

independence, whether national or individual. It means supporting Moscow right or wrong, because it has become axiomatic that Moscow is always right.

Actually, it was worse than that. It was not supporting the Communist Party of the Soviet Union that mattered for the CPGB in 1939; it was supporting Stalin. True, the full extent of Stalin's excesses was learnt only later, but enough was known at the time to make him a pretty suspect figure. Some of the ordinary decent communists must have read Malcolm Muggeridge's accounts of the Soviet Union in the Manchester Guardian. And in the autumn of 1939, even by his own standards, it was a remarkable feat of acrobatics that Stalin was asking the CPGB to perform.

You could just about accept the Nazi/Soviet pact on the grounds that it might postpone a German attack on the Soviet Union when the communist empire was still inadequately prepared to defend itself. Diplomatically, the non-aggression pact might have been seen as rather an astute move. Metternich would probably have approved of it. The CPGB went along with it.

It was something else again, however, to ask the CPGB suddenly to accept that there was no difference between Hitler and Chamberlain and therefore to oppose not only the war against Nazism, but also the defence of Poland as an independent state. Some years before 1939, it had been argued that there was no significant distinction between the two forms of the 'dictatorship of the bourgeoisie': the democracy of (say) Britain and France, and the most authoritarian and arbitrary regime in Germany. Yet as 1939 approached and Hitler's delinquencies became more blatant, it seemed reasonable that there should be a pact between communism and the bourgeois democracies against fascism.

That was precisely what Stalin proposed to wreck when he ordered the CPGB and other western commun-

ist parties to treat Hitler and Chamberlain as two of a kind. The language used through his intermediaries was quite brutal. Clearly he would have no qualms, to put it mildly, if Poland ceased to exist. He thought that the capitalist powers - Germany and the bourgeois democracies - would knock each other out. The result would be to make the world safe for communism.

Such were the demands with which the CPGB was confronted in 1939 after the war against Hitler had been declared. You could read this book as a record of brave resistance. Some members, such as William Gallacher, the Scottish shop steward, did oppose. Possibly the majority were opposed, both in their head and in their heart. But if the basis of your political credo is that the



CPSU must be right, then you go along in the end.

This book is the record of the debate, finally released by Moscow. It shows that there was considerable heart-searching before the wrong decision was taken. And when Germany attacked the Soviet Union in 1941 the decision was, of course, reversed. Nevertheless, the subservience to Moscow was to continue for many years. It is intriguing to reflect what might have happened if Britain had had a more independent communist party in the years before communism as a whole gave up the ghost.

Malcolm Rutherford on a change of heart for the CP Turning Point

Perhaps I am naive, but I find it absolutely astonishing that the records of some crucial meetings of the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1939 - now published as **About Turn: The Communist Party And The Outbreak Of The Second World War** (Lawrence and Wishart, hbk £34.95), edited by Francis King and George Matthews - should have been sent directly to Moscow without so much as a summary, let alone a copy, being retained at the party headquarters in Britain. I find it much less surprising that the records should have fallen into the hands of the British intelligence agency, MI5.

How MI5 got hold of them is

not clear. But as Monty Johnstone points out in his introduction to this book, the fact that the British Government knew what was going on is revealed in the 1943 war cabinet papers in the public record office. MI5 was actually more aware of what was going on at the top of the CPGB than the Party's own members.

It is the exclusive consignment of the records of the top party meetings to Moscow that gives everything else away. If you are not prepared to keep an account of what was said for yourselves and your own supporters, but do entrust the verbatim records to the Soviet Union, you sacrifice any claim to