti-fascist ‘people’s fronts’ embracing not only workers’ parties but ‘progressive’ Liberals and Conservatives. The CPGB now presented itself as a conventional British party, downplaying revolution, espousing patriotism, and conciliating amenable labour movement leaders, liberals of all parties, the ‘progressive’ middle class and intellectuals (Branson, 1985, pp. 112–29; Fyrth, 1985). The Comintern’s demand for ‘a single mass workers’ party in each

country' produced the CPGB's formal application for affiliation to Labour in November 1935. To achieve that end, intensification of entrisism was necessary – diplomatically expressed as: 'More attention to the organisation of the left-wing inside the Labour Party'.³⁴ A significant motivation of the subsequent adoption of anglicised organisational forms and terminology – 'locals' were replaced by 'branches', a term 'familiar to workers in this country', and 'cells' by 'groups' – was the need to develop 'closer relations with Labour Ward Committees' (Robson, 1936, pp. 25–26). Every branch member was to be organised in their 'appropriate Labour, Co-operative or Trade Union fraction' (Branson, 1936, p. 19).

It would be unrealistic to expect extensive discussion of the tradecraft of clandestinity in CPGB documents. Labour's hostility to Communism is well-documented and officials such as Morgan Phillips in London, Len Williams in Yorkshire and Arthur Woodburn in Scotland were experienced gatekeepers. The hierarchy's writ did not run everywhere and proselytising for unity was not the prerogative of interlopers. The fact that CPGB policy was increasingly reformist helped. Judging by autobiographical accounts, many concealed Communists were taken at face value as Labour enthusiasts of the Soviet Union and Popular Front, rather than intruders. Some converts welcomed their new double life: one expressed delight 'when I was instructed to carry on with my [Labour Party] membership' and predicted further recruits if it was made clear that 'the [Communist] Party expects them to continue their work in the organisation in which they are at present members' (Morris, 1937, pp. 12–13). In recollections corroborated by the historian, John Saville, briefly a CPGB branch secretary, Branson stated the party cards of secret members were held by party headquarters or the relevant district secretary (Branson, 1985, p. 157; Saville, 1991, p. 26, n. 10).³⁵ Duplicity was formally licensed: trade unionists were instructed to deny CPGB membership in order to attend Labour

Party meetings but had to clear things with national or district leaders before protecting their position.³⁶ In 1937 a Special Branch informant reported:

Instructions are being issued that party members who have obtained positions in the Labour Party must hide the fact that they are communists. If they have compromised themselves in this respect in the past, they are to say that they have resigned from the party, if challenged.³⁷

Unlike subsequent entrists, the CPGB nurtured few illusions that Labour could be transformed into a socialist party. Unlike later infiltrators, it eschewed schemes for a breakaway based on the CPGB, the SL and the ILP, in which it was also conducting entristism. That might bring into question the leading role of the Comintern. The purpose was rather to push the Labour Party as presently constituted into a Popular Front alliance on the French model by securing CPGB affiliation.³⁸ The primacy of affiliation and consequent need to demonstrate respectability ensured that the CPGB did not attract attention and appear disruptive by espousing manoeuvres common in entrist narratives, seeking cover by colonising existing Labour groups – or inventing new ones. It did discuss infiltrating the SL. Elaborating ‘on Communist fraction work inside the Labour Party’ in June 1935, CPGB organiser Dave Springhall urged: ‘we should put special chosen people to work in the Socialist League ... In London, there are a number of middle-class elements and workers who cannot be used for open Party work, who can be drafted for work inside the Socialist League and the Labour Party’.³⁹ There was more ambivalence about the Constituency Parties Movement (CPM) which campaigned for increased representation of local parties on Labour’s NEC. There is little evidence Communists played a leading role here.⁴⁰

Entrism encouraged accommodation to Labour. In the 1935 general election, the CPGB fielded only two candidates and urged support for the party recently excoriated as ‘social fascist’. There was some disorientation among activists, ‘as if they’ve got to take back all they said in the past concerning the Labour Party. An inner feeling they’re making some kind of surrender’.⁴¹ But there was no let-up in entrism. The Lancashire organiser, William Rust, argued:

where there are people in the Labour Party who are prepared to join the [Communist] Party we should carefully consider whether they should remain in the Labour Party. We should consider still further the sending of people into the Labour Party in order to win leading positions, to have in every [CPGB] District Committee somebody responsible for work in the Labour Party and nationally.⁴²

It was accepted that every district should have a cadre in charge of entry work ‘without any revelations being put in the press’.⁴³ But there was concern over making concessions to reformism. There was uncertainty about whether the weight of entry work should be borne by new recruits remaining inside Labour or those sent in by the CPGB; and differences regarding the extent to which recruits should be pulled out to build the CPGB as open Communists. Mindful of the Comintern leader, Dimitrov’s, strictures against ‘right opportunism’ and an instruction from Moscow to ‘correct’ over-identification with Labour, Pollitt was critical of his party’s election activities:

We have not asked any of the Labour Party workers to join our Party ... it would be a tragedy if we, in the carrying out of united activity, tend to succumb to reformist lines or encouraged a belief in them ... And we recruit every member

of the Labour Party into the Communist Party who wants to join ... This does not mean that they should break their connections.⁴⁴

Walking the tightrope between working within Labour and conciliating reformism, between pedagogic adaptation and political capitulation, required hands-on guidance from the Comintern. Ruminating ‘we can very easily go wrong unless we are very careful’, Pollitt travelled to Russia.⁴⁵ The Comintern maintained its stance against ‘liquidationist tendencies’ and rejected suggestions that the CPGB should complete what some perceived as the logic of entrism by acting as a recruiting sergeant for Labour. Suitably emboldened, Pollitt on his return renewed his criticism of the party for ‘submerging its independent line’ during the election: ‘the propaganda was for voting Labour on exactly the same line of argument as the ordinary trade union reformist type of Labour worker, and this constitutes a very serious danger for the Party’.⁴⁶ He urged greater recruitment into the CPGB to counteract accommodationist tendencies. If Labour Party militants felt they could do their best work there, ‘nothing but disaster lies in front’.⁴⁷ Support for publicly recruiting workers who were neither in the CPGB nor the Labour Party into the latter came from the party full-timer, Emile Burns. Others resisted this as a step towards total entry and dissolving the CPGB. But it resonated with activists. Pollitt reported that at a CPGB conference in Nottingham, ‘the line of half was affiliation and the other half said we need a change in line so badly we should liquidate the CP and get inside the Labour Party’.⁴⁸

This latter group believed the urgency of a Popular Front demanded total entry to challenge Labour opposition more effectively. Rust and Pollitt articulated the Comintern’s position. Rust rejected illusions ‘that the Labour Party can be made into the Party that will bring socialism in Britain’; Pollitt stressed ‘our fight against social democracy must be carried

on more bitterly than before'.⁴⁹ Quoting Dimitrov, Manuilsky and Stalin, Pollitt repudiated Burns' proposal as tantamount to dissolving the CPGB.⁵⁰ Worry that the affiliation campaign and entrisism could, paradoxically, constitute an avenue via which Communists became Labourites and condemnation of Burns' 'right-wing errors' was reiterated by the CPGB's representative at the Comintern, Robin Page Arnot, addressing the Marty Secretariat in Moscow: 'there were Party members in London who were openly discussing and expecting the liquidation of the CP'.⁵¹ This caused consternation and Comintern representatives demanded reassurance it was a minority view. Affiliation, bringing in its train legitimacy for the CPGB and a diminished need for dissimulation, could have ameliorated these problems. But it was rejected at Labour's 1936 conference by 1.7 million votes to 592,000 (Labour Party, 1936, p. 208).⁵²

From Popular Front to Imperialist War: progress, problems and demise

Defeat prompted further affirmation that entrisism should be prosecuted more energetically to facilitate future affiliation. At the post-mortem in October 1936, the party's leading intellectual, Rajani Palme Dutt, maintained, 'we have got to strengthen our work in the Labour Party. We want to get more and more active members in the Labour Party fighting on a common programme.'⁵³ Pollitt went further, dubbing infiltration 'the biggest task of the party ... we have literally to send thousands of our members inside the Labour Party'.⁵⁴ The CPGB's sole MP, Willie Gallacher, insisted his party must become 'an integral part of the Labour Party' and form 'an alternative leadership inside the Labour Party', but queried: 'How is it to be done?'⁵⁵

The SL's pliability promised a possible solution: led by Sir Stafford Cripps, it favoured a united front with the CPGB and the ILP. Negotiations, monitored by the Comintern, culminated in a Unity Campaign in January 1937.⁵⁶ It lasted less than three months, as Labour's NEC moved decisively to proscribe the SL: 'The Socialist League is now seeking to provide a bridge to make the Communist invasion of our ranks easier.'⁵⁷ The PB supported the League's decision to dissolve, with its members continuing to agitate individually for a united front. Pollitt had never been impressed by its utility as a vehicle for Communist permeation of the Labour Party.⁵⁸ Initiating the Unity Campaign, the Comintern had re-emphasised infiltration: 'The Communist Party must give more attention to sending into the Labour Party trusted comrades who can be relied upon to develop the mass movement for unity within the Labour Party.'⁵⁹ In its aftermath, Arnot reassured the Marty Secretariat that despite the furore over the SL, '[Ernest] Bevin and [Walter] Citrine don't know ... that there are many hundreds of members in the LP who are Communists'.⁶⁰

In August 1937, before departure to Russia of another delegation, a CC review highlighted progress with the entrism tactic but continuing problems in applying it.⁶¹ Applauding 'splendid results' in London, Bramley argued the 'new situation' required the CPGB to recruit to the Labour Party workers not yet willing to join the CPGB:

We stamped on this a year ago. I agree we have got to put more and more of our best people in the Labour movement ... but is it not true that the great bulk of people that follow us are not yet Communists ... there must be thousands of workers who would go into the Labour movement and not fall under the influence of Transport House but under the influence of our organised fractions.

If CPGB infiltrators could be augmented by non-CPGB Labour Party sympathisers, why not reinforce the latter by recruiting to Labour? Burns concurred: ‘we have to regard the Labour Party ward associations under our leadership, as ... a part of our organisation. [Recruiting to them] does not mean bringing members of the working class under the influence of reformist ideology ... They are very rapidly brought forward under the influence of our comrades.’ Appreciating recruiting to a reformist party had been anathema to revolutionaries, Rust opposed blanket recruiting but offered a pragmatic prescription for entrists who won positions: ‘You cannot have a local secretary or executive that refuses to recruit. We have to have strong ward associations where we have the people there.’ He reported that Communists had ‘captured’ positions on the executive of the Manchester Labour Party and ‘we had to work out with these comrades the whole plan of campaign in the Labour Party’. Maurice Cornforth agreed. Communists who held positions had to recruit but this was different from a public declaration that the CPGB would recruit for Labour. In ‘the Eastern Counties’, sending ‘some of our best comrades’ into the Labour Party had exposed the need to finesse CPGB control over the work: ‘there is a tendency to leave the Comrades alone not knowing what to do and therefore they do not act in the most effective manner ... we have to get them linked up together, to supervise and lead their work.’

