Fascism for the British Audience

The Communist Party of Great Britain's Analysis of Fascism in Theory and Practice

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Abstract

A key player in the campaigns against fascism, the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) has been subject of much attention by historians of anti-fascism. The Party's approach to anti-fascism, through various campaigns such as the 'united front from below' and the Popular Front have been well documented, however its own analysis of fascism has been subjected to much less scrutiny. It has generally been accepted that the CPGB faithfully followed the interpretation of the Communist International. While this is true, this article will argue that the CPGB's analysis of fascism was often adapted to suit the British political climate. By examining the CPGB's approaches to 'social fascism', democracy and the British Union of Fascists (BUF), this article will show that the CPGB's analysis of fascism was much more fluid. Moreover it will suggest that the Party only adhered to the strictest of Comintern analyses at times of increased attention from Moscow. Finally this article will show that the CPGB's analysis of fascism as an antithesis to all things 'British' survived, and indeed was strengthened, by the end of the Second World War. By 1945 its analysis of fascism was much more generic, following an economic and ideological reading as per the Stalinist interpretation, but with a strong focus on patriotism, and the empirical evidence of the destructive and murderous qualities of fascism as shown by the Holocaust.

Keywords

fascism – Britain – Communist Party of Great Britain – patriotism – democracy – social fascism – British Union of Fascists – Spanish Civil War

Much attention has been paid to the role of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) in the interwar struggle against fascism. However the CPGB's analysis of fascism has been subject to little scholarly attention, with most historians taking for granted that the Party accepted the Comintern, or 'Stalinist' analysis without question. As this article will show, the CPGB's analysis of fascism was much more fluid and malleable. Although the official Comintern line was followed, often to the letter when Moscow exerted its authority upon the Party, the CPGB made great efforts to adapt the interpretation to suit not only the political climate in Britain, but also to appease its members who often had their own ideas about what constituted the real fascist threat in 1930s Britain.¹ With this in mind, this article will add to the revisionist arguments of Andrew Thorpe who regards the CPGB-Comintern relationship as an unequal partnership² and Matthew Worley whose work on the CPGB in the Third Period (1928–1935) concluded that although the Comintern often had the final word on matters of policy, if domestically the ultra-left interpretation 'proved to be unproductive it was quickly realigned.'³ With the analysis of fascism, the CPGB had to ensure it suited the situation in Britain – otherwise it would not have resonated with the public. A degree of flexibility was therefore required.

Although this article will not suggest that the CPGB's analysis of fascism contradicted the Comintern's interpretation, it will show that the CPGB was open to other analyses, and showed a willingness to apply these in conjunction with the Comintern line. The 'social fascism' line for example will be shown to be ever-evolving, designed to fit the shifting political backdrop in Britain and Europe. What we will also see is that the CPGB often appealed to ideals and principles that chimed with the British people, something which became more pronounced with the onset of the Popular Front line in 1935. Thus fascism was often portrayed as a series of negatives: as un-democratic and inherently un-British; a foreign ideology imported to Great Britain and led by puppet masters in Berlin and Rome.

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- 1 An editorial in the CPGB's journal *Discussion* stated that the Party's line was 'made up of the voices in the coal mines, the dockyards, in the Trade Union Branches, and Co-op Guilds . . . wherever working men or women get together to discuss their problems.' Although it agreed that there were men and women in the Party who were theoreticians, this statement shows how the CPGB leadership endeavoured to ensure the line was receptive to the arguments of its members. See 'Editorial - Who Makes the Party Line?', *Discussion*, January 1937: 1–2.
 - 2 Andrew Thorpe, *The British Communist Party and Moscow, 1920–1943* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 5.
 - 3 Matthew Worley, *Class Against Class: The Communist Party in Britain Between the Wars* (London: IB Taurus, 2002), 312–13.

While this synoptic article will focus primarily upon the period 1928–1939, it will conclude by assessing the effects of the Second World War upon the CPGB's analysis of fascism. The article will argue that by the end of the Second World War, the analysis of fascism followed a much more simplified interpretation. Although a class-based reading still featured, the CPGB began to rely more upon an interpretation of fascism as an oppressive ideology that committed acts of terror and mass murder, and something that the people of Britain had sacrificed so much to defeat.

CPGB Approaches to Fascism: Toeing the 'Stalinist' Line or a More Malleable Analysis?

Due to the nature of the Comintern and the role of democratic centralism, the core of the CPGB's interpretation centred on the Stalinist analysis of fascism. According to Dave Renton this analysis of fascism followed as such: 'a form of state coercion, achieved by the bourgeoisie. It was an elite movement, defined by its goal . . . to smash the workers' movement [and the] inability to separate fascist reaction from any other form of reaction under capitalism.'⁴

This analysis formed the central tenet in the CPGB's theory of fascism. Writing in *Fascism and Social Revolution* CPGB theoretician Rajani Palme Dutt argued that 'capitalist democracy in decay breeds Fascism', and that with the inevitable decay of capitalism the capitalist classes would seek to hold on to its authority and curtail any attempt at proletarian revolution.⁵ Even with the broadening of the anti-fascist front at the 1935 Seventh Congress of the Communist International (Comintern), fascism continued to be characterised primarily as 'the open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinist and most imperialist elements of finance capital.'⁶ Accordingly, fascism was above all an arm of the capitalist classes and created with the aim of crushing the independent working-class movement. In the British situation the CPGB would direct much of its anti-fascism against the National Government and its representatives. Fascist organisations such as the British Union of Fascists (BUF) were often regarded as the military arm of the National Government.

⁴ Also described as 'left theory'. See Dave Renton, *Fascism: Theory and Practice* (London: Pluto Press, 1999), 55.

⁵ Rajani Palme Dutt, *Fascism and Social Revolution* (London: Martin Lawrence, 1934), x.

⁶ Renton, *Fascism*, 77.

Was this analysis of fascism, and its apparent inability to separate between the state and fascist movements, as 'crude and simplistic' as Renton suggests?⁷ It will be argued here that this simplicity was often a deliberate move by the Comintern or the Party. During a crisis of capitalism, in which democracies across Europe were seen to be failing their citizens and resorting to more authoritarian-style methods of government, depicting capitalism and fascism as two sides of the same coin painted an image of 'Communism versus Fascism'. It was one or the other with no middle ground. In this, the Comintern and its British section were seeking to attract a wider constituency to its cause, rather than simply relying on those from a communist background.

The CPGB could not discard the Stalinist analysis – to do so would have been to seek conflict with the Soviet Union – but it could adapt the interpretation to suit the political situation in Britain. Thus we see the CPGB portray fascism as an antithesis to 'democracy'.⁸ Although 'democracy' as understood by the CPGB was in the form of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', the Party recognised that in Britain 'democracy' was generally accepted through the lens of liberal democracy, founded upon representation and the notion of one man, one vote. The Party would therefore articulate a broader understanding of democracy, and argue that fascism posed a danger to this. From this analysis we also see the CPGB adapt its interpretation of fascism to suit British sentiments. Although the anti-democratic nature of fascism was one such method, fascism would also be depicted as 'un-British'; an antithesis to everything that Great Britain allegedly stood for – liberalism, tolerance and liberty. Thus the theories of 'social fascism', the 'fifth column' and the more 'direct' fascism such as the BUF would be predominantly framed in a 'British' point of view: as a threat to Britain's democratic traditions and an 'un-British' ideology.

