BRITISH COMMUNISM AND THE POLITICS OF EDUCATION, 1926-1968

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SCHOOL OF ARTS, LANGUAGES AND CULTURES
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## Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACE</td>
<td>Advisory Committee on Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>ARP</td>
<td>Air Raid Protection</td>
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<tr>
<td>AMA</td>
<td>Assistant Masters’ Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>BCRGT</td>
<td>British Committee for the Relief of German Teachers</td>
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<td>BCTA</td>
<td>Buckinghamshire County Teachers’ Association</td>
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<td>CACE</td>
<td>Central Advisory Council on Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCCS</td>
<td>Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (University of Birmingham)</td>
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<td>CEA</td>
<td>Council for Educational Advance</td>
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<td>CND</td>
<td>Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament</td>
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<td>Comintern</td>
<td>Communist International</td>
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<td>CPGB</td>
<td>Communist Party of Great Britain</td>
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<td>CPSU</td>
<td>Communist Party of the Soviet Union</td>
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<td>EWI</td>
<td>Educational Workers’ International</td>
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<tr>
<td>EWL</td>
<td>Educational Workers’ League</td>
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<tr>
<td>IAAM</td>
<td>Incorporated Association of Assistant Masters</td>
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<tr>
<td>LBC</td>
<td>Left Book Club</td>
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<tr>
<td>LCC</td>
<td>London County Council</td>
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<td>LEA</td>
<td>Local Education Authority</td>
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<td>LTA</td>
<td>London Teachers’ Association</td>
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<td>LW</td>
<td>Lawrence and Wishart</td>
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<td>NALT</td>
<td>National Association of Labour Teachers</td>
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<td>NAS</td>
<td>National Association of Schoolmasters</td>
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<td>NCC</td>
<td>National Cultural Committee (Communist Party of Great Britain)</td>
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<td>NCCL</td>
<td>National Council for Civil Liberties</td>
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<td>NCLC</td>
<td>National Council of Labour Colleges</td>
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<td>NEAC</td>
<td>National Education Advisory Committee (Communist Party of Great Britain)</td>
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<td>NMM</td>
<td>National Minority Movement</td>
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<td>NUT</td>
<td>National Union of Teachers</td>
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<td>NUWT</td>
<td>National Union of Women Teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>RILU</td>
<td>Red International of Labour Unions</td>
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<td>TAWM</td>
<td>Teachers’ Anti-War Movement</td>
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<tr>
<td>TCND</td>
<td>Teachers’ Committee for Nuclear Disarmament</td>
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<tr>
<td>TLL</td>
<td>Teachers’ Labour League</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TUC</td>
<td>Trade Union Congress</td>
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<tr>
<td>USSR</td>
<td>Union of Soviet Socialist Republics</td>
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Abstract

This thesis provides an analysis of British communist attitudes to education in English schools between 1926 and 1968. Although the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) in many ways remained a marginal force in British politics throughout its life (1920-1991), historians have acknowledged that it made a contribution to cultural and industrial politics in Britain which far exceeded its membership figures and electoral success. Surprisingly, given that the Party produced several teacher trade union presidents and Britain’s foremost post-war educationalist, scholars have largely overlooked British communism’s role in the politics of education in schools – a field which straddles both areas in which the Party is widely regarded to have punched above its weight. Researchers into the Party’s internal life have also paid little attention to its schoolteachers’ group, despite the fact that it was one of the CPGB’s largest occupational groups, and the fact that leading communist teachers and educationalists also took up prominent positions inside the Party.

Although some existing work has discussed CPGB attitudes to the education of children during the 1920s, 1940s and 1950s, to date there has been no PhD-length study which covers the period between 1926 and 1968 and has British communism and the politics of education as its sole focus. This study fills this gap by identifying individuals and institutions central to CPGB discussions and policy-making on education in schools, namely the leading figures in and around the Party schoolteachers’ group, and exploring how they anticipated, reflected or resisted the wider Party line in their work throughout several pivotal shifts in the CPGB’s position.

Drawing upon source material unused by or unavailable to previous researchers, the thesis complicates existing arguments about the extent to which Party teachers and educationalists subordinated questions of educational content, method and theory to trade union work between 1926 and 1968. Furthermore the study also contextualises and illuminates the notable communist contribution to broader educational politics on the Left in Britain, particularly during World War Two and in the campaign for comprehensive education in the two decades which followed.
Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in this thesis has been submitted in support of an application for a degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.
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Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Brian Simon (1915-2002) is acknowledged as Britain’s foremost post-war educationalist for his contribution to the history, theory and practice of education.¹ Yet when he published the third volume in his Studies in the History of Education series in 1974,² a “major criticism” of the book came from one quarter:

[O]ne would have liked more of the history behind the history (as it were) of the TUC and NUT and other public top-level reactions ... The political ‘left’ for example, appears nowhere apart from the Labour Party ... Did no-one else, for example the Communist Party, play any part in the politics of educational reform in this period?³

The question was nakedly rhetorical, for by 1974 Brian Simon had been a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) for nearly four decades. Indeed, Simon’s reviewer had been in the CPGB for the same amount of time,⁴ and in that time had risen, alongside Simon, to its Executive Committee. He was also a head teacher and had recently finished his term as President of the National Union of Teachers (NUT). His name was Max Morris, and the point he made in the posing of his question was a relevant one. Almost half a century on, its relevance has only increased, since the absence of communist teachers and educationalists from the historiography of the politics of educational reform – and, indeed, the historiography of the CPGB itself – remains.⁵ That was the initial spur to this inquiry, but the choice requires further justification.

Rationale

Admittedly the CPGB remained but a marginal force in British politics throughout its 70 year existence (1920-1991). The high water mark of its electoral achievements was the return of 2 MPs and 215

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⁵ The terms ‘education’ and ‘educational reform’ will be used in this study to refer to the education of children in schools.
councillors in 1945-6, whilst individual membership peaked at 56,000 in late 1942. Yet academic interest in the Party endures, for the CPGB is acknowledged to have made a significant contribution to cultural, intellectual and industrial politics on the Left in Britain, one which far outweighed its numerical size and electoral success.

CPGB schoolteachers and educationalists were active in both of these spheres of influence and also made highly noteworthy contributions. A few preliminary examples will suffice at this stage. As well as Simon being “undoubtedly the chief intellectual influence on the comprehensive school movement”, and Morris being “probably the best known and most influential President the National Union of Teachers ever had”, communist Margaret Clarke was head teacher of one of the first experimental comprehensive schools in England in 1947. Fellow Party members Nan McMillan and G.C.T. Giles served as national presidents of teacher trade unions during the Second World War, a pivotal time in the history of educational reform in England, and Party teachers held positions on national and local trade union executives from the 1930s onwards.

In fact, as will be shown, on a number of occasions throughout the period selected for study, alarm about communist influence in schools and in teacher trade unions prompted speeches in Parliament, newspaper splashes, campaign groups, local authority clampdown and even attracted the attention of the security services. Thus, a full knowledge and understanding of the CPGB’s contribution

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9 Francis Beckett, obituary of Max Morris, the *Guardian*, 9 September 2008.
to the cultural, intellectual and industrial politics of the British Left must surely include the activities and outlook of the Party’s schoolteachers and educationalists alongside the communist artists, academics, literary figures, scientists and ‘blue collar’ trade unionists who have more usually been the subject of scholarly interest.\footnote{11}

Academic interest in British communism also extends into the CPGB’s internal life,\footnote{12} and here too schoolteachers and educationalists make up an intriguing constituency of the Party to study for several reasons, their numerical significance being one of them. In his essays on the CPGB’s inner culture, the historian Raphael Samuel remarked that “education was a universal idiom” in the Party.\footnote{13} Unsurprisingly, an organisation so concerned with learning attracted many teachers. A number were present at the CPGB’s foundation in 1920,\footnote{14} and the Party teachers’ group numbered somewhere between one and three hundred for the next decade.\footnote{15} When the CPGB first made serious attempts to attract professional workers in the second half of the 1930s, the Party’s official historian noted that teachers were represented “above all” amongst such recruits.\footnote{16} And they retained this presence into the post-war period. Between 1944 and 1963 schoolteachers were by far the largest ‘white collar’ profession represented at CPGB National Congress; moreover they made up the third largest of all occupational groups represented at Congress during these years.\footnote{17}

But it is not just the numerical force of communists concerned with children’s education which makes them a compelling group of communists to analyse. For the vast bulk of the period examined in this study, prominent CPGB teachers and educationalists also took up senior positions inside the Party.

\footnote{11} See footnote 7.
\footnote{13} Samuel, The Lost World, p. 194.
\footnote{14} These were Marjorie Brewer, David Capper, Margaret Clarke, and Ellen Wilkinson, who was later to become the first Labour Minister of Education in 1945.
Once the Party teachers’ group was formally established as the National Education Advisory Committee (NEAC) during the early 1940s, its leader retained a seat on the CPGB Central Committee (by then renamed the Executive Committee) until 1970. Furthermore, during the 1960s, the CPGB’s ideological response to the cultural and intellectual challenges posed by the ‘New Left’ was shaped to a significant extent by Brian Simon through his prominent role on the Party’s Cultural Committee.\(^{18}\) Such appointments show the proximity of educational cadres to the CPGB leadership’s ‘line’, which was vital in shaping the trajectory of a political party run along principles of democratic centralism. Yet, in a Party which saw itself as overwhelmingly proletarian, teacher communists could also be perceived as occupying a contradictory class position. As has been shown by previous studies, at times throughout the Party’s history King Street regarded ‘brain workers’ as potential inculcators of capitalist values who required a degree of surveillance from the Party centre.\(^{19}\) Schoolteachers, whilst further down the social scale than ‘bourgeois intellectuals’ such as academics, scientists, doctors and lawyers, could be placed within the ‘petit-bourgeoisie’ of white-collar workers, incapable of an independent political role and prone to vacillation between alliance with the bourgeoisie and the working class.\(^{20}\) However, at other times during its history, the CPGB leadership was at pains to emphasise the importance of attracting professionals and intellectuals to the Party if it was to be successful.\(^{21}\)

**Research Context**

Brian Simon went on to publish a fourth volume of *Studies in the History of Education* before he died.\(^{22}\) It extended his political history of educational reform in Britain from 1940 to 1990, and, like the previous volume, offered a Marxist analysis which emphasised the antagonism of social class interests in the politics and course of educational advance. For Simon, educational reform was rooted in the class


\(^{19}\) This tendency was most noticeable in the CPGB during the ‘Third Period’ (1929-1934) and the ‘Battle of Ideas’ of the early Cold War. See, for example, John McIlroy, ‘The Establishment of Intellectual Orthodoxy and the Stalinization of British Communism, 1928-1933’, *Past and Present*, 192 (Aug 2006), pp. 187-230; and Callaghan and Harker (eds), *British Communism*, pp. 167-168.


\(^{21}\) For example during the ‘Popular Front’ period (1935-1939) and the 1960s. See *ibid*, pp. 204-219; and Andrews, *Endgames and New Times*, pp. 73-104.

struggle, the result of the working-class movement securing qualitative and quantitative gains from the State. But in Education and the Social Order, Simon again devoted little attention to the involvement of communists in this struggle, nor did he do so in his autobiography six years later.23 This omission, as it had been with the previous volume, was likely due to a combination of the hostility Simon had experienced during the Cold War on account of his CPGB activity,24 and a fear of lacking the necessary critical distance. For in private correspondence Simon himself acknowledged the need for more scholarly attention to be paid to the history of communists in education.25

Certainly, other histories of education in Britain devote very little attention to the actions of communists. Asher Tropp, P.H.J.H. Gosden, Ronald A. Manzer and Walter Roy have each produced impressively detailed studies of the history of the teaching profession in England and Wales. But they do not offer a serious investigation of the political allegiances of teachers and their influence on their attitudes towards educational provision. Teachers tend to be treated as a cohesive group with a collective identity moving towards an agreed definition of ‘professionalism’ and ‘education’. They are presented by and large as ‘non-political’, and certainly non-communist.26 As Roy wrote of the NUT in 1968:

The picture that emerges shows a widespread, deeply felt, hostility to communism; a cleavage of opinion on the issue of affiliation to the TUC, the supporters of such a step being identified with socialism, and not strong enough to bring about an alignment with the industrial unions.27

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25 Letter from Brian Simon to Nan McMillan, 21 September 1975 (Simon Papers, DC/SIM/2/26).
Events were shortly to show that Roy’s analysis was wide of the mark. In 1969 the NUT went on strike over pay, and in 1970 aligned its interests with the rest of the British Labour Movement by affiliating to the TUC. Max Morris would become its President by 1973. Such a shift obviously did not begin in the twelve months after Roy’s assessment was published. There were clearly actors and tendencies already present to bring about such a change.28

Indeed, some historians of education have acknowledged this relationship between schoolteachers, educationalists and the British Labour Movement. Respective works by Rodney Barker, Denis Lawton and Michael Parkinson have documented the Labour Party’s view of the education of children during the twentieth century, including the role of Labour teachers and educationalists on their party’s Advisory Committee for Education (ACE).29 Clive Griggs’ The TUC and Educational Reform has revealed much about the attitudes of the TUC Education Committee to education in schools between 1926 and 1970.30 In addition, Martin Lawn and Hilda Kean have each produced detailed studies of the activities and outlook of schoolteachers and educationalists to the left of the Labour Party and TUC during the 1920s, in which communist teachers and the CPGB’s education policies for children are discussed.

According to both Kean and Lawn, communists dismissed the idea that meaningful educational reform could be achieved in the absence of socialist revolution. Instead, they prioritised trade union activity, investigating and praising Soviet educational practice, and criticising the lack of class consciousness among teachers and educationalists. Hence, they failed to develop a specifically communist educational policy that went beyond ‘exposure’ of the redundancy of capitalism and social democracy, and isolated themselves from fellow teachers as a consequence. This position, it is argued, arose due to the CPGB’s ‘Class Against Class’ position, officially adopted in 1929, which argued that the collapse of capitalism was imminent, and any aegis of the capitalist state was necessarily an

ideological weapon of the bourgeoisie aimed at propping it up.\textsuperscript{31} But communists are not the chief focus of Lawn and Kean’s work. Rather, they seek to draw conclusions on the relationship between socialism, schoolteachers, education and the state. Hence there is no sustained examination of the internal dynamics of the CPGB’s application of Class Against Class to education. It is implied that all communists interpreted it obediently without regard to British conditions, which more recent histories of the CPGB have revealed was not always the case in other areas.\textsuperscript{32} And as both Lawn’s and Kean’s studies end in 1930, when the Party was barely a decade old, and ‘Class Against Class’ itself only two years old, they leave many questions unanswered about the trajectory of communist activists in education, and their relationship with the CPGB centre.

Ken Jones’ \textit{Beyond Progressive Education} contains a chapter which also explores the work of CPGB in education during the 1920s. Jones concurs with Lawn and Kean that by the end of the decade communists dismissed as redundant any discussion of meaningful educational reform until such time as socialism had been established. But Jones’ analysis extends beyond 1930. By 1935, the rise of fascism in Europe prompted the CPGB, alongside other international communist parties, to seek an alliance with all progressive forces, whether socialist, social democratic or liberal. For Jones, the implications of this for communist attitudes to education were as follows:

\begin{quote}
[T]he new tendency ... was to suggest that henceforth the path of socialist strategy was in the mere extension of rights which were already in part being gained ... [communists] ... adopted positions that responded to the prospect of expanded state education in a one-sided, over welcoming, way.\textsuperscript{33}
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{33} Jones, \textit{Beyond Progressive Education}, pp. 108-110
In Jones’ view, this tendency continued unabated during and after the Second World War, until the time he was conducting his research in the early 1980s.\textsuperscript{34} Around the same time, a similar conclusion was drawn in a study of schooling and social democracy by the University of Birmingham’s Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS).\textsuperscript{35} However, such studies rely only upon published policy statements to reach such conclusions, and as such give little insight into precisely how this seeming \textit{volte face} was debated and interpreted. Again, they imply that the agreed line was followed obediently and uniformly; any internal dissent or nuance is not investigated. Also, depictions of the CPGB strategy as continuous after 1935 take no account of its shifts in position during the early stages of the Second World War, and the early Cold War. With regard to the latter, both Gary McCulloch and Deborah Thom have considered how Brian Simon’s communism affected his writing on education and its reception at this time, but the effect of the Party’s line on Simon, his relationship with the Party leadership, and his role in its positions on education are not considered in detail.\textsuperscript{36}

To turn to the historiography of the CPGB itself, broad political histories of the Party necessarily make only fleeting reference to Party members in the teaching profession. And, as has already been discussed, to date the existing literature on the social and cultural history of British communism ignores the Party’s efforts in school-based education, focusing instead largely upon communists in the creative and performing arts, criticism or academia.\textsuperscript{37} Where education has been the principal focus of historians, it has been the Party’s work in adult education.\textsuperscript{38} Kenneth Newton’s \textit{The Sociology of British Education Group, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Unpopular Education: Schooling and Social Democracy in England since 1944} (London: Hutchinson, 1981), pp. 66-69.


\textsuperscript{37} See footnote 6.

Communism however, notes the proliferation of schoolteachers amongst the Party membership. He demonstrates that between 1945 and 1965 they provided seven times more than any other middle-class occupational group in the CPGB, and made up 7% of the overall membership. Newton also interviewed five Party teachers in the course of his research, and from this is able to glean brief insights. However, as a sociological analysis, it provides very little historical perspective, and pays scant attention to how this sizeable constituency of the CPGB related its politics to its profession.

Steve Parsons’ unpublished 1990 PhD thesis on communism amongst the British professions does feature a chapter dedicated to communist schoolteachers, which subsequently went on to inform a published journal article. He concurs with Jones that the prioritisation of anti-fascist unity within the CPGB after 1935 meant that existing norms of state educational content and method were not questioned by communists. But, like Jones, Parsons implies that this change from the militancy of the late 1920s and early 1930s was accepted without question. However, unlike Jones, Parsons does consider the shifts in the CPGB’s line between 1939 and 1941 caused by the Soviet Union’s decision to enter into a non-aggression pact with Nazi Germany. He charts the isolation many communist teachers faced during the period. Parsons also explores the reversal of this situation following the German invasion of the USSR and the latter’s military alliance with Britain during 1941. Following this, he notes that communists were able to enjoy increasing prominence in the NUT, leading to G.C.T. Giles being elected President in 1944 and playing a direct role in the formation of the Government’s education reforms, and the CPGB’s first contribution to the debate on national post-War reconstruction was to offer substantial plans for educational policy in peacetime. Parsons concurs with Jones that the CPGB welcomed the 1944 Education Act as a major advance. However, he also acknowledges that the communists were the “foremost advocates” of non-selective secondary schooling, and that they were

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40 Ibid., 147-149.
42 Parsons, ‘Communism in the Professions’, p. 485.
“important in ensuring that NALT [The National Association of Labour Teachers] took up the issue” inside the Labour Party, who are more often associated with opposing selective secondary education.\(^{44}\)

According to Parsons, during the onset of the Cold War after 1947 communists working in education “faced the most public and sustained witch-hunt” apart from civil servants. They were swept from the NUT Executive and attacked by national and local government officials, and in the press, something which has also been acknowledged by historians of education.\(^ {45}\) This treatment encouraged hardening ideological positions, insists Parsons, and under the influence of the CPGB’s ‘Battle of Ideas’ line communists developed a tendency to interpret new ‘active’ learning methods then becoming popular in English primary schools “as part of a conspiracy ... aimed at creating an illiterate working class”.\(^ {46}\) This conservatism was encouraged by similar developments in Soviet educational practice, and the dominance in the NEAC of a group of secondary school teachers, centred around Max Morris, who preferred to focus their attention on securing influence in the NUT. Hence, the NEAC had little time for discussing theoretical questions. Parsons does indicate that such a position was not universally popular, and that after 1956 – in the wake of the tumults caused by Soviet premier Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalin and the USSR’s violent suppression of the Hungarian uprising – some CPGB teachers and educationalists did attempt to question the NEAC’s approach and address matters of educational content and psychology. But according to him any discussion on educational content, theory or practice came from outside the Party teachers’ group.\(^ {47}\) For Parsons, the CPGB leadership condoned this conservatism. They felt that the Party gained prestige from the prominence of Morris in the NUT when the ‘witch hunt’ abated from the late 1950s, and thus were content to let him dominate affairs.\(^ {48}\) In this way, Parsons hints at a cleavage between the CPGB’s academic educationalists such as Brian Simon, and those communists who worked as schoolteachers, represented by Morris. But this issue is not explored in depth.

\(^{44}\) Ibid., p. 65
\(^{45}\) Parsons ‘Communism in the Professions’, p. 497. See also Roy Lowe, The Death of Progressive Education: How Teachers Lost Control of the Classroom (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 29-34 ; and Simon, Education and the Social Order, pp. 121-125.
\(^{46}\) Parsons, ‘British Communist Party School Teachers’, p. 58.
\(^{47}\) Ibid., pp. 61-64.
\(^{48}\) Ibid., p. 64.
Overall Parsons’ research is detailed, informative and highly valuable, shedding much light upon how CPGB schoolteachers related the Party line to their work before 1956, and upon relations between them and the Party centre. Unlike Ken Jones and the CCCS, he goes beyond published communist pronouncements on education by consulting a wider range of source material, including relevant CPGB periodicals, the personal papers of G.C.T. Giles, and conducting several interviews with leading Party teachers and educationalists. Yet there is still room for further investigation. For there is only so far Parsons can delve in one chapter of a PhD thesis and one journal article. Moreover, there are gaps in the chronological scope of existing work. No study goes beyond the pivotal year of 1956, and thus the communist contribution and reaction to the expansion of comprehensive education, and the effects of that year’s trauma on the CPGB’s teachers and educationalists, require further illumination.\textsuperscript{49}

Furthermore, the years 1935-1939 and 1941-1945 are dealt with rather swiftly in all existing accounts. Given that many histories of the CPGB argue that these periods saw the Party at the peak of its influence,\textsuperscript{50} and given that these were pivotal periods in the politics of educational reform in England and Wales, deeper scrutiny is necessary to fill gaps in historical knowledge and understanding. The present study will also benefit from being able to access NEAC and other files in the CPGB archive, a source unavailable to any previous researcher, since all were writing before its opening following the Party’s collapse in 1991. The same applies to the Brian Simon archive at the Institute of Education, opened following his death in 2002.

\textbf{Aims, Research Questions and Methodology}

This study aims to explore in detail British communist attitudes to education in English schools between 1926 and 1968, by identifying individuals and institutions central to CPGB discussions and policy-making in this area, and exploring how they related to the wider Party line to their work. In doing so, the study also aims to illuminate the role of schoolteachers as a group within the CPGB, and to contextualise the communist contribution to the broader educational politics of the British Labour

\textsuperscript{49} It should be noted here that Parsons’ work does give a brief overview of the period after 1956.

Movement between 1926 and 1968. The primary research questions informing this study are: 1) Who were the CPGB’s prominent schoolteachers and educationalists between 1926 and 1968?; 2) What was their relationship with the Party leadership?; 3) How did they relate the Party line to their profession?; and 4) What was their contribution to the broader educational politics of the Labour Movement in England in the period?

Before beginning the study, it is necessary to justify its geographical and chronological scope. The decision to focus upon England results from the fact that this is where the overwhelming majority of communist teachers and educationalists practiced, as well as the fact that the Scottish, Northern Irish, and to a lesser extent the Welsh, education systems are subject to different policy and legislation. Regarding chronology, there are several reasons for choosing the years 1926-1968. Firstly, in this period a number of crucial changes in the CPGB’s line significantly affected its policy agenda, its membership, its internal cohesion and its relationship with the wider British Left. These changes were ultimately determined by the Party’s relationship with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and Communist International (Comintern). Admittedly, significant debate exists among scholars over the extent and nature of Soviet influence over British communism between the 1920s and late 1960s, but it is generally accepted that the former was critical to the latter’s political position.\textsuperscript{51} As an objective of this study is to contextualise the activities and outlook of CPGB schoolteachers and educationalists in relation to the Party’s political line, the choice to study the period 1926-1968 lends coherency to the thesis. For after 1956, distance grew between the CPGB and the CPSU, culminating in the former’s criticism of the intervention of Warsaw Pact forces in Czechoslovakia in 1968. After 1968, the Party’s political line was formulated in a significantly altered context. The same applies to the CPGB’s internal

\textsuperscript{51} Very broadly, and to varying degrees, ‘official’ histories written by CPGB cadres during the Party’s lifetime have avoided detailed scrutiny of the CPSU and Comintern’s role in the Party. More critical studies, written from a Cold War/Trotskyite perspective, or shortly after the Party’s dissolution in 1991, have presented the CPGB as dominated by the Soviet Union. However, newer, ‘revisionist’ authors have sought to complicate such accounts by acknowledging that although the CPSU/Comintern undoubtedly exercised a significant determining influence over the CPGB’s direction, the British Party was no Moscow dupe and in fact adapted Comintern instructions to local conditions, a process which produced original interpretations, alterations and even rejections of the agreed ‘line’. For a concise summary of these debates, see John Newsinger, ‘Recent Controversies in the History of British Communism’, \textit{Journal of Contemporary History}, Vol. 41, 3 (2006), pp. 557-572.
organisation. The loosening of the relationship with Moscow meant that the Party’s adherence to Leninist organisational forms also relaxed, in practice if not in theory.\textsuperscript{52}

Restricting the focus of this inquiry to the period 1926-1968 will also make for a more consistent analysis of CPGB schoolteachers’ and educationalists’ contribution to the educational politics of the wider British Labour Movement, in relation to the Labour Party and the teacher trade unions in particular. When the CPGB was founded in 1920, Lenin directed that it should seek affiliation to Labour in order to avoid isolation from the mass of the working class. Building a ‘united front’ with Labour Party activists would allow British communists to expose to the ‘redundancy’ of reformism to the workers, who would then flock to the CPGB, which would then in turn assume its rightful position as the mass party of the working class. The CPGB’s pursuance of the united front was damaged following the collapse of the General Strike in May 1926, and although the official break with Labour did not come until 1929, Comintern and domestic analyses that British workers were radicalising at a pace which outstripped their reformist leaders grew in influence from late 1926. Lessons learned from the isolation suffered by the CPGB as a result of this ‘Class Against Class’ approach, as well as the need to seek out allies in the fight against the rise of fascism in Europe, meant that from the early-to-mid-1930s a measure of constancy entered into the British communist approach to social democracy. The Party again attempted to seek affiliation to the Labour Party and to build up communist influence in its affiliated trade unions. However, by the 1970s the CPGB was forced to reappraise this method when a period of renewed industrial militancy in Britain failed to yield the expected results. As John Callaghan and Ben Harker put it, “in the 1970s and 1980s … the Labour Party at last moved to the left and the CP found itself largely superfluous in the process”.\textsuperscript{53}

Similarly, educational politics on the British Left also revolved around a consistent theme between 1926 and 1968. The CPGB split from the existing structures of adult worker education in the British Labour Movement as early as 1922, after a Party Commission set up in the wake of the previous year’s 3\textsuperscript{rd} Comintern Congress issuing a code of procedures for national communist parties’

\textsuperscript{52} Andrews, \textit{Endgames and New Times}, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{53} Callaghan and Harker (eds), \textit{British Communism}, p. 62.
organisation. The Commission had recommended that British communists build their own structures of political education as an alternative to the non-party political Plebs League and National Council of Labour Colleges (NCLC). This decision was ratified in a December 1922 Comintern ‘Resolution on the Education Question’, which stated that “educational activity … should be the responsibility of the fighters of the Party and not the unattached intellectual fringe of the revolution”. This led to prominent educationalists in the Plebs League such as Raymond Postgate, Mark Starr, J.T. Walton-Newbold and Ellen Wilkinson leaving the CPGB and taking the majority of League opinion with them. Yet in terms of children’s education, it was not until 1926 that communists began the process of taking the group in which they organised, the Teachers’ Labour League (TLL), towards Party control (see chapter one). Hence, it makes sense to begin the present study then. It was also in 1926 that the idea of ‘secondary education for all’ – which had been famously outlined by Labour educationalist R.H. Tawney in 1922 – gained its first ‘official’ recognition in a report by the Board of Education’s Consultative Committee, The Education of the Adolescent (the Hadow Report - see chapter one). The struggle to complete the ‘Hadow reorganisation’ of English and Welsh state schools into primary and secondary divisions was to dominate the educational debates of the British Labour Movement during the inter-war years. Once the 1944 Education Act made transfer to a secondary school at age 11 compulsory, discussion then centred on the organisation and type of secondary education to be delivered by the state. Defenders of the selective, tripartite system established by the governments of the late 1940s and 1950s vied with those who advocated non-selective, or ‘comprehensive’ period of full secondary education for all, rather than only a select few. Similarly, advocates of a traditional teacher-led, examination-based, approach to learning along distinct academic or vocational pathways clashed with those who argued for a less rigid, more child-centred, system. Despite considerable resistance from successive Conservative governments after 1951, and notwithstanding much prevarication from the Labour Party leadership, by the late 1950s it appeared that the reformers had won out, aided by a period of economic growth in the capitalist West which made enhanced educational opportunity seem both affordable and necessary.

In 1964 a Labour Government was returned for the first time in almost fifteen years, on a manifesto which pledged to introduce comprehensive education. In 1965 it requested that all local education authorities submit plans to reorganise secondary education on non-selective lines. Such wide-ranging developments in secondary education necessarily also had a transformative effect on the nature, purpose and work of the primary school. However the reformers were to face a backlash before long. Serious student dissent across the universities of the West during 1968 and Britain’s declining status as a world economic power were seized upon by right-wing traditionalists as grounds for an end to consensus, typified by the first ‘Black Paper’ in 1969, which argued “no longer can it be accepted that progressivism and comprehensive schemes are necessarily right, or that the future inevitably lies with them”. Thus, a chronological scope of 1926-1968 will mean that the communist contribution to the broader educational politics of the British Labour Movement can be contextualised around a coherent theme. For after 1968, the educational politics of the British Left moved from the promotion of the expansion of secondary education for all to defending against its retrenchment.

In the same way, the period 1926 to 1968 is also a coherent one in terms of the nature and activity of organised teachers in England and Wales. Between these years there existed an oft-cited ‘partnership’ between local education authorities, government and teachers, during which the NUT – then the largest teachers’ union by far, and the one in which by far the most communists were active – did not call any national strikes, and instead operated chiefly through the strategies such as lobbying, deputations to Ministers, mass media influence and public campaigns. Following the 1965 Remuneration of Teachers Act which increased the power of the Minister of Education in pay settlements and arguably dissolved the ‘partnership’, the NUT embarked upon a period of greater militancy, including the first national strike by teachers over the 1969-1970 pay award. It must be emphasised that this thesis situates communist schoolteachers in relation to their Party’s line and the

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broader politics of education in the British Labour Movement, and is not \textit{per se} an attempt to situate communist teacher trade unionists within the Party’s industrial strategy. However, given the relationship between the CPGB's industrial and political strategies outlined above, it will of course be necessary and relevant to analyse the activities of Party schoolteachers in the NUT, and therefore terminating the study in 1968 will aid the consistency of the thesis.

The study adopts a qualitative historical methodology, charting, recording and narrating the work of CPGB teachers, educationalists through a defined chronological period, and comparing the findings to the Party line, and to the broader politics of education of the British Labour Movement. This is done through searches of relevant correspondence, newspapers, journals, personal papers, policy statements and Party documents. Evidence gathered through these searches is critically analysed and interpreted in order to provide a thesis which answers the research questions above. Due to the time frame adopted for the study, the use of interviews as a research technique is not feasible as most of the leading actors are deceased. However, despite this limitation, the communist teacher and educationalist voice can be viably reconstructed through the wealth of correspondence, personal papers, internal Party documents, published and unpublished biographies and autobiographies and through the periodicals which communists interested in education consistently published.

The structure of the thesis is chronological. This will be beneficial in two ways. Firstly, the chronological scope of each chapter mirrors major changes in the political line of the CPGB, or the site of major political tensions within the Party. This will facilitate analysis of the extent to which the Party’s teachers and educationalists anticipated, reflected or resisted the CPGB line. Furthermore, a chronological structure will allow the thesis to provide an analytical narrative of the communist approach towards education in English schools between 1926 and 1968. It is to the beginning of this period that attention now turns.
Chapter One: A Long and Difficult Third Period, 1926-1934

Chapter Summary

From its establishment in 1923, the left-wing schoolteachers’ pressure group the Teachers’ Labour League (TLL) contained CPGB members in prominent positions. Communists dominated the TLL from late 1926, and enmeshed it closely with their Party. When the CPGB adopted its ‘Class Against Class’ line under the influence of Comintern during 1928-29, the intellectual orthodoxy, sectarian exclusiveness and economic determinism which often characterised the Third Period undoubtedly permeated British communists’ attitudes to educational politics. Previous accounts of the TLL during this period have emphasised that under tight central Party direction of ‘brain workers’, CPGB teachers obediently characterised movements for educational reform under capitalism as delusional diversion from political and economic struggle, and became isolated from other left-leaning teachers and educationalists. This chapter complicates such accounts by arguing that whilst communists undoubtedly indulged in sectarian isolation, the rest of the picture is more complicated. Firstly, it will be shown that leading CPGB schoolteachers came from a generational and ideological tendency in their Party that made them initially reliable advocates of Class Against Class, not reluctant followers of central diktat. Second, although ultimately obedient to a Party centre which gradually became more suspicious and controlling of them, communist schoolteachers often resisted the narrow economic determinism prescribed by the Third Period CPGB leadership. This was particularly true when it came to the potential for qualitative educational reform under capitalism. Although the impact of Class Against Class certainly narrowed the focus of the TLL in favour of economic questions, some communists also interpreted the line as making reform of the capitalist classroom more necessary: in order to expose and combat its more reactionary features; and to aid the development of class consciousness for the coming revolution. Indeed, the chapter will demonstrate that it was not Class Against Class which negated a communist interest in questions of educational content, but rather the priorities which emerged when that line began to be reconsidered. In doing so, it will also be shown that communist schoolteachers were among the first constituencies in the CPGB to move away from Class Against Class, and towards a new line.
Prepared for Class (Against Class): CPGB teachers and the United Front, 1926-1928

The TLL was formed at the start of 1923, inspired by the actions of previous a group of teachers using the same name, who had tried and failed to get the NUT to affiliate to the Labour Party and TUC between 1916 and 1918.\(^1\) By the end of 1924, the League had a membership of around 800, with 27 branches across the country.\(^2\) It defined its aims and objectives as:

To advance the cause of education by … wholehearted co-operation with the Labour movement in working towards a new social order.\(^3\)

Such a statement was attractive to a broad range of left-leaning teachers and educationalists. Hence, although affiliated to the Labour Party from 1923, the TLL had amongst its ranks a wide variety of socialist opinion. Its National Executive Committee included prominent and loyal Labour Party educational figures such as Leah Manning and Morgan Jones MP, but the TLL’s honorary Vice Presidents were more independently-minded left-leaning figures like Bertrand Russell and H.G. Wells. And communists also formed an integral part. CPGB teachers Sandy Duncan, his wife Kath, David Capper and Margaret Clarke were also members the Executive.\(^4\) Indeed, Capper was the League’s founding secretary, and Sandy Duncan was in charge of its press and publications from an early stage.\(^5\) Other Party teachers were prominent in local TLL branches, notably G.C.T. Giles in West London,\(^6\) and Ben Ainley in Manchester.\(^7\)

Leading communist teachers were products of the CPGB’s ‘united front’ line. At the Party’s foundation in 1920, Lenin made it clear to a reluctant leadership that they should seek to conduct the struggle for communism from inside the Labour Party, which in his mind was an essential means to

\(^2\) ‘Labour Teachers’ Policy’, \textit{The Times}, 31 December 1924.
\(^3\) ‘Teacher Labourists’, \textit{Aberdeen Press and Journal}, 31 December 1924.
\(^4\) See the list of the TLL National Executive Committee members in the League’s 1926 Constitution (G.C.T. Giles papers, Working Class Movement Library, Salford, PP/GILES, box 2).
\(^5\) McMillan, ‘Portrait of a Comrade’, p. 6; and p. 16.
\(^6\) ‘Teachers’ Labour League’, \textit{The Times}, 30 December 1925.
\(^7\) Unattributed and unpublished biography of Ben Ainley, (Ben Ainley papers, Working Class Movement Library, Salford, PP/AINLEY/1), p. 81.
winning the British working class. Most leading teacher-communists made their way to the CPGB from the left-wing of the Labour Party or its affiliated organisations. Capper, who then taught at Altrincham County High School for Boys, Manchester, joined the Labour Party in 1919. He then became a founder member of the CPGB in 1920, though he retained dual membership until communists were expelled by Labour in 1924. Giles, headmaster of Acton County Grammar School in Middlesex, was also expelled by the Labour Party for attempting to drag its policy too far to the left. The Duncans had both been members of the ILP until the General Strike, after which they joined the CPGB. They taught in London. Ainley also joined the CPGB after a spell in the ILP and the Labour Party, in 1922. He was introduced to the TLL by Capper whilst working with him at Altrincham. Only Clarke, who taught in a Birmingham secondary school, and like Capper was a founder member of the CPGB, does not appear to have belonged to the Labour Party or ILP.

Given such trajectories, the united front line, and the open stance of the TLL with regard to individual members’ party affiliations, it is not surprising that the League’s Labour and communist strands coexisted successfully at first. But coexistence was not coalescence. As Hilda Kean observes, from early on both strands interpreted the TLL’s goal in different ways. Labour Party activists saw the League as a means of steering teachers towards their party, and acting as an advisory body on its education policy, which was committed to expanding access to educational provision without any fundamental change to control or the curriculum. By contrast, communist members saw the TLL as a complement to the work of the National Minority Movement (NMM), a communist front organisation formed in 1924, designed to bring under Party leadership militant trade unionists dissatisfied with reformism. The influence of this can be detected as early as 1925, when the League changed its

12 Unattributed and unpublished biography of Ben Ainley, p. 2; p. 28; and p. 81.
14 Kean, *Challenging the State?*, p. 171.
constitution to include in its objects the need to work for a single teachers’ trade union, which reflected the approach of the NMM. Communist teachers also felt the TLL should eschew ‘neutral’ education within the existing state apparatus, and propagandise the need for worker-controlled schools, delivering a class-conscious curriculum. The apparent unity between Labour and communist currents inside the TLL Executive only existed because the division of labour on the Committee made it possible for them to simultaneously follow fundamentally divergent paths.

The priorities of CPGB cadres in the TLL situate them amongst an emerging wing in the Party represented then chiefly by the theorist Rajani Palme Dutt and the NMM leader Harry Pollitt. They argued that, in the wake of the fall of the Labour Government of 1924, the united front made too many concessions to left unity, and consequently the goal of a mass Communist Party was becoming remote. Dutt felt that the Government’s demise would act as a spur to the class consciousness of British workers, to whom it would soon become plain that the Labour Party was “in open alliance with the bourgeoisie”. There would follow a “process of separation of the workers and the Labour Party”, and the former would “be compelled to seek for a new leadership” in the CPGB. Other leading communists like Central Committee member J.T. Murphy disagreed. He argued that the Labour Party was “a mass movement of which we are a part”. Murphy anticipated that a mass CPGB was a distant prospect, and would emerge, not by separation from, but in amalgamation with, Labour’s left-wing.

In their interpretation of the TLL’s primary function, communist schoolteachers were evidently more sympathetic with Dutt’s analysis than Murphy’s. As Ben Ainley put it in a campaign speech as a Labour-funded candidate for the Moss Side Board of Guardians in 1924, “I don’t want your vote … I want you to join the Communist Party”.

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20 Unattributed and unpublished biography of Ben Ainley, p. 36.
Communist TLL members also tested the united front in their attitudes to the Soviet Union. In 1924 and 1925, they led the argument within the TLL Executive that the League should affiliate to the Educational Workers’ International (EWI). Labour members of the Executive argued against this on the grounds that the EWI was a communist body allied to the Soviet Union, and affiliation to it would endanger the TLL’s link with the Labour Party, whose leadership was then keenly proscribing communists from its organisation. This view won out at the League’s December 1924 Conference, but early in the following year Capper formed and led an International Subcommittee within the League’s Executive to continue the pressure for international affiliation. That April, he also visited an EWI Secretariat meeting in Paris. At the TLL’s December 1925 Conference, affiliation to the EWI was again proposed by Capper, and this time it was carried by 291 votes to 211, despite opposition from Labour Party figures in the League, whom Capper bitterly accused of “playing the game of the capitalists”. An intervention from G.C.T. Giles – who had earlier that year visited the USSR and, like many western observers, come back convinced of the merits of the Soviet system – also urged Labour Party figures on the Executive to cease making a “bogy” out of communism and endorse international affiliation. Thus, by late 1925, leading CPGB schoolteachers were clearly keener to advance the TLL’s links with international socialism than they were to safeguard its attachment to the British Labour Party.

During 1926, communists in the TLL continued to risk to their relations with their left Labour counterparts, not to mention their livelihoods and their civil liberties. This was a time of substantial anxiety about the influence of communism in Britain, and the teaching profession was no exception. Alarmist rhetoric about the subversion of children by ‘reds’ in the classroom featured in the speeches of Conservative politicians and in national newspapers. Special Branch monitored the activities of

21 The EWI in fact declared its autonomy in respect of the 2nd and 3rd Internationals, see Parsons, ‘Communism in the Professions’, p. 504, n. 11.
23 ‘Labour Teachers’ Policy’, *The Times*, 31 December 1924.
24 Kean, *Challenging the State?*, p. 185, n. 48.
25 See the account of the affiliation debate in ‘Teachers and Russia’, *Daily Mail*, 30 December 1925.
28 For an engaging summary of these developments and the recent scholarship surrounding them, see Carí Tuhey, ‘The Politics of ‘Indirect Rule’: Conflict, Contradiction and Control in Education Policy, 1922-9’, *Reflecting Education*, 6, 1 (April 2010), pp. 64-67.
Capper, and he was also harassed at work. At the start of 1926 his employer took exception to his communism and advised him to leave. Grammar school heads then had full rights to hire and dismiss teachers, and so Capper agreed to relinquish his post in return for an agreeable reference. Undeterred, he then moved to London and threw himself full-time into CPGB, TLL and EWI work. During the General Strike, he was arrested for holding an open air meeting after the declaration of martial law. He was bailed out by Giles, who around this time had joined the CPGB officially after a period as a fellow traveller. Ainley was also highly active in the Lancashire coalfield during the miners’ lock out. In addition, Margaret Clarke and Marjorie Pollitt (another schoolteacher who was a founder member of the CPGB, who had married Harry Pollitt in 1925) were both subject to criminal proceedings for their parts in publishing and distributing communist literature during the strike and its aftermath. They also were dismissed from their posts, and had their teaching certificates suspended. Despite such victimisation and the failure of the strike, Capper was sure that it had radicalised the profession in Britain. Marjorie Pollitt felt the same. This tendency to see the General Strike not as a defeat, but as a sign of advancing radicalisation, was more combative than the CPGB Central Committee, who following the strike concluded that it must continue to work with the non-communist left. Again Party teachers were in step with Dutt, who argued that after the strike the non-communist left was finished, and a final confrontation between communism and reformism had been hastened.

Before long, there was just such a confrontation within the TLL, and communist teachers revealed their lack of faith in working through the machinery of the Labour Party. In October 1926 at the Labour Conference in Margate, a motion on education was carried which suggested that schools had a part to

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29 Kean, Challenging the State?, p. 185, n. 49.
33 For a fuller account of the treatment of both Clarke and Pollitt, see Martin Lawn, Servants of the State: The Contested Control of Teaching (London: Falmer Press, 1987), pp. 131-132; Pollitt also discusses her case in detail in her autobiography, A Rebel Life (St Ultimo: Red Page Publications, 2007), pp. 18-20.
34 David Capper, cited in Kean, Challenging the State?, p. 85.
35 Marjorie Pollitt, ‘Teachers are Learning’, Woman Worker, 3 (June 1926). Available at https://www.marxists.org/archive/pollitt-marjorie/1926/06/x01.htm [Accessed November 2 2014].
play “in abolishing the present and creating a new Order of Society”. It demanded that investigation be conducted into how textbooks, teaching and disciplinary methods fostered “a bourgeois psychology”, and into how this could be “counteracted and a proletarian attitude ... cultivated”.37 This directly attacked the basis of Labour educational policy, which favoured ‘neutral’ education within the existing system of control.38 More significantly, in its insistence that a “Workers’ Committee of Inquiry” be set up and deliver the report, the motion seriously questioned the legitimacy of the framework within which Labour Party education policy had hitherto been developed: its Advisory Committee on Education (ACE), on which several of the TLL’s senior Labour Party figures themselves served.39 Communists in the TLL were likely to have been involved in this motion. It was moved by the Manchester Borough Labour Party and Liverpool Trades Council and Labour Party, and the League had a number of Manchester members among its leading left-wingers.40 As has been shown, Capper had been active in Manchester only months before. Moreover, Ainley remained there, still holding on to his Labour Party membership.41 Furthermore, the motion had been suggested to the TLL Executive prior to Margate, but Labour moderates had used their majority to reject it.42 It seems communists then used other methods to get the motion heard. Certainly, that is what the Labour ‘loyalists’ in the League Executive felt. Furious, they sent a circular to all League members which placed the blame for on a “definite organised attempt” by communists.43

On the latter point, it is hard to disagree. For the then TLL President H.S. Redgrove also circumvented the League Executive to successfully move a motion at Margate (as a delegate of Croydon Labour Party) which similarly challenged the ‘neutrality’ of state education, condemning “widespread reactionary and imperialistic teaching in the schools”, reinforced by the celebration of Empire Day and

38 Barker, Education and Politics 1900-1951, p. 151.
40 Barker, Education and Politics, p. 149, n. 5.
41 Recorded interview of Ben and Audrey Ainley by Ruth and Eddie Frow, 1968 (Working Class Movement Library, Salford, TAPE/028).
42 The resolution was rejected by the TLL Executive because “the phraseology of the terms of reference indicated a very ‘left wing’ outlook, and in view of the debateable nature of the structure of the proposed committee and of certain of these terms of reference”, H.S. Redgrove, ‘Impressions of Margate’, Educational Worker: Organ of the Teachers’ Labour League, 1, 1 (November 1926), p. 7.
43 Letter to all members of the TLL, December 1926, cited in Kean, Challenging the State?, p. 175.
text books “with an anti-working class bias”. The evidence suggests this was done in concert with CPGB members. Although not in the Party himself, Redgrove advocated working with communists, arguing that “Minority Movement cannot be ignored”. TLL General Secretary E.P. Bell remarked that if Redgrove served another term as President, the League would become a part of the NMM. When Redgrove was re-elected at the League’s December 1926 Conference, it was alongside David Capper as Vice Chairman and Sandy Duncan as General Secretary, further suggesting an organised attempt to bring the League into the NMM. In response, 24 leading Labour delegates walked out of the conference hall, and the TLL. They then formed the National Association of Labour Teachers (NALT), in order to “work wholeheartedly within the National Labour Party”.

Predictably, in summer 1927 the TLL was disaffiliated by the Labour Party, on the grounds that it had violated the conditions of its affiliation (namely to be a discussion group advocating Labour education policy, rather than a body operating inside the trade unions which did not). However, disaffiliation must also be seen in the context of the wider post-General Strike Labour leadership drive to root out communists. The League Executive resolved to fight against disaffiliation, but insisted that it would not be deterred from its efforts to build up a group of militant teachers inside the teachers’ unions, and would continue to press for change in the content of education, rather than just press for its expansion. However the united front was not yet totally broken. At its Conference in December 1927, the Executive made it clear that the League was still in practice working with Labour teachers, both inside and outside NALT, disaffiliation notwithstanding. For now, the Party’s teachers were remaining

47 ‘Unity the Keynote at Conference’, Educational Worker, 1, 3 (January 1927), p. 9.
48 Ibid.
51 For a detailed account of this, see Branson, History of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1927-1941, pp. 4-11.
52 See ‘Disaffiliated: Statement from the Executive Committee of the Teachers’ Labour League’, pp. 2-3.
loyal to the British Party leaders’ view at the 9th CPGB Congress two months earlier, where no change in attitude to the Labour Party emerged.\(^{54}\)

But just as the Congress was taking place, a telegram was on its way from the Comintern which announced that the CPGB should change its attitude. It had support from Pollitt and Dutt, who dissented from the opposition to the Comintern position on the Party’s Central Committee. Their ‘Minority Thesis’ was that the Labour Party was now an unadulterated capitalist party, and hence Lenin’s instruction to seek to work within it no longer applied.\(^{55}\) As has been demonstrated, by 1926 maintaining a link within the Labour Party had also ceased to be the priority for the communists on the TLL Executive. They were thus prepared for what was to come.

‘New Proletarian Elements who have come to the Front’? 1928-1929

By the summer of 1928 developments in world communism had overtaken the discussions going on inside the British Party. Under the influence of Stalin’s consolidation of power in the Soviet Union, the 6th World Congress of the Comintern announced that capitalism had entered a ‘Third Period’ of crisis and revolutionary opportunity. The thesis ran that capitalism was in decay, and mutating into fascism as a means of assuring its survival. Thus, cooperation between social democrats and communists in capitalist countries was to be regarded no longer as the way to win the working class. Instead, such practice was now to be considered a collaborationist prop to a collapsing social order. Moreover, left-wing social democrats were to be regarded with special contempt, since they were deemed ‘social fascists’, essential tools in the “subtle deception of the workers” by sounding left but leaning right.\(^{56}\)

Schoolteachers were among those in the CPGB most decisively agitating for this clean break with social democracy. During 1928, *Educational Worker* editorials by Sandy Duncan suggested that the ‘L’ in NALT might well stand for Liberal rather than Labour,\(^{57}\) and referred to its ACE as “perfectly

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\(^{57}\) ‘Where is NALT Going?’, *Educational Worker*, 2, 19 (June 1928), p. 2.
bourgeois”.

At the TLL’s 7th Annual Conference, held on January 5 and 6 1929, the Labour Party was formally denounced as a “shameful” purveyor of “pure and undiluted Liberalism”. In his address to Conference as incoming President, David Capper’s message was clear: the Labour Party was now a capitalist party, it had abandoned socialism. There was no discussion of re-affiliation in the Conference Report. In acting in this way, the TLL had ignored the advice of the EWI, who counselled after the split that the League attempt to re-affiliate to Labour Party. Moreover, the TLL’s rejection of Labour and its claim to exclusivity in leading the struggle of teachers for socialism predated by a fortnight the CPGB’s official adoption of its ‘Class Against Class’ policy at its 10th Congress. This categorised Labour as a “third bourgeois party” and stated that the CPGB was “the only force capable of leading the working class”.

But the TLL was not yet under the full control of communists. A resolution to withdraw League support from Labour Party candidates in the May 1929 general election was defeated. Nonetheless, the June 1929 editorial of the Educational Worker reiterated that there was no significant difference between Labour’s programme and that of the Liberals and Tories; it was “the Communist Party alone who tackled the fundamental issues” but “their time is not yet”. The use of ‘yet’ was symptomatic of Third Period communist confidence in the certainty of capitalist collapse even under a Labour Government, and the inevitability of the CPGB’s revolutionary triumph. Those who clung to the idea that a Labour Government was a step on the road towards the establishment of socialism were now denounced as the ‘right danger’, having broken with Marxism and the revolutionary working-class movement. So it was that the Educational Worker applied this maxim to its own members, asserting that “no teacher with an atom of class consciousness can possibly claim that the Labour Party is a

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59 ‘Conference Records a Year’s Solid Work’, Educational Worker, 3, 25 (February 1929), p. 4.
60 Presidential address by David Capper at TLL Conference, cited in Kean, Challenging the State?, p. 180.
63 ‘Conference Records a Year’s Solid Work’, Educational Worker, 3, 25 (February 1929), p. 4.
64 ‘Great Expectations’, Educational Worker, 3, 29 (June 1929), p. 2.
At the November meeting of the TLL Executive, it was agreed to recommend to the January 1930 Conference the deletion of any reference to the Labour Party in the League’s constitution. Its acceptance without any record of dissent indicates plainly that the TLL Executive was under the control of CPGB members pushing a Third Period analysis of the Labour Party. At least 5 (and probably more) of the 12 Executive members present at the November meeting were CPGB members.