Other speakers noted the difficulty in drafting in seasoned Communists whose reputation may have preceded them but accepted the need to expedite infiltration and strengthen its oversight. Springhall claimed that in the capital it would be possible ‘to put in another five hundred or more in the next few months’. It was vital that entrists start from bread-and-butter issues and proceed to high politics, ‘by getting down to the question of the actual problems of the local labour movement and linking them with the big national

campaigns, at the same time carrying through our propaganda for Marxism'. Fraction work should be supervised from the centre 'in a much more organised way than has existed in the past'.

In Moscow, the CPGB delegation laboured with a Comintern commission over a resolution, 'The Next Steps in the Fight for Working Class Unity'. Endorsed by the Comintern secretariat, the text emphasised that the affiliation campaign should 'be more than ever energetically carried forward'; recognising differentiation in Labour, it stressed the importance of appealing to the centre and isolating the right. To that end, the Comintern authorised its British affiliate to announce it would abide by Labour's constitution. The CPGB should 'seek by every means' to extend 'local unity in all forms', while the 'struggle for correct working class policy inside the Labour Party' was counterposed to 'self-liquidation chatter'.⁶² Pollitt presented the document to the CC, insisting its origin be concealed from members: 'this resolution is the product of British circumstances and conditions' and should be 'popularised ... without any references to discussions having taken place either here or elsewhere'.⁶³ Meetings would be held in every district to ensure its implementation. Antagonism from Labour's leadership and most members remained strong. The 1937 conference overwhelmingly confirmed the banning of the SL and opposition to cooperation with Communists. Moreover, further discussion of affiliation was caught by the 'three-year rule' and could not be reopened until 1939.

Renewed concern about the organisational looseness of fractions inside Labour led the CC to establish 'a secret department ... set up to control members of the party who have obtained official positions in local Labour Parties ... They will not attend the Party meetings and, in order to maintain contact, they will secretly be called together from time to time, when

the Party line will be explained to them ...'.⁶⁴ The department was under the general direction of Bramley, assisted in the London district, an important locus of entrism, by Jack Gaster. In February 1938, a 'closed' meeting of CPGB fraction leaders in the Labour Party in London was attended by around 50 people and chaired by Bramley, accompanied by Gaster.⁶⁵ A letter sent by Gaster convening a further 'secret' meeting was reported to be phrased in such a way as to conceal from the 'uninitiated' that it dealt with 'Communist Party contact work in Labour organisations'. Each copy of the letter was individually numbered and it was clear that Gaster was making every effort 'to keep as secret as possible this phase of Communist Party activity'.⁶⁶ A report of the meeting revealed Gaster expounding party policy: 'All members should get their local Labour Parties to send a deputation to Transport House on the question of unity ... The immediate programme of the Communist Party contacts in the Labour Party should be (1) Campaign for arms for Spain (2) Concrete plans for adequate air-raid precautions (3) Closer cooperation with industrial workers ...'.⁶⁷ He announced plans to significantly strengthen the 'Labour Party Bureau' on the CPGB London District Committee and that 'The Communist Party Group in the Labour Party' would have representation and voting rights at the London District Party Congress.⁶⁸

Gaster energetically prosecuted his new responsibilities; for example, an informer reported that he had visited the Kingston branch of the CPGB and it had been agreed that four members would be 'ostensibly leaving the C.P.' in order to 'concentrate on gaining Labour Party cooperation in the United Front'.⁶⁹ Testimony to the results of such interventions was provided some two years later by the well-publicised resignations of the secretary and chair of the Kingston District Labour Party, together with those of the secretary of the Kingston

Borough Labour Party and a former Prospective Parliamentary Candidate, as well as six others, a number of them announcing their intention to join the CPGB.⁷⁰

Nevertheless, the landscape was darkening. Springhall reported tensions between the Labour Party fraction and open Communists. When CPGB branches mounted public campaigns, ‘our people who are in the Labour Party advise against this ... because by doing so we harm the chances of developing their work and would tend to reveal them as Communists in the Labour Party’.⁷¹ A few months later, Dutt identified ‘a new type of secret member – the half-baked Communist, who has never had experience and full outlook of the Communist Party, but has only known existence as a secret member of the Communist Party’.⁷² There was a danger of dilution so that the CPGB would be starved of forces to mount effective independent campaigns. Dutt questioned the assumption every Labour supporter who wished to join the CPGB should become a secret member inside the Labour Party; this would restrict open recruitment to ‘miscellaneous elements outside of the Labour Movement’ and adversely skew the party’s social composition. There was, moreover, the possibility that clandestine members would never achieve ‘a Communist outlook and understanding’. Dutt concluded that only those who held important positions in the Labour Party should remain, while ‘everyday Labour Party workers’ should be encouraged to join the CPGB openly.⁷³

Failure to achieve a breakthrough was breeding more critical attitudes to entrisism. Frictions between open work and undercover operations, working through an organisation hostile to Communism, were increasingly recognised and the quality of a party built this way increasingly questioned. In March 1938, Pollitt reiterated Dutt’s concerns. Recruitment to the CPGB was faltering. Pollitt blamed this on sympathisers who believed that joining the CPGB would hinder them in fighting for Communist policies in the Labour Party and trade unions. If

they were advised to belong to both parties, ‘you get called hypocritical ... it gives an atmosphere of double dealing to the fellow you are putting this to. He has got already to be one hundred percent to be able to carry through that successfully.’⁷⁴ Despite possibly two to three thousand members inside the Labour Party, many ‘become susceptible to the pressure and are not active as Communists’.⁷⁵

By 1939, the failure of the campaign for a Popular Front was underlined by the heavy vote against at Labour’s Conference.⁷⁶ As Soviet foreign policy shifted, so did the CPGB’s always expedient and Comintern-contingent attitudes to Labour. The renewed application for affiliation in July had a formulaic feel and no hope of success, even before the Hitler-Stalin Pact was announced the following month.⁷⁷ In June, Rust, charged by the PB with presenting a new policy toward entristm, had rehearsed to the CC the difficulties the party had experienced.⁷⁸ While initially a productive stratagem, tensions had arisen between ‘concealed’ and ‘active, open’ members; there were also political costs: ‘the tendency is to pull strings instead of directly developing the political agitation ... a tendency to replace the mass activity by the method of working through fractions’. Moreover, Transport House discounted resolutions from Labour organisations known to be penetrated by Communists. The CC therefore decided on ‘the withdrawal of comrades from the Labour Party, *but with certain qualifications*’ [emphasis added]. In consequence, there would be ‘a number of people coming into the Party openly with quite good names and reputations’ and this would be accompanied by appropriate publicity.

Two weeks later, the *Daily Worker* announced that Eric Gower, Labour’s prospective parliamentary candidate for Stretford and ‘actively associated with the campaign for a People’s Front’, had joined the CPGB, his conversion allegedly accomplished through reading *The*

History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, although suspicions of his Communist affiliation were longstanding. His defection was the first of many in the following months, including the secretaries of the Oxford, Rottingdean, Mitcham, Woking, South Kensington, Hammersmith, Old Oak and Putney Labour Parties, chairs of the Brixton, North Montscombe, Watford, Woking and Hollingsbury Labour Parties, the vice-president of Hornsey Labour Party, and numerous less prominent office-holders.⁷⁹ Cripps lamented these ‘desertions’ and urged ‘all good socialists’ to remain inside Labour. The CPGB retorted that those joining the party could work more effectively for ‘working class unity by building a strong Communist Party’. It made no general appeal, it insisted, for workers unable to accept its full programme to abandon Labour: ‘On the contrary, the interests of the working class will best be served by such workers remaining within the Labour Party, supporting all progressive measures and fighting for working class unity.’⁸⁰

Tortuous phraseology helped obscure the fact that withdrawal was not total. Contradicting claims that entrism ended with the outbreak of war, renewed Communist activity was reported to the NEC by George Shepherd, National Agent, in December 1939; the committee encouraged him to take ‘all necessary disciplinary action’.⁸¹ Three months later, a memorandum to the NEC lamented the continued presence of members who followed ‘every line of the changing policy laid down by the Communist Party’.⁸² These members were not a residuum of individual ‘impetuous spirits’: that CPGB entrists remained organised was evidenced by a meeting of the Communist fraction inside the Labour Party convened by Gaster on the eve of Labour’s 1940 annual conference.⁸³

Nevertheless, the phased withdrawal of the CPGB’s cadres continued with accompanying fanfare. Between the outbreak of war in September 1939 and the banning of the

Daily Worker in January 1941, the paper reported that some 35 local Labour officials had resigned from the party in disgust at national policy, many of them declaring their intention to join the CPGB: in December 1939 alone, ten such resignations were announced.⁸⁴ In addition, it was claimed in June 1940 that eighteen members of the general council of the North Kensington Labour Party had resigned since the start of the war, most transferring allegiance to the CPGB.⁸⁵ We do not know how many were already clandestine Communists. Some may simply have been disillusioned Labour activists attracted to Communist policies. But we do know that some of those resigning to publicly 'join' the Communists were entrists, including George Matthews, Kenneth Campbell, Bill Rounce, Howard Hill and William Ross. The staggered nature of their withdrawal suggests it was carefully choreographed to provide maximum embarrassment to Labour and sustain the momentum of recruitment to the CPGB.⁸⁶

The Labour leadership continued to combat its enemy within. In July 1940, the NEC approved dissolution of Hammersmith Labour Party because of 'disruptive activities' and reported Sheffield Trades Council and Labour Party had been 're-organised on a basis of loyalty to the Labour Party'.⁸⁷ In September, the Belper party was disaffiliated for supporting the National Vigilance Committee (NVC), 'established by expelled members of the Labour Party with the backing of the Communist Party'.⁸⁸ Labour's Annual Report concluded that: 'Since the outbreak of War and the aggression of Russia against Poland and Finland, the Communist Party of Great Britain has intensified its underground work in certain sections of the Labour Party' (Labour Party, 1940, p. 20). In the summer of 1940, the CPGB and the NVC had launched a campaign for a People's Convention aimed at securing a 'people's peace' and, despite the implacable hostility of the Labour leadership, had organised a well-attended conference in January 1941. Labour's officials conducted a determined counter-offensive,

interviewing dozens of members, requesting they withdraw support for the Convention: 132 refused, including 20 members of the Reading party, and were expelled.⁸⁹ Continuing anxiety over the opportunities for entrism offered by the ‘organisational decay’ induced by wartime disruption was such that the selection of prospective parliamentary candidates was suspended in October 1941 (Thorpe, 2014, p. 231).

By then the CPGB’s *bouleversement* following the German invasion of Russia had transformed the situation. The People’s Convention was wound up and the focus shifted to building an Anglo-Soviet Unity movement. The Soviet Union’s new-found popularity led to rapid expansion of CPGB membership and growth of influence in the trade unions under conditions of full employment (Hinton, 1979, pp. 27–32; Croucher, 1982). When the CPGB launched a renewed campaign for Labour Party affiliation in 1943, the primary locus of its hopes lay in its new battalions in the unions rather than among any residual entrism cadres.⁹⁰ Although the proposition attracted 712,000 votes, the largest ever in favour of affiliation, it was rejected by 1,951,000 (Thorpe, 2014, pp. 234–238).