'Social Fascism' as Practised in Britain, 1928–1934

'Social fascism' argued that social democrats were an 'instrument for the paralyzing of the activity of the masses' and colluded with the elites to establish a

⁷ Ibid., 55.

⁸ Nigel Copsey has articulated the notion of an 'anti-fascist minimum', a theory that anti-fascism at its most basic is 'a political and moral opposition to fascism rooted in *democratic* values of the Enlightenment tradition.' Nigel Copsey, 'Preface: Towards a New Anti-Fascist "Minimum"?' in *Varieties of Anti-Fascism: Britain in the Inter-War Period*, ed. Nigel Copsey and Andrzej Olechnowicz (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), xiv.

dictatorship of capital.⁹ This analysis was fleshed out by the 1928 Sixth Congress of the Communist International, a period described by Martin Kitchen as the 'highest point of the Comintern's analysis of fascism as directly caused by the capitalist elite.'¹⁰ Such an analysis of the Third Period is however too simplistic, and fails to take into account that the New Line was, in Matthew Worley's words, 'in many ways an understandable (though not necessarily "correct" or "successful") response to contemporary events and attitudes.'¹¹ Although undoubtedly used by Stalin for reasons of personal ambition, the 'social fascist' line fitted the British political and economic situation well. The Communist Party pointed to the Labour Party's poor response to the 1926 General Strike as evidence of 'social fascist' tendencies,¹² and was receptive to the general dissatisfaction with the moderate policies of the Labour Party,¹³ when it began the move towards a more sectarian line.

At the same time the New Line opened the way for the CPGB to focus on the underlying fascism of the State and the Establishment. The CPGB was keen to stress that fascism should not simply be seen as an imported form of authoritarianism but as a more indigenous form of dictatorship. An editorial on 'social fascism' produced in the CPGB's newspaper. The *Daily Worker* wrote that it was: 'not something limited to Italy, Spain, Hungary and other countries where it assumes the form of an open Fascist Dictatorship. It is to be seen in the tendency of the capitalist class in every country to now adopt new methods of domination, to create new forms of State power, accompanied by a closer linking together of State, the employers' organisations and the trade unions.'¹⁴ 'Social fascism' in Britain then was defined as collusion between the state and the official Labour movement. This had not happened overnight in 1928, but was part of a tradition of social democracy's betrayal of the workers. The role of the Labour Party leadership during the General Strike was but one example;¹⁵

9 'Theses on the International Situation', Enlarged ECCI (1928), in *Marxists in the Face of Fascism: Writings by Marxists on Fascism from the Inter-War Period*, David Beetham (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), 155.

10 Martin Kitchen, *Fascism* (London: Macmillan, 1976), 3.

11 Worley, *Class Against Class*, 18. On the adoption of the new line, *Workers' Life* told its readers 'class against class' was 'timely and essential' for the struggles ahead. See *Workers' Life*, 23 March 1928, 2.

12 *Workers' Weekly*, 4 June 1926, 1. The right wing leadership of the Labour Party and TUC General Council was described as 'beneath contempt'.

13 Worley, *Class Against Class*, 18.

14 *Daily Worker*, 31 January 1930, 6.

15 Francis Beckett, *Enemy Within: The Rise and Fall of the British Communist Party* (London: John Murray, 1995), 37.

the Labour Party's record in government, and its policy of rationalisation and collaboration with employers and trade unions¹⁶ provided the Party with further 'proof'.

It was rather fortuitous from the CPGB's point of view that the National Government was formed when it did for it appeared to confirm the CPGB's arguments that the decay of capitalism was inevitable, and that the Labour Party was acting as pacemakers for an open dictatorship of capital.¹⁷ The CPGB could argue that their theory of 'social fascism' was correct and that the Labour Government had dropped any pretence of pretending to care for the working-classes, capitulating to their capitalist masters in order to wage class war under the guise of the 'national interest'.¹⁸ There was, the CPGB argued, no difference between the new National Government formed on 24 August 1931 and the previous Labour Government.¹⁹ That the former Labour Cabinet only split on the scale, rather than the idea, of cuts,²⁰ served to strengthen the CPGB's analysis. The National Government was therefore the natural progression of Labour's class collaboration and as such there could be 'no fight against the Government without a ruthless struggle against the Opposition (Labour Party)'.²¹ The formation of a 'National Government' was an evolutionary process.²² Furthermore, the formation of such a government proved, to the CPGB at least, that those who argued that Britain was immune to fascism were wrong. The rise of fascism was not just to be evidenced in form of Mussolini's March on Rome, but through a much more 'British' manifestation: the betrayal of the working classes by their 'social fascist' leaders, without a shot of a gun or violent overthrow of government.

The formation of the National Government, with the purpose of forming a majority in Parliament so the Government could make cuts, gave the CPGB a chance to promote its vision of an alternative and to mobilise the British workers against former Labour Party Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald, his Conservative allies, and the Labour Party. It started by attempting to spread its message to workers, soldiers and sailors; being helped by a naval mutiny at

16 Andrew Thorpe, *A History of the British Labour Party* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 73–74.

17 Keith Hodgson, *Fighting Fascism: The British Left and the Rise of Fascism, 1919–1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 115.

18 Reg Bishop, 'The British Government Crisis,' *International Press Correspondence (Inprecorr)*, 27 August 1931, 843.

19 *Daily Worker*, 26 August 1931, 1.

20 Andrew Thorpe, *The British General Election of 1931* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 77–87.

21 'The CPGB on the Political Situation,' *Inprecorr*, 3 September 1931, 864.

22 Wal Hannington, 'Great Britain: Who is Responsible?' *Inprecorr*, 3 September 1931, 863.

Invergordon in September 1931 over cuts to sailors' pay.²³ The National Government's reaction to this – raiding the office of the *Daily Worker* and arresting its staff²⁴ – played into the CPGB's analysis of an emerging dictatorship of capital. The CPGB could argue that its paper had been subject of an attack for criticising the policy of the National Government, hardly the act of a democratic government. The following edition of the *Daily Worker* was a masterstroke for the Party; it presented its readers with a blank page but for a letter entitled 'CENSORED BY THE POLICE', and arguing that the CPGB's press had been attacked because 'we are the only daily newspaper that fights the "National" Government and organises the struggle of the working class against the Economy Plan and wage-cuts!'²⁵ Thus the fascism of the National Government came not in a wave of terrorism but primarily in the form of wage cuts and economic 'plans', all designed to subjugate the working-classes. However the CPGB was keen to show that the actions of the police towards the *Daily Worker* were evidence of a move towards a more direct form of fascism.