During November 1929 the CPGB held an 11th Congress, at which a Comintern-inspired purge of the Central Committee took place, which was preceded by the installation of Harry Pollitt as Party leader. The CPGB’s poor showing during the general election, and a slump in membership to 3500 from 9000 at the start of 1927, was blamed upon the ‘right danger’ in the Central Committee who had initially resisted ‘Class Against Class’. The fact that Kath Duncan was among the new Central Committee who – in the words of the Comintern – represented “new proletarian elements who have come to the front ... who correctly express the revolutionary determination of the Party” and would “guarantee the carrying out of the Bolshevik line of the Comintern”, is further evidence that leading Party teachers were reliable advocates of Class Against Class. They were typical of a new generation of CPGB members who had asserted themselves in the Party by its 11th Congress. Both of the Duncans, Clarke, Ainley, Capper, and his wife Nan McMillan (born in 1906, also a teacher and TLL Executive Member who joined the Party in 1929) were born into working-class homes in the early 1900s, they were in their teens and early twenties at the time of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia and the CPGB’s foundation. They had not been members of any of the CPGB’s predecessors, and hence shared none of some older communists’ reservations about adopting Bolshevik organisational forms and strategy.

67 Minutes of NEC Meeting 9 November 1929, (Capper papers, box 1).
68 Capper, Duncan, Giles, Clarke and McMillan were all present. Also present were comrades Moore, Williams and Griffiths who were certainly members of the Party by 1932, if not already in 1929. See handwritten breakdown of CPGB fraction members’ levy payments, 13 November 1932 (Giles papers, box 2).
72 Giles, born in the early 1890s, and from an upper middle-class background, was an exception. Yet he was also free from any association with the CPGB’s predecessors. His entry into the CPGB was inspired by a visit to the
Their trajectories and outlook resemble other ‘young Turks’ who, encouraged by the Comintern, were ensuring that the CPGB was thoroughly cleansed of old habits.  

Yet in another way, Party schoolteachers were atypical of the 11th Congress generation. The ‘Bolshevisation’ of the Party from 1922 had led to a flight of many intellectuals, due to their disapproval of the CPGB’s growing obedience to the Comintern, and the rigidity of expression dictated by democratic centralism. This tendency only worsened during the Third Period, when “intellectuals were often regarded with suspicion, as conscious or unconscious carriers of capitalist ideas”. Although schoolteachers do not fit neatly into the ‘intellectual’ category, their status as ‘brain workers’ or professional workers, not to mention their position within a school system which was among the principal pieces of the ‘capitalist apparatus’, laid them open to the same pitfalls as intellectuals. Certainly, Ellen Wilkinson, a schoolteacher who had been present at the CPGB’s foundation and would later become the first Labour Minister of Education in 1945, left the Party in the 1924 due to the growing imposition of intellectual orthodoxy. Marjorie Pollitt also remembered that most professional workers were “almost ignored” during Class Against Class. But the CPGB’s Labour Monthly, whilst lamenting the “snobbishness” of the profession as a whole, did identify their interests as identical with the working-class children they taught and their parents. This, coupled with leading communist schoolteachers’ zeal for the new line and their generational position, explains the relative trust placed in Kath Duncan to take a position on a Central Committee otherwise dominated by industrial cadre.

USSR in 1925. He was thus also more open to the applicability of Bolshevik organisation and ideas to Britain. See his ‘Why I Joined the Communist Party’, p. 6.

73 For further discussion of such inter-generational tensions in the CPGB in its first decade, see Kevin Morgan, Gidon Cohen and Andrew Flinn, Communists and British Society 1920-1991 (London: Rivers Oram Press, 2007), pp. 233-240.


76 Pollitt, A Rebel Life, p. 40.

The faith of the Party leadership in its schoolteachers’ ability to correctly interpret Class Against Class and lead their profession towards communism was not to last. However at the time the TLL held its 8th Conference in January 1930, the CPGB teachers who now dominated its Executive were confident in their mission and moved decisively. According to the report, “[t]he lead came from the Executive ... [i]t showed, from a close analysis of the situation ... that a new line was necessary”. The Executive’s Political Report to the membership judged that the Labour Party was now engaged in “a complete rejection of the class struggle”. It was now the duty of the League to “find ways of convincing rank and file teachers that the Labour Government is the most dangerous enemy of teachers and other workers”. But finding such ways would not be easy.

**Sectarianism and Isolation, 1930**

The CPGB’s adoption of Class Against Class corresponded with a significant decline in its membership. The TLL had a similar experience. Its 1929 and 1930 Conferences were attended by just 43 and 40 delegates respectively, down from 54 delegates in 1928 and from 150 in 1926. In January 1927 overall League membership was 594, whereas by 1930 it was as low as 103 teachers, and the majority of these were in London (29), or individuals unattached to branches (54). When this is contrasted with an overall teaching workforce in England and Wales numbered at 301,679 in 1931; an NUT membership of 155,282 in the same year; and the TLL’s own (probably conservative) estimation

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80 In many histories of the CPGB, the decline in membership during this period is explained directly or significantly by the isolationist and sectarian nature of Class Against Class. See, for example, Branson, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain 1927-1941*, p. 48; Thompson, *The Good Old Cause*, p. 51; Beckett, *Enemy Within*, p. 34; and Hugo Dewar, *Communist Politics in Britain: The CPGB from its Origins to the Second World War* (London: Pluto Press, 1976), pp. 91-93. However other historians note that Party membership was declining before the adoption of Class Against Class, began to rise again from 1931, and was subject to geographical variations. See Worley, *Class Against Class*, pp. 12-13; and Andrew Thorpe, *Britain in the 1930s* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 43. Despite such nuances however, it is clear that the Third Period position had a detrimental impact on CPGB membership figures, even if some accounts have exaggerated it.
81 ‘Conference Records a Solid Year’s Work’, *Educational Worker*, 3, 25 (February 1929), p. 3; and ‘Success of Eighth Annual Conference’, *Educational Worker*, 3, 35 (February 1930), p. 9.
83 ‘Unity the Keynote at Conference’, *Educational Worker*, 1, 3 (January 1927), p. 9.
84 Gosden, *The Evolution of a Profession*, p.2; and p. 6.
that it had lost 200 members to NALT,\textsuperscript{85} communist teachers’ isolation during the Third Period is laid plain.

This was not surprising given the sectarian hostility espoused by the TLL. For not only was the Labour Party harangued as a reactionary force of capitalism, frequently the teaching profession was given the same treatment. Teachers were deemed to be in conscious collaboration with the bourgeoisie, “lag[ing] behind” in class consciousness, “cherish[ing] illusions as to the possibility of securing for themselves a privileged position”.\textsuperscript{86} In November 1929 a TLL political education class for teachers told them that they “acted as a disciplinary agent for the capitalist” and were thus to be “classed with the policeman and the soldier rather than the productive worker”.\textsuperscript{87} This binary application of the Third Period position even extended to the term ‘teacher’ itself. At the January 1930 Conference of the TLL, on behalf of the Manchester branch Ben Ainley moved that the League should drop the “rightist” words ‘teacher’ and ‘Labour’ from its title and become the ‘Educational Workers’ League’.\textsuperscript{88} Though the motion was defeated, the League Executive nonetheless included Ainley’s suggestion in a revised TLL constitution.\textsuperscript{89} Thus the communist-dominated leadership clearly sympathised with such a view. Indeed, Ainley’s biographer records that it “plainly reflected the mood of Communist teachers at the time” who were “caught up in the sectarianism of the period”. A TLL Special Conference that October approved the new name, and the organisation became the Educational Workers’ League (EWL). This move further isolated communist teachers:

The nett [sic] effect was entirely negative. Contacts were severed ... it took a number of years to establish ... trust and confidence with non-Communist teachers.\textsuperscript{90}

However, by now the TLL/EWL was not overly concerned with denting the trust and confidence of those outside of the CPGB. Whilst it never openly declared itself the Party’s teacher group, by 1930

\textsuperscript{87} ‘Are Teachers Workers?’, \textit{Educational Worker}, 3, 33 (November 1929), p. 16.
\textsuperscript{88} Unattributed and unpublished biography of Ben Ainley, p. 82.
\textsuperscript{89} ‘Success of Eighth Annual Conference’, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{90} Unattributed and unpublished biography of Ben Ainley, p. 82.
it operated as such.\textsuperscript{91} In the spring, the TLL’s Executive declared that the League should affiliate to the NMM, having received a written invitation to do so from the latter. A seat on the NMM Executive Bureau was offered if the TLL accepted its overtures.\textsuperscript{92} This clearly shows that the CPGB also saw the TLL as a mechanism by which Party teachers could spread a revolutionary message to the profession, indeed Harry Pollitt had been in contact with Party teachers about NMM membership as early as September 1929.\textsuperscript{93} In 1930, the TLL Executive voted by 18 votes to 1 abstention in favour, and called an October Special Conference chiefly to recommend it to the membership.\textsuperscript{94} Doubters among the TLL’s rank and file were dealt with unsympathetically. W.H. Spikes – a left-wing teacher trade unionist who later in the decade would become a member of the NUT Executive\textsuperscript{95} – counselled that whilst NMM affiliation might seem “logical”, if the League was to remain of real value it must take more teachers with it. Otherwise, it would “court extinction”. In reply, G.C.T. Giles put forward an unmistakably Third Period analysis: resisting NMM affiliation would cast the TLL into irrelevance, not the other way around, since it would demonstrate that the League was not keeping up with the supposed rising revolutionary temper of the workers. Employing a well-worn Comintern phrase, he stated that to duck affiliation would mean the League would “lag behind the masses”.\textsuperscript{96} At the Special Conference, after being addressed by the Assistant Secretary of the NMM and leading CPGB figure John Mahon, affiliation was approved with only one vote against. The \textit{Educational Worker} was at pains to point out that half of the delegates present were not members of the CPGB.\textsuperscript{97} But the dwindling membership of the League demonstrates that even if this claim is taken to be true, thanks to Class Against Class the TLL was still reaching fewer teachers than it ever had.

\textsuperscript{91} Nan McMillan, cited in Parsons, ‘Communism in the Professions’, p. 476.
\textsuperscript{92} ‘Should We Affiliate to the Minority Movement?’, \textit{Educational Worker}, 4, 39 (June 1930), p. 8.
\textsuperscript{93} According to the TLL Executive Committee minutes, 14 September 1929, correspondence had been received from Pollitt asking for the names and addresses of branch secretaries in order to appoint delegates to NMM meetings (Giles papers, box 2).
\textsuperscript{94} ‘Should We Affiliate to the Minority Movement?’, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{95} Griggs, \textit{The TUC and Education Reform}, p. 170.
\textsuperscript{96} See the letter, and Giles’ reply, in ‘Should We Affiliate to the Minority Movement?’, p. 8.
Suspicion, Surveillance and Self-Criticism, 1930-1931

As well as affiliating to the NMM, at the Special Conference the TLL adopted a new constitution and officially became the EWL. The journey towards this constitution highlights how closely enmeshed the EWL and CPGB were by summer 1930. It also shows how schoolteachers increasingly became subjected to suspicion from the CPGB leadership, accused of ‘deviations’ which required rigorous self-criticism. A June 1930 draft of the EWL constitution read:

In all Capitalist countries there are two classes, the ruling classes, who own and control the means of production and distribution, and the working class, who, in effect own nothing but their power to work. From this fact arises the existence of a pitiless and intensifying class struggle. The propertied class maintains its power to exploit the working class through the State, part of which is the educational machine ... Teachers are of necessity, therefore, paid agents of the Capitalist class.

Thus, the League’s mission was to work for the replacement of the capitalist state by a revolutionary workers’ government, and to replace the capitalist education system with the “Workers’ School”. But the NMM and the CPGB felt its teachers had overestimated their role, and unambiguously told them so. At a meeting of the TLL Executive that September, Sandy Duncan, acting on the advice of “a leading member of the Minority Movement” declared that:

The League appears to have taken upon itself the whole burden of leading the social revolution ....

That is not our job. Our job is to bring teachers into the ranks of the League, to help them realise their common interests with the rest of the workers, and to identify themselves with working-class struggle.

To do this, the Party’s teachers were told to focus instead on “a broad and simple programme of economic demands” and the “day to day issues confronting the rank and file teacher”. The Executive, in a self-critical statement admitted its tendency to “indulge in ‘revolutionary’ talk” and thanked the NMM for bringing this to its attention. A new constitution was prepared for the Special Conference to

reflect the necessary changes;\textsuperscript{100} the description of teachers as was amended to “involuntary ... agents of the Capitalist State” and it was added that “Teachers ... have common interests with the working class [my emphases]”. The reference to the Workers’ School was dropped from the League’s aims, as was the pledge to establish help establish a Revolutionary Workers’ Government. Instead, as per the NMM’s advice, there was a list of specific, concrete demands such as a £200 minimum salary; professional equality for men and women; security of tenure; improvements to equipment, accommodation, recreational and welfare facilities; and a maximum class size of 30.\textsuperscript{101} These changes were evidence of the tight supervision now being exerted by the CPGB centre over its teachers. The fact that John Mahon spoke at the Special Conference where the revised constitution was agreed suggests that he was the leading member of the NMM who provided the criticisms of it. Furthermore, the Political Bureau of the CPGB itself had also intervened to amend the constitution before the Special Conference.\textsuperscript{102} It was in the late summer of 1930 – around the same time that Sandy Duncan had been rebuked by the NMM over the League’s constitution – that Harry Pollitt had returned to Britain after attending one of the Comintern’s British Commissions. He did so convinced that his Party’s failure to capitalise on soaring unemployment and a bedevilled Labour Government was due not to flaws in Class Against Class itself, but rather the remote way in which the line was being communicated to British workers.\textsuperscript{103} Plainly the Party’s teachers were no exception. Pollitt’s remedy was a programme of immediate, practical demands in the form of a pamphlet titled the \textit{Workers’ Charter}.\textsuperscript{104} It is no coincidence that the latter was pushed in the same issue of the \textit{Educational Worker} which had repudiated its own draft constitution, and that in the following issue the editorial was given over to the EWL’s own ‘Charter for Scholars and Teachers’.\textsuperscript{105}

Following this reorientation, the EWL did indeed attempt to get more involved with the day to day concerns of schoolteachers, only to again to fall under leadership suspicion for ‘right deviations’.

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{101} Educational Workers’ League constitution, November 1930 (Giles papers, box 2).
\textsuperscript{102} ‘Resolution of the Party Fraction of the Educational Workers’ League’, n.d., though its reference to the Special Conference being in the past means it is likely to be 1931 (Giles papers, box 2).
\textsuperscript{103} Morgan, \textit{Harry Pollitt}, p. 74.
The League began offering support to outside groups also campaigning on one of its major issues: cuts to teachers’ salaries. In 1931 the Burnham Committee – the system set up in 1919 to negotiate a national salary scale for teachers, including both representatives of Local Education Authorities (LEAs) and teachers’ unions – was renegotiating its 1925 agreement. The LEAs were pressing for reductions, but in any event the negotiations were cut short by the national financial crisis of 1931. By 31 July of that year the Committee on National Expenditure set up by the Labour Government recommended a 20 per cent pay cut for teachers. A rank and file movement which emerged to urge for more militancy over the proposed cuts was the Young Teachers’ Movement (YTM). It was open to student teachers and those with less than 12 years’ service, regardless of union, sex, type of school or pay grade. Given the fact that the YTM was highly critical of teachers’ union leaders’ suppression of militancy over salaries, the EWL welcomed it as an ally. Dave Capper and Nan McMillan addressed a YTM meeting in July and offered the League’s support, and the YTM manifesto was published in the Educational Worker. Yet there was tension among Party teachers over this move. The YTM’s appeal to youth was seen by some as a negation of the fundamental class basis of the struggle. The EWL Executive had been alert to this, and wrote an ‘open letter’ to the YTM urging it to widen its programme and to sign up to the Workers’ Charter. But the YTM evidently did not heed this message to the satisfaction of some. Kath Duncan raised the issue twice with Capper to no avail, after which she wrote to G.C.T. Giles expressing her alarm at YTM documents and urging that they should be brought to the attention of the CPGB Fraction in the EWL. The Fraction had been formed at some point during 1931 and by mid-November Giles was its leader. It reported to the NMM and CPGB centres, and was an attempt by communist teachers in the League to tighten up their organisation and ensure that its direction remained in accordance with the Party line, probably a reaction to an increase in the League’s membership from 103

106 “The Young Teachers’ Movement”, Educational Worker, 5, 48 (June 1931), pp. 2-3.
107 ‘Young Teachers Give the Lead’, Educational Worker, 5, 49 (July 1931), p. 12.
108 ‘A Call to Young Teachers’, Educational Worker, 5, 48 (June 1931), p. 11.
110 Letter from Kath Duncan to G.C.T. Giles, 22 November 1931 (Giles papers, box 2).
to 162 during the year, since most of the new recruits had come from outside of the CPGB, including from the YTM.\textsuperscript{111}

Kath Duncan’s caution about the YTM’s incompatibility with the CPGB’s line was shared by the Party leadership. It issued “strong ... criticism” for “capitulation to reformist elements” and a “fascist approach of youth versus age” which “made no attempt to explain the issue of class against class”. In response the Fraction pledged to avoid a repetition of such “by maintaining closer contact with the [N]MM and Party Centre for advice and guidance”.\textsuperscript{112} In December 1931 the Fraction was again reprimanded over its proposals to work with the Acton Teachers’ Defence Organisation and to join up with a campaign for teachers’ income tax to be spread out to deflect the worst effects of the salary cut. The CPGB Executive Committee stated the teachers had “allowed themselves to be tricked” by “entirely reformist” strategies, and was moved to warn that the “Party fraction in the EWL must alter their attitudes to the leading committees of the Party or effective leadership is impossible”.\textsuperscript{113} As 1931 ended then, the Party’s teachers were no longer insulated from the suspicion accorded to other communists in white collar occupations. As John McIlroy puts it such cadres were, “[i]n the eyes of many members in 1931 ... fickle and individualistic, lacking the natural discipline attributed to proletarians”.\textsuperscript{114} Though not everyone in the Fraction agreed with the Party leadership’s criticisms,\textsuperscript{115} like many communist intellectuals, the teachers ultimately toed the line through recantation and self-criticism:

[The] swing … from extreme sectarianism to a liquidationist policy is acknowledged by the Party fraction and the EWL Executive as anti-working class. The Party fraction and the EWL condemns these deviations and pledges itself to fight such manifestations of what must be described as the ‘right-danger’ on the one hand, and ‘left’ sectarianism on the other hand.\textsuperscript{116}

\textsuperscript{111} Handwritten breakdown of TLL membership numbers for 1930 and 1931 (Giles papers, box 2).
\textsuperscript{112} ‘Resolution of the EWL Fraction on the Young Teachers’ Movement’, n.d. (Giles papers, box 2).
\textsuperscript{113} Letter from CPGB Executive Committee to the Party Fraction of the EWL, 15 December 1931 (Giles papers, box 2).
\textsuperscript{114} McIlroy, ‘The Establishment of Intellectual Orthodoxy and the Stalinization of British Communism 1928-33’, p. 197.
\textsuperscript{115} A letter from Fraction member Owen Morgan to G.C.T. Giles on 21 December 1931 disagreed with the Party’s position on the income tax campaign; and according to Party Fraction meeting minutes of 31 January 1932, Comrade Cooke registered a complaint about the letter from the CPGB Executive Committee on the issue (Giles papers, box 2).
\textsuperscript{116} ‘Resolution of the Party Fraction of the Educational Workers’ League’, 1931 (Giles papers, box 2).
Yet in other ways, communist schoolteachers were subject to even more scrutiny than intellectuals, in that they were also subject to the pitfalls of ‘correctly’ applying Class Against Class to trade union work.

‘Independent Leadership’ and the Teachers’ Unions, 1929-1931

At its 10th Congress, the CPGB listed one of its principal tasks as the “fight for the independent leadership of the Party in economic struggles”. At that time, this was to be conducted from inside the existing trade union movement. However, this was not consistent with an interpretation of the new line emerging from the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU), the body to which the NMM was affiliated. In late 1928 its Russian General Secretary argued that communists should be prepared to lead workers’ struggles without the trade union movement, and, if necessary, in opposition to it. This was largely welcomed by French and German communists, but the CPGB leadership felt the move was wholly inappropriate to British conditions. After dragging its feet and facing criticism at the 10th Comintern Executive (ECCI) Plenum in July 1929, eventually the British leaders fell in line. The new position was confirmed at the 11th Congress.

By far the biggest teachers’ union in 1929 was the NUT. It had begun as a union of elementary schoolteachers, and since elementary schools were then the only avenue of mass education, the NUT was home of the bulk of the profession. However the slow expansion of state secondary education meant that by the 1920s there were a growing numbers of secondary teachers in the NUT. Other organisations, such as the National Association of Schoolmasters (NAS) and the National Union of Women Teachers (NUWT) had seceded from the NUT in 1922 and 1920 respectively, over the issue of equal pay: the NAS because they were aggrieved at the NUT’s support for it, and the NUWT because they felt the that support was inadequate. There was also the Association of Assistant Mistresses

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117 CPGB, The New Line, p. 78; and pp. 91-92.
118 For a good summary of the emergence of the new line towards the trade unions in the RILU, and the NMM’s eventual acceptance of it, see Martin, Communism and the British Trade Unions, pp. 106-121.
119 CPGB, Resolutions of the 11th Congress, pp. 22-23.
120 For the early history of the NUT, see Tropp, The School Teachers, pp. 108-159.
(AAM) and the Assistant Masters’ Association (AMA), whose membership was reserved to teachers in fee-paying grammar schools. Since most schoolteachers and most leading Party teachers belonged to it, before the CPGB’s 11th Congress the TLL organised mainly inside the NUT. But they did so reluctantly. As early as 1927, the Educational Worker concluded that the NUT was not a union due to its refusal to affiliate with the TUC. Like the break with Labour, it was younger elements among the NMM and CPGB had encouraged a break with the existing trade unions. Since the key positions in the TLL/EWL were occupied by a similar generation, and given their lack of faith in the NUT as a ‘proper’ union, it is unsurprising communist teachers keenly adopted the new line to union work. The same month as the 11th Congress, a TLL leaflet distributed to all NUT delegates called for the formation of a separate union for all teachers which would bring them into the ranks of the working-class. A similar attitude was displayed towards the NAS and NUWT: devoting so much time to arguing about gender interests was deemed acquiescence to capitalism by substituting the class war for a war of the sexes. At the TLL’s 8th annual Conference in January 1930 a vote to “break from working to win to an open fight against the teachers’ organisations” was carried. The TLL was “destined to become the Education Workers’ Trade Union”. This was incorporated into the 1930 draft constitution, laying plain the ambition and confidence of CPGB teachers that the League would itself become a ‘red’ trade union, along the lines of the recently-formed United Clothing Workers’ Union and the United Mineworkers of Scotland. Communist teachers’ vision of the TLL as a ‘red’ union was not a reluctant result of NMM or King Street diktat.

122 An important exception was Nan McMillan, who was prominent in the NUWT.
123 See ‘The Teachers’ Labour League and Organised Teachers’, Educational Worker, 2, 13 (November 1927), pp. 4-5.
124 See, for example, John Mahon’s ‘Revolutionary Work in the Trade Unions’, Labour Monthly, 11, 6 (June 1929), pp. 349-358.
125 Unattributed and unpublished biography of Ben Ainley, p. 82.
130 For further discussion of the formation and fortunes of the UCWU and the UMS, see Worley, Class Against Class, pp. 162-169.
If anything, the Party leadership restrained their ambition. The TLL incorporated the new line on the unions into its constitution around the very time that King Street was beginning to re-examine it. The failure of the new line to provide effective leadership or make lasting membership and organisational gains by spring 1930,131 coupled with RILU criticism of the British application of the new line at its 5th Conference that summer, led to an acknowledgement that “the line of independent leadership ... has been wrongly interpreted as meaning the abandonment of work within the reformist trade unions”.132 Instead, a ‘united front from below’ was to be adopted, whereby concentrated effort inside the reformist unions, based on concrete demands arising from workers’ day to day experiences, would bring the latter towards communism. This was in effect an abandonment of independent leadership, but this was not then admitted.133 The influence of this change of direction on the Party’s teachers was soon apparent. John Mahon’s summer 1930 revision of the TLL’s proposed new constitution also had consequences for trade union work. Mahon had been a keen young advocate of independent leadership, but the RILU’s dilution of the principle for Britain in 1930, and the failure of the strategy to advance communist trade unions changed his perspective.134 He clearly pressed this view onto Sandy Duncan. “Do we seriously contemplate in the near future ‘the formation of a single Trade Union for all Educational Workers?’” asked Duncan rhetorically in the Educational Worker after a meeting with Mahon. He continued that “this is a very dim prospect which has no place in our constitution”.135 Instead Duncan proposed a new version of the constitution which pledged to work “with teachers in the schools and in the professional organisations”.136 The word ‘existing’ was removed from in front of ‘professional organisations’ in an obvious scaling back of the League’s ambitions. Thus, by September 1930, communist teachers’ tendencies towards red unionism were nipped in the bud by the Party leadership.137

131 This was starkly exposed by the Bradford woollen strike of spring 1930. For a useful summation of this, see Keith Laybourn and Dylan Murphy, Under the Red Flag: A History of Communism in Britain (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1999), pp. 66-67.
133 Martin, Communism in the British Trade Unions, p. 156.
134 Ibid.
137 Unattributed and unpublished biography of Ben Ainley, p. 82.
The ‘Charter for Scholars and Teachers’ published in the last *Educational Worker* of 1930 was, then, the *Workers’ Charter* for the educational sphere. The latter toned down talk of revolution in favour of “immediate demands to help the workers find a way to achieve ... unity”, did not insist that workers must accept the entire NMM programme, and was designed for discussion *inside* reformist trade union branches.\(^\text{138}\) So too was the ‘Charter for Scholars and Teachers’:

Practically the whole of this programme is either included in or implied by the official policy of the teachers’ organisations [...] It is our job to rouse teachers ... to break through the conspiracy of silence on the vital issues and so to force a fight. Up to now we have failed to do that. Now ... we must find a way to win the confidence of our colleagues in the staff room and in the local associations.\(^\text{139}\)

David Capper’s General Secretary’s address to the EWL thus summarised the task for 1931 as “[i]nto the Unions!”\(^\text{140}\) But, as shown earlier in this chapter, during that year, the League’s attempts to cooperate with rank and file teachers’ movements in response to the salary crisis saw the NMM and King Street condemn them for ‘rightist’ tendencies. Despite the fact that it had been John Mahon himself who had pushed the EWL back inside the NUT, the same happened again:

The tendency to formal trade unionism ... the absence of independent leadership of the EWL and the mere passing of resolutions in the teachers’ unions must be challenged. It is necessary for the EWL itself to call meetings and organise demonstrations of teachers ... as a means of intensifying the fighting spirit among the teachers, the recruiting of members to the EWL and the Communist Party.\(^\text{141}\)

Patently, by the end of 1931 CPGB teachers’ attempts at independent leadership both outside and inside the trade unions had failed to significantly boost the EWL’s membership. This was despite the interventions of leading NMM and CPGB figures, and the considerable enthusiasm and rigorous self-criticism of Party teachers themselves. It had been a tricky position for the CPGB’s teachers and the

\(^{138}\) Pollitt, *The Workers’ Charter*, p. 8; and p. 12.

\(^{139}\) ‘A Programme of Action’, *Educational Worker*, 4, 42 (November-December 1930), p.3.


\(^{141}\) ‘Resolution of the Party Fraction of the Educational Workers’ League’, 1931.
EWL to negotiate: the Party Fraction was expected to exercise both “independent leadership” and “mass work” simultaneously, but had yet to achieve either satisfactorily in the eyes of the NMM and the Party. This was not easy, as evidenced by G.C.T. Giles’ hand-written annotation of “How?” in the margin of the document containing this criticism.142 Luckily for the CPGB’s teachers however, Harry Pollitt shared the same frustration about the direction of communist industrial work since late 1929, and by 1932 he resolved to change it decisively.143 Before considering this change, it is necessary to examine the extent to which the early-to-mid Third Period’s rejection of reformist strategies extended into the classroom as well as politics and economics.

**Class Against Class and the Classroom, 1929-1932**

Under Class Against Class, the CPGB tended to dismiss existing institutions and forms of culture as capitalist dope aimed at perpetuating the present order.144 Education was no exception. The Party’s rupture with traditional Labour Movement organs of adult education during the 1920s in favour of developing a ‘revolutionary’ alternative has already been discussed (see introduction). Yet as has been shown, when it came to the education of children, the communist schoolteachers entered the Third Period undoubtedly open to the viability of offering an alternative ‘socialist’ or ‘progressive’ education under capitalism. Previous accounts of the TLL/EWL have concluded that this ceased during Class Against Class.145 As Ken Jones argues:

> The theory produced at this time tended towards a rigorously functional view of education: it was there to defend, slavishly and harshly, the established order. It allowed no space for debate or dissident activity, no room for serious reform ... [T]he unchangeable ideological work of teachers linked them to the interests of the state. They would break from those interests only through participation in the political and economic struggles of the working class.146

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143 Morgan, *Harry Pollitt*, p. 78.
Certainly, at times, the TLL/EWL projected a view that attempts to ameliorate capitalist bias in the curriculum or pedagogy were pointless; a socialist revolution was a fundamental pre-requisite for a socialist education policy.\textsuperscript{147} Typifying this approach, a book by the labour historian and pedagogue Mark Starr, \textit{Lies and Hate in Education},\textsuperscript{148} was praised in a review by CPGB teacher A.L. Morton (later to be a celebrated Marxist historian) for its exposition of anti-working class bias of education under capitalism, but Morton was scathing that Starr saw a way out other than the necessary “dispossession of the class in whose name the lies are issued”.\textsuperscript{149} Attempting socialist moderations of practice inside capitalist society was even deemed a form of class collaboration, a symptom of sentimental bourgeois delusion.\textsuperscript{150} This especially included independent ‘progressive’ schools that grew during the 1920s and 1930s, aimed at training pupils in social responsibility and the common good.\textsuperscript{151} Such schools, run by left-leaning liberal educationalists such as John Haden Badley, A.S. Neill and Bertrand Russell\textsuperscript{152} were dismissed as “experiments in the void”.\textsuperscript{153}

The reorientation of the TLL/EWL around its new constitution and the ‘Charter for Scholars and Teachers’ during 1930 and 1931 arguably exacerbated the tendency to dismiss the prospect of qualitative educational reform under capitalism. The Charter consisted of five slimmed down demands: uniform conditions in all schools; classes of 30; adequate buildings, equipment and playing fields; the extension of social services in schools; and a nationwide system of nursery schools – was designed to “show up the idealistic humbug of the present day talk of educational progress” by highlighting the inability of capitalism to deliver even these modest proposals.\textsuperscript{154} As education could not progress under

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{148} See Mark Starr, \textit{Lies and Hate in Education} (London: The Hogarth Press, 1929).
\item \textsuperscript{149} A.L. Morton, \textit{Educational Worker}, 3, 35 (February 1930), p. 7.
\item \textsuperscript{150} ‘Vic Conley’s Schooldays’, \textit{Educational Worker}, 4, 40 (July 1930), pp. 15-16.
\item \textsuperscript{151} An excellent summation of this ‘progressive’ liberal educational approach and its influence can be found in Gary McCulloch and Tom Woodin, ‘Learning and Liberal Education: The Case of the Simon Family, 1912-1939’, \textit{History of Education}, 36, 2 (April 2010), pp. 187-190.
\item \textsuperscript{153} Nan McMillan, cited in Parsons, ‘Communism in the Professions’, p. 480.
\item \textsuperscript{154} ‘A Programme of Action’, \textit{Educational Worker}, 4, 42 (November-December 1930), pp. 2-3.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
capitalism, the EWL looked to the Soviet Union as an example instead.\textsuperscript{155} In the decade or so after the Bolshevik revolution, Soviet teachers and educational theorists were to a large extent operating in the dark. Marx and Engels had advanced only a vague commitment to a ‘polytechnic’ education which advocated combining academic education with industrial production. Moreover the geographically vast and economically destitute state of many areas of the USSR complicated matters further. Hence there was much variation in practice.\textsuperscript{156} But Soviet schools were generally influenced by progressive western educational theory, including the work of the American John Dewey, who interpreted polytechnic education as a thorough understanding of the economic, political and social context of production.\textsuperscript{157} Another influence was Helen Pankhurst’s Dalton Plan, which substituted a teacher-led pedagogy for one in which students worked on assignments individually or in small groups at their own pace.\textsuperscript{158} Two TLL/EWL delegations went to Russia to investigate Soviet schools, and their impressions were published in both book and pamphlet form. These did discern a pedagogy based on ‘doing’. Schoolteachers were not there to impart knowledge or keep discipline, but acted as “guides and advisers trying to lead the children both in lessons and school administration to conditions of freedom” using a ‘project plan’ similar to the Dalton Plan. Discipline was dealt with by student-elected discipline committees, and students were also present on school pedagogical and management committees. In line with Dewey’s theories and the polytechnic principle, schools worked in close association with industry or agriculture. Instead of the study of separate subjects, the curriculum was based upon a thematic ‘complex principle’ which hinged around the study of natural environmental phenomena, man’s struggle to control them and the social characteristics that resulted from this struggle.\textsuperscript{159} Despite praise for such theory and method, the TLL/EWL did not attempt to explain how they could be applied

\textsuperscript{155} Clause 5 of the EWL constitution, November 1930 (Giles papers, box 2).
in England. It was “a task only made possible of achievement by the workers having secured the power to do it”.\textsuperscript{160}

In view of the evidence above, it is understandable that previous scholars have concluded that Class Against Class meant British communists dismissed the viability of meaningful qualitative educational reform under capitalism. But closer analysis reveals a more complicated picture. Leading Party teachers often interpreted the line differently. Certainly, when it first adopted Class Against Class, David Capper, speaking on behalf of the TLL Executive felt it “imperative” that the League “distinguish our own policy of definitely Socialist education” since the Labour Government had clearly gone over to Capital.\textsuperscript{161}

Even after the adoption of the ‘Charter for Scholars and Teachers’, the TLL/EWL still pressed the need to reform the content and methods of the schools under capitalism. This admittedly did not get beyond ‘exposure’ of their most objectionable aspects: the imperialism of Empire Day, the opiate effects of religious instruction, the study of kings and queens in History, and the “hopelessly feudal and reactionary” writings of Shakespeare in English lessons.\textsuperscript{162} But this had also been the way of the TLL in the years before Class Against Class. As Jones admits, from the League’s earliest days, discussions of educational content were “valued more for their ability to serve as clear standard-bearers of opposition than for their subtlety as instruments of explanation”.\textsuperscript{163} The effect of the Third Period was to exacerbate this tendency, rather than to sweep such questions off the agenda.

The TLL/EWL also argued that some changes to practice inside the capitalist classroom could actually assist the victory of socialism by developing children’s class consciousness and weakening capitalism’s ‘hold’ over them. Co-education was deemed “essential to aid men and women to live harmoniously ... and so strengthen a united movement for workers’ freedom”,\textsuperscript{164} whilst secular teaching

\textsuperscript{160} TLL, Schools, Teachers and Scholars in Soviet Russia, p. xiii
\textsuperscript{161} ‘ Eighth Annual Conference of the Teachers’ Labour League – Class Against Class’, Educational Worker, 3, 34 (December 1929), p. 9.
\textsuperscript{162} See, for example, ‘Banish Shakespeare from the Schools?’, Educational Worker, 3, 29 (June 1929), pp. 8-9; and ‘The Good School’ feature, which ran during early 1931, in Educational Worker, 4, 43, (January 1931), p. 7; 4, 44 (February 1931), p. 3; and 4, 46 (April 1931), p. 7.
\textsuperscript{163} Jones, Beyond Progressive Education, p. 118.
\textsuperscript{164} V.A. Hyett, ‘Co-Education’, Educational Worker, 4, 40 (July 1930), p. 3.
in schools was necessary to end the “clerical domination over the minds of the young in the interests of the existing social system”,\textsuperscript{165} or “[a]s a means to the development of the consciousness of the workers”.\textsuperscript{166} As late as summer 1931, the League’s Education Committee also suggested socialist approaches to discipline and assessment could be applied in capitalist schools. A long report on ‘Discipline and Self Government’ was spread across two issues of the \textit{Educational Worker} in June and July. Whilst repressive methods of discipline present in English classrooms were an inherent symptom of the capitalist system, and “bourgeois intellectual” responses by progressive educationalists who advocated the completely ‘free’ child were criticised, there was still scope for the deployment of ‘socialist discipline’ under capitalism. It would enable pupils to “obtain the training ... necessary for the socialist state”.\textsuperscript{167} Although the ideal socialist discipline could not exist under capitalism:

\begin{quote}
[w]e must not ... be content with an attitude of mere condemnation of every change until the social revolution comes. We must support every change that tends to weaken the hold of capitalist society on school. We must support every attempt to obtain part of our ideals even in capitalist society.\textsuperscript{168}
\end{quote}

The EWL’s challenging of Third Period ‘logic’ was sufficient to attract rebuke from the NMM. After John Mahon attended a meeting of the EWL Executive in November 1931, he wrote to its members insisting that there needed to be a “complete overhaul” of EWL work in favour of economic questions.\textsuperscript{169} As well as the Executive, Mahon singled out the \textit{Educational Worker} for its intransigence over this issue. Like the TLL/EWL Executive, since 1926, the journal had been in the hands of the League’s communists,\textsuperscript{170} hence the Executive and the \textit{Educational Worker’s} digression from the officially-approved, narrowly economic application of Class Against Class was also that of some of the CPGB’s most prominent schoolteachers. Furthermore, for Mahon, expressing such digression in the EWL’s official organ was significant. Its circulation was much greater than the League’s membership,

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\item[\textsuperscript{165}] David Capper, ‘Selling the Pass: To all Delegates and Visitors to the NUT Conference’, 22 April 1930 (Giles papers, box 1).
\item[\textsuperscript{166}] CPGB education policy for 1929 general election, in \textit{Educational Worker}, 3, 28 (May 1929), p. 3.
\item[\textsuperscript{167}] ‘Discipline and Self Government’, \textit{Educational Worker}, 5, 48 (June 1931), pp. 8-12.
\item[\textsuperscript{168}] ‘Discipline and Self Government’, \textit{Educational Worker}, 5, 49 (July 1931), p. 11.
\item[\textsuperscript{169}] Letter from John Mahon to the EWL on behalf of the NMM Secretariat, 19 November 1931 (Giles papers, box 1).
\item[\textsuperscript{170}] Lawn, ‘Organised Teachers and the Labour Movement’, p. 271.
\end{itemize}
it was the EWL’s “shock force” in making sure the Party line was projected correctly.\footnote{Letter from John Mahon to the EWL on behalf of the NMM Secretariat, 19 November 1931.} If Mahon was aware of the importance of the *Educational Worker* in this regard, then Party schoolteachers surely must also have been. Therefore, the survival of discussions about of qualitative educational reform in the journal is significant. And on this issue there was no instant recantation, unlike with the YTM situation which occurred at the same time (see earlier in the chapter). Three months after his original letter, Mahon was still unsatisfied, to the extent that he was moved to insist that agenda of future meetings of the *Educational Worker* Editorial Committee must be submitted to the NMM Secretariat for approval.\footnote{Letter from G.C.T. Giles to EWL Party Fraction, 22 February 1932 (Giles papers, box 2).}

Therefore, it is too simplistic to assert that the Third Period all-but liquidated the radical educational heritage of the TLL/EWL in favour of narrow economic trade union objectives.

This is not to deny that the drawing of the EWL into the NMM and *Workers Charter* certainly intensified its economic role and restricted the amount of time it could spend on questions of educational theory and practice. Nor did all leading CPGB schoolteachers resist a narrow economic application of *Class Against Class*. At a meeting of the Party Fraction the month after Mahon’s letter, Kath Duncan too argued that the EWL was “dissipating [its] energies on too many fronts” and insisted that “the primary purpose of the EWL is economic”.\footnote{EWL Party Fraction minutes, 6 December 1931 (Giles papers, box 2).} It is significant that Duncan also sided with the NMM leadership over the issue of the YTM. Indeed, it was likely she who brought the matter to the attention of the NMM and Party leadership in frustration, for there is no record of Giles raising her issues before the Fraction as she requested of him. It should also be remembered that Duncan was also present on the Comintern-approved CPGB Central Committee, elected at the 11\textsuperscript{th} Congress to “systematically struggle ... to get every member clear on the line of the Party”.\footnote{CPGB, *Resolutions of the 11\textsuperscript{th} Congress*, p. 47.} She was also a member of the London District Committee, alongside her husband Sandy.\footnote{Fred Copeman, *Reason in Revolt* (London: Blandford Press, 1948), p. 71.} Fred Copeman – Invergordon mutineer, prominent National Unemployed Workers’ Movement activist and also then a member of the Party’s Central Committee – was close to the Duncans, having lived with them for over two years. In his view, there
were no two members accepted its line more loyally.\footnote{ibid, pp. 71-72.} Dave Capper also complained to the Fraction that Sandy Duncan often did not see the relationship between EWL work and Party work,\footnote{EWL Party Fraction minutes, 15 November 1931 (Giles papers, box 2).} suggesting that Duncan felt that the latter was something done to the EWL rather than through it. A letter from Fraction Bureau member Owen Morgan also outlines his frustration with the way the Duncans were “hypercritical” of comrades in the Fraction.\footnote{Letter from Owen Morgan to G.C.T. Giles, 26 April 1932 (Giles papers, box 2).} Therefore, the Duncans had both the zeal and the opportunity to act as King Street’s eyes over the ‘correctness’ of the EWL’s line, and the evidence suggests they did so on more than one occasion. But the fact that the Duncans and the NMM felt the need to ‘police’ the EWL in this way, and the resistance shown to them, again complicates the view that communist schoolteachers simply jettisoned their educational work under Class Against Class. It would take another shift in line to do that.

\textbf{Towards a New Line and an Economy of Education, 1932-1934}

By the end of 1931, the NMM’s campaign around the \textit{Workers’ Charter} was winding down. So too was the EWL’s ‘Charter for Scholars and Teachers’. At that year’s NUT Conference, the EWL urged the rank and file to force the union’s leaders to support the Charter’s suggestions, but its amendments were defeated, and the NUT Executive was able to enter the upcoming renegotiation of the Burnham Award with a free hand.\footnote{‘Trade Unionist’, ‘The NUT Conference’, \textit{Educational Worker}, 5, 47 (May 1931), p. 3.} These negotiations were then usurped by the national financial crisis, the consequent fall of the Labour Government in August 1931. The Conservative-dominated National Government which replaced it rushed through a National Economy Act the following month, which allowed for the withdrawal that October of the Board of Education 50% expenditure grant to LEAs and the reduction of teachers’ salaries by 10%. Encouraged by John Mahon,\footnote{Letter from John Mahon to the EWL on behalf of the NMM Secretariat, 19 November 1931} the EWL’s answer to this surrender by the NUT leadership was to encourage rank and file unity against cuts to education spending by forming ‘Defence Committees’ involving teachers and parents at school level.\footnote{EWL, ‘A Message to Members of the National Union of Teachers: The Ten Per Cent “Victory”’, 1932 (Giles papers, box 2); and ‘1931 and 1932’, \textit{Educational Worker}, 5, 54 (January 1932), p. 2} But just at that time, an adjustment in the CPGB’s line on trade union work occurred which was to more fundamentally redirect
its energies towards rank and file work *through* the workers’ existing institutions. In January 1932, as a result of an ECCI British Commission convened the previous month, the CPGB published the ‘January Resolution’, which called upon its activists to decisively return to work in the established trade unions.\(^{182}\)

This clearly came as a relief to the leaders of the EWL Party Fraction. Owen Morgan contributed a central article to the March 1932 *Educational Worker* bluntly accepting that “[e]very EWL member must carry out this work, to disregard it renders a member of little use to the EWL. The official leaders have reached their place and power by steady plodding in the branch and school. This was a clear shift towards not just winning the union’s lower organs, but positions of leadership. Defence Committees were not mentioned.\(^{183}\) This was in line with the thinking of Pollitt, who had always been a less than enthusiastic advocate of Class Against Class in trade union work; but it predated even his decisive exhortation to take the unions out of the hands of the existing leadership, which did not occur until summer 1932. Such a move was resisted by Rajani Palme Dutt and others as a revision too far.\(^{184}\) but Pollitt was ultimately successful in getting that November’s 12\(^{th}\) Party Congress to resolve that it was the duty of Party members to “aim at the winning of all elective posts and representative positions” inside the existing trade unions.\(^{185}\)

As well as Morgan, G.C.T. Giles needed little encouragement to adopt this revision. In Giles’ view, the “greatest defect” of the EWL was a lack of contact with the mass of teachers in the trade unions.\(^{186}\) He stood for the NUT Executive in that Easter’s elections, although ill health prevented him from campaigning and he was unsuccessful.\(^{187}\) But the desire of leading communist schoolteachers to work inside the teacher trade union machinery was clear. Pollitt’s changes to Party organisation

\(^{184}\) See Morgan, *Harry Pollitt*, pp. 78-80 for an engaging summary of the debate between Pollitt and Dutt.
\(^{186}\) G.C.T. Giles, handwritten note titled ‘CC Resolution and the EWL’, n.d., but a sentence which reads “transformation of TU branches from organs of class collaboration to organs of class struggle” is a verbatim replication of the 1932 January Resolution. (Giles papers, box 2).
\(^{187}\) ‘In the Associations’, *Educational Worker*, 5, 56 (March 1932), p. 6.
intended to cement the new direction in favour of the trade unions were replicated swiftly by communists in the EWL. Just as Pollitt insisted that members should be attached to a local Party organisation and held personally responsible for their Labour Movement work, so on 22 January 1932 Giles reorganised the EWL Party Fraction into teachers’ cells, like factory cells for industrial workers, which were to be attached to local NUT associations. They were required to submit a monthly report on their activities to Giles. By the following month there were nine CPGB teachers’ cells in London, each containing between 3 and 5 Party teachers.

The decisive return to work in the trade unions released the EWL to some degree from the isolation it had endured during the earlier Third Period. By summer 1932 membership doubled to around 300 teachers. The League’s provincial presence was also strengthened. But the growth in trade union activity placed onerous demands on communist teachers which restricted the amount of time they could devote to the EWL. Giles was regularly compelled to chase down overdue reports and levies, and to urge attendance at Fraction meetings. In response to one such reprimand a CPGB teacher in Leyton complained that it was unreasonable to expect him to attend all EWL meetings, given the agitational work now also required in the unions. A Leeds-based Fraction member expressed a similar weariness with the proliferation of meetings, to the extent that he/she would have to allow their EWL activity to lapse. Edith Edwards of the Manchester EWL branch, also advised Giles that the most pressing need of communist teachers was to widen their contacts among the profession, something which could only be done in the unions. By the end of the year, Morgan recommended to Giles that the EWL should be streamlined to this end.

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188 Morgan, *Harry Pollitt*, p. 77.
189 ‘Suggested Composition of Teachers’ Cells’, 31 February 1932 (Giles papers, box 2).
190 Minutes of EWL Party Fraction meeting, 31 January 1932 (Giles papers, box 2).
191 ‘Tenth Annual Conference of the EWL’, *Educational Worker*, 5, 58 (May 1932), p. 11.
192 See letters from G.C.T. Giles to teachers’ cells requesting overdue monthly reports and fraction levies, 22 February 1932; 20 September 1932; and 12 November 1932 (Giles papers, box 2).
193 Letter from W. Greghorn to G.C.T. Giles, 8 March 1932 (Giles papers, box 2).
194 Letter from M. Kline to G.C.T. Giles, 10 April 1932 (Giles papers, box 2).
195 Letter from Edith Edwards to G.C.T. Giles, 27 May 1932 (Giles papers, box 2).
196 Letter from Owen Morgan to G.C.T. Giles, 13 November 1932 (Giles papers, box 2).
Giles was already alive to the idea that Party teachers’ best chance of expanding their influence was to lead the fight against educational spending cuts (often referred to as ‘economies’) inside the unions. Just before the end of the summer term in 1932 he had chaired a meeting of teachers to decide what action the profession could take against the spread of fascism and war. They arranged a mass meeting at Essex House in London that July to appoint delegates to the upcoming Anti-War Congress in Amsterdam, and decided to call their group the Teachers’ Anti-War Movement (TAWM).\textsuperscript{197} Communists had long emphasised the interrelationship between fascism and war as joint symbols of the escalating contradictions of capitalism,\textsuperscript{198} and Party teachers now felt that their fellow professionals were beginning to realise that armaments expenditure had a direct connection with educational economies. In this situation, ‘peace work’ would be the best focus for uniting the rank and file.\textsuperscript{199} The TAWM specifically aimed to unify different strands of opinion. It consisted of liberals and social democrats alongside revolutionaries, and pledged to work within the existing trade unions. Its Vice President was H.A. Cooke, and B.V. Vincent was one of its joint Secretaries, both of whom were members of the EWL Party Fraction. But the other joint Secretary, P. Polishuk, and its Treasurer, R. McGregor, were not in the Party. Moreover the Essex Hall meeting was chaired by a highly ‘respectable’ figure – the then chief inspector of schools for the London County Council, Dr P.B. Ballard. And it attracted an audience of over 160, indicating the breadth of its appeal,\textsuperscript{200} something which attracted the attention of state security services.\textsuperscript{201} From the very outset, Vincent was especially keen that communist teachers should not narrow the TAWM’s appeal by organising too openly:

\begin{quote}
We shall have to be jolly careful if we intend to keep the Teachers’ Anti-War Movement an open group and not split it. Most of the non-EWL people are very willing to cooperate with generals and admirals to bring about peace, but not with Communists, and if we appear to have organised ourselves too much they will undoubtedly refuse to subscribe or give any more help.\textsuperscript{202}
\end{quote}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{198} Kevin Morgan, \textit{Against Fascism and War: Ruptures and Continuities in British Communist Politics 1935-41} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), p. 28.
\textsuperscript{200} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{201} Giles’ activity in the TAWM during 1932 is noted in his MI5 file (National Archives, Kew, KV2/1785).
\textsuperscript{202} Letter from B.W. Vincent to G.C.T. Giles, 11 July 1932 (Giles papers, box 2).
\end{flushleft}
Clearly CPGB schoolteachers were peeling away from Third Period exclusivity more quickly than their international counterparts. In January 1933, Vincent warned Giles that sending TAWM members to EWI meetings could endanger the whole project:

[T]he crude slogans and the inclusion of the word ‘imperialist’ in the phrase ‘anti war will simply put them right off at the start … [T]he EWI … consists only of violent left-wingers who indulge in the nauseating phraseology of the Comintern at every opportunity … I mean the amazing overemphasis of the conscious wickedness of the pacifists, parsons, Quakers etc

Instead, Vincent argued that schoolteachers could be brought towards socialism much more effectively by emphasising the specific threat fascism and war posed to teachers as middle-class professionals:

[T]o suggest that teachers can be classed with the proletarian who has no liberty is not calculated to win over the TAWM class of person into the ranks of the revolutionary working class... [it] tend[s] to alienate the class to which I belong and which is, I believe, prepared to be a least a supporter of the communist revolution if not an active participant in the struggle at its highest.203

Within a couple of months, this message got through to the pages of the Educational Worker. An editorial placed special emphasis on the specific dangers fascism and war presented to schoolteachers in their work as teachers, rather than its previous subsuming of the particular problems of the profession within those of the proletariat as a whole.204 Thus schoolteachers were among the first British communists to peel away from an interpretation of Class Against Class which attached real importance only to uniting with industrial workers, and instead began to consider that communist ‘brain workers’ themselves had a special role to play in the struggle for socialism. Margot Heinemann has written of such developments among British communist artists, writers, scientists and performers by 1933-34,205 but the contribution of schoolteachers in this development has been neglected. As well as the summer 1932 Anti-War Congress in Amsterdam, TAWM and EWL delegates also attended its equivalent in

203 Letter from B.W. Vincent to G.C.T. Giles, 21 January 1933 (Giles papers, box 2).
204 ‘To the Teaching Profession. To all Teachers’ Organisations. To all Teachers’, Educational Worker, 5, 67 (April 1933), p. 2.
Paris during June 1933. Both meetings were sponsored by and featured liberals, social democrats and pacifists as well as communists, and were the germ of the broad anti-fascist, anti-war coalition called for at the 7th World Congress of the Comintern two years later. 206

This was certainly a turnaround from earlier in the Third Period, when the EWL had poured scorn on non-revolutionary peace movements as “pathetic” and “meaningless”. 207 In doing so, they had been following the Third Period line that as the crisis of capitalism worsened, and the growth of productive forces clashed with the contraction of markets, inter-imperialist war was inevitable. 208 But from late 1932 Comintern attitudes altered. The fundamental analysis of the relationship between capitalism, fascism and war was unchanged. However the growth of enmity towards the Soviet Union emerging from fascist states such as Japan and Germany, their increased aggression, and their exit from the League of Nations by 1933 meant that mobilising peace movements as a temporary restraint against the warlike tendencies of fascist powers was feasible. 209 This willingness to seek an alliance with a wide range of political opinion succeeded in attracting more members to the EWL. There were 82 delegates at the League’s 12th Annual Conference in January 1934, 210 almost double that of four years earlier. In the same month, the TAWM boasted a membership of 650 and launched a journal of its own, The Ploughshare, edited by a Party writer and schoolteacher named Edward Upward. 211 Yet despite membership gains, the new approach did cause tension. At the League’s 12th Annual Conference in January 1934, one delegate raised a pertinent question:

Is the League a ‘red’ opposition? Or is it rather an organisation intended to fold in a warm and wide embrace people of all shades of opinion? Are the contents and tone of our paper compatible with our constitution? 212

207 ‘War’, Educational Worker, 3, 30 (July-August 1929), p. 2.
212 ‘12th League Conference’, Educational Worker, 6, 5 (February 1934), p. 10.
In the resulting debate, some contributors even suggested that Winston Churchill might now be willing to accept the League’s programme and read the *Educational Worker*.\(^{213}\) Clearly there was some concern over the new direction. But an EWL memorandum written days after Conference is fully in favour of embracing “as warmly and widely as possible”:

> The confusion about the future of the EWL ... comes from an inability to reconcile ... tactics with social philosophy ... There is always a real danger of an organisation like the EWL wasting away in isolation from the masses of the teachers ... complementary to the danger of indiscriminate, debilitating embraces ... The policy of ... of working within the Unions, of selecting immediate aims and agitating around them, is aimed at precisely these two dangers ... The programme must make an immediate appeal to ... people who know little about socialism ... simple expositions of Marxism-Leninism applied to present day educational problems will ... always advance the struggle for immediate objectives.\(^{214}\)

The primacy of unity over immediate objectives meant that there was little room to discuss questions of educational content. Indeed, for a teacher to attempt to do anything other than their ‘job’ in the classroom, was deemed “sabotage” and indulgence in “smug self-satisfaction” which would isolate teachers from their colleagues, thus destroying the unity of the profession which the EWL now prized above and beyond all else. The teacher’s responsibility was to work on the “school front”, with the bulk of the profession against fascism, war and economies:

> The opinion seems to be widely held that progressive teachers should ... “tell children the truth” ... But some comfortable illusions lie beneath this opinion ... Shall we also ask the teacher who joins our movement to ... refuse to participate in examinations, to introduce a new discipline, sing socialist songs, and, generally act as though an individual can step right into a new order in society? ... [S]abotage ... is a bad weapon in the day to day struggle. It isolates one from one’s fellows.\(^{215}\)

\(^{213}\) ‘The Function of the EWL and of the EW’, 13 January 1934 (Giles papers, box 2).
\(^{214}\) ‘The Function of the EWL and of the EW’, 13 January 1934 (Giles papers, box 2).
Thus, it was not *Class Against Class* which decisively turned communists away from radical discussions about educational content. On the contrary, it was their zeal for a new line. This new line, its ambiguities, and its consequences for communist schoolteachers are considered in the next chapter.
Chapter Two: Against Fascism, War and Economies, 1935-1939

Chapter Summary

The CPGB was much more hospitable to ‘brain workers’ during the Popular Front than it was under Class Against Class. The emphasis the former placed on mass ideological and cultural struggle against fascism meant that artists, intellectuals and professionals became important allies to be won for the working class. Among the principal transmitters of ideology and culture to the masses, schoolteachers could be perceived as operating at front line of the anti-fascist effort, just as important as the academics, artists, writers and musicians more traditionally associated with the pull of British communism in this period. But communist schoolteachers on the whole avoided the exploration of their agency in the classroom. Rather, their primary focus and success was in achieving the greatest possible unity against fascism among their professional colleagues outside the classroom: in the staff room, cause groups, in the Party itself, and above all by the winning of responsible positions in the trade unions. This stance largely excluded discussion of the theory or practice of a ‘socialist’ education of children which, as chapter one demonstrates, had endured even the Third Period. It also meant that communists avoided taking a definitive position on the future organisation of secondary education, and consequently largely absented themselves from discussion of arguably the most important issue in the educational politics during the late 1930s, an issue on which most other commentators were far from ambiguous. But as well as the tactical considerations of the Popular Front line, communist positions on education were encouraged by Soviet conservatism, and elements of continuity between the Popular Front line and Class Against Class which are often overlooked.

