

THE POLITICAL CONFLICTS which have long simmered beneath the surface within the Communist Party have exploded into the open. There is a growing feeling that there are now two parties in one. Of course there have been major controversies at previous stages in its 65-year history, but what is new is that a minority in the party are now refusing to accept the principles of democratic centralism and follow majority decisions in public, even if they disagree with them.

The most spectacular sign of this conflict has been the hijacking of the *Morning Star* by the hardline minority within the party, the expulsion of its editors from membership, and the much publicised efforts of the majority to regain control through the AGMs of the Peoples' Press Printing Society, the cooperative that runs the paper. A special National Congress on May 18-20, called by the CP Executive Committee, and this year's PPPS AGMs in June, must now try to resolve the crisis.

Politics hidden

It has been less obvious what the conflict over the *Morning Star* is about. Both sides have been reluctant to bring out the underlying political differences. For tactical reasons the *Star* grouping have tried to claim fidelity to the party's programme *The British Road to Socialism*, arguing that they were its true custodians, and that the EC and *Marxism Today* were moving away from both the programme and the working class. The EC, following the approach of the last National Congress, has emphasised the need to restore the long standing relationship between party and paper, breached unilaterally by the PPPS Management Committee. It was only in January of this year that the EC put the politics clearly on the line.

The situation is further complicated by the fact that the hardline minority within the CP is not a united block. The dominant section, based around the *Morning Star*, are opposed to the party's attitude to the socialist countries, regarding its criticisms on such questions as socialist democracy, Poland and Afghanistan as breaches of working class internationalism, and reinterpret the concept of the broad democratic alliance to downgrade the importance of issues of democracy and oppression, falsely posing these against 'class' issues. The pamphlet *Class Politics, an answer to its critics*, reviewed in the January issue of *Marxism Today*, summarises the *Star* group's theoretical position. The most succinct example of this is the section on the peace movement, which makes strug-

**Arguments within the Communist Party are coming to ahead.
But the debate is of considerable significance for the whole of the Left.**

No Private Drama

Dave Cook

gle against anti-Sovietism the priority issue for CND.

A smaller grouping, based around the journal *Straight Left*, represents a more traditional 'Stalinist' opposition to *The British Road to Socialism*, one totally opposed to many of its basic principles. In their analysis a definition of the working class as the industrial core replaces the 'broad' one in the *British Road*. Political pluralism in a socialist Britain is rejected, and the possibilities of revolution without armed struggle are rated pretty low. In practice the difference between these groups grows less as the struggle within the party intensifies. The *Star's* position has shifted dramatically towards that of the Stalinists. Recent examples are the articles by Andrew Rothstein and Robin Page Arnot.

The media has been quick to attach the label 'Eurocommunist' to the Congress positions, strategy and EC of the Communist Party, and there is much to be said for the description. The *British Road* does contain clear commitments to socialist democracy, to a non-insurrectionist strategy, and to the need for left and ultimately revolutionary majorities to be expressed in parliamentary terms. Nor does the Communist Party use the term 'the dictatorship of the proletariat'. However, I am unhappy with Eurocommunism as a description because it places the emphasis more on features of strategy common to several communist parties, rather than on ones that stem from the unique features of the British political system and working class movement.

However veiled the underlying issues

have been in the past, they are coming into the open. Within the party the period of 'phoney war' is over. Two questions need to be raised here. Why has this happened now, and not for example at the time when the tanks rolled into Prague, or martial law was declared in Poland and secondly, why are the disputes within the party attracting considerable attention and interest among the wider Left?

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Why not earlier?

To answer these questions means looking back at some history. Within the party the main controversies between the time of the 20th Congress of the CPSU and 1968, when this phase climaxed with the Warsaw Pact's crushing of the 'Prague Spring', centred on socialist democracy. The next phase, leading up to the adoption of a new edition of the *British Road* in 1977, was dominated by discussion of strategic issues

- the nature of working class leadership, alliances, new social movements and feminism - and was heavily influenced by Gramsci's ideas. After 1978 the emphasis shifted once more as the party grappled with 'applying' the new *British Road*, to the immediate issues of British politics. This coincided with a realisation of the crisis of the labour movement, revealed so dramatically in the 1979 general election and the then new phenomenon of 'Thatcherism'.