The 1931 general election emboldened the CPGB and its 'social fascist' line. As Matthew Worley has argued, 'if the Wall Street crash and the onset of fascist or authoritarian regimes throughout parts of Europe had given credence to the determinants of the Third Period, then the dissolution of the Labour government placed the New Line in a specifically British context.'²⁶ The 1931 general election was regarded as a 'cloak' masking the fascistisation of the state.²⁷ The Labour Party remained the primary antagonist as the 'social fascists' who ushered in the National Government, and any debates the Labour Party had with the 'National' parties were described as 'mere difference opinion on the fundamentals'²⁸ designed to dupe the voters into thinking that the election was not a sham in which the result had been already decided upon. Dutt argued that the National Coalition's 554 seats, marked 'the process of the bourgeois concentration and intensified dictatorship for carrying through of measures of an increasingly Fascist character'²⁹ and, despite as Buchanan states, being 'massively endorsed at the polls in 1931' was regarded as a 'perversion of

23 *Daily Worker*, 17 September 1931, quoted in Noreen Branson, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1927–1941* (London: Lawrence & Wishart), 69.

24 William Rust, *The Story of the Daily Worker* (London: People's Press Printing Society, 2010), 40–41.

25 *Daily Worker*, 26 September 1931, 1.

26 Worley, *Class Against Class*, 274.

27 Reg Bishop, 'The Coming General Election in Great Britain,' *Inprecorr*, 8 October 1931, 944.

28 Ibid.

29 Dutt, *Fascism and Social Revolution*, 244.

democracy.³⁰ Although the CPGB would continue to frame the National Government as the emerging dictatorship of capital, and the Labour Party as 'social fascists', an evolution of the CPGB's 'social fascist' theory would begin to come about in the aftermath of 1931. This occurred due to a number of considerations, both international and domestic.

On both a domestic and international level, the 1931 General Election and the instability of German Weimar Republic, resulting in the rise of so-called 'Presidential Cabinets' – government by decree, and the eventual handover of power to Adolf Hitler, had shown that there was a real need to take the open fascist organisations seriously while also continuing the struggle against the National Government.³¹ It became a pressing concern that the Weimar Republic may have become vulnerable to fascism due to the split in the German Left, a split intensified by the 'social fascist' narrative of the Comintern. On the domestic front, Kevin Morgan has argued that the General Secretary of the CPGB, Harry Pollitt, was becoming increasingly convinced that such an ultra-sectarian strategy was not convincing the working classes.³² It became necessary for the CPGB to re-examine the 'social fascist' line in order to adjust it to the British situation, whilst also building bridges with the wider labour movement. So as Andrew Thorpe has shown, the CPGB began to move away from the ultra-sectarian 'social fascism'³³ while continuing the line through other, more subtle means, to avoid confrontation with the Comintern.

The CPGB had to contend with the emergence of a new organisation prior to the 1931 General Election – the New Party of Sir Oswald Mosley. A former Conservative, and later left-leaning Labour MP, Mosley epitomised the collaborationist nature of Labour Party. His resignation as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in May 1930 was derided by the CPGB as a ploy on the part of the Labour leadership to channel discontent of the second Labour Government into the Independent Labour Party (ILP).³⁴ But, as Worley argued, the emergence of Mosley allowed the CPGB to 'point to a "fascist threat" that was both tangible and close to home.'³⁵ As a result the CPGB analysis of Mosley graduated towards that of a fascist 'strong-man' in the same vein as Spanish dictator Primo de Rivera, governing on behalf of the capitalist

30 Tom Buchanan, 'Anti-Fascism and Democracy in the 1930s,' *European History Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (2002): 51.

31 Thorpe, *British Communist Party and Moscow*, 209.

32 Kevin Morgan, *Harry Pollitt* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 65.

33 Thorpe, *The British Communist Party and Moscow*, 192.

34 *Daily Worker*, 23 May 1930, 1.

35 Worley, *Class Against Class*, 260.

class.³⁶ With the founding of the New Party the CPGB began to argue that Mosley was exhibiting incipient fascism.³⁷ However much of its analysis remained within the ‘social fascist’ analysis, showing as Copsey has argued, that the linear interpretation of a shift from anti-‘social fascism’ to ‘anti-fascism’ was ‘too neat.’³⁸ If anything, as Thorpe has argued, the emergence of the New Party ‘appeared to suggest that “class against class” analyses of social democrats as social fascists had some basis in reality.’³⁹ Much of the CPGB’s analysis of the organisation focused around Mosley’s backers – the capitalist classes,⁴⁰ its conciliatory and class-collaborationist policies, and Mosley’s left-wing background as proof of its social fascist nature. By 1932 however, and perhaps reflecting the emergence of the ‘Presidential Cabinets’ in the Weimar Republic, the *Daily Worker* was describing the New Party as one of the ‘open Fascist forces in this country.’⁴¹

Where we see a more nuanced ‘social fascist’ line is with the CPGB’s analysis of the National Labour Party. Although much attention has been focused on the CPGB’s relationship with the ILP as ‘social fascist’, there has been no scholarly literature on the CPGB’s analysis of MacDonald’s National Labour Party. Indeed as an organisation itself, it has received only scant attention by historians, often featuring in biographies of leading figures.⁴² A party grouped around MacDonald, it had secured thirteen seats at the 1931 general election, the smallest number of all parties competing under the ‘National’ banner.⁴³ However in line with the CPGB’s analysis, it became solid proof of a ‘social fascist’ element in the labour movement. National Labour allowed the CPGB to continue with the ‘social fascist’ analysis while also attempting to build a united front from below with other quarters of the labour movement.

36 William Rust, ‘Parties and Policies in Britain,’ *Labour Monthly*, November 1930, 658.

37 Nigel Copsey, ‘Opposition to the New Party: An Incipient Anti-Fascism or a Defence Against “Mosleyitis”?’ *Contemporary British History* 23 (2009): 464–65.

38 Ibid., 466.

39 Andrew Thorpe, ‘The Communist Party and the New Party,’ *Contemporary British History* 23 (2009): 488.

40 Reg Bishop, ‘Mosley’s New Fascist Party,’ *International Press Correspondence*, 5 March 1931, 207.

41 *Daily Worker*, 9 August 1932, 2.

42 National Labour gets mention in various biographies such as David Marquand, *Ramsay MacDonald* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1977); Keith Laybourn, *Philip Snowden: a biography* (London: Aldershot); and a number of contributions in Keith Gildart and David Howell’s, ed., *Dictionary of Labour Biography, Vol XI* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003). As of yet there is no history of the National Labour as an entity in itself.