‘Above all – Teachers’: The Popular Front and Professional Workers

Though its rudiments can be found in the international peace congresses in Amsterdam in 1932 and in Paris in 1933; in national communist parties’ joint action with the non-communist left after 1933; and in the USSR’s entry to the League of Nations in 1934,¹ the rearrangement of Comintern politics away from Third Period isolationism and towards building a broad alliance against fascism which became

known as the ‘People’s Front’, or ‘Popular Front’ was not formalised until the 7th World Congress of the Comintern during the summer of 1935. The Comintern General Secretary, Georgi Dimitrov, officially announced the new position thus:

With the outbreak of the present and most profound economic crisis, the sharp accentuation of the general crisis of capitalism and the revolutionisation of the toiling masses, fascism has embarked upon a wide offensive. The ruling bourgeoisie is more and more seeking salvation in fascism, with the object of instituting exceptionally predatory measures against the toilers, preparing for an imperialist war of plunder, attacking the Soviet Union ... and by all these measures preventing revolution.²

In order to deal with the left-wing division and consequent fascist advance so starkly highlighted by the coming to power of Hitler in Germany in January 1933, communists in capitalist countries were to come out and build alliances with all those who opposed fascism, even those who were committed to liberal democracy. Instead of regarding all non-communists as indistinguishable from the fascists themselves, the new reading of the situation saw worth in making defensive gains within the field of bourgeois democracy in order to stem fascism’s threat. For this to be successful, communists would “have to find a common language with the broadest masses … to find ways of finally overcoming the isolation of the revolutionary vanguard from the masses”.³ This required a higher profile for intellectual and cultural struggle, in that it ‘permitted’ communists in capitalist states to engage with their national culture in order to make meaningful interventions aimed at protecting it from fascist encroachment:

Many comrades did not believe that so reactionary a variety of bourgeois ideology as the ideology of fascism ... was capable of gaining mass influence at all. This was a great mistake ... We must under no circumstances underrate this fascist capacity for ideological infection. On the contrary we must develop for our part an extensive ideological struggle on the basis of clear, popular argument

³ Ibid., p. 92.
and a correct, well thought-out approach to the peculiarities of the national psychology of the masses of the people.4

As a result of this, academics, actors, writers, musicians and other such figures joined the Party in significant numbers, keen to combat the fascism they saw growing in the crisis of capitalism going on around them, and to take their place alongside the working class in creating a different political future.5 Although by no means all of the CPGB’s increase in membership came from such artistic, intellectual and professional recruits, their presence was undoubtedly important in the trebling of the Party’s 1930 membership by summer 1935, and a steady subsequent increase which was to result in almost 18,000 members on the eve of World War Two.6 In return, the CPGB leadership was eager to emphasise that such people as “intellectuals, authors, doctors, scientists and professors” could find a home in the Party as, in Harry Pollitt’s words, “valuable allies who can be won for the working class”.7 And through various initiatives (some of the Party, others closely linked) such recruits contributed to a vibrant communist cultural life in the late 1930s: the Left Book Club (LBC), the journals Left Review and Modern Quarterly, the Artists’ International Association, Unity Theatre, Kino Films and the Workers’ Music Association among the prominent examples.8 But, as the CPGB’s official history of this period puts it, present “above all” among the Party’s new intake were schoolteachers.9

The Educational Potentialities of the Popular Front Line

It is not surprising that teachers concerned about the dangers of fascism would find the Popular Front line relevant to them. Such a shift in attitude towards ideological struggle had obvious implications for communist ‘brain workers’ like them. If, as Dimitrov vividly described it, the “putrefaction of capitalism” that fascism represented penetrated “to the innermost core of its ideology and culture”,10

5 Callaghan and Harker, *British Communism*, p. 126.
8 For overviews of the intellectual and cultural politics of the CPGB during the Popular Front, see Margot Heinemann, ‘The People’s Front and the Intellectuals’, in Fryth (ed.), *Britain, Fascism and the Popular Front*, pp. 157-185; and Jon Clarke, Margot Heinemann, David Margolies and Caroline Snee (eds.), *Culture and Crisis in Britain in the Thirties* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1979).
then education, one of the key methods of transmitting ideology and culture to the masses, could be interpreted as being at the front line of the battle now being waged. In 1934, Willie Gallacher had spoken to Cambridge students on behalf of the CPGB Central Committee, emphasising that the Party needed good teachers.\(^\text{11}\) Harry Pollitt, too, attributed the new attractiveness of communism to the middle class to their concern for the fate of children under capitalism, and the dangers of fascism for education:

> These people see that the situation has changed and the time gone by when they could feel assured that they would see their children in positions of comfort and security ... This anxious uncertainty for ... their children has brought them to a clearer understanding and sympathy of the position of the working-class and their common interests. They are able to put themselves in the place of mothers and fathers of South Wales and the North-East coast, where for the boys and girls of working-class families there is only the blind alley of unemployment. They feel the iniquity of the policy of leaving the Depressed Areas to rot, of allowing malnutrition to sap the vitality of the rising generation ... They have seen Fascism at work in Germany; they have observed the destruction of all forms of cultural, educational and scientific progress.\(^\text{12}\)

Schoolteachers, as key actors in the future progress of both children and education, did not have to look hard to see the relevance of Pollitt’s words to their work. And Pollitt mentioned teachers specifically as a group that was coming over to, and should be embraced by, the Party in his speech to the following year’s Congress too.\(^\text{13}\) The attraction of such emphases on the need to fight fascism in order to safeguard children’s future and education can be detected in the experiences at this time of two figures who were to become central to communist educational politics in the coming years. Max Morris was in 1936 a 23-year-old starting his first teaching post at a secondary school in Willesden, London. He had joined the Party upon graduating from university two years before, just as the change to the Popular Front line was taking place, firm in his ideas that the future of society rested “first and foremost, on a good school for all”.\(^\text{14}\) Brian Simon had experienced the danger fascism posed to education first

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hand: as a pupil during the early 1930s at Kurt Hahn’s progressive school at Salem, which was then under Nazi attack. Simon joined the CPGB in early 1935, and although he was then still an undergraduate at Cambridge, he later reflected upon how the communist line of the mid-1930s helped cement his desire to become a teacher. In his own words, it “no doubt fuelled the growing dissatisfaction with, and critique of, educational work and procedures” that he and his fellow communists in the university education society were feeling. For schoolteachers already in the Party when the line changed, its attraction and relevance to their work was no less strong. Their enthusiastic journey towards it is explored in the previous chapter.

But just at the point when the Popular Front line was gaining ground among schoolteachers, the national organisation through which they had hitherto organised and published a monthly journal, was being wound up. The EWL was dissolved after the EWI took the decision at its August 1935 Conference to unify with its opposite number in the Second (Amsterdam) International. This was done in recognition of the “organic unity” between the two bodies, and in order to create a single unified teachers’ international that could more effectively wage a common struggle against fascism and war.

As the EWI’s ‘British Section’, the EWL folded. Its dissolution was certainly undertaken without fanfare: even G.C.T. Giles could not remember when the EWL ceased to exist, and another communist teacher active in the League in the mid-1930s similarly attested that it “died ... without anyone really being aware of it”. Evidently the EWL’s disappearance was decided upon quickly, it had outlived its usefulness as the priorities of international communist politics shifted.

18 Letter to Joan Simon from ‘Andrew’, a former member of the EWL, 12 June 1961 (Simon papers, DC/SIM/4/3/23).
‘Schools at the Cross Roads’: Fighting Fascism in the Classroom?

Given the saliency of the CPGB’s new line to teachers dissolving the EWL seems a strange decision, especially since a not insubstantial pamphlet had just been published under the name of the ‘Educational Workers’ International (British Section)’. *Schools at the Cross Roads* opened with a statement which clearly outlined the relevance of the Popular Front line to education, and the vital role of schoolteachers in the struggle against fascism:

> English education is at the crossroads. But we are free to choose which way we shall lead it; the way of Fascism, the way of reaction, or the way of progress and a new society? The articles within will, we hope, help teachers ... to choose. The choice will have to be made sooner or later.⁴⁹

The pamphlet was published by the CPGB’s publishers and given a favourable review in *Labour Monthly*.⁵⁰ Given that the latter publication was always the signpost of the Party’s line, this was another signal of the importance being ascribed to schoolteachers and the education of children by the Party as the Popular Front position began to take shape. *Schools at the Cross Roads* contained chapters on English, Soviet and fascist education. As its opening statement suggests, British communist teachers were hugely concerned at the threat fascism posed to education in schools. “Education is a subject that Fascism rates high in importance” ran the argument, “but ... Fascism claims a fundamental change of approach to the educational problem”. The essential shift in slant towards schooling made by fascism meant that education in Nazi Germany or Fascist Italy was set firmly against liberal education, in that the object of teaching and learning in the former was not to build a child’s intellect or powers of reason. On the contrary, pupils in fascist countries were fed a diet of militarism, nationalism, anti-Semitism, hero-worship and obedience. Compliance with the fascist ideal of man was the name of the game, not enlightenment. This approach had implications not only for students, but their teachers: those who did not comply with the fascist vision of education would face dismissal, persecution and even arrest.⁵¹ The emphasis in this chapter of the pamphlet on contrasting fascist education with liberal, rather than

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socialist, education is instructive. Communist schoolteachers were corresponding to the thesis outlined by Dimitrov: namely that the united opposition to fascism must be built by emphasising the threat the ideology posed to existing national cultural and intellectual norms, rather than just contrasting it with what could be achieved under socialism. That is not to say Schools at the Cross Roads did not celebrate the perceived triumphs of Soviet schools – it did, and had nothing to say about the less than liberal aspects of Stalin’s recent educational reforms, as will be discussed later – but the threat fascism posed to British pupils and teachers was firmly rooted in the worth of defending what was best in a liberal education.

Another major contribution by a CPGB schoolteacher to the discourse on the place of education in the political situation of the mid to late 1930s made a similar effort. 1937’s The Mind in Chains was a Cecil Day-Lewis edited symposium of the current state of culture under capitalism by cultural and intellectual figures inside, or sympathetic to, the CPGB.22 Rex Warner, then a teacher at Frensham Heights School, contributed a chapter on education. He was careful to acknowledge that education had made “an enormous advance” under liberalism.23 And, like Schools at the Cross Roads, the communist reading of the present educational position emphasised that much of this progress would be lost if fascism marched on:

There are educationists who voluntarily abandon the ground won by nineteenth-century criticism from superstition, and who make lofty and unreal mysticism the basis of their teaching. These people will assure us “all things work together for the good” and that the duty of the young is to obey ... [W]e may expect this semi-mystical authoritarian tendency to increase.24

Thus, Warner similarly agreed with the British section of the EWI that schoolteachers would be a key agent in stopping the advance of fascism. To remain aloof from the struggle would be to abandon the rising generation to reaction:

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All ... systems of retreat from what some educationists scornfully call ‘politics’ are foredoomed ...

Children brought up on the assumption that fair dealing and Christian virtues are the rules that govern contemporary society will, when they leave school, receive such a shock that ... [they] will tend to fall back upon cynicism or mysticism ... If education is to remain true to itself it will have to become revolutionary.

So the stage was set for education to be key to the destruction of fascism, and communist teachers could be among its vanguard, ensuring that liberal rationalism would not be sacrificed to mysticism, reaction and obedience. In such circumstances, communist schoolteachers could plausibly seek to make qualitative interventions into the nature of the education they were providing for their pupils. Warner’s analysis had emphasised that if education were to have any real value, “the boy or girl at school has to be convinced there is some point in being educated ... On leaving school, the young man or young woman has got to be either for or against the social organisation of the time”.25 And some communists recruited to the Party in this period were active in a developing experimentation in such ‘socialist’ education: Beatrix Tudor-Hart was instrumental in setting up the independent Fortis Green School in London, which was “run on socialistc principles by a Co-operative Society of parents and teachers”.26 Some Party members did send their children to Fortis Green.27 Yet, despite such experiments, and despite communist expositions of the potential for agency which teachers had in saving education from fascism, limits were simultaneously set on the way in which communist schoolteachers could explore any of the Popular Front’s educational potential.

**Unity over Agency**

Despite its exploration of the relationship between the content of, and philosophy behind, education under fascism, and the ability of fascist governments to cement their desired social transformation by inculcating their ideas in the classroom, *Schools at the Cross Roads* had made no effort to carry out a similar explanation in relation to the schools under capitalism. The authors admitted that “the article on England deals only with education from the quantitative aspect. It makes no attempt ... to analyse our

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26 Advertisement, *Daily Worker*, 4 June 1938.
27 Parsons, ‘Communism in the Professions’, p. 484.
system from the standpoint of the actual teaching”. The reason given for this was a lack of space, but this seems disingenuous considering the amount of space given to discussing the content of fascist education. Rather, the qualitative debate on education was not addressed as it was more complex and controversial, and could therefore damage the potential of the pamphlet to chime with a teaching profession more easily convinced of the need to fight material encroachments on its work than to challenge its ‘non-political’ attitude to what went on in the classroom. Furthermore, to have stressed the need for socialist or class-conscious content in the curriculum would undermine communist attempts to portray socialism as the rightful protector of the best qualities of a liberal education in the face of fascist encroachment. Warner admitted as much in *The Mind in Chains*:

> There is no longer ... any need for us in our propaganda to adopt that aggressive attitude which is appropriate to one who drags people from great darkness into the light. Our job now is ... to insist patiently on following the approved principles of reason and morality ... people who will not join us ‘for socialism’, let us at least be sure they are with us ‘against war and against fascism’.

Warner might well have added ‘and against the educational economies caused by them’ to his article. For the fight against the quantitative effects of fascism and war upon education was clearly an issue around which CPGB schoolteachers, and their Party leaders, felt they could best promote unity against fascism. The demands for educational change in England in *Schools at the Cross Roads* were limited to decreasing class sizes, raising the school leaving age, rebuilding and reconditioning school premises and the providing of free milk and meals in school for the children of the unemployed. In 1935, the CPGB’s major policy statement on education also rested upon equalising access to the existing system of schooling, by bringing all schools into the aegis of the state, and raising the leaving age to 16. The only mention of educational method or content was a demand for more trade and technical education. The previous chapter of this thesis also demonstrated that unity against educational economies was the chief strategy of the EWL from as early as summer 1932, and it was the desire for

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this unity which was decisive in shifting the *Educational Worker* away from discussions of educational content.

The dissolution of the EWL in 1935 further indicates unity with the ‘mass’ of schoolteachers was more important than the maintenance of a separate organisation for CPGB teachers which could discuss the content of education from an openly communist standpoint. Party teacher Edward Upward’s semi-autobiographical novel set in the period backs this up; the “overriding aim was to obtain unity between Communist and non-Communist teachers in the fight for better educational conditions” and not to “raise controversial matters of secondary importance which might make unity harder to get”.32 For CPGB schoolteachers were not alone in seeing the potential of the school classroom as a site for safeguarding the future of democracy and reason. The Association of Education and Citizenship (AEC) had been formed in 1934 by the Liberal industrialist Ernest Simon, Brian Simon’s father. Like his communist son, Simon senior also felt that education had the potential to develop a more critical and informed citizenry which would be better equipped to defend democracy against the rise of fascism, telling the National Labour peer Lord Allen that whilst the politicians’ job was to save democracy here and now, the AEC sought to lay the basis for saving it in future by better education.33 But the AEC was anxious to avoid association with the CPGB. When invited by the then communist-sympathising LBC to send an AEC representative to a rally at the Albert Hall in 1937, Simon declined lest he frighten off potential Labour and Liberal support. Thus, as Gary McCulloch put it “the political tensions of the 1930s helped to discourage broad alliances in favour of ‘education for citizenship’”.34 It was awareness of these political tensions and their divisive effect, which led communist schoolteachers to avoid addressing questions about the content of education under capitalism. Instead of focusing their efforts on organisations like the AEC, they chose to fight fascism in other ways.

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International Solidarity: Germany and Spain

One such example is CPGB teachers’ close involvement in broad front campaigns and pressure groups which highlighted the effects of fascism on schools and schoolteachers abroad. The British Committee for the Relief of German Teachers (BCRGT) was formed in December 1933 as a sub-committee of the International Committee of the Teaching Profession against Fascism, Economies and War. G.C.T. Giles was on the Committee, and several other Party figures had pledged their support, including academic Maurice Dobb, scientist Hyman Levy and writer Amabel Williams-Ellis. The NAS and NUWT also provided co-operation and assistance to it, as well as Victor Gollancz, Harold Laski, and the Society of Friends. It was thus undoubtedly a Popular Front venture, its stated aim being to help all teachers dismissed by the National Socialist Government, be they pacifist, Quakers, social democrats, communists or liberals. However, Giles was in a key position and took a highly active role in the Committee’s work, and was among a deputation which visited Berlin during August 1934 to press for the release of Dr Theodore Neubauer, a schoolteacher and Communist Deputy in the Reichstag who had given evidence against the prosecution at the Reichstag Fire Trial in 1933, and been incarcerated shortly after. Neubauer spent 14 months in concentration camps before being sentenced to 7 months in prison. Giles also pressed Neubauer’s case with the British Foreign Secretary, and made efforts to get other groups such as the Quakers and the Academic Assistance Council on board with the BCRGT. By 1935 the Committee had raised nearly £400 in donations, of which over half was secretly distributed to German teachers in need. The BCRGT was certainly considered to be an effective force by its parent body, as the International Committee of the Teaching Profession Against Fascism, Economies and War entrusted it to take over all of the International’s work at the end of 1934, though retaining all the international names and appearances.

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35 Letter from the BCRGT to NUWT General Secretary Ethel Froud, 6 May 1934 (Giles papers, box 1).
36 British Committee for the Relief of German Teachers (London: Orphans Printing Press, n.d.).
37 BCRGT appeal leaflet, November 1934 (Giles papers, box 5).
38 See copy of a letter from N.B. Ronald on behalf of Sir John Simon, Foreign Secretary, to G.C.T. Giles 12 September 1934, in Giles’ MI5 file (National Archives, Kew, KV2/1785).
39 Letter from G.C.T. Giles to NAS General Secretary A.E. Warren, 4 December 1934 (Giles papers, box 5).
40 ‘Financial Statement of the British Committee for the Relief of German Teachers’, 27 June 1935 (Giles papers, box 5).
The rise of the far-right in Spain meant that the plight of teachers and education there was also a concern around which communists could participate in a coalition against fascism. As early as December 1934, Owen Morgan visited Madrid. He went alongside Leah Manning of NALT. The fact that Morgan and Manning were now working together demonstrates that communist schoolteachers were reaching out to former reformist foes even before the official shift to the Popular Front line. The willingness of Labour Monthly to print an interview with Manning about the trip to Madrid shows that the CPGB sanctioned its teachers’ new readiness to collaborate with previously sworn enemies of social democracy in united action against fascism.\textsuperscript{41} Indeed, a few days after Hitler’s victory in January 1933 Harry Pollitt had “quietly discarded much of the ideological baggage of Class Against Class” by reaching out to the ILP,\textsuperscript{42} and on 9 March the Party’s Political Bureau agreed to send letters offering a united front to the Labour Party and the TUC as well, though this was of course refused.\textsuperscript{43} But communist schoolteachers had been seeking a united front with Labour teachers even earlier. In a letter to Giles in May 1932, Manning outlined her surprise at “all the niceness and courtesy” being shown to her by communist teachers given the hostility of the past.\textsuperscript{44} After the military rising by Franco’s forces in July 1936, G.C.T. Giles also travelled to Spain the following December on behalf of the BCRGT to assess the experiences of Spanish teachers and students.\textsuperscript{45} An International Committee for the Relief of Victimized Teachers was set up, presumably also a label for the work carried out by Giles and others on the BCRGT. The Committee sent funds to the Spanish teachers’ unions, and clothing and food was sent to a refugee children’s home set up by Spanish teachers.\textsuperscript{46} And one CPGB schoolteacher was involved in the most serious commitment a British communist could make to fight fascism in Spain: as a member of the British Battalion of the International Brigade of volunteers who put their lives on the line to join the Spanish Republican forces fighting against Franco. Alan Gilchrist taught English Literature at a London public school, and in May 1937 left England on the last boat of volunteers to serve in the Major Attlee Company of the British Battalion. Injured by machine gun fire whilst fighting

\textsuperscript{42} Beckett, Enemy Within, p. 47.
\textsuperscript{43} Branson, History of the Communist Party of Great Britain 1927-1941, pp. 112-113.
\textsuperscript{44} Letter from Leah Manning to G.C.T. Giles, 2 May 1932, (Giles papers, box 1).
\textsuperscript{45} Invitation to ‘Spain’ meeting of the BCRGT, 26 January 1937 (Giles papers, box 5).
\textsuperscript{46} 1936 Report of the International Committee for the Relief of Victimized Teachers (Giles papers, box 5).
at Ebro, victim of a bout of malaria at Seguros, and also seeing action in Jarama, Brunete and Aragon, Gilchrist stayed in Spain until the International Brigades left in 1938, and was made a Political Commissar of the Anti-Tank Brigade.\(^{47}\)

The extensive activity of CPGB teachers in helping to coordinate the international teaching profession’s response to the plight of education and teachers under fascism has been described at such length in order to highlight their priorities during the Popular Front. Rather than sinking their energies into fighting fascism through socialist education, Party schoolteachers sought to maximise international teacher unity against fascism by focusing on its encroachments upon the material conditions and political freedoms the profession enjoyed under liberal democracy. In this “subordination of specifically socialist policies to the needs of a broad democratic alliance”\(^{48}\) they were ahead of the CPGB leadership and the Comintern.

**The Teachers’ Anti War Movement**

As outlined in the previous chapter, the formation of the TAWM in May 1932 was another example of how communist schoolteachers were among the earliest professionals in the Party to seek to organise the non-Party members of their profession in Popular Front movements. By 1934, the TAWM had 650 members nationwide and felt this justified a regular publication to publicise its work.\(^{49}\) A journal, *The Ploughshare*, was launched that January, producing 5 issues a year. The TAWM has been described by one historian as a front for the CPGB,\(^{50}\) and its activities were frequently given coverage in the *Daily Worker*,\(^{51}\) though chapter one also demonstrated how keen leading communist teachers were to play down their communism in order to keep the TAWM united. Party figures were certainly prominent in *The Ploughshare*. Edward Upward, a Cambridge educated poet and writer, who had in 1932 infused his


\(^{50}\) Frank Gloversmith (ed.), *Class, Culture and Social Change: A New View of the 1930s* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1980), p. 244.

artistic sensibilities with his politics, joined the CPGB and become a teacher of English at Alleyn’s, a public school in London, was its editor. Patty Jarvis of the EWL’s Party Fraction, was on its History Commission. A letter of congratulations on the journal’s establishment came from the BCRGT. The TAWM also sent a delegate to a Labour Monthly conference in London during January 1935. And given Upward’s connections with elements of the literary left then in the CPGB, it is not surprising that Party writers such as Christopher Isherwood (a Cambridge contemporary of Upward’s and close friend) and Amabel Williams-Ellis contributed pieces to The Ploughshare. Stephen Spender’s poetry was highly favourably reviewed, as were books by Rajani Palme Dutt, Daily Worker journalists Allen Hutt and Tom Wintringham. Before it folded, the Educational Worker was also advertised in The Ploughshare.

Given that many schoolteachers were reluctant to openly reveal themselves as communist at this time, many of the articles are anonymous, simply initialled or attributed to pseudonyms. But their content and tone shows that many of them were written by communists. These contributions reveal much about the importance which CPGB teachers attached to reaching out on issues which could achieve broad anti-fascist teacher unity, such as the education cuts caused by capitalism’s war drive. Indeed, the publication was specifically intended to be the “chief link” between teachers who were, in the opening editorial’s rather dramatic words, “fighting with all their might against the Cerberus whose heads are War, so-called Economies and Tyranny”.

Teachers were urged to sell copies in their staff room, or at trade union meetings, and to form local teacher anti-war groups, and this was not without success. By mid-1936 the TAWM claimed to

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52 Alan Walker, obituary of Edward Upward, the Guardian, 16 February 2009.
53 ‘What History Shall We Teach?’, The Ploughshare, 4 (September-October 1934), p. 12.
54 Letter to the editor from BCGRT, The Ploughshare, 1 (January 1934), p. 3
56 For Amabel Williams-Ellis’ contributions see The Ploughshare, 4 (September-October 1934), pp. 4-5; and 21 (January-February 1938), p. 5. For Christopher Isherwood, see 7 (April-May 1935), pp. 6-7.
58 Dutt’s ‘Fascism and Social Revolution’ was reviewed in The Ploughshare, 4 (September-October 1934), pp. 8-9; Hutt’s ‘The Condition of the Working Classes in Britain’ was reviewed in 2 (March-April 1934), p. 8; and Wintringham’s ‘The Coming World War’ was reviewed in 9, (September-October 1935), p. 12.
59 See The Ploughshare, 3 (June-July 1934), p. 12.
61 The Ploughshare, 7 (April-May 1935), p. 11.
have almost doubled its nationwide membership to 1000,\(^\text{62}\) and whilst its activities were primarily centred in London, there were provincial groups established in Abertillery, Acton, Birkenhead, Birmingham, Sunderland, South Shields, Swindon and Newcastle.\(^\text{63}\) Considering that the journal was run on voluntary basis, and did not pay its contributors,\(^\text{64}\) this was quite a rate of development. Thus, *The Ploughshare* was an embodiment of Popular Front teacher politics, affiliated to no political party or trade union (officially, at any rate) and open to contributions from all teachers so long as they wanted to combat fascism, war preparations and educational cuts. The extent to which broader ideological differences could be subordinated to this shared goal, and the communist tinge of *Ploughshare* editorials, is indicated in the below excerpt from that key year of 1935:

> [T]he gulf between capitalism and socialism grows daily wider. The former sinks into barbarism, the latter sails on to higher cultural achievements ... There can be no doubt on which side we stand. To be passive is to play into the hands of reaction ... Every penny spent on education means one less for war. Of whatever union, political party, religious denomination you belong, we can all join on this supreme issue. A united profession against war can hinder its outbreak.\(^\text{65}\)

The TAWM had more appeal among teachers than the EWL ever did, but its desire for unity at all costs meant that communist teachers largely absented themselves from one of the most important debates of educational politics in the late 1930s.

**The Caution of The People’s Schools**

Max Morris’ *The People’s Schools* was issued as an ‘educational’ choice for February 1939 by the Left Book Club, and thus probably received among the widest domestic readership of any book on education at the time, and certainly benefitted from greater circulation than any previous CPGB book on education. This point can’t have been lost on the Party leadership. Moreover, Morris was a Popular Front recruit to the Party, and thus had never belonged to the EWL. The book’s focus is therefore

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instructive as to the priorities of communist approaches to educational politics. In his foreword, Morris made plain the scope of the discussion:

...we have adopted what may be called a “quantitative” approach. Little or no reference is made to the “content” of education, to questions of curriculum, or, for example to the problem of biased textbooks. We have had perforce to be concerned almost solely with the system itself.66

After surveying the growth and organisation of the school system in England and Wales, The People’s Schools concluded that the major anti-working class bias came not from text books or teaching, but rather unequal provision. Rather than adopt the Marxist standpoint that this was inevitable under capitalism, Morris warned that its presence was “dangerous from the standpoint of a truly democratic community”.67 In doing so, Morris was cautioning that the systemic ruling class bias of education needed to be ameliorated in order to protect democracy, rather than to establish socialism. This chimes with Dimitrov’s instruction that communists were to make defensive gains against fascism within bourgeois democracy. Morris’ view was that the “chief vices” of the 1936 Education Act—which legislated for the raising of the school leaving age to 15 in 1939 – were exemptions for ‘beneficial employment’ and the lack of maintenance allowances, since these factors inevitably discriminated most against poorer children.68 “Our real aim” wrote Morris was “the compulsory attendance at school, to the age of fifteen of all children”.69 Thus, the type of education received by children in Britain under bourgeois democracy was accepted as inherently beneficial. Communists’ ‘real aim’ was restricted to making sure enough working class children got access to it.

Prescriptions for the reform of the educational system that were made by The People’s Schools’ were as quantitative as its analysis of its problems: a massive extension of school-building; a maximum class size of 30 pupils; playing fields for every school; the raising of the leaving age to 16 as soon as possible; and the aforementioned abolition of exemptions and of the establishment of maintenance

67 Ibid., p. 93.
68 Ibid., p. 36.
69 Ibid., p. 41.
grants.\textsuperscript{70} Virtually all of these recommendations had already been included in \textit{Schools at the Cross Roads}, and could be found in the proposals of mainstream bodies such as the Association of Education Committees, NUT, School Age Council, Liberal and Labour figures, and even some Conservatives.\textsuperscript{71} The only difference between communist prescriptions was the emphasis put on the provision of maintenance grants. As by June 1938 the National Government was considering delaying beyond 1939 its plans to raise the leaving age, many organisations had chosen to focus their fight on hedging ‘beneficial exemptions’ with restrictions so that the number of children actually exempted was minimal. \textit{The People’s Schools} felt that “there is much to be said for this attitude”, and conceded that the demand for maintenance allowances should not be pursued at the expense of “the beneficial exploitation of the Act”.\textsuperscript{72}

On the organisation of secondary education, Morris’ caution is striking. His only demands for reform were the transfer of ‘senior’ elementary schools into the secondary system, and the “establishment of experimental multilateral schools”.\textsuperscript{73} The Consultative Committee of the Board of Education chaired by Sir Will Spens had in 1933 been charged with making recommendations to the Board about the organisation of secondary education after the attempts at ‘Hadow reorganisation’ during the 1920s, when the Consultative Committee to the Board of Education, under the Chairmanship of Sir Henry Hadow, had recommended that all children be entitled to secondary education at age 11, but because of its terms of reference it was not empowered to recommend that all education after age 11 be included under the secondary code. Thus the Hadow Report envisaged ‘secondary education for all’ as fundamentally divided in terms of amenities, its content and thus the prestige and prospects it offered. It was the children of the working class which would receive the austere side of this division, but of course this was not mentioned in the Report.\textsuperscript{74} The Spens Report was published December 1938, and though it argued for the integration of all post-11 education under the secondary code, it did

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., pp. 94-95.
\textsuperscript{71} See the account of a national conference of protest against the Education Bill on 29 February 1936 in Simon, \textit{The Politics of Educational Reform}, pp. 219-220.
\textsuperscript{72} Morris, \textit{The People’s Schools}, p. 41.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., p. 95.
recommended a tripartite system of separate grammar, technical and secondary modern schools for England. In doing so, Spens accepted the argument put forward in the Hadow Report and prevalent among educational psychologists at the time that children inherited a fixed ‘general intelligence’ that was the most important factor determining their educational capacity, and could be reliably measured by an intelligence test at age 11.\textsuperscript{75} As an alternative to tripartism, the multilateral school, where grammar, technical and modern streams would be educated in one common institution, was a hot topic in the politics of education. Certainly, in their evidence to Spens, the NUT, NALT and the TUC came out in favour of the single secondary school in terms much less equivocal than Morris’.\textsuperscript{76} Since \textit{The People’s Schools} was published only 2 months after the Spens Report, it must have been written whilst the debate about multilateralism was going on, so the fact that it was relatively conservative on secondary organisation is an indication of CPGB teachers’ anxiousness not to upset the potential for maximum possible unity, even when teacher activists and educationalists on Labour’s left had come up with more radical solutions. In fact, NALT’s \textit{Education: A Policy} had advocated a nationwide multilateral secondary school system as early as 1934,\textsuperscript{77} and post-Spens in January 1939, the Labour’s ACE –which by this point included among its number one Brian Simon\textsuperscript{78}– had said that there was a strong case to be made for the general development of multilateral schools. Later in 1939, ACE recommended to the LCC that it should implement multilateral reorganisation in London in order to anticipate the same on a nationwide basis by a future Labour government, and confirmed its approval of the multilateral school to the Party’s National Executive Committee.\textsuperscript{79} This is not to suggest that there was wholesale support for multilateralism within the Labour Party – there were significant doubters still attached to the grammar school – but overall Labour teachers and educationalists were


\textsuperscript{78} Simon, as he was then a member of the University Labour Federation, was automatically a Labour Party member despite also being in the CPGB, for students were outside Labour’s proscription of communists. See Brian Simon, \textit{A Life in Education} (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1998), p. 29.

\textsuperscript{79} Parkinson, \textit{The Labour Party and the Organization of Secondary Education}, p. 32.
certainly making more ambitious suggestions for reform of secondary education than those outlined in *The People’s Schools*.

A review of the book in *Labour Monthly* indicates that the CPGB was conscious of the limitations in Morris’ enquiry. It argued that the book showed “the need for a more comprehensive treatise on English education, both in theory and practice, from a Marxist point of view”. However, the reviewer approved that Morris “deliberately refrained from entering the field of pedagogical and educational theory” in order to “deliver a series of proposals for educational advance which will have the backing of the majority of teachers and educationalists”.\(^8^0\) There is hardly a more apposite description of the priorities of communist educational politics during the Popular Front.

**Part of the Union: the Popular Front from Above and Below**

Also crucial to securing the backing of the mainstream of teachers for the Popular Front was work in the established trade unions. As the first chapter of this thesis outlined, in the early 1930s British communist schoolteachers had envisaged the EWL as a radical ‘red’ alternative to the mainstream teaching unions, but after the Party’s ‘January Resolution’ the League had pledged itself to working within existing organisations to build up rank and file coalitions against the perceived class-collaboration of their leaderships. Consequently, by the advent of the Popular Front communist schoolteachers were already active in their unions. However, emphasising as it did the need to take the masses “as they are, and not as we should like to have them”,\(^8^1\) the Popular Front copper-fastened this approach. Furthermore, accepting more firmly the legitimacy of existing trade union structures as a basis for defeating fascism meant that communists needed to make absolutely certain that the existing reformist trade union leadership did not hand them over to the forces of reaction.\(^8^2\) This meant getting communists into responsible positions.

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\(^8^1\) Dimitrov, *The United Front*, p. 25.
\(^8^2\) See Morgan, *Against Fascism and War*, pp. 36-38. For further discussion of the CPGB’s approach to trade unionism during the Popular Front, see also Branson, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1927-1941*, pp. 172-187. The leading contemporary exposition of the CPGB’s attitude towards trade unionism during the Popular Front is John Mahon, *Trade Unionism* (London: Gollancz, 1938).
The Ploughshare edition for summer 1935 argued that the trade union movement was for communist teachers the centre of gravity in their fight against fascism and war. A communist, Labour Party and a pacifist teacher were asked what teachers could do for peace. For the CPGB teacher, movements such as the TAWM had an important role to play, but it was “above all through the teaching unions” that the profession could be roused. Getting Party teachers into positions of influence and power was clearly central to this strategy. In 1937, G.C.T. Giles was elected to the Executive Committee of the NUT, and Nan McMillan was voted Vice-President of the NUWT, becoming its national President during the Christmas holidays of 1938-39. Both had been influential figures in their local associations for some time (Giles in Middlesex, McMillian in London) and McMillan had been on the Central Council of the NUWT as early as 1934, but it was not until after the CPGB’s change to the Popular Front line that they were elected to national office. The Party leadership evidently approved of and encouraged this strategy, for it invited schoolteachers in union office to speak at Party events. For example, Nan McMillan was a speaker at an August 1938 Daily Worker conference on the need for trade union unity, sharing the platform with other CPGB stalwarts of industrial politics Arthur Horner, R.F. Papworth and Wal Hannington. The Daily Worker made great play of McMillan’s position within the union, despite the fact that she asked the paper not to do so, as she was speaking in a personal capacity and not as a union representative. This attempt by the CPGB to imply that the NUWT endorsed the Party’s stance for a Popular Front caused much consternation among McMillan’s union colleagues.

Ruffling feathers was not the priority, however. Essentially, the aim of Party teachers in their unions was to build up the greatest possible unity in their profession. Demands for secular education, co-education, or to fight against imperialist teaching were no longer pursued. When, in the wake of the 1936 Education Act, the NUT journal The Schoolmaster gave a its front pages to ‘Secular Educationists

84 ‘Our New President’, The Schoolmaster and Woman Teacher’s Chronicle, 14 April 1944, p. 231.
85 Letter from Nan McMillan to Brian Simon, 18 May 1989 (Simon papers, DC/SIM/2/26).
86 Letter from Ethel Froud, NUWT General Secretary, to Central Council members, 28 July 1934 (NUWT archive, UWT/D/27/54).
87 See Daily Worker, 29 August 1938 (clipping in NUWT archive, UWT/D/43/8).
88 Letter from Nan McMillan to Ethel Froud, 5 September 1938 (NUWT archive, UWT/D/43/8).
89 See the disclaimer published by the NUWT in The Woman Teacher, 16 September 1938, p. 367.
and the Act’, no communist teacher featured.\(^9^0\) Thus when an issue of already stated communist concern appeared to rub against the grain of mainstream teachers, it was dropped. Another typical instance of this can be found in the attitude of Party teachers towards gas drills in schools. In 1935 communist teachers were among those firmly opposed to holding them. The General Committee of the London Teachers’ Association (on which CPGB teacher Dave Capper was highly active) was congratulated in *The Ploughshare* for passing a resolution expressing strong opposition to such drills, citing them as instrumental in building up a “war psychology” in children.\(^9^1\) However, when teaching union leaders readily answered the call of the Board of Education to discuss the matter in April 1937 the TAWM suddenly dropped its opposition.\(^9^2\)

But this is not to say that communist teachers instantly became ‘respectable’ figures to the rest of the profession. They still faced prejudice from within their unions, even those elected to high office. For example, G.C.T. Giles was warned by fellow NUT Executive member Harry Spikes that their General Secretary Frederick Mander regarded Giles as a “cancer”, that he loathed the idea of him being on the Executive and would “do his damnedest to get you out”.\(^9^3\) Similarly, there was much suspicion about Nan McMillan within the NUWT. Some members threatened to refuse to pay their subscriptions on hearing of her communism, and particular energy was put into a campaign against her by London Labour Party teachers.\(^9^4\) And as much as they called for unity, communist teachers were not afraid to level strident criticism at union officialdom when it was deemed to be frustrating the fight against fascism or for peace. Both the NAS and NUWT leadership were attacked for their lack of enthusiasm for the TAWM.\(^9^5\)

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\(^9^3\) Letter from Harry Spikes to G.C.T. Giles, 13 June 1935, (Giles papers, box 1).
\(^9^4\) See letter from D.L. Giles to Miss H.D. Deadman, Honorary Secretary of NUWT, 17 October 1937; and letter from Miss G.M. Chaplin to Ethel Froud, General Secretary of NUWT, 25 March 1938 (NUWT archive, UWT/D/43/8).
\(^9^5\) See *The Ploughshare*, 2 (March-April 1934), p. 11; 17 (April 1937), pp. 6-7; and 18 (June-July 1937), pp. 5-6.
Hence, the union activity of CPGB schoolteachers during the Popular Front was not simply a timid acquiescence with their associations’ bureaucracies in an attempt to appear respectable. On the contrary, communists were vociferous and energetic: they just concentrated on a much more focussed and less contentious set of issues as compared to the late 1920s and early 1930s. The threat posed by fascism and war to quantitative educational advance was a rallying cry around which many teachers previously hostile to working with communists could gather. For example, Leah Manning could be found speaking at a *Labour Monthly* United Front conference, by working closely with Giles on the NUT Executive. By subordinating potentially divisive discussions about educational content and organisation to those of war, peace and educational economies, the Party’s teachers were following Dimitrov’s advice and attempting to end their isolation from the profession by finding a common language with it. The election of Giles and McMillan to senior office in their unions demonstrates that they were successful in this endeavour. Nevertheless this undoubtedly came at the cost of developing the potential for agency in the classroom which *The Mind in Chains* had hinted at, and also led to a rather tame communist position on the future organisation of secondary education.

**The Primacy of Political Struggle**

As well as activism inside their profession, schoolteachers were still expected to involve themselves energetically in the day-to-day legwork of a CPGB member. And since the Popular Front line laid special emphasis on reaching out beyond the converted, such Party legwork was considerable: canvassing, selling the *Daily Worker*, addressing meetings, duties as a branch-secretary or literature secretary, or carrying out Party education, and working on local Peace Councils, Aid to Spain campaigns, the LBC and the like. The primacy of such political work naturally detracted from the amount of time communist teachers could spend discussing education. Brian Simon spent weeks away in the Rhondda campaigning for the Party in local elections in 1935 and 1936. For Ben Ainley in Manchester, too, the Popular Front was “the paramount issue of the day”. He threw himself

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97 Letter from Harry Spikes to G.C.T. Giles, 1 December 1935 (Giles papers, box 1).
wholeheartedly into building it up: sitting as the CPGB representative on the local Branch of the National Council for Civil Liberties, building up support for the Peace Ballot, the Unity Campaign and, above all, in the LBC.100

The LBC founder Victor Gollancz clearly saw education as the Club’s raison d’être,101 and this coupled with the proximity of the Club to the CPGB before 1939102 meant that Party teachers could, and did, play a part in its activities during the Popular Front period. One way they did this was through establishing a prominent role in the running of local LBC discussion groups. The network of such groups had reached over 1200 by summer 1939,103 and they were a primary site for discussion of the Club’s books and debate on how best to defeat fascism and war. Indeed, the LBC’s National Group Organiser until 1940, Dr John Lewis (also a loyal supporter of the CPGB), told Gollancz that “teaching work” was the groups’ most vital role.104 Gollancz himself complained to Harry Pollitt that local CPGB branches virtually ran many local groups by early 1939.105 Julian Symons and George Orwell made similar observations.106 If such perceptions are accurate, it is highly likely that Party teachers, being the comrades with the necessary skills to convey information and marshal discussion, were closely involved.

Certainly, the activities of Ben Ainley in Manchester provide a fascinating snapshot of how actively a Party teacher could get involved in an LBC group. Frank Allaun – who was later to become Labour MP for Salford but in the 1930s was a communist activist who ran Collett’s bookshop in Manchester, from where over 1000 LBC books a month were distributed – remembered that local CP

100 Unattributed and unpublished biography of Ben Ainley, p. 88.
101 Gollancz insisted that the Club started out as “an educational body”, and “must at all costs retain its educational character”: see Victor Gollancz, ‘Thoughts after Munich’, Left News, 31 (November 1938), p. 1033. For further exploration of Gollancz’s view of education, how this was reflected in the activities of the LBC, and of the tensions between the educational and political aspects of the Club, see Gary McCulloch, ‘“Teachers and Missionaries”: The Left Book Club as an Educational Agency’, History of Education, 14, 2 (1985), pp. 137-153.
104 Letter from John Lewis to Victor Gollancz, 2 September 1939 (Victor Gollancz papers, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick, MSS.157/3/DOC/1/8).
105 Letter from Victor Gollancz to Harry Pollitt, 16 January 1939 (Gollancz papers, MSS.157/3/DOC/1/1).
teacher Ben Ainley was “extremely active” in the LBC in and around Manchester as a group convenor and a lecturer.  

Such was his involvement in the LBC that Ainley actually influenced discussions in group meetings at which he was not even present. He provided a critical appraisal of each monthly LBC choice, and a list of two or three questions pertinent to it, which were circulated to all the discussion group leaders in and around Manchester. Ainley was so effective that he led monthly training sessions for the other group leaders in and around Manchester, and day schools for those from further afield. Nor was he preaching to the converted few: by far the majority who attended LBC groups in Manchester and Salford were Labour Party members, and such groups spread across the whole district, with a total membership of over 500.

And Ainley’s experience was not an isolated one. The LBC held a Teachers’ Conference in 1937, attended by over 200, at which G.C.T. Giles was a keynote speaker. Specialist LBC groups for teachers sprang up in its wake, and several such groups existed in London by the spring of 1938. Given the closeness of the LBC to the CPGB at this time, not to mention that the groups were co-ordinated by John Lewis, it is highly probable that communist teachers participated in them. Certainly, Nan McMillan was invited to speak to the Hackney LBC Teachers’ Group in early 1939. A Manchester Teachers’ Group was established in June 1938, and given his presence in Manchester’s LBC community, it is extremely likely that this involved Ben Ainley.

Nonetheless, the primary task of LBC groups was to discuss book choices and educate adults about the necessity of a broad alliance against fascism and war, so it is doubtful that CPGB teachers often departed from this in order to start discussions about the qualitative aspects of education for children, even in specific teacher groups or at teacher conferences. McMillan’s invitation to the Hackney Teachers’ Group was to speak on the general subject of ‘The Defence of Culture’, rather than

107 Letter from Frank Allaun to Jack Askins, 19 October 1981 (Ainley papers).
108 Unattributed and unpublished biography of Ben Ainley, p. 86.
112 Letter from M.H. Lee to Nan McMillan on behalf of Hackney Teachers’ LBC Group, 9 February 1939 (NUWT archive, UWT/B/9/2).
113 Heddon, ‘The Left Book Club in Manchester and Salford’, p. 63.
the education of children specifically. Furthermore, *Left News*’ summation of the 1937 Teacher Conference at which Giles spoke was that future such events should be “far less left” and noted that “there is a great deal of work to be done in showing teachers what possibilities there are, even within the limits of the present system”. This was hardly a ringing endorsement of the LBC as a site from which teachers could hold radical discussions on educational content or method.

**Soviet Conservatism**

An LBC book which no doubt provided British communists with a further disincentive to think radically about education. Beatrice King’s *Changing Man: The Education System of the USSR* was issued by the Club in June 1937. It confirmed the changes in Soviet schooling which had been taking place, since 1931. The experimentation and decentralisation of the 1920s (see chapter one) was being reined in by a Stalinist system which valued above all loyalty to the Soviet state and its rapid drive for industrialisation. A number of decrees between 1931 and 1932 abolished the Project Method and Dalton Plan, returned to teacher-led class lessons as the basic pedagogic method, limited the self-government of schools, and increased the authority of teachers over pupils. In 1934 compulsory revised syllabuses were imposed by central government, returning to the teaching of separate subjects which King described as “very much in the same way as in the general run of English schools”. School uniforms were reintroduced, co-education ended and grading and examinations were given more importance.

Such seemingly retrograde steps were perceived and explained by British communists and Soviet sympathisers in a number of ways. King’s explanation was much like the one she had begun in the *Educational Worker* back in February 1933. To her, the modifications in Soviet education were both a temporary aberration which reflected current economic priorities of the Second Five Year and simultaneously a reaffirmation of the true principles of communist education, in that they demonstrated the truth of the Leninist maxim that the “educational system of any country is conditioned by the

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116 For a full account of Stalin’s changes to education in the USSR 1931-1934, see Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union*, pp. 209-233.
economic system prevailing at the time”. The *Daily Worker* had reported on the shift in Soviet schools earlier than King, in late 1935, but in common with her, argued that the USSR’s educational policy had changed because the Soviet economy had changed. The stabilisation of the socialist planned economy meant that the changes were not “falling into line with bourgeois thought and method”, but rather that Soviet children were “being fitted for the society in which they are going to live … where they are needed to fill jobs for which they have been educated and prepared. That is the difference”. By contrast, capitalism’s decay meant that “English … parents scarcely know in what manner of society their children will grow up and what to educate them for”. A letter to the *Daily Worker* from Noel Brinton, who had toured Soviet schools with the TLL in the 1920s (see chapter one), further developed this argument. The reduction in Soviet educational experimentation was really evidence of the success of socialist planning and its ability to deliver mass education to a population where it had previously not existed. The Soviet Union had to abandon the Dalton Plan and the Project Method as they were now unfeasible and costly: since there were so many more schools than in the 1920s, with larger class sizes, the Dalton Plan and Project method were no longer workable or affordable. This explanation by a CPGB schoolteacher shows that the tendency of the Party’s teachers to focus arguments for educational advance in terms quantitatively rather than qualitatively was not solely a product of attempting to build Popular Front unity among teachers. It was also encouraged by developments in the USSR’s education policy.