Popular Front entrism: dimensions

‘Communists have eaten far deeper into Local Labour Parties than is realised’, the *Labour Organiser* warned in 1936 (Drinkwater, 1936, p. 202). A subsequent Comintern review of the CPGB concurred: ‘With the goal of strengthening the campaign for unity within the Labour Party in the last year, many members of the Communist Party have secretly been sent for work in the internal local organs of the Labour Party.’⁹¹ From this and other reports, we have ascertained the number of such members for the five largest CPGB districts in November 1937 and, using district membership data, the percentage of entrists in these localities. See Table 1.

These districts embraced eighty-three per cent of the party's total membership.⁹² While there was significant variation between districts, the overall figure of ten per cent of Communists operating inside the Labour Party is derived from a large sample of the party. If we accept the suggestion that entristism was more prevalent in industrial backwaters, this may be a slight underestimate. In the small CPGB branch in York in 1937, most of the ten members were also members of the Labour Party, while in Harrogate all eight members were in the Labour Party.⁹³ In Jarrow, an industrial town but in a region where the CPGB was exceptionally weak, five out of the seven Communists were reported to hold Labour Party cards (Wilkinson, 1939, p.194).

Table 1. CPGB members in the Labour Party, 1937

CPGB District	Number of covert CPGB members in Labour Party	CPGB District membership, Nov. 1937	Percentage entrists
London	450	6,500	6.9
Scotland	150	2,330	6.4
Lancashire	384	1,500	25.6
South Wales	82	896	9.2
North Midlands*	150	747	20.1
Total for above districts	1,216	11,973	10.2

*Primarily covering South Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire.

Sources: RGASPI, 495/74/37, Report on some of the fundamental tactical, organisational and cadre problems for the Communist Party of Great Britain, December 27, 1937; CPA, CI 16, Report on South Wales membership, PB, November 12, 1937.

The total number of entrists indicated in Table 1 is broadly consistent with Rust's claim that during 1938–9: 'we have had somewhat more than a thousand of our members, 1500 at the present time, who are concealed members' [of the Labour Party].⁹⁴ It contrasts with higher estimates by academics that around twenty per cent of CPGB members worked inside Labour.

While 1500 entrists represented 8.5 per cent of CPGB membership in July 1939, it may be contrasted with Labour's individual membership of 409,000 in that year.⁹⁵ However, Labour's members were distributed across the entire country. The crude total tells us nothing of the health of local Labour organisations. Nor should it obscure the disproportionate role energetic Communists might play, particularly given their geographical concentration in localities such as London and Lancashire. Burns noted: 'in most of these [Labour] ward organisations the number of members is extremely small and the number of active members smaller still (in most cases smaller than the number of active members in our Party areas)'.⁹⁶ Tenure by Communists of elected positions as Labour representatives confirmed this. In 1937 Bramley reflected that in London: 'We have eight members of the Council now and are nearly in a position to double our number. We have members of the E.C. of the Labour Party.'⁹⁷ The following year, CC member Idris Cox claimed: 'we have inside the Labour Party 32 Communists who are Councillors in London and Labour Party MPs and others'.⁹⁸

Further examples of Communists who were Labour councillors or leading activists in local Labour parties are provided in Table 2 below. This tabulates information about fifty-five CPGB members or sympathisers who were simultaneously members of the Labour Party. This sample is illustrative, not representative, drawn in an *ad hoc* manner from a range of sources. Nevertheless, our data questions the character of entrism posited in earlier literature. While a handful operated in non-industrial counties, the majority were active in cities or industrial areas. Only Horace Green, and perhaps Malcolm MacEwen, fitted the template of a Communist joining Labour because of geographical isolation from other members of the party. In the context of the primary materials' repeated insistence on concealment, the only claims

that it was unnecessary remain those of Mitchell and Westacott – two out of fifty-five entrists in our sample (see Table 2, below).

Although twelve entrists for whom occupational information is available were middle-class, twenty-six were manual workers and twelve were in clerical or white-collar employment. Only one was a student, a group whose mobility, it has been conjectured, facilitated concealment, while two (Milner and MacEwen) had become Communists at university. Subterfuge was indispensable for some manual workers, such as Dave Priscott, an apprentice in Portsmouth Naval Dockyard where CPGB membership could lead to dismissal. Reed Jenkins demonstrated that even in the closely-knit mining communities of South Wales, Communists could successfully operate undercover. That twenty of those listed remained Labour Party members after 1939 confirms the qualified nature of the CPGB's withdrawal that year.

Even allowing for the small-scale, unrepresentative nature of the sample in Table 2, and the problems of ascertaining precise dates of recruitment, it is notable that seventeen were CPGB members who infiltrated the Labour Party, compared with twenty-nine who were recruited to the CPGB when already Labour members. Of the seventeen, the data is sufficient to show that five had been Communists for two years or more before they entered the Labour Party while four had been Communists for up to one year. Only one of these four, Jim Foulds, unequivocally joined both parties simultaneously: 'the comrades suggested I should join the Labour Party at the same time [as I joined the CPGB]'.⁹⁹

Stalinist entriism: protagonists

It is difficult to classify Labour Party activists working for the CPGB with precision. Given the secrecy which shrouded the enterprise, categorisation can only be rough, boundaries between groups are approximate and classification has to acknowledge fluidity and internal differentiation. We can largely, although not completely, exclude the popular front fellow-travellers anatomised by David Caute (1988, pp. 166–174) from the entrist paradigm. The majority neither espoused the CPGB’s programmatic politics nor acted under its discipline; they differed from most Labour activists in their attitude to the Soviet Union and/or determination to collaborate with the Communists in the fight against fascism. However, some had a closer, if still ambiguous, relationship with the CPGB. For example, Dorothy Woodman, forced to resign from the chair of a proscribed CPGB front by Labour’s NEC, was described by MI5 as a ‘near communist’;¹⁰⁰ dismissed by Cripps from the editorship of the erstwhile popular-frontist *Tribune* in 1940 for continuing to plough a Stalinist furrow, H.M. Hartshorn is variously designated a ‘fellow-traveller’ (Caute, 1988, p. 168), ‘a near Communist’ (K.O. Morgan, 2007, p. 64) or ‘a secret member of the CP’ (Anderson & Davey, 2013, p. 859). There is continuing controversy over whether John Strachey, classified in the past as ‘a fellow traveller strictly adhering to the party line’ (Wood, 1959, p. 43) may have been for a time a card-carrying Communist.¹⁰¹ Characterised by one historian as somebody who ‘should probably be counted with the communists in all but name’ (Morgan, 2009), D.N. Pritt himself described membership as ‘a technical matter’, a judgement which certainly applied to his own case.¹⁰²

Caute (1988, p. 173) similarly countenanced against fetishizing possession of a party card and Jack Cutter, the anti-Communist columnist of the *Labour Organiser*, claimed each entrust fraction contained ‘ordinary’ and ‘party’ members:

‘Ordinary’ members are Union or Labour Party delegates who are prepared to put the CP case and use CP tactics in the organisations to which they are delegated. To comply with LP and TUC rules they do not take out CP membership cards, but seasoned members of the CP attend their meetings to act as ‘guides’ (Cutter, 1940b, p. 55).

‘Ordinary’ members were ‘to all intents and purposes’ members of the CPGB, ‘and in close cahoots with that organisation’. Cutter observed of the underground operative:

He does not possess a CP membership card, and if he made formal application for CP membership he would probably be refused because he is doing much more valuable work for them inside the Labour Party. The Americans have a word for this kind of under-cover man. They would call him a stool pigeon (Cutter, 1940a, p. 26).

Cutter may have over-generalised – as we have seen, CPGB activists were, at times, under pressure from their leaders to recruit sympathetic Labour activists into the CPGB and some secret members had CPGB cards held by party officials. Whatever the formal position, it is clear from autobiographical accounts that, card or no card, ‘ordinary’ members acted as CPGB members. On that basis, and allowing for diversity, entrists may be broadly and provisionally grouped into three categories: *classic entrists* (Communists infiltrating the Labour Party); *recruited entrists* (Labour Party members who joined the CPGB but remained

active on its behalf inside Labour); and *non-card-carrying Communists* (Labour Party members who did not formally join the CPGB but strictly adhered to its line).

The organisers of entrism should not be overlooked. The tactic was driven from the top by the Comintern and Pollitt. But as we have seen, the CC and district functionaries were involved; indeed, it is implausible that conscientious activists remained unaware of the policy. Bramley and Gaster directed operations and were well-fitted to that role. An engineering trade unionist, Bramley had been active in the Labour Party in the 1920s. He himself had been recruited to the CPGB in 1927 by Communists who had evaded expulsion and was familiar with clandestine technique. A CC member who had attended the 13th Plenum of the Comintern Executive in Moscow in 1933, he held a pivotal position as London Organiser. From a bourgeois Jewish background, Gaster brought a lawyer's skills to subversion. He had known Bramley in Westminster Labour Party in the 1920s and joined the CPGB from the ILP where he had become well-versed in the world of factionalism and Communist entrism (Cohen, 2001, pp. 190–209).¹⁰³

Douglas Hyde exemplifies the first category of entrism. When he moved to Woking in 1938, he adopted 'the familiar communist infiltration methods' in the local Labour Party. After his first meeting he engaged 'keen young members' in discussion:

I noted the most hopeful and sat with them at the next meeting ... Two or three weeks later I got the first of them into the Party, telling them to keep quiet about his membership and to continue to work in the Labour Party. Then another, another and another ... When the Constituency Party's Annual General Meeting came round we decided in advance whom to support ... The group captured a majority of the positions and was soon doing most of the work of the Labour

Party in the district. (Hyde, 1950, pp.64–65).

Gathering his recruits together, Hyde revealed the strength of the CPGB caucus and launched a Labour Party newspaper which disseminated the CPGB line. When the CPGB leadership decided that ‘most of the undercover members in the Labour Party should come out into the open’ almost the entire group resigned, severely disrupting Labour organisation in the district. (Hyde, 1950, p.66). Although Hyde wrote as a critical ex-Communist, his recollections are supported by the *Daily Worker* which reported in July 1939 that the chairman, vice-chairman, secretary and a committee member of Working Labour Party had resigned to join the CPGB.¹⁰⁴

Tom Murray was another successful infiltrator. He had been an ILP and Labour Party member from 1919 before joining the CPGB in Edinburgh in 1930. At some point he became involved in what he described as the party’s ‘policy of clandestine underground activity’ and joined the Labour Party. By 1936 he was a Labour councillor, supported in his campaign by Communists who ‘were subterranean like me’ (MacDougall, 2000, p. 292).¹⁰⁵ He recalled three other councillors who were secret CPGB members. Jack Kane claimed only a brief, nominal membership. The two others, David Chalmers and George Boath, elected in 1938 and 1939 respectively, came out openly as Communists by 1940 and served as CPGB councillors until after the war (MacDougall, 2000, pp. 294–5, 537–8, nn. 259, 261). Murray, by then secretary of the Labour group as well as prospective parliamentary candidate for North Midlothian, made no similar admission and continued to play a leading role among Labour councillors.