43 Marquand, *Ramsay MacDonald*, 675.

The arrest of veteran trade unionist Tom Mann at a National Unemployed Workers' Movement demonstration against the Means Test on 19 December 1932,⁴⁴ and the subsequent trial and jailing of him⁴⁵ provided the CPGB with further evidence of the emerging fascist dictatorship. Moreover, the response of the National Labour's journal *Everyman* to the arrest provided the CPGB with a chance to adapt its 'social fascist' narrative. *Everyman*, the *Daily Worker* declared, was 'the most vindictive organ of the Press in connection with the Tom Mann case.'⁴⁶ That *Everyman* had, according to the *Daily Worker*, congratulated the National Government on keeping the aged trade unionist in prison⁴⁷ appeared to reflect the 'social fascist' nature of National Labour. National Labour was therefore both the cheerleader of the National Government, and the left-wing cover it needed in order to attract a proportion of the working classes to its cause. By late 1933 the CPGB was arguing that National Labour and its journal were moving toward a platform of 'open' fascism. The *Daily Worker* reported that *Everyman* had become 'Fascist',⁴⁸ and was voicing support for the 'Corporate State' – a key tenet in the CPGB analysis of fascism.⁴⁹ That so-called 'Fascist mystic' Francis Yeats-Brown was appointed as editor,⁵⁰ only served to strengthen the CPGB's analysis. Yeats-Brown was an early British advocate of Benito Mussolini.⁵¹ Even if this could be written off as naivety on the part of Yeats-Brown, that he was associated with a number of pro-fascist groups⁵² up to, and beyond his appointment as editor, proved to the CPGB that its analysis of the fascisation of not only MacDonald's party but of the National Government as a whole was correct.

Nor was it simply *Everyman* that the CPGB regarded as evidence of National Labour's 'social fascism'. Never a popular figure within the CPGB,⁵³ Ramsay

44 Chushuchi Tsuzuki, *Tom Mann, 1856–1941: The Challenges of Labour* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 243.

45 Joseph White, *Tom Mann* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), 212.

46 *Daily Worker*, 22 January 1933, 2.

47 Ibid.

48 *Daily Worker*, 2 October 1933, 3.

49 Dutt, *Fascism and Social Revolution*, 72.

50 *Daily Worker*, 2 October 1933, 3.

51 Martin Pugh, *Hurrah for the Blackshirts Fascists and Fascism between the Wars* (London: Pimlico, 2006), 84.

52 Ibid., 146. Even after this appointment Yeats-Brown was a member of the January Club, formed in 1934, whose primary function as privately acknowledged by its founder Captain H. W. Luttman-Johnson was to give a platform to Oswald Mosley.

53 MacDonald was seen as a divisive figure with little sympathy towards the workers' movement. See Rajani Palme Dutt, 'Notes of the Month,' *Labour Monthly*, May 1924, 261.

MacDonald became the epitome of 'social fascism' in the National Government and although Dutt failed to include him in a list of European social democratic leaders who had evolved towards fascism,⁵⁴ it is not difficult to conceive that he had MacDonald in his mind also.⁵⁵ In this analysis the CPGB was very much receptive to the Labour Left's view of its erstwhile leader. MacDonald's biographer David Marquand has argued that this antipathy towards the former Labour Party leader extended beyond the CPGB's 'social fascist' analysis. He wrote that 'little by little, the MacDonald of flesh and blood faded from the [Labour] party's collective memory. In his place a two dimensional monster of vanity, snobbery and social cowardice, whose systematic flattery by the upper class adequately explained both his own behaviour and his party's downfall.'⁵⁶ Thus MacDonald evolved into something of a caricature: at best MacDonald was a self-serving hypocrite who had sold his own Party for power – a view the *Daily Worker* was willing to endorse,⁵⁷ at worst he was a despot, presiding over an authoritarian government, 'unmoved' by the plight of the working-classes and 'by the growing hostility of his administration towards free speech [and like] Hitler and Mussolini, no longer recognises a sovereign virtue in government by consent.'⁵⁸ Following the reshuffle of the National Government following the withdrawal of [Herbert] Samuelite Liberals in 1932, the communist press told its readers that MacDonald would 'do his utmost to try to maintain the camouflage that his Government is a "National" Government',⁵⁹ thus avoiding democratic processes in order to carry through the programme of cuts. Although the Party did not go as far as to call MacDonald out as a fascist, it did regard him akin to the Presidential Cabinets of Weimar Germany – whose willingness to work with capitalists edged the country ever closer towards open fascism.

54 Dutt mentions the Polish leader and former leader of the Polish Socialist Party Josef Pilsudski, Benito Mussolini and the BUF's Oswald Mosley. See Dutt, *Fascism and Social Revolution*, 156. Although not explicitly mentioned, Dutt was a consistent critic of MacDonald and his policies, especially in regards to the Indian question.

55 The notion of anti-working class 'dictatorship' played a key part in this. In Rajani Palme Dutt, *Fascism and Democracy: A Reply to the Labour Manifesto 'Democracy versus Dictatorship'* (London: Communist Party of Great Britain, 1933), 8, Dutt attacked MacDonald's record as Prime minister in which the Labour Government 'ruled and held in subjugation these four hundred and twenty million colonial slaves.' See John Callaghan, *Rajani Palme Dutt: A Study in Stalinism* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1993), 160.

56 Marquand, *MacDonald*, 678–79.

57 *Daily Worker*, 6 January 1933, 2.

58 Harold Laski, 'The Underlying Assumptions of the National Government,' *The Political Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (January 1934): 26.

59 *Daily Worker*, 29 September 1932, 2.

There was therefore an attempt by the CPGB to adapt its 'social fascism' to the changing political climate in Britain. This shift was also receptive to international events, the appointment of Hitler as Chancellor of Germany in particular.⁶⁰ With the rise of fascism on the European continent the CPGB could not afford to continue to alienate the Labour Party, and so it began to focus its analysis of 'social fascism' onto the National Government and MacDonald's National Labour Party. Eventually the National Government would evolve into the primary fascist threat in Britain, to be regarded as not simply a dictatorship of capital, but also a steadfast ally of the fascist powers in Europe – a 'pro-fascist', according to Dutt's analysis in *World Politics, 1918–1936*.⁶¹ The next section of this article will focus on the BUF, the so-called 'fifth column' and the role of 'democracy' in the CPGB's attempts to portray fascism as antithesis to British ideals.

CPGB Images of Fascism in the Popular Front Period: Fascism versus Democracy

The adoption of the Popular Front in 1935 marked a turning point in how the Comintern, and the CPGB, engaged with the idea of fascism. As Keith Hodgson states, the analysis of fascism remained one of capitalist decay, but the CPGB was able to tailor its message to suit the British audience.⁶² A new analysis of fascism emerged, one based upon a number of negatives that ran contrary to how the CPGB understood 'British' ideals. Thus the CPGB would come to portray the world situation in Europe as one of democracy, a liberal (or capitalist) democracy in the case of Britain, versus fascism.