**Continuity with Class Against Class**

However, the influence of educational practice in the Soviet lodestar and the tactical exigencies of anti-fascist unity were not the only reasons communist schoolteachers avoided discussion of educational content after 1935. For some, an additional disincentive to consider qualitative reform of education under capitalism lay in the continuities between the Third Period and the Popular Front line. For although Class Against Class was over in the sense that the CPGB now saw worth in working with

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bourgeois democrats in order to make defensive alliances against fascist encroachment, the Comintern analysis of the general crisis of capitalism and its relationship to fascism remained essentially unchanged. Communist willingness to work with reformists was not a recognition that capitalism could be reformed, but a temporary measure designed to deal with a temporary delay in the coming revolution, simultaneously striking a blow against fascism and exposing the redundancy of reformism. Dutt’s ‘Notes of the Month’ in February 1935 make this point clear:

In the simplest terms, the sharpening of the class struggle represented by fascism, inevitably brings a crisis for social democracy, the party of the practical denial of the class struggle, of class conciliation. A process of differentiation sets in ... of which the final choice comes ever more sharply into view: either on one side, or on the other side, of the barricades. Either with the bourgeoisie, with the White Guards, with Fascism, or with the revolutionary working class, with Communism.

This reading of the situation influenced some communist teachers to not only refrain from discussions about the qualitative reform of education under capitalism, but rather to confront them head on as pointless tinkering with a school system that was, as an aegis of the capitalist state, unreformable in this regard. Chapter one of this thesis demonstrated that this tendency was evident in the TLL/EWL during the Third Period, but it was by no means unanimous: there remained an element within the League which felt that exposition and combat of the anti working-class bias of educational content under capitalism was worth pursuing. It was for the convenience of the nascent Popular Front against economies and war which began developing in earnest from late 1932 and early 1933 that such discussions were actively discouraged, not the militant excesses of ‘Class Against Class’. And, as this chapter has so far illustrated, as the Popular Front developed, so the avoidance of public discourse on the qualitative reform of schooling among CPGB teachers was further established, despite the seemingly logical space for it in the new line. But there was more to this than keeping quiet on such matters for the sake of unity against fascism, economies and war. A fundamental continuity between

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120 Kevin Morgan, Against Fascism and War, p. 21; and Callaghan, The Far Left in British Politics, p. 52.
121 Labour Monthly, 17, 2 (February 1935), pp. 73-74.
‘Class Against Class’ and the Popular Front was that capitalism was still in terminal decline and bound for fascism. Thus, that strand among communist teachers which during the Third Period had dismissed meaningful reform to the content of education under capitalism could still find outlet.

This explains the suspicion demonstrated by the CPGB towards the limited communist experimentation with ‘socialist’ education which did go on during the Popular Front at Fortis Green. Such efforts were dismissed in the *Daily Worker* as “considering our children as existing in a void, not as vital links in a huge capitalism system” and derided as socialism of the “Hampstead variety … cut off from all realities of the class struggle”.

Criticism like this bore the hallmarks of the anti-intellectualism and economic determinism of Class Against Class. This tendency even made itself known in that most Popular Front of enterprises, the TAWM. During the late 1930s, a dialogue had emerged among schoolteachers about using their positions to educate youth to properly play a part in building international cooperation as a method of avoiding war in the future. These discussions were closely associated with the Advisory Committee on League of Nations Teaching and the New Commonwealth Society.

The education committee of the LCC had similarly been engaged in efforts on this front: in 1934 it had suggested that Empire Day be substituted for ‘Commonwealth Day’ to divest the celebrations of any glorification of imperialist conquest.

To this suggestion, the following rejoinder appeared in *The Ploughshare*. Changing the name and tone of Empire Day was:

...to merely deflect the propaganda from one emotional plane to another ... [to] subtly create in [schoolchildren] such an intense love for country that they are forced to uphold any war of aggression in order to preserve their ideal of patriotism. And they do not realise that their country does not, in any vital sense, belong to them, but that it belongs to a group of monopolists who do not mean to share the booty. But ... what can teachers to express their resentment? As individuals nothing ... it is impossible to conceive of education as divorced from the theory and practice of the state.

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122 ‘Do we want Socialist Schools?’, *Daily Worker*, 2 October 1936.
125 ‘Empire Day Celebrations and the Schools’ *The Ploughshare*, 3 (June-July 1934), p. 7.
Similarly, when, later in the same year, the LCC encouraged teachers to use Armistice Day to promote the need for of international arbitration in order to inculcate a spirit of peace, an article in The Ploughshare said it was “a waste of time … to teach international brotherhood and peace by arbitration” since “pupils will never have chance to put it into effect”. To do so was “like sending them out naked into a hailstorm”.126 A 1935 article suggesting Geography lessons could help engender mutual international understanding was panned for similar reasons. “To save ourselves we must settle the monopolists” ran the communist counter-argument, “then we can study and practice a unified ecology on a world basis”.127 This tendency was still apparent in the TAWM by the final months of 1935: Edward Upward stressed that that “to stop war … our first duty is to struggle against our own rulers”.128

Admittedly however, such strident communist criticism of efforts to ‘teach peace’ faded away as the march of fascism abroad continued unabated. This is in common with the general policy of the CPGB, which at this time was prepared to downplay its revolutionary rhetoric and forgo the necessary preconditions of a Popular Front in favour of uniting all those who stood for collective security – even conservatives – as the international situation deteriorated throughout 1937 and 1938 and the need for an Anglo-Soviet alliance against fascism became ever more desperate.129 Around this time, there was a definite change in tone in The Ploughshare. The last issue of 1936 gave the leading article to Labour MP Professor Philip Noel Baker, an Executive Member of the International Peace Campaign (IPC) and former assistant to the League of Nations Secretary General, who was permitted to extol the worth of “teaching peace” to children.130 By summer 1937 Margaret Clarke could be found at the NUT conference attempting to pass a resolution pledging full support to the IPC and the League of Nations Union, and quoting a letter from its Conservative President, Lord Cecil to support her.131 Indeed, Cecil himself had a letter published in The Ploughshare extolling the virtues of the IPC and the viability an

129 Morgan, Against Fascism and War, p. 45.
131 ‘The National Union of Teachers at Conference’, The Ploughshare, 18 (June-July 1937), pp. 5-6.
effective peace built on the League of Nations. At the start of 1938 the editorial board of *The Ploughshare* decided in this spirit to hand over the journal to the Teachers’ Committee of the International Peace Campaign in order to widen out its appeal even further. A new journal, *The New Ploughshare* was subtitled *The Teachers’ Peace Paper* and no longer *Organ of the Teachers’ Anti-War Movement*, presumably to downplay its connection to communism. But it was still a fundamentally communist enterprise. Edward Upward was still editor. But now even he was outlining the need to teach peace, though phrased in a way which made less attempt to hide his unchanged views about the relationship between fascism, capitalism and education:

> It would be easy for us to maintain that the schools are already opened up to all sorts of propaganda and to cite in evidence Empire Day ... But an answer along such lines ... would fail to satisfy those teachers - and there are many of them - who consider that Empire Day ... has nothing to do with propaganda ... ‘Propaganda’, we suggest, means for ... many teachers in England ... ‘dissemination of ideas ... which have not yet received the official approval of the government in power’. We state ... that to teach Peace is to disseminate ideas which have received the official approval of the government, and therefore Peace Teaching cannot be regarded as ‘propaganda’.

Despite the softening of its stance by 1938 however, *The Ploughshare’s* early editions demonstrate that communist schoolteachers’ avoidance of discussion about alternative educational content or method was a logical imperative of the continuities between the Comintern’s Third Period and Popular Front analyses of capitalism as well as a tactical ploy to unify anti-fascist sentiment, and a influenced by developments in Soviet schools.

**CPGB Educational Politics at the Outbreak of War**

Issues such as teaching peace would be rendered somewhat irrelevant on 3 September 1939. For from that day, Britain was actually at war. But just before these developments, the CPGB did advance its educational policy from those which had been advocated by Max Morris months earlier in *The People’s*

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Schools. The Draft Programme to be submitted the Party’s 16th Congress scheduled for October 1939 went further than Morris’ call for experiments with multilateral secondary schools. It proposed the establishment of a single type of secondary school for all children aged over 11.\textsuperscript{135} In the end however, the outbreak of war led to the postponement of the Congress. Moreover, by the time the Congress had been due to go ahead, the anti-fascist credibility which the CPGB and its teachers had built up during the late 1930s was to be sorely tested by the machinations of Soviet diplomacy, as will now be shown.

\textsuperscript{135} Parsons ‘Communism in the Professions’, p. 507, n. 44.
Chapter Three: Unwelcome Allies? 1939-1941

Chapter Summary

The CPGB’s policy of opposing the Second World War as ‘imperialist’ during 1939-41 was accepted by most of the Party membership, either enthusiastically or loyally. Evidence suggests communist schoolteachers were not atypical, even though they had been amongst the earliest, most committed, and most successful agitators for united opposition to fascism during the 1930s. The imperialist war line undoubtedly lowered public esteem for communists in Britain. Yet during the ‘phoney war’ the senior positions to which some Party teachers had managed to rise within their unions during the Popular Front years meant that they actually helped lead their profession’s response to the unique challenges war brought to pupils and teachers. However, this was to change following the CPGB’s support for the Soviet invasion of Finland, and as the Nazi threat to Britain became increasingly serious from spring 1940. From then, the nature of the imperialist war line meant communist teachers became more isolated, and a campaign was waged against their influence by the NUT and the security services. Nonetheless, it is argued here that this hostility, considerable though it undoubtedly was, should not be exaggerated. Evidence shows that the freedom the Party policy gave communist teachers to criticise the Government and highlight the inadequacies of its educational provision during the War earned them a degree of respect. Leading Party teachers worked closely with NALT, and retained not insignificant support in their unions despite the imperialist war line.

How to Win the War?

The CPGB spent much of the 1930s identifying the National Government as a friend of fascism, and agitating for a Popular Front which could hopefully unseat it, or at least force it to sign an alliance with the Soviet Union, which was presented as the world’s only consistently anti-fascist power. Thus the signature of the Nazi-Soviet Pact on 23 August 1939 and the National Government’s declaration of war on Germany by 3 September could be seen as the unravelling of the whole Popular Front thesis. On the other hand, these events can be interpreted as a vindication of the line. The failure to establish a Popular Front government in Britain serious about forming an alliance with the USSR had – as the CPGB had
warned – led to a worsening of the threat fascism posed to Britain, from within and without. Rebuffed by the National Government, some argued that the Soviet Union had been forced to seek a deal with Germany in order to defend itself, and that Hitler was now looking westward. Meanwhile, Chamberlain had in the existence of war conditions the perfect excuse to further the drive towards domestic ‘fascistisation’.¹ But whichever way British communists interpreted the events of late August and September 1939, the decision of the CPGB Central Committee to denounce the War as ‘imperialist’ at the beginning of October was certainly a surprise. Just over a month earlier, the same Committee had published a statement calling for a “war on two fronts”; against both Nazi aggression and the National Government.² Twelve days later, a Harry Pollitt authored pamphlet, How to Win the War, was more unequivocal; whilst it did not dispute that the fall of the National Government was necessary, it nonetheless insisted that communists’ first priority should be to defeat Nazism.³ However, on the very day that How to Win the War was published, a telegram from Moscow arrived at King Street stipulating that the War should be interpreted as an inter-imperialist conflict, and thus Britain’s cause was just as bankrupt as Nazi Germany’s. The telegram caused much debate at the top of the the CPGB, and led to Harry Pollitt standing down as leader, though he never publicly refuted the ‘imperialist war’ line, and later issued a recantation of his stance over it.⁴ On 7 October 1939 King Street announced that the War was not a struggle against fascism, but “a fight between imperialist powers over profits, colonies and world domination”. The war against fascism was now best waged not on two fronts, but one. The “struggle of the British people against the Chamberlains and Churchills” was now “the best help to the struggle ... against Hitler”.⁵

¹ For a convincing interpretation of the period between the Nazi-Soviet Pact and the decision to oppose the War as a continuity of the Popular Front line, see Morgan, Against Fascism and War, pp. 86-90; and Thompson, The Good Old Cause, pp. 65-67.
² ‘War! Communist Policy’, Daily Worker, 2 September 1939.
³ Harry Pollitt, How to Win the War (London: CPGB, 1939), pp. 3-4.
⁵ CPGB, ‘Peace or War? Manifesto of the Central Committee of the Communist Party to British People’, Daily Worker, 7 October 1939.
Schoolteachers’ Perceptions of the New Line

Most CPGB members accepted the imperialist war line, whether reluctantly or enthusiastically.\(^6\) Certainly, the Party press reported that CPGB membership actually increased by two thousand between August 1939 and March 1940,\(^7\) and recent scholarship backs this up.\(^8\) Any loss of hope in the Party during the early ‘imperialist war’ phase therefore occurred chiefly not amongst its membership, but amongst those ‘fellow travellers’ on the Left who had sympathised with the Popular Front campaign. A notable example is the LBC founder Victor Gollancz. His open disagreement with the communist attitude to the War\(^9\) and the consequent split between British communism and the LBC have been cited as a symbol of the fissure of the Popular Front campaign in Britain.\(^10\) Given the close involvement of communist schoolteachers in the LBC before 1939 (see chapter two), the experience of two Party teachers in the Club provides insight into communist teachers’ commitment to the imperialist war line.

Harry Fomison, who taught in Westmorland, took the time to write to Gollancz:

> When the millions of young men slain in this war ask ‘why?’, dare you reply ‘to save the people of Britain from Fascism’? Leave that hypocrisy to the Beaverbrooks and the Bishops! You know that their deaths will help rather than hinder the Churchills and Chamberlains ... to put the Fascist yoke upon us ... And you have joined that band of infamous traitors, fit only for the nethermost circle of Dante’s Hell ... I, for my part, will certainly use every ounce of influence I have to prevent the Club being used as an instrument of imperialist war”\(^11\).

Fomison’s letter indicates that – over half a year into the War – communist schoolteacher involvement in the LBC continued, and that they were among those willing to push the imperialist war


\(^11\) Letter from Harry Fomison to Victor Gollancz, 20 May 1940 (Gollancz papers, MSS.1573/DOC/1/74).
line in the Club. Certainly, by February 1940, Gollancz was worried that the Groups were becoming, vehicles of “communist ... propaganda for that point of view”. Given the close Party teacher involvement in the LBC during the Popular Front (see chapter two), it is likely that other teachers followed Fomision’s example, even if they were not as vituperative. Certainly, in Manchester, Ben Ainley was a “forceful ... advocate” of the imperialist war line. However he expressed this by terminating his previously extensive activity in the LBC. Outside the LBC, Margaret Cohen was well known in Coventry for shouting out the merits of the new line at shopping centres and factory gates, and Brian Simon remembered that it took “some discussion”, but eventually he accepted the new approach as “tenable and right”. Whether communist teachers opposed the War or not however, they were not immune to the challenges it posed to their profession. Though they were able to play a key role in responding to them.

‘Phoney War’, 1939-1940

Early CPGB pronouncements focussed opposition to the War on the toll it was taking on ordinary workers. The Central Committee’s manifesto of 7 October 1939 makes this clear. For all its rhetoric about an immediate peace conference and waging war instead against the National Government, its key demands focused on measures against profiteers, the lowering of prices, wage and benefit increases, the restriction of working hours and the preservation of people’s rights and services. During the early ‘phoney war’ period of 1939-1940, this stance gained some traction among a wider Labour Movement frustrated by price rises, wage freezes and declining living standards on a home front not yet racked by air raids or the threat of imminent invasion. And the communist demand that the National Government keep its “[h]ands off ... social services” meant CPGB schoolteachers made a leading contribution to

12 Letter from Victor Gollancz to Betty Reid, 19 February 1940 (Gollancz papers, MSS 157/3/DOC/1/26/1).
13 Unpublished and unattributed biography of Ben Ainley, p. 89 and p. 92.
14 Margaret Cohen, in Attfield and Williams, The Communist Party and the War, p. 124.
15 Brian Simon, draft of his autobiography, chapter 6 (Simon papers, DC/SIM/4/5/2/4), pp. 15-16.
16 CPGB, ‘Peace or War?’ See also Morgan, Against Fascism and War, pp. 122-128.
18 CPGB, ‘Peace or War?’
the educational politics of the time, something overlooked by Steve Parsons in his otherwise excellent summation of this period.\textsuperscript{19}

Evacuation measures undertaken by the Government from 1939 plunged schools into chaos.\textsuperscript{20} Nan McMillan remembers that she and her fellow Party teachers in London were “scattered ... to all corners of the country”,\textsuperscript{21} Nan herself being billeted to Sussex,\textsuperscript{22} whilst her husband David Capper remained in post in South West London.\textsuperscript{23} G.C.T. Giles was evacuated with his school to Winchester.\textsuperscript{24} In Manchester, Ben Ainley was not evacuated, but had to juggle his profession with working for the Auxiliary Fire Service, often working all night after a day of teaching.\textsuperscript{25} Party teachers were also called into the armed forces, including Brian Simon, Max Morris and Reg Neal, who taught at Yeading Junior School.\textsuperscript{26} Yet those teachers who were in responsible union positions helped lead the profession’s attempts to cope with the War’s ill effects in its early months. McMillan was NUWT President until 1941,\textsuperscript{27} and devoted much energy to her office, for example representing her Union at a deputation to the Board of Education pressing the need to maintain educational standards during the War.\textsuperscript{28} Similarly, as a member of the NUT’s Executive G.C.T. Giles was appointed to its Education and Evacuation Committee.\textsuperscript{29} David Capper was elected unopposed as Secretary of the emergency London Central Committee, which was set up to co-ordinate the 5 divisions of the London NUT association’s attempts to look after the interests of those children and teachers who had not left the capital.\textsuperscript{30} Capper worked

\textsuperscript{19} Parsons, ‘Communism in the Professions’, pp. 486-487.
\textsuperscript{21} Letter from Nan McMillan to Brian Simon, 18 May 1989 (Simon papers, DC/SIM/2/26).
\textsuperscript{22} Letter from Ethel Fround, NUWT General Secretary, to E.M. Rich, 8 April 1940 (NUWT archive UWT/D/21/6).
\textsuperscript{23} ‘Minutes of the First Meeting of the London (NUT/LTA) Central Committee Held at Hamilton House on Saturday February 24\textsuperscript{th} 1940’, 9 March 1940, (Capper papers, box 1).
\textsuperscript{24} Letter from Colnel Sir David Petrie to W.G. Stratton, Chief Constable of Winchester City Constabulary, 5 May 1941 (Giles’ MI5 file, KV 2/1785).
\textsuperscript{25} Unpublished and unattributed biography of Ben Ainley, p. 92.
\textsuperscript{27} Letter from McMillan to Simon, 18 May 1989.
\textsuperscript{28} Letter from E.M. Rich, Education Officer, to Ethel Froud (NUWT archive, UWT/D/21/6).
\textsuperscript{29} ‘The Executive Committee: Appointment of War-time Committees’, \textit{The Schoolmaster}, 19 October 1939, p. 470.
\textsuperscript{30} ‘Minutes of the First Meeting of the London (NUT/LTA) Central Committee Held at Hamilton House on Saturday March 16 1940’ (Capper papers, box 1).
tirelessly on the Committee, and did much to harry the local authorities, the Government and NUT National Executive. Thus, during the phoney war, communist teachers were swimming with the stream of opinion: the WEA, NALT, TUC, the Times Educational Supplement and even the Archbishop of Canterbury were making similar demands. And the Board of Education even responded to some of them. As the danger Nazi Germany posed to Britain became more real however, communist schoolteachers found that a shifts in their Party’s presentation of the imperialist war line would seriously jeopardise their influence.

**Isolation and Suspicion, 1940**

Following the Soviet invasion of Finland during winter 1939-40, the CPGB placed less emphasis on its economic objections to the War. Instead the Party identified Anglo-French plans to aid the Finns as evidence that they were the belligerents who had forced war on Hitler and were now turning their attention to the USSR, with the calculation that Germany would join them against her. This undoubtedly caused public hostility against the CPGB to rise, especially after Hitler’s invasion of Norway on 9 April 1940. Giles certainly experienced some of this hostility. Just days after the German campaign in Norway began, he spoke at a public meeting in Sheffield designed to call attention to the plight of education in wartime. On a handbill advertising the meeting, Giles had been advertised in his capacity as a NUT Executive member, and the Daily Worker did the same. Incensed by this, the General Secretary of the Sheffield NUT association wrote to his national General Secretary Frederick Mander to complain that in his speech Giles had advocated soviet control of schools by teachers and

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31 This included campaigns to improve evacuation provisions, conditions in emergency schools, air raid protection for schoolchildren, war bonuses for teachers, civil and employment rights of teachers. See the considerable documentary evidence in the Capper papers, box 1.
32 See Dent, Education in Transition, pp. 52-66.
33 See for example, ‘Hitler Speaks’, Daily Worker, 1 February 1940; and Quaestor, ‘New Fronts for Old’, Labour Monthly, 22, 2 (February 1940), pp. 83-88. This switch in emphasis is also usefully summarised in Childs, ‘The British Communist Party and the War’, pp. 243-244.
34 Thompson, The Good Old Cause, p. 69; Morgan, Against Fascism and War, p. 147; Pelling, The British Communist Party, pp. 113-114.
35 Letter from T.E. Hepworth, General Secretary of the Sheffield Teachers’ Association, to Frederick Mander, General Secretary of the NUT, 13 April 1940 (Giles papers, box 3).
36 ‘Teachers and Parents Meet’, Daily Worker, 15 April 1940; and copy of letter from T.E. Hepworth to Sheffield Telegraph, 16 April 1940, in NUT, ‘Addition to General Secretary’s Report: Sheffield Parent Teacher Meeting (Additional)’, 20 April 1940 (Giles papers, box 3).
parents. He had not done this exactly, but he did argue that Russia, the Spanish Republican Government and China had been able to safeguard educational advance during times of war because their schools were controlled by popular committees, and called upon parents, teachers and the Labour Movement to engage in similar action in Britain. Mander referred the matter to the NUT Executive, which met to consider it at NUT headquarters on 20 April. No action was taken against Giles at this meeting, but the Sheffield meeting was repudiated in *The Schoolmaster* as being of “doubtful character” and “Muscovite inspiration”. Giles was evidently anxious about the damage such allegations could do to him. He wrote to the General Secretary of the Sheffield NUT, the editor of *The Schoolmaster* and to the NUT Executive, denying he had claimed to be speaking on behalf of the Union at the meeting and rejecting that he had made any suggestion of soviet control of schools. Giles also wrote to the Chairman of the NUT’s Tenure Committee seeking support. In addition, he requested the opportunity to make a statement to the NUT Executive defending himself, but this was denied. Giles sensed that his treatment was indicative of an organised campaign against communist teachers within the NUT:

... these articles [in *The Schoolmaster*] are a direct incitement not only to act against me but against others ... Indeed I already have news of preliminary moves in other parts of the country ... Obviously under present conditions of rising war hysteria the general position is dangerous.

Giles’ anxiety was not unjustified. The nature of *The Schoolmaster*’s criticism of the meeting indicates that elements among its editorial board were hostile towards him and his communism. Someone also posted a copy of the critical article, with the most damaging allegations highlighted in blue pencil, to Giles’ employer at the Middlesex County Council’s Education Committee. As a result of this, Giles was summoned to explain himself. Moreover, the General Secretary of the Sheffield

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38 ‘Teachers and Parents Meet’.
39 NUT, ‘Addition to General Secretary’s Report: Sheffield Parent Teacher Meeting (Additional)’
40 Letter from Edith E. Murrell to the editor of *The Schoolmaster*, 16 May 1940, (Giles papers, box 3).
41 Letter from G.C.T. Giles to T.E. Hepworth; letter from Giles to the editor of *The Schoolmaster*, 10 May 1940; and letter from Giles to the NUT Executive, 12 May 1940 (Giles papers, box 3).
42 Letter from G.C.T. Giles to J.H. Woolridge, Chairman of the NUT Tenure Committee, 20 May 1940 (Giles papers, box 3).
43 Copy of letter from G.C.T. Giles to NUT President, 12 May 1940, in NUT, ‘Mr Giles and the Sheffield Meeting’, Minutes of NUT Executive meeting, 18 May 1940 (Giles papers, box 3).
44 Letter from G.C.T. Giles to J.H. Woolridge.
45 Ibid.
NUT association made a considerable effort to discredit Giles and communism more widely. Not content with reporting his alleged misdemeanour to Mander, T.E. Hepworth also took the time to travel to the school of a Miss Renshaw, organiser of the April meeting, to interview her about Giles’ conduct. Renshaw felt Hepworth’s “whole attitude was to attempt to get some commitment from me ... about you ... and to try to get a statement which would give him a hold … from a political point of view”.46

Margaret Cohen also experienced wartime hostility on account of her communism. When teaching a class one day, she turned around from the blackboard only to see the children stood looking directly at her, extending her a mock ‘Heil Hitler’ salute.47 But the taunts of their pupils or suspicion from union bureaucrats were far from the worst of the Party teachers’ problems. Many of them risked dismissal, even a loss of liberty, as the Government began measures to clamp down on potentially disloyal elements following the fall of France in June 1940. The Emergency Powers (Defence) Act and associated Defence Regulations were used by the Churchill Government to detain British fascists, and there was fear that they would also be used against communists too.48 The Board of Education wrote to MI5 on 30 April to report that Giles and Max Morris were “busily engaged in subversive activities”.49 In reply, MI5 stated that they knew “a great deal” about Giles and Morris, and revealed that “our investigations show … that communism is spreading amongst school teachers and we are watching the situation carefully”.50 Evidently they did, as in August 1940 LEAs were required to write to headteachers, asking them to report on any of their staff who were of dubious loyalty. Manchester and London, two areas where communist schoolteachers were numerous and active, were among them.51 Lanark County Council Education Committee also investigated communist teachers at Hamilton Academy on suspicion of being pro-Nazi and anti-British.52 Giles’ brother in law in Cardiff even

46 Letter from Miss Renshaw to G.C.T. Giles, 7 May 1940, (Giles papers, box 3).
47 Margaret Cohen, in Attfield and Williams (eds.), The Communist Party and the War, p. 124.
49 ‘History Sheet re the Activities of Granville Chas Trelawny from 10.4.39 to 18.1.45’ (Giles MI5 file, KV2/1785, part two).
50 Copy of letter from Major General Sir Vernon G.W. Kell, MI5, to Sir Maurice Holmes, Board of Education, May 1940 (Giles’ MI5 file, KV2/1785, part one).
51 ‘Employment of Aliens’ confidential Memo from LCC, 1 June 1940; and letter from W.O. Lester Smith, Manchester Education Committee, 7 August 1940 (NUWT archive, UWT/D/20/2).
reported him to the police as a potential fifth columnist whose “house is frequently full of Russians and Germans”.  

Although no action other than surveillance was ever taken against Giles or Morris, two of the first people to be arrested by order of the Home Office for distributing the CPGB’s 22 June manifesto *The People Must Act* were Harold Worthy and Eric Sleight, communist teachers at Sowerby Secondary School.  

Safeguarding schoolteachers’ civil liberties was, then, unsurprisingly a very live issue in educational politics by the summer of 1940. The NUT itself launched a specific campaign on the topic, discussing it at a Special Conference on 10 August. But such was the hostility towards the CPGB line that its teachers garnered little sympathy, despite their obvious vulnerability. An ‘Appeal to Teachers’ leaflet by the CPGB was distributed outside the NUT Special Conference, and the National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCL) – an organisation then very close to the CPGB – decided to make a direct appeal to teachers on the protection of their civil and political rights by suggesting the formation of a special Teachers’ Committee. On 16 August a group of six teachers from the NUT, NUWT, AAM and NALT met with the Secretary and the Solicitor of the NCCL to discuss the issue. The minutes record that all the teachers who spoke rebuffed the NCCL’s offer. When David Capper proposed that he and five other teachers from the London NUT attend an August 1940 NCCL demonstration as representatives of their union, a written warning from the General Secretary forbade them from doing so. To cement its hostility to the NCCL and CPGB’s overtures to teachers further, on 22 August the NUT published a front page article, ‘Unwelcome Allies’ which was heavily critical of both the CPGB and NCCL’s overtures to teachers as “obviously attempting to cash in” on teacher uneasiness in order to push a wider anti-War agenda. The NUT Executive forbade its local associations from working with

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53 ‘Fifth Column’, Cardiff City Police Report, 3 June 1940 (Giles’ MI5 file, KV2/1785, part 1).
55 ‘Unwelcome Allies’, *The Schoolmaster*, 22 August 1940, no page number.
57 Minutes of meeting between the NCCL on Suggested Teachers’ Joint Committee, 18 August 1940 (Capper papers, box 1).
58 Ibid.
59 Telegram from Frederick Mander to David Capper, 19 August 1940 (Capper papers, box 1).
the CPGB and the NCCL, and expressed support for the Churchill Government. The article starkly demonstrates the degree of isolation that communist teachers and their Party faced by mid-1940:

[T]he Communist Party of Great Britain apparently does not rate the intelligence of the teaching profession very high ... [Its appeal] merely consisted of a blatant attempt to create prejudice by the familiar method of ridiculous exaggeration of the situation in the schools ... In any case teachers would eventually find the Communist Party of Great Britain an embarrassing ally in the field of civil liberties, since this is a cause which it champions and threatens at one and the same time. A recent manifesto issued by the Party demands the immediate dismissal from public office of all people holding specified views, and it is clear that the Communist Party, given a favourable opportunity, is quite prepared to do a little heresy hunting on its own.60

**Teachers and the People’s Convention, 1940-1941**

By the end of summer 1940, shifts in the CPGB’s line on the War offered renewed opportunity for communists to appeal to those in educational circles. The fall of France had given the Party leadership food for thought: simplistic calls to end the War, and the presentation of Britain and France as the main obstacles to peace no longer seemed tenable when fascism had trampled the latter and was at the former’s gates. Although its Political Bureau would not openly admit it, an adjustment in the Party line was taking place: from the pessimistic suggestion of an imperfect ‘imperialist peace’ to the more optimistic proposal of a ‘people’s war’ undertaken by a ‘people’s government’. This was more akin to the ‘war on two fronts’ policy initially pursued.61 Though 22 June’s *The People Must Act* was the first to emphasise that communists were not in favour of peace with Hitler and called instead for a new government “in which there shall be no representative of imperialism or friend of Fascism”,62 the maturation of this approach came in September 1940 with the call for a ‘People’s Convention’, to be held in Manchester on 12 January 1941. The Convention’s six point programme demanded a “People’s Government” and “People’s Peace”, as well as the ever familiar call for friendship with the USSR. However, among the other demands were the defence of living standards, the safeguarding of trade

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60 ‘Unwelcome Allies’.
61 Morgan, *Against Fascism and War*, pp. 174-177.
62 ‘Communist Party’s Urgent Call to the People’, *Daily Worker*, 22 June 1940.
union and democratic rights, and the provision of adequate air-raid protection (ARP). The latter point was most relevant to communist schoolteachers, because it offered an opportunity for them to connect with wider campaigns already ongoing among educationalists as schools suffered during the Blitz from the late summer of 1940. Now that the Party’s line was shorn of its ‘defeatist’ emphasis, it would perhaps be possible for its schoolteachers to find allies instead of suspicion.

Indeed, the Convention’s demand for adequate ARP facilities was particularly pushed by the CPGB among schoolteachers. It had been championed before the People’s Convention, featuring in numerous pamphlets from 1938, but the Blitz gave it greater salience. During October 1940 F.J. Sander, the Secretary of the ARP Co-ordinating Committee (which was chaired by the communist Professor J.B.S. Haldane) wrote to local teachers’ associations to ask for their support in the Committee’s campaign to secure better ARP for schoolchildren. Nan McMillan for one was evidently aware that the ARP message offered a potential inroad for the CPGB among schoolteachers, as in November she wrote to the NUWT’s acting General Secretary asking for permission to distribute ARP Co-ordinating Committee literature to the union’s Central Committee. And the People’s Convention campaign attempted to keep this appeal to schoolteachers going. The Daily Worker of 3 January 1941 gave prominent place to an address by the retiring chairman of the AMA which condemned the inadequacy of school ARP. At the same conference Harry Fomison and George Rudé (then a Party teacher in a London secondary school, but later to become a celebrated Marxist historian) successfully moved a resolution calling for the requisitioning of houses for use as hostels for schoolchildren. When the People’s Convention itself actually took place on Sunday 12 January 1941 – in London’s Royal Hotel after Manchester’s Free Trade Hall was destroyed by an air raid during December 1940 – it seemed that the Party’s adjustment in its line had borne fruit. Over two thousand delegates attended,

64 These included the NUT, NUWT, NALT, WEA, the LCC and the Times Educational Supplement. A summary of these campaigns can be found in Dent, Education in Transition, pp. 66-78.
66 Letter from F.J. Sander, Secretary of the ARP Co-ordinating Committee, to NUT local associations, October 1940 (Capper papers, box 1).
67 Letter from Nan McMillan to Mrs Pierotti, acting General Secretary of the NUWT, 12 November 1940 (NUWT archive, UWT/B/9/2).
claiming to represent 1.2 million workers. But a closer look at the statistics does not augur well for the support of the Convention among schoolteachers. There were only 460 professional workers from 12 groups represented at the Royal Hotel. None of these were official representatives of the major teaching unions, as their presence would surely have been mentioned. As has already been shown, Giles and McMillan had learned to their cost that the CPGB was especially eager to advertise teaching union presence at approved events.69

This must have been a disappointment, as the CPGB was evidently hopeful that the People’s Convention could win support from the teaching unions. An invitation to attend was sent to its General Secretary, and to all local NUT associations. However, the response revealed much about the depth of the hostility towards communist teachers from the rest of their profession on account of their Party’s attitude towards the War. Secretaries of local associations recorded their “embarrassment” that a member of their own Executive (Giles) was one of its signatories. One speaker felt the Convention was an “incitement to treason”. Another remarked that he could not understand how Giles could still call himself an Englishman. The Convention was linked to orders from Moscow, it was claimed that it had been promised IRA support, and that its aim was to bring down the Churchill Government within three months. One speaker said he would never be a party to it “as long as there was breath in his body”, and it was observed with confidence that at least 90 per cent of the Union would be “bitterly opposed”. Of the 34 members present at the Executive meeting, all were moved enough about the issue to vote. In supporting the Convention, Giles found himself in a minority of one.70

The CPGB nonetheless keenly continued its attempts to make the Convention appeal to schoolteachers. Ben Bradley, the Convention’s National Organiser, wrote to the editor of The Schoolmaster on 25 February 1941 to assure him that its aims were “neither sinister nor seditious”. However, as he also accused the editor of an attempt to “create blind prejudice in the minds of his readers”, and of “trying to lead teachers into ... totalitarianism”, 71 it is clear that the CPGB had given

69 ‘Resolutions of the People’s Convention’, 12 January 1941, printed in Attfield and Williams (eds.), The Communist Party and the War, pp. 185-190.
70 ‘NUT Executive Meeting: The President’s Message’, The Schoolmaster, 9 January 1941, p. 21.
71 Letter from Ben Bradley, National Organiser of the People’s Convention, to the editor of The Schoolmaster, 25 February 1941 (Capper papers, box 1).
up as a lost cause the winning over of the profession’s leadership. Instead they went over the heads of the Union leadership in a direct appeal to the rank and file. Towards the end of January, Giles hosted a teachers’ lunch where D.N. Pritt – a left-Labour MP who was expelled from his party due to support for the Soviet invasion of Finland – gave a talk on the People’s Convention. Another memorandum was sent out to the secretaries of local NUT branches on 26 March. It appealed to “the many thousands of ardent and sincere democrats ... inside ... the teaching profession” to bring the People’s Convention to the attention of their members. Reference was also made to the BBC’s attempt to ban its employees who supported the Convention, stressing that teachers could be next. “It is not a very far cry from artistes to teachers” the memorandum warned, “FREEDOM IS IN PERIL! We look to teachers to DEFEND IT WITH ALL THEIR MIGHT!” Yet the Party’s attitude to the War was just too toxic, and as Parsons puts it “little progress was made in advancing the cause of the People’s Convention among teachers”. And even those limited expressions of support which did come struck a pessimistic tone. A non-Party Nottingham teacher wrote to Giles stating he was willing to go to prison for his support of the Convention, and declaring it to be “the saviour of mankind”, but even this zealous advocate was forced to admit that “I wish I could say you have the good wishes of the profession here with me. I know of one or two near converts, but that is all”. 

The Limits of Isolation, 1940-1941

Despite the considerable hostility that undoubtedly existed towards communist schoolteachers during the life of the ‘imperialist war’ line, it is important to point out that their freedom and willingness to criticise the Government’s education policy gathered support and cooperation from some quarters. Party teachers claimed that they maintained close involvement with NALT through 1939-41, and other evidence bears this out. The controversy which Giles became involved in at Sheffield was as a result of being invited to speak at a NALT meeting. Miss Renshaw who wrote to Giles to warn him of the

72 Letter from Sir Maurice Holmes to Roger M. Hollis, 29 January 1941 (Giles’ MI5 file, KV2/1785, part 1).
73 People’s Convention, ‘Teachers and the Nation: A Grave Warning’, memorandum sent to Local Secretaries of the NUT, 26 March 1941 (Capper papers, box 1).
74 Parsons, ‘Communism in the Professions’, p. 487.
75 Letter from R.A. Davies to G.C.T. Giles, 12 January 1941 (Giles papers, box 1).
76 ‘National Association of Labour Teachers’, memorandum of the CPGB Teachers’ Bureau, 18 January 1942 (Capper papers, box 2).
attempts to discredit him, was the Secretary of the Sheffield NALT branch. Her forewarning of Giles, and use of the term “all of us” in her letter demonstrates her perception of a unity of purpose between NALT and CPGB teachers.\textsuperscript{77} Moreover, Renshaw reported that she was “urged” by her fellow members of Sheffield NALT to write to Hepworth and defend Giles.\textsuperscript{78} A number of NALT members in Sheffield also responded positively to requests from Giles to corroborate his claims.\textsuperscript{79} Furthermore, several other teachers wrote letters regretting the tone of \textit{The Schoolmaster} articles which criticised the Sheffield NALT meeting.\textsuperscript{80} And Giles even had some allies on the NUT Executive: the Tenure Committee Chairman J.H. Woolridge assured Giles of his support, and W. Easterby wrote to Giles offering to move that the whole matter be referred to the Officers of the Union in order that he would get a fairer hearing.\textsuperscript{81}

Aside from Giles, Dave Capper was able to maintain the support of his fellow members, remaining unopposed as Secretary of the Central Committee which ran the capital’s NUT branch throughout the ‘imperialist war’ line’s duration. He did not exactly tread carefully either: he was part of a team which passed numerous motions critical of the Government and NUT leadership. A notable example is a 15 point manifesto issued in November 1940, which was heavily disparaging of the London education authorities and central government for their failure to provide adequate facilities for the children and teachers who remained in London during the Blitz.\textsuperscript{82} It must also be remembered that Nan McMillan remained President of the NUWT until April 1941, and after her term had finished she still had enough support to be elected to the union’s Council.\textsuperscript{83} Yet such support as did exist for communist

\textsuperscript{77} Letter from Miss Renshaw to G.C.T. Giles, 7 May 1940.
\textsuperscript{78} Letter from Miss Renshaw to T.E. Hepworth, 5 May 1940.
\textsuperscript{79} See letter from Ada Cummings to G.C.T. Giles, 1 May 1940; and letter from Mr Lenthall, President of the Sheffield Teachers’ Association, to Giles, 3 May 1940 (Giles papers, box 3).
\textsuperscript{80} For example, G.D. Cast wrote to G.C.T. Giles on 13 May 1940 accusing the \textit{Schoolmaster} of “an attempt to discredit you”. Cast also wrote to the \textit{Schoolmaster}’s editor on the same day to state “what has been written gives a very clear picture of the Editor’s political prejudices, but seems completely out of place in a professional journal”. An Edith E Murrell also wrote to the \textit{Schoolmaster} editor on 16 May 1940 stating that “in describing the meeting as ‘of doubtful character’ and the speeches of ‘Muscovite inspiration’ you have revealed your own political standpoint” and “personal political bias”. An F.W. Birchenough also wrote to the editor on 18 May 1940, stating “I found nothing to justify the editorial reference to ‘Muscovite inspiration’... It would have been far more satisfactory had you... yourself not indulged in political criticism – in the worst possible taste” (Giles papers, box 3).
\textsuperscript{81} See letter from J.H. Woolridge, Chairman of the NUT Tenure Committee, to G.C.T. Giles, 18 May 1940; and letter from W. Easterby, fellow NUT Executive member, to G.C.T. Giles, 15 May 1940 (Giles papers, box 3).
\textsuperscript{82} South West Region of the London Teachers’ Association, Draft Manifesto, 23 November 1940 (Capper papers, box 1).
\textsuperscript{83} ‘National Union of Women Teachers’ Annual Conference in York’, \textit{Education}, 18 April 1941.
schoolteachers was in spite of the Party’s line, not because of it. Moreover, by the spring of 1941 this support was on the wane. In May the Party’s teachers decided to withdraw from any cooperation with NALT, because the presence of the Labour Party in a Government prosecuting what the CPGB still fundamentally regarded as an ‘imperialist war’ proscribed any further collaboration. It would take a fundamental shift of the CPGB’s position on the War to bring its teachers in from the cold. As the spring of 1941 turned to summer, such a shift took place.

84 ‘National Association of Labour Teachers’.
Chapter Four: The ‘People’s War’ and Educational Reconstruction, 1941-44

Chapter Summary

The invasion of the Soviet Union by Nazi Germany in June 1941 and the resulting Anglo-Soviet military alliance occasioned a fundamental shift in the CPGB’s position – this was an ‘imperialist war’ no longer. This enabled communist teachers to widen their influence considerably, both inside and outside their Party. The CPGB Teachers’ Bureau was created, for the first time establishing schoolteachers officially inside the Party machinery, and in 1943 a leading Party schoolteacher was represented on the CPGB’s new Executive Committee. After the setbacks of 1940 and early 1941, by 1944 several communists took up leading positions inside the NUT. Despite the initial slowness of the CPGB to enter the debate about post-war reconstruction, Party teachers began forming policy plans when widespread calls for educational reform prompted the Government to issue a Green Paper in summer 1941. The Teachers’ Bureau was key to the formation of the CPGB’s education policy, which was one of the Party’s first statements on post-war Britain. This was a largely pragmatic, quantitative policy which did not get involved in discussions of the content of education, and echoed much of the Labour Movement and NUT consensus in the Council for Educational Advance. This meant that communists engaged energetically in the national debate on educational reform, and through their union office contributed directly to the negotiations leading up to the 1944 Education Act. During this time the CPGB and its leading schoolteachers formally and finally broke any association with experiments in socialist or progressive education in independent schools and insisted that such ends could and should be achieved inside the aegis of the British state. This reflected developments in the wider Party line, which by 1944 was arguing that the state planning of the war years should be carried forward into the peace, and that this would represent a step on the road to socialism. However, there was more to the Teachers’ Bureau’s outlook than a mere aping of King Street’s political priorities. Rather, there was a belief that the reforms that the Education Act promised would provide a framework for radical change in the purpose and content of education for the masses; and to regard educational experimentation the job of independent
schools would act as a disincentive to this. Furthermore, by combining analysis of official policy pronouncements with analysis of the internal debate in the Teachers’ Bureau and the CPGB over educational reconstruction, it is also shown that that despite its overall pragmatic attitude to the Education Act, the issue of religious influence in the new education settlement was a cause of much tension inside the Bureau. At one stage disagreement over the issue caused a cleavage between those Party teachers on the NUT Executive and the rest of the leading figures inside the Teachers’ Bureau which threatened its support for the Education Bill. It took the intervention of the Party leadership to reach a compromise. And although it was undoubtedly positive about the major bulk of the Government’s plans for educational reconstruction, the Party did adopt a position on the common secondary school which would become influential in educational politics in the years after 1944.

The Line Changes

Initially, the German invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941 prompted no change in the CPGB’s attitude to the Churchill Government. On the same day the Central Committee reiterated demanded a “A PEOPLE’S GOVERNMENT WHICH CAN BE TRUSTED”. However, hours later, Churchill made a statement indicating that Britain would offer its support to the Soviet Union against Germany. Consequently, over the coming days the Party’s position slowly began to alter. On 26 June, the demand for a ‘People’s Government’ turned into an assurance that the CPGB would support the Churchill Government in any steps it took to support the Soviet Union and Britain against Nazism. By 5 July the Central Committee stated “[t]he Communist Party will ... press forward every measure of the Government designed to promote ... the complete defeat and destruction of Hitlerism”. At the same meeting at which this statement was agreed, there was another important indicator that the Party was radically shifting its attitude to the War. Harry Pollitt, the man who had privately opposed the

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1 22 June Central Committee statement, World News and Views, 21, 26 (28 June 1941), p. 400.
3 ‘For a People’s Victory over Fascism’, World News and Views, 21, 8 (5 July 1941), pp. 442-443.
‘imperialist war’ line from the beginning, was reinstated as General Secretary. On 8 July, he wrote a letter to all branches of the CPGB which put the matter beyond doubt:

There can be no doubt ... that the Churchill Govt. and the Soviet Union are now fighting side by side ... Speculation on how long this co-operation will last, how soon before a switch is made ... represent defeatism in its worst possible form; lack of faith in our own class, our Party and the sound instincts of the British people [...] 

The formal declaration of a military alliance between the Soviet Union and Britain five days after Pollitt’s letter cemented this fundamental transformation of the CPGB’s line. The stage was set for the Party to transform its public appeal in a manner which would eclipse even the shift from Class Against Class to Popular Front during the 1930s.

‘With the Stream’, 1941-1942

There is a paucity of evidence on the reaction of communist schoolteachers to their Party’s change in attitude to the War as it occurred in July 1941, but much proof exists of the energy and vigour with which they pursued the Party’s new course in the ensuing months and years. Communist teachers were no exception to the observation of the official Party history that any recalcitrance over the new line among the membership was soon replaced by excitement that the changed line on the War had ended the exile from national life that they had been experiencing for almost two years. Certainly, the recollection of Margaret Cohen backs this impression up:

[O]n that day [22 June 1941, the day that the Soviet Union invaded by Germany] like many others I got up on a chair, and thinking that that I was absolutely right I said that Churchill would never wage war against fascism, we had to get rid of Churchill. And then came a totally different period ... I will always remember that time ... we were with the stream.

8 Margaret Cohen, in Attfield and Williams (eds), The Communist Party and the War, p. 124.
Leading Party teacher evidently shared Cohen’s view. For immediately after the German Army began its assault on the USSR, the decision taken only a month previously to suspend co-operation with NALT was reversed. By the end of 1941, when the Nazis’ previously untrammelled advance into Soviet territory began to suffer setbacks and the USA had joined the war, a national conference of Party teachers was called in order to co-ordinate their response to the new situation. The tone of the resolutions adopted at the 28 December conference makes plain the determination of CPGB schoolteachers to take full advantage of the growth in pro-Soviet sentiment in Britain in order to increase their presence and popularity in the profession and beyond. “Communist teachers have unequalled opportunities” observed the conference, pressing the need to “take advantage of the profound admiration for the Red Army victories”. This was not misplaced optimism, almost as soon as the line had changed, communist teachers began to win respect nationally and locally.

For instance, Nan McMillan led the London Women’s Parliament as its speaker. This had initially been a strictly People’s Convention venture, but by the time of its first session on 13 July 1941, a considerable degree of the noxiousness of the Convention’s to mainstream opinion had already begun to ebb away. Attendance at the Women’s Parliament’s sessions rapidly grew in spite of TUC disapproval, from 345 delegates at the first session to 983 at its third less than a year later. The Parliament passed many resolutions relating to the maintenance of wartime educational standards, including proposals on improved nursery provision. This was something to which the CPGB had attached great importance, as had many others in education and healthcare. And the Women’s Parliament was successful in getting women the right to force local authorities to provide nursery care to women engaged in war work. When the 1944 Education Bill was going through the House of Commons, a Women’s Parliament’s resolution on equal pay was taken up by a female Conservative

9 ‘National Association of Labour Teachers’, memorandum of the CPGB Teachers’ Bureau, 18 January 1942 (Capper papers, box 2).
10 ‘Resolutions of Teachers’ Conference, December 28th 1941’ (Capper papers, box 2).
14 For further discussion, see Dent, Education in Transition, pp. 81-88.
MP, who pressed, and gained majority support for, an amendment to the Bill granting equal pay for schoolteachers, regardless of their gender.\(^\text{16}\) Shorn of the baggage of the imperialist war line, a communist schoolteacher now played a leading role in an organisation which connected with the mainstream of working women, and beyond.

G.C.T. Giles was also experiencing the pleasure of swimming with the stream by late 1941 and early 1942. A dispute he was involved in at the time illustrates this. When the Buckinghamshire County Teachers’ Association (BCTA) Secretary J. Bristow remarked during a December 1941 meeting that Giles “had nearly been sent to prison for what he said in Sheffield some time ago”\(^\text{17}\) (see chapter three) it was not Giles who was force to defend himself. This time Giles demanded – and received – a public retraction by Bristow.\(^\text{18}\) Indeed, Bristow was acutely anxious that Giles was placated. He twice wrote to Giles apologising,\(^\text{19}\) and invited him to speak at a meeting on post-War educational reconstruction at Aylesbury Grammar school as an olive branch.\(^\text{20}\) When he refused, the President of the BCTA felt moved to get involved, pleading “I am most anxious to assure you that the [BCTA] Executive in no way intended to slight or hurt your feelings”.\(^\text{21}\) In comparison with the incivility and isolation Giles had endured during the Sheffield controversy and the People’s Convention which was outlined in the previous chapter – as well as the contrition and caution Giles’ precarious position had forced him to display in the face of such attacks – the transformative effect of the Party’s new line on its teachers’ standing is made clear. Indeed, their level of confidence was such that in January 1942 all Party teachers

\(^\text{16}\) Thelma Cazalet-Keir MP actually managed to gain a Commons majority for her amendment to the Education Bill providing equal pay for male and female teachers, but Churchill turned the issue into a matter of confidence in the Government, and thus it was dropped. Nonetheless, a Royal Commission into equal pay was established as a result.
\(^\text{17}\) Letter from Margaret Fraser, Honorary Secretary of the BCTA, to G.C.T. Giles, 17 December 1941 (Giles papers, box 3)
\(^\text{18}\) Giles demanded the apology in a letter to Mr Stone, the President of the BCTA, on 24 January 1942. It was eventually agreed that Bristow would apologise publicly at the next BCTA meeting, see letter from G.C.T. Giles to J. Bristow, 22 March 1942 (Giles papers, box 3).
\(^\text{19}\) See letters from J. Bristow to G.C.T. Giles, dated ‘December 1941’ and 18 March 1942 (Giles papers, box 3).
\(^\text{20}\) Letter from J. Bristow to G.C.T. Giles, 3 March 1942 (Giles papers, box 3).
\(^\text{21}\) Letter from Mr Stone, President of the BCTA, to G.C.T. Giles, 17 March 1942 (Giles papers, box 3).
were again advised again to leave NALT and make their communism known. The time was right for communist schoolteachers to confidently assert themselves in their own organisation.

The CPGB Teachers’ Bureau, 1941-1942

Communist teachers’ enhanced standing outside their Party during the early phase of ‘The People’s War’ was mirrored by intensified organisational strength inside it. The exact date of the formation of the CPGB Teachers’ Bureau is unclear but it was certainly in existence by summer 1941. This was a significant step. Since the dissolution of the EWL in 1935 there had been no formal organisation of communist schoolteachers, and even the EWL had officially claimed to be non-Party. The creation of a group formally located within the Party demonstrates the enhanced self-confidence and sense of place communist schoolteachers had acquired since the change from the imperialist war line. This confidence was reciprocated by the CPGB leadership; Harry Pollitt, Rajani Palme Dutt and industrial organiser Peter Kerrigan gave the Teachers’ Bureau strategy their direct approval.