It is this third phase of controversy which has brought things to a head. There is a certain luxury about arguments confined to strategy, their implications can be put off until tomorrow. Arguments about politics now do not permit that luxury. In fact Thatcherism holds, or rather should hold, a pistol to all left wing heads, because the scale of its challenge demands that we get our act together. This can be a painful process, for it can mean striking out in new directions, and breaking with practices no longer appropriate.

It is not just the CP that feels the pain. Similar controversies reverberate in the Labour Party, among trade unionists and feminists and in CND. Everyone on the Left has to face up to the issues raised by the crisis of the labour movement. Although the miners' struggle has helped revive many a tired organisation, it has not resolved that crisis, and if some socialists have been able to ignore the task that faces us, most have not. Even if their prescription, like Benn's, is more of the same, it still has to be *more*.

Because the CP was consciously trying to apply the new edition of the *British Road* around the time the blizzard hit the Left, and was armed with the theoretical concepts that had been developed in the preceding debates within the party, it was better placed to analyse what was happening. *Marxism Today* made a headstart on the job, significantly in advance of the rest of the Left, and was able to identify key elements of Thatcherism around which theoretical attempts to deal with the changed situation have revolved.

November '81 Party Congress - Gordon McLennan and Mick McGahey.



Suddenly controversies within the CP, previously regarded as rather impenetrable and esoteric, have taken on a major relevance. What is going on inside the party is being seen not just as its own private drama.

Four main issues

Firstly, there is the argument about socialist democracy and more broadly what sort of socialism the CP is in business to achieve. This dispute has focused on the long standing opposition by a minority within the party to the *British Road* commitment to a pluralistic democratic socialism, and the party's preparedness to, while combatting anti-Sovietism and supporting peace initiatives by socialist countries to criticise them on such issues as the invasion of Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan and the declaration of martial law in Poland. However, it involves more than these individual issues, important though they are. It also involves the analysis of the Soviet Union, our own models for the future, and relations between socialist countries. Although this opposition has been decisively defeated at successive national congresses, the hijack of the *Morning Star* and its use as a hardline platform against the party has given a new encouragement to these arguments.

A *second* controversy centres on the concept of Thatcherism. Does this government represent a qualitatively different form of Toryism from the more consensus based approach of Edward Heath, or should the emphasis be placed more on the unchanging realities of ruling class power, with the responsibilities for the problems that the labour movement faces put down primarily to hostile media and past betrayal? The latter is the *Morning Star's* position.

The *third* argument is closely linked to Thatcherism. It involves the long term decline in the position of the labour movement. In September 1982 *Marxism Today* published an article by Tony Lane, entitled 'Trade Unionism - Caught on the Ebb Tide'. It contained fairly limited criticisms

of some problem areas. The *Star* published an attack on *Marxism Today*, accusing the journal of acting 'in the Tories' interests'. The subsequent furore showed alarming 'head in the sand' complacency by many hardliners in the party.

The *fourth* controversy centres on the question of alliance, and in particular interpretation of the concept of the broad democratic alliance, one of the main 'new' features in the 1977 edition of the *British Road*. In developing the theme of a popular alliance contained in earlier versions of the party's programme, the broad democratic alliance upgraded the significance of issues of democracy and oppression, and the movements built around - them like feminism, black people's organisations and so on. It sees advanced and ultimately revolutionary consciousness being built by recognising, acting upon and linking reactions to different forms of exploitation and oppression, and not by attempting to reduce all contradictions to something alleged to be a unified class interest.

Opponents of these ideas within the Communist Party downgrade the importance of issues of democracy and oppression and the need for a mutually transforming alliance between movements based around them and the organisations of the labour movement.

The most common reinterpretation of the broad democratic alliance involves an arithmetical approach. For 'working class' read 'labour movement'. As the labour movement is the largest component of the alliance, actual or potential, it is the most important. Therefore, by definition other issues take second place.

These four questions - socialist democracy, Thatcherism, facing up to the crisis of the Left, and alliance, are the theoretical battleground of the conflict within the CP. Hitherto that conflict has often been conducted in code. Not so now. The recent January EC statement made them explicit and this is long overdue and all to the good. As I shall try to show, these debates are intensely relevant to the Left as a whole. When, within the CP, the conflict is resolved with victory for the ideas of the *British Road*, they will illuminate and inspire far more widely.