With the outbreak of civil war in Spain in July 1936, the CPGB had an opportunity to put this more simplified analysis of fascism into practice. As Thorpe has argued, the timing of the civil war could not have been better⁶³ and the CPGB emerged as the most energetic force in Britain calling for action to help the Spanish Republic.⁶⁴ Gone was the idea of a clash of two opposing ideologies: communism against fascism, to be replaced by the new line of fascism versus democracy. It was an analysis that could resonate with the British

60 Worley, *Class Against Class*, 275.

61 Rajani Palme Dutt, *World Politics, 1918–1936* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1936), 341–43.

62 Hodgson, *Fighting Fascism*, 201.

63 Thorpe, *The British Communist Party and Moscow*, 230.

64 Tom Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 74.

people regardless of political affiliation. A leading figure of the Marxist, but non-CPGB left, John Strachey, took up this idea and wrote that Spain was a democracy like Britain, elected on a model similar to that of France. Moreover, he argued, the government in Spain – although left-leaning – was hardly initiating a revolution, but rather moving ‘with all the timidity and hesitation of such Governments’ towards land reform and upsetting the landowners.⁶⁵ Despite this the CPGB and Comintern insisted that the Spanish Republic needed to be defended. Although the Soviet model of democracy – the dictatorship of the proletariat – was the ideal, Secretary of the Comintern Georgi Dimitrov argued that communists in ‘capitalist countries . . . defend and shall continue to defend every inch of bourgeois-democratic liberties which are being attacked by fascism and bourgeois reaction, because [the] interests of the class struggle of the proletariat so dictate.’⁶⁶ Even the worst type of democracy – such as the capitalist, bourgeoisie model of Britain, France and Spain – provided rights to the working-classes the fascist regimes completely denied. It was therefore imperative for the continuation of workers’ rights and liberties that the Spanish Republic survive against the fascist assault.

With this analysis the CPGB sought to tap into British ideas of democracy. They were not the only ones to do so as Tom Buchanan has shown. Anti-fascist politicians of all political colours ‘articulated a powerful and seductive language of liberty, democracy and democratic rights which asserted that theirs was a cause worth fighting for precisely because it represented a defence of democracy.’⁶⁷ Highlighting the fascist attack on Spain allowed the CPGB to draw parallels with Britain, much more so than if the Soviet Union was under attack. The civil war showed the world fascism’s contempt for democracy, and its willingness to usurp it through any means. It also put the British people on their guard for, as the CPGB could argue, if fascists were willing to wage war upon one democracy, what was to suggest that they leave Britain alone in the future.

The undemocratic nature of fascism was not only expressed in its aggressive behaviour against democratic states, but through other more clandestine means, both from the National Government and so-called ‘Fifth Columnists’.

Although the Communists had been warning the British people about the British States’ alleged programme of fascisation from the outset,⁶⁸ with the

65 John Strachey, ‘The Civil War in Spain,’ *Left News*, October 1936, 116–17.

66 Georgi Dimitrov, *Working Class against Fascism* (London: Martin Lawrence, 1935), 30–31.

67 Tom Buchanan, ‘Anti-fascism and Democracy in the 1930s,’ *European History Quarterly* 32 (2002): 41.

68 An example of this was the *Sunday Worker’s* report of fascism as Greenock magistrates ‘as a means of silencing the demands of the unemployed workers, and preventing working

National Government in office this argument was stepped up. According to the CPGB, who released a statement of the issue, the introduction of 'conscription, irrespective of the government in office, was anti-democratic.'⁶⁹ Despite Neville Chamberlain's claims, the CPGB interpreted the measure as a 'calculated step towards "putting Britain into fascist fetters".'⁷⁰ As Kevin Morgan has shown, although there being a split on this issue in the Party⁷¹ the official CPGB line on conscription was explicitly set out in the *Daily Worker*: 'CONSCRIPTION IS A STEP TO FASCISM.'⁷² Voluntarism on the other hand was promoted as one of the great British customs⁷³ and therefore as the 'superior', and genuine, counterpart to conscription⁷⁴ which expressed the true democratic traditions of the country.

Whereas the National Government was seen to be pursuing an open agenda of fascisation, the 'Fifth Column' was working behind the scenes. The theory of the 'Fifth Columnist' emerged in the CPGB fascist analysis during the time of the Spanish Civil War; although Thorpe has argued that the conception was born in the midst of internal power struggles taking place in the Soviet Union from 1934.⁷⁵ In the context of the Spanish Civil war the term 'fifth columnist' denoted 'any rebel supporter, real or potential, active or imprisoned.'⁷⁶ They replaced the 'social fascist' in the CPGB's analysis of fascism; a group of people working for fascism through a number of underhand and duplicitous ways. Although used by the Soviet Union and Comintern as

class candidates from addressing the electors', see *Sunday Worker*, 7 October 1928. A low-level example of fasciation, but one that suggested the policy was in practice at all levels.

69 Labour History Archive and Study Centre (LHASC): CP/CENT/STAT/1/2, A Review of the Party's Campaign on Conscription - Statement adopted by the Political Bureau (8 June 1939).

70 Morgan, *Against Fascism and War: Ruptures and continuities in British Communist politics, 1935-1941* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), 77.

71 Ibid., 79.

72 *Daily Worker*, 29 April 1939.

73 Thorpe, *The British Communist Party and Moscow*, 248.

74 LHASC: CP/CENT/STAT/1/2, A Review of the Party's Campaign on Conscription.

75 Thorpe, *The British Communist Party and Moscow*, 229.

76 On the march to Madrid in 1936 an over-confident General Mola told reporters that he marched with five columns: the four with him and a 'fifth column' of Nationalist sympathisers within the capital, ready for revolt. It caused a period of terror in Madrid with alleged traitors being rooted out and a useful phrase for the Comintern. See Paul Preston, *The Spanish Holocaust: Inquisition and Extermination in Twentieth Century Spain* (London: HarperCollins, 2013), 293-94.

an expression of anti-Trotskyism,⁷⁷ in Britain, the term evolved into those within the establishment with pro-German tendencies. There was a reason for playing down the anti-Trotskyist element for a domestic audience as Trotskyism had a marginal following in Britain.⁷⁸ As a result CPGB needed a 'fifth columnist' that could be portrayed as a realistic threat to British democracy. Thus the CPGB would 'expose' pro-German, or pro-Nazi groups in Britain as 'fifth columnists', highlighting their alleged attempts to usurp democracy for their fascist allies.

The 'Cliveden Set' was the most well-known example of these fifth columnists. Led by Conservative MP Nancy Astor and her husband Waldorf, this group was alleged by the journalist Claud Cockburn⁷⁹ to be planning to exert their pro-German influence upon the National Government's foreign policy. Like 'fifth columnist', 'Cliveden Set' quickly became a 'cliché used by speakers at anti-Nazi political rallies.'⁸⁰ However the CPGB was keen to suggest that the Cliveden Set was not a one off, but rather one of a number of pro-fascist groups working in the shadows and undermining democracy.

Other organisations with a clear pro-German platform were regarded with suspicion. Stephen Dorril argues that the suspicion was in some way justified as these groups were 'ideal propaganda platforms' for Nazi officials.⁸¹ Thus the Anglo-German Fellowship (AGF), founded in 1935, was found to have members with links to the Nazi Foreign Minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop.⁸² Although not especially pro-Nazi, Richard Griffiths has argued that the AGF 'obviously served German propaganda purposes.'⁸³ With Germany currently under the heel of fascism, promoting friendship with Germany was regarded by the CPGB as little more than pro-fascism. That the bulk of its membership were businessmen, industrialists, and often linked to the Conservative Party, only strengthened these suspicions, whilst also confirming the view of fascism as a form of capitalist

77 Antony Beevor, *The Battle for Spain, 1936–1939: The Spanish Civil War* (London: Phoenix, 2007), 233.

78 Renton states that by 1939 those identifying as "Trotskyist" numbered around 150. See Renton, *Fascism*, 82.

79 Aaron Goldman, 'Claud Cockburn, "The Week" and the "Cliveden Set"', *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 49 (1972): 721–28.