The Bureau set about organising “thorough discussion of the new line among Party teachers in each Party District”. Each District also called a special conference for teachers, at which Bureau and District leadership were represented. All Districts were required by the Centre to collect the names of teacher members and forward them the Bureau, who felt that “since the war many teachers have joined the Party and have not yet been drawn into organised teacher activity”. By spring 1942 the Teachers’ Bureau reported to the Party Secretariat that at a conservative estimate there were now at least 300 communist schoolteachers organised in Party groups which spanned the Districts of London, South Wales, Lancashire, the Midlands, East Midlands, South Midlands, West Yorkshire, Kent, Essex, Hants and Dorset, East Anglia, West of England and Merseyside. In sum, the Bureau reported communist teachers’ forces were “increased, organised and have a better conception of their role in the Party”. Clearly there was confidence that schoolteachers could be attracted to communism, become a more

22 ‘National Association of Labour Teachers’, memorandum of the CPGB Teachers’ Bureau, 18 January 1942 (Capper papers, box 2).
23 Memorandum from the Teachers’ Bureau to the CPGB Secretariat, 9 July 1942 (Capper papers, box 2).
24 Memorandum from the Teachers’ Bureau to the CPGB Secretariat, 22 January 1942 (Capper papers, box 2).
powerful force within the CPGB, and play a specific part in the Party’s national campaign for an enhanced production drive to aid the successful prosecution of the War.

‘Schools for Victory’

On 4 October 1941, the CPGB Central Committee released a statement which insisted that it was “a point of honour for every British worker to set the example” by helping to increase production, with “[n]o evasions to be tolerated”.26 Keen to play their part, the Teachers’ Bureau issued its ‘Schools for Victory’ programme that same month.27 It was a seven point programme outlining what communist teachers’ responsibilities in aiding the prosecution of this now legitimately anti-fascist war. “Comrades”, it began, “[t]eachers, no less than factory workers ... have their role to fulfil ... [o]ur comrades should stand out among teachers as leaders, agitators and organisers in the building of the national front against fascism”. The seven points were then expounded: teachers were to safeguard educational standards; to aid in the release of women for War work by ensuring the schools provided children with meals and milk; to develop a more positive evacuation policy; to campaign for an adequate war bonus for teachers; to maintain and develop the teachers’ unions; and “the essential factor” of the ‘Schools for Victory’ programme, “to recruit immeasurably bigger numbers of teachers into the Party”.

Another priority was “building now a solid, unshakeable Anglo-Soviet front” by educating children and adults about the USSR.28 Party teachers formed local Anglo-Soviet Committees, organised regular school film showings on the USSR, ensured school libraries were stocked with books on the Soviet Union, and organised demonstrations of their pupils in solidarity with their Soviet counterparts.29 As a Metropolitan Police Special Branch Report from August 1942 noted of G.C.T. Giles:

27 ‘Schools for Victory Programme’, n.d., but probably issued in October 1941, since it cites the 18 October edition of World News and Views, and refers to ‘our Christmas Conference’ as being in the future (Capper papers, box 2).
28 ‘Resolutions of Teachers’ Conference’, 28 December 1941 (Capper papers, box 2).
29 ‘Draft for bulletin on schools and the USSR’, n.d. (Capper papers, box 2).
At present his main activities appear to be in support of the Anglo-Soviet Alliance ... [he] played an important role in the organisation of the Acton Anglo-Soviet Friendship Week ... He was present at the various meetings and entertainment arranged.³⁰

In addition, Beatrice King, who was active in the TLL/EWL and had contributed to *Educational Worker* and LBC analyses of Soviet education during the 1930s (see chapter two) wrote pamphlets and textbooks for the Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR.³¹

King Street was keen to publicise the Schools for Victory campaign. In January 1942, *World News and Views* featured a prominent article of the same title. It made considerable effort to praise schoolteachers for “playing a big part in organising the people for total war and victory over Fascism” through their roles in establishing rest centres, providing school milk and dinners, and ensuring that all but a small minority of children were still receiving an education during the War. However the article also emphasised that “the schools and the teachers can and will make a still greater contribution to the national effort”. What was needed was “a conscious effort on democratic lines to enlist the experience and enthusiasm of the mass of teachers”.³² The mass of teachers were to be found in the NUT.

**War Bonus: Progress in the NUT**

The War heaped extra duties upon schoolteachers. The NUT had successfully pressed for remuneration in the form of a war bonus in 1940, but some LEAs refused to pay it. Strike action was threatened, but the House of Lords managed to prevent industrial action by ruling that future disputes between teachers and LEAs could be reported to the Ministry of Labour for settlement by conciliation, and arbitration if necessary.³³ The Teachers’ Bureau began campaigning on the war bonus very soon after the change in the CPGB line in July 1941. As early as September, G.C.T. Giles and Margaret Clarke challenged the NUT Executive’s position at a Special Conference on the issue. Executive recommended to Conference that a war bonus offer made by the LEAs be accepted, but both Clarke and Giles moved against this.

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³¹ See, for example the pamphlets *Education in the Soviet Union* (London: SCR, 1940); and *Children in the Soviet Union* (London: SCR, 1941); and her children’s text book *Life in the USSR* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1943).
Clarke rubbished an amendment which had been posed to suggest that the LEAs’ offer should be accepted but only ‘under protest’. She argued that such action was “futile”; the most effective protest would be for Conference to refuse to accept the award altogether. Her amendment was defeated, but Giles then disagreed with the Executive on which he sat by moving another amendment – in a personal capacity – which proposed that arbitration be sought. Giles’ amendment was carried, and thus Party schoolteachers led the rank and file of the largest national teachers’ union to go for arbitration on the war bonus.\(^{34}\) Communists were no longer the ‘unwelcome allies’ they had been at the beginning of that year (see chapter three).\(^{35}\)

Yet, as has been shown, in October 1941 the CPGB decisively shifted its industrial strategy to one of cooperation between employers and employees in order to maximise war production, and the consequent Schools for Victory campaign prescribed that Party teachers act as responsible and trustworthy advocates of a national strategy to defeat Hitler, rather than militant agitators for sectional interests. Thus, in its 1942 report to the CPGB Secretariat, the Teachers’ Bureau was keen to emphasise that in “every group and District there are reports of our comrades setting personal examples and inspiring their colleagues to do likewise”. The report claimed that Party teachers were “playing a leading part” in the extraneous duties once resisted by many: the Home Guard, fire-watching, staffing after school play centres and nursery centres. It actually complained that, in contrast with communists, the mass of teachers were not sufficiently enthusiastic in their acceptance of extraneous duties, “[a] great weakness is the negative attitude of the Unions, who seek rather to protect their members from the impact of war, than to lead them in waging it”.\(^{36}\) On the Emergency Committee of the London NUT, David Capper’s South West region of the Emergency Committee had moved a motion which strongly resented extraneous duties,\(^{37}\) but was soon adopting a much more conciliatory tone, requesting that the

\(^{34}\)‘The Special Conference’, *The Schoolmaster*, 12 October 1941, pp. 855-857.

\(^{35}\)In the end however, the Executive called another Special Conference on 25 October, at which they again recommended acceptance of the LEAs’ offer. Giles again proposed an amendment to push for arbitration but it was defeated, see ‘NUT Special Conference’, *The Schoolmaster*, 20 October 1941, pp. 955-956. However, it was clear that communist teachers were undoubtedly chiming with the instincts of the mass of their profession, as in 1943 the NUT did push for arbitration. See Tropp, *The School Teachers*, p. 230.


\(^{37}\)Minutes of the meeting of the London Central Committee, 29 March 1942 (Capper papers, box 2).
LTA “call on all members to assist in the performance of these duties in order that the education and the welfare of the children may be safeguarded” and in case refusal should “hamper the war effort”.38 Briefing notes prepared by the Teachers’ Bureau for the 1942 NUT Easter Conference struck a similar tone; members were to “bring home the urgency of this paramount issue” by making every effort to press the relevant resolutions on the Conference’s agenda. Furthermore, any “demagogic use ... of hints of strike action” were to be “quickly and effectively dealt with” by communists.39 Clearly, Party schoolteachers were following the example set by Harry Pollitt, whose emotional appeals to workers to maintain production above all else was described by his biographer as “an intriguing fusion of Bolshevik and Blimp”.40

Ultimately though, the aim of the Party Teachers’ Bureau in adopting such a tone was not just the subordination of teachers’ sectional interests to the war effort. It was keen for its members to “win recognition as the leaders of the profession”.41 The changed situation legitimated “a completely new line and a new approach to teachers’ problems”. A key element of this new approach was the ending of “our own sectarian narrowness”. In a return to the strategy they had successfully adopted during the Popular Front, the Teachers’ Bureau were to make their Marxism palatable to the rest of the profession by learning to speak to them in a language which correctly estimated the political maturity of the average teacher. It was decided that “[w]e can no longer confine ourselves to criticism of the leaders of the professional associations”.42 Again, this reflected the wider Party policy: during 1942 and 1943 communists sought and gained election to leading positions in industrial unions.43 Party schoolteachers were their equivalent in white-collar unionism, as they became more and more influential in the NUT. The Party took its teachers’ influence on the NUT Executive seriously, as did the security services, as a report of an MI5 recording of a November 1942 conversation between CPGB Industrial Department full-timers Frank Jackson and George Allison reveals. Jackson felt confident that Giles commanded a

38 Minutes of the meeting of the London Central Committee, 9 July 1942 (Capper papers, box 2).
39 ‘N.U.T. Conference Easter 1942’ (Capper papers, box 2).
40 Morgan, Harry Pollitt, p. 136.
41 ‘Resolutions of Teachers’ Conference’ 28 December 1941 (Capper papers, box 2).
42 Ibid.
sympathetic majority of 15 on the 35 member Executive, and asked that “special attention be given to this for the Party” in the upcoming elections. Allison was confident they “could turn this minority into a majority”. The elections took place in April 1943 and the efforts of the Industrial Department in “getting Party members active in the Union” paid off.44 Alongside Giles, 3 other Party teachers were elected to the Executive: Charles Darvill, Margaret Clarke and John Mansfield.45 Furthermore, Giles was returned as the NUT’s Vice President.46 The Schoolmaster recorded that upon rising to make his acceptance speech at Conference, Giles was met “with a great burst of cheering”.47 On the issue of NUT affiliation to the TUC on the 21 August that same year, nine other members of the Executive supported Giles in supporting the measure. Although this was not the majority hoped for, it was huge progress from the minority of one Giles found himself in over the People’s Convention just two years earlier.

Yet this rapid turnaround cannot be explained solely by the CPGB’s general national growth as a result of the Anglo-Soviet alliance and King Street’s change in line, as Steve Parsons has suggested.48 Though the dropping of opposition to the War undoubtedly helped, communists would likely not have found themselves with the allies they did in 1943 without the work done building an anti-fascist coalition both inside and outside the NUT during the 1930s (see chapter two). Indeed as the previous chapter showed, the Popular Front period had built a respect for leading Party teachers that even the imperialist war line could not totally revoke. The changed situation for communists in the NUT was also the consequence of CPGB teachers’ increased organisational muscle and strategic clarity since the formation of the Teachers’ Bureau in 1941. This allowed them to gather as a force, to effectively coordinate their response to the pressing issues of the day, and to increase their importance to the Party’s Industrial Department, which in turn provided the mobilisation necessary to get four Party members on to the NUT Executive. This was also fundamental to – for the remainder of the War at least – extinguishing any sectarianism which still lingered. For in 1943 even Ben Ainley finally joined the

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44 MI5 report on recording of conversation between George Allison and Frank Jackson, 23 November 1942 (Giles’ MI5 file, KV2/1785, part 1).
45 Parsons, ‘Communism in the Professions’, p. 487 and p. 507, n. 49.
48 Parsons, ‘Communism in the Professions’, p. 487.
Manchester branch of the NUT, and soon after was elected to its General Committee.\textsuperscript{49} Ainley’s move was significant, for as chapter one demonstrated, it had been he who had first suggested in 1929 that communist teachers should break away from the NUT, and had since had no truck with it, not even during the Popular Front. By 1943 the Teachers’ Bureau would also be central to shaping the CPGB’s policy on educational reconstruction after the War. But first, the phrase ‘after the war’ needed to lose its heretical status.

**The Primacy of the War Effort, 1941-1942**

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact date that the Teachers’ Bureau first turned its attention to the fate of educational reconstruction and reform. Certainly, the Schools for Victory campaign had its eyes firmly fixed on the present. However, a report of a Teachers’ Bureau conference located among Dave Capper’s papers seems to be the earliest record of the Party’s schoolteachers’ discussions of education after the War. It records the discussion at a meeting attended by 65 Party teachers on 15 November 1941. The Teachers’ Bureau was keen that their Party formulate a detailed response to the Board of Education’s nominally confidential Green Book, which had recently begun to leak into wider circulation.\textsuperscript{50} A ‘Resolution on Post-War Educational Reconstruction’ stated:

\begin{quote}
...[W]e must counter the tendency to dismiss the plans for post-war reconstruction as mere Utopianism or as an attempt to distract the attention of teachers, administrators or parents from the present education chaos by promises of a finer system after the war. The fact is that the world of education has been more deeply stirred than ever before by the impact of the war on schools … a great reorganisation of the school system must be envisaged as inevitable ... We should therefore approach the question realistically ... our present task is to put forward a clear and practical policy.\textsuperscript{51}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{49} Unpublished and unattributed biography of Ben Ainley, Working Class Movement Library, p. 84.
\textsuperscript{51} ‘Resolution on Post-War Educational Reconstruction’, n.d. (Capper papers, box 2).
The world of education had indeed been deeply stirred by the War. There was a flood of press articles, pamphlets and policy statements and commentary on post-War educational reform. However, the CPGB was publicly quiet on the issue until the very end of 1942. The reason for this was probably that the leadership was at this point deeply hostile to discussions of a world after the War. Whilst it acknowledged that a “new political awakening ... has taken place [that] makes the workers all the more serious in their view of what Britain will be like after the war”, it nonetheless resolved that May 1942 was not the time for such discussion:

[A]t this moment, when the political and military situation so far as Britain is concerned is still marked by only a partial offensive policy against fascism, this general discussion on the world after the war can take on the character of a dangerous political diversion ... used to perpetuate the illusion that we can leave the main brunt of the fighting and dying in Europe to the Russians, while the clever people in Britain and America work out the plans for the reconstruction of the world after the victory has been won.

Clearly, the Teachers’ Bureau’s ‘Resolution on Post-War Educational Reconstruction’ was somewhat at odds with this. But the freeze of CPGB policy-making for the world after the War was soon to thaw.

**A Teachers’ Policy**

In June, a year after the Green Book, the Political Bureau finally informed the Teachers’ Bureau that there must be a clear statement of the CPGB policy on education. And that December, following the Beveridge Report on social services after the War, the Party Central Committee issued a memorandum which indicated that post-war planning was no longer the realm of wishful thinkers or harmful diversionists, but rather the subject of proposed legislation upon which the CPGB needed to develop a position. Committees were set up to examine specific areas of policy, one of which was education. The Teachers’ Bureau became the National Educational Advisory Committee (NEAC), providing

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52 For detailed discussion of the numerous contributions to the debate on post-War educational reform, see Dent, *Education in Transition*, pp. 163-203.
54 Handwritten minutes of National Bureau meeting, 19 June 1942 (Capper papers, box 2).
guidance on education policy to the Party’s Executive Committee. A memorandum Britain’s Schools was swiftly published in late December 1942, outlining CPGB policy on educational reform. It was not a total break from the Party’s fixation with winning the War: like the Schools for Victory campaign, the school was envisaged as “an integral part of the war effort” which could “truly help the wheels of industry to run smoothly” given better accommodation, better trained and remunerated teachers and improved meals services. These were not advanced as desirable reforms in and of themselves, but primarily to give mothers more time to work and thus boost industrial production. Consultative Committees were also called for, to involve teachers’ organisations in questions of educational planning and delivery, the educational version of the Joint Production Committees in industry aimed at boosting output for the War. In total, almost half of the memorandum’s 40 pages were taken up with wartime policy. But Britain’s Schools did represent a fundamental advance on the Party’s educational policymaking to date in that its second half set out communist principles of educational reconstruction when the War was over.

Comparing Britain’s Schools with the Teachers’ Bureau’s late 1941 ‘Resolution on Post-War Educational Reconstruction’ shows that the former was based around the latter. The Bureau’s Resolution had proposed: the right of every child to a secondary education to be asserted in law; the need for a unified, national system of schooling which was democratically controlled (i.e. abolishing dual control and abolishing the public schools); nationwide provision of nursery schools or classes; a leaving age of 16 without exemptions and with maintenance grants; the extension of a child welfare service for school feeding and medical care; and the unification of elementary and secondary teachers in terms of salaries and training. All of these recommendations also featured as the essential components of any new Education Bill in Britain’s Schools. By July 1943, the CPGB held its first national Congress since 1938. Though the Party had only recently been defeated in its quest to secure

57 See CPGB, Britain’s Schools: A Memorandum Issued by the Communist Party of Great Britain (Watford: Farleigh Press Ltd). The memorandum itself is undated, but it was featured in The Schoolmaster and Woman Teacher’s Chronicle, 7 January 1943, p. 7, dating it to late 1942.
58 CPGB, Britain’s Schools, pp. 10-16. See also Parsons, ‘British Communist Party School Teachers’, p. 53.
60 CPGB, Britain’s Schools, p. 33.
affiliation to Labour, the Congress was nonetheless a largely celebratory affair: the Red Army was pushing back the German advance, resulting in a swell of admiration for its achievements among the British people; the Party’s membership had reached an all-time high of 56,000 in December 1942; and the dissolution of the Comintern a month prior to the Congress had seemingly removed a considerable obstacle to the domestic growth of communism in Britain: the charge that the Party owed its loyalty to Moscow. In an attempt to further prevent Muscovite association, the Congress also took the step of renaming its Political Bureau the ‘Political Committee’ and Central Committee as the ‘Executive Committee’ and for the first time publishing the names on the latter. Among the list of names was G.C.T. Giles. This was the first time that a teacher had been on the body since Kath Duncan at the 11th Congress in 1929, a clear demonstration of the rising profile of schoolteachers within the CPGB. The formation of the NEAC, the position of Party schoolteachers in the NUT, in conjunction with the presence of Giles on the CPGB Executive Committee, ensured that schoolteachers were prominent in formulating the communist policy on educational reform.

**Communists, Consensus and the CEA**

CPGB education policy for educational reconstruction was broadly consistent with a progressive consensus on educational reform which had built up among the Labour Movement and the teaching unions during the War. This consensus was illustrated by the decision of four organisations – the TUC, the Co-operative Union Education Committee, the NUT and the WEA – to jointly form the Council for Educational Advance (CEA) in May 1942. The CEA had launched a nationwide campaign for a new Education Bill which had demanded a single, national system of education (including an end to dual control and the assimilation of the public schools); a common code of regulations for secondary schools; and a school leaving age of 16. Unsurprisingly given its tendency around this time to emphasise its

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62 Ibid., p. 16.
65 Ibid., p. 43.
British character, *Britain’s Schools* was framed as a contribution to the CEA campaign, and there was also strong support for the CEA in the *Daily Worker*. Significantly, the Council’s programme did not address the question of curriculum content. This was due to a belief that to dwell on such controversial matters would lead to a new education bill being delayed. Conscious of this, the Council excluded the NCLC – which was committed to class conscious education – from participation in its work.

Thus CPGB calls for educational reconstruction were wedded to a pragmatic, quantitative, social democratic consensus which accepted the ability of the capitalist state school system to deliver meaningful educational advance. But the decision to follow such a course had been established by the Party’s schoolteachers long before the CEA or *Britain’s Schools*; it had been followed during the Popular Front (see chapter two) and affirmed by the Teachers’ Bureau in late 1941, before post-War reconstruction was even a dot on the horizon to the CPGB leadership. At the national conference in November 1941 the Teachers’ Bureau leaders had noted that the Green Book had “ignored the content of education”, but conceded that its proposals nonetheless “would constitute a big step forward”. G.C.T. Giles asserted that a class conscious education “could only be realised under a Communist government” and Nan McMillan’s closing speech urged communist teachers to “master the proposals” made by the Board, not simply criticise them. They should “see that the good parts are implemented” in order that the Party could “make a great contribution to the shaping of post-war education”.

Rather than push for a ‘socialist’ programme of educational reform, communists, like many in the Labour Movement and educational circles, were determined to ensure that some meaningful reform should occur after the stasis of the 1920s and 1930s. The Board of Education’s proposals, imperfect as they were, did represent considerable progress. Secondly, the Party’s teachers wanted to ensure they had a presence and an influence over the post-war settlement, something they could probably not achieve remaining on the sidelines calling for a fully socialist programme. The NCLC’s exclusion from the CEA backs this up, as does the fact that *Britain’s Schools* avoidance of educational content meant it was even given a full

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67 ‘Educate our Children for the New World’, *Daily Worker*, 23 November 1942.
69 CCCS, *Unpopular Education*, p. 56.
As the Teachers’ Bureau’s own ‘Resolution on Post-War Educational Reconstruction’ put it back in November 1941:

We should ... approach the question realistically; and while it will be necessary to formulate in conjunction with the Party a policy which will take account of the needs of an educational system in a socialist state, our present task is to put forward a clear and practical policy.\(^72\)

But willingness to put forward such a policy did not mean that there were not sharp struggles between leading Party teachers on what compromise would be acceptable.

**Opposition to Religious Influence**

There was considerable division between the Party’s teachers over religious influence on any new educational settlement. As chapter one demonstrated, during the 1920s and early 1930s communists called for an end to the system of dual control, and fought for a secular solution in the removal of religious teaching from all schools supported by public funds. This stance softened somewhat during the Popular Front: the call for the secular school was dropped, publicly at any rate, in order to maintain anti-fascist unity (the NUT did not object to religious teaching in schools). However, in the early years of the War a campaign by church leaders to gain a greater degree of influence over education (including in schools under LEA control) roused the anti-clerical instincts of the Teachers’ Bureau.

The signs that Church leaders were on the offensive first emerged during 1941. Evacuation had drawn their attention to the lack of religious instruction provided for many inner-city schoolchildren, and in February the Anglican Archbishops issued a statement proposing ‘Five Points’ to the Government for future policy. These were that: religious instruction should be given to all schoolchildren and that any teacher providing religious instruction should be ‘competent’ to provide it; religious instruction should be a subject which counted towards the School Certificate and Teaching Certificate; religious instruction should be offered at any period during the school day, so that the same (‘competent’) teacher could teach all of it; religious instruction should be subject to HMI inspection;

\(^{71}\) See ‘Communist Education Policy’, *The Schoolmaster*, 7 January 1943, p. 7.

\(^{72}\) ‘Resolution on Post-War Educational Reconstruction’, n.d. (Capper papers, box 2).
and that there should be a compulsory act of worship at the beginning of each school day.73 The Annual Congress of Free Church leaders also issued a statement that April pressing similar concerns that worship and religious instruction was not being “adequately supervised”.74 The Archbishops’ five points were incorporated into the Board of Education’s Green Book, and their emphasis on the ‘competency’ and supervision those providing religious instruction sounded like something approaching a religious test for schoolteachers and religious inspection of schools. Opposition to this was certainly not confined to communists; the NUT too guarded the conscience clause and resisted clerical inspection.75 But in the CPGB depth of feeling on the issue was such that it threatened the consensus over education policy which existed between the Party’s teachers, between teachers and the Party leadership, and between overall CPGB policy and the CEA.

A policy agreed by the Teachers’ Bureau on 8 July 1941, the ‘Schools and Religious Instruction’ ultimately aimed for the abolition of dual control and for the secular school. Yet communists were prepared to support an education bill that did not increase in the churches’ influence from the status quo.76 This willingness to compromise was not easy arrived at. It “was only adopted after long and sharp discussion in the Teachers’ Bureau”, and David Capper in particular only accepted it after the personal intervention of Rajani Palme Dutt, Harry Pollitt and Peter Kerrigan.77 Yet at the time, the focus of the CPGB and its teachers on prosecuting the War above all else, and the absence of any Government White Paper or Bill on education meant that the issue was not as pressing as it would become. But in Easter 1942 the NUT Conference accepted its Executive’s recommendation to accept many of the Archbishops’ ‘Five Points’ in return for promise of an Education Bill in 1943; guarantees that no teacher would suffer professional disadvantage on religious grounds; and that teachers would be involved in the drawing up of an agreed religious instruction syllabus.78 This caused tension between G.C.T. Giles and the rest of the Teachers’ Bureau, who felt that “Giles was weakening and seeing the thing in terms

73 See the copy of the ‘Statement by the Archbishops’, February 1941 (Capper papers, box 2).
74 Education, 18 April 1941, p. 303.
75 Copies of the three lead articles by Sir Frederick Mander, titled ‘The Religious Instruction Controversy’, The Schoolmaster, 29 January, 5 February and 12 February 1942 (Capper papers, box 2).
76 ‘The Schools and Religious Instruction’, 8 July 1941 (Capper papers, box 2).
77 Memorandum from the Teachers’ Bureau to the CPGB Secretariat, 9 June 1942 (Capper papers, box 2).
78 Tropp, The School Teachers, p. 240.
of … support of the NUT Executive and [to] not aggravate ourselves there, instead of what we want to achieve as far as the bigger movement is concerned”. The Party leadership was also concerned at this change in line. Giles was accused of “gross opportunism” by Rajani Palme Dutt, who addressed a Teachers’ Bureau leadership meeting to squash the idea and urge the teachers to “mobilise forces to ensure defeat” of these “strong reactionary features”. A letter was sent to all Party teachers reaffirming the stance of opposition to any concession to the churches, and this was published in World News and Views in the same month. By December Britain’s Schools advocated the abolition of dual control and an end to religious instruction in schools, making the CPGB the only political party do so.

The Government eventually issued a White Paper, Educational Reconstruction, on 16 July 1943, which went on to form the basis for the Education Bill later in the year. The White Paper conceded the churches a compulsory daily act of worship, compulsory religious instruction and public funding for reconstruction of church controlled schools. In return churches agreed to involve teachers and LEAs in creating an agreed syllabus for religious instruction, and to increased LEA powers over appointment of teachers and curriculum regulation in church schools. A response to the White Paper in the Party press that month by senior teacher Gladys Driver called for the removal of the clauses on dual control and religious instruction from the White Paper. But at a 4 hour meeting of leading Party teachers on 17 August, Giles informed them that although an end to dual control and religious instruction should continue to form part of communist propaganda, they “must fight for the White Paper even if it meant losing on dual control and the religious question because the White Paper contained many positive improvements … the Party line was firstly and foremostly [sic] to get the Bill”. All the other teachers present (including Gladys Driver, Pearl Tibbles, Nan McMillan, Max Morris and David Capper) disagreed, and in exchanges which got “noiser and noiser” Giles was accused by them of “anti-working class tendencies”. The matter was referred to the Political Committee. The latter evidently eventually

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79 MI5 report of Teachers’ Bureau meeting on 31 March 1943 (Giles’ MI5 file, KV2/1785, part 1).
80 Handwritten minutes of Teachers’ Bureau meeting, 19 June 1942 (Capper papers, box 2).
82 CPGB, Britain’s Schools, p. 21.
83 See Board of Education, Educational Reconstruction (London: HM Stationery Office, 1943), section IV.
85 MI5 report of NEAC meeting, 17 August 1943 (Giles’ MI5 file, KV2/1785, part 1).
supported Giles’ position, as in October 1943 one of its members, Ted Bramley, authored an official response to the Government’s plans, *Communism and the Schools*. It conceded that whilst it would have been better to abolish dual control, the Government’s compromise with the churches represented an improvement, and the White Paper would be supported by the CPGB.\textsuperscript{86}

What swayed the Party in the end was the attitude of the TUC. The TUC was opposed to any compromise which increased the power of the churches, and the *Daily Worker* made much of its support for this.\textsuperscript{87} But in September 1943 the TUC Conference opted to accept the compromises over dual control and religious instruction in the White Paper in the interests of getting a Bill,\textsuperscript{88} and it was only after this that the CPGB gave in on the religious question and swung behind the White Paper. The policy had ultimately been one of brinkmanship. This is proved by an MI5 report of Teachers’ Bureau meeting on 31 March 1943. Giles had again found himself arguing with the other leading teachers on the Bureau on the religious question, and after the meeting had closed and everyone else had left George Allison privately confided to Pearl Tibbles that “[w]e won’t wreck the Bill at all … but the character of the Bill will be determined by the strength that we’ve shown in battle … we fight on whatever issue we can get a fight on. But in the main we approximate ourselves to the line of the TUC”.\textsuperscript{89} The Party was not ultimately prepared to let its frustration with the White Paper’s compromises to the churches lead it into the position of opposing an Education Bill which offered so many changes with which they agreed, especially if it had the support of the wider Labour Movement in the shape of the TUC. But such was the strength of feeling on the issue that it was prepared to agitate until the last moment.

**Opposition to Public Schools**

With regard to the public schools, the Labour Movement’s proposals as broadly embodied by the CEA and TUC were that they should be ‘assimilated’ into the state system, but should not be forced into doing so. In the end, aside from stipulating that public schools would be subject to inspection by the

\textsuperscript{87} See the *Daily Worker* articles ‘TUC Carries Better Schools Plan’, 10 September 1942; and ‘Educate Our Children for the New World’, 23 November 1942.
\textsuperscript{88} Griggs, *The TUC and Education Reform*, pp. 107-108.
\textsuperscript{89} MI5 report of Teachers’ Bureau meeting on 31 March 1943 (Giles’ MI5 file, KV2/1785, part 1).
LEA or the Board of Education, the Education White Paper did not seek to alter their position.\textsuperscript{90} The Government was able to dodge any further change by pointing out that the Fleming Committee was still investigating the position of the public schools, and they could not jeopardise its findings. The CPGB’s Party’s education policy remained in favour of the total abolition of all independent schools. On the one hand their arguments were predictable seeing such schools as an embodiment of class privilege and opportunity.\textsuperscript{91} But communists also opposed independent schools on educational grounds. This was not just a case of communists having faith in the ability of state schools to deliver effective advances in educational theory and practice on their own. It was also about the communists’ lack of faith in the type of educational experimentation delivered in independent schools, even socialist pioneer schools. Such experiments were judged to be “insecurely shrouded in anarchism” in that they accorded too much emphasis to the development of the individual rather than encouraging the child’s perception of his or her place among, and obligations to, others.\textsuperscript{92} Furthermore, even if the educational experimentation which went on in independent schools was worthwhile for the children lucky enough to receive it, its benefits did not ‘trickle down’ to the state system. Indeed they felt that reserving educational experiment to the private sector actually impeded state schools from doing the same:

[S]everal organisations, including the Trades Union Congress and the Labour and Liberal Parties, have demanded the incorporation of private schools into the state system whilst allowing certain schools to obtain a “licence” to continue a separate existence ... on the grounds of educational experiment. The methods adopted in these schools have no permanent effect upon State education and it should be part of the duty of the Board of Education to provide more opportunity for experiment in educational methods within its own system.\textsuperscript{93}

The Common Secondary School

Communist teachers and communist education policy also adopted a radical position on the organisation of secondary education. Although The Teachers’ Bureau’s ‘Resolution on Post-War Educational

\textsuperscript{91} Bramley, \textit{Communism and the Schools}, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{93} CPGB, \textit{Britain’s Schools}, p. 25.
Reconstruction’ in November 1941 echoed the caution of 1939’s *The People’s Schools*’ in its call for only experimental multilateral schools,94 at a May 1942 meeting of the Bureau’s leaders it was decided that the Party’s education policy should be for a single type of secondary school.95 They were likely influenced in their decision by NALT’s *Reconstruction of Education*, published in late 1941. Whilst the TUC, the Labour Party, the Co-operative Union and the WEA all supported in one way or another the general development of experimental multilateral schools,96 NALT had gone further: advocating the multilateral school as the single type of secondary education which should be provided for in any Education Act.97 NALT’s policy had “met with general approval” among Party teachers,98 but in the end communist proposals went further still. NALT had suggested that pupils in a common school would follow a common curriculum between the ages of 11 and 13, and then differentiate according to ability, albeit within the same building. Thus, whether they wished for multilateral schools to be set up alongside the tripartite system, or to replace it, for most of those in the Labour Movement during the War, at this stage the multilateral school was seen not primarily as a device for providing a common education, but rather as a more effective and less socially divisive method of selection.99 Even fierce advocates of the single secondary school accepted the need for differentiating children’s education soon after the primary stage, they just sought to do so later and under the same roof.100 For the CPGB however, the multilateral school should have no differentiation in the secondary curriculum until the age of 15 at the earliest, and preferably not until the age of 16. Only in this way would the secondary schools be able to provide true equality of opportunity, “a common basis of knowledge and attainment” which would produce in young people “an awakening sense of responsibility as citizens of a nation where the talent of all is utilised”.101 This principle was reiterated in *Communism and the Schools* once

94 ‘Resolution on Post-War Educational Reconstruction’, n.d. (Capper papers, box 2).
95 Handwritten minutes of Teachers’ Bureau meeting, 17 May 1942 (Capper papers, box 2).
the White Paper had been published,¹⁰² and the latter suggesting a selective secondary education system along grammar, technical and secondary modern lines.¹⁰³ The Norwood Report had also been published just ten days after the White Paper in 1943 and (without taking any evidence from psychologists) had asserted there were three distinct groupings of children: the academically minded who should go to grammar schools; the scientific who should go to technical schools, and the child who “deals more easily with concrete things than ideas”, for whom the secondary modern school should be the destination.¹⁰⁴ Norwood was delivered by a committee of the Secondary School Examinations Council chaired by the former headmaster of Harrow, Cyril Norwood, had been set up quietly by the Board to replace the Spens Committee in 1941. Much smaller, less independent and less populated with progressive thinkers than Spens, Norwood was less likely to challenge dominant thinking. Thus, despite an inhospitable environment, communist schoolteachers were among the first interpreters of common secondary schooling as ‘comprehensive’ rather than multilateral (or ‘many sided’), something which will be considered further in the next chapter.

Assessing Communist Attitudes to Educational Reconstruction

In the month after the Education Act received Royal Assent on 2 August 1944, Harry Pollitt’s How to Win the Peace held that the capitalist state planning which Britain had engaged in during the War had led to “an enormous increase in productive power”.¹⁰⁵ Pollitt believed this should be extended out into the peace, and in this way steps could be made towards the peaceful establishment of a socialist system. Pollitt argued that “increased production … is an absolute necessity for even the most modest schemes of social reform”. This was related specifically to education, for the “increase of production … cut[s] the ground from beneath the feet of those who claim that we cannot afford … to raise the school leaving age or give secondary education for all”.¹⁰⁶ Indeed the Daily Worker saw the Education Act specifically as a vindication of the argument that engagement with progressive aspects of capitalism could provide

¹⁰² Bramley, Communism and the Schools, p. 8.
¹⁰⁶ Ibid. pp. 24-25.
a blueprint for the peace: if wholesale education reform could be passed, so could the rest of Britain’s much needed social reconstruction.\textsuperscript{107} When the Education Bill was making its way through the Commons then, criticism of the plans for educational reconstruction were largely restricted to issues of timing and detail, rather than scope. Willie Gallacher’s speeches on the Bill pressed for amendments or guarantees on adequate playing fields, smaller class sizes, and to fix the date that the school leaving age should be raised to 16, and did not dwell on the retention of the dual system, the public schools, or the organisation of secondary education.\textsuperscript{108}

Ken Jones thus argues that in the years leading up to 1944 communists “responded to the prospect of expanded state education in a one-sided, over-welcoming way … the imperatives of economic modernisation [were] rendered indistinguishable from socialist educational objectives”.\textsuperscript{109} However, whilst there is no doubt that overall the Education Act was hurried along and not fundamentally challenged by the CPGB, on three aspects of reform most key to the relationship between schools and the social order – the role of the churches, the position of the public schools, and the future structure of secondary education – the CPGB adopted the most radical position inside the Labour Movement. And although the compromises of the Act were ultimately accepted by the Party, analysis of how these positions were arrived at shows that Jones’ summation is overly simplistic when it comes to the religious question. Parsons’ work also lacks investigation of this.\textsuperscript{110} Furthermore, in focussing above all on the speed of the Education Bill’s passage rather than the spreading of its possibilities, educational questions were not simply subordinated to the wider Party line on economic modernisation and production as Jones contends. When in June 1944 Joan Thompson\textsuperscript{111} complained to World News and Views that the CPGB’s policy lacked concern for the content and method of education, leaving “our children ... to be made efficient wage-slaves, to be trained to pass examinations and hold down jobs”,\textsuperscript{112} the NEAC

\textsuperscript{107} ‘Out slipped the Education Act’, \textit{Daily Worker}, 23 August 1944.
\textsuperscript{109} Jones, \textit{Beyond Progressive Education}, p. 110.
\textsuperscript{110} Parsons, ‘Communist Party School Teachers’, pp. 52-55.
\textsuperscript{111} Née Beauchamp, a founder member of the CPGB and journalist who married the renowned Labour Movement lawyer Harry Thompson. See her biography, available at \url{http://www.grahamstevenson.me.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=52:joan-beauchamp&catid=2&Itemid=98} [accessed 18 July 2015].
\textsuperscript{112} Letter from Joan Thompson, \textit{World News and Views}, 24, 24 (10 June 1944), p. 192.
refuted the charge that the Party had abandoned any commitment to progressive changes in the content and methods of education for children. Rather, “[o]ur Party sees the Butler Bill as … providing the structural opportunity for radical and fundamental changes in purpose, content, and methods of education” in state schools, where the mass of schoolchildren were to be found. This was linked with the Party’s position on ‘pioneer’ independent schools – which, as pointed out earlier in this chapter, were seen as a disincentive to radical practice in the state sector – and the communist policy on the common secondary school:

I challenge Comrade Thompson’s implication that rapid advance in educational theory and practice lies in the survival of independent pioneer schools … a common secondary school of single purpose best serves our cause. Let us not be led by enthusiasm for the personal flowering of privileged middle-class children … to uphold a policy that can only be put into practice at the expense of the interests of the majority of children. 113

Thus, for communist schoolteachers who formulated the Party’s education policy between 1941 and 1944, the Education Bill provided what G.C.T. Giles’ described to the 1944 NUT Conference as “a magnificent … framework within which we can build a worthy educational mansion”. 114 It was not an abandonment of the prospect of advance in educational theory and practice, but rather the codification of quantitative educational advance deemed a necessary pre-requisite to qualitative advance. As has been argued in this chapter and the previous one, the decision to press primarily for a quantitative extension of state schooling had been taken by the Teachers’ Bureau in November 1941, before the Party’s line on post-war planning had been conceived.

However, it should also be acknowledged that communist education policy during the ‘People’s War’ was also influenced by the CPGB’s strategy of making progress into positions of trade union leadership in order to achieve a united front from above as well as below, which had first began to bear fruit during the Popular Front (see chapter three). The attention the Party paid to securing the election of communists on the NUT Executive from 1943 has already been noted, as has Giles’ election that

year as Vice-President. But this was not to be the sum of Party teachers’ progress in the NUT. In April 1944, Giles was elected its national President, Dave Capper was its London President, and Ben Ainley was on the NUT General Committee in Manchester. Pearl Tibbles was also made London President of the NUWT, and Nan McMillan was still on its Central Council. Hence, in taking up the positions they had, Party teachers had a disincentive to block their unions’ strategy, which was to get the Act passed without delay. This was also the position of the vast majority of the CEA, which had also been backed by the CPGB, the Labour Party to which it still hoped to affiliate, and the TUC. As has been shown, the eventual compromise over the religious question hinged on the position of the TUC. But communists’ belief in the transformative potential of the new educational settlement and their standing in the teachers’ unions were soon to dissipate in the face of national and international educational and political developments. It is to consideration of such matters that this thesis now turns.
Chapter Five: ‘A Focal Point in the Struggle’, 1945-1956

Chapter Summary

Having acquired during the later years of the War a popularity hitherto unimaginable, and with a landslide Labour majority in Parliament by 1945, the CPGB asserted that a gradual, parliamentary road to socialism was possible in Britain and promised constructive support to the new government. Given the passage of a reforming Education Act and significant progress in the NUT and in their Party between 1941 and 1944, leading communist schoolteachers were (despite the notable exception of Edward Upward) also positive about the prospects for progressive advance in education in the years immediately after 1945, particularly in the re-organisation of secondary education along non-selective lines. This chapter argues that for much of the late 1940s the NEAC envisaged widened access to a common secondary education not as sufficient in itself, but as a first step in a process which would herald big changes in the aims, content and method of education which would mean the schools would become an important element of establishing a ‘new humanist’ consciousness, vital to the peaceful transition to socialism advanced by the wider Party line. Considerable thought went into this among some leading Party teachers, something which has been overlooked in previous accounts. However at the same time as the Cold War dented the CPGB’s respectability and its relations with the Labour Government, communist teachers became increasingly frustrated by the cementing of tripartite secondary education under Labour, and became subject to an anti-communist ‘witch hunt’ in the teaching profession which by 1949 had all but removed communist influence from the NUT Executive, and led to discrimination against communists in the workplace. But just as the constitutionalist emphasis in the CPGB line persisted into the early 1950s despite poor showings at the ballot box, the NEAC continued to campaign for comprehensive education despite the further buttressing of the grammar school under the Tories after 1951, and played an important and influential role in the developing campaign against selection and intelligence testing. Leading Party teachers also retained much of the personal regard in which they were held for their tireless wage militancy in the NUT when the cost of living was a big issue in the profession. In addition, communists had not inconsiderable success in leading broad front teacher campaigns for peace as Cold War tension and military proliferation intensified. There were also
growing numbers of schoolteachers joining the Party, and by the late 1940s they were unquestionably the biggest ‘white collar’ profession inside the CPGB, and once again began publishing their own journal on education. Reflecting this prominence, there were two leading Party teachers on the CPGB Executive Committee by 1952. However, from around 1949 the increasingly crude pro-Soviet and anti-American flavour of the CPGB’s ‘Battle of Ideas’ cultural campaign encouraged an increasingly conservative attitude towards new western methods in education, which were often dismissed as capitalist inspired attempts to dull the critical faculties of working-class children. This was in marked contrast to the optimism about the potential for such methods in the years immediately after 1944. This conservatism was encouraged by the proliferation of NUT work; and the increasing presence of working grammar school teachers on the NEAC at the expense of primary and academic educationalists, who remained more open to new educational thinking. Yet the two strands managed to co-exist into the mid-1950s.

A New Road to Socialism

In his May 1945 pamphlet, Answers to Questions, Harry Pollitt was optimistic. The conference of the ‘Big Three’ at Yalta that February had, he believed, created a context of global peace and co-operation which made a gradual, peaceful transition to socialism possible across the world.¹ The new programme adopted at the 17th CPGB Congress in October 1944 had hinted at similar prospects domestically. Britain for the People held, for the first time in the Party’s history, that a reformed Parliament under a progressive administration was capable of beginning movement towards socialism.² In this spirit the CPGB Executive withdrew over half of its 52 prospective parliamentary candidates for the 1945 General Election in order to boost the chances of a Labour victory.³ And even though only 2 out of 21 communist candidates were returned, the election of 215 local councillors,⁴ and the landslide victory for the Labour Party with a manifesto largely welcomed by communists seemed to accord with Pollitt’s prognosis for progressive advance. Despite Labour’s rebuffing of the CPGB’s latest – and as it would

³ Ibid., p. 96.
⁴ Callaghan, Cold War, Crisis and Conflict, p. 184.
happen, final – attempt to affiliate in June 1946; growing frustration with the speed and scope of Labour’s domestic reforms; despair at its Atlanticist foreign policy; and six months beset by economic crisis and fuel shortages, critical support for the Government continued. In August 1947 another Pollitt-authored pamphlet, *Looking Ahead*, optimistically argued that “I have no hesitation in declaring that the essence of the period we are now in is that of a transition stage towards Socialism”.

5 But almost as soon as *Looking Ahead* was published, developments in international communism undermined it. In September 1947 the newly-established Communist Information Bureau (Cominform) decreed that the world was divided indisputably into two camps, and that the British Labour Government was firmly inside the camp of reactionary American imperialism. Accordingly, at its 20th Congress in February 1948, the Party agreed a new attitude towards the Labour Government.  

6 In contrast to his dented, but intact, faith in Labour’s socialist credentials in *Looking Ahead*, a year on Pollitt wrote that “there is nothing common with socialism in what the Labour Government is doing”.  

7 Sectarianism began to take hold in parts of the CPGB again.  

8 From hereon in, as Kevin Morgan puts it, “Communist policy was very much a reflection of the Cold War version of the two camps theory … and … the shifting alignments of great power politics”.  

9 Instead of looking for allies in the British Labour Movement, British communists now looked east, and their defence of often highly repressive Eastern European regimes severely damaged what domestic acceptance and legitimacy they had built up since summer 1941. Predictably, this approach led to disastrous results in the 1950 general election.  

10 But a new CPGB programme unveiled in January 1951 nonetheless committed the Party even more explicitly to a parliamentary approach. *The British Road to Socialism* still held that a ‘People’s Government’ elected from a progressive Parliament could break capitalism without the need for violent revolution. No specific detail was given as to how this would happen; supposedly the “People’s Democracies of Eastern Europe” provided the blueprint. The only real adjustment made in *The British Road* was a theoretical toning down of the sectarianism which had re-emerged following the break with the Labour

7 Harry Pollitt, cited in Thompson, *The Good Old Cause*, p. 79.  
8 Callaghan, *Cold War, Crisis and Conflict*, p. 179.  
10 The Party lost both of its sitting MPs, and 97 of the 100 CPGB candidates fielded lost their deposits.
Government in 1947, since collaboration with the left-wing of the Labour Movement was vital to *The British Road*’s prognosis.\(^{11}\) Yet the fact that Pollitt developed *The British Road* whilst in Moscow (with elements of it even said to have been formulated by Stalin)\(^{12}\) was not going to convince potential allies that “the Communist Party has no interests other than those of the British working class”.\(^{13}\) Pollitt claimed that *The British Road* was “a programme which charts the future”, but Tory victories and communist oblivion in the 1951 and 1955 general elections indicated that the CPGB leader was a better polemicist than he was a cartographer.

**‘Reformist Illusions’: Edward Upward, the NEAC and the New Line**

The CPGB’s reappraisal of Leninism between 1944 and 1951 was presented to the membership as a *fait accompli*,\(^{14}\) and was accepted without much dissent. As Willie Thompson notes, it probably seemed “common sense” after the turns of 1935 and 1941.\(^{15}\) But opposition existed,\(^{16}\) not least from a prominent Party schoolteacher. Edward Upward’s concerns about the direction of the CPGB began even before the War was out. His copy of Pollitt’s *How to Win the Peace* (see previous chapter) contains margin annotations which reveal his doubts about his Party leader’s confidence that wartime cooperation between socialism and capitalism could be carried into the peace. For Upward this was “impossible whilst monopoly cap in power [sic]”. Pollitt’s argument that those who dismissed the possibility for socialist advance inside the capitalist state showed lack of faith in the working class was countered by Upward writing “lack of faith in capitalism is not the same thing as lack of faith in the working classes”.\(^{17}\) At first he wrestled with his doubts via these annotations, and in his political writings notebook. Entries in the latter show that Upward’s Leninism, unlike Pollitt’s, remained unreconstructed. Upward was adamant that there could be no withering away of the capitalist state as the Party line

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\(^{12}\) This was widely rumoured at the time, and was a claim made in 1991 by George Matthews, then the CPGB’s Assistant General Secretary. See Beckett, *Enemy Within*, p. 122; Thompson, *The Good Old Cause*, p. 89; and Alison MacLeod, *The Death of Uncle Joe* (London: Merlin Press, 1997), p. 29.

\(^{13}\) CPGB, *The British Road to Socialism*, p. 3.


\(^{15}\) Thompson, *The Good Old Cause*, p. 90.

\(^{16}\) See, for example, the collection of excerpts from *World News and Views* correspondence and the CPGB’s 18th (1945) Congress resolutions in Callaghan and Harker (eds.), *British Communism*, pp. 160-162.

suggested. An armed uprising of the workers would ultimately be necessary in order to establish socialism.\textsuperscript{18} He delivered a course on Lenin’s \textit{State and Revolution} to his Dulwich Branch of the CPGB which only strengthened his convictions, and in July 1946 hearing “a leading comrade on the wireless” state that the Coal Nationalisation Act meant that “a great industry was becoming property of the people” he noted that “all Party members would benefit by studying or restudying ‘State and Revolution’”.\textsuperscript{19} Reading \textit{Looking Ahead} was the final straw for Upward, and led both him and his wife Hilda to go public by submitting formal statements to the Dulwich Branch Committee on 30 September 1947. They were firm in their criticism of the Party’s direction and leadership since 1945. To quote Edward Upward’s statement:

During the last two years I have become convinced that we as a party … are making one fundamental mistake which if persisted in can only lead us to disaster. What is this mistake? It is the view (recently expressed in Pollitt’s ‘Looking Ahead’) that we can begin to build socialism … without a revolutionary upheaval (violent revolution), that we can begin to advance towards socialism by a series of gradual reforms here and now in imperialist Britain. When it is pointed out that Lenin took the opposite view we reply that the situation has changed since he wrote and we leave it at that. I consider this is just not good enough … I believe that to a certain extent our party has been taken in by the propaganda of the Labour Party … This is not a question of optimism versus pessimism, but is a question of illusion versus reality.\textsuperscript{20}

Upward recommended to the 1948 CPGB Congress that the since the Party had now “accepted the clear and realistic analysis of the Nine Parties [Cominform]” it should admit it had been engaged in revisionism and publicly withdraw \textit{Looking Ahead} immediately.\textsuperscript{21} When that request was predictably rebuffed, he and Hilda resigned their membership officially in March 1949.\textsuperscript{22} Reflecting on this period, in 1969 Upward published a novel, \textit{The Rotten Elements}.\textsuperscript{23} Set in the years immediately following the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item See Edward Upward, political writings notebook, n.d. [but mention of the Coal Nationalisation Act dates it to 1946] (Upward papers, Add MS 89002/3/10).
\item Ibid.
\item ‘Statement by E Upward to Dulwich Branch Committee’, 30 September 1947 (Upward papers, Add MS 89002/3/11).
\item Edward Upward, ‘For Congress Discussion 1948’ (Upward papers, MS 89002/3/11).
\item Letter from Jean Shapiro, Dulwich CPGB Branch, to Edward Upward, 2 March 1949, accepting his resignation from the Party (Upward papers, Add MS 89002/3/11).
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War, the book charts the experiences of a communist schoolteacher Alan Sebrill and his wife Elsie as they grapple with their doubts about their Party’s position and its lack of internal debate. Upward’s political notebook contains expressions of doubt which are echoed by Alan and Elsie Sebrill in the novel,\(^{24}\) and Upward later admitted that the characters in *The Rotten Elements* were based on real people.\(^{25}\) Thus, clearly the book draws directly on Upward’s real concerns and experiences and demonstrates how an active and committed Party schoolteacher who played a key role in during the Popular Front (see chapter two) was prepared to leave the CPGB over the new line, believing that “the national unity necessary during the war has somewhat blinded us to the reality of the post-war class struggle”.\(^{26}\)

In Upward’s analysis, this blindness extended to the leading Party teachers. His advice was consulted on an early draft of a CPGB response the 1944 Education Act. This demonstrates he was closely involved with the NEAC leadership at this time, and it also shows that Upward’s disagreement with the wider Party line extended into education policy. His amendments to the draft indicate he just did not share the NEAC’s optimism about the Act, so they are worth quoting:

> Para 1: I suggest the words “the Education Act has laid the basis of a permanently unified school system” shd [sic] be amended to “the Education Act – though it fails to deal with the ‘Public’ and Direct Grant Schools and thought it perpetuates Dual Control is an important step towards the establishment of a fully unified school system in Britain” […]

\(^{24}\) For example, Elsie Sebrill’s criticism to a senior Party figure that official communist policy was “different in some ways from the line laid down by Lenin in *State and Revolution*” in that it “assumes that we can begin to build up a socialist state now even though the workers have not come to power and the monopoly capitalist state is still intact” (p. 32, *The Rotten Elements*) bears a very close relation to Upward’s note in his political writings notebook “You have asked what moved us at the closing session of our course on State and Revolution [sic] to pass the resolution which I have sent to you. The answer is that we all felt that our study of this book had given us a clearer understanding of such current problems as ... the nature of capitalist democracy ... We felt that all party members would benefit by studying or re-studying ‘State and Rev’ ... The present Labour govt [sic] is a Social Democratic government and is quite unprepared to cope with the powerful resistance which the monopoly capitalists will put up” (Upward papers, Add MS/89002/3/12).