Murray’s career is testimony to the difficulties Labour faced in identifying and removing entrists. His ability was suggested following the outbreak of war when the CP appointed him to lead a small group in Scotland charged with preparing for illegality: ‘reliable comrades who would cease to be prominent in open party activities, and indeed who would

preferably appear to be renegades from Party organisation ... in no circumstances were they to be seen reading the *Daily Worker* ...' (MacDougall, 2000, pp. 274–275). Despite such precautions, Labour officials had grounds for suspecting his political sympathies. Murray had been secretary of the Scottish branch of the Society for Cultural Relations with the Soviet Union and twice visited Russia; he led the Scottish delegation to the International Peace Congress in Brussels in 1936; was a commissar in the International Brigade in Spain between April and August 1938; and served on the Presidium of the International Conference on Refugees in Paris in 1939. The same year he attended the Conference of Petition Committees protesting against the expulsions of supporters of Cripps.¹⁰⁶ While many suspected Murray and his fellow 'subterraneans' were 'very close to the Communist Party if not actually members ... they couldn't prove anything' (MacDougall, 2000, p. 294).

Appointed Scottish secretary of the Fire Brigades Union in 1939, Murray became president of Edinburgh Trades and Labour Council in 1941. He subsequently claimed pressure of union work led him to resign his parliamentary candidature in 1940 and his council seat in 1942. Although Woodburn had prevented Murray from securing parliamentary nomination in Dundee, he was unable to repeat this in Midlothian where Murray had strong support. However, following an interview with Labour's Scottish Executive concerning his 'attitude to Party policy', he agreed to withdraw his candidature.¹⁰⁷ His politics provoked his removal as Trades Council president in 1943 following a vote of no confidence, critics accusing him of using his office to assist the Communist Party. Murray stood for the town council as a Communist candidate in 1946. Although his election report claimed that Labour Party organisation in the ward had been 'developed by the C.P.', he came bottom of the poll.¹⁰⁸ Disillusioned with what he termed the CPGB's 'desertion of the infallible guiding principles of

Marxism-Leninism', he resigned in 1965 to become a Maoist.¹⁰⁹ His retrospective evaluation of his 'infiltration and clandestine activity was that it was a failure ... because people just don't tolerate that sort of thing after a certain experience of it' (MacDougall, 2000, p. 292).

Many Labour activists recruited to the CPGB continued working inside the Labour Party. Lawrence Kirwan, a journalist, joined Labour in 1931 aged 21.¹¹⁰ Largely inactive, he had been galvanised by the failure of the Vienna revolt in 1934 and had switched to the Chiswick branch of the CPGB, moving the following year to Enfield where there were only four other party members:

The five of us linked up and recruited most of an active group of Socialist Leaguers and we soon had a functioning branch ... All this time I had retained my Labour Party membership. I joined the Enfield Chase Ward Labour Party and quickly was elected Secretary and a delegate to the Divisional General Council. Soon almost half our then small membership was in influential positions in the LP there.

Kirwan stood unsuccessfully as a Labour council candidate in 1938. The following year, in conformity with CPGB instructions, he announced his disagreements with Labour policy and that he 'was going over to the CP (of which of course [he] was already an active member)'.

Like London, Manchester was a stronghold of entrism and Jack Owen one of the most effective of those who operated inside the Labour Party after his recruitment to the CPGB in 1936. A veteran of the SDF, Owen lent authenticity and tradition to entrism. He had participated in the 1909 Ruskin College strike, graduating to work in the Plebs League and the pre-1914 syndicalist upsurge, as well as the wartime shop stewards' movement. He was particularly useful as he combined activity in the Amalgamated Engineering Union with his undercover endeavours in the Labour Party where he became a Labour councillor and vice-

chair of the Manchester City Labour Party. Like many entrists, Owen came out in 1940 when he was expelled for chairing a *Daily Worker* rally. He became a member of the editorial board and subsequently the full-time staff of the Communist newspaper.¹¹¹

Frank Truefitt, from a left-wing, republican family in Salford, had joined the LLOY aged 19 in 1931.¹¹² Two years later he was recruited to the ‘YCL [Young Communist League] fraction’ and underwent ‘quick development’, becoming Chairman of the Salford LLOY and attending three national conferences. He joined the CPGB in 1937 and progressed to covert work inside the adult Labour Party, although, echoing the concerns of the CPGB leadership, he recalled he initially displayed ‘tendencies to carry Labour Party background into Party work’. Truefitt was elevated to command of the CPGB’s Labour Party fraction in Salford and thus represented a significant asset: the ‘decision to withdraw me from LP was slow, as it was thought advisable I remained in after the Munich crisis’ (of September 1938). His selection for ‘special work’ on the outbreak of war – in similar fashion to Murray and Hyde, who was placed in charge of CP underground activity nationally in 1939 – bespoke skills developed as an entrist. His political reliability was underlined by his appointment to the CP’s Cadre Commission in 1942.

The journalist Charlotte Haldane, was a Labour Party member of many years standing when she was recruited to the Communist Party. A secret member of the CPGB under ‘Party discipline’ from 1937, she followed Pollitt’s personal instruction in 1939 to attend meetings of the South-West St Pancras Labour Party: ‘It was a small group, but even here there was a strong Party fraction, of which, of course I was a member also. In due course the fraction got my nomination to the Borough Council. I became a member of the Labour Group on the council on January 17th 1940’ (Haldane, 1949, pp. 238, 182; see also Adamson, 1998, pp. 97,

137). This corroborates the qualified nature of the CPGB's 'withdrawal' from entrism in 1939. Haldane was eventually expelled from Labour for supporting the People's Convention and, disillusioned with Stalinism following service as a war correspondent in Russia, resigned from the CPGB in 1941.¹¹³

The intricacies of entrism and the complexities of classifying entrists are apparent from the case of Malcolm MacEwen who may be viewed as a recruited entrist or a non-card-carrying Communist. He joined Labour at Edinburgh University in the mid-1930s but soon became associated with the YCL.¹¹⁴ To all intents and purposes, he was a Communist when he enrolled in the Labour Party in Inverness in 1937. He retrospectively explained this decision on the grounds that the CPGB mustered only two members in an area unprepossessing for Communists and his apprehension of the adverse impact open affiliation to the CPGB might have on his family's law firm. Nonetheless, there was an expectation that in these circumstances Communists would enter Labour. Although MacEwen described himself as a fellow-traveller, he religiously read the *Daily Worker* and faithfully followed the CPGB line, being elected a Labour councillor and adopted as prospective parliamentary candidate for Ross and Cromarty. The Hitler-Stalin pact failed to shake his faith and his resignation from the Labour Party over its condemnation of the Soviet attack on Finland confirmed his Communism. He worked for the *Daily Worker*, supported the People's Convention and stood as what he termed 'the Crypto-Communist Candidate' in the East Dunbartonshire by-election in 1941. On his own account, CPGB leaders assumed MacEwen was a member, although it was only when appointed a CPGB organiser that 'I then got my Party card'.¹¹⁵

The barrister D.N. Pritt was perhaps the most prominent non-card-carrying Communist. Converted to Stalinism following a visit to Russia in 1932, and quickly utilised as chair of the

legal commission established by the World Committee for the Victims of German Fascism into the Reichstag fire, Pritt was elected Labour MP for Hammersmith North in 1935 and a member of the NEC in 1936. He was initially cautious in his public dealings with the CPGB. Invited by Springhall to an 'open conference' organised by the party in 1935, Pritt declined, explaining that he was already suspected of collaboration: 'I have to be particularly careful to do nothing to jeopardise my chances of doing useful work in the future.'¹¹⁶ His utility was demonstrated by his apologia for the Moscow trials. His attendance at Zinoviev's trial in 1936 was secured by Arnot with difficulty, but the CPGB representative in Moscow concluded that 'when he gets back ... it ought to be thoroughly useful'.¹¹⁷ Pritt's book endorsing the proceedings realised Arnot's expectations. Expelled from Labour for supporting the Soviet invasion of Finland, Pritt became treasurer of the People's Vigilance Committee and a frequent speaker on CPGB platforms where he deployed his non-membership of the party to legitimise his pro-Soviet views.¹¹⁸ In private, he came close to joining the party on several occasions but does not appear to have done so.¹¹⁹ While not a formal member, the Security Service judged that 'in every other respect he is an ardent Communist'.¹²⁰

Pritt's value was underlined by his involvement with another apparent 'non-card carrier', Wilfred Vernon, a technician at the Royal Aircraft Establishment (RAE). An active member of the Farnborough and Cove Labour Party, police surveillance concluded he was 'closely connected' with CPGB headquarters, Hampshire's Chief Constable labelling him 'a fanatical communist' who distributed the *Daily Worker* to his workmates.¹²¹ A Special Branch informant alleged that Vernon, along with an aeronautical engineer and fellow Labour Party activist, Frederick Meredith, were members of 'an active and dangerous Communist cell at RAE'.¹²² Although he distributed CPGB literature, propounded Communist policies and

organised meetings for a variety of leftwing causes, Vernon emphasised the importance of discretion: 'It is very necessary to be careful how we go about things and not to run into trouble unnecessarily. We must choose our jobs. I, being a civil servant, have to be particularly cautious'.¹²³ Although both men were justifiably suspected of Communist sympathies – Meredith had signed a letter to the *Daily Worker* office 'Yours sympathetically' – there was no hard evidence that they were CPGB members.¹²⁴ According to a moderate official of the local Labour Party, 'Meredith is 100% [Communist] but has not openly stated so before the [Labour] Party, so cannot be expelled; Vernon runs him very close ... I have tried all along to keep the Party clean Labour, but not always successfully I am afraid'.¹²⁵

Following a burglary at his home, Vernon's notes on classified documents were discovered among stolen papers. Charged under the Official Secrets Act, he was defended by Pritt, who emphasised the 'difference between this case and one of spying'. Pritt insisted there was 'no hint' of his client making 'improper' use of the information and, denying Vernon's Communist connections, protested: 'There was not a single word of truth in that.'¹²⁶ Fined and dismissed from the RAE, Vernon alleged political victimisation, strenuously denying he was a Communist.¹²⁷ Sympathisers established a 'Vernon Defence Fund' and his local Labour Party petitioned the NEC. Sentence was pronounced the day the NEC met and the committee agreed that Pritt (an NEC member) should discuss matters with the chair.¹²⁸ Pritt's successful advocacy permitted Vernon's adoption as a prospective parliamentary candidate in 1938 and he was elected Labour MP for Dulwich in 1945.