80 Ibid., 724.

81 Stephen Dorril, *Blackshirt: Sir Oswald Mosley and British Fascism* (London: Penguin Books, 2007), 363.

82 Richard Griffiths, *The Fellow Travellers of the Right: British Enthusiasts for Nazi Germany, 1933–39* (London: Constable, 1980), 183.

83 Ibid., 184.

dictatorship. Other organisations such as the Right Book Club (RBC), founded in 1937 by Christina Foyle, and with individuals associated with pro-fascism on the book selecting committee, including the aforementioned Francis Yeats Brown,⁸⁴ only served to further the CPGB's analysis of a group of pro-fascist 'fifth columnists' working to undermine the system from within. By 1939 the *Daily Worker* featured a column called 'Fascism's Friends in Britain'. It investigated the membership of groups such as the AGF and RBC, listing names of peers and MPs.⁸⁵ Connections were drawn between these public servants' pro-German agenda and the policy of the National Government regarding the Nazi regime. They were shown to be the British 'fifth column', duping their electorate and undermining the democratic institutions of Britain to promote the Third Reich's agenda. Although they were not seen to be promoting a fascist agenda on British soil, their support for Nazi Germany was regarded as a dangerous, potential first step.

CPGB Images of Fascism in the Popular Front Period: Fascism as 'Foreign' and Un-British

Through the Spanish Civil War and fascism's alleged 'fifth columnist' allies the CPGB was able to portray fascism as an undemocratic ideology. The BUF on the other hand, was held up by the CPGB as an antithesis to the 'British' way of life. Although 'Britishness' was never specifically defined in this analysis, the CPGB in its Popular Front phase broadly understood it to be about a commitment to the principles of democracy and the ideals of liberty, tolerance, and moderation. The Party would play on these ideals in order to draw an image of fascism as a foreign creed, and one that was entirely alien to Great Britain and its political traditions.

Before the adoption of the Popular Front in 1935, the BUF was regarded by the CPGB as the armed wing of the real fascist danger in Britain: the National Government. Writing in *Labour Monthly*, Dutt argued that the BUF was a 'kind of auxiliary irregular force of the State.'⁸⁶ The organisation also needed to be understood as part of the bigger picture of the decay of capitalism and the intensification of the dictatorship of capital.⁸⁷ Even in 1934 the key tenet of the

84 Terence Rodgers, 'The Right Book Club: Text Wars, Modernity and Cultural Politics in the Late Thirties,' *Literature and History* 12, no. 2 (2003): 1, 4.

85 *Daily Worker*, 5 January 1939, 2.

86 Rajani Palme Dutt, 'Notes of the Month,' *Labour Monthly*, July 1934, 390.

87 Allen Hutt, 'Fascism in Britain,' *Communist Review*, May 1933, 229.

CPGB's analysis towards Mosley and the BUF fitted that of its 'social fascist' analysis – much like the CPGB's interpretation of Mosley's New Party: an anti-working class organisation working as both a private army for the capitalist class, and a tool with which to dupe the masses into submission through the use of pseudo-revolutionary slogans and fascist trade unions.

As Kevin Morgan states, while CPGB leaders such as Harry Pollitt 'never overestimated Mosley's significance' he nevertheless saw in the BUF as a 'visible piece of evidence' that the British public could identify with the spread of fascism.⁸⁸ At the same time Pollitt also had to appease his members, many of whom lived in the East End of London – Mosley's main area of activity – and who were joining the CPGB as an anti-fascist, and often specifically anti-Mosley, act. Joe Jacobs, secretary of the CPGB Stepney branch wrote in his memoirs that the 'fight against Mosley was bringing in members from all quarters', suggesting that a deep-seated hatred of fascism in the form of Mosley and the BUF often motivated branch members into action more than Stalinist theory of State-created fascism.⁸⁹ Members accepted the role of capitalism in the rise of fascism,⁹⁰ but Mosley and BUF activities on their 'patch' were considered the immediate issue to be addressed. In the East End the BUF posed a real threat to the CPGB's own electoral fortunes. As Thomas Linehan had shown, the BUF's membership was on the rise in the East End, reaching around 5,600–6,500 by the end of 1936.⁹¹ The organisation attempted to appeal to the working-class constituency both through its newspaper and in the creation of a fascist labour movement. Under the editorship of former Labour MP John Beckett, the BUF's newspaper *Blackshirt* adopted the banner 'The Patriotic Workers' Paper'.⁹² Philip Coupland has examined how the BUF also attempted to stress its links to the working-class traditions of Robert Owen and William Morris.⁹³ It had also previously organised a Fascist Union of British Workers (FUBW), although this was wound up by 1936.⁹⁴ The CPGB therefore had to take a dual approach to fascism: focusing on the National

88 Morgan, *Harry Pollitt*, 84–85.

89 Joe Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto: My Youth in the East End, Communism and Fascism, 1913–1939* (London: Phoenix Press, 1991), 173.

90 Phil Piratin, *Our Flag Stays Red* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2006), 6.

91 Thomas Linehan, *East London for Mosley: The British Union of Fascists in East London and South West Essex, 1933–40* (London: Frank Cass, 1996), 198. This includes both active and inactive members.

92 Dorril, *Blackshirt*, 371.

93 Philip Coupland, "Left-Wing Fascism" in *Theory and Practice: The Case of the British Union of Fascists*, *Twentieth Century History* 13 (2002): 58.

94 *Ibid.*, 45.

Government and the anti-democratic nature of fascism, whilst also campaigning against the BUF.

The CPGB's approach to the BUF fell into two broad categories: fascism and its effect on the workers, and fascism as un-British. With the former, the CPGB was at pains to expose the anti-working class nature of fascism. As Coupland has shown, the 1933 Firestone Factory strike in Brentford was an early attempt by the BUF and its union, the FUBW, to court the working-class vote.⁹⁵ Understanding the threat the FUBW could pose, the CPGB portrayed the FUBW's activities to that of the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* [NSDAP; National Socialist German Workers Party]. The FUBW's campaign at Firestone was described as a 'cunning popularisation of their line of class peace';⁹⁶ a description entrenched in the 'social fascist' narrative, as it suggested that the BUF and its 'labour union' were tools of the capitalist class for the purposes of keeping the working classes in their place. Nor was fascism a danger the working classes only. In a *Daily Worker* article from April 1934, the CPGB stated that in Germany and Italy wages were 'cut far below the cost of living, all workers' rights abolished, the unions destroyed, workers were compelled to toil at work schemes for a few shillings per week more than unemployed relief. A wave of bankruptcies sweeping through the middle class.'⁹⁷ Although the CPGB portrayed fascism as anti-working-class, it was at pains to stress that it was not exclusively so. Fascism threatened everyone but the few – the capitalist elite who fostered fascism for their own ends, and its allies. This analysis was prominent up until the adoption of the Popular Front.