Why it matters for the rest of the Left

There is considerable overlap between arguments among the wider Left, and within the CP, but they certainly do not correspond exactly. For a start only in the CP would socialist democracy be issue number one, although it should not be bottom of the list in the Labour Party.

Secondly, within the CP the route by which the present stage of acute controversy has been reached is very different from that of the Labour Left. This can be illustrated with the question of alliance.

Within the CP the *British Road*, while giving primacy to class considerations in that it sees a transformed labour movement as the only force with the potential to build a broad democratic alliance, insists that this must involve mutually enriching alliances with a whole range of forces mobilised around issues of oppression and democracy. The hardline opposition, and the *Morning Star*, would see alliance much more exclusively in class terms.

Within the Labour Party 'alliance' is seen primarily in electoral terms, and only infrequently on the Left as a question of class and social forces as it is in the CP. Of course this is to some extent because the Communist Party has such tiny representation in the councils and none in parliament. But it is also because this is simply not the way political and theoretical discussion goes on in the Labour Party.

When Eric Hobsbawm speculated that the end of two-party domination, the decline of Labour, and the emergence of the Alliance *might* in some circumstances necessitate an anti-Thatcher electoral agreement, this didn't cause too much offence within the CP. Among the Labour Left it caused outrage (the fact that on several occasions he specified that he was not referring to the *present* circumstances seemed irrelevant). Labour's knee jerk reaction of seeing an argument that was mainly about class as an issue of electoral arithmetic, was exposed here.

Thatcherism and the Left's crisis

The approach of the CP Executive Committee to Thatcherism and the labour movement's crisis has wide-ranging implications. If, as CP hardliners, the *Morning Star*, Benn, and a section of the Labour Left assert, the novelty of Thatcherism has been exaggerated as a smokescreen to legitimise a shift to the right in labour movement politics, panic stations are unnecessary. The priority is to keep arguing for left wing policies, building on the '8,500,000 votes for socialism' and concentrating on those who did not vote at the last general election. Before long the natural class consciousness of the working class can be expected to reassert itself, and hey presto, socialism is on the agenda. This position takes its most extreme form in Heffer's claim that the renewal of the Labour Party is all but complete, and what is needed now is 'popularisation' of its

policies. Problems have to be admitted but they can be put down primarily to past betrayals and media bias.

This is a comforting perspective. Unfortunately it is completely wrong. Although it is dressed up in left sounding language, and accuses the Communist Party and *Marxism Today* of pessimism and defeatism, in reality this viewpoint represents a conservative force in labour movement politics because it absolves the Left of any need to change the way it operates.

There are a number of 'key' features of Thatcherism: the 'global' nature of its attack, its break with 'consensus' politics, confrontation with the unions, privatisation, its populist style echoing in right wing language concern at bureaucratic depersonalising and inefficient aspects of the welfare state, its ideological drive to replace the previous common ground on the need for a caring society with attitudes that free the privileged and wealthy from any social responsibility. All these have been widely discussed, not least in this journal. Of particular relevance here is its political success in building, however unstable this may be, a new class and social alliance around the Tory Party.

This is a particular theoretical problem to Labour Left thinking, and also to the hardliners in the CP. Their approach sees political support very much in terms of 'traditional constituencies'. Behind the Labour Party stand the trade unions, the co-operative movement, tenants associations, while surrounding the Tories are big business, the BBC, the judiciary and the established church, and so on. The problem is that Thatcherism, while obviously maintaining some elements of this scenario, has also significantly disorganised it. The 'new' style Toryism has succeeded to some extent in disconnecting substantial parts of Labour's 'traditional constituencies', and bringing them over to its alliance, and not just electorally. Some of its appeal is ideological, dressed up in maxims like 'freedom of choice' and 'taking responsibility for oneself'. In this situation it is simply not enough to see the problem, as many of the Labour Left seem to do, as one of calling on traditional support. To rebuild a political majority the labour movement has to set a far more ambitious aim, that of attracting around it an alliance, conceived in class and social terms, and in mass campaigning as well as votes.