\(^{25}\) See a set of footnotes from an unidentified academic essay noting points of correspondence between CPGB figures and characters in *The Rotten Elements*, n.d. It states that “the identification of characters in the novel with real people in this essay is based entirely on information to me supplied by Edward Upward” (Upward papers, Add MS 89002/3/12).

\(^{26}\) Edward Upward, ‘For Congress Discussion 1948’ (Upward papers, Add MS 89002/3/11).
Para 3: I suggest the words “if the Act is to be rapidly and effectively implemented” shd be amended to “if the progressive clauses of the Act are to be rapidly and effectively implemented” and that the words “the operation of the Act itself held up” shd be amended to “the operation of progressive clauses of the Act held up”

Para 4: … There are certain important obstacles to unity which the Act will not remove. As long as the ‘Public’ and D.G. [Direct Grant] schools maintain their present status they will foster snobbery and separation among sections of G.S. [grammar school] teachers”

Indeed, Upward admitted later it was the transformative potential leading Party teachers saw in the Education Act which “led on to my disagreement with the CP’s post-war line as a whole”. In particular, Upward took issue with the “reformist illusions” of G.C.T. Giles’ 1946 book, The New School Tie.

The New School Tie, the Common School and the New Road to Socialism

It is unsurprising that Upward found himself in disagreement with Giles and the rest of the NEAC leaders over the possibilities of the 1944 Education Act and the CPGB’s new line. Giles himself sat on the Executive Committee which pushed the latter, and as NUT President was closely involved in negotiating the former. Indeed the now Minister of Education R.A. Butler (the Act beefed up the Board of Education to a Ministry) consulted Giles personally on a number of matters whilst formulating the Bill. Just days after the Act was passed, Pearl Tibbles congratulated the now Minister of Education R.A. Butler on the achievement in the Party press. Nan McMillan also remembered that in 1945 the “whole” of CPGB’s education policy was geared around the implementation of the Act. Of course, communists were not exceptional in this regard. Secondary education for all was finally on the statute book after two decades of successive governments failing to deliver it, so the Act was widely welcomed by the Labour Movement. But Giles was responsible for one of the most detailed contemporary

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27 Loose sheet placed inside Upward’s notebook, n.d. [1944 or 1945] (Upward papers, Add MS 89002/3/7).
explorations of the potential of the Education Act in *The New School Tie*, written in the eight months after his term as NUT President came to an end in April 1945.\(^{32}\)

In *The New School Tie*, Giles set three central tests for the Act. “Does the Education Act of 1944 give expression to a modern democratic outlook?”; “[d]oes it provide the framework needed for a thorough recasting of our educational system?”; and “[c]an it be made to work efficiently in the next few years?”\(^{33}\) A positive answer to the second question could be found in the text of the Act, Giles claimed, by the removal of the divide between elementary school for the majority and a secondary education for the wealthy few, and the raising of the leaving age.\(^{34}\) Any doubts about the third test posed were, Giles argued, assuaged by the Labour victory at the general election.\(^{35}\) A ‘modern democratic outlook’ for Giles added up to equality of educational opportunity in order to harness economic and scientific advance. He asserted that a modern industrial democracy could not rely on a small minority of educated citizens, and the entitlement to secondary education for all in the Act provided for the end of this situation.\(^{36}\) Although Giles did devote two chapters of the book to areas where he felt the Act was lacking – notably the continued existence of fee-paying independent and direct grant schools, and the failure to abolish the dual system – and the CPGB criticised Butler’s decision the previous year to delay the implementation of the new leaving age,\(^{37}\) overall the communist view of the promise of the Act in 1945 was a positive one. The victory of the Labour Party at the polls only added to this optimism, showing that “history is advancing with a giant’s stride … the Government is in the hands of a Party pledged to build real democracy in education”.\(^{38}\) Clearly then, Giles, like the new CPGB line, was confident that “post-war society was the product of an imminent … transformation and therefore popular needs and economic development could be easily reconciled”.\(^{39}\)

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\(^{37}\) Tibbles, ‘Raising of the School Leaving Age Postponed’, p. 276.

\(^{38}\) Giles, *The New School Tie*, p. 64.

\(^{39}\) CCCS, *Unpopular Education*, p. 69.
Key to reconciling the two was the multilateral school. Giles pointed to the “comprehensive, non-selective” secondary schools of the USA and USSR and argued that such “equality of opportunity” was fundamental to their industrial and technical advance during the early twentieth century.\(^\text{40}\) It was “only by bringing everybody within the educational net” that Britain could hope to “bring to the top all the ability, talent and genius which we possess and need. Equality of opportunity is not only a social but an economic need”.\(^\text{41}\) Although Giles at this stage still used the term ‘multilateral’, he was careful to point out the need to go beyond simple co-existence of tripartite streams under one roof, or a more ‘efficient’ mode of selection,\(^\text{42}\) which, as the previous chapter demonstrated, was at this time the policy of the Labour Party and the TUC. Much of Giles’ argument for the multilateral school was taken directly from an NEAC memorandum which had been published just two months after the Education Act received Royal Assent, in October 1944. Its title, *The Multilateral (or Common) School*, reflected the move away from any association with selection and tripartism inside the same school.\(^\text{43}\) From this point on, communists used the word ‘common’ or ‘comprehensive’ instead of ‘multilateral’. This vision of the new secondary school influenced NALT, the ACE and in turn Labour Party policy. As discussed in chapters two, three and four, NALT had always at the radical end of the Labour Party’s educational thinking on multilateralism, and in 1946 they too definitively broke with the conception of the multilateral school as three streams under one roof. It was “a bastard creature … conceived deliberately in order to put a spoke in the wheel of the legitimate heir of our brains”.\(^\text{44}\) The ‘legitimate heir’ of NALT’s thinking was, like the NEAC, a single “common” school which all children of the area would pass to at age 11 without any selection. Like their communist counterparts, NALT also envisaged that there would be no differentiation at all in the curriculum until age 13, and after that a ‘common core’ of undifferentiated studies would still occupy much of secondary school pupils’ time. By 1948 a leading member of ACE, Lady Simon of Wythenshawe (mother of Brian Simon) published *Three Schools or*

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40 Giles, *The New School Tie*, pp. 77-78.


One? in which she too came out in favour of comprehensive schools over multilateral, and the Labour Party too dropped the use of the term multilateral and pressed the comprehensive school instead. But even so, this vision for the common school was still not quite as radical as the communist one. For its Labour proponents, unstreamed and undifferentiated classes after age 13 would account for only fifty per cent of the timetable, not the seventy per cent prescribed by the NEAC.

The Comprehensive School and Educational Content

Ken Jones argues that this communist focus on widening access to state provision of education meant “there was no serious concern for matters of educational content”. However, such a judgement overlooks not insignificant efforts by communists to flesh out how the proper implementation of the 1944 Education Act along comprehensive lines could effect changes in the content and nature of education. Indeed, The New School Tie did not argue that the improved access to and resourcing of schools would in themselves bring about the change he saw as necessary in the education system. Although Giles argued that “[w]hat we teach and how we teach it depends in the first instance on the conditions under which teaching is carried on”, he also pointed out that “improvements in material conditions are not enough. A new conception is needed of education and of its aim and purpose”. The curriculum needed to be freed of “slavish acceptance of the old classical and academic tradition, putting in its place the new discoveries of science and psychological research”. Giles also argued that “we must substitute self-discipline and co-operation for authoritarian discipline”. He felt that the need for these changes was most urgent in secondary education, and could be provided for by the common secondary school.

The NEAC had earlier argued that the demand for the common school arose from “new and changing social conditions”. Therefore “experiment in the curriculum” was necessary to ensure

47 ‘Multilateral or Common’, p. 5.
48 NEAC, The Multilateral (or Common) School, p. 3.
49 Jones, Beyond Progressive Education, p. 110.
51 Ibid., p. 70; and p. 79.
secondary education developed in a way which met the needs of the new society which it was to serve. In the new economic and social context, the NEAC argued, secondary education would become “less bookish, more related to practical life and the world as it is than is at present the case”. History, Geography, Economics were to be integrated as ‘Social Studies’. Science would not be split into Physics, Chemistry and Biology, but as ‘General Science’. Music, Art, Modern Languages and ‘Handwork’ – “the study and practice of simple machines” – were to be given greater priority. This concern for educational content was not just rhetoric from Giles. H.G. Stead, former Director of Education at Chesterfield, and according to Parsons a ‘closed’ member of the CPGB, had been appointed as Secretary of the New Education Fellowship (NEF) towards the end of the War, a body which carried out significant research on the nature the new education system should take. Brian Simon set up a Manchester branch of NEF and recalled that in the mid-to-late 1940s “there was quite a lot of re-thinking about the content of education” among Party teachers, including a conference held on the subject in Manchester. By late 1945 Simon had been demobilised and began five years as a secondary schoolteacher in Manchester and Salford, gaining experience in an un-reorganised ‘senior’ elementary school, a secondary modern and a grammar school. Like Giles, he saw the common secondary school as not just about widening access to a full secondary education, but rather:

… the need for a transformation of the content of secondary education. To envisage a common comprehensive school was to see the grammar school approach as arid and subject centred … Given the return of a Labour government … the single school seemed to be in sight … But more was needed – an overall reconstruction of educational practice using modern methods and techniques; the enhancing of children’s disciplined activity, the devising of activities directed to defined and desirable ends.

Communists were by no means alone in calling for changes in the nature of the secondary curriculum around this time, when, as Gary McCulloch points out, “[c]ompetition between opposing

52 CPGB, The Multilateral (or Common) School, p. 3.
53 Ibid.
54 Parsons, ‘Communism in the Professions’, p. 462
55 Ibid., pp. 492-493.
56 Simon, A Life in Education, p. 54.
ideologies and interests inside and around the educational State was clearly thriving”. In 1938 the Spens Report had argued that economic and social change, and the diverse needs of individuals should be a driving force for educational change, and that thus the secondary curriculum should be brought into closer contact with everyday life, with more consideration given to practical and vocational subjects as opposed to the dominant model of the liberal academic grammar school. On the other hand, the 1943 Norwood Report was keen to preserve the grammar school curriculum, advancing the idea that curricular provision should be guided by universal values of learning for learning’s sake, and had emphasised the importance of community, citizenship and leadership. The communist position can be viewed as an amalgamation and extension of elements of both of these approaches: social and economic change drove alterations in the curriculum in order to give it a more sound relationship with real life, but the new curriculum should as far as possible provide a general education for all children rather than defining and measuring individual differences, in this way preparing all for democratic citizenship, not just ‘leaders’. But the biggest difference between the communist position and the standpoints adopted in both Spens and Norwood was that the latter two accepted the division of children into types and resisted multilateralism. Frustratingly for the CPGB, by 1946 the Labour Government did too.

Although the Norwood Report gave a clear steer to LEAs to plan their secondary education provision along tripartite lines, the Education Act itself did not specify how secondary education should be organised. However on 7 May 1945 the Ministry of Education put out the pamphlet The Nation’s Schools, which advised LEAs to plan to plan for three different types of secondary school and discouraged wide experimentation with multilateral schools. But both Norwood and The Nation’s Schools were products of a Tory-led wartime coalition or the interim Conservative administration which had followed it. As already discussed, communists did not expect that the Labour Government would pick up the baton. But this faith in the Labour’s stewardship of educational reform was dented even before 1945 was out. On 12 December the Ministry of Education issued Circular 73 which

58 For further exploration of these contestations between the Spens and Norwood Reports, see ibid., pp. 117-126; and Gary McCulloch, Philosophers and Kings: Education for Leadership in Modern England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 44-65.
recommended to LEAs that three types of school be maintained and that grammar or technical places be provided for only around a quarter of children. Despite strident criticism emanating from multilateral school supporters among Labour backbenchers and NALT, and a repudiation of The Nation’s Schools at the 1946 Labour Party Conference, the tripartite policy emanating from the Minister was not abandoned, even if The Nation’s Schools was quietly allowed to go out of print. After Wilkinson’s death in June 1947 – though given her approval just before – her successor George Tomlinson issued The New Secondary Education, which basically reaffirmed the position of The Nation’s Schools, arguing that the 1944 Education Act would be best implemented if planners kept in mind the ‘fact’ that no two children were alike, and thus their secondary schools had to be different too. Educating the different ‘types’ of children under one roof was only to be considered in exceptional or experimental cases, and bearing in mind the “disadvantages” of such a course of action, since the Circular also insisted that multilateral schools would need to have an intake of 1500-1700 to make them feasible. In this context, it is not surprising that only one quarter of LEAs submitted plans for a system of common schools, and of those who did, prompt and uncomplicated Ministerial approval was only given in rural areas like Anglesey, the Isle of Man and Westmorland. Although this is not the place to provide a full explanation for the ambiguity of the Labour Party and 1945 Labour Government towards the comprehensive school, there is evidence to suggest that having come up through one herself, Ellen Wilkinson was an advocate of the grammar school. She also prioritised raising the school leaving age and increased material provision as a more pressing concern than the re-organisation of secondary education. For his part, Tomlinson, despite time served on Labour’s ACE during the 1930s, felt that the multilateral school

60 NALT considered The Nation’s Schools “a thoroughly reactionary document ... [which] approaches the organisation of our educational system from a narrow, privileged class point of view”. See ‘The Nation’s Schools’, Modern Education, 1, 1 (July 1946), p. 1.


was not a vote-winner. Furthermore, there was a clear preference for tripartism among Ministry officials, and significant elements of the Labour Movement – including many working class parents, trade unionists and influential members of the Labour Party itself – felt that to remove from ‘bright’ poor children the prospect of a grammar school education after years of denial would be “like snatching away at the last moment a prize they had just won”. Perhaps heartened by the reassurances they had received from central government, by 1947 defenders of the tripartite system were emboldened. For example, some grammar school teachers’ associations and headmasters made a series of influential interventions bemoaning the dangers that the supposed diluting effects of the common secondary school posed to the standards and values of the grammar school, and wider culture and society. By the time Labour left office in 1951, only 0.7 per cent of all secondary school pupils in the state sector in England and Wales were in multilateral or comprehensive institutions. Unsurprisingly, the prospects for comprehensive education did not improve once the Conservatives took office in 1951. Tory Minister of Education Florence Horsbrugh and her successor David Eccles displayed hostility towards the establishment of multilateral or comprehensive schools, especially if it meant an existing grammar school was to be closed. At this time most of the NUT leadership was also prepared to dodge the issue of the comprehensive school in order to avoid conflict in the Union.

Obviously this was certainly not a view shared by communists. Giles registered his dismay early. An article he contributed to the *Times Educational Supplement* in May 1945 condemned The Nation’s Schools for its “complacent acceptance of the status quo ante Butler”. As tripartite policy was consolidated under Labour, Party campaign materials on education began to press demands for the comprehensive school more aggressively, arguing that without it the potential of the Education Act

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could not be fulfilled. Communists campaigned alongside members of NALT and the Labour Left, pointing out that comprehensive education was “implicit in Labour policy … [b]ut it is not the policy being carried out by the Labour Government”. In Middlesex, where left Labour figures on the County Education Committee devised schemes to create six comprehensive schools only for them to be rejected by both Wilkinson and Tomlinson, Labour members “did not forget the support given to them by communist teachers in a campaign against a Labour Government”. In the NUT, communists became the “political driving force behind comprehensive school lobby”, before their forces were diminished in 1949 (see later in the chapter). But the argument went wider than just education. Comprehensive schools were intertwined with the wider Party vision of a gradual advance to socialism in Britain hanging in the balance. Just as Harry Pollitt had argued that the quicker the influence of a united working class movement could “purge the State apparatus of ... reactionaries”, and ensure a “new type of Government and Parliament, new types of local and county councils ... the quicker we shall advance to Socialism”, a new type of school could also assist in this process. Communists in the NUT also presented the comprehensive school in such terms, as a “mobilisation of the progressive forces of the country”. As a 1946 pamphlet produced by the Party put it:

The three types of secondary school have emerged not for educational reasons, but as a result of social and economic factors. The division reflects and perpetuates the inequalities of our society ...

Only the common school can develop a new type of education for a new age. Only the common school ... could send out young people with a lively understanding of social needs, equipped with the knowledge to meet these needs and eager to place their skill at the service of the community.

Ultimately, during the late 1940s Party teachers were unsuccessful in persuading the NUT or the Labour Government to fully commit to comprehensive schools. But the communist confidence in the potential

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70 W. Wainwright, ‘Secondary Education’, CPGB Speakers’ Notes, 20 November 1946 (CPGB archive, CP/CENT/SPN/1/5).
72 Fenwick, The Comprehensive School, p. 69.
73 Pollitt, Answers to Questions, p. 37.
74 Fenwick, The Comprehensive School, p. 69.
of common secondary schooling to change the content and nature of education in English schools and thus aid the transition to socialism persisted at this time.

‘New Humanism’ and the Transition to Socialism

The abandonment of hope in Labour’s educational policy in many ways necessitated a deeper and more urgent analysis of what precisely what communist educationalists themselves could do to push education in a progressive direction. In 1947 Party teachers developed a substantial draft policy offering their most sophisticated interpretation to date of the development of English education and the prospects for progressive change in its methods and content.76 It is thus worth considering in some detail. The ‘Content of Education’ surmised that the historical development of schools in England and Wales reflected not a munificent mission on the part of individuals or the state, but rather the economic and political struggle of classes. But the document also posited that in the British historical context, the schools also contained within them an internal development which sometimes counteracted economic and political developments, caused in large degree by the failure to ever definitively rupture organised religion from the provision of education. Hence the original grammar schools, though born out of bourgeois challenge to the power of the Church and the aristocracy from the fifteenth century onwards, remained dominated by a classical humanist tradition of Platonic philosophic idealism “existing in uncomfortable proximity ... and often at open war” with the scientific culture often associated with the rising middle class.77 Even the economic pressures exerted by the Industrial Revolution – which necessitated that the working class receive some form of basic, and then vocational, education and led to the establishment of state elementary schools, and eventually secondary schools – were not enough to shake off the domination of the classical tradition. There was a certain degree of reconciliation between the Platonic and utilitarian educational traditions, true, but essentially the former won out.78

However, ‘The Content of Education’ espoused hope for a fundamental shift in educational content in what is described as “the recently developed senior school”, a reference to the post-Hadow

77 Ibid., pp. 2-4.
78 Ibid., p. 6.
report ‘reorganised’ senior school, which after 1944 was referred to as the secondary modern. Since this type of school was “relatively free of the academic bonds that constrict the rest of the system”, and educated chiefly the children of the working class, “the immediate producers who are in constant touch in their daily life with material reality”, it was able to base the curriculum on children’s direct experience and test theory in practice. The development was also beginning to trickle down to the primary schools. Nonetheless, the ruling class were wise to this occurrence, and thus the maintenance of the grammar school advocated in the Norwood Report, and in both Tory and Labour policy after the passage of the Butler Act, was an attempt by the capitalist class to ensure that the elitist classical tradition. In this way the status of the ruling class would endure despite the statutory provision of secondary education for all. So although the state system of schools could still therefore be categorised as a system provided for the working class by the bourgeoisie, and thus the content of the education delivered in them was ultimately reflective of bourgeois thought and method, progressive influences were beginning to appear. Therefore:

[i]t becomes clear that the primary task is the establishment of a common secondary school within which the new forms of education could be developed in accordance with the interests of the progressive force in society, the working class, and so of their children.\textsuperscript{79}

Thus, ‘The Content of Education’ represented the most rigorous contribution to date of the NEAC’s previous statements that secondary education for all in a common school system would deliver important qualitative changes in education. And by 1947, communist teachers were also becoming much more specific about the problems of educational quality under capitalism. Under capitalism the relations of production were expressed in a “fetishistic” form, “elevated to an eternal and immutable plain”. Schools were the main agency used to restrict the consciousness of the worker in this way, through “myths and dogmas” taught in them. Thus mental labour trumped physical labour, theory was exalted above practice, and consequently knowledge became fragmented and static, valuable for its own sake rather than for its interaction with a given social or economic context. The enrichment of the individual’s sensations and personality were seen as key to understanding the universe, rather than his

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., pp. 6-7.
or her interaction with society. Literature, science and art became commodities, turned inward on themselves and isolated from social relations, studied as separate and disconnected subjects. School pupils themselves were similarly “disintegrated into a loose compound of body mind and spirit, for each of which different methods are involved”.

But, as indicated earlier, ‘The Content of Education’ did not argue that there was no chance of amelioration of educational content under capitalism. On the contrary, the document holds firm with the Party line that capitalism was potentially in a stage of peaceful transition toward socialism, and that the schools could be key to that transition:

What we want to achieve now is a form of education suited to the needs of our present society in transition, an education that will fit the people for the sharpening struggle ahead ... we must bear in mind that the schools of today can in some measure extend their function to perform tasks which a socialist society to a very great extent performs for its members ... i.e. they can make it a major task to clarify existing social practice and to destroy the basis of myths, dogma and confusion.

In this context, communists should avoid thinking in terms of an ideal socialist education policy. Rather, they should use a Marxist analysis of the causes and nature of the present situation to determine immediate reforms in educational content appropriate to the stage of development British society had reached.

Thus it was permissible to make alliances with non-communists who also advocated multilateralism and a more flexible curriculum. That said, Simon was keen to emphasise that this did not imply a convergence of aims. Indeed, he stated that communists “must make open war on the issues of idealism versus science”:

This approach is profoundly different to that of the social democratic who pins his faith on a gradual increase of social mobility through education and the changing of the individual through improved education and believes that by such means alone the transformation to socialism can be brought about ... It is profoundly different from the ‘progressive’ educationalist who, for all his good

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80 Ibid., pp. 7-8.
81 Ibid., p. 9.
82 Ibid., p. 9 and p. 16.
intentions, is searching vainly for a final ‘synthesis’, ‘integration’, ‘correlation’, co-ordination’, within the framework of capitalist social relations.  

‘The Content of Education’ encouraged Party teachers to experiment in their classroom practice, for “the example of success ... will have a snowball effect on other teachers”. In primary schools, the use of the ‘discovery’ or ‘activity’ method (whereby children worked on projects collaboratively and the teacher acted as facilitator, rather than deliverer, of a lesson) was encouraged, as were the use of field trips, visits of workers to the schools, and the development of visual aids. In the secondary school, barriers between subject should be broken down and disciplines grouped under themes, such as ‘Tool’ for Maths and English, ‘Sciences’ for Science and Social Science (History and Geography were to be combined under this heading), ‘Foreign Study’ for a modern foreign language, ‘Arts’ for English Literature, Music, Art and Handiwork, and ‘Health’ for PE and Games. Teaching was to be practical as far as possible: ‘Tool’ courses should be “taught in relation to their uses, i.e. presented as scientific instruments”, and ‘Foreign Study’ to reading and conversation, “without slavish concern for grammar and syntax”. In a similar way, ‘Arts’ subjects were to include material relevant to children’s own social experience. English Literature, for example, was to encourage “general” and “pleasurable” reading. Only towards the end of secondary school should the classics be encountered, and then they should be studied in close contact with the Social Science course to illustrate the importance of historical and social context to literary form.  

This growing concern with the formulation of a distinct communist attitude to educational theory and practice, and its relationship to economic, social and political change continued into 1948 as the schism between the Labour Government and the CPGB grew wider. Several articles appeared in Modern Quarterly on the historical development of schooling in England since the bourgeois revolution, on the place of a ‘new humanism’ in school-based education, and on theory and practice in the education of children. The latter piece was by Joan Simon, educational journalist for the Times.

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83 Ibid., pp. 10-11.  
84 Ibid., p. 28.  
86 See Joan Simon ‘Educational Theory and Practice’ and K.D. Sotiriou, ‘The New Humanism in Education’, abridged and translated version of a speech delivered to the Greco-Soviet League of Youth, with a foreword by
Educational Supplement, and wife of Brian Simon. She lifted and expanded upon passages from ‘The Content of Education’ and reiterated apprehension about the growing influence those who sought to reassert the classical humanist approach to education in schools through the maintenance of tripartism, seeking to preserve a secondary school curriculum which was “devitalised, abstract ... anything but the source of instruments of positive social action”.87 In other words, explicitly relating arguments about the content of education to the struggle between capitalism and progress towards socialism which was inherent in the Party’s post-20th Congress political line:

What are the real issues underlying educational controversy? They are, of course, the same as those in every field of social life. Are we to advance or return to barbarism? The present educational system is a capitalist agency in a capitalist society ... [it] continuously transmit[s] the ideas and values of the ruling order ... it works to stabilise social relations ... But by its very existence it puts new weapons in the hands of the people which they can use to transform social relations. It is therefore a focal point in the struggle for social advance ... The attempts to maintain divisions and differences of subject matter as between the curricula of different schools is in effect an attempt to counteract the effects of the increased dose of enlightenment.88

Again, Joan Simon was keen to distance communist prescriptions for educational content from social democratic or ‘progressive’ ones. Despite offering praise for the work of the Central Advisory Council of England and Wales’, School and Life and Sir Fred Clarke’s Education and Social Change – both of which argued for closer interrelation between the curriculum and the child’s experience and social relations89 – Simon also emphasised that “those who accept the divisions of capitalist society as final and absolute must search in vain for a final ‘integration’ of the various aspects of human knowledge, experience and emotion”.90 She also criticised Labour policy on education for being confined to organisational questions and neglecting theory.91 That CPGB had been guilty of the same

88 Ibid., p. 42.
89 See Fred Clarke, Education and Social Change (London: The Sheldon Press, 1940).
91 Ibid., pp. 44-45.
between 1935 and 1945 was not mentioned, presumably because a quantitative focus was deemed appropriate then, when the priority was the defeat of fascism. Whereas, in 1948:

[t]he present time is a period of transition, a moment in the development of our culture when capitalism is in a final stage of decline and the transition to Socialism is imminent. Educational issues therefore reflect both the manifestations of social collapse and of immense new social opportunity ... Teachers therefore have great opportunities. In spite of inevitable limitations they have the perspective of teaching the right thing, of enabling children to understand what science offers, how society develops, what human culture consists in. This is not utopianism. This is not merely the end of a dying age; it is also the threshold of the new.  

In this way, schoolteachers were expressing the logic of the CPGB’s wider political line: that the conditions for a gradual transformation to socialism in Britain were in place, if only the forces of progression, and not reaction, could steer the institutions of the state in that direction: whether that institution was Parliament or the school. It was for this reason that the Party leadership had advanced the argument that there was a definite need for communist professionals to develop a Marxist approach to their own fields. One of the most successful and influential examples of this was the NEAC’s campaign against intelligence testing. Brian and Joan Simon first took members of the CPGB Psychologists’ Group to task in Communist Review and Modern Quarterly in the late 1940s. They challenged their view that intelligence testing should be developed so that measures could be devised that would make the most of everyone’s individual abilities, not just an elite. Emboldened by the recent ‘rediscovery’ of the Soviet Communist Party’s 1936 decree condemning ‘pedology’ (mental measurement), and the obvious use of intelligence testing in Britain as a justification for resisting the comprehensive school which was seen as an important feature of the transition to socialism, Party teachers, led by Brian Simon, played a leading role in questioning the validity of the eleven-plus exam along Marxist lines, which emphasised the malleability of human capacity in the interaction with his/her

92 Ibid., pp. 47-48.
94 For a detailed and excellent discussion of this see Parsons’ work on the CPGB Psychologists’ Group in ‘Communism and the Professions’, pp. 394-401.
environment and social relations.\(^{95}\) The CPGB held an open meeting on ‘Intelligence Testing and the Class System of Education’ in October 1950, attended by 300 people, including many non-Party teachers.\(^{96}\) Developing out of such work and intensive further statistical research which he had begun on a small scale as a classroom teacher in Salford and when studying part-time for an M.Ed. course at Manchester University,\(^{97}\) Brian Simon’s 1953 book *Intelligence Testing and the Comprehensive School* spelled out clearly and scientifically how the construction and validation of tests were prone to subjective social calculations which discriminated against the often culturally deprived children of the working class. He thus was significant in discrediting the concept of fixed genetic intelligence which restricted opportunity not just in secondary education, but also in the primary school through the distorting and self-selecting effects of streaming and coaching for the 11-plus.\(^{98}\) According to the *Times Educational Supplement* commented, Simon had delivered “a formidable indictment of the theory and practice of intelligence testing ... the case stands up”.\(^{99}\) Indeed the work rapidly became “the theoretical and practical manual for opponents of selection”.\(^{100}\) It has also been suggested by the biographer of leading educational psychologist Professor Cyril Burt, the foremost advocate of testable innate genetic intelligence in the period, that *Intelligence Testing and the Comprehensive School* played a major part in him later using fraudulent data in order to substantiate his theories.\(^{101}\) In 1955 Simon contributed another book called *The Common Secondary School*, which developed his arguments by using data from working-class secondary modern school pupils who had been entered for the GCE ‘O’ Level, and achieved passes which their IQ score suggested they were incapable of. It also used observations from visits to almost all of the then existing fully comprehensive schools in England and Wales to illustrate

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\(^{100}\) Thom, ‘Politics and the People’, p. 525.

that they were bringing about a general improvement in standards, contrary to the fears expressed by advocates of the grammar school.\textsuperscript{102}

**The NCC, the ‘Battle of Ideas’ and Educational Conservatism**

Continuing the theme which had been developing since the Popular Front (see chapter two), a supposedly nationally grounded strategy built on awakening a socialist consciousness amongst the mass of the people required a greater emphasis to be placed on cultural and ideological struggle. This in turn necessitated a re-energising of the Party’s attempts to reach out to professional workers and intellectuals. During 1947 the Party established a National Cultural Committee (NCC) to co-ordinate cultural activity, involving sub-groups of historians, scientists, musicians, film-makers, artists and writers.\textsuperscript{103} The head of the NCC Emile Burns pointed out its relevance to teachers, an indication that they too could take their place in “the united movement ... that can make democracy a reality”.\textsuperscript{104} This was not surprising, given that there were 2000 schoolteachers in the CPGB by 1949,\textsuperscript{105} making them by far the largest group of professional workers inside the Party,\textsuperscript{106} at a time when the CPGB more widely was losing members.\textsuperscript{107} Although Party teachers were already organised under the Industrial Department, Burns felt it opportune to point out that the NEAC had an important part to play in the Party’s cultural work. Reflecting this, G.C.T. Giles was given a place on the NCC when it was launched,\textsuperscript{108} and the October 1950 meeting on intelligence testing mentioned earlier was a joint venture between the NCC and the NEAC. Following the formal adoption of *The British Road to Socialism*, the Party’s Executive Committee adopted a resolution on cultural work calling for “[a] deeper study” of it and “continuous efforts to make it well known among ... professional colleagues”.\textsuperscript{109} The idea was to counter American capitalist cultural domination as energetically as its economic and military

hegemony. But at times this ‘Battle of Ideas’ – a term coined by communist historian A.L. Morton in 1948 to describe the struggle on the cultural front110 – was characterised by an “increasingly one-eyed application” under which “there was pressure to conform to Soviet endorsed models” highlighted by Lysenkoism among scientists and ‘socialist realism’ among writers.111 It also found expression on the NEAC’s attitudes to new western progressive educational theories.

Despite the radical visions for the ‘new humanist’ transformation of educational content and methods during the mid-to-late 1940s, and the valuable theoretical critique of intelligence testing, a rather more conservative attitude began to prevail among the NEAC leadership as the Cold War progressed. Communist teachers became more isolated from domestic currents and less inclined to flesh out ‘new humanism’ and apply it to social conditions as they existed in England. Rather, like during the early Third Period (see chapter one) they sought to investigate and promote Soviet or Soviet bloc educational trends. Here education, like Soviet culture generally, was influenced by a strict Stalinist purging of ‘bourgeois influences’. As discussed in chapter two, a teacher-led pedagogy had been returned to the USSR during the 1930s, but after World War Two it was in the ascendant, and although access to education had considerably increased, the development of pupils’ initiative and self-discovery was not encouraged. Instead “the school … was seen as a place of unflinching respect for the teacher … a place in which unsanctioned and independent actions were usually inappropriate … an enormous amount of time was spent dispensing precise instructions”.112 Visits by British communist teachers to schools in the Soviet Union remarked with pride on the “very strict” discipline and the “high standard” attained by using teaching methods “like those in our grammar schools”, rather than the ‘freer’ methods that had developed in non-selective schools, and had previously been presented as the hope for the ‘new humanist’ education of the future.113 In a similar vein, Party teacher Chris Hayes used educational

research from the USSR and the GDR to expound an idea of education where “serious work” could only be done where “the teacher [is] completely in control and commands unquestioned discipline”. Max Morris’ 1953 book, *Your Children’s Future*, which contained a chapter – revealingly titled ‘People’s Democracy and Education’– that sought to lay down a blueprint for a ‘democratic’ education system in Britain, was clearly influenced by this model. Although he agreed with pupils having “an active rather than a passive approach to learning [my emphasis]” he was not effusive about teachers encouraging too much freedom in the classroom itself. “Education should be systematic, programmes clearly defined” wrote Morris, teachers should not depend “as so often happens now, on accidental, individual predilections for particular theories. Freedom there must be to discuss and learn ... but freedom should surely not result in confusion”.¹¹⁵

Morris’ attitude was considerably different five years earlier. In a July 1948 article for *World News and Views*, he celebrated the fact that “[a]ll over the country teachers are discussing how to modernise the content and methods of the school curriculum. New methods are being applied, the keynote of which is the development of the children’s initiative through activity rather than the passive absorption of knowledge”.¹¹⁶ But by November, when the NEAC launched its own journal, attitudes were beginning to change. *The Educational Bulletin* (later *Education Today* and then *Education Today and Tomorrow*) was launched at the height of the ‘witch hunt’ against communist schoolteachers (dealt with later in this chapter), a time when the NUT’s journal was increasingly hostile to communists and the Union was adopting an increasingly cautious attitude to the common secondary school. In this way it provided a medium for communist and left-leaning schoolteachers to conduct and discuss the fight against tripartism and intelligence testing both inside the classroom and the unions, and of course to publicise CPGB education policy and recruit teachers to the Party. Its staff of Party teachers were unpaid, and despite regular appeals for funding, it was selling 3000 copies an issue by the 1950s,¹¹⁷ and was apparently widely read inside the NUT.¹¹⁸ But during the late 1940s and early 1950s *The

¹¹⁷ Parsons, ‘Communism in the Professions’, p. 500.
Educational Bulletin in general advocated a very traditional attitude towards teaching and learning which contrasted sharply with the potential for progressive change that leading communist teachers had espoused in the wake of 1944. Although the first edition pointed its readers to Joan Simon’s article in The Modern Quarterly, and encouraged them to engage with “activity and field of study” methods which relied much less on teacher instruction and more upon guiding the interests of the child, there were portents of a creeping scepticism towards such approaches. Readers were also warned to be wary of the danger that such methods could also lead to a “failure to develop a coherent body of knowledge”.\footnote{119 ‘Discussion – Education for What and How?’, The Educational Bulletin, 1, 1 (November 1948), p. 7.}

Before long, a reasonable doubt such as this accelerated into dismissing activity methods as an American inspired plot, in conjunction with the Ministry of Education, who were promoting such methods at this time, “to produce men incapable of thinking”\footnote{120 ‘Discussion – The Content of Education’, The Educational Bulletin, 1, 2 (January 1949), p. 12 and p. 11.}. As leading NEAC member and grammar school History teacher R.S. (Sam) Fisher put it: “[t]he apologists for capitalism desire a working class ‘socially minded, co-operative’, but ignorant, i.e. ripe for the illusions of class collaboration. Activity methods cater for that need”.\footnote{121 Sam Fisher, ‘Correspondence and Controversy – Activity Methods’, The Educational Bulletin, 4, 4 (April-May 1952), p. 9.}

Attitudes hardened on other new educational practice in schools as well. In contradiction to the NEAC’s previous suggestion that History and Geography be merged as Social Studies or Social Science (in 1944’s the Multilateral (or Common) School, 1946’s The New School Tie and 1947’s ‘The Content of Education’), when this practice was taken up in secondary modern schools on the recommendations of the Ministry of Education, an article in the Educational Bulletin framed it as “depriving working-class children of the knowledge which is their birthright” in favour of “a hotchpotch of unsystematic activities”. Yet again this was linked to ideas spilling over from America.\footnote{122 S. Sellars, ‘Social Studies’, The Educational Bulletin, 4, 4 (January-February 1952), p. 8.}

Other new education methods which had once been advocated by communists were also subject to something of a volte face: visual aids were characterised as a slippery slope towards a form of ‘visual education’, apparently a powerful movement of American “business concerns” and “[r]eactionary ideologists” whose aim was to “limit as narrowly as possible the thinking done by the rising generation” and “to deprive them of
any serious education at all and raise up a generation conditioned to react mechanically and uncritically to certain shapes and colours’. Thus, the CPGB leadership’s rather dogged adherence to the ‘two camps’ thesis and the ‘Battle of Ideas’ was clearly making itself felt among the Party’s teachers. Educational theories emanating from America were liable to be seen as part of a US project of political, economic and cultural hegemony, even though communist teachers had previously advocated the same or similar methods in the schools. Some communist teachers involved themselves deeply in NCC activities. Peter Mauger was one example, speaking at NCC conferences on ‘Communism and Liberty’ and writing for World News and Views on the dangers posed to children by “[t]he insidious medium of the American comic [which] deals in brute force and direct sadism, disguised pornography, the unquestioned superiority of the capitalist way of life”. Mauger was at the forefront of the movement against American comics, and he and other Party teachers eventually formed an unlikely alliance with church groups and conservative moralists in the Comics Campaign Council, speaking all over the country on the menace the comics posed to young minds.

Admittedly, not all Party teachers were as enamoured with the NEAC leadership’s unsophisticated application of the ‘Battle of Ideas’ to education. Some were willing to defend the judicious use of activity methods and visual aids, or social studies, and their views were not censored from The Educational Bulletin. Equally, some of the concerns expressed about new methods were more reasonable, based not upon Cold War hysteria, but upon activity methods’ emphasis of the free development of the fixed and innate (rather than developable) potential of the individual divorced from his/her social relations. But the conservatives generally had the last word in the journal, and it was those conservatives who held the leading positions on the NEAC. As Parsons points out, such conservatism was not just a product of Soviet influence, but also reflects the fact that by the early 1950s the Party teachers’ leadership was dominated by secondary schoolteachers like G.C.T. Giles, Max

Morris and Sam Fisher. As activity methods and visual aids had more natural applicability with younger children in the primary schools, secondary school teachers naturally took less interest in them. As Eric Porter, a Party primary school teacher put it: “Morris and Fisher waged a strong campaign against ‘free’ methods from their secondary redoubt … [T]he Morris/Fisher attitude was designated generally by primary members as reactionary”.129

Added to this primary/secondary division between the teachers was a developing cleavage in the NEAC between ‘intellectual’ or ‘academic’ educationalists and classroom practitioners. In 1950, Brian Simon left school teaching in Manchester and Salford in order to take up a post in the Education Department at University College Leicester. He recalled feeling at the time that it was in a university, rather than the school classroom, that the theory and practice of education could be properly investigated.130 This perspective was out of line with an NEAC dominated by working schoolteachers concerned largely with professional questions in the trade unions (see later in this chapter). Shortly after taking up his academic post, Simon vented his frustration at the lack of attention being paid to theoretical matters by the NEAC. A June 1951 memorandum from him to the Committee laments the lack of “organised attention to the ideological struggle in education”. Simon agreed that attempts to degrade the standard of education provided for the working-class based on “American pragmatist theory” and the use of intelligence testing, but his underlining of the word ‘organised’ clearly suggested that the any existing attention to ideological matters was being applied unsystematically by the Party’s teachers. He stated bluntly that the Party was “lagging behind” on clarifying a Marxist theory of education, and the application of that theory in a specific manner to the use of intelligence testing and to different age groups and different subject areas was an area “virtually untouched by us”. He felt that there was a tendency to avoid such issues for fear of causing dissension among the Party’s teachers, and that this was “short-sighted and wrong”. Simon recommended that the development of attention to theoretical issues in education be given to a sub-Committee of the NEAC created for the purpose and “consisting of a few comrades particularly interested in this area”. The sub-Committee was to establish

128 Parsons, ‘Communism in the Professions’, p. 496.
129 Eric Porter, cited in ibid., p. 496.
130 Simon, A Life in Education, p. 61.
contact with intellectuals and academics in the Party Historians’ Group and Psychologists’ Group and work more closely with them. The memorandum clearly demonstrates that Simon felt the current leadership of the NEAC avoided theoretical discussions in favour of concrete professional matters. And where Party teachers did stray into theoretical areas matters of classroom practice, Simon felt their pronouncements on these matters tended to be knee-jerk rather than grounded in Marxist theory.  

Certainly, Max Morris’ election to the CPGB Executive in 1952 was indicative of the extent to which he endorsed the Party leadership’s prescriptive imposition of Cold War. Moreover, being part of the Industrial Department actually further diminished the prospects for theoretical advancement among the NEAC, as the Committee was caught between two stools: education in schools was a cultural matter, but one perceived through the lens of a leadership focussed more on its professional politics.

**Counting the Cost: The NEAC in the NUT**

Post-1945, CPGB trade union strategy attempted to combine wage militancy with the promotion of Party members to leadership positions. Communists in the NUT had certainly adopted the latter course, as shown by the election of G.C.T. Giles as the Union’s President 1944-1945, and the presence of five communists on the NUT Executive by 1947. But before 1948, wage militancy was given less emphasis by communists in the NUT. As the Union President, Giles was on the Teachers’ Panel of the Burnham Committee, which negotiated the new basic scale salary for schoolteachers. Whilst this was widely seen as a victory, it did not achieve equal pay for women, and allowances for graduates were nowhere near as high as the NUT had pressed for. These deficiencies were pressed by teachers in letters printed in *The Schoolmaster*, yet Giles was unhesitant in recommending the Union’s acceptance of the Burnham offer, stating “I cannot believe that any responsible body of teachers will

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113 ‘Ideological Struggle in Education’, memorandum from Brian Simon to the NEAC, June 1951 (Simon papers, DC/SIM/4/6/36).
112 Callaghan and Harker (eds.), *British Communism*, p. 206.
113 These were Giles, Margaret Clarke, J.T. Jones, John Mansfield and Charles Darvill.
114 The increment agreed for male graduate teachers at Burnham was £45 minimum to £60 maximum. The Teachers’ Panel had requested a £105 minimum and £135 maximum. See Tropp, *The School Teachers*, p. 250.
115 See for example the letters from Percy B. Knowles and H.K. Olphin in *The Schoolmaster*, 30 November 1944, p. 354. There were also objections from NUT members working in secondary schools (of which Giles was one) to the relative loss of their financial status, but as President of an NUT which was dominated by primary school teachers, Giles could hardly have been expected to press this case too firmly.
However, the change in the wider CPGB line at its 20th Congress put an end to such restraint from communists in leadership positions in the NUT. From the late 1940s and into the early 1950s, the NEAC sank much of its energy into NUT campaigns around teachers’ salaries, including securing a ‘cost of living bonus’ and for the Union leadership to name a fixed figure for salary negotiations at Burnham during 1950 and 1951. Equal pay was also a big priority, although not on feminist lines, but strictly as an issue of advancing the salary of tens of thousands of teachers, and professional unity. There was widespread discontent over salaries in the NUT during the late 1940s and early 1950s, so Party teachers often achieved significant support over the issue at Conference. For example, at the 1949 Conference, John Mansfield moved a resolution on the cost of living bonus which was accepted with only six votes against. As Geoffrey Partington, a Party secondary school teacher who joined the NUT in 1954 recalls, teachers who would “never have voted for … communists” in national or local political elections often supported them in the NUT because of “the zeal and persistence of Party comrades on short-term employment issues, especially salaries … Most teachers wanted higher salaries … but few were prepared to spend the time and effort in union organisations that Party members put in”. However, as Parsons points out, the increasing time and effort spent on union work meant less and less NEAC attention was paid to theoretical matters by the early 1950s. Moreover, Cold War tensions meant that although local NUT associations like London and Middlesex became communist strongholds, Party representation on the NUT Executive was severely weakened.

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141 Partington, Party Days, p. 135.
142 Parsons, ‘Communism in the Professions’, p. 493.
143 Partington, Party Days, pp. 133-139.
‘The Witch Hunt’

In March 1948, John Mansfield was standing for Vice-President of the NUT. As part of his campaign he gave a speech in St Albans. The welcome was not warm. It was “pretty heavy going” he wrote to G.C.T. Giles. “They gave me the impression of looking at a real live Communist!” In the same month the journal *Teachers’ World* issued dire warnings about a “Communist Fifth Column” in the profession, awaiting an opportune moment to enact their Kremlin instructions and “warp the schools to their Communist ideology”. In fact *Teachers’ World* invited all candidates standing in the NUT elections to issue declarations that they were not communists, and all but John Mansfield obliged. Naturally the journal made much of this, and Mansfield’s showing in the elections was poor, not even making the second ballot in the Vice-Presidential round. And although he, Giles, Margaret Clarke, J.T. Jones and Charles Darvill managed to keep their seats on the Executive, their votes were much reduced. But this did little to calm *Teachers’ World*’s frenzy. They then claimed that communists would switch their ‘infiltration’ attempts to local NUT associations, no doubt mindful of the strong presence of communists in London and Middlesex. By October, events took a bizarre and sinister turn. A statement purporting to be from a ‘Young Communist Action Group’ was sent to all NUT local associations, outlining plans for infiltration of the Union by tactical voting the 1949 NUT poll, and adopting crude Cominform-style phraseology. It was a clear forgery – even the NUT leadership acknowledged it as such  – but nonetheless communists were clearly aware of the injury it could cause them, given the febrile atmosphere. Various members of the NEAC wrote to *The Schoolmaster* to repudiate the document, and senior Party figures Idris Cox and Harry Pollitt also wrote to the NUT leadership in Wales and England.

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144 Letter from John Mansfield to G.C.T. Giles, 16 March 1948 (Giles papers, box 3).
145 Typed copy of *Teachers’ World* article, 3 March 1948 (Giles papers, box 3).
146 Typed copies of *Teachers’ World* articles, 10 March 1948 and 7 April 1948 (Giles papers, box 3).
147 ‘Election Results Easter 1948’, *The Schoolmaster*, 1 April 1948, p. 315.
148 Typed copy of *Teachers’ World* article, 28 April 1948 (Giles papers, box 3).
149 Typed copy of ‘Unite the Left and Advance: Young Communist Action Group’ (Giles papers, box 3).
150 This is not to suggest that the document did not raise huge concerns. The NUT Executive held a special meeting on the subject and issued a lengthy article in the journal. But in this they acknowledged the “crudity” of the document, and appeared more concerned about the clear attempt to introduce a political fight into their ‘non-political’ organisation than they were about a communist plot. See ‘The Executive and “Young Communist Action Group”’, *The Schoolmaster*, 21 October 1948, pp. 401-404.
to deny its authenticity.\textsuperscript{151} It was hugely damaging to communist teachers on the NUT Executive nevertheless. There was a considerable amount of hostile correspondence in \textit{The Schoolmaster} over the issue,\textsuperscript{152} and in 1949 all but C.S. Darvill lost their seats, and he only scraped through.\textsuperscript{153}

It was not just inside the NUT that communists were subject to harassment and suspicion. In December 1947, sixteen members of staff at Acton County Grammar school (including Giles himself) sent a telegram in support of French teachers who were on strike for a cost of living bonus. Though the telegram was signed as an expression of the point of view of the individuals concerned, and not sent on behalf of the whole staff or the school, certain members of the Acton Education Committee and the Old Actionians’ Association attempted to use it as evidence of ‘communist indoctrination’ at Acton County Grammar. Fortunately for Giles, the personal regard in which he was held by both members of Acton County Council and former pupils saw to it that critical motions at 1948 meetings of both organisations – which expressed concerns about his fitness to be a headmaster and Chair of the Old Actionians – were voted down.\textsuperscript{154} However this did not stop the \textit{Daily Mail} and the \textit{Daily Graphic} seizing on the story,\textsuperscript{155} and the episode was a demonstration of the lengths some would go to in attempting to discredit communists working in schools during the late 1940s. But this was by no means the apex of the ‘witch hunt’. The early 1950s were to bring even more straitened times.

Early in the new decade, discrimination against communist teachers moved up a gear. In March 1950 Conservative peer Lord Vansittart told the House of Lords that the recent purge of communists in the civil service should be extended into the schools.\textsuperscript{156} In one area of the country at least, this idea took root. On 20 June 1950 CPGB teacher Reg Neal was interviewed for the Headship of Bounds Green

\textsuperscript{151} Letter from David Capper to \textit{The Schoolmaster}, 8 November 1948, p. 478; letter from Brian Simon to \textit{The Schoolmaster}, 18 November 1948, p. 532; letter from Harry Pollitt to NUT General Secretary Ronald Gould in \textit{The Schoolmaster}, 21 Oct 1948, p. 418; and letter from Idris Cox to Welsh associations of the NUT, 11 October 1948 (Giles papers, box 3).

\textsuperscript{152} See the correspondence columns of \textit{The Schoolmaster} during November 1948: 11 November, p. 504; 18 November, p. 532.

\textsuperscript{153} ‘Election Results Easter 1949’, \textit{The Schoolmaster}, 21 April 1949, p. 481.

\textsuperscript{154} See ‘Report of the Meeting of the Acton Education Committee held on 8\textsuperscript{th} April 1948’ and ‘Special General Meeting of the Old Actionians Association’, 6 March 1948 (Giles papers, box 3).


Junior School, Wood Green, Middlesex and the recommendation of the interview panel to Middlesex Education Committee was that he be offered the post. On 10 July, the Education Committee rejected the appointment. They admitted from the outset that they had no doubt Neal was an excellent teacher and that they had no evidence that he had ever tried to espouse his political philosophy in school, but that his membership of the CPGB alone meant that he should not be appointed as a headteacher. This was then extended to a ban on any communist being appointed as a headteacher in Middlesex. It survived until Labour took control of Council back in 1958. Although the ‘Middlesex ban’ applied to fascists as well as communists, its target was clearly the latter, but not Reg Neal specifically. Rather, it was aimed at G.C.T. Giles and Max Morris. Even though Giles was already a headteacher at Acton County Grammar School, after Neal’s appointment had been refused, local Alderman A. Hoare addressed a public meeting at which he made allegations that Giles favoured communists and communist sympathisers among his staff, and that there was a deliberate policy of indoctrinating children at Acton:

The head of a school who is a Communist and who has on the staff Communist teachers and sympathisers and also those who differ from his opinions, cannot be fair to them all. He must use his position to favour those who are in agreement with his Communist opinions ... His obligations to Communism compel him to assist his Communist staff in any course they may follow to instil the tenets of their evil creed into the minds of children.

Thus Conservative figures on Middlesex Council were determined another communist be stopped from running a school in their area. As a result Morris was not promoted to a headship until 1962. But Middlesex was not just about one overly zealous council. As Roger Seifert has pointed out, the half-hearted response of the NUT and the Minister of Education to such a flagrant breach of civil liberties demonstrated how far anti-communism seeped into trade union and national politics in 1950s Britain, especially when compared to how zealously both the NUT and the Minister had acted against Durham.