With the latter analysis of fascism as un-British the CPGB played upon British ideals tolerance, moderation and a rejection of violent political extremism. The leadership of the CPGB argued against the use of violence from communists on the basis that such actions could turn British voters away from the CPGB. Mobilisation of the working classes against fascism in a united front was always the goal of the CPGB.⁹⁸ Although Stephen Cullen has argued that the BUF was often the victim of violence more than it was the perpetrator, and has listed the number of time communists were arrested in comparison to the BUF,⁹⁹ these

95 Ibid.

96 Anonymous, 'The Firestone Strike,' *Communist Review*, October 1933, 386. As Coupland has shown, the FUBW was in fact rebuffed by the strikers. See Coupland, "Left-Wing Fascism", 45.

97 *Daily Worker*, 21 April 1934, 5.

98 R. M. White, 'Some Features of the Development of Fascism in England,' *Communist International*, 1 October 1933, 646–47.

99 Stephen Cullen, 'Political Violence: The Case of the British Union of Fascists,' *Journal of Contemporary History* 28 (1993): 245–67.

were more likely to be unofficial acts of violence rather than acts sanctioned by the CPGB leadership. Even before the onset of the Popular Front, the CPGB understood the notion of political violence as something alien to British culture. It therefore sought to paint the BUF as an organisation prone to violent action in an attempt to create an image of fascism as foreign to Britain.¹⁰⁰

The events at the Olympia Stadium in June 1934 played into the CPGB's analysis of fascism as violent and as such, un-British. In an attempt to appear more respectable and professional, the BUF staged a major rally in which public figures were in attendance. Mosley's methods of dealing with hecklers – including the use of floodlights to single out the dissenter – and stewards' brutal methods when dealing with hecklers may have been an attempt to impress visiting politicians of the seriousness of Mosley's movement,¹⁰¹ but it also provided ample ammunition to its opponents. For the CPGB Olympia proved two things: firstly, Britain could no longer regard itself as immune to fascism.¹⁰² Mosley and the BUF provided a real threat of fascism to the British way of life. Secondly, and following reports of violence against both men and women,¹⁰³ the CPGB had visible proof that the BUF was violent and willing to use excessive force against opponents. The BUF and its supporters could not claim that it was different from the fascism in Germany and Austria¹⁰⁴ after it had violently ejected hecklers. The CPGB could always point to the events at Olympia as tangible evidence of the violent nature of the BUF and in so doing, it could argue that the BUF's actions were more in tune with that of its German and Austrian comrades rather than having any grounding in the British political heritage.

Carrying on from this, the events of Cable Street in October 1936 allowed the CPGB to consolidate its analysis of fascism as an un-democratic, tyrannical force that ran in contradiction to everything the British people held dear.¹⁰⁵

100 Jon Lawrence has argued that the use of stewards and violence during political debates was a common factor in Edwardian political life. However, in 'Fascist Violence and the Politics of Public Order in interwar Britain: the Olympia Debate Revisited,' *Historical Research* 76, no. 192 (2003): 238–67, he argues that by the inter-war period, the British public was becoming more adverse to these methods.

101 Pugh, *Hurrah for the Blackshirts*, 157.

102 Dutt, 'Notes,' *Labour Monthly*, July 1934, 387.

103 *Daily Worker*, 8 June 1934, 1.

104 In Germany, Hitler was about to initiate mass purges against members of the SA and other potential rivals (the Night of the Long Knives); in February 1934 the Austro-fascist dictator Engelbert Dollfuss had defeated the Austrian labour movement in a short, but bloody, civil war.

105 *Daily Worker* (Supplement), 3 October 1936.

With an estimated 100–300,000 people demonstrating against Mosley's fascists,¹⁰⁶ the CPGB was able to argue that fascism was out of step with the overwhelming majority of the East End population, and therefore with the British people as a whole. The Party utilised the slogan of the Spanish Republicans in Madrid, *No Pasaran!*, when reporting in Cable Street's aftermath: 'MOSLEY DID NOT PASS: EAST END ROUTS THE FASCISTS.'¹⁰⁷ In reality the BUF did not pass due to the barricades put up by anti-fascists. After failed attempts by the police to remove them, the BUF march was re-routed.¹⁰⁸ This however did not fit with the CPGB's narrative and thus they declared that 'the rout of the Mosley gang is due entirely to the splendid way in which the whole of East London's working-class rallied as one man (and woman) to bar the way to the Blackshirts'.¹⁰⁹ An editorial in the *Daily Worker* spoke of

Gentile and Jew, Labour man and woman, with Communists, Catholics, Protestants, all in the presence of their deadly enemy found their previous differences dropped like an old cloak. They were workers, part of democracy's grand army, fighting for every ideal which the human mind has reached for, fighting against a power which is attempting to drag mankind back to the political domination of the Middle Ages.¹¹⁰

It spoke the language of tolerance, of all people regardless of faith or political beliefs, standing together to fight a creed that was alien to their beliefs. This became, as Dave Renton described it, the 'overriding image of Cable Street . . . of working-class solidarity, expressed in the common visual image of the Orthodox Jew and the Catholic docker, arm in arm for the fight.'¹¹¹ That the people of the East End were shown to have come together to defend their homes from fascist aggression, by engaging in resistance to the BUF and by explicitly rejecting Mosley's creed, only served to show that fascism was contrary to the deals of the British people. Fascism, the CPGB could argue, spoke a language of hatred that was foreign to the British people.

106 Hodgson, *Fighting Fascism*, 137.

107 *Daily Worker*, 5 October 1936, 1.

108 Pugh, *Hurrah for the Blackshirts*, 227.

109 *Daily Worker*, 5 October 1936, 1.

110 *Ibid.*, 4.

111 David Renton, *This Rough Game: Fascism and Anti-Fascism* (Gloucester: Sutton Publishing Limited, 2001), 150.

Of course there were members of the CPGB who advocated so-called 'Workers' Defence Forces' in the 1930s, but these were once again rebuffed.¹¹² The image of 'British tolerance' would continue to be used by the CPGB in its analysis of fascism as an alien, specifically, un-British creed. In 1937 the CPGB would play on patriotic feeling during a demonstration at Trafalgar Square. A planned BUF demonstration at the site of celebration of Britain over its opponents was turned into an anti-fascist counter-demonstration that celebrated Britishness over 'foreign' fascism.¹¹³ The CPGB questioned to what extent 'Jew baiting' in the East End was 'British',¹¹⁴ conveniently ignoring Britain's own anti-Semitic history in the process,¹¹⁵ and a cartoon in the *Daily Worker* supplement showed Mosley being kicked off Nelson's Column back to his 'Papa and Mama' - Hitler and Mussolini.¹¹⁶ Nelson's rejection of Mosley was symbolic of the rejection of fascism by the British people. The CPGB was therefore depicting highly idealised notions of Britishness, using British traditions, to paint fascism as foreign, as something different and therefore dangerous to the British way of life.