Natural constituencies

Immediately you start talking about 'traditional constituencies' a further problem



Crisis of Eurocommunism-

looms - that of how representative of the working class these are. One of the important contributions of Bea Campbell and others has been to spotlight the ways in which most labour movement organisations, trade union and political, are at present seriously deficient, when it comes to representing both women workers and unwaged women. This deficiency could be fatal if it is not rectified. The same can be said in regard to black people. A political struggle must take place to make the labour movement more 'representative' of huge sections of the class on whose behalf it speaks.

Seen against this background, it is essential to shift the emphasis of left thinking much more onto what changes are needed in the Labour Party and the trade unions if they are to become the attractive magnet at the heart of the alliances that are needed. It must be said loud and clear that these changes do not involve a shift to the right. In fact the very opposite.

Policy development is part of this, in areas like non-nuclear defence, the alternative to Common Market membership, and the sort of policy needed to tackle crime. However, the changes are much more to do with the style of politics of the Left, and in particular of many local Labour Parties. All too often victories 'within the apparatus' have been mistaken for the successful popular projection of socialist policies. Frequently, the Left has little organic connection to extra-parliamentary forces and struggle, and their argument about and organisation of political activity remains for the most part locked within Labour Party structures. They are far

away from the mass campaigning politics that can involve ordinary people in action.

Lambeth, a prominent stronghold of the Labour Left in London, a borough where I have some experience of local politics, spotlights the problem with great clarity. The Labour Party has been compressed into the council and almost no 'mass' politics have emerged from Labour Party initiatives. In the coming confrontation over ratecapping the door is open for the local Tories to make populist moves at grass roots level, as they have done before to considerable effect.

With the gift of hindsight, which is of course an exact science, we can now see that in different ways both Communists and the Labour Left have contributed to an underestimation of the *immediate* problems of winning political support. Both of us were debating the future when we should have been giving more attention to the present.

In the debate around the new edition of the *British Road* in 1977 the emphasis was overwhelmingly on the election of a 'left Labour government of a new type', and what struggles to implement its policies could set in process. Similarly, what was different about many of the Left's speeches at the annual 1980 and Wembley 1981 Labour Party conferences was not so much the content of their proposals, but the urgency with which they insisted they should be implemented, and the inner party constitutional changes which made their implementation more likely. It was this which changed the proposals from standard manifesto promises to the platform of a possible alternative government.

Of course, given what the last Labour Government was actually doing in its final phase, namely helping pave the way for Thatcherism by introducing the first monetarist measures, this emphasis on accountability was absolutely necessary. The problem was that immediate questions did not get a look in.

Strategy: what comes next?

The last National Congress of the CP identified the building of an anti-Tory majority as the immediate objective, with the clear aim of involving the many millions of working class people who either did not vote at all, or who voted for the Alliance parties, the Nationalists and the Tories, in experiences which either jolt their apathy or draw them into anti-Tory activity. In other words, this immediate stage was not seen in primarily electoral terms. The emphasis was more on building broad movements, where possible around

labour movement leadership, as with the Peoples March for Jobs, the defence of the GLC and metropolitan councils and sometimes without that leadership, as with CND. It was out of these sorts of politics, of which Communist electoral work and independent agitation are part that the conditions for a Labour victory would grow.

Thatcherism holds. . . a pistol to all left wing heads

Such an approach does not see the campaign for socialist policies which a Labour government with the 'correct' programme would then 'enact', as the immediate issue. Indeed it sees such an imposition into broad movements as the *next* stage being positively harmful. Yet to take CND as an example, the tactics of hardliners within the CP, the line of the *Morning Star* and Labour CND, would suggest that withdrawal from NATO was every bit as much of a campaigning priority as Cruise, Trident and civil defence. All this is not to say that socialists should lose any chance to argue for revolutionary solutions and advanced policies in their *independent* work, but that is a different question.

As the *Morning Star* has distanced itself from the CP, the line of its editorials has dwelt more and more on past betrayals, particularly by the Callaghan government, and the unchanging realities of capitalist power; Kinnock has been singled out for special treatment, almost as the main enemy in the Labour Party. It is ironical that in the year of the 50th anniversary of Dimitrov's famous speech breaking with sectarianism at the 7th World Congress of the Communist International, the *Morning Star* seems to be turning its back on this legacy.

The broad democratic alliance

Although the language of this argument is internal to the Communist Party (no one else on the Left speaks in terms of the broad democratic alliance) the content is central to the situation facing socialists in all parties. Take the following examples.