The involvement of Vernon and Meredith in Soviet espionage was only revealed after the war, following the discovery of Gestapo files in Paris relating to a Soviet spy ring (West, 2005, pp. 228–235). That Pritt's defence had been disingenuous was suggested by Meredith's

assurance that Vernon had told Pritt ‘the whole story of his espionage connections’.¹²⁹

Meredith confessed he had spied to MI5 interrogators in 1949. Vernon was not questioned until 1952, having lost his seat in the 1951 election. He admitted espionage but denied CPGB membership.¹³⁰ His denial cannot be accepted uncritically since he was then a Labour county councillor and parliamentary candidate, but, given it was normal for Soviet agents to distance themselves from local Communist parties, it remains plausible. In 1939, an MI5 informant reported meeting Vernon who, he claimed, was ‘working up the Labour Party and CP at EAST DULWICH ... Says CP latest instructions are that – all Communists are to leave the weak-kneed Labour Party and concentrate on building the CP. Some areas are to work openly. Others – like Aldershot – are to build up secret Parties.’¹³¹ If Vernon did not carry a card, he was at least well informed on current party policy.

A normal British party?

This paper has reconstructed an under-researched aspect of political history and extended and clarified the existing historiography. Communist entrism, a specific, often overlooked, variety of the species, was on a smaller scale than some historians have estimated. Nevertheless, by 1937 around 10 per cent of CPGB members were operating inside the Labour Party and some held office. Entrism commenced earlier and concluded later than has been assumed.

Exploratory moves were in train in 1933, coinciding with the CPGB’s initial united front overtures to Labour Party leaders. Entrism was prosecuted from 1934, and thereafter with mounting vigour. It functioned as a significant adjunct to successive campaigns for Communist affiliation to facilitate a Popular Front. Our findings question the perception in the literature

that sustained entrism began in 1937 and was abandoned after 1939. Assets remained in place until the downturn in Labour activity and dissolution of the Comintern in 1943.

Biographical data validates party documents: like later entrism, the Communist variant involved infiltration of CPGB members to stimulate the defection of Labour Party members and organise their retention as secret Communists or collaborators who augmented the process of winning recruits to Communism and influencing Labour Party policy. Largely absent from existing accounts of the period, entrism constituted a significant aspect of Communist strategy. Its character, secrecy and limited demands contrast with the relative openness and socialist programme of the NLWM. It raises questions about the degree to which Popular Front sentiment inside the Labour Party was organic or artificially stimulated and casts new light on the relationship between the CPGB and the Labour left. To present entrism as a semi-spontaneous alignment of ideals and goals, across porous political boundaries between Communist and Labour activists, is to diminish the element of organised agency apparent from the primary materials; minimise the borders between the two parties; and dissolve the secrecy and subversion intrinsic to the tactic. What was involved was, as Pollitt conceded, ‘a question of the Trojan Horse’.¹³²

The Stalinist entrism of the 1930s has some claims to be considered the major modern essay in covert factional activity based on infiltration of a mass party. It is, moreover, important to situate the episode in its broader context. From one vantage point, the CPGB was a conventional British party, an image it strenuously cultivated in the Popular Front years; from another, it was a Russian-directed and financed, conspiratorial organisation, a reality it sought to suppress in these years. Consideration of entrism confirms that secrecy and double-dealing was integral to the CPGB’s *modus operandi*, as much part of British Communism as

campaigning for arms for Spain, mobilisation against the Blackshirts, struggles for higher wages and union democracy – or adulation of Stalin. There was a unity between the ‘normal’ facets of British Communism and its identity as a conspiratorial avatar of Soviet policy. The latter, as the Comintern archives substantiate, directed and infused the former. In any attempt at holistic history, both aspects demand attention; neither should be disregarded. A small vignette illuminates the way in which the different worlds of Russo-British Communism were connected. In early 1943, Pollitt reported to Dimitrov via the NKVD intelligence network on what he considered the successful progress of the CPGB’s latest affiliation campaign, intimately related to the entrust project.¹³³ Not to be outdone, Pavel Fitin, Head of the NKVD Foreign Department, countered that his resident station chief in London had taken time out from supervising British Communists spying for Russia to assess the affiliation campaign with his own practised eye. Fitin concluded that Pollitt’s estimation did not ‘correspond to reality’ (Firsov, Klehr & Haynes, 2014, p. 191).

Yet some academics who focus on the ‘normal’, ‘British’ features suggest that scholars who focus on ‘the secret world’ are ‘fixated’ on it.¹³⁴ In contrast, the eminent historian and former Communist, Dorothy Thompson, reasserted its significance, both for political and social historians: “‘undercover’ work formed a part at least of the political lives of many comrades, among them the most committed party members. They were part of the “front” activity and should perhaps show up somewhere in the social history of the CP membership’ (Thompson, n.d., p. 4).

Latter-day Communists admitted the CPGB maintained a list of secret members, not for nefarious reasons but to protect civil servants, teachers and others in similar employment who feared victimisation because of their party membership (Griffiths, 2008). This overlooks the

denial of party membership and resort to subterfuge of Communists operating in voluntary institutions, from the trade unions through the Union of Democratic Control and the League of Nations Union, and a plethora of student and youth organisations, to the National Council of Labour Colleges, the ILP and, of course, the Labour Party. Converts to Communism embraced duplicity with a vengeance. In the light of other evidence, there seems little need to question the recollections of Oxford University in the late 1930s of the then Communist, Robert Conquest: ‘Nearly all the committee of the Labour Club, with over 1,000 members, and all the committees of the League of Nations Union, Liberal Club and Student Christian Movement, together with two of the five Conservative Club committee were also in the CP. So, extraordinary as it seems, were two even of the ten British Union of Fascists!’ (Conradi, 2009, p.82).¹³⁵ Together with its subordination to the Comintern, the Soviet state and bureaucratic centralism, entrism stamped the CPGB as far from a ‘normal’ British party.

Yet entrism produced problems. There were tensions between building a centralist party which proclaimed itself the vanguard of the working class, and marshalling members to construct an undercover caucus inside a competitor with a fundamentally antagonistic, organisation, politics and culture. The contradictions even posed a kind of premature Browderism, the unintended, existential issue of dissolving the CPGB. There were conflicts between ‘open Communists’ and ‘subterraneans’, anxieties about the quality of Labour Party recruits and difficulties in organising and executing a changing line while evading detection. Some entrists became inactive; others felt the pull of the politics they simulated. And it was not only Labour’s leaders but many members who did not take kindly to deception. In the end, an intriguing enterprise in which the Comintern in Moscow mounted a covert operation to systematically subvert what was, in contradistinction to the CPGB, a very British party

founded on the antipathy to Communism and suspicion of its methods that the majority of Labour Party activists shared with their leaders.

Table 2. A sample of Communist entrists in the Labour Party and Labour League of Youth*

<i>Name/ Locality</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Category of entrist</i>	<i>Date joined CP (or YCL)</i>	<i>Date joined LP/LLOY</i>	<i>Date left LP</i>	<i>LP positions</i>	<i>Notes</i>
Sam Apter (1917–?) London	n/a	Classic	1938 (1932)	n/a	1939?	Sec., of LP Ward; Mgt Ctee, Mile-End LP 1938–39	
Robert Barnes (1911–?) London	Teacher	Classic	1934	1935	1938		ex-ILP member; ‘worked in West Ham Labour Party’, 1935–38.**
Kay Birbeck (1901–?) London	Telephonist	Recruited	1938	1936	1940		Worked in ‘LP fraction’ Enfield, 1937–1940.
George Boath (n/a) Edinburgh	Lift engineer	Classic	pre-1936	pre-1936	1940	LP councillor, 1939	Continued to sit as CPGB councillor until 1946.
Dave Bowman (1913–96) Dundee	Railwayman	Recruited	1940	c.1935	1941	Municipal election Agent, Dundee	Expelled from LP Feb. 1941 for supporting People’s Convention.
P. J. Broomfield (n/a) Somerset	Printer	Recruited	1939	pre-1938	1940	EC of DLP; LP Councillor, Chilton RDC, 1938–40	Left LP when forced to leave district following victimisation.
Bernard Buckman (1910–?) London	Businessman	Recruited	1938	1931	1939	Propaganda Sec., Hampstead LP	‘I first joined the Party in 1938, although in 1937, under the instructions of [the local CPGB secretary] I worked in the Labour Party ... Under [CPGB] guidance I worked with the Labour Party and became propaganda Secretary. I began open air meetings and did many meetings jointly with our Party. I became May Day organiser for the Hampstead Labour Party and was their delegate to the China Campaign Committee.’
Kenneth John Campbell (1909–2002) Welwyn Garden City	Architect	Recruited?	1930s	1938	1939		In charge of Miners’ Welfare Commission, West Midlands.
David Chalmers (n/a) Edinburgh	Industrial worker	Classic	pre-1936	pre-1936	1940	LP councillor, 1938	Continued to sit as CPGB councillor until 1947.

<i>Name/ Locality</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Category of entrust</i>	<i>Date joined CP (or YCL)</i>	<i>Date joined LP/LLOY</i>	<i>Date left LP</i>	<i>LP positions</i>	<i>Notes</i>
Frederick Dickenson (n/a) Gillingham, Kent	Engineer	Recruited	1936	1935	1940?	Divisional Labour Party	Sec., Gillingham TC, 1939; active in People's Convention movement.
Dorothy Edwards (1912–?) Manchester	Typist	Non-Card	1939	Mid-1930s	1939	In charge of Rusholme LLOY	'For some time I was the Social Secretary for the [Manchester] Anti-War Council ... The Communist explanation of the causes of war seemed to me the only logical one and I became a Daily Worker reader ... The Anti-War Council was campaigning for affiliations from the LP ... and it was agreed that a number of individual members should join the LP. I joined the Rusholme Division ... where the leftwing was quite strong and we fought continuous battles for a united working class movement, against non-intervention in Spain etc.'
Dick Etheridge (1909–85) Halesowen	Shop assistant	Classic	1929	1929	1939	Sec., Halesowen LP; Del. to DLP; LP Municipal candidate	'Joined the Party in 1929. Was instructed to work in the LP.'
Reuben Falber (1914–2006) London	Hairdresser	Recruited	1937	1935	1937		'In the Labour Party I worked with other left-wing people and regularly sold Party literature at the ward meetings.' On recruitment to the CP 'I was told not to leave the Labour Party ... Unfortunately I took the law into my own hands and resigned from the Labour Party and was sharply rebuked by the Party branch secretary.'
Jim Foulds (n/a) Colne	Unemployed	Classic	1938	1938	1939	Elected Chair of LP Ward at first meeting	'Rather strangely, it appeared to me at the time, the comrades suggested I should join the Labour Party at the same time [as I joined the CPGB] ... By July [1939] it was decided I should resign from Labour Party and take up open Party work.'