157 ‘Report of a Joint Committee Regarding the Appointment of a Head Teacher at Wood Green, Bounds Green County Primary (Junior Mixed) School’, 6 Feb 1953 in (Middlesex County Council Collection, London Metropolitan Archives, MCC/CL/L/EO/054).
158 Copy of speech by Alderman A. Hoare, 21 April 1951 (Giles papers, box 4).
Council, who had tried to institute a ‘closed shop’ for schoolteachers between 1950 and 1952.\textsuperscript{159} But discrimination against communists in schools during the 1950s was not just against high profile headteachers or would-be headteachers. The Middlesex case has been well documented,\textsuperscript{160} but Dave Capper’s experiences at Battersea Grammar School provide a snapshot of the comparatively low level, but nonetheless damaging, discrimination that an ordinary classroom teacher could face as a result of his or her communism during the 1950s. Capper had been appointed in 1945 as Teacher of Geography.\textsuperscript{161} His primary subject was actually French, but when vacancies arose in the Modern Languages Department during the following years, Capper was not given any French to teach. If Capper’s testimonial to his trade union is to be believed, this was due to political opposition from the Senior Modern Languages Master at Battersea, Mr Riley. When finally Capper was allowed to teach some French at the start of the 1953/54 year, Riley informed the headmaster of Capper’s communism, and then he too took against him.\textsuperscript{162} During the winter term of 1953, Capper was asked to leave by the headmaster, who then subsequently made an application to the school’s Governors that Capper be transferred to another school in the county. The official reason for this was criticisms of his teaching,\textsuperscript{163} but Capper felt that his communism was the real problem: “I have learnt that gossip and rumours are circulating among local head teachers to the effect that my headmaster ‘has already got rid of that Red Capper’ he complained to his union representatives.\textsuperscript{164} Capper’s feeling that he was being persecuted for political reasons is backed up by the available evidence. Capper had experience of teaching French at secondary level for all but one year between 1922 and 1945.\textsuperscript{165} He was also appointed to Officer

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[159]{In Durham the NUT leadership had encouraged industrial action, and the Minister had threatened to intervene, whereas in the case of Middlesex, the NUT leadership appeared reluctant to threaten strike action, and the Minister did not countenance intervention, despite both of them officially disagreeing with the ban. See Roger Seifert, ‘Teachers’ Unions and Anti-Communism in the 1950s’, *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, 27/28 (Spring/Autumn 2009), pp. 79-110; and Roy, *The Teachers’ Union*, pp. 122-125.}
\footnotetext[160]{See ibid.; Simon, *Education and the Social Order*, pp. 121-125; Seifert, *Teacher Militancy*, pp. 67-69.}
\footnotetext[161]{Letter from H. Russell Ellis, Headmaster of Battersea Grammar School, to David Capper, 3 May 1945 (Capper papers, box 2).}
\footnotetext[162]{Typed statement by David Capper to Mr Smith and Mr Shaw of the IAAM and LTA, 1 March 1953 (Capper papers, box 2).}
\footnotetext[163]{W.J. Langford, statement to Governors of Battersea Grammar School, 6 November 1953 (Capper papers, box 2).}
\footnotetext[164]{Letter from David Capper to Mr Smith and Mr Shaw of the IAAM and LTA, 1 November 1953 (Capper papers, box 2).}
\footnotetext[165]{Typed statement by David Capper to Mr Smith and Mr Shaw of the IAAM and LTA, 1 March 1953 (Capper papers, box 2).}
\end{footnotes}
d’Academie in recognition of services rendered to French culture. Thus it is unlikely there were any serious problems with his ability to teach the subject. Capper was also able to find three fellow members of staff at Battersea to act as witnesses on his behalf that the matter was political. Moreover, the Staff Society voted 24 to 1 in favour of a resolution to the Governors that the compulsory transfer of Capper be dropped. If there really were issues with Capper’s competency, it is unlikely that fellow professionals would have defied the wishes of their employer in this manner to defend him. As a result, the head backed down, and Capper was not forced to leave. But the fact that he was again refused a full-time position teaching French when a vacancy arose at Battersea again in 1955 adds weight to the point that it was his political affiliation, and not his professional skills that were the problem.

The Limits of the Witch Hunt

The experiences of Capper at Battersea, Giles in Acton and Neal in Middlesex demonstrate the antagonism that could be directed towards communist schoolteachers during the early phase of the Cold War. That said, the individual support each received from colleagues and sympathisers on the Left indicates that the ‘Witch Hunt’, as damaging as it was, did not reach the heights of American McCarthyism. As former Daily Worker journalist Alison Macleod remembers, “that the anti-Communist cause should be represented by a brutal, ignorant loudmouth was marvellous for us. Anybody accused … could be called a victim of McCarthyism”. Giles, Neal and Capper’s careers were not wrecked, and the personal regard in which they were held by their colleagues and pupils did not diminish. One Party teacher recalls that Giles’ “great charm and his air of scholarship and gentlemanly values, combined with his industriousness, attracted many people would not normally have voted for a communist”. He was back on the NUT Executive by 1952, and when he was attacked

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166 Letter from Dave Capper to Mr Shaw, LTA, 3 May 1953 (Capper papers, box 2).
167 Record of Battersea Grammar School Staff Society Meeting, 8 December 1953 (Capper papers, box 2).
168 Letter from W. Spooner, Senior Master in charge of Modern Languages, Battersea Grammar School, to David Capper, 21 October 1955 (Capper papers, box 2).
169 In addition to the support Giles and Capper received in Acton and Battersea, there were many NALT and trade union figures who were willing to speak out on Reg Neal’s behalf. See the various letters of condemnation to Middlesex council over the treatment of Neal and the ‘Middlesex ban’ in the file ‘Appointment of Communist Headteachers’ (Middlesex County Council Collection, MCC/CL/L/EO/054).
170 MacLeod, Death of Uncle Joe, p. 44.
171 Partington, Party Days, pp. 133-134.
172 Letter from Harry Pollitt to G.C.T. Giles, 28 March 1953 (Giles papers, box 1).
again in 1954 in the House of Commons by Conservative MP John Eden, he received a letter of support from Labour MP James Chuter Ede, Home Secretary in the Attlee Government, who stated that “I do not think the man who attacked you had much support in the House”. Edward Short MP, who was to become Minister of Education in the 1966-1970 Labour Government, intervened in the Commons to dispute Eden’s attack, and wrote to Giles say he had “always had a high regard” for him. Chuter-Ede also wrote to Alderman C.A. Smith, the chairman of Middlesex Education Committee and leader of the anti-communist campaign group ‘Common Cause’ describing Giles as “a personal friend of long standing” and stating how much he “bitterly resented” Common Cause’s campaign against him.

And it was not just a case of respect for Party teachers’ personal qualities. As highlighted earlier, there was substantial co-operation between communists, NALT and left-Labour people over comprehensive schools. This also extended to criticism of British foreign policy. In March 1950, one Margaret Davies resigned from NALT to join the CPGB for this reason. Long standing NALT figures – including its leader Peter Ibbotson – also involved themselves in ‘Teachers for Peace’, an organisation founded by communist teachers in 1949 in order to campaigning against nuclear proliferation and for a peace conference of the great powers. Teachers’ For Peace had a membership of 500 by 1952, and collaboration between Labour and communist teachers in the group was such that in late 1952, its Chairman, Dr. Maurice King MP, wrote to warn Ibbotson against “identification with CP front organisations”. Indeed the Labour Party was concerned enough to proscribe Teachers for Peace in 1953, but such was the support for the group that NALT’s AGM defied the Labour leadership and

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173 Letter from James Chuter Ede MP to G.C.T. Giles, 2 August 1954 (Giles papers, box 1)
174 Letter from Edward Short MP to G.C.T. Giles, 28 July 1954 (Giles papers, box 1)
175 Copy of letter from James Chuter-Ede MP to C.A. Smith, 17 September 1955 (Giles papers, box 1).
176 Letter from Margaret Davies to Clifford Smith, Honorary Secretary of NALT, 5 March 1950 (NALT Archive, A/NLT/4/1-13).
178 Letter from Maurice King to Peter Ibbotson, Honorary Secretary of NALT, 3 November 1952 (NALT Archive, A/NLT/4/1-13).
passed a resolution against the decision, leading to King’s subsequent resignation as Chairman. Some Labour teachers refused to leave Teachers for Peace even after this, and the death of Stalin in the same year seemed to improve the prospect for a relaxing of Cold War tension.

Yet the actions of Stalin’s successor would by 1956 threaten the unity and success of Teachers for Peace, and for that matter the entire CPGB. It was a crisis which Party schoolteachers could be found at the heart of.

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179 Letter from Maurice King to Peter Ibbotson, Honorary Secretary of NALT, 21 June 1953 (NALT Archive, A/NLT/4/11).
180 Letter from Maurice King to Peter Ibbotson, Honorary Secretary of NALT, 21 June 1953 (NALT Archive, A/NLT/4/11).
181 Letter from Martha Martin to Peter Ibbotson, Honorary Secretary of NALT, 27 July 1953; and letter from Madge Turnbull to Peter Ibbotson, 27 July 1953 (NALT Archive, A/NLT/4/11).
**Chapter Six: Crisis, Dissent and Democratic Centralism, 1956-1957**

**Chapter Summary**

The theme of ‘Left Unity’ given to the 24th CPGB Congress held between 30 March and 2 April 1956 turned out to be wholly inappropriate. For relegated to a private session was discussion of the 20th Congress of the CPSU which had taken place that February, and at which Nikita Khrushchev – then emerging victorious in the power struggle after the death of Stalin in 1953 – delivered his ‘secret speech’ which denounced the former leader as a vicious autocrat who had terrorised his people and blundered at the outset of World War Two. Foreign communists had been excluded from Khrushchev’s speech, and thus CPGB leaders claimed to be unaware of its contents,¹ and avoided serious discussion of it.

Although the speech was not published in the British media until June, by March correspondence about it was already flooding into the *Daily Worker*, and its contents were common knowledge in the newspaper’s office after its Moscow correspondent telephoned over a summary.² Thus the British Party leadership could not contain the impact of Khrushchev’s revelations to one afternoon’s discussion. In the following months, the partial and sometimes dismissive way in which Party leaders dealt with rank-and-file concern about the speech and its consequences for the CPGB did more to arouse dissent than to quell it.³ Harry Pollitt’s retirement as leader in May 1956 unsurprisingly did not lead to a change in attitude, as he was replaced by protégé John Gollan.⁴ In July two Party historians, E.P. Thompson and John Saville defied Party rules by publishing a critical journal, *The Reasoner*, demanding a candid examination of the CPGB’s history, its internal democracy and its relationship with the Soviet Union.⁵

The Party Executive Committee did announce the appointment of a Commission on Inner-Party Democracy and a national conference to debate it, to be held in 1957. But protests for greater political

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¹ The CPGB delegates at the 20th CPSU Congress were Harry Pollitt, George Matthews and Rajani Palme Dutt. There has been speculation that they may have seen a copy of the speech before leaving Moscow, but there is no proof of this. See MacLeod, *The Death of Uncle Joe*, pp. 54-57 and pp. 65-66; Callaghan, *Cold War, Crisis and Conflict*, p. 47 and p. 81, n. 47.
² MacLeod, *The Death of Uncle Joe*, p. 69.
⁴ Morgan, *Harry Pollitt*, p. 174. Moreover, Pollitt retained a position of influence as Party Chair, with a seat on the Political Committee.
freedom in Poland and Hungary during the summer and autumn of 1956 culminated in the Soviet Union invading the latter, an action supported by the CPGB Executive Committee, but condemned by The Reasoner. Saville and Thompson were suspended and subsequently resigned from the Party, but they were not alone in doing the latter. 7000 members departed in the wake of 1956, including at least a third of the Daily Worker staff and important industrial cadres, although this did not prevent the CPGB leadership falsely claiming that the dissidents were an intellectual minority out of touch with the workers.

Party schoolteachers are an intriguing constituency of communists to examine in the context of 1956. For as well as being numerically significant, they straddled the industrial, intellectual and leadership sections of the Party. By 1956 there were 1012 Party teachers, making them the fourth largest group organised under the Industrial Department, and by far the largest ‘white collar’ one. Party teachers were highly active in the NUT, and their leader Max Morris had a place on the CPGB Executive Committee. Brian Simon – since 1950 no longer a practising schoolteacher, but an academic educationalist still significantly involved in the training of teachers at University College Leicester – was becoming an important intellectual figure in the Party. By 1957, he too was on the Executive Committee. Furthermore two Party teachers were appointed to the Commission on Inner-Party Democracy. Thus it is surprising that hitherto there has been little attention paid by historians to the effects of 1956 on CPGB’s schoolteachers. This chapter demonstrates that although significant disagreement about how the CPGB should respond to 1956’s crises went right to heart of the NEAC; ultimately dissent was contained by leading Party teachers, and as a group, schoolteachers on the whole

7 Thompson, The Good Old Cause, p. 100; and p. 105. Lawrence Daly was at pains to point out that “I am no “intelectual”, having been a coal-miner all my life” in a letter titled 'The Long Road Back', The Reasoner, 2 (September 1956), pp. 27-28. Steve Parsons’ research shows that resignations were indeed not confined to any single social or occupational group, see his ‘1956 and the Communist Party of Great Britain’, Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History, 47 (Autumn 1983), pp. 9-10. MacLeod also makes this point in The Death of Uncle Joe, pp. 159-160.
8 According to a CPGB breakdown of Party members by trade union dated February 1955, there were 1012 NUT members. They came behind only the AEU (3250), the NUM (1672) and the TGWU (1659) (CPGB archive, CP/CENT/ORG/02/01).
9 It should be noted that although Steve Parsons’ study of Party teachers ends in 1956, he does make reference to its impact on them, though this is brief. See his ‘Communism in the Professions’, pp. 499-500; and ‘British Communist Party School Teachers in the 1950s and 1960s’, pp. 62-63.
remained ‘loyal’. Although a number of teachers did leave the CPGB, they were less hard hit than other professional groups in the Party, and teachers swallowed their doubts for the same reasons that many other communists did. However it is also true that despite their ultimate loyalty communist teachers could be found expressing dissenting opinions at the very highest levels of the Party, and that 1956 did stir up debate on the NEAC about communist education policy which would have implications in the years after 1957.

Democratic Centralism Prevails

In the first edition of *Education Today and Tomorrow* after the invasion of Hungary, a feature titled ‘Communism, Democracy and Us’ revealed that leading NEAC figures were divided over their Party’s response to the events of the past year. The journal’s editor Frank Gubb – a teacher of Spanish in London who had been a Party member since 1937 and had been on the production team of *Education Today and Tomorrow* since 1950 – outlined views similar to those presented by Saville and Thompson in *The Reasoner*. For Gubb, British communists had been “profoundly wrong in our belief of the democratic nature of Soviet Communism”. To point out to the British Labour Movement, as the CPGB was inclined to do, that the democratic freedoms they enjoyed under capitalism was “illusory”, was “idle”. Such liberties were “far more real here than in the Soviet Union”. Gubb departed from Saville and Thompson only in the sense that he was not ready to leave the Party. He argued it was the duty of dissenters to reform the CPGB from within:

So long as the rest of the British people regard the Communist Party’s road to socialism as being signposted in Russian, they will refuse to take a step along it. So long as they believe that it leads to the position in which the people of Hungary find themselves, they will continue to prefer the evils of Eden ... The whole future of the British people depends upon

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10 For example, the Party’s Writers’ Group and Historians’ Group lost many of their most talented and acclaimed figures. See Cullagham, *Cold War, Crisis and Conflict*, pp. 95-96 and pp. 99-102.
11 Frank Gubb Party record, 1952 (CPGB archive, CP/CENT/DISC/10).
the transformation of the Communist Party into a party which is not, and cannot be regarded as, a rubber stamp for Moscow.\textsuperscript{12}

Alongside Gubb’s piece, the Business Manager of \textit{Education Today and Tomorrow}, D. A. Hamilton, presented another view. In common with Rajani Palme Dutt’s analysis in May 1956 that “that there should be spots on the sun would only startle an inveterate Mithras-worshipper”,\textsuperscript{13} Hamilton argued that it was obvious that the USSR would make mistakes “in view of the tremendous tasks they have had to carry out amidst ... continuous attack”. Those who argued that there was no democracy in the USSR had been “conditioned” into a “one-sided view” by capitalist propaganda.\textsuperscript{14} Democracy was “a subtle thing” according to Hamilton, and the freedom of the individual was not as important as providing for the material needs of a people in the way that he felt the Soviet Union did. Hamilton’s view clearly had the support of the NEAC leadership. In the next issue, Max Morris had the last word in the debate, dismissing Gubb’s views as “reformist”. They portrayed “serious misconceptions about Marxism, the Soviet Union and our Party” in “accepting lock, stock and barrel the [capitalist] version of democracy”. Whilst Morris accepted that British communism needed to “travel a road determined by British conditions, and ... must jealously safeguard the liberties won for our people”, the CPGB would never judge the USSR in the same way as other states:

If he means that we must treat the USSR as just ‘another state’ and not as the leading country of socialism, from whom we have a great deal to learn; if he means that ... then these views must be repudiated as a danger to our party.\textsuperscript{15}

A similar debate took place in Teachers for Peace, with the same result. The invasion of Hungary led to “bitter disputes” within the group. Even its leader Marie Philibert, “for whom the Soviet Union was close to a New Jerusalem”, wanted Teachers for Peace to condemn the Soviet action in Hungary.

\textsuperscript{12} Frank Gubb, ‘Communism, Democracy and Us’, \textit{Education Today and Tomorrow}, 9, 3 (Jan-Feb 1957), p. 6.
\textsuperscript{13} Rajani Palme Dutt, cited in Callaghan, \textit{Rajani Palme Dutt}, p. 269.
But, according to one of its members “the party teacher ‘big guns’” in the shape of Max Morris and Sam Fisher “were determined that no such resolution should be passed”.\textsuperscript{16} It was not. Instead, after two-and-a-half hours of argument, Teachers for Peace issued a resolution which fudged the issue of national self-determination for one of peace. “Above all we regard with apprehension the danger of the situation deteriorating into a major war” read the resolution. The USSR’s withdrawal from Hungary was “urged”, not demanded, “as soon as is possible”, but Britain’s intervention in Suez was condemned.\textsuperscript{17} In his silencing of dissidence in the NEAC, Max Morris appears to have had little doubt about the correctness of his Party’s response to the Hungarian intervention. In actual fact, however, Morris was deeply disturbed by King Street’s reaction to the Soviet offensive and expressed this forcefully in Party Executive Committee meetings during the crisis. Morris felt that the Hungarian uprising was a response to legitimate grievances on behalf of the people, and should be condemned by the Party,\textsuperscript{18} and demanded “a forthright statement of why things went wrong”.\textsuperscript{19} Morris was alarmingly frank, given that there was only one other dissenter on the Executive, Arnold Kettle. But ultimately, both men fell into place with democratic centralism, accepted their Party’s decision and dropped their opposition. Indeed, by the 15 December Executive Meeting, Morris admitted that he was now “prepared to suspend judgement”.\textsuperscript{20} Morris had shared Frank Gubb’s anxiety about how justifying the USSR’s action would undermine the legitimacy of \textit{The British Road to Socialism}, stating that “we should condemn it most sharply … or we won’t win confidence on the \textit{British Road}”.\textsuperscript{21} Thus his dismissal of Gubb’s identical concerns, as well as his silencing of criticism of the USSR by Teachers for Peace, is a clear indication that his personal critical judgment of the Party’s reaction to events in Hungary had indeed been suspended, and that democratic centralism prevailed for the NEAC leadership. The fate of Frank Gubb underlines this. By September 1957, he was no longer editor of \textit{Education Today and Tomorrow},\textsuperscript{22} having been replaced

\textsuperscript{16} Partington, \textit{Party Days}, p. 140.  
\textsuperscript{17} Marie Philibert, ‘Suez, Hungary and Teachers for Peace’, \textit{Educational Today and Tomorrow}, 9, 3 (Jan-Feb 1957), p. 4.  
\textsuperscript{18} George Matthews’ notes on meeting of the CPGB Executive Committee, 3 November 1956 (CPGB archive, CP/CENT/EC/04/01).  
\textsuperscript{19} James Klugmann’s notes on meeting of the CPGB Executive Committee, 11 November 1956 (CPGB archive, CP/CENT/EC/04/02).  
\textsuperscript{20} Minutes of CPGB Executive Committee meeting, 15 December 1956 (CPGB archive, CP/CENT/EC/04/03).  
\textsuperscript{21} Matthews’ notes on CPGB Executive Committee, 3 November 1956 (CPGB archive, CP/CENT/EC/04/01).  
\textsuperscript{22} See \textit{Education Today and Tomorrow}, 10, 1 (September-October 1957), p. 12.
by the pro-Soviet primary school head Ian Gunn.23 Gubb left the Party,24 having seemingly lost his faith in changing the direction of the CPGB from inside. The Party’s 25th Congress may well have been the impetus.

**Teachers and the 25th Congress**

Dissidents who had remained inside the CPGB after the final months of 1956 pinned their hopes on the 25th Congress, scheduled for April the following year, as a chance to turn the Party around. This was certainly the attitude of some of its teachers. Geoff Partington remembered that he disagreed with the CPGB’s position on Hungary, but hoped that the travails of 1956 would be “the beginning of massive and much-needed internal change”.25 Jack MacLeod, Party teacher and husband of *Daily Worker* journalist Alison MacLeod, advised his Party comrades not to rip up their membership cards, but wait to see if the Special Congress would bring about a change.26 Shaken by the number of resignations since it had accepted and repeated the Soviet line on Hungary, on 17 December the Party’s Executive Committee had elevated the intended national conference into a Special Congress with decision making powers. There would be discussion of a new draft of *The British Road to Socialism*, and the report of the Commission on Inner Party Democracy set up the previous July.27 Yet the composition of the Commission was worrying for the dissidents. 10 of its 16 members were loyal full-time Party workers, 5 of whom were also on the Party’s Executive Committee. However some hope was provided by the presence of two well-known dissenters: historian Christopher Hill, and full-timer Malcolm MacEwan. There were also two Party schoolteachers: Joe Cheek, and Peter Cadogan.28

Like Hill and MacEwan, Cadogan was a confirmed dissident, if less well known. For Cadogan, Khrushchev’s speech “was a blinding flash”. At that point, he was Secretary of the Cambridge Branch and taught History at a secondary school in the city. He had been in the CPGB for a decade, having

24 There is no record of any Party disciplinary procedure against Gubb.
26 MacLeod, *The Death of Uncle Joe*, p. 208.
28 ‘Report to the Executive Committee of the Commission on Inner Party Democracy’ (the Majority Report) December 1956 (CPGB archive, CP/CENT/EC/04/03)
joined immediately upon demobilisation after the War. By the early 1950s he felt the CPGB was “dying of Stalinism”. Cadogan wrote a memorandum on inner-Party democracy in 1955, but it did not get past the sympathetic but powerless attention of the Cambridge District Secretary, Arthur Utting. But in April the following year, when Utting was called to nominate someone to be on the Commission for Inner Party Democracy, he did not forget Cadogan. The job was one that Cadogan was keen to do. Despite his misgivings about the Party, like Macleod, Cadogan at that point wanted to stay inside the CPGB in order to attend to its faults. Like Partington, in Cadogan’s mind Khrushchev’s speech offered the chance for “liberation” of the CPGB. Although he quickly realised that the Commission’s composition meant that “of course it was all fixed”, Cadogan recalls “quite a good atmosphere” on it, until Hungary. After that, he “went into overdrive” and spoke at a public meeting at Cambridge University Church, “fulminating against Moscow”. Unbeknown to Cadogan, a reporter from the national newspaper the News Chronicle was in attendance. The next day the paper featured a story headlined ‘Communist Denounces Hungarian Revolution Crushed by Moscow’. When Cadogan next attended a meeting of the Commission, its Secretary, Betty Lewis, refused to share a table with a “traitor”. Cadogan was suspended from the Party by his District Committee for 3 months and could take no further part in the Commission’s work. 29 Joe Cheek had been picked as a ‘neutral’ member of the Commission, alongside the only industrial worker on it, Kevin Halpin. Cheek taught at a London school, and was a Party Branch Organiser in the city. 30 He does not appear to have had any prior association with Cadogan. 31

When the results of the Commission’s inquiries were delivered to the Party on 16 December 1956, there were two documents placed before the Executive Committee. One was a ‘Majority Report’ representing the views of all but three of the Commission. The three dissenters were, unsurprisingly, Hill, MacEwan and Cadogan. Equally unsurprisingly, the Majority Report found the Party’s structure

31 Cadogan did not mention any previous meeting with Cheek in his recollection of his time on the Inner Party Commission. Indeed he refers to him only once, and cannot recall his name. See testimony recorded for the CPGB Biographical Project.
and organisation to be fundamentally sound and appropriate for British conditions. Joe Cheek and Kevin
Halpin did attach some reservations regretting the lack of rank-and-file representation on the
Commission, and the short length of time given for investigations, but ultimately they were persuaded
to back the full-timers in the Party. Hill, MacEwen and Cadogan submitted a ‘Minority Report’ which
was highly critical of the recommendations made by the majority, and the whole method of the
Commission’s undertakings. In their view, it had not the membership, the time, the means, nor the will
to investigate properly. The CPGB’s interpretation and operation of democratic centralism was “iron
discipline ... bordering on military discipline” and more suited to revolutionary Russia than 1950s
Britain. Perhaps, they argued, the term should even be dropped. It demanded that lessons be learned
from the “degeneration” of inner-party democracy in the USSR and the Eastern Bloc. The Minority
Report was written up largely by MacEwan, with Hill adding a few paragraphs. Given his suspension
from the Party and the Commission after Hungary, Cadogan’s involvement was simply to read and sign
it, though he had no doubt influenced its contents through his earlier work. A draft version indicates
that Joe Cheek was also at one stage prepared to put his signature to the Minority Report, with a caveat
saying he did not accept all its criticisms of the Party. But he did not distance himself at all from the
vast majority of the Report’s damning verdict on the CPGB’s operation of democratic centralism in the
past.

The Impact of 1956 on Teachers

Clearly there were communist teachers among the dissidents thrown up by the events of 1956,
concerned about the inflexibility of democratic centralism in the CPGB and the reluctance of its
leadership to criticise the Soviet Union. However, just as clearly, the King Street view in the end
prevailed inside the NEAC. The Minority Report was dismissed by the Party’s Executive, who felt “its
proposals amount to the disintegration of the Communist Party as a unified political organisation …
would end Party unity and discipline and reduce … [it] to an assembly of contending sects incapable of

32 ‘Report to the Executive Committee of the Commission on Inner Party Democracy’ (the Majority Report)
December 1956 (Labour History Archive, People’s History Museum, Manchester CP/CENT/EC/04/03)
33 Cadogan, testimony recorded for the CPGB Biographical Project.
34 Typed draft of the Minority Report, n.d. (CPGB archive, CP/CENT/EC/04/04).
giving leadership to the working class”. Max Morris remained on that Executive, whilst Brian Simon was also elected to it at the 25th Congress, like Morris keeping his own criticism of the Party’s line on Hungary private. The Congress approved the Majority Report and a revised draft of *The British Road to Socialism*. There were notable contributions from dissidents such as Brian Behan of the Executive, and academics Hyman Levy and Christopher Hill, but despite being the second largest occupational group present among the delegates at the Congress, teachers were quiet on the issue. This undoubtedly aided the leadership in portraying the dissidents as an intellectual minority remote from the Party’s mass, and some leading Party teachers supported this view. Dave Wallis, the Assistant Editor of *Education Today and Tomorrow*, made an appearance in *World News* dismissing those around *The Reasoner* as self-indulgent “irrationalist” and “anarchist” intellectuals who were only able to attract such attention due to their privileged access to a printing press. In a similar letter to the same paper, Joan Simon wrote “it is politically necessary to establish that the people concerned are intellectuals because we have got to recognise this negative propaganda for what it is”. The following month G.C.T. Giles used the lead article of *Education Today and Tomorrow* to point out the vulnerability to capitalist propaganda of “the so-called intellectuals”. He had in fact experienced this in his own home. Salley Vickers, today a successful novelist, was 8 years old in 1956, and lived with the Gileses. They had offered her mother and father – who had become communists at Cambridge University during the 1930s and were contemporaries of Eric Hobsbawm and Arnold Kettle – somewhere to stay after the family moved to London. Her father was a lecturer at Barlaston Trade Union College in Stoke-on-

35 ‘Report to the Executive Committee of the Commission on Inner Party Democracy’ (the Majority Report).
38 Callaghan, *Cold War, Crisis and Conflict*, pp. 75-76.
40 The only contribution from a Party teacher at the Congress was Max Morris’ speech expressing opposition to an amendment suggesting that the Executive Committee should in future be partly comprised of at least one member from each District elected by the District Committee but approved by Congress, rather than having the Executive Committee chosen by a ballot of Congress delegates from a recommended list. This reveals his priorities when it came to inner-party democracy. (CPGB archive, CP/CENT/CONG/10/08).
41 For a useful summary of these anti-intellectual interjections in the Party press, see Wood, *Communism and British Intellectuals*, pp. 207-213.
Trent, and then became education officer for the Electrical Trade Union (ETU). According to Vickers, the Giles family was so close to John Gollan’s family that “they were part of the daily fabric” of her life as a child. When her father disagreed with the CPGB leadership’s line over the Hungarian invasion, Vickers remembers it was perceived as “serious dereliction” by Giles. She recalls lying on bed hearing raised voices at home and being “aware that our relationship with my extended family had subtly and permanently changed”. Unlike his adult lodgers then, Giles, like the rest of the Party teachers’ leadership, stayed loyal to Gollan. He felt that the 25th Congress had “demonstrated beyond all doubt that our Party has worked out over the years a procedure which is both efficient and democratic”.  

Many communists stayed in the Party after 1956 because, as John Callaghan points out, “[l]oyalty to the Soviet Union had deep emotional supports … the glorious October Revolution [and] the fight against fascism … which the Soviet Union had paid for in blood and destruction”. John Gollan played upon these at the 25th Congress, and “many delegates responded to Gollan’s signal”. Party teachers were of course not immune to this. Max Morris’ insistence to Gubb that the CPGB would never treat the USSR as just ‘another’ country demonstrated such thinking, but this was not only the view of leading figures on the NEAC. Muriel Seltman, schoolteacher who was in the midst of very grave doubts about other aspects of the CPGB line (see next chapter) could not believe that “the Soviet Union [was] guilty of any form of imperialism when its policy was anti-imperialist everywhere”. Len Goldman, a Party member since the 1930s and a teacher at Holloway Comprehensive School, recalled that “many comrades … were allowing breast beating (mea culpa; mea culpa) to take over from sober analysis … Their [the USSR’s] policies had to be seen in their historical context”. Even though Jack MacLeod eventually left the Party in 1957, he listened to radio broadcasts on the invasion of Hungary trying to

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48 Callaghan, Cold War, Crisis and Conflict, p. 75.
list reasons why the Soviet Union was justified.\textsuperscript{51} Loyalty to the USSR was something that was amplified by the hostility of the British media. A communist “couldn’t criticise a country ruled by the working class, while the capitalist press was listening”,\textsuperscript{52} and Party members routinely dismissed hostile press coverage of the USSR as unreliable and therefore not worthy of serious consideration.\textsuperscript{53} Muriel Seltman recalls that “[a]ll around us, all the time, the radio, press and TV had the Soviet Union under attack … it was the enemies of the working people of Britain who seemed to be the most virulent opponents of Socialism … In those days we relied on logic and it told us to reject what the owners of the \textit{Daily Mail} and the \textit{Daily Express} etc. told us”.\textsuperscript{54} Goldman too remembers that “[i]t was because of the hostility of ‘the class enemy’ that I, along with many others, had been reluctant to believe their stories”.\textsuperscript{55} Linked to this was a belief that the CPGB was the only Party in Britain capable of leading a transition to socialism. The Labour Party was seen by communists as standing only for a reformed capitalism, even if it was now accepted that unity with the Labour Left was the only way to advance to socialism. Seltman “saw the Party, despite all its shortcomings, as the only available instrument for changing society and building a better world”.\textsuperscript{56} Sam Fisher admitted to a young teacher that he had grave doubts about how communism had been forced upon the peoples of Eastern Europe, to the extent that the latter “could hardly believe a Communist was saying this”, but Fisher would not leave the CPGB as he felt a Marxist party was necessary in Britain.\textsuperscript{57}

As has been shown, however, there were also Party teachers deeply involved in the most frank expressions of dissidence on the Commission for Inner Party Democracy. Even though the NEAC had ultimately remained loyal to the Party centre, leading figures on it – indeed figures also part of the CPGB leadership itself – did so despite serious misgivings. And not all teachers followed the loyal stance of the NEAC. Peter Cadogan resigned, though not before he had contributed to pre-Congress

\textsuperscript{51} MacLeod, \textit{The Death of Uncle Joe}, p. 144.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., p. 59.
\textsuperscript{54} Seltman, \textit{What’s Left?}, p. 56.
\textsuperscript{55} Goldman, \textit{Back to Brighton}, p. 51.
\textsuperscript{56} Seltman, \textit{What’s Left?}, p. 56.
discussion by arguing that *The British Road to Socialism* should be done again from scratch. Frank Gubb’s departure has already been mentioned. Another important Party teacher who left after the 1957 Congress was Harold Rosen, who then taught English at Walworth Comprehensive School, but would later go on to become a leading academic educationalist at the University of London’s Institute of Education. Like Gubb, he had been on the editorial board at *Education Today and Tomorrow*. He was also close to both Max Morris and Brian Simon. But unlike them he could not silence his doubts in the name of democratic centralism. He was too tired of the “gramophone-like” way in which CPGB members were expected to repeat the leadership’s line. Margot Heinemann, who had been both a Party schoolteacher and a full-time Party worker in the years before 1956, recalled that disillusioned reaction after the fallout from the Stalin era that year was notable among teachers. Nigel Kelsey, an East London primary schoolteacher, remembered years later that the many “thriving” Party teachers’ groups” in “almost every” division of the city were irrevocably weakened by 1956, as active members either left the Party or fell into inactivity.

No exact figures survive on how many Party schoolteachers were among the 9000 CPGB members who had resigned by the weeks after the 25th Congress. But as a whole, Party teachers remained loyal. Though the CPGB itself estimated it had lost up to one quarter of its white collar workers, teachers were not noticeably among them. They made up 11 per cent of the total number of delegates at the 1957 Congress, which actually represented a substantial increase of the 7 per cent they made up in 1956 – indeed they were one of only three occupational groups in the Party which actually grew as a proportion of total delegates between those two years, and their growth was the largest among these three. Marie Philibert remembered that “the Party teachers remained very faithful”, and fellow

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59 See the list of staff in *Education Today and Tomorrow*, 9, 6 (July 1956), p. 16.
63 Callaghan, *Cold War, Crisis and Conflict*, p. 76.
64 The percentage of engineering delegates, for example, went down from 25 per cent to 18 per cent, and building from 10 to 7 per cent. The only other occupational groups to increase their proportion were professional and technical (from 2 per cent to 5 per cent) and distribution (from 2 per cent to 3 per cent). As well as highlighting that teachers represented the largest growth of any occupational group in the wake of 1956, these
Party teacher Eric Porter agreed. Nonetheless, teachers remained loyal despite severe reservations among their most important figures. And even if those leaving were not numerically significant, both Kelsey’s recollection and the cases of Cadogan, Rosen and Gubb show that they were highly active members. But what Henry Pelling described as a “crumbling of support for the party among the members of the professions” during 1956 clearly did not apply to communist schoolteachers. Neither did the neat intellectual/worker divide characterised by the Party leadership. There was no distinct flight of the intellectuals from the NEAC. Whilst more ‘intellectual’ educationalists like Harold Rosen and Beatrix Tudor-Hart (see below) left, others such as Brian Simon and George Rudé remained loyal to the Party leadership, and would do so for years to come. However as the final section of this chapter demonstrates, 1956/57 had aroused questions about Soviet educational policy which were to have an impact on the NEAC’s attitudes to educational politics at home.

**1956 and Communist Educational Policy**

Naturally, CPGB schoolteachers’ concerns about their Party’s attitude to the Soviet Union during 1956 were not reserved to international relations. They were also concerned about the implications of 1956’s crises for communist educational policy. This was a theme taken up by Beatrix Tudor-Hart shortly after Khrushchev’s speech. She published an article which damned the CPGB’s subservience to the CPSU over questions of education.

Many teachers, both in, and out of the Party, have been very disturbed for a long time at the Communist Party’s attitude towards progressive ideas and methods in education, particularly in primary education. We have damned activity methods, play, individual work, project methods, assignments, because the Soviet Union disapproves of them.

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57 MacLeod, *The Death of Uncle Joe*, p. 261.
Tudor-Hart was picking up on a complaint which she had first raised in the late 1940s and early 1950s, at the height of the ‘battle of ideas’. She was now emboldened to try again by the de-bunking of the Stalin myth that had evidently taken place in Moscow. As well as the hostile attitude towards progressive primary education, Tudor-Hart also felt that the Party’s flagship policy in secondary education – opposition to intelligence tests, on which communists were leading the charge by the late 1950s – had been determined by the USSR. Communist teachers in Britain would “gain more support ... if we discussed English methods and practice ... from the viewpoint of Marxists using our own experiences”, rather than “report[ing] on and prais[ing] only Russian methods, even when these are nonsense, incorrect ... or obvious and trite”.68

Dave Wallis attempted to undermine Tudor-Hart’s credibility referring to her “wrong impressions” and “many inaccuracies”. The NEAC’s opposition to intelligence testing came about because of a response to British conditions, since the opponents of the comprehensive school were using them as their main line of defence. Activity methods had been discussed equally and fairly, and any one-sidedness which occurred in the debate was because “many people, Beatrix Tudor-Hart among them, could not be bothered to write in”. Articles on British developments in education were regularly publicised. There needed to be no change in attitude towards the USSR, indeed there was not enough praise or understanding of its educational developments among Party teachers. In common with the method taken by the CPGB leadership leading up to and during the 25th Congress, Tudor-Hart’s criticisms were brushed off as those of a middle-class intellectual working in the independent sector. They were remote from the mass of communist teachers employed in state education:

Communist teachers have many faults. One is that they don’t do nearly enough to popularise, or even begin to understand, Soviet educational achievements ... If Beatrix

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68 Beatrix Tudor-Hart, ‘Are We Subservient to Moscow?’, *Education Today and Tomorrow*, 8, 6 (July-August 1956), p. 5.
Tudor-Hart had any real day to day contact with Communist teachers she would know this.\textsuperscript{69}

Tudor-Hart replied to Wallis’ dismissal of her concerns, denying his claim that activity methods had been discussed in a balanced fashion. She stated that both she and another writer were prevented from publishing a second article, so that the last article published in the discussion was one which condemned activity methods. Wallis’ argument that CPGB teachers gave sufficient attention to British matters was rebutted too, and in a manner which suggested that Tudor-Hart had long been sidelined among Party teachers for her social class and her intellectualism:

Party teachers in the thirties supported intelligence tests and when I stated that in my opinion they were a very grave danger as they postulated a false scientific theory, I was called … a social fascist, defending my class (middle class) interests when threatened by working class children being given a real equal opportunity … Yes I know we have published articles [on British educational developments] … But none of them have ever touched on the principles, basis and theory underlying … or approached a serious discussion on dialectical materialist lines, of content or method in either primary or secondary schools.\textsuperscript{70}

But Tudor-Hart was not alone in her misgivings about NEAC education policy in the wake of 1956. Peter Mauger also felt that, whilst a tendency to adulate Soviet educational achievements was “a natural reaction” given the USSR’s very real advances in this field and the hostility of the capitalist press, Tudor-Hart’s views should not be dismissed as inaccurate. It was “a fair comment that Communists have tended to propagandise Soviet education” wrote Mauger. “I do not remember reading any criticism of Soviet education by Communists” he added. He emphasised the need “to solve, in our own way, the very pressing problems facing British education”. He then echoed concerns that Tudor-


Hart had expressed about the formal and academic style of education being delivered by Soviet schools since the reforms under Stalin in the 1930s. Mauger was a practising teacher in a state school, and had played key role in the ‘battle of ideas’ campaign during the late 1940s and early 1950s (see the previous chapter). Given these facts, he could not be easily dismissed as an unreliable ivory tower intellectual. Nor could G.C.T. Giles, who despite his loyalty to the Majority Report, also felt that the Party’s teachers had neglected Marxist theory. As the previous chapter demonstrated, Brian Simon had also made this point during the early 1950s, and he took another opportunity to do so in the wake of 1956. Even Wallis’ demolition of Tudor-Hart had admitted that “[w]e spend too much time arguing and fighting for a militant salary policy and not enough on discussing educational theories”. Clearly, 1956 stirred up concerns about the theoretical rigour of communist educational policy among CPGB teachers. The consequences of this will be explored in the next chapter.

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73 Brian Simon, ‘British Teachers and Moscow’, *Education Today and Tomorrow*, 9, 3 (January-February 1957), p. 3.

Chapter Summary

The CPGB emerged from the crisis of 1956-57 bruised, but unbowed. With the exception of Harry Pollitt, its leading personnel remained in place, and although it had lost thousands of members, it was still bigger than at any point before World War Two.\(^1\) It also appeared to be a relatively cohesive organisation with a solid base of support among the skilled and semi-skilled working class. Moreover, even though the CPGB’s showings in the 1959 and 1964 general elections were disappointing,\(^2\) the relative ‘thaw’ in Cold War tension following Khrushchev’s ‘de-Stalinisation’, early Soviet victories in the ‘space race’, and the beginning of the end of the British post-war economic boom (resulting in growing government attempts to enforce wage restraint), created favourable conditions for advance in industrial and cultural spheres. These developments were especially relevant to communist teachers, for, they created relative consensus in Britain around the need for expanded educational opportunity in order to maintain national economic efficiency.\(^3\) This, coupled with the growing success of experimental comprehensive schools which communists had championed (and in many cases helped develop) created a more sympathetic environment for non-selective secondary education. In contrast to other professional Party groups which had been badly damaged by the trauma of 1956-57, the schoolteachers’ group remained relatively strong, by far the largest and most influential ‘white collar’ group in the CPGB. Between the late 1950s and the early 1960s Party teachers, in close collaboration with academic/intellectual educationalists like Brian and Joan Simon, developed an influential theoretical critique of selection which did not hang on the simplistic class reductionism of the late 1940s and early 1950s, but engaged with questions of educational psychology, theory and method in the creation of a common curriculum. In turn,

\(^1\) At the 25\(^{th}\) Congress in 1957, Party membership stood at 26,742, compared to a 1939 membership of 17,756. Membership began to grow again from 1961, reaching 34,281 in 1964. Although it did decline slightly in the years immediately following, in 1967 membership stood at 32,916. Figures taken from Thompson, *Good Old Cause*, p. 218.

\(^2\) Callaghan, *Cold War, Crisis and Conflict*, pp. 187-188.

communist hostility to ‘modern’ teaching methods softened considerably compared to the more rigid pro-Soviet and anti-Americanism of the ‘Battle of Ideas’. As will be shown, this has not been recognised by previous writers, who have tended to oversimplify the years after 1956 as a time of unbridled trade union discourse and hostility to educational theory. However, when in 1961 Joan Simon was about to publish a pamphlet developing a Marxist theory of education in Britain (which she had written at the request of the CPGB’s publishers), leading members of the NEAC became concerned that schoolteacher control over communist educational policy was being threatened. They attempted to reassert their dominance by blocking publication, and were backed up by a CPGB leadership which did not wish to risk alienating a large ‘worker’ constituency then making significant advances in an NUT increasingly open to militancy on salaries as governments attempted to impose wage controls. Paradoxically, the marginalisation of intellectual educationalists occurred at a time when King Street was beginning to assign a greater role for ideological and cultural struggle in other spheres, and whilst Brian Simon was to play a leading role in this as chair of the NCC, he found himself to some extent limited in his own field of expertise inside his own Party. Yet, in another way, the struggle for the control of communist education policy was a portent of a wider schism developing in the CPGB by the mid-to-late 1960s: between those advocates of a more pluralist, humanist approach which ascribed a greater role for culture and ideas as site of resistance; and those who wished to keep the battle for socialism more firmly rooted in industrial struggle.

**New Trends: Communist Teachers, Educationalists and ‘Educability’**

Chapter five of this thesis argued that during the early stages of the Cold War something of a divide began to develop on the NEAC between those leading members interested in developing theoretical work on the content and method of education in schools, and those more concerned with pursuing professional battles inside the NUT. Generally, academic educationalists and primary school teachers were more open to theoretical discussions and new ‘active’ or ‘child-centred’ methods. On the other hand, leading communists teaching in secondary schools normally prioritised work in the trade unions, and sometimes adopted a conservative attitude towards new methods under the influence of the CPGB’s ‘Battle of Ideas’, and also because such methods were less applicable to
their day-to-day work as teachers. Yet chapter five also showed that the two strands successfully co-
existed through to 1956, and chapter six argued that the turmoil of that year led an increasing number
of communist teachers to question the uncritically pro-Soviet and conservative attitude of aspects of
the NEAC’s work, and the balance between trade union and theoretical concerns. As will now be
discussed, in the years immediately after 1956, the NEAC paid much more attention to developing
educational theory and practice from a British point of view, and considerable collaboration took
place between working schoolteachers and educationalists. Indeed, from the late 1950s until the mid-
1960s, this interaction meant that communists gave arguably the greatest theoretical rigour to the
campaign for comprehensive education in England.

The previous chapter outlined the importance of the work of Brian and Joan Simon in this area
during the period of tripartite retrenchment in the late 1940s and early 1950s. By the mid-1950s,
their work was gathering in influence. Brian Simon later recalled that in tracing the origins of the
comprehensive “breakout” of the 1960s “one is led inevitably and precisely to … 1956”. That year,
only a quarter of all children in England and Wales stayed at school beyond the minimum leaving
age of 15, but technological change demanded a more skilled workforce, something Conservative
Minister of Education David Eccles had in mind when he asked the CACE, chaired by Lord
Crowther, to investigate the education of 15-18 year olds “in relation to the changing … industrial
needs of our society”. The Crowther Report advised that the growth in proportion of skilled jobs
meant the average citizen required “much more education than was needed only a short time ago …
It is not only at the top but almost to the bottom of the pyramid that … needs … a longer educational
process”. This was something already pointed out by Simon in his 1955 book *The Common
Secondary School*. Although this wastage of talent had obvious implications for a selective system
of secondary education which restricted education beyond 15 to a minority – especially since the

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5 Rick Rogers, *From Crowther to Warnock: How Fourteen Reports Tried to Change Children’s Lives*, 2nd
1951 introduction of the General Certificate of Education (GCE) which had a higher pass mark than the old School Certificate – the tripartite system was outside Crowther’s remit. However the Tory Government could not ignore a growth in parental demand for enhanced educational opportunity for their children, one which exceeded the available number of grammar school places and put yet more pressure on the system. Furthermore, the fact that the GCE, unlike the School Certificate, could be sat at age 15 meant that a growing number of secondary modern schools were entering pupils, and a rising number of them enjoyed success of which the 11+ test had indicated they were incapable. This was reinforced by the success of a growing number of ‘experimental’ multilateral and comprehensive schools. It was in this context that in 1957 Brian Simon published a substantial symposium he had edited, *New Trends in English Education*. It collected the work of teachers across England (including several Party teachers) on unstreaming the junior school, developing the potential of secondary modern pupils, and on the experience of developing teaching and learning in embryonic or transitional comprehensive schools. It was favourably reviewed in the Labour Movement and educational press. The editor himself, normally highly modest, reflected towards the end of his life that *New Trends* was agenda-setting in terms of advancing unstreaming in primary schools and in advocating a common curriculum for all students.

It was also in 1957 that Simon’s earlier work on intelligence testing and the problems of selection in secondary education – helped along by the psychologist Alice Heim’s 1954 work *The Appraisal of Intelligence* – was really beginning to make its mark. That year, P. E. Vernon, Professor of Educational Psychology at the University of London’s Institute of Education published a landmark report by a team leading psychometrists he had chaired. It rejected the theory of total genetic determination in intelligence and conceded that streaming should be abolished in junior schools, and a common secondary schooling given to all for at least the first few years after age 11.

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9 The Crowther Report, p. 450.
Vernon said that Simon’s work was the impetus for him to carry out the study.\textsuperscript{15} And this work would be built on in the years immediately after by several other important studies and reports by psychologists, sociologists and educationalists which discredited 11+ selection.\textsuperscript{16} Thus, by the late 1950s and early 1960s a communist educationalist, alongside the many practising communist schoolteachers he worked with, was important in providing an educational basis to what had been a largely egalitarian or instinctive reaction against selection elsewhere in the Labour Movement. Whilst the concept of fixed inherited intelligence was not solely criticised by communists, as Deborah Thom asserts, “the group that can claim to have investigated testing most extensively and systematically was the Communist Party”.\textsuperscript{17}

However, Thom also argues that in the hands of the Party’s practising teachers – rather than academic educationalists like Simon – the communist campaign against tripartism was reduced to a “trade union style discourse based entirely on selection” which “did not advance the debate theoretically at all” but “took it back to the utility of tests as a weapon in ruling class hands”.\textsuperscript{18} Parsons, too, argues that after 1956 “discussion on education as such within Communist circles seem to nearly all come from outside the Teachers’ Group”.\textsuperscript{19} It is true that a lot of space was given to teacher trade union politics and material provision for schools in \textit{Education Today and Tomorrow}, and that Max Morris and other leading members of the NEAC gave much more attention to such issues than they did pedagogy. This will be discussed later. Nonetheless, both Thom and Parsons overlook a period of increased openness to discussing the theory and practice of comprehensive education among the Party teachers during the late 1950s and early 1960s, which involved collaboration between communist teachers and academic educationalists. Even at the height of the ‘Battle of Ideas’ in 1951, whilst Max Morris did make much of the fact that intelligence testing was

\textsuperscript{15} P.E. Vernon, cited in Simon, \textit{A Life in Education}, p. 77.
\textsuperscript{16} See D.A. Pidgeon and Alfred Yates, \textit{Admission to Grammar Schools} (London: Newnes, 1957); and Robin Pedley, \textit{The Comprehensive School} (London: Penguin, 1963). As has already been observed in the first section of this chapter, the CACE’s Crowther Report (1959) and Newsom Report (1963) also expressed concerns about the rigidity of the secondary system and the consequent wastage of talent, even if it was outside of their remit to question tripartism. In 1967 the CACE’s Plowden Report came out in favour of junior school unstreaming.
\textsuperscript{17} Thom, ‘Politics and the People’, p. 519.
\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 525.
\textsuperscript{19} Parsons, ‘Communism in the Professions’, p. 500.
a useful weapon being used to prop up class privilege in the education system – something which Brian Simon also did in great detail in his work – he also argued that “[t]his does not mean that the testers are Machiavellian plotters aiming to close the avenues of opportunity to the masses”. He conceded that many of them had precisely the opposite intention. Rather, Morris advanced the case against testing in a way which acknowledged the relevance of educational content and method:

Marxists must repudiate the whole restrictive system. We do not deny the significance of either hereditary or environmental influences. But we declare that neither constitutes the main force determining the psychological development of the human individual ... The determining factor is the way in which his life relationships are composed and the content of his activity [my emphasis]. The deciding role is played by education, a consciously directed process subordinated to definite aims advanced by society. It is the significance of the whole educational process which is reduced by the “intelligence” theories, the creative richness of the work of the teacher that is denied [my emphasis].