Conclusion

Although bound by Comintern decisions and the Stalinist interpretation of fascism, the CPGB's analysis was a malleable one that was adapted to the ever-changing political situation. When Stalin asserted his authority, the theory of fascism as a top-down ideology imposed by capitalists to maintain their wealth would emerge as the primary facet. This could be seen in the CPGB's approach to 'social fascism' in the 1928–1931 period; and once again at the outbreak of the Second World War with the new 'anti-imperialist war' line when the CPGB temporarily reverted to a highly sectarian strategy. With the latter the CPGB recycled old ideas: depicting the Labour Party's role in the Churchill Coalition as blatant collaborationism: ensuring that the 'men "go quietly" to

112 *Discussion* dedicated two articles to a debate on the issue of Workers' Defence Forces, see E. Burgess, 'Workers' Defence Forces,' May 1936, 21–24. E. Burgess argued for the creation of such bodies, and John Gollan – speaking for the leadership – arguing against them as the 'muddled reasoning of people who think fascism can be crushed by banging fascists and others on the head.'

113 *Daily Worker*, 3 July 1937, 1.

114 *Daily Worker* (Supplement), 3 July 1937, ii.

115 The Edict of Expulsion, 1290, is one such example with Edward I issuing a ruling that saw every Jew living in England expelled.

116 *Daily Worker* (Supplement), 3 July 1937, ii.

the slaughter in the defence of Big Business interest and that the men and women may “keep quiet” in the factories, abandoning wage claims, trade union rights.¹¹⁷ They were, according to William Rust, no better than NSDAP.¹¹⁸ At the same time the war was depicted as a quarrel between imperialists in which the only losers were the workers.¹¹⁹ The introduction of Emergency Powers, including the power to ban strikes, was regarded as an attack on the working class, and one excused under the argument of ‘ensuring the war effort’.¹²⁰ Although as Copsey has argued, emergency powers such as Defence Regulation 18B which proscribed the BUF, saw the state reassert its anti-fascist side ‘albeit under exceptional circumstances’,¹²¹ the Communist Party chose to attack these measures as anti-democratic, and more specifically, anti-working class.¹²² But at the same time the Party sought to mitigate this sectarianism, never dropping the official line but channelling it accordingly with an eye on the wider picture. Thus the CPGB introduced the People’s Convention during its anti-imperialist war phase, a movement described by Morgan as ‘very much as a reincarnation of the pre-war People’s Front’,¹²³ and one that reflected the reassertion of ‘popular patriotism’ that was prominent within the Popular Front period.¹²⁴

So what we see is that the CPGB had political space in which to apply its own theory of fascism, semi-autonomously from the views of Stalin and the Comintern, suitable for the British audience. Thus the CPGB evolved its ‘social fascist’ theory to focus on the National Labour Party; allowing the Party to make overtures to the Labour Party in the pursuit of a united front from below. So too was the ‘fifth columnist’ analysis adapted for the political situation in Britain; replacing Trotskyists with pro-German organisations. By 1935 and the implementation of the Popular Front line, the CPGB was able to play upon patriotic notions of British identity and democracy. Fascism was depicted as undemocratic, and an antithesis to everything Britain allegedly stood for – tolerance, moderation, and liberty. Portraying the BUF as a foreign import, alien to the history and politics of Great Britain – although highly idealised, allowed the CPGB to tap into British political traditions, and broaden the appeal of

117 *Daily Worker*, 7 May 1940, 3.

118 William Rust, ‘National Socialism - Labour Party Brand,’ *Labour Monthly*, September 1940.

119 *Daily Worker*, 3 June 1940, 1.

120 *Daily Worker*, 6 June 1940, 1.

121 Nigel Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 75.

122 E. M. Winterton, ‘Is this a War for Democracy?’ *Labour Monthly*, September 1940, 491.

123 Morgan, *Against Fascism and War*, 209.

124 *Ibid.*, 178.

anti-fascism to people of all political colours. Whilst broadly following the Comintern's analysis of fascism, the CPGB always attempted to render it applicable to the political situation in Britain.

Although by October 1939 the CPGB had been pulled back into an extreme Stalinist interpretation of fascism, this did not herald the death knell of an analysis of fascism that emerged from 1935. Rather the anti-imperialist war line was an anomaly in the CPGB's analysis, to be dropped following the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941. With the backing of the Soviet Union, and with the Soviet Union now the wartime ally, the CPGB's analysis of fascism post-June 1941 would follow much the same pattern as the Popular Front period in which democracy – whether a workers' democracy of the Soviet Union or a liberal democracy of Britain – was to be defended against fascist aggression.¹²⁵ Thus in 1943, after a number of years being regarded as insignificant in comparison to the Chamberlain and later Coalition government, Mosley emerged once again as the 'personification in the country of everything we are fighting against . . . [representing] . . . in all its foulness the Fascism which the best sons of Britain are determined to destroy.'¹²⁶ The 'fifth columnist' thesis would also return with Trotskyists,¹²⁷ anti-Coalition socialists¹²⁸ and the so-called 'Men of Munich'¹²⁹ taking the mantle of pro-fascist enabler within the CPGB's analysis.

Dan Stone has argued in his recent study of post-war Europe that the Western European anti-fascist narrative was one of an 'anonymous victory of good over "evil"'.¹³⁰ Although the CPGB would continue to discuss fascism in the framework of the 'Stalinist' analysis in 1945,¹³¹ it became an almost secondary analysis to this narrative. Moreover, as Dave Renton has suggested, the horrors of the Holocaust gave the CPGB and other anti-fascist groups the chance to depict fascism as a 'system of rule which was absolutely founded on

125 Harry Pollitt, 'The Most Urgent Need of the Moment,' *World News & Views*, 30 August 1941, 545.

126 *Daily Worker*, 18 November 1943, 1.

127 William Wainwright, *Clear out Hitler's agents! An exposure of Trotskyist disruption being organised in Britain* (London: CPGB, 1942).

128 D. N. Pritt, 'Common Wealth or Common Danger?' *Labour Monthly*, April 1943.

129 Douglas Hyde, *I Believed: The Autobiography of a Former British Communist* (London: Pan Books, 1953), 107.

130 Dan Stone, *Goodbye to all That: The Story of Europe since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 60.

131 On the suicide of Adolf Hitler, Dutt wrote in the *Daily Worker* that he was 'a pawn of the ruling class which was bent on aggression and world domination.' See *Daily Worker*, 2 May 1945, 1.

repression, which lived and thrived off the murder of its opponents.¹³² This mass murder on an industrial scale – in which resources that could have been used for the German war effort were syphoned away to run death camps – showed that fascism was not only an evil ideology but one that could not be solely about the maintenance of the capitalist system. Fascism, the CPGB could argue, was an inherently evil ideology; one centred on oppression, that committed genocide and engaged in a highly destructive war. It was also an ideology that the British people had sacrificed so much to defeat, and must not be allowed to grow in strength again. This analysis could resonate with the British people much more than any abstract interpretation of fascism as a tool of capitalism ever could.

¹³² Renton, *Fascism*, 99.