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Sally Freedman (n/a) London	n/a	Classic	1928 (1924)	pre-1935	n/a	Sec., Holborn Anti-Fascist League; Holborn LP	'In 1935 started on a special assignment that lasted two years'; trained as a CPGB radio operator in Moscow, code name SILVIA.
Eric Gower (1903-?) Manchester	Trade union official	Non-Card or Recruited?	1939	pre-1926	1939	Sec., Manchester LP, 1926-31; PPC; Chair, Manchester LP, 1937	Removed as Chair of Manchester LP for Communist associations; resigned. LP to join CPGB 1939.
Horace Green (1907-?) South Yorks	Boot repairer	Non-Card	1938	1924/1936	1935/1940	Sec., Brierley LP; Del., DLP; LP Municipal Candidate	Left ILP 1935; rejoined LP 1936 as a 'fellow traveller'; joined CP in 1938, 'whilst remaining in local Labour Party, I developed a Left Book Club Group, from that a Labour Monthly Discussion Group, and eventually recruitment in the locality gave us the basis for a [CPGB] branch ... in 1940.'
Peter Grimshaw (1914-?) Salford	Engineer	Recruited	1937	1933	1938	EC of DLP; former Sec., LLOY	Withdrawn from LP work 'to lead work of a new [CPGB] group'.
John Griffiths (1913-?) Tunbridge Wells	Hospital Administrator	Recruited	1936	1931	1938	Vice-President, Sutton DLP	
Charlotte Haldane (1894-1969) London	Journalist	Recruited	1937	early 1930s?	1941	LP Councillor, 1940	Secretary, Dependents' Aid Ctee; Expelled from LP over support for People's Convention; Left CPGB 1941.
Christine Harper (1902-?) Cardiff	Garment worker	Recruited	1935	'for many years before joining the [Communist] Party'	1939		'in 1935 being at that period undercover was Secretary of the Penarth Trades and Labour Council for seven years... represented the LP on all committees such as Assistance Board, Public Assistance, etc.' Resigned LP and CPGB 1939; rejoined CPGB 1941.

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A.G. Harris (1905-?) Reading	Railwayman	Recruited	1936-7	1932	1938	EC of Local LP;	Sec., Reading branch of Socialist League, which he founded.
Owen Heather (1918-?) Manchester	Student	Recruited	1936	pre-1936	?		Expelled from CPGB 1938 and joined ILP but retained LP membership throughout.
Mary Higgins (1914-95) Oldham	Typist	Recruited	1940	1930/31	n/a	Sec., Failsworth LLOY	Sec., Oldham CPGB; 'I joined the Communist Party in Oldham but still felt that I could do better work inside the Labour Party ... I am still [1942] a member of the Mossley LP and delegate to the Mossley DLP'.
Howard Hill (1913-80) Sheffield	Electrician	Classic	1934-35	1930s	1940	LP Councillor, 1938-46	Required to resign from LP for chairing DW rally in May 1940; retained council Seat until 1946. Full-time Sheffield CP District Secretary from 1943.
Stanley Hughes (n/a) North Wales	Miner	Recruited	1937	1930	1938	LP branch sec.; LP candidate, Parish Council	'Joined the C.P. 1937 covered member until I should come out openly I was forced to resign from Wrexham TLC with a letter of regret.'
Douglas Hyde (1911-96) London	Dental technician	Classic	1928	1938	1938	Edited local LP paper	News Editor, <i>Daily Worker</i> ; left CPGB 1948.
Reed Jenkins (1907-?) South Wales	Miner	Classic	1932	mid-1930s	late-1930s	...	There was no Labour Party in Trelewis so I attended the Communist Branch meeting in Bedlinog and advanced the view that the main task in our area was to get the re-election of this sympathetic [to the CP] Labour man ... I re-formed in Trelewis the Labour Party. After [the] election I again joined the Communist Party but worked for a time under cover. When it was considered fit, I emerged into the open and assisted in the general activities of the Party. The LP is not functioning to any extent now.

<i>Name/ Locality</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Category of entrust</i>	<i>Date joined CP (or YCL)</i>	<i>Date joined LP/LLOY</i>	<i>Date left LP</i>	<i>LP positions</i>	<i>Notes</i>
Lawrence Kirwan (1900–?) St Albans	Journalist	Recruited	1934	1931	1939	Sec., Ward LP; Council candidate	
Albert Kitt (1898–?) Eccles	Engineer	Classic	1931	post-1931	pre-1943		‘Worked inside the Labour Party ... for 5 years under Party guidance’.
Miriam Llewellyn (1906–?) Neath	Housewife	Recruited	n/a	n/a	n/a	Sec., LP Women’s Section	‘Moved to suburbs. Formed a section LP there and this proved [Communist] Party stronghold. Husband expelled from [Labour] party. I continued but found I had played out so joined openly the [Communist] Party’.
Kay Loosen (?–1997) St Albans	Typist	Recruited	1934	pre-1934	n/a	Sec., Cuffley LP; del. to St Albans DLP	Sec., Aid Spain Ctee; when in LP paid CPGB dues ‘to comrades in Enfield’.
Harry Lubbock (1912–?) London	Accountant	Classic	1931/2	post-1932	pre-1939	Chair, Hampstead LP ‘with knowledge of Party Centre (pre-war)’	Chair, CPGB Commercial Branch.
Malcolm McEwen (1911–96) Inverness	Lawyer	Non-Card	1941 (1935)	1935	1940	LP County Councillor, 1938–40; LP PPC	Student Communist, 1935–7, but did not join CPGB until 1941.
Rena Maitland (1912–?) Glasgow	Factory worker	Classic	1937	1938	1939	Sec., Ward LP	Sec., Glasgow Peace Council; ‘during 1938 and 1939 worked only in LP and trade unions’.
George Matthews (1917–2005) Bedfordshire	Farmer	Recruited	1938	1937	1939	LP PPC, Mid-Bedfordshire	First elected to CPGB Central Committee, 1943.
Frederick Meredith (1895–?) Farnborough	Aeronautical engineer	Non-Card	n/a	Pre-1934	n/a	Leading activist in local LP	Scientific officer, RAE; from 1938 head of physics at Smiths Aircraft Instruments; in 1949 confessed to spying for Soviet Union 1936-39 but not charged.
Ralph Milner (1912–?) St Albans	Barrister	Classic	1932	1934	1937	Prospective LP Councillor, St Albans	Joined CPGB at Cambridge; Sec., St Albans Spanish Aid Ctee.

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Tom Mitchell (1915–?) Letchworth	Foundry worker	Classic	1936	1936	n/a	Secretary, Letchworth LP	Later Secretary, CP SE Midlands District.
Tom Murray (1900–?) Edinburgh	Temperance organiser	Classic	1930	1922	1943–45	LP Councillor; Sec., Labour Group; PPC, North Midlothian	Commissar, International Brigade; President, Edinburgh Trades and Labour Council; later a Maoist.
George ‘Myke’ Myson (1903–?) Harrow	Dental technician+	Recruited	1938	1937	1939		Active in Left Book Club Theatre Guild.
James Oldbury (1904–?) Warrington	Train driver	Recruited	1935	c.1932	1941		‘Joined CP 1935 but was instructed to still retain membership Labour Party. About this time elected on to the EC of TC, playing a prominent part until expelled in 1941 for association with the People’s Convention.’
Jack Owen (1887–1957) Manchester	Engineer	Recruited	1936	1920s?	1940	LP Councillor, Vice- Chair, Manchester LP	Ex-SDF member involved in Ruskin College strike, Plebs League; expelled from LP for chairing <i>DW</i> rally; immediately joined <i>DW</i> Editorial Committee and became regular <i>DW</i> columnist.
George Pemberton (1904–?) London	Butcher	Recruited	1933–4	1932	1938	Sec., Central Wandsworth LP	‘recruited 20 party members from LP’.
Dave Priscott (1919–1995) Portsmouth	Apprentice	Non-Card	1938	1934	1938	Del., DLP	Later secretary, Yorkshire District CP.
Denis Pritt (1887–1972) London	Barrister, MP	Non-Card	n/a	1919	1940	Labour MP, 1935–40	Expelled form LP 1940; independent MP 1945–50.
William Ross (1901–?) Corby	Steel worker	Classic	1926	1937	1940	Labour councillor; Sec., Corby Trades Council	Having moved to Corby from Lanarkshire, joined LP after consulting CP District Secretary; later Birmingham CP Organiser.
Bill Rounce (n/a) Jarrow	Joiner	Recruited	1937	pre-1937	1940	Labour councillor, 1938	Deselected for being CPGB member.

<i>Name/ Locality</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Category of entrust</i>	<i>Date joined CP (or YCL)</i>	<i>Date joined LP/LLOY</i>	<i>Date left LP</i>	<i>LP positions</i>	<i>Notes</i>
Les Smith (1909–?) London	Factory worker	Non-Card?	1938	1935	1938	LP Ward Sec.	‘Finally decided I would have to join CP if I wanted to fight for Unity, the People’s Front , and the Spanish People. On application was told to remain in LP, but came out openly as a party member the later end of 1938. A number of others from the ward joined the party with me.’
Frank Truefitt (1912–?) Salford	Joiner	Recruited	1937 (1933)	1931	1938	Chair, Salford LLOY; Sec., Salford LP	‘Was in charge of fraction work in LP in Salford up to or just previous to Munich’.
Wilfred Vernon (1882–1975)	Aeronautical draughtsman	Non-Card?	n/a	pre-1934		PPC, 1938; MP, 1945–51; LP Councillor, post-1951	Convicted for breach of Official Secrets Act, 1938; later confessed to espionage on behalf of Soviet Union.
William Ward (1921–) Blackpool	Clerk	Recruited	1939	1938	1941		‘Worked simultaneously in the Party, the [Young Communist] League and the Labour Party, the local LLOY becoming more or less defunct ... This was the position up to being called up in May 1941’. Later CPGB organiser in Lancs and Cheshire.
Fred Westacott (1916–2001) Winchester	Fitter	Recruited	1937	1932/1935	1940	Sec. Local LP; delegate to CLP	CP full-time worker South Wales, 1942.
George Whomack (1883–?) Bexley	Gun examiner	Non-Card?	pre-1927	pre-1934	n/a	LP candidate, Bexley UDC, 1934	By mid-1930s, still attended CP demonstrations and espoused CP policy but was not known to be a CP member. This may have been due to his employment at Woolwich Arsenal and his membership of a Soviet espionage ring there, for which he was convicted in 1938.
Syd Wilkin (1908–89) Rotherham	Factory worker	Recruited	1937	1935	1942	EC of local LP	‘In 1937 I joined the CP although a member of the LP. I remained in the LP until 1942.’

*Although the CPGB conducted extensive entristm inside the Labour League of Youth (LLOY) through its youth organisation, the Young Communist League (YCL), we have not included individuals who were solely involved in entrist activity in the LLOY. However, our sample includes some who initially joined the YCL or LLOY and progressed to entristm in the adult Labour Party.

**Unless otherwise stated, quotations are from CPGB personal files.

Sources: CPA, CP/CENT/PERS/1–8, Personal files; LPA, NEC Minutes; TNA, Security Service Files: Frederick William Meredith, KV2/2199, KV2/2202, D.N. Pritt, KV2/1062–1065, W.F. Vernon, KV2/994–996, George Whomack, KV2/1237, E.D. Weiss, KV2/2230; *Daily Worker*, 1939–40; Stevenson, G. ‘Compendium of Communist Biographies’ retrieved at <http://www.grahamstevenson.me.uk/index>; Flinn, A. (2005). ‘Labour’s family: Local Labour parties, trade unions and trades councils in cotton Lancashire, 1931–39’. In M. Worley (Ed.), *Labour’s grass roots: Essays on the activities of local Labour parties and members, 1918–45* (p.117). Aldershot: Ashgate; Haldane, C. (1949). *Truth will out*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson; ‘Mary and Percy Higgins: Communists in Thameside. Retrieved at <https://radicalmanchester.wordpress.com/2010/04/15/mary-and-percy-higgins-communists-in-tameside>; MacDougall, I. (2000). *Voices from work and home: Personal recollections of working life and labour struggles in the twentieth century by Scots men and women* (pp.293–5, 530, 538. Edinburgh: Mercat Press; McHugh, D. (2001). *A ‘mass’ party frustrated?: The development of the Labour Party in Manchester, 1918–1931* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Salford, UK; Morgan, K., Cohen, G., and Flinn, A. (2007). *Communists and British society, 1920–91: People of a special mould*. London, Rivers Oram; ‘Dave Priscott’ (1984). In J. Attfield and S. Williams, (Eds.), *1939: The Communist Party of Great Britain and the war* (pp. 100–102). London: Lawrence and Wishart; Weinbren, D. (1997). *Generating socialism: Recollections of life in the Labour Party*. Stroud: Sutton; West, N. (2005). *MASK: MI5’s penetration of the Communist Party of Great Britain*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Notes

¹ John Earl Haynes. Personal communication, October 28, 2017.

² Deutscher remarked in relation to ‘the French turn’: “‘Entrism” is the term by which the Trotskyists described and discussed this move even thirty years later’: Deutscher, 1963, p. 272. The designation does not seem to have been used by official Communists in the 1930s but has passed into general use.

³ Callaghan (1986) terms Communist factional organisation in trade unions ‘a form of industrial entrism’ (p. 385). Unions have excluded Communists from office but rarely from membership, although the latter interdict has been applied to fascists.

⁴ Apart from surveillance as a prelude to entrism, cadres might be sent into an opponent simply to gather intelligence on it. Trotskyist groups were penetrated for this purpose by Stalinists – as well as state agents – which illustrates that the invader is not invariably smaller than the host.

⁵ Birchall (2011) states: ‘This was not done out of any hope of challenging the Labour leadership, nor of making any quick gains. It was simply recognised that in the given circumstances, it was the best milieu in which to fight for revolutionary ideas and find such recruits as could be won’ (p. 142).

⁶ Total entry made provision for the continuation of an outside centre and an open journal. The latter was often dispensed with.

⁷ For the personal dimension of entrism, see Bensaid (2001), pp. 71–88; Kiernan (1989); Nick (2002), esp. pp. 225–229.

⁸ Branson (1985) claims entrism was abandoned because it ‘laid the party open to charges of “conspiracy” and “subversion”’ (p. 157).

⁹ Jenkins (1979) concludes of CPGB publicity about the entrism of supporters of *Socialist Outlook* in 1954: ‘It was largely on the basis of the Communist Party evidence that the Trotskyists were proscribed’ (p. 182).

¹⁰ Entrism is not mentioned in Fyrth (1985) and only vaguely in Thompson (1992), p. 57.

¹¹ Pelling (1958) refers briefly to secret members of the CPGB and ‘crypto-Communists’ in the Labour Party (pp. 105–106). There is nothing in Laybourn & Murphy (1999) or Eaden & Renton (2002).

¹² Morgan (1989) adds that the CPGB instructed a number of ‘crypto-Communists’ to resign from the Labour Party and proclaim their Communist affiliation in 1939 (pp. 75, 83, n. 36).

¹³ The National Archives, London (TNA), MEPO 38/54, CPGB Central Committee meetings, Metropolitan Police Special Branch report, December 8, 1937.

¹⁴ The source given is the memoir of ex-member, Douglas Hyde. Yet the story Hyde (1950) recounts is a classic tale of subversion and successful recruitment of Labour Party members in order to form a CPGB unit in a non-industrial area of military importance: ‘It was a situation where the frontal attack was almost bound to fail. So I tried the familiar communist infiltration methods instead, using the local Labour Party for the purpose’ (p. 64).

¹⁵ If the analogy with Wyndham’s story is contrived, the science fiction writer’s titular metaphor is less so. It was possible to hear references to ‘cuckoos in the nest’ on the lips of critics of Trotskyist entrism in the Labour Party in the 1980s. Opponents of earlier entrism metaphorised it as ‘cannibalism’ and more soberly as ‘colonisation’ (Myers, 1977, p. 140).

Trotskyists compared ‘the French turn’ to ‘a surgeon penetrating a rotten corpse in order to remove healthy living organisms’ (ibid., p. 25, n. 36). The US Communist leader, Earl Browder, warned the SP: ‘You are about to swallow a deadly poison. Better prepare an emetic for surely you will be in convulsions ...’ (Ottanelli, 1991, p. 93).

¹⁶ Viz: ‘Except in cases of inter-regional migration or returning from university, they could hardly have infiltrated very effectively had this not been the case, and the active concealment of an existing political affiliation and circle of contacts was the exception rather than the rule’ (Morgan et al., 2007, pp. 131–132). The authors provide no evidence, statistical or otherwise, for their assertion that ‘active concealment’ was the exception. Not only are no statistics provided for their additional claim that ‘the great majority’ of undercover Communists joined Labour before or roughly simultaneously with their adhering to Communism, but only four of the seven covert Communists discussed in their book justify this characterisation. On Morgan et al.’s own account, the cap fits Tom Mitchell, Fred Westacott, Mary Higgins and Jack Owen, referred to by Morgan et al., pp.143–144. It does not fit Douglas Hyde or William Ross. Honor Arundel (ibid., p. 209), was a special case, joining the CPGB-controlled Oxford University Labour Club – very different from the adult party – as a student who had sympathised with the CPGB at school.

¹⁷ This figure is apparently a rough, maximum extrapolation from an aside by CPGB leader, Harry Pollitt, ‘although we get 2/3 thousand members in the Labour Party it does not go as it ought to do’: see Morgan et al., p. 303, n. 196, and Communist Party Archive, Manchester (hereafter CPA), CI 9, Central Committee (CC), March 5, 1938: CPGB membership was 15,781 in September 1938 (Thorpe, 2000, p. 284).

¹⁸ The reference is to Howell (1983, pp. 210–213). Howell characterises the SDF and ILP as ‘two organisations stylistically and organisationally very similar’. Whether the CPGB and the Labour Party of the 1930s merited similar designation is contentious to say the least.

¹⁹ See, for example, Corthorn (2006); Howell (1976); Pimlott (1977).

²⁰ For example, Cole (1948); Pelling & Reid (1996); Thorpe (2001). Harmer (1999) notes without elaboration: ‘In the 1930s members of the Communist Party often joined in order to further their party’s Popular Front line’ (p. 255).

²¹ Neither Blaazer (1992) nor Corthorn (2006) touch on the topic. Webb (2009) deals briefly with entrism in the youth organisation. Because of the Labour League of Youth’s distinctive character, the present study is limited to the adult party.

²² CPA, CI 15, Political Bureau (PB), November 21, 1935: Pollitt’s injunction was not completely successful but the issue was generally avoided in the *Daily Worker* and the *Party Organiser*. There was only occasional, brief reference in *Discussion*, the CPGB forum for internal debate.

²³ Russian State Archive of Social and Political History, Moscow (hereafter RGASPI), 495/14/239, Reports of the Lancashire CPGB organisations for 1937.

²⁴ Labour Party (1933), p. 3.

²⁵ CPA, CI 15, PB, February 8, 1934, Report by ‘Samson’ (Springhall).

²⁶ RGASPI, 495/72/257, Bureau, Anglo-American Secretariat, February 28, 1934: RGASPI, 495/72/256, Anglo-American Secretariat, March 31, 1934.

²⁷ CPA, CI 5, PB, May 4, 1934.

²⁸ CPA, CI 6, CC, April 26, 1935.

²⁹ Hyde (1950), p. 4. Dick Etheridge joined Labour as an undercover Communist as early as 1929: CPA, CP/CENT/PERS/2/6, Dick Etheridge, 1948.

- ³⁰ McDermott & Agnew (1996), pp. 109–142; Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI), Statement on the German situation and the united front, March 5, 1933, in Degras (1971), Vol. 3, p. 253; Fascism, working class unity and the tasks of the Comintern, August 20, 1935, in *ibid.*, p.368.
- ³¹ Howell (1976), p. 64; Labour Party Archive, Manchester (hereafter LPA), National Executive Committee (NEC), May 16, 1934: Labour Party (1933), p. 3; LPA, NEC, March 22, 1933.
- ³² Labour Party (1933), pp. 32–33; and see LPA, General Secretary’s papers, Box 4, GS/ILP/10, Arthur Henderson to the Secretary, CPGB, March 2, 1934; LPA, JSM/CP/75, The United Front (n.d., 1934?).
- ³³ ‘We cannot do it from without ... the Party has to try and find the ways and means of developing that form of campaign ... within the Labour Party, at the same time as from the outside we are advancing our policy’: CPA, CI 10, CC, June 24, 1939, Pollitt.
- ³⁴ CPA, CI 15, PB, October 4, 1935; Degras (1971), Vol. 3, p.368; Dimitrov (1935).
- ³⁵ Cf. the testimony of the Sheffield Communist, Bill Moore, who formally ‘resigned’ from the CPGB and went ‘under cover’ in 1937: ‘the District Secretary kept me and my wife stamped up’: Hyde, (1989), p. 34.
- ³⁶ CPA, CI 6, CC, April 26, 1935.
- ³⁷ TNA, MEPO 38/54, Metropolitan Police Special Branch report, December 8, 1937.
- ³⁸ CPA, CI 7, CC, October 10, 1936; RGASPI, 495/100/149, Draft resolution of Secretariat on report of Comrade Pollitt, January 4, 1937.
- ³⁹ CPA: CI 15, Minutes, June 23, 1935. Although filed with PB minutes, these appear to refer to a CC or special meeting.
- ⁴⁰ CPA, CI 7, CC, October 10, 1936. For the CPM, see Pimlott (1977), pp. 116–140.
- ⁴¹ RGASPI, 495/100/1006, John Gibbons to Secretariat, n.d. (late 1935).
- ⁴² CPA, CI 15, PB, 4 Oct. 1935.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*; MARTY to HARRY, November 4, 1935, decrypted radio message reproduced in West (2005), p.170.
- ⁴⁵ CPA, CI 15, PB, November 21, 1935.
- ⁴⁶ CPA, CI 7, CC, January 4/5, 1936.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.* The task was to turn Labourites into Communists – not *vice versa*.
- ⁵¹ CPA, CI 33, Marty Secretariat, February 20, 1936.
- ⁵² For affiliation through Communist eyes, see Branson (1985), pp. 150–155. Labour’s hostility was evident from its decision to refuse to discuss any further correspondence from the CPGB: LPA, NEC, July 24, 1935.
- ⁵³ CPA, CI7, CC, October 10, 1936.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁶ RGASPI, 495/14/220, Pollitt to Arnot, October 29, 1936; Corthorn, 2006, pp. 106–58; RGASPI, 495/14/270, Pollitt to Arnot, November 6, 1936; RGASPI, 495/100/1149, Draft resolution of Secretariat on report of Comrade Pollitt’, January 4, 1937.

- ⁵⁷ LPA, ‘The Unity Campaign’, Organisation Sub-Committee, March 17, 1937; Labour Party (1937), pp. 27–28.
- ⁵⁸ ‘The Socialist League is practically non-existent’: RGASPI, 495/14/243, Pollitt to Arnot, March 17, 1937; Corthorn (2006) estimates membership had fallen to 1,600 by May 1937 (p. 157). See also LPA, NEC, March 24 1937.
- ⁵⁹ RGASPI, 495/100/1149, Draft resolution of Secretariat
- ⁶⁰ CPA, CI33, Marty Secretariat, July 2, 1937.
- ⁶¹ The following paragraphs are based on CPA, CI8, CC, August 6/7, 1937.
- ⁶² RGASPI, 495/20/239, Decision of the Secretariat of the ECCI, September 4, 1937, Draft resolution of the CC of the CPGB, September 4, 1937.
- ⁶³ CPA, CI8, CC, September 10, 1937.
- ⁶⁴ TNA, MEPO 38/54, Metropolitan Police Special Branch report, December 8, 1937.
- ⁶⁵ TNA, KV2/1558, Metropolitan Police Special Branch report, February 21, 1938.
- ⁶⁶ TNA, KV2/1558, Metropolitan Police Special Branch report, May 2, 1938.
- ⁶⁷ TNA, KV2/1558. Metropolitan Police Special Branch report, May 11, 1938:
- ⁶⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁹ TNA, KV2/1558, M/X report, February 28, 1938.
- ⁷⁰ *Daily Worker*, May 22, 1940.
- ⁷¹ CPA, CI8, CC, September 10, 1937.
- ⁷² CPA, CC, December 3/4, 1937.
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁴ CPA, CI 9, Emergency CC, March 5, 1938.
- ⁷⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁶ As well as the expulsion of prominent supporters of the Cripps Petition calling for a ‘Peace Alliance’: Thorpe (2001), p. 85.
- ⁷⁷ CPA, CP/CENT/CONG/04/12. *Report of the Central Committee to the 16th Party Congress*, pp. 69–72.
- ⁷⁸ This paragraph is based on CPA, CI 10, CC, June 24, 1939.
- ⁷⁹ Flinn (2005), p. 117; *Daily Worker*, July 7, 13, 19, 20, 24, 27, 31, August 2, 4, 7 1939.
- ⁸⁰ *Tribune*, July 21, 1939; *Daily Worker*, July 27, 1939.
- ⁸¹ LPA, NEC, December 20, 1939.
- ⁸² LPA, NEC, March 20, 1940, Memorandum on the constitutional position of those members of the Labour Party who give their support to Russian aggression in Finland, p. 1.
- ⁸³ TNA, KV2/1558, Major General Sir Vernon Kell to Chief Constable, Winchester, May 10, 1940, and Extract from telephone check on Temple Bar 4277, May 8, 1940.
- ⁸⁴ *Daily Worker*, September 4, 1939–January 21, 1941.
- ⁸⁵ *Daily Worker*, June 3, 1940.
- ⁸⁶ *Daily Worker*, December 19, 28, 1939, March 28, May 30, October 24, 1940; and see Table 2.
- ⁸⁷ LPA, NEC, July 3, 1940, Organisation Sub-Committee, July 17, 1940.
- ⁸⁸ LPA, NEC, September 25, 1940. The National Vigilance Committee was proscribed the following month: LPA, Organisation Sub-Committee, October 22, 1940.
- ⁸⁹ Calder (1969), pp. 244–245; LPA, NEC, May 30, 1941, Party membership and the National Convention.
- ⁹⁰ That some entrust assets remained in place is supported by a Security Service report that Naomi Wolff was the leader of the Communist Party group working inside the North

Hammersmith Labour Party (TNA, KV2/1064, B.2 Note, PF 37634, March 20, 1942). The constituency of D.N. Pritt, who sat as an Independent Labour MP following his expulsion from Labour in 1940, Hammersmith North was of strategic significance for the CPGB.

⁹¹ RGASPI, 495/74/37, Report on some of the fundamental tactical, organisational and cadre problems for the Communist Party of Great Britain, December 27, 1937, p. 9. (Original in Russian. We are grateful to Professor Michael Hughes for its translation).

⁹² Calculated from *ibid.*, p.7, which reports a total CPGB membership of 14,370 in November 1937.

⁹³ CPA, CI 16, Report on West Riding of Yorkshire, October 28, 1937, PB, October 1937.

⁹⁴ CPA, CI 10, CC, June 24, 1939.

⁹⁵ Based on a CPGB membership of 17,756: see Thorpe (2000), p. 284.

⁹⁶ CPA, CI 8, CC, August 6/7, 1937.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* Presumably referring to the EC of the London Labour Party, not the NEC.

⁹⁸ CPA, CI 9, CC, February 4, 1938. The reference to MPs is obscure. It may relate to prospective parliamentary candidates or to the Labour MP, D.N. Pritt: see below. Cf. the claim that a dozen Labour MPs in 1945 were either ‘secret Communists’ or close to the CP (Beckett, 1995, p. 104). For figures for council candidates in Liverpool, see above.

⁹⁹ CPA, CP/CENT/PERS/2/7, Jim Foulds.

¹⁰⁰ According to Pollitt, Woodman had stolen ‘a secret party card’. However, CPGB leaders came to consider her ‘erratic’ and possibly an ‘agent’: TNA, KV2/1607, Monitored conversation between H. Pollitt and A. Clegg, February 10, 1942.

¹⁰¹ For a recent re-statement that Strachey was never a CPGB member, see Young (2014), pp. 913–15. However, there is evidence to the contrary. In 1936, the PB decided Strachey should be ‘definitely enrolled as a member’ (CPA, CI 16, PB, May 7, 1936). The Security Service subsequently recorded a conversation of Gallacher on Strachey. He proceeded to criticise a former member who advocated credit reform; who reneged on his vow never to attack the party; and who criticised party policy on the war (TNA, KV2/786, Extract, William Gallacher and a soldier visitor, September 8, 1942). Strachey fulfilled these criteria. See Strachey (1940), esp. pp. 82–92.

¹⁰² TNA, KV2/1065, Transcript of conversation between D.N. Pritt and Salme Dutt, November 2, 1950.

¹⁰³ Their biographies are silent on their entrise activities: see Cohen (2001); Stevenson (n.d.).

¹⁰⁴ *Daily Worker*, July 24, 27, 1939.

¹⁰⁵ Unless otherwise indicated, biographical information on Murray is taken from the interview in MacDougall (2000), pp. 254–332.

¹⁰⁶ CPA, CENT/PERS/5/3, Statement of qualifications, record of service, etc, of Thomas Murray, October 15, 1945; National Library of Scotland (hereafter NLS), Acc. 9083, Thomas Murray papers, Box 6, fo. 2, Papers relating to the Stafford Cripps petition. For his activities in Spain, see MacDougall (1986). Murray was instructed by the CC to volunteer for service in Spain to stimulate recruitment to the International Brigade among Labour Party members, with the proviso that he return to stand in council elections in September (Hopkins, 1998, pp. 250–251). The recommendation to widen the recruitment pool for the brigades emanated from the Comintern (Firsov, Klehr & Haynes, 2014, p. 105).

¹⁰⁷ NLS, Acc. 9083, Box 6, fo. 1, Murray to Jack Kane, May 27, 1940, Murray to William Campbell, September 14, 1942; LPA, NEC, 26 June 1940.

- ¹⁰⁸ NLS, Acc. 9083, Box 6, fo. 5, Municipal election – Edinburgh Liberton ward campaign 1946. Report and observations.
- ¹⁰⁹ CPA, CENT/ORG/21/3, Murray to Albert Merrylees, December 8, 1965.
- ¹¹⁰ This paragraph is based on CPA, CENT/PERS/4/4, autobiography of Lawrence H. Kirwan, October 17, 1951.
- ¹¹¹ Craik (1964, p. 179); Working-Class Movement Library, Salford, PP/BIOGA/1/762, Owen, Jack; Stevenson (n.d.), Jack Owen; *Daily Worker*, May 17, 1940.
- ¹¹² This paragraph is based on CPA, CENT/PERS/7/4, autobiographical notes of Frank Truefitt, Lancs School, 1942.
- ¹¹³ Haldane (1949, p. 268) claims that she remained a Labour councillor after her resignation from the CPGB but NEC minutes record her expulsion earlier that year: LPA, NEC, February 26, 1941.
- ¹¹⁴ TNA, KV2/2985, Malcom MacEwen to David Lewis, January 2, 1942.
- ¹¹⁵ MacEwen (1991), pp. 77, 20–76; TNA, KV2/2985, Malcolm MacEwen to J.B.S. Haldane, July 21, 1940.
- ¹¹⁶ TNA, KV2/1062, D.N. Pritt to ‘Dave’ Springhall, November 26, 1935. See also TNA, KV2/1062, Sir Vernon Kell, MI5, to F.J. Howard, Colonial Office, February 17, 1937: although Pritt was ‘a very convinced and energetic supporter of communism, he remains a member of the Labour Party and conceals to some extent his real beliefs in order to be of greater service to the communist cause’.
- ¹¹⁷ RGASPI, 495/14/220, Page Arnot to Harry Pollitt, August 20, 1936.
- ¹¹⁸ TNA, KV2/1064, Report from Chief Constable of Reading, March 16, 1942.
- ¹¹⁹ TNA, KV2/1064, Informant’s report, June 15, 1944; KV2/1065, Transcript of conversation between D.N. Pritt and Salme Dutt, November 2, 1950.
- ¹²⁰ TNA, KV2/1065, Memo from K. Morton Evans, August 10, 1951.
- ¹²¹ TNA, KV2/994, Notes on Vernon, November 5, 1936, Report, October 28, 1936.
- ¹²² TNA, KV2/2199, Royal Aircraft Establishment, Farnborough.
- ¹²³ KV2/2199, Subversive activities of RAE personnel.
- ¹²⁴ TNA, KV2/2199, Letter to Deputy Chief of the Air Staff, March 13, 1934.
- ¹²⁵ TNA, KV2/2199, ‘HOPS’ report, May 24, 1934.
- ¹²⁶ *The Times*, October 28, 1937.
- ¹²⁷ *Daily Herald*, November 23, 1937.
- ¹²⁸ LPA, NEC, October 27, 1937.
- ¹²⁹ TNA, KV2/2230, Wilfred Foulston Vernon; West (2005), p. 235.
- ¹³⁰ TNA, KV2/2230, The case of Major Vernon, June 23, 1952. West (2005, p. 229) asserts, without corroborating citation, that Vernon was a CPGB member.
- ¹³¹ TNA, KV2/996, ‘HOPS’ report, August 29, 1939.
- ¹³² CPA, CI 15, PB, November 21, 1935.
- ¹³³ For the close working relationship between the Comintern and Soviet intelligence, see Firsov et al. (2014), pp. 188–191.
- ¹³⁴ Morgan et al. (2007, p.130) refer to the mole, spy or crypto-communist ‘whose ubiquity remains the fixation of the “secret world” school of communist historiography’ – citing as an example Klehr, Haynes & Firsov (1995).
- ¹³⁵ Conquest was subsequently a scholarly pursuivant of anti-Communism.

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