The more the miners have expressed their struggle in terms of the defence of the community, the future for youth, the role of women and the need for a new energy policy, and have linked up with other groups, for example progressive church people, the stronger they have been. The interweaving of their industrial strength with other forces and other issues broke

down the isolation which the media strove to impose upon them. It is a commonplace that this interweaving has been a two-way process. There cannot be many sections of the movement which have not been inspired by their contacts with the miners. Conversely the more the NUM have been in contact with and won support from other sections, the stronger their position has been.

In Liverpool the furore over the appointment of Sam Bond as Race Relations Worker by the council has different lessons. The council insisted that the objections of the city's 'black caucus' should be overruled by their interpretation of the necessities of 'class' politics, a classic, and fortunately in this case, for the Militant Group disastrous example of a crude reductionist approach. Yet all too often such experiences are ignored. The history of the last decade is littered with sectarian 'downgrading' of other forces than labour movement ones. In the referendum on the Scottish and Welsh Assemblies we had Labour refusing to work with Plaid and the SNP. Attempts were made to turn the second People's March for Jobs into a moving Labour Party election meeting. In the peace movement we see Labour CND displaying a barely disguised contempt for the views of members and supporters of other political parties or none, regarding CND backers more as potential voting fodder than as part of an autonomous mass movement.

Occasionally there have been brilliant exceptions to this rather gloomy story. In reply to an interviewer's question about the by-election caused by the resignation of himself and three other GLC councillors last autumn, Ken Livingstone made it clear that which ever candidate won - Labour or Alliance - would have been a victory, as the priority was the defeat of government plans to destroy London's council. It is interesting that this left wing Labour leader actually sought out Tory and Alliance involvement, going to fringe meetings at their conferences. This is one of the reasons why its campaign has gained such massive support.

New alignments on the Left

As well as helping to initiate and reinforce political and theoretical developments among the wider Left, the conflict in the CP is also helping consolidate new alignments. Until fairly recently it was possible to make a rough three-way division within the 'party political' Left in British politics: Tribune-style socialists, communists and an 'ultra left' hitherto generally outside the

Labour Party. Now, although the lines are not clearly drawn and the situation is still very fluid, it is possible to discern some significant changes. The *anti-British Road* role of the *Morning Star*, and the breakdown of loyalty to congress decisions within the CP is in effect a 'rogue' political tendency. No one is quite sure about where it will hitch its wagon or who may grab the reins. Some surprising political alliances, for example between entrust Trotskyists in the Labour Party and Communist Party Stalinists are being created, as happened at the last CND national conference.

Increasingly, on all or several of the key issues of controversy outlined in this article, common cause is being made between Communist Party hardliners and the *Morning Star*, some of the Labour Party Left often called the hard Left, and 'entrust' socialists who have gone into the Labour Party in some force since 1979. This is being experienced within CND, sometimes within the trade unions, in theoretical argument, and in 'inner' Labour Party struggle.

On the other side are the Communist Party majority, that section of the Labour Party Left differentiating itself from more 'fun-

damentalist' positions, and a range of activists in broad movements like CND. Similar trends can be traced within the unions in the differentiation between the broad left and BLOC.

A great deal is at stake in the argument between these two trends. For the CP the question is whether it remains a significant force in left politics and lays the basis for wider influence in the future; for the Left in British politics it is whether out of the fight back against Thatcherism can be laid the basis for a renewal of socialist politics among the working class and the building of a political majority 'of a new type'. •

THE Socialist Society
— Annual General Meeting —
 Saturday 2 Feb/Sunday 3 Feb
 County Hall, London SE1

- Seminars include 'Labour and its Trade Union Links', 'The Miners Strike—A Watershed', 'Project 2000—Looking Forward To Socialism'
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We print here a list of the donors—our apologies if your name has been left out.

Thanks to all for your generous response, which was very much appreciated at this critical stage of the strike. The bulk of the goods and money was handed over to the women's support group at Ashington and Lynemouth collieries, Northumberland. A further cheque for over £400 was sent in January to the women's group at Whittle colliery, England's northernmost pit.

Ashington and Lynemouth women organising the distribution of goods

Handing over the cheque at Ashington

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