As the influence of such determinist theories intelligence declined from the late 1950s, more discussion could be given over to the content and method of non-selective education. Historian of education Roy Lowe describes an educational environment in which “the drive to ensure that … the whole process of learning was made more efficient in the schools. This … meant that that educationalists were particularly susceptible to new ideas on pedagogy”. Communists were not exceptional here. A significant number of CPGB teachers involved themselves in discussion of such ideas, even if such discussions were naturally – but by no means exclusively – more rooted in day-to-day classroom practice than in Marxist theory. Indeed, although edited by Brian Simon, New Trends in English Education was written in large part by practising communist schoolteachers. George Freeland, communist headmaster at Mowacre Junior School in Leicester, contributed a chapter on his decision to abolish streaming. This was not presented on egalitarian grounds but to

challenge “the determining effect of … supposed hereditary endowment”. Freeland also remarked that the absence of selection enhanced the need for detailed discussion of curriculum and method:

Educational problems, concerning the syllabus, methods of teaching, and the progress of individual children, are often side-stepped in the streamed school by simply relegating children who do not keep up to an inferior stream … In the unstreamed school a real attempt has to be made to overcome these problems … and to find their solution. This involves critically assessing the content and method of education.\(^{22}\)

The growing currency of ‘educability’ caused a marked shift in attitudes towards developments in primary education among communists. The narrow, class-based damning of activity methods which had been prevalent in the NEAC during the early phase of the Cold War (see the previous chapter) was certainly tempered. An article by Party primary school teacher Eric Masters in early 1958 started in the typical fashion, expressing anxiety about the “cranky schemes, half-baked ideas ... often imported from across the Atlantic” during the previous decade, which diminished the role of the teacher and endangered the ability of the primary school child “to acquire the knowledge he requires”. However, Masters was also prepared to admit to “very real advantages brought by the free activity experiment”, acknowledging that they had led to a “loosening up of the old rigidity and a far better understanding of the relationship between teacher and child”. As far as Masters was concerned, as the pressure of preparing children for the 11+ began to diminish, there could be no return to “the old, harsh ‘chalk and talk’” in the primary school. This would be “indeed be retrogressive”.\(^{23}\) In the following issue a communist primary school teacher wrote in to applaud that there was “[a]t last a balanced approach to Activity Methods”, which showed “our business is education and not mere instruction”. To that end, she announced that an NEAC Primary Schools Sub-Committee was being set up, issuing a questionnaire to primary schoolteachers in the Party to investigate the function of the primary school in this new environment.\(^{24}\)

The following year, George

Freeland summed up the new attitude. The discrediting of fixed intelligence now meant that communists could take a different attitude towards modern primary school methods:

It is possible to unstream on social grounds. Indeed many teachers and educationists would accept it on these grounds whilst retaining doubts about its educational impact. Real unstreamers support it because they see the environment as the decisive factor in learning and believe that they will be able to increase the attainment of the mass of children ... It is significant that just at these points we come into conflict with much of the “advanced” junior school theorising of the post-war years. If you start with the idea of hereditary intelligence unfolding of its own accord in its own good time, then you don’t think in terms of subjects or standards ... [But] if we are going to choose the best methods ... we have to know all we can about how children learn ... Our concern for standards must not lead us to conclude that all we desire can be achieved by direct teaching, to reject all “modern” methods, or to underestimate the value of subjects and activities outside those we regard as basic.25

Whilst there were still conservative voices who remained sceptical about active learning in the primary school, such criticism was noticeably more measured and less knee-jerk than during the early Cold War (see chapter five). Moreover by the late 1950s and early 1960s the conservatives were not always given the last word like they were a decade or so previously. Discussion was more positively encouraged in Education Today and Tomorrow.26 As an editor’s note from 1961 read: “NONE of the articles or letters in this paper is sacrosanct. All are open to comment. So don’t keep criticism or praise to yourself!”27

There was also a greater openness among communists towards critically examining the content, curriculum and method of education in the growing number of comprehensive schools, and again this involved schoolteachers and educationalists working together. A section of New Trends

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which discussed the development of common syllabi in the comprehensive school was written largely by Party teachers. George Rudé provided a detailed analysis of the common history syllabus at the new Holloway Comprehensive School and again argued that in such a context, schoolteachers needed to give more attention to pedagogy: “everything … depends on the way it is handled by the teacher, whose experience will lead him to adapt his methods to the varying needs and potentialities of pupils”. Deana Levin, the communist head of maths at Walworth interim comprehensive school in London described how “my experience … has convinced me that every normal child can learn mathematics … [if] teachers have … every opportunity to keep up with advances in method”.

Marie Philibert and Michael Robinson (CPGB member and head of science at Great Barr Comprehensive School in Birmingham) discussed new methods in science teaching. There were similar substantial articles dealing with the practice of a common curriculum in Education Today and Tomorrow spread across a number of issues throughout the late 1950s and into the early 1960s, and most of this was from the British point of view - there was also a noticeable decline in coverage of Soviet and Eastern Bloc issues. Attention was also given to educational psychology and the learning process now that the determining role of fixed intelligence had been discredited. An annual Party teachers’ ‘summer school’ was held throughout the 1950s and early 1960s to discuss questions of educational method, content and the psychology of learning.

Parsons correctly notes that these schools were not organised by the NEAC but by Brian Simon and colleagues in the East Midlands District of the CPGB. However this does not mean, as Parsons implies, that there was no connection with the

29 Deana Levin, ‘Mathematics Teaching in Interim Comprehensive Schools’, ibid, p. 182.
33 Topics included, for example, ‘The Content of Education’ (1954); ‘The Psychology of Learning’ (1958); ‘The Theoretical Basis of Comprehensive Education’ (1959); ‘Arts, Literature and Education’ (1961) (Simon papers, DC/SIM/S/7).
34 Parsons, ‘Communism in the Professions’, p. 501.
NEAC. The discussions at the Summer Schools were given prominent coverage in *Education Today and Tomorrow*,[^35] and as NEAC Vice Chair Sam Fisher spoke at both the 1958 and 1963 schools; not on narrow professional issues, but on ‘Learning and Teaching in the Comprehensive School’, and ‘Towards a Philosophy for British Education’ respectively.[^36] The official submission by the NEAC to the CACE’s Newsom Committee (asked in 1961 to “consider the education between the ages of 13 and 16 of pupils of less than average ability”[^37]) called for a “a fuller understanding of the continuity of the educational process and therefore for continuity of method with increasing attention to the developmental psychology of the child”, including the importance of sensory experience and the role of speech. Tellingly, there was an admission that “[t]he whole question of balance between fully organised work and more independent work by the children needs investigation”.[^38] In sum, by the early 1960s, discussion among CPGB teachers included educationalists and psychologists, and went well above and beyond a mere fixation on teacher trade unionism and ending selection for egalitarian reasons. They were interested not just in improving working class access to existing systems and methods of education, but also in the recognition of the complexity of human potential, which had significant implications for both the theory and practice of teaching and learning. As Michael Robinson’s article ‘Educability’ put it:

> It does not only mean considerably improved material facilities for education or more and better qualified teachers. It does not derive merely from a sentimental and egalitarian optimism. It arises from a recognition of what can be achieved given a greater understanding of the laws of mental development, the nature of the learning process ... There is plenty of room here for ... much closer co-operation between the psychologist and the teacher ... Even in general terms, the developmental conception of education as opposed to the static idea of “fixed abilities” suggests

[^36]: Programmes for 1958 and 1963 teaching schools (Simon papers, DC/SIM/5/7).
[^38]: See ‘Evidence Submitted by the Education Advisory Committee on behalf of the Executive Committee of the Communist Party to the Central Advisory Council for Education Studying the Education of Children from 13-16 Years Old’, May 1962 (Labour History Archive, People’s History Museum, Manchester CP/CENT/IND/13/01).
new attitudes and new approaches to education, presents new tasks and suggests methods of undertaking them ... foundations on which we can begin to build a scientific pedagogy.\textsuperscript{39}

Further complicating the argument that after 1956 CPGB teachers jettisoned interest in theory matters is the fact that in late 1963 the NEAC began to prepare a book on it. The announcement was made in \textit{Education Today and Tomorrow}:

\begin{quote}
It is possible, with Marxist method and socialist perspective, to suggest solutions of the educational problems which will prove widely acceptable to teachers and parents alike ... because they will be based on the best available experience ... free on disproven ideas of fixed abilities, and synthesising many apparently conflicting views concerning human potentialities and development. Hence the book which the Education Advisory Committee is preparing ... The main bulk of the book will deal with questions of content and method and organisation from the essential nursery stage to further education and the finale will be an appraisal of the possibilities of democratic advance in the near future.\textsuperscript{40}
\end{quote}

However, the announcement of the book did mask a serious dispute then ongoing between communists concerned with the education of children, one which went right to the Party centre and is worth describing in some detail.

\textbf{Tension between Educationalists and Schoolteachers}

On 15 October 1961, Max Morris penned a letter to the CPGB Political Committee on behalf of the NEAC. He had received the previous day a manuscript of a book by Joan Simon, titled ‘Marxism and Education’. It had been agreed for publication by Party publishers Lawrence and Wishart (LW), but she was seeking Morris’ comments on it. This was the first that he had heard that such a book was being prepared, let alone at the late pre-publication stage. Morris did not read the manuscript, but instead called a meeting of the NEAC at once. They were very unhappy at not having been previously consulted about the book. In his letter, Morris did not mince his words, accusing LW of

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“a completely individualistic and bourgeois approach and an utter negation of a Marxist one” and “a serious breach of the democratic functioning of the Party”. Morris then sent the manuscript to Sam Fisher, and they jointly submitted a report on it to LW, copied to the Party centre. It was not complementary. They argued that the book lacked any “systematic treatment of the main issues ... it seems to us that the book has been written with no clear plan at all” because it “leaps straight into the statement of Marxist theory”. In Morris and Fisher’s view, the theory should have been presented as a response to the real needs of an advanced society, and arising out of critique of existing theory and practice, deal with “the application of scientific pedagogical principles to British education” and make some reference to the CPGB’s actual education policy. They also felt the book was too complex for non-specialist readers to understand, bluntly asserting that “the book reads like a highly dogmatic concentrated précis of Marxism and of Soviet works on psychology in language quite unfamiliar and alien to many readers”. Unsurprisingly they summarised that the work “as conceived and executed is not suitable for publication”. And as such, they saw “little point” in making any specific recommendations for revision.

Before it reached Morris and Fisher, the manuscript had been read by the now retired Party headmistress Margaret Clarke, Frank Stanley (an Executive Committee member and factory worker) and Maurice Cornforth and Nan Green (representing the LW Board). Party intellectuals James Klugmann and Emile Burns had also read it. Whilst they had also felt that some of the language was too complex, they saw none of the major flaws outlined by Morris and Fisher. After Joan Simon had made the suggested minor revisions, the completion of the manuscript was reported to the Party centre. But then John Gollan intervened to insist that it be sent to Max Morris for approval before publication. Klugmann, Burns, Green and Cornforth subsequently rejected Morris and Fisher’s objections as “ridiculous”. Nora Jeffrey at the Party centre also read the manuscript and said that whilst there was still some difficult phraseology, this could be resolved by further minor revisions.

41 Letter from Max Morris to the CPGB Political Committee, 14 October 1961 (CPGB archive, CP/CENT/IND/13/02).
which Joan Simon agreed to make. A sub-committee of the Political Committee then approved publication of the manuscript on 5 December 1961. LW then wrote to Morris to inform him. He did not reply. Instead, he called another meeting of the NEAC. It then got in touch with the Political Committee, to inform them that they felt had been deliberately sidestepped by LW in the production of the book. They were also unsatisfied by the “perfunctory manner” in which Morris and Fisher’s criticisms of Joan Simon’s manuscript had been “waved aside”. LW offered a compromise to the NEAC to sub title the book with ‘A Contribution to Discussion’, but this was also deemed inadequate, since given its alleged flaws, it was not considered a worthy contribution by the Morris and Fisher. Rather, it was “in danger of retarding the development of discussion among our party teachers and limiting the influence of our ideas elsewhere ... it lags behind the level of understanding and discussion in party educational circles ... and progressive educational circles”. Thus the NEAC leaders confirmed that they strongly opposed the decision to proceed with the book’s publication. They requested another hearing with the Political Committee to make their comments in person, which was granted just before Christmas 1961. At the meeting, John Gollan was “impressed by the vehemence of the [N]EAC comrades” and instructed LW to send the manuscript to Morris and Fisher again for them to make more detailed suggestions for revision. LW reluctantly obliged, but according to Cornforth and Green, Morris and Fisher then prepared a further document which made no reference to Joan Simon’s manuscript, but rather set out a synopsis for a different, longer book. The matter dragged on into 1962. The different sides of the dispute did meet in the meantime. Joan Simon refused to attend on the grounds that it was unconstitutional. Brian Simon attended to represent her, and Morris told him that his wife’s manuscript was “atrocious and should never be published”. Simon understandably did not take this well, and the meeting ended in acrimony before

44 ‘Comments of the Education Advisory Committee re the MS ‘Marxism and Education’ by Joan Simon, December 1961 (CPGB archive, Manchester CP/CENT/IND/13/02).
45 Cornforth and Green, ‘Aide Memoire: ‘Marxism and Education’ by Joan Simon’.
46 Letter from Joan Simon to the Political Committee, 30 December 1961 (CPGB archive, CP/IND/MATH/07/03)
47 Letter from Brian Simon to John Gollan, 4 February 1964 (CPGB archive, CP/CENT/IND/13/02).
the manuscript could be discussed further. Eventually in April 1962 Joan and Brian took the
decision to destroy her manuscript, for “[i]n view of all that has happened in the last 6 months I could
not wish to see the book published”. The decision of the NEAC to then commission its own book
in 1963, as mentioned above, shows that the Party’s teachers decided to take the matter into their
own hands.

This episode has been described in such detail because it reveals much about the primary
reason for the lack of a definitive statement of British communist educational theory by the early
1960s, despite the obvious and growing interest in the subject in Party educational circles since 1956.
John Gollan’s insistence that Morris be sent a copy of Simon’s manuscript even though it had already
been agreed fit for publication, and the Political Committee’s agreement to halt publication in order
to hear a deputation from the NEAC without any parties from the other side being present, clearly
indicate that King Street was on the NEAC’s side. Morris’ self-belief that his continued refusal to
negotiate over or offer substantive corrections to Joan Simon’s manuscript would lead ultimately to
it remaining unpublished was a demonstration of this. Brian Simon certainly thought so:

At the meeting held in February [1962] between Max Morris and myself … Max continued to
assert that he had “all rights” in this matter of publication, and obviously was under the
impression that he had, since he continued to accept no compromise whatsoever on the book and
was clearly under the impression that this line of his would lead to its suppression ... It is difficult
to see what reason could be given for this ... other than what the P.C. had previously denied: that
the NEAC had certain overriding rights in this field. These ‘overriding rights’ and their significance will be explained in the following sections of this chapter.

48 Letter from Max Morris to the Political Committee, 25 February 1962 (CPGB archive, CP/IND/MATH/07/03)
49 Letter from Joan Simon to Nora Jeffrey, 27 March 1962 (CPGB archive, CP/IND/MATH/07/03)
50 Letter from Brian Simon to John Gollan, 4 February 1964 (CPGB archive, CP/CENT/IND/13/02)
By the early-to-mid 1960s then, it was clear that in terms of communist education policy, intellectual educationalists had to accept subordination to ‘worker’ teachers. This was ironic after a period in which there had been unprecedented and successful collaboration between the two strands in the campaign for comprehensive education, work which bore fruit after the election of a Labour Government that October, which in July 1965 issued Circular 10/65, requesting that LEAs submit schemes for comprehensive reorganisation.\(^{51}\) The sidelining of intellectual educationalists also jarred with the fact that the CPGB leadership had slowly been moving away from the tight supervision and class reductionism which had previously characterised its cultural work (see chapter five). During the late 1950s and early 1960s there had been a belated awareness that the New Left was monopolising the burgeoning interest in the social and cultural dimensions of the struggle for socialism amongst the young and in the universities. In 1958 Eric Hobsbawm, an intellectual who, like the Simons, had remained inside the CPGB after 1956, reported to the Executive Committee that the CPGB was unattractive to this new activist milieu, despite them being concerned about issues upon which the Party also campaigned, such as nuclear disarmament, sexual equality and anti-colonialism.\(^{52}\) A potent symbol of this had been the Party’s attitude to the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). Many young people, including communists, were active in the Aldermaston marches of 1958 and 1959, yet the Party was initially suspicious, regarding calls for unilateral disarmament as unrealistic, and seeing CND as a New Left rival to its British Peace Committee, which included Teachers for Peace. But in 1960 the CPGB changed its line on CND and encouraged its members to join.\(^{53}\) This led to Teachers for Peace being rechristened as the ‘Teachers Committee for Nuclear Disarmament’ (TCND), which although officially separate from CND, played an active


\(^{52}\) Callaghan, *Cold War, Crisis and Conflict*, p. 23.

\(^{53}\) Thompson, *The Good Old Cause*, pp. 116-117.
role in its work. This recognition of the importance of struggle outside the traditional economic and industrial spheres also resulted in the CPGB Political Committee issuing a statement in 1963 reassuring communist intellectuals that it would not seek to impose any control or directives over their work. By 1967, the Party’s *Questions of Ideology and Culture*, repudiated the narrow attitudes of the past and acknowledged that “industrial and professional workers and intellectuals participate together in a common struggle”. This must have been especially bittersweet for Brian Simon, who by then was NCC Chair. For whilst, as Geoff Andrews points out, under Simon’s leadership the NCC became “an increasingly fertile area of discussion … over the nature of art and culture and its relationship to politics”, he was forced to accept constraints on his work in his primary area of expertise. He made this point in a letter to John Gollan, and in a memorandum to the Political Committee in 1964, but to no avail. Indeed, Simon was so disillusioned that he gave up on his attempt to integrate the CPGB’s approach to educational work and instead plunged his energies into the left-leaning journal *Forum for the Discussion of New Trends in Education*, he had formed in autumn 1958 with Labour Party supporter and fellow comprehensive school enthusiast Robin Pedley. Certainly after late 1960 he did not contribute to *Education Today and Tomorrow* again until the 1980s. Joan Simon felt so undervalued in the Party that she took more drastic action, deciding in 1964 to let her membership lapse after almost 30 years. Although Gollan asked her to reconsider, reassuring her that “I have always admired what you have done for the Party … the Party needs you and people like you”, Joan Simon replied “[i]t cannot be accepted that the contribution I made was

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54 Partington, *Party Days*, pp. 146-149.
55 NCC minutes, 11 February 1963 (CPGB archive, CP/CENT/CULT/16).
57 In a letter to John Gollan on 21 December 1963, Simon stated “The present compromise of two committees [one for higher education, and the NEAC for schools] … will … operate, in my view, as an obstacle to effective work in this field” (CPGB archive, CP/CENT/IND/13/02).
58 In this memorandum, dated 14 June 1964, Simon wrote: “If the Party is to attract intellectuals … then the Party must not only avoid giving the impression that intellectuals have to toe a particular line … but must also ensure that their work is valued and appreciated … Certainly the NEAC has been concerned with ideological questions in education … but this has not been its main direction of work … I have for some years been conscious of a division between theory and practice in our work which I felt was weakening our overall impact” (CPGB archive, CP/IND/MATH/07/04).
60 Letter from Ernie Hallett, South Leicester CPGB Branch Secretary, to John Gollan, 6 January 1964 (Labour History Archive, People’s History Museum, Manchester CP/CENT/IND/13/02).
61 Letter from John Gollan to Joan Simon, 13 January 1964 (CPGB archive, CP/IND/MATH/07/03).
of any real value since in practice it has gone unnoticed”. This had been telling in Gollan’s letter. In spite of Joan Simon’s manifold contributions to developing the Party’s theoretical work, the one offering Gollan saw fit to highlight was “the particularly valuable role you played at the very difficult period around Hungary when so many comrades wavered and you didn’t”. This suggests that for Gollan, intellectuals mattered more for the loyalty they showed to the CPGB leadership than their originality of thought. Despite noises to the contrary, it seems that Gollan’s statement to the 1957 Congress that Party intellectuals must be “modest in their attitude” held good when it came to the NEAC. As Arnold Kettle put it in a letter to Assistant General Secretary Bill Alexander concerning Joan Simon’s resignation: “I’m not sure we do yet fully accept all implications of the line laid down about not giving directives to our writers etc”.

The inconsistency of the CPGB leadership’s approach to the place of intellectuals when it came to educational policy has several causes. Parsons argues that after 1956 the NEAC became a “law unto itself” or “a party within a party” because “[t]he national Party leadership felt that the CP gained prestige as a result of Max Morris’ prominence in the NUT and therefore left him to operate as a free agent”. This certainly forms part of the explanation. From the late 1950s wage militancy increased in the NUT, as members increasingly became concerned about a relative fall in their income compared to doctors and civil servants. This culminated in the NUT Executive for the first time recommending the rejection of the agreement reached by the Teachers’ Panel of the Burnham Committee. This managed to consolidate the influence of the Left in the Union. According to one Party teacher, with G.C.T. Giles having retired in 1956, Max Morris became the undisputed leader of this new militancy. His house in Hornsey became the “command centre of a highly efficient network” of local Union associations, led by the Party stronghold of Middlesex NUT:

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62 Letter from Joan Simon to John Gollan, 21 January 1964 (CPGB archive, CP/IND/MATH/07/03).
63 Letter from John Gollan to Joan Simon, 13 January 1964.
65 Letter from Arnold Kettle to Bill Alexander, 6 April 1964 (CPGB archive, CP/IND/MATH/07/03).
66 Parsons, ‘British Communist Party School Teachers’, p. 64.
67 Seifert, Teacher Militancy, pp. 79-80.
Year after year in the early 1960s, Max would move the first big conference motion from the floor of Conference and was unchallenged as the national leader of the militant Left, most of whom would not have thought of voting for a communist in general or local elections.

Before NUT Conference opened, CPGB delegates and Labour sympathisers would meet to be guided by Morris as to what the most appropriate tactics might be. As a result of such action, a Special Conference was forced for October 1962, at which the Executive were pressured into recommending a national strike. Although ten days later the Executive subsequently accepted a compromise deal and reversed its decision, over 1000 NUT members lobbied Union headquarters in protest. Communists, which continued to give huge attention to the wage issue into the 1960s, following further attempts by the Minister of Education to exercise control over teachers’ salaries, culminating in the 1965 Remuneration of Teachers’ Act. Such success in the NUT was welcomed in a CPGB which by the early 1960s was moving away from exclusivist, furtive practices which had caused much damage to the Party’s reputation after the exposure of a communist ballot-rigging scandal in the Electrical Trades Union (ETU) in 1961. In 1965 Industrial Organiser Peter Kerrigan handed over the reins to Bert Ramelson, who favoured an emphasis on ‘broad left’ unity with other progressive forces in an attempt to resist both Conservative and Labour governments’ attempts at wage control and the restriction of free collective bargaining. This strategy proved successful in building up communist industrial influence in the miners’ and seamen’s unions, and in the foundation of the Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions in 1966, and the teachers were the white collar equivalent. As a consequence, the Industrial Department no longer intervened in its teachers’ work like it had in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s (see chapters one, two and three). By the 1960s its involvement was restricted to attending the NEAC’s annual conference. In Morris’ view, his relative

success in influence in the NUT led to the teachers operating virtually an independent group. Nor is this egotism or hubris on his part. It is backed up by the recollections of his contemporaries. Geoffrey Partington feels that “Max seemed to enjoy the complete confidence of … the British Party’s Central [Executive] Committee”; and Leonard Goldman remembered that “the Party leadership did not dictate to us … rather it was the other way around”.

However, Goldman’s use of the word ‘us’ points to another reason why the CPGB leadership took the side of Morris over the academic educationalists, one which goes beyond the success of communists in the NUT. It was also to do with the collective strength of schoolteachers as a constituency in the CPGB by the 1960s. The NEAC was not damaged by 1956 in the same way as other professional groups in the Party, such as the Historians or Writers. Nor did the New Left exercise the same pull on schoolteachers as it did on intellectuals in the Party in the years after 1957. The percentage of teacher delegates at the 1959, 1961 and 1963 CPGB Congresses fell slightly from the 1957 high to between 8 and 9 per cent of the total number, but in 1963 the 2520 teachers were still the third largest occupational group in the Party, and by far the largest white collar one. As a consequence, it was less risky for the Party leadership to alienate intellectuals than it was teachers. Arnold Kettle certainly felt this. In his letter to the Political Committee about Joan Simon’s resignation he sympathised with her view that “the leadership is so concerned with immediate practical political problems … that it neglects the development of theoretical work”. In Kettle’s view,

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73 Partington, Party Days, p. 138.
74 Goldman, Back to Brighton, p. 30.
75 Peter Cadogan did leave the CPGB for a rival far-left organisation, but avoided the New Left as “it didn’t even have a policy, it was all about ‘commitment’”. Instead, he joined Gerry Healey’s Trotskyites in 1957, who – until the 1959 foundation of the Socialist Labour League – operated as clandestine entryists within the Labour Party. Healey told Cadogan “I want you to take charge of the education of the British working class”, and although Cadogan later laughed at the incredulity of Healey’s statement, he did seem to take it seriously at the time, as he joined the Cambridge Branch of NALT in March 1958. Upon Labour’s proscription of the Socialist Labour League in 1959, Cadogan was expelled from the Labour Party. But he still maintained an interest in educational politics: after joining Tony Cliff’s International Socialists he was appointed to the editorial board of International Socialism and wrote the first article in the first edition on secondary education. He later broke with Marxism and the Trotskyites and joined Bertrand Russell’s Committee of 100. See Cadogan’s, testimony recorded for the CPGB Biographical Project, March 2001; and letter from Peter Cadogan to G.L. Watt, General Secretary of NALT, 14 March 1958 (NALT archive, A/NLT/04/003).
76 The only larger occupational groups were engineering, at 8280, and building, at 3000. The nearest white collar group in terms of numbers was the clerical and administrative, at 1800. See the table ‘Occupational and Industrial Composition of National Congress Delegates, 1944-63’ in Newton, The Sociology of British Communism, pp. 162-163.
the ‘immediate practical political problem’ in this case had been Max Morris’ ability to exert “undue political pressure on the PC … i.e. ‘if this book is published, there’ll be trouble from the teachers’”.

Yet this should not be taken as a dismissal of the importance of theoretical matters as such on the NEAC, or as hostility to working with educationalists, which, as argued earlier in this chapter, was a not insignificant feature of the NEAC’s campaign on comprehensive education. Rather, it was about the ownership of educational policy. For instance, when Brian and Joan Simon published a jointly edited book *Educational Psychology in the USSR* in late 1963 at the height of the dispute over her manuscript, Sam Fisher gave the work a prominent and positive review in *Education Today and Tomorrow*, and reiterated the need for educationalists and schoolteachers to work together:

> The purely practical approach, to which most teachers have turned in reaction from pre-occupation with selection … is inadequate. To understand how the mind develops, and abilities are formed and apply this understanding to fully educating all children, science is needed, and a working alliance between teachers and educational psychologists acceptable.

Clearly then, the NEAC were happy to let academic educationalists produce Marxist theories of mental development, but jealously guarded their control over Party education policy. James Klugmann certainly felt this, commenting that that “the title [of Joan Simon’s manuscript, ‘Marxism and Education’] is unfortunate. The book is really about ‘Marxism and Learning’ or ‘Marxism and How You Get Knowledge’. If this had been the title perhaps the issue would never have arisen”. As Max Morris later reflected, by the 1960s communist schoolteachers “decided our own education policy” unlike in the Labour Party, where NALT’s influence over education policy was limited, demonstrated by the fact that it took almost twenty years for the Labour Party leadership to commit fully to comprehensive education. However, communist educationalists active mainly in the universities felt that there needed to be greater co-ordination within the Party throughout the whole

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77 Letter from Arnold Kettle to Bill Alexander, 8 April 1964.  
80 Max Morris, cited in Parsons, ‘British Communist Party School Teachers’, p. 64.
field of education. As discussed in the previous chapter, Brian Simon had sent a memorandum to the NEAC in 1951 to suggest that they needed to give more attention to a theoretical Marxist critique of intelligence testing and selection. As has been shown earlier in this chapter, discussion amongst Party teachers undoubtedly advanced in this regard. Yet at some point in the late 1950s Morris asked Simon to leave the NEAC on account of the fact that he lived outside London. Since Simon had lived in Manchester when he was a working schoolteacher between 1945 and 1950, and his presence on the NEAC had not been a problem then, it is likely that the reason he was asked to leave was that he was now working exclusively in higher education. This is something that Simon stated plainly in a note he sent to both the NEAC and the Political Committee in September 1963. He felt that one of the Party’s weaknesses was “this tendency to view education as purely a teachers’ affair”, and argued that this should be rectified by a “genuine Education Advisory Committee, concerned with thinking about and developing policy over the whole field of education, regarded as a unity”, including higher education. However, Morris, Fisher and other prominent figures on the NEAC wanted to ensure that they maintained control over CPGB education policy. They had clearly been troubled by the fact that LW and a non-teacher in Joan Simon had prepared a book on education without their participation, and their submission to the Political Committee over the affair reflects this. The criticisms they made over the book’s style and substance were provoked largely by its provenance, not because they were anti-theory per se. Joan Simon certainly felt that “Comrade Morris has for 15 years had a rooted belief in his committee’s right to lay down lines of books on education”. The board at LW also stated that the dispute “arose … out of the [N]EAC’s opinion that nothing should be published bearing on education that had not been prepared by the [N]EAC itself”. Arnold Kettle too also had “no doubt that MM [Max Morris] on this occasion behaved as though no book in any

81 Parsons, ‘Communism in the Professions’, p. 500.
82 ‘Communist Party Educational Organisation – Note by BS’, September 1963 (Simon papers, DC/SIM/5/7).
83 Letter from Joan Simon to the Political Committee 30 December 1961 (CPGB archive, CP/IND/MATH/07/03).
84 Maurice Cornforth and Nan Green, ‘Aide Memoire: ‘Marxism and Education’ by Joan Simon’. 

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way connected with education should be published without the support of the NEAC.” 85 Morris and Fisher’s own comments on Joan Simon’s manuscript suggest the same:

There is no doubt of the importance of such a book on this topic, nor of the need for it. Whilst the application of Marxist theory to education has been well and fully elaborated in … the columns of “Education Today and Tomorrow” … the presentation has quite naturally been on the practical, political and social side. An effective exposition of the basic Marxist scientific approach to education would strengthen the understanding of our party teachers and party generally, and could make our policy and our party more influential and attractive to teachers, educationalists and parents. At the same time, it is a very difficult book to write. Just because it is the first attempt to do this job in English and in relation to English circumstances, it will be regarded not as an individual essay but an authoritative work [my emphasis].

The Triumph of Labourism

Phil Cohen, 86 Mike Waite 87 and Geoff Andrews 88 have each argued that by the mid-1960s there were two contradictory currents developing in the CPGB: one wedded to a more pluralist, humanist conception of socialism increasingly cognisant of the importance of intellectual and cultural struggle; and another labourist strand rooted in traditional trade union struggles. Both led to a sense of forward momentum in the Party by the mid-1960s, but the two doctrines did not relate well:

On the one hand the intellectual renaissance and political pluralism associate with socialist humanism were leading in the direction of a new analytical framework, one which would allow a reconciliation with the anti-Labourist stances of the New Left, and a greater exploration of ideological and cultural politics … On the other hand, the party’s growing industrial and organisational influence, associated with militant labourism, was pulling it towards a focus on

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85 Letter from Arnold Kettle to Bill Alexander, 8 April 1964.
88 Andrews, End Games and New Times, pp. 96-97
very specific areas of struggle, which remained rooted within ... the economic sphere, and
depended on very traditional forms of organisation.89

This chapter has shown that a similar divide was developing among those communists
interested in developing Party education policy. Although this was not an antagonism to theory in
itself, when the relative thaw in the Cold War and increased wage militancy in the NUT presented
an opportunity for Party teachers to make progress, an increasingly labourist strategy then began to
rule. Significantly, the book on educational theory which was being planned in 1963 to replace Joan
Simon’s unpublished manuscript never materialised, and Morris’ first Education Today and
Tomorrow editorial after the Labour Government’s election in 1964 was dominated by issues of
teacher pay, pensions, supply and overall educational spending.90 Although the NEAC did keep up
the pressure on Labour to honour its commitment to a comprehensive secondary school system, and
maintained a critique of the partial and voluntary nature of comprehensivisation,91 Morris was keen
not to criticise Labour too much, since an alliance with the Labour Left was, as has been shown, key
to both the teachers’ and the wider Party’s industrial and political strategy.92 And in 1966 a key
development pushed the Party’s teachers firmly towards labourism. Morris secured election to the
NUT Executive, to be followed shortly after by Sam Fisher. From hereon in, communists on the
NUT Executive tried to develop a long-term strategy for creating a ‘progressive majority’ in the
NUT,93 a strategy which did not encourage asking potentially divisive questions about the theory and
practice of education. If anything, it encouraged a creeping conservatism, as would wider national
and international events which opened up new chapters in the history of both British education and
British communism.

89 Ibid., p. 97.
90 Max Morris, ‘What We Want of the New Government’, Education Today and Tomorrow, 17, 2
91 See, for example, ‘Secondary Reorganisation’, Education Today and Tomorrow, 18, 1 (September-
October 1965), p. 3.
92 In a letter to Bill Alexander on 31 May 1963 Morris stated that he had purposefully avoided being too
critical of Labour policy (CPGB archive, CP/CENT/IND/13/02).
93 Parsons, ‘Communism in the Professions’, p. 64; and Partington, Party Days, p. 136.
Coda: 1968 and after

In May 1968 Max Morris was instrumental in getting the CPGB Executive Committee to support the less authoritarian ‘socialism with a human face’ presented by Dubček’s reforming communist government in Czechoslovakia. And when in August the Soviet Union moved to stifle that reform process, he, alongside the rest of the Executive, condemned the action.94 Yet Morris and his followers in the leadership of the NEAC were not as open to reforming moves in education which were also apparent in the spring and summer of 1968. Serious student dissent across western Europe resulted in moves towards a less authoritarian and more student-centred system of teaching and governance in the universities.95 Such calls also trickled down to the schools to some extent. Whilst the NEAC had given a cautious welcome to the child-centred teaching recommendations for the primary school in 1967’s Plowden Report,96 by the 1970s there was a hostile attitude among leading NEAC members to applying similar approaches in the secondary school. This stance, support for comprehensive education aside, found some common cause with right-wing critics of ‘progressivism’ in the ‘Black Papers’.97 Leading communist teachers were also outspoken opponents of the Young Communist League and National Union of Students’ decision to organise secondary school students in the National Union of School Students.98

The CPGB’s industrial strategy of militant labourism saw communists play an influential role in industrial unrest in Britain between 1968 and 1974. This also applied in the NUT, culminating in the election of Max Morris as NUT President in 1973. However, the desire to maintain the ‘broad left’ alliance in the Union also led to Max Morris, Sam Fisher and other leading communists expending a great deal of their energy engaged in attacks against Trotskyist elements represented chiefly by the ‘Rank and File’ movement in the NUT. Despite Morris’ stance over Czechoslovakia in 1968, in the decade afterwards he and his backers among the NEAC leadership bucked against

95 Simon, Education and the Social Order, pp. 390-396.
98 See ‘Children’s Unions’, Education Today and Tomorrow, 24, 4 (Summer 1972), p. 11.
reforming trends within the CPGB leadership, which by the mid-to-late 1970s was moving in a Eurocommunist direction which placed less importance on trade union struggle. In 1976 Max Morris left the CPGB, but his followers who remained inside the Party used the relative autonomy of the NEAC, and their dominance over it, to adopt positions at odds with Eurocommunism, to the extent that in 1984 the entire teachers’ leadership was removed by the Party centre and replaced by its appointees. Meanwhile, Brian Simon had returned to the centre of educational policy-making in the CPGB in the year after Max Morris’ departure, when his longstanding calls for the NEAC to be opened up to the whole field education were finally heeded, and the Party teachers were reorganised into the Teachers’ Advisory Committee. This was a sign that the CPGB’s direction was now more congenial to a more humanist conception of the relationship between education and political change which was less focused upon economic struggle by schoolteachers inside the NUT. One of the Party centre’s appointees to the teachers’ leadership in 1984 was Marion Darke. Also a member of the Executive Committee, Darke was to preside over the CPGB’s last Congress, held in 1991, by which time the Party was deeply divided and its membership numbers, electoral fortunes and trade union presence in terminal decline. She told Congress “[w]e are dying on our feet as a Communist Party … If you are stuck in a hole, the best advice is stop digging”. Thus, schoolteachers and educationalists were a notable presence at the CPGB’s death as well as its birth.

100 The correspondence over this is located in the CPGB archive, CP/LON/ADV/11/01.
101 Letter from Roy Gore to NEAC members, 17 August 1977 (CPGB archive, CP/CENT/IND/10/01).
102 Marion Darke, cited in Beckett, Enemy Within, p. 5.
Conclusion

This study set out to explore British communist attitudes to education in English schools between 1926 and 1968, by identifying individuals and institutions central to CPGB discussions and policy-making in this area and exploring how they related to the wider Party line to their work. The study has also sought to illuminate the role of schoolteachers as a group within the CPGB, and to contextualise the communist contribution to the broader educational politics of the British Labour Movement between 1926 and 1968. As the introduction to the thesis demonstrated, the literature in this area is relatively sparse, despite the prominence of schoolteachers and educationalists in the Party, and the notable presence of such figures in the history of educational politics on the Left in England. There has been no PhD-length study dedicated to such matters, and the work which does exist provides some insights but does not provide comprehensive answers to the following questions, namely: 1) Who were the CPGB’s leading teachers and educationalists between 1926 and 1968?; 2) What was their relationship with the CPGB leadership?; 3) How did they relate the wider CPGB line to their work?; and 4) What was their contribution to broader educational politics on the Left in England in the period? This conclusion will tie together, integrate and synthesise the findings of the previous seven chapters of this thesis, and in doing so provide answers to the research questions. As such, it will reaffirm the thesis’ original contribution to knowledge; discuss any limitations and consider areas for future research.

Individuals and Institutions

As chapter one shows, there was a generation of schoolteachers, born in the late 19th or early 20th century, who were present at the CPGB’s foundation – or joined in the wake of the General Strike’s collapse in 1926 – and went on to become prominent Party voices on education in schools. This early generation included figures such as David Capper, G.C.T. Giles, Margaret Clark, Sandy and Kath Duncan, Ben Ainley, Nan McMillan and John Mansfield. At this time the CPGB had no formal teachers’ group, but communists were present at the foundation of the TLL and took up leading positions inside it, and in particular controlled the content and production of its journal The Educational Worker. Following its split from the Labour Party in 1926/27, communists dominated the TLL, which in 1930
became the EWL, joined the NMM and operated as the *de facto* teachers’ group of the CPGB. But the isolationist stance of Class Against Class meant the EWL remained a small organisation comprising of little more than 100, until the second half of 1932, when the CPGB’s January resolution and the growing threat of fascism encouraged it to adopt a less sectarian tone and broaden its base. In this spirit, the EWL dissolved itself in 1935.

At or around this time, a younger generation of schoolteachers and educationalists who joined the Party, attracted by the anti-fascist stance of the CPGB and its campaign for educational reform during a period of stasis and spending cuts in English education. This generation’s most significant figures included Edward Upward (joined 1932), Max Morris and Brian Simon (joined 1935). With the exception of Upward (born 1902) they were born in the 1910s or 1920s. They never, or only briefly, belonged to the EWL, and during the Popular Front instead operated chiefly inside ‘front’ organisations with a much broader reach, such as the LBC and TAWM (whose membership reached over 1000 and had a communist-dominated journal *The Ploughshare*), or in the NUT (on in Nan McMillan’s case the NUWT). They were supplemented by an influx of schoolteachers of roughly the same age who joined the CPGB during or after World War Two, and like Morris and Simon, saw active service in the armed forces. These include Peter Cadogan, Sam Fisher, Len Goldman, Ian Gunn, Frank Gubb, Nigel Kelsey, Peter Mauger, Eric Porter and Dave Wallis. Marie Philibert was another prominent teacher who joined the Party around this time.

Of course, there were active and prominent teachers who joined the Party in the 1950s and 1960s, such as June Fisher, Geoffrey Partington and Michael Robinson. But it was the figures who joined in the 1930s and 1940s, in particular Max Morris, Sam Fisher and Brian Simon, who dominated communist discourse and policy-making on the education of children from 1945 until the end of the period dealt with by this study. By 1941 the first official CPGB teachers’ group, the Teachers’ Bureau, had been formed, which by 1943 or 1944 was reformulated as the NEAC. David Capper led the NEAC during World War Two, but soon after was “deposed from the role of leading comrade” by Max Morris.¹

¹Partington, *Party Days*, p. 139.
From 1948, like the TLL/EWL/TAWM before it, the NEAC also had its own journal, which maintained uninterrupted publication to the terminus of this study and beyond (indeed, *Education Today and Tomorrow* survived until the CPGB’s demise in 1991). In terms of Party teacher activity in the NUT/NUWT, G.C.T. Giles and Nan McMillan were the dominant figures during the 1930s and 1940s, achieving election to their respective national Executives in the late 1930s and becoming Presidents during World War Two. Cold War tensions seriously diminished communist presence in the unions after 1949 however, and when McMillan left the NUWT after equal pay for women was finally agreed in 1955 and Giles retired in 1956, Morris took on the leading teacher-trade unionist mantle, and thus led communist teachers both in the NUT and inside the Party machinery, increasingly doing the latter indirectly through his loyal supporters after the CPGB’s leadership of NUT pay militancy from the late 1950s (see chapter seven) meant he had to focus most of his energy there. Where Morris provided political and trade union leadership, from the late 1940s Brian Simon, as a teacher, and then later as an academic educationalist in collaboration with his wife Joan and some Party teachers (see chapters five and seven), contributed theoretical and intellectual direction. But the influence and involvement of the theoretical ‘wing’ of the NEAC varied, depending upon the CPGB leadership, and the wider Party line.

**Relations with the Party Leadership**

In a CPGB which guarded its proletarian credentials, teachers were not authentically ‘of’ the working class, whatever their origins. Even though many of the Party’s leading teachers were from working-class backgrounds (for example Max Morris, David Capper and Nan McMillan) being employed in the schools which were a part of the capitalist state apparatus meant they were therefore engaged in the transmission of its values. Yet conversely this also meant that schoolteachers could be vital to boring against capitalism from within. Hence, King Street always took an interest in communists in or around the teaching profession, but the relationship between Party teachers and their leaders hinged on the way the CPGB’s line interpreted the condition of capitalism. Thus, during the Third Period, when capitalism was deemed to be decaying into fascism, the TLL/EWL was subject to close central supervision and direction as a source of the ‘right danger’ (see chapter one). Yet, when the CPGB line/leadership could discern ‘progressive’ elements within capitalism which could stem the progress of fascism (between
c.1935 and 1939) or assist in the transition to socialism (after 1945) educational cadres were given more trust by King Street, to the extent that they became a part of the CPGB leadership itself; with G.C.T. Giles, and then Max Morris and Brian Simon all sitting on the Executive Committee between 1943 and 1970.\(^2\) To some extent this trajectory mirrors that of other professionals in the CPGB, for by the 1960s one sixth of the Party Executive was comprised of the post-1934 generation, among whom ‘brain workers’ were heavily represented.\(^3\) However, schoolteachers were different in important regards. Firstly, as has been shown, their numerical strength in the CPGB by the 1940s dwarfed that of any other ‘white collar’ occupation. Furthermore, during the 1940s and after the ‘witch hunt’ (see chapter six) abated in the late 1950s, communist teachers had a trade union strength which no other professional Party group got anywhere near. Both these factors meant that the NEAC was given exceptional latitude. King Street could ill-afford to alienate such a large constituency of the Party, and as British communism’s electoral fortunes declined consistently after the high tide of 1945, and its intellectual and cultural influence waned following the events of 1956 and the rise of the New Left, trade union influence increasingly became the one of the CPGB’s few strong suits. A further incentive for the Party leadership to allow the teachers autonomy was their ‘loyalty’ in 1956. When other professional and intellectual groups were decimated, as chapter six showed, the NEAC (with certain notable exceptions) obeyed democratic centralism, despite the fact that Max Morris himself had grave doubts. This thesis therefore concurs with Steve Parsons’ observation that after 1956 communist teachers became ‘party within a party’, in total charge of Party educational policy, and able to circumvent the political duties of other Party members and focus solely on educational work. However, the reasons for this were more complex than simply the fact that King Street felt it gained prestige as a result of Max Morris’ presence in the NUT.\(^4\) This was certainly part of the explanation, but as outlined above, had the CPGB line not been committed to the peaceful transition to socialism and engagement with the Labour Left, had the teachers not been so large a constituency, and had Max Morris and Brian Simon not swallowed their

\(^2\) Although, as shown in chapter one, Kath Duncan was on the Executive Committee (then Central Committee) in 1929, her spell was relatively short, lasting only until 1932. It would be over a decade until another Party teacher was present on the Committee.

\(^3\) Morgan, Cohen and Flinn, *Communists and British Society*, p. 85 and p. 91.

\(^4\) Parsons, ‘British Communist Party School Teachers’, p. 64.
doubts as they did in the wake of 1956, it is doubtful that presence in the NUT alone would have been enough to merit the teachers the freedom they enjoyed.

How Teachers and Educationalists Related the Party Line to their Work

As the introductory chapter explained, and as recalled at several points throughout the following chapters, authors such as Lawn, Jones and Parsons have argued that communist schoolteachers applied the CPGB line to their work in a way which resulted almost exclusively in a quantitative, economistic approach to education which paid very little attention to content, theory or method, and focused instead upon trade union work. This thesis does not deny these were certainly strong features of communist teachers’ work at various points between 1926 and 1968, but it does reveal that previous studies have oversimplified the situation and underestimated the extent to which Party teachers concerned themselves with qualitative questions. As chapter one argues, Class Against Class no doubt encouraged some in the TLL/EWL to eschew the possibility of educational reform in the absence of socialist revolution, but this position was by no means as ubiquitous as others have suggested. Party teachers often resisted the narrow economic determinism prescribed by the Third Period CPGB leadership and some even interpreted the line as making reform of the capitalist classroom more necessary in order to expose and combat its more reactionary features, and to aid the development of class consciousness of the rising generation. Indeed, the chapter showed that it was not the economic determinism of Class Against Class which negated communist interest in questions of educational content, but rather the anti-fascist unity required by the Popular Front position, of which Party teachers were among the earliest and most enthusiastic advocates. Chapter two, the first full consideration of the communist teachers during this Popular Front, reaffirms this argument.5

Following on from this, during the run-up to the Education Act of 1944, and in its immediate aftermath, the Teachers’ Bureau/NEAC did undoubtedly adopt a pragmatic, quantitative approach and formally and finally broke any association with experiments in socialist or class conscious education in independent schools. This did indeed reflect developments in the wider CPGB line, which was moving

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towards acceptance that capitalist state planning could represent a step on the road to socialism, a belief buttressed by the Labour victory in 1945. However, as chapter four and five argue, there was more to the communist educational outlook than just this. There was a belief that the ‘secondary education for all’ that the Education Act promised would provide a framework for radical change in the purpose and content of education for the working class, and that to leave educational experimentation to private schools independent schools would retard this potential. For much of the late 1940s the NEAC envisaged widened access to a common secondary education not as an end in itself, but as a first step in a process which would herald significant qualitative alteration in the education provided by the schools, which would be a vital in establishing a ‘new humanist’ consciousness, and enable peaceful transition to socialism. Considerable thought went into this among some leading Party teachers, something which has been overlooked in previous accounts. Jones does not acknowledge this at all, and Parsons only hints at it.

That said, Parsons rightly argues that during the Cold War, the increasingly reductionist anti-Americanism of the CPGB’s ‘Battle of Ideas’ cultural campaign encouraged the NEAC to adopt conservative, even regressive, attitudes towards new methods in education, which were characterised as capitalist plots to rob working-class pupils of access to knowledge and therefore buttress the tripartite system of education. This was certainly encouraged by the conservatism then apparent in the USSR’s schools at the height of ‘High Stalinism’ and there was much eulogy of Soviet and Eastern Bloc educational systems. However, as chapters five, six and seven explain, the openness to new educational methods which existed on the NEAC managed to co-exist alongside this conservatism. Parsons’ work does acknowledge this to an extent. However he underestimates how far the trauma of 1956, alongside a growing national consensus in Britain around the need for expanded educational opportunity, and the growing success of experimental comprehensive schools, opened up space between the late 1950s and the early 1960s for Party teachers to work in collaboration with academic/intellectual educationalists like Brian and Joan Simon, and engage with questions of educational psychology, theory and method to soften considerably the pro-Soviet and anti-Americanism of the ‘Battle of Ideas’. This is proved by the battle for control over education policy sparked by the dispute between the NEAC and Joan Simon
over her pamphlet on ‘Marxism and Education’ during the early 1960s. Morris and Fisher’s criticisms of Simon’s pamphlet, however unreasonable they may or may not have been – since the manuscript was destroyed it is not possible to tell for certain – were based upon its authorship rather than a hostility to theory in itself. There is no doubt that Morris and Fisher were themselves more concerned with trade union matters, and that this was important to the overall direction of the NEAC. But the episode says more about the power of Max Morris as a leading trade unionist within the CPGB than it does about the lack of theoretical concern on the NEAC in the early 1960s. This position would only truly dominate the NEAC after 1968, as a consequence of growing communist presence on the NUT Executive, and as a manifestation of a growing divergence between humanist and economic interpretations of socialism developing in the wider CPGB. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that British communists never did develop a coherent Marxist theory of education in their own country between 1926 and 1968, but that is not the same as suggesting that they gave no serious consideration to this.

Communists and Broader Educational Politics on the Left

As outlined in the introduction to this study, the absence of communists from the history of educational politics on the Left in England is marked. But this thesis has shown that communists made a significant contribution here. This contribution was not consistent across the period of this study however. At times when the wider CPGB line went against the grain of the British Labour Movement, for instance during the Third Period, under the ‘imperialist war’ line or in the ‘Battle of Ideas’, Party teachers found themselves on the margins of the debate. But this thesis has argued that there has been a tendency amongst historians to overstate this marginality. For example, as chapters three and five demonstrate, despite the hostility they could face between 1939 and 1941 or 1948 and 1956 communists teachers still had allies among Labour teachers or in the trade unions, despite the best efforts of the Labour leadership or the NUT hierarchy. Certainly, in the campaign for educational reconstruction during and after World War Two, and throughout the campaign against selective education in the two decades afterwards, communists played a vital role on the Left. This was not only through their work on professional questions in the NUT, but as chapters five and seven show, in developing a common curriculum as head teachers and teachers in primary schools and experimental comprehensive schools, and in collaborating
with academic educationalists like Brian and Joan Simon to discuss and develop a theoretical and educational critique of selective primary and secondary education. Alongside, and often in collaboration with NALT, they influenced the Labour Party leadership, and ultimately national legislation.

**Contribution to Knowledge**

This thesis is an original contribution to knowledge because it is the only existing comprehensive study focussing on the British communist approach to school-based education in England between 1926 and 1968. It therefore fills a gap in the literature in the history of the educational politics in England. As outlined in the introduction to the study, as Britain’s foremost educational historian, Brian Simon’s own work made only passing reference to the involvement of communists in the struggle for educational reform during the twentieth century, and this was an omission he felt needed to be rectified, and no other historian has since taken on the challenge. This study also makes an original contribution to the historiography of the CPGB by illuminating the experiences and contribution the largest group of ‘white collar’ communists by some margin, and one which bestrode both the industrial and intellectual wings of the CPGB in a way that no other group did. Not only does the present study fill this gap, but in doing so it adds to understanding by complicating the positions taken by the existing literature, as outlined in each chapter of the study, and summarised above. Furthermore, this study is methodologically original in that it has accessed sources unused by, or not available to, previous authors, such as the NEAC records in the CPGB archive, and the Brian Simon papers at the Institute of Education. Consulting these has provided many insights which challenge existing narratives about communist attitudes to the content of education.

However, this piece of research, like any, also has its limitations. As the key personnel of the period are dead, the use of interviews was not viable. As much of the interaction between NEAC members was no doubt done over the telephone or in person, only so much can be gleaned from accessing written sources, but again hopefully the variety of written sources compensates for this. It should also be added that this thesis is about the Communist Party of Great Britain, but is England-centric. Although the vast bulk of the Party’s teachers taught in England, further research into the
experience in Scotland and Wales would undoubtedly add further understanding. Another limitation lies in the fact that this thesis has focused only on leading CPGB teachers, who necessarily make up only a minority of a group which numbered between one and two thousand at times in the period selected for study. Yet, given the passage of time outlined above, most of these teachers’ experiences will remain inaccessible, though this would be feasible in any future research into the period 1968-1991.

Nonetheless those years represent another epoch in both the history of education in England, and in the history of communism in Britain. In the meantime, it is hoped that this thesis has addressed Max Morris’ question, referred to at its outset. And in the present day, where a national schoolteachers’ pay scale is a thing of the past, when new restrictions are being placed upon the right of teachers and other public servants to take industrial action, when a significant and growing number of schools are being taken out of democratic control, and when the grammar school still exists, important lessons can be drawn from both the successes and failures of communists outlined here